

Dao of the Bizarre— Immortal



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Dao Of The Bizarre Immortal

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Chapter 1 - The Master

Li Huowang held the pestle, using it to rhythmically pound the mortar, slowly breaking down a mud-covered green rock into powder.

Despite the cave being cold and humid, the only thing covering him was an overall woven from rough fabric. Still, he did not seem to be bothered by it.

He was not the only one in the cave. Around him were people roughly the same age, with their hair tied up and wearing the same apparel.

The only difference between them and him was that everyone else was either visibly disabled or had some sort of medical condition, such as albinism or polio.

Everyone here was different—it was as if this cave was a twisted museum displaying the various ailments that could affect a human.

All of them were engaged in the same task as Li Huowang: using the mortar to pound raw ingredients into powder. Some were pounding golden rocks, while others were grinding herbs. Although it looked like everyone was diligently doing their assigned task, a few seemed less focused.

“Ack!”

Suddenly, a girl’s scream was heard, causing everyone to turn toward her.

In a corner of the cave, a harelippped young man was grinning maliciously while attempting to hug a girl with albinism.

“It’s ok, let me *play* with you for a bit. Just a little bit. Heheheh...”

Li Huowang ignored the commotion and kept his eyes closed,

focused on his own task.

The girl's cries grew louder and louder.

The commotion started to annoy Li Huowang. He tightened his grip on the mortar.

Then, a dull sound of rock hitting bone reverberated through the cave.

The young man stumbled backward, startled and stunned by the impact. He immediately clutched the wounded area on his head, grimacing in pain.

The girl who had escaped her predicament held down her shirt and hid behind Li Huowang.

"You are so dead! Don't you know what the Master is like?! He'll kill you once he finds out!" the young man shouted furiously, threatening Li Huowang.

"And what does that Master think he is?! He is insignificant!" Li Huowang's statement caused everyone to stop working. The entire cave fell into complete silence. No one had expected him to utter such words.

Seeing everyone's stunned expressions, Li Huowang took a deep breath, trying to calm himself down.

What's happening to me? Why am I so angry with them? This isn't how I usually act. I can't let them affect my emotions. That wasn't the real me. I need to calm down.

Just as Li Huowang was trying to regain his composure, a voice called out for him from the entrance.

"Disciple Li, Disciple Wang, our Master has summoned both of you," shouted a young man.

The young man who shouted the order held a higher rank than Li Huowang, evident from the green Daoist robe he wore.

The robe, though ancient and faded, was still in a better condition than what Li Huowang wore.

The man brandished a horsetail whisk and observed the other

disciples, his eyes filled with arrogance.

Seeing the young Daoist, the man with the bleeding head laughed loudly. “Hahaha! You are dead! Today’s the day to meet our Master!”

Li Huowang completely ignored him and, alongside the other disciple, Disciple Wang, walked toward the entrance. Disciple Wang had a deformed mouth, skewed sideways with drool leaking from the corner of her lips. Her face was pale and she appeared quite unhealthy.

Li Huowang had just taken two steps when someone tugged at his shirt. When he turned around, he saw it was the girl with albinism.

Tears streamed down her face as she shook her head, her eyes filled with fear.

Li Huowang ignored her, shook her off and continued walking.

The cave they were in was the Preparation Room. Exiting the Preparation Room, they entered a larger cave. This cave was riddled with entrances to other smaller caves similar to the Preparation Room. Based on the unevenness of the cave, it was evident that the one who made this place wasn’t particularly skillful.

The entire cave system was quite vast, with tunnels leading in all directions, almost like an ant colony.

Above the entrances to the smaller caves, rotten wooden planks were nailed, each excellently carved with different names: the Spiritual Palace, the Judgement Hall, the Memorial Palace, and the Four Heavenly Palace.

The entire cave system was designed to resemble a proper martial dojo.

As they ventured deeper into the cave, the girl beside Li Huowang took out a black item and handed it to him.

“Want some candy?” she asked blankly.

Li Huowang frowned. He knew that she was mentally

challenged. So, despite being irritated, he took the candy and tucked it into his clothing.

Seeing that Li Huowang accepted the candy, she took out another piece and put it in her own mouth, chucking and saying, “Master is great. Master gives us candy.”

Li Huowang remained silent as they continued walking. Fifteen minutes later, they arrived at their destination. A giant black furnace appeared before their eyes.

Green smoke billowed from the furnace, rising toward a hole in the cave ceiling. The furnace almost resembled a small metallic hill.

As they approached it, the furnace grew larger and larger until Li Huowang was engulfed in its shadow. It gave off a very oppressive feeling.

But the oppressive feeling wasn’t only due to the furnace; it was also because of the hunchbacked figure that stood in front of it.

Wearing a blue Daoist robe, the figure had his white hair tied up and was adorned with a crown, giving him a sage-like appearance.

He, too, was pounding something with a pestle, similar to what Li Huowang had been doing earlier. However, the difference was that the pestle he wielded was enormous, almost resembling a giant pillar.

The pestle rose and fell, the echoing sound of rock being pounded reverberating through the chamber.

“Mas... Master!” the girl stammered, holding her left thumb with her right hand and covering it with her remaining fingers. She brought both her hands close to her chest and bowed, her eyes filled with respect.

The sound of the pounding abruptly ceased as she spoke.

Even though Li Huowang had mentally prepared himself, he couldn’t help being startled when he saw the figure turn around.

When viewed from the front, the Daoist presented a strikingly

different impression. While his posture appeared noble and sage-like from behind, he was an ugly man. Cracked and distorted lips revealed his few remaining teeth.

“You are here? Good girl! You’ve kept me waiting,” he exclaimed, leaping into the air, his dirty robes fluttering in the wind. He then gripped her by her neck with a single hand and jumped back to the mortar.

Before she could even utter a sound, he tossed her into the stone urn, seized the pestle, and slammed it down into the stone urn with a twisted expression.

The girl let out a scream, which abruptly halted.

Meanwhile, he kept pounding. Blood and flesh splattered across his face and body, yet he paid it no mind as he started chanting fervently.

“Fire Ox extends my life, Fire Pig shields my soul, Wood Rat protects my body, Wood Dog maintains my form, Wood Monkey anchors my life, Wood Horse protects my soul, Wood Dragon anchors my spirit!”

Once the girl had been completely ground into a paste, he held up the stone urn which weighed hundreds of kilograms, and poured its contents into the furnace. Excitement filled his eyes as he raised both hands into the air.

“Start the furnace and refine the pill!”

Upon hearing this command, two young female assistants, their faces covered in an excessive amount of makeup, emerged from the shadows. One began fanning the flames, while the other added secondary ingredients into the furnace—various types of stone powders and wriggling lifeforms.

A peculiar scent soon filled the air; however, it was strangely pleasant for the nose.

The Master closed his eyes, took a deep breath and stroked the last few strands of hair that made up his beard. A satisfied

expression soon appeared on his ugly face.

Finally, he slowly opened his eyes and placed his hands behind his back before turning toward Li Huowang. “So, I heard you called me insignificant? Is that true?”

The atmosphere around them froze instantly.

Staring at the Master who wouldn’t hesitate in the slightest when taking a life, Li Huowang remained motionless. He closed his eyes and focused on calming his breath.

You can’t deceive me; all of this is a fabrication. It’s all fake!

“Are you mute?! Speak!” The Master’s voice grew louder, accompanied by the sound of his approaching footsteps.

As he drew nearer, the pungent stench of rotting flesh assaulted Li Huowang’s nostrils.

Li Huowang shuddered and clenched his teeth, summoning all his strength to open his eyes. And when he did—

The dark cave around him vanished. He found himself in a brightly lit room filled with fresh air. It was a hospital ward!

At that moment, Li Huowang glanced down and realized that he was tightly bound to a bed with leather belts.

Chapter 2 - Li Huowang

“Phew, I’ve finally returned,” Li Huowang sighed in relief before calling out into the microphone installed at the headboard.

A few moments passed before his attending physician came into the room, holding a white tablet. The physician was accompanied by a nurse.

“How are you feeling, Little Li? Are there any changes in the hallucinations?” The doctor sat on a stool and asked in a kind voice.

“In the hallucination, I was stuck in the same place and doing the same thing as last time. However, this time, that bald master cruelly killed a person right in front of me and attempted to use her body parts to refine a pill,” Li Huowang described his hallucinations in detail.

“Mm-hmm.” The attending physician nodded, taking notes on the tablet.

Li Huowang thought about something and hesitated before asking, “Doctor, what do you mean when you say a different hallucination? How does it reflect my psychological and subconscious status? Does all of it mean something?”

“No, you do not need to care about such things. It is much more important to take note of how long your hallucinations last as well as your mental stability,” the doctor shook his head and avoided the question.

“Since this is a hallucination, you must always remember that it is not real. You have already recovered from your psychosensory disorder, so you must not regress. Everytime you enter a hallucination, you must always follow the logic of that world. With the help of our treatment, you should be able to recover soon.”

Li Huowang’s heart pounded upon hearing this. This was the

key to being discharged from the hospital, so he could not afford to be careless.

Meanwhile, the doctor did not forget to cheer his patient up.

“Actually, you’ve already recovered quite a lot. When you were admitted, you couldn’t even differentiate between the real world and your hallucinations. You are on track to recovery, so keep it up. Keep fighting!”

While the two of them were conversing, the soft sound of footsteps echoed from the direction of the door.

Both of them turned at the same time and saw a girl peeking into the room. She was wearing a black turtleneck.

She looked to be sixteen or seventeen, an age where she was like a flower ready to blossom.

Her skin was white as jade, her straight black hair covering her shoulders like a dark waterfall. She looked as pretty as a flower in bloom.

Both teenagers wanted to say something, but no words came out.

Meanwhile, the doctor chuckled; he knew what was going on and so he just adjusted his glasses and promptly left the room.

“I still have something to do, so I will leave the two of you alone. Oh right, don’t forget to take your medicine on time, Little Li.”

As soon as the doctor left, the young girl walked into the room. Both of them smiled at each other as Li Huowang felt a warm feeling in his heart. All his concerns about his illness were quickly forgotten.

“Stop smiling. You look ugly when you smile like that. I brought you a little something... It’s the homework assigned to us by our dear teacher!” The girl smiled slyly, revealing a sling bag made from cloth behind her.

Seeing this, Li Huowang’s smile disappeared immediately.

“Nana, we are childhood friends! Is this how you are going to repay me?”

Yang Na turned around and closed the door before taking out a portable game console and waving it in front of him cheekily. “Of course there’s also this! Call me big sister, and I will give it to you! Hehe~”

“Big Sis! My dear sister! You are my one and only big sister.” Li Huowang excitedly ran up to her and took the gaming console from her hand.

He was bored out of his mind staying within this psychiatric hospital. It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that he might end up going crazy from boredom.

“Don’t play too much and make sure to do your homework.” Yang Na sat beside the bed and reminded Li Huowang.

“Yeah, yeah.” said Li Huowang, while fully concentrating on the flashing screen.

Her white, slender fingers tugged at his blue and white hospital gown as she said, “Hey, don’t forget about our promise.”

Li Huowang momentarily paused his game and looked up at her. His face was filled with determination as he said, “Yeah, we promised each other that we will enter the same university.”

Seeing him staring at her with such determination, Yang Na lowered her head shyly, and her voice became as soft as a mosquito as she said, “Ok. Please recover soon. I will be waiting for you.”

Li Huowang suddenly pulled her into his embrace.

Her face was red, but she did not stop him. She just closed her eyes and whispered *‘pervert’* under her breath.

Both of them did not move. They were already content even if all they got to do was just hug like this.

After they had spent some time together, Yang Na had to leave. She was now in her third year of high school, a very important year of her life. It was a luxury to free up half a day from her schedule.

While her visits were short, Li Huowang always appreciated them. To him, she was a ray of sunlight in his miserable life.

“Let me send you out.” Li Huowang stood up from his bed, still in his blue and white hospital gown and wore the white sandals that were prepared for him by the hospital.

Just as he walked her to the door, he felt that something was wrong. He noticed a mortar on the table beside his bed.

Li Huowang took two steps back in surprise. When he checked again, he saw that the mortar had transformed into his meal box.

“Are you ok?” Looking at how startled he was, Yang Na started getting concerned.

Seeing her worried face, Li Huowang grinned mischievously. “Haha! Fooled you! Were you scared?”

Yang Na puffed out her cheeks in anger and pinched his waist. “You are already so old yet still like to act like a child. To think you would pull a childish prank like this.”

“Wait, don’t be mad. I was just trying to cheer you up.” He tried to grab her hands, but she easily shook him off.

After multiple attempts, he finally succeeded in grabbing her hands.

When the other patients who were sunbathing in the courtyard saw both of them, they grinned. Ah, how good must it be to be young and in love~

They walked quite slowly but still arrived at the entrance soon enough.

Standing at the entrance, Yang Na turned and looked at him reluctantly. “I will come back again next week, so please be well.”

“No, you don’t need to come. I know that you must be under immense stress due to all the studying you have to do right now. You only have half a day off every week. Don’t waste it on me.”

Yang Na raised her feet and gently stepped on Li Huowang’s sandals, her lashes fluttering gently as she blinked.

“You dummy. Don’t try to make it sound like I can’t handle it. I have never dropped from the top three spots in our class, so I have never had any stress.”

“Aaa~” Li Huowang held his chest, showing a pained expression, “such harsh words, my lady.”

Yang Na chuckled and lightly punched him before leaving the hospital. She then walked toward the bus station just across the hospital.

Li Huowang stood at the entrance of the hospital until she got on the bus and disappeared from his view. Slowly, the smile on his face disappeared.

He was concerned about what he had just seen, and so he quickly went to the doctor’s office.

An hour later, Li Huowang was turning and tossing in his bed. He was concerned about his future with Yang Na.

A new set of medications had been prescribed to him and was now placed on his table.

The mortar that he had seen, as well as Yang Na’s smile, were constantly on his mind.

What if my illness worsens? What if I am not discharged before the National Higher Education Entrance Examination? Then I would not be able to enter the same university as Yang Na.

Even though he was stuck within the hospital, he still knew about the rumors. In the eyes of the people outside, he was nothing but a crazy man.

To think that his childhood friend, Yang Na, would confess to him a day before he was admitted to the hospital, despite knowing that something was wrong with him.

Yang Na is an amazing girl, so as a man, I must not let her down.

This can’t be right. I’ve been following the doctor’s orders, so why have my hallucinations been getting worse? Should I transfer to another hospital? But this is already my third one.

There should be nothing wrong with Doctor Li's treatment. Dad had told me that he was the best.

All these thoughts continued to plague his mind before he finally gave up on thinking and sat up.

He took out the textbooks and exercise books that Yang Na had delivered to him and started studying. He wanted to use complex theorems to drown out his ever-growing thoughts.

Late into the night, he started completing his homework.

After completing a mock exam sheet for English, he stretched his back and rubbed his temples.

“Yawn~ What time is it? It should be pretty late.” Li Huowang wore his slippers before heading to the toilet. He needed to sleep soon.

Just as he walked toward the toilet while yawning and scratching his chest, his right hand felt something weird and paused.

He looked down at his gown and saw something black and sticky stuck to his chest.

That color looked quite familiar.

Suddenly, a thought flashed across his mind.

He touched the object and licked his finger. A bitter taste that was accompanied by a hint of sweetness caused his pupils to shrink in surprise.

This was the piece of candy that the mentally challenged disciple had given to him!

An object that should have only existed in his hallucination had appeared in reality!

Chapter 3 - Jade Pendant

Once he confirmed that the piece of candy was the real deal, Li Huowang's heart started pounding.

I need to tell Doctor Li!

However, as soon as he was about to take his first step, he stopped himself. Soon, other thoughts flooded his mind.

He knew that the piece of candy was not the only thing that he had seen within his hallucination. There were other items as well, and some of them were way more valuable!

As he savored the sweetness of the candy in his mouth, he shuffled around his ward.

This is a chance! Both me and Yang Na can become rich! Heck, I could even reach the peak of my life!

He quickly realized the implications of all this.

I mustn't tell Doctor Li. The last thing I need right now is for me to be dragged into a lab to be dissected. Plus, this is not something that would fall under his jurisdiction.

But still... this is not something that I can be hasty about. I have to understand the logic behind this phenomenon.

A plan started to hatch within his mind.

Just as he was formulating a plan, the room around him started to distort, slowly fading away.

Huowang had already grown accustomed to this phenomenon. He quickly shoved his homework and textbooks into his bag and threw it toward a corner of the room to avoid it being torn apart while he was in the hallucination.

He promptly pressed the red button beside his bed, and several nurses immediately barged into the room seconds later. They restrained him on the bed.

When he opened his eyes once again, he was back inside the cold and dark cave. The other malformed disciples were staring at him curiously.

He sat up from the cold stone floor and once again surveyed his surroundings to gain a new understanding.

Even if this was just a hallucination, everything around him felt like treasures placed within a vault.

Maybe he wasn't sick. Maybe he had acquired a strange power that even the doctors did not know about.

Maybe I'm not sick. Yes, that's right. I'm not sick.

He had long suffered from his ailment, facing discrimination from everyone no matter where he went.

It was as if ever since he was afflicted with hallucinations, he was no longer a human but a mutant.

Just the mere thought of finally being free from that stigma and discrimination excited him.

Li Huowang, now in quite a good mood, chuckled as he approached a bald guy near him. "Haha, this is interesting."

"What are you guys gathering around and loitering for? Quickly go and get back to work! If the guiding drug that was requested by Master isn't ready and ruins his chance at becoming an Immortal, he will skin all of you alive!" A spiteful voice echoed from the entrance.

Li Huowang turned toward the voice and saw that it was the same Daoist who had summoned him before, Xuan Yang. He was still arrogant as ever; it was as if it was a disgrace for him to speak to all of them.

Seeing Li Huowang's fearlessness, Xuan Yang felt that his authority was being challenged. He shook the horsetail whisk in his hand and confronted him. "Disciple Li, to think that you did not end up becoming a part of the guiding drug for Master. It's quite a shame."

Meanwhile, Li Huowang couldn't even be bothered to pay attention to his words. All his attention was placed on a jade pendant attached to Xuan Yang's waist.

This must be an antique. If I were to get my hands on it and bring it back to the real world, it would be worth quite a lot of money, right? But how should I do it? Should I just take it and place it near my chest, just like I did with that candy?

When Xuan Yang saw Li Huowang remain silent, he mistook it to mean that Li Huowang was afraid of him. He scoffed and left the cave.

Staring at Xuan Yang's back, Li Huowang thought about his plan. He wanted to take the jade pendant and see if he could bring it back to the real world. The easiest way to do so was to steal it at night.

That is a really nice jade pendant, and soon, it will be mine.

At that moment, a white hand, one that was slightly reflecting the dim light within the cave, gently tugged at Li Huowang's sleeve. At the same time, a soft voice spoke to him, "Disciple Li, quickly get back to work, or you won't be able to eat."

Li Huowang turned and saw that it was the girl suffering from albinism that he had helped out before.

He thought about something before taking out the partially melted black candy and placing it in her hand. Then, he went back to his place and picked up the pestle, continuing with his work.

Currently, he couldn't afford to do something out of character, be it at the hospital or within the hallucination.

He must not tell anyone about this shocking power. He planned to slowly explore the rules of this power before deciding on his next move.

The mundane task of grinding up drugs finally came to an end for the day.

It was soon late at night. Amidst the darkness and the sound of

snoring, Li Huowang opened his eyes.

It was dark. There were no windows, nor were there any lights. He had to slowly feel the cave and navigate toward the exit.

He first came up to his workstation and picked up the powder of a green rock that he had ground earlier. It was glowing softly, providing just enough light to walk around the cave.

Even though he looked extremely conspicuous within the completely dark cave, he didn't care.

Even if I am found out, I will just return to the hospital. I have a way to escape this, so there is nothing to fear.

He assured himself as he walked in the cave by himself.

The hallucination was something brought about by himself, so how could he be afraid of it? He was fearless even though he couldn't control the hallucination.

The cave was large, but since Li Huowang had been here for quite some time, he could navigate it pretty easily.

He soon arrived in Xuan Yang's small cave. It was simple, but the large bed that he had all for himself was enough to show how much authority he had compared to the rest of them.

Li Huowang was surprised to see that Xuan Yang wasn't in the cave. However, his clothes were here. Li Huowang couldn't care less and immediately grabbed the jade pendant from the Daoist robe.

He sneaked out of the cave and carefully examined the jade pendant under the dim light from the green stone powder.

The jade pendant was surprisingly smooth and clear. Images of clouds and intricate patterns were carved onto the jade. Even an amateur could tell that this was excellent quality jade.

As he carefully examined the jade pendant, Li Huowang grew happier and happier. If he could truly bring it back to the real world, both his and Yang Na's university tuition fee of four years could be easily paid off!

"Hehehe~ Miss Yang Na, get ready to become a rich lady." Li

Huowang muttered those words before placing the jade pendant within his clothing and leaving.

Up until this point, everything had progressed quite smoothly. Just as he reached the entrance, he encountered a group of people going up a flight of stairs.

They were almost the same age as Li Huowang, and consisted of both boys and girls. Fear covered their faces as they were illuminated by a flickering torch.

Both parties were surprised and none of them made any noise for quite some time.

In the end, Li Huowang was the one who broke the silence first. He raised the hand that held the green rock powder and illuminated them. “Xuan Yang, your clothes... Were you assigned to the Preparation Room?”

It was not only Xuan Yang. The rest of them also had responsibilities assigned in different sectors. One of them was even the one who had fanned the furnace before.

But regardless of what their usual responsibilities were, they were all wearing clothes made from coarse fabric. None of them had anything else on them except their clothes.

Xuan Yang was not as arrogant as he was during the daytime. His expression quickly changed before he approached Li Huowang and whispered, “Let’s go! We need to leave, now! It’s time to leave this place! I’ve already bribed the disciple guarding the entrance to the cave!”

“Leave? Oooh! You guys are trying to—”

Before Li Huowang could even finish his sentence, Xuan Yang had already covered his mouth.

Chapter 4 - Black Cauldron

As Xuan Yang covered Li Huowang's mouth, the others holding torches swarmed up, staring unkindly at him.

“Aren’t you leaving? Then you’ll die here today! We’ll not allow you to report back to that Baldy!”

Li Huowang was surprisingly calm in the face of his life-and-death predicament. Rolling his eyes, he silently cursed the sudden turn of events in his hallucination. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes.

When he opened his eyes again, he found himself back in the hospital, bound by a wide belt onto the bed. The other disciples surrounding him had vanished.

“Nurse Wang, I’m awake, can you untie me?” Li Huowang called out into the microphone, calling for the nurse on the night shift. He eagerly wanted to see if that jade pendant was still in his clothes.

However, there was no response even after he shouted for some time. Li Huowang knew that Nurse Wang liked to slack off, and was probably engrossed in secretly watching Mary Sue TV dramas and not paying attention.

Li Huowang looked down at his chest under the blue-and-white hospital gown. He desperately tried to twist and turn, attempting to use the pressure to feel whether the jade pendant was still within his clothes.

Unfortunately, his body was restrained quite tightly, and while he felt it sometimes, at other times, he couldn’t feel it. After trying a few more times, he gave up.

Li Huowang yawned; he could only lie on the bed and pray that Nurse Wang would eventually glance at the surveillance screen after she had finished her drama.

It was already late at night, and even the second floor that housed the critically ill patients was very quiet. Amidst this silence, Li Huowang dozed off. When he woke up, he found himself lying on the ground inside the icy cave.

He was still in the same place, but the group of people plotting their escape was nowhere to be seen.

“Tsk... just this group of NPCs wanted to deal with me?” Li Huowang said as he pulled out the jade pendant from his pocket and gently flipped it over before putting it back.

After a while, he returned to the large dormitory and laid on a pile of dry grass, waiting patiently for the arrival of dawn. He was so excited that he couldn’t sleep, and so he spent his time contemplating the value of the jade pendant.

Li Huowang didn’t know how much time had passed, since there were no clocks around. When he saw the disciples beside him start stirring, he sat up as well.

It’s morning now, so Nurse Wang should have changed shifts as well. Should I go back and take a look first? Nurse Ai is a lot more professional than her.

Just as Li Huowang was sorting his thoughts, urgent footsteps were heard from the entrance.

A Daoist disciple frantically entered. He had a topknot and was dressed in a black Daoist robe.

“Hurry! Master wants everyone to gather at Hui An Palace!”

This sudden command perplexed everyone, but they had no reason to delay since it was Master who wanted them to be there.

Soon, all the disciples had gathered in the biggest cave in Hui An Palace. Torches illuminated the confusion on their faces.

Li Huowang noticed that there were a few people missing from

the group. Even besides Xuan Yang, some of the Baldy Master's personal disciples were nowhere to be seen.

Oh, they also tried to escape with Xuan Yang's group? Li Huowang thought, silently watching the spectacle unfold.

At that moment, an ugly person stepped out from a dark tunnel, and all the Daoist disciples besides Li Huowang instinctively lowered their heads.

This was their Master, Dan Yangzi.

"Ke~!" This cough caused everyone to tense up.

"There was an escape attempt late last night, and two of my very own personal disciples were involved in it as well. I am deeply saddened!"

His words expressed sorrow, but the hostility on his face was palpable.

Li Huowang scoffed inwardly.

They were discovered just like that? Xuan Yang and that bunch are really lousy.

"There cannot be any order without rules. Mistakes must be punished! This is the iron clad rule of my Xishan Donghua Sect! Follow me."

No one dared to make any sound as they followed Dan Yangzi.

Following him, they traversed caverns large and small, and crossed a turbulent underground river. Soon, they arrived at a damp classroom-sized cavern.

Li Huowang saw those who had attempted to escape last night. Not a single person was missing, and they were all tied up in a corner.

Initially they were dejected, but started struggling agitatedly when they saw their Master. However, the pieces of cloth in their mouths prevented them from speaking.

Dan Yangzi couldn't be bothered to listen to their pleas, and gestured with one hand, pointing forward with a finger. "Open!"

A large hole suddenly opened up in the smooth floor of the cavern, and those who had tried to escape last night instantly fell inside it.

This was followed with muffled shouts and hysterical cries echoing from within the hole, together with the sound of flesh being torn apart.

Faced with this terrifying scene, many of the Daoist disciples trembled with fear and wished that they could look away.

“Move closer and observe closely! This is the fate of those who try to escape!” Dan Yangzi’s words caused everyone’s faces to turn a few shades paler.

No one dared to disobey Master’s orders, and everyone came to the edge of the pit.

The inside of the pit was completely dark. The pitch-black circular hole was like a whirlpool that wanted to pull everyone in.

After observing carefully, Li Huowang saw a black cauldron within the hole, with twisted talismans on its rim.

There seemed to be something moving within the cauldron, but Li Huowang could not make out what it was.

The only thing he could distinctly take note of was a nauseating stench of blood.

Whatever was inside the cauldron, it was definitely extremely dangerous.

Logically, something belonging to this hallucination shouldn’t be able to harm me. Nothing like that has ever happened before.

He still felt anxious despite comforting himself, and prepared himself to return to the hospital at any time.

Whoosh!

At that moment, a wriggling shadow shot out from within the hole, swiftly coiling around a disciple beside Li Huowang and dragging him down into the hole.

Everyone was frightened, swiftly retreating back to the smooth

walls of the cavern. They would have long since started running if not for the fact that Dan Yangzi was watching them.

The spectators were petrified with fear as they tried to make sense of what it was that they had just seen.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang, as the person who stood the closest, had clearly seen what it was.

It was a black mass with a fleshy texture. It had clusters of black tentacles extending from its sticky and slippery skin!

Just based on that, Li Huowang was certain that the organism that Dan Yangzi was rearing here was not something that existed in the normal world.

Even though Li Huowang could not guess what exactly it was, he did not want to go over for another look.

Li Huowang knew that all of this was his own brain's imagination, but he had to wonder why would he dream up such a monstrosity?

As he was surveying his surroundings, a sudden but terrifying thought emerged in Li Huowang's mind.

Wh-what if this horrifying and mysterious world was real?

Li Huowang's body started to tremble. He realized this hallucination was unlike anything he'd experienced before. He thought of those people who had just died before. If they had been real and not a hallucination, then would he also die if that thing had grabbed him?

Li Huowang was starting to get overwhelmed by the suffocating fear. He forced himself to take a few deep breaths, then followed the self-soothing methods taught to him by Doctor Li.

These are all hallucinations, no matter how real they may seem. Li Huowang, you definitely cannot get lost in them once again; they're all created by you, there's nothing to be afraid of.

Yang Na is still waiting for me. I cannot let her down. I can beat all of this. I must!

Feeling composed, Li Huowang was ready to face the hallucination once more, determined not to let it overpower him.

Chapter 5 - Pills

Currently, Dan Yangzi did not know about what Li Huowang was thinking, and he wouldn't care even if he knew. He just continued to lecture his terrified disciples.

"Remember what you have seen today, lest any of you harbor any ill intentions!"

Dan Yangzi's words made everyone's hearts shiver, the fear in their eyes clear as day.

With his hands behind his back, Dan Yangzi paced around in front of his disciples, his eagle-like gaze scanning their faces.

"Listen carefully. Assisting others in becoming an Immortal is a great honor. If and when I become an Immortal, I will not forget your contributions. But for anyone who tries to ruin my plans, there will be dire consequences! Hmph!"

He suddenly stopped in front of Li Huowang, fixing his gaze on this young man whose face had a slightly different expression from the others.

You are just a figment of my imagination, so why should I be afraid of you? Li Huowang thought, calmly locking eyes with his Baldy Master.

The atmosphere in the cave became tense as Dan Yangzi raised his right hand, revealing his nails that were caked with dirt. The pitiful gazes of the other disciples' locked onto their fellow disciple who had dared to provoke their master, waiting to see how he would be dealt with.

Unexpectedly, Dan Yangzi's expression softened. He raised his right hand and patted Li Huowang's head, dispelling the tense atmosphere.

"Last night, when those traitors invited you to leave with them,

why didn't you go?"

While this seemed to be a question directed toward Li Huowang, it was thinly veiled praise.

Just as Li Huowang was about to respond, he saw Dan Yangzi raise his right hand.

"No need for words. Although you didn't report to me in a timely fashion, compared to those traitors, you did quite well."

Dan Yangzi lowered his hand and continued, "I can see that you have talent. From now on, you don't need to work in the Preparation Room. You will now be my official disciple."

Li Huowang was taken aback; his status was suddenly being elevated? But he soon realized that with the loss of so many people in the cave, Dan Yangzi was probably short on helpers.

"Since you are now an official disciple and have entered the sect, you need to have a Daoist name. Hmm... Your Daoist name will be Xuan Yang."

Li Huowang glanced at the circular hole in the corner, recalling the tragic end of the previous Xuan Yang.

Hmm, this name is really inauspicious.

Though Li Huowang couldn't care much about this sudden preferential treatment, the others from the Preparation Room were very envious; becoming Dan Yangzi's official disciple meant that he wouldn't be killed.

Dan Yangzi knew that he needed to offer some more rewards to keep them hooked. "Xuan Yang, since you have just joined our sect, I'll show you some goodwill."

Upon hearing this, Li Huowang quickly walked up to Dan Yangzi, expecting to receive something.

From the gourd on his waist, Dan Yangzi poured out five dark pills and placed them in Li Huowang's palm.

"Keep them well. These five pills are divine pills refined by me. When you eat them, not only will they increase your lifespan by ten

years, they will also temporarily grant you a huge boost in strength, allowing you to protect yourself."

Li Huowang's brows creased into a frown as the pills were placed before him.

Could these things possibly be made using people as well?

Just as he had this thought, he noticed one of the pills roll slightly. It changed from a circular to an oval shape, almost as if something was struggling to emerge from it.

However, when he focused his eyes to take a closer look, he found that the pill had not changed at all.

Damn, am I going crazy? Why do I even care about the things I encounter in this hallucination? It's all fake, and I absolutely cannot get caught up in it again.

Frustrated, Li Huowang slapped his own head.

Meanwhile, Dan Yangzi just ignored Li Huowang's reaction and turned toward the remaining disciples. "See that? Going against me means death. But you will be handsomely rewarded as long as you help me!"

Everyone looked alternately between Dan Yangzi and the pills. At this moment, all of them were lost in their own thoughts.

Seeing that he had managed to achieve his objective, Dan Yangzi waved his filthy sleeves, signaling for everyone to disperse and continue with their work.

Li Huowang no longer needed to go to the Preparation Room. His Daoist name was Xuan Yang, meaning that he now owned everything that belonged to the previous Xuan Yang – his status, his Daoist robe, and even the small but unique cave.

However at this moment, he couldn't care less about anything that was happening in the hallucination.

He was much more concerned about his gains.

Now with his hands crossed, Li Huowang looked at the two items placed on the white hospital bedsheet—the jade pendant and

the pills.

"My gosh, I actually brought both of them out."

But now, he had a dilemma. The old problem that he had been ignoring resurfaced, and now he had to confront it.

If I take these pills out of there, and they actually work, does it mean that it is not a hallucination, but a real place? What is happening to me?

He had faithfully followed the doctor's advice and firmly treated everything there as a hallucination. But now that these things were physically appearing before him, he felt conflicted.

If all that really had been a hallucination, then how did these things become tangible? What risks do they pose to me?

If that place really was another world...

The horrifying imagery of the mentally challenged disciple being ground into a paste and used in the concoction of a pill, Xuan Yang being swallowed by the creature inside the black cauldron, as well as many other scenes flashed through his mind, causing his breathing to become more rapid.

Ah! So annoying! I don't even have anyone I can discuss this with.

Feeling exasperated, Li Huowang scratched his head.

After venting his emotions for a while, Li Huowang still had to come face to face with reality. After a long period of contemplation, he determined his next course of action.

Whether it was real or fake, inside the hallucination, he would continue to act like usual, treating it as if it were real. If by any chance it was all real, this would ensure his safety, and if it turns out to be fake after all, then there was no harm in it of itself.

For now, before he made any further plans, he would need to verify the authenticity and the value of the objects he had acquired.

Having made his decision, Li Huowang took a deep breath and picked up one of the pills with his index finger and thumb.

No, it's too dangerous to take this myself.

His gaze then shifted to the patients enjoying the sun in the garden outside.

After a brief internal struggle, he dejectedly put the pill down. They were just as unfortunate as him, so how could he possibly use them as his test subjects? He would need to get his hands on a guinea pig later.

Then, Li Huowang turned his gaze toward the circular jade pendant. Compared to the pills, dealing with this item would be much easier.

"Alright, what do you want? I went to great lengths to be able to sneak out for your sake. If it's a prank, then hmph!" Yang Na clenched her small and white fist, threatening Li Huowang.

"Yang Na, I only called you here for help as a last resort. You know that I can't get out of here," Li Huowang said while walking to the ward's door to close it. Then, he also drew the curtains.

Translator's Thoughts

Li Huowang, drawn by the talented @格子的乱七八糟 on Douyin!



Chapter 6 - Worth

Upon seeing Li Huowang's actions, Yang Na panicked and took a step back. "What are you doing? The nurse station can hear everything that we say over here."

As soon as she finished speaking, laughter resounded from the speakers by the bedside. "Haha, don't worry! We can't hear anything. Little Li, keep at it!"

"Ladies, can you please stop being so nosy? Go and focus your attention on the ICU." Li Huowang shouted toward the speakers.

Then, he grabbed Yang Na's hand and led her to another corner of the room.

He took out the jade pendant from his pocket and placed it in her palm, then leaned close to her ear and whispered. The more she listened, the more Yang Na's eyes widened.

"This can't be true... This—" Before she could even finish her sentence, Li Huowang covered her mouth with his hand.

Their gazes met, and Li Huowang looked at Yang Na with intense longing in his eyes.

"Help me! Everything I have told you is true. None of the people outside trust me, not even my parents—they all think I'm crazy. You're the only person I can trust in the whole wide world. I'm not insane!"

After a few seconds, Yang Na finally nodded while biting her lips.

As she was leaving, she looked back at him through teary eyes multiple times, clearly worried about Li Huowang's mental state.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang watched her departing figure with mixed emotions. While he no longer cared about what others thought of him, Yang Na was different.

"Nana, please trust me! Just this once!"

Li Huowang shuffled around nervously inside his room. The time spent waiting for something always felt the longest.

During this time, he had suffered from another bout of hallucination, but Li Huowang quickly snapped out of it. While the doctor had told him that this wouldn't be ideal, he was afraid that he would end up missing Yang Na.

One, two, then three days passed while Li Huowang became increasingly anxious.

"Little Li, your little girlfriend is here to visit you~" Upon hearing the nurse's announcement, Li Huowang jumped out of the bed like a carp and rushed toward the hospital entrance.

Li Huowang bumped into Yang Na in the garden located within the hospital, and they embraced each other with excitement.

She suppressed her voice and whispered in his ear, "Huowang, it's real, the jade pendant is real!"

"I'm not sick! Hahaha! I'm not sick!" Li Huowang exclaimed, tightly hugging the girl and twirling her in the air.

The two basked in their excitement for quite a while before finally calming down.

"Did me asking for your help affect your life and studies?" Li Huowang asked Yang Na in a voice filled with concern, as they sat beside a flower bed in the garden.

However, Yang Na decided to dodge the question by changing the topic. She extended four slender fingers toward Li Huowang, "Do you know how much this jade pendant is worth? This much!"

"40,000?"

"400,000! And I am sure that he under-valued it. We'll definitely get a better offer if we ask around."

"400,000! Damn, 400,000!" Li Huowang chuckled. Such a sum could cover his medical expenses for these few years, and there would even be some leftover. Even more importantly, this was just

the beginning.

"Miss Yang Na, are you ready to become a wealthy wife?"

Li Huowang's teasing made Yang Na blush slightly. "Stop joking. All of this is so strange. Are you sure that it won't harm your body?"

"It's fine! I'm perfectly okay. What could possibly happen to me? Heck, with the current situation, I might have to lengthen the duration of my treatment. After all, this is precious! I can't be cured too quickly."

Hearing this, Yang Na's expression tensed up. She worriedly replied, "Huowang, these are two separate matters. I don't want money. You must not stop your treatment or your medications. Promise me, or I won't help you anymore."

Li Huowang had thought of many reasons to refute her, but a warm feeling arose in his heart as he looked at her concerned eyes. "Okay, I promise you."

Yang Na smiled, and gently patted his head. "That's more like it, you stinky head."

Just as the two were discussing how to sell this jade pendant, a few burly middle-aged men bustled past with riot forks.

Confused, Li Huowang asked one of the familiar faces, "What happened to Master Zhao? Did something happen?"

"Don't ask what you shouldn't, Little Li. Get back to your ward quickly. Also, if you happen to meet Old Liu, remember to report it immediately. That guy must have secretly spit out his medications again." That person hurriedly said, then turned back and rushed toward the stairs.

'Aren't there two layers of iron barricades surrounding the critically ill zone? How did Old Liu manage to escape with his small physique?' Li Huowang thought as he looked toward the critically ill zone with eyes full of doubt.

Back when he could not differentiate between hallucination

and reality, he was kept there for a period of time. Those memories were not very pleasant.

Li Huowang saw that the other patients were being escorted back to their wards by their respective nurses. Seeing this, he turned to Yang Na and said, "It's a little chaotic here, so you should go back first. Call the hospital tonight and we'll talk over the phone."

"Okay. Take care of yourself. Also, remember what you just promised me." Yang Na said before turning around to walk toward the distant hospital entrance.

"400,000!" Li Huowang sighed as he walked toward his ward. Quite a few new ideas and questions started popping up in his mind after confirming that the jade pendant was worth so much.

Was it a hallucination or a reality?

Then again, if something from there was so valuable, then it didn't matter whether it was a hallucination or reality.

He hadn't even taken a few steps before a familiar cry resounded behind him. Li Huowang turned back, only to see a bald and skinny old man knocking Yang Na to the ground.

Li Huowang's blood instantly boiled over as he witnessed such a scene unfold. He gritted his teeth and dashed up fiercely, "Old Liu! That's my girlfriend, let go of her!"

"Huhuhu~" A whistling sound filled the air as a hexagonal brick flipped and flew toward Li Huowang, directly smashing into his head.

Li Huowang felt the world spinning around him, and then he fell heavily onto the ground. His vision gradually turned red due to the wound that had opened up on his head.

A pair of bloated feet covered with the hospital gown walked across Li Huowang's reddened vision, toward the screaming and struggling Yang Na.

The heavy footsteps gradually approached Yang Na.

There was only one thought running through Li Huowang's mind. ' *I must not let Yang Na be harmed!*'

Trembling, he fished out one of the pills given to him by the Master and stuffed it into his mouth. It mixed along with his own blood that was flowing out of the wound on his head.

In an instant, an extremely hot stream of energy surged out from his abdomen into his four limbs, filling him with strength. At the same time, his fuzzy mind instantly turned incomparably clear.

Bang!

He delivered a firm punch onto the fatty's chin. The impact caused some of the fatty's yellowed teeth to fly out, barely leaving him with any teeth.

Drenched in blood, Li Huowang paid no attention to the fatty who had now fallen onto the ground. Instead, he took large strides toward Old Liu, and stomped on his skinny chest.

Crack-crack.

The sound of bones breaking resounded over and over. At the same time, Old Liu was spitting out blood, his bones breaking into pieces like noodles.

Meanwhile, Yang Na was sobbing on the ground, clutching her tattered sweater. Seeing this, Li Huowang clenched his teeth, causing his gums to bleed as well.

His bloodshot eyes stared unwaveringly at the two people on the ground. He stomped on the concrete floor with one foot, and then leapt toward them like a cheetah.

"Huowang! Stop! What are you doing?!"

Chapter 7 - Zephyr Temple

Li Huowang lay on the bed, wearing the hospital's specialized straitjacket. He looked up at the intravenous drip above him, seemingly waiting for something.

Then, the ward door squeaked open, and in came a voice, "Hey, Little Li, weren't you recovering well before? What happened so suddenly?"

Li Huowang's attending physician walked in, looking at him with a disappointed expression.

Upon hearing this, Li Huowang, whose head was wrapped in bandages, anxiously explained his case, "Doctor, they were the ones who attacked Yang Na first! I was forced to fight back to protect her!"

The Doctor adjusted his glasses with his finger and said, "You call that fighting back? That's more like killing! Liu Jianye is still admitted to the ICU. Your kick nearly killed him. You have spent quite some time here, and know how the others are. Did you really not consider Master Liu's condition before you took action? I had assumed you to be a sensible kid."

When Li Huowang thought of the frightened Yang Na, he continued to remain indignant. "So what if he has a mental illness? Does that give him a free pass to do whatever the heck he wants? If I had to choose between Yang Na being harmed or being sent to prison, I would pick the latter in a heartbeat."

"You-" Hearing Li Huowang's retort, the attending physician was at a loss for words.

Finally, he just sighed and shook his head. "Forget it, the hospital director has called the families of both parties. You don't need to worry about these matters anymore."

Upon hearing that, Li Huowang turned away and curled toward the other side of the bed where no one was facing him, contemplating whether the jade pendant worth 400,000 would be enough for compensation.

However, he wasn't all that worried. Now that he knew that those pills were indeed effective, Li Huowang suddenly felt that he had many new choices in his life.

Feeling that his young patient's spirits were low, the Doctor tried to console him. "Little Li, don't worry, you won't be sent to jail. The hospital can issue a certificate for you. Focus on recuperating properly, and we'll handle the other matters."

Li Huowang sensed the concern in his tone and replied, "Thank you, Doctor."

"There's no need to thank me; after all, I'm still your attending physician. And I have to care more for you as well since you're so young," Li Huowang felt his hand pat his own shoulder.

"But Little Li, tell me the truth. How did you manage to injure them to that extent? That's not something the average person can achieve. Were you in a normal state, or were you going through a stressed hallucination?"

Li Huowang's heart skipped a beat, his attention focusing on his shirt pocket. "That was me."

"I specialize in psychology and have some expertise in this area. Think well before you answer me again, and don't try to hide your illness. I especially hate it when my patients try to deceive me."

Though the Doctor's tone was friendly, Li Huowang could sense the heavy atmosphere in the room.

What should I do? I can't let him know about the existence of those pills.

Just as Li Huowang was anxiously trying to find a way to avoid the question, his surroundings started to fade, and the Doctor's

voice started growing hazy.

Just a few seconds later, he found that he had once again slipped into the hallucination and that he was lying on the stone bed inside Xuan Yang's solitary cave.

He sat up and supported his head, surveyed the simple furnishings around him, and smiled.

Hehe, no matter what happens, this is also a way out.

He did not plan to return so quickly this time around. In case the Doctor was the one waiting for him.

He stepped out of his room and saw some of his fellow disciples entering and leaving the cave's passageways. His mind started to plan his next moves.

Since those pills were effective, he knew that he could not be as careless in the future. He had to manage his standing in this place properly and maximize the benefits he could reap from there.

Fortunately, his status was elevated from a mere guiding drug ingredient working away in the Preparation Room to one of Baldy's official disciples. This allowed him to have much more freedom of movement.

When he saw a bearded man who was also wearing a set of Daoist robes walk by him, Li Huowang's eyes gleamed, and he immediately chased after him, shouting, "Senior, senior!"

The bearded Daoist turned to find that it was Li Huowang who was calling out to him. He replied indifferently, "Junior Xuan Yang, what's the matter?"

Li Huowang imitated the tone they spoke in, "Junior just became Master's disciple and would like to receive Senior's guidance. What should I be doing next?"

"Forgive me for being blunt, but even though you were personally accepted by Master, your seniority is the lowest. For now, you can only run errands within Zephyr Temple. Only the inner-circle disciples have the privilege of learning the cultivation

of Immortality from the Master, and you aren't qualified enough yet. For now, follow me and wait outside the pill room."

"Cultivation of Immortality?" Li Huowang mumbled to himself. He had never heard of any immortal using humans to refine pills to achieve immortality.

"Can Master really become an Immortal?"

The bearded Daoist had a look of self-satisfaction as he said, "Of course. Master even has supernatural powers. You just need to serve him well."

From talking to this senior called Xuan Yin, Li Huowang also got a clearer idea of the hierarchy within this cavernous Daoist Temple. There were five official disciples, one personal disciple, and only one temple master, which was Dan Yangzi himself.

Aside from these people, the rest were just auxiliary staff members, such as the cooks, the guiding drug ingredients working in the Preparation Room, or the young assistants tasked with doing miscellaneous work. In total, there were around 180 people.

This was the first time that Li Huowang got a comprehensive understanding of this Daoist academy. They didn't have a lot of people, especially after the last batch of disciples died.

While they were conversing, the pill furnace appeared before Li Huowang again, and along with it came a sense of suppression. White smoke faintly wafted out from within, as though it was being used to refine something.

This time, accompanying Dan Yangzi was his inner-circle disciple as well, who had a gloomy expression.

After waiting for a while with Xuan Yin, Li Huowang was assigned his task. It was the same task as the previous Xuan Yang—to retrieve ingredients and keep a proper inventory of the Preparation Room.

Li Huowang arrived at the Preparation Room which was covered in white dust. The workers within looked toward him, a

tinge of fear in their nervous expressions.

Initially, the young girl suffering from albinism pursed her lips and took a few steps forward in an eager manner, but in the end, she did not say anything and slowly backed away.

The other party's status had changed from a fellow oppressed to the oppressor.

Li Huowang looked at them while his mind whirled. The dynamics of his relationship with them had changed, and perhaps he could use this fact to gain some benefits.

"Um, do you guys have any money on you?" asked Li Huowang.

This question left everyone stunned.

"Money, don't you understand? Silver, gold, or jade will do too," Li Huowang asked again.

If he were being honest, Li Huowang really did need money now. It was unknown just how much compensation he would need to provide Old Liu with, and his own family was from an ordinary background. If the compensation was huge, his Mom might even have to sell the house. Hence, his urgent need for money.

"Since it cannot be spent here, better to pass it all to me as protection fees. I'll have your backs from now on."

His words were quite straightforward, so everyone understood them and began to search their pockets. They did not beg for Li Huowang to protect them but only hoped that he would not bully them after they handed over their items.

A blackened and shattered silver piece about half the size of a thumb; a copper hairpin; and around forty round copper coins with a square inner hole. All these items were his harvest.

Li Huowang sighed when he saw all these things; it seemed that he had miscalculated. These guys wouldn't have much money at all. From the looks of it, even his medical insurance would be worth more than all this junk.

Chapter 8 - Rewriting The Script

Just as Li Huowang was preparing to leave, he saw the girl suffering from albinism shyly remove one of her shoes before removing a golden anklet that had a red thread tied around it from around her almost transparent ankle.

Li Huowang's eyes widened as he estimated the weight of the golden anklet in his hand. Even though it was somewhat light, it was still made of gold and should be worth a decent amount.

Satisfied, he stuffed these objects into the wide sleeves of his Daoist robes. He then pointed to the girl suffering from albinism and said, "Listen up, from now on she's in charge of the preparation room. All of you should obey her instructions."

Seeing everyone nodding hesitantly, he took the prepared ingredients and rushed off toward the pill room.

On the way, he stole glances at the waists of others he saw, hoping to find another jade pendant. Unfortunately, he was disappointed.

When Li Huowang returned to the furnace room, he saw the large and oppressive pill furnace slowly opening.

At the same time, Dan Yangzi flicked his sleeves, causing several dark-blue pills to be arranged neatly into rows in front of him and then be poured into the khaki gourd hanging on his waist.

As he watched this, Li Huowang burned with envy; these should be the supernatural powers that Xuan Yin had told him about. He wondered if he could learn them somehow.

If I could bring this ability back to reality, then focusing purely on money would be quite short-sighted.

Li Huowang bent down to place the ingredients in his hand, ready to observe and listen. Currently, he did not understand much, so it was better to just watch and absorb as much as he could.

“Xuan Yang~”

Another task? So soon? Am I really just an errand boy now? I can't keep running around like this... I've got to think of a way to convince Baldy to pass his supernatural powers onto me.

In response to his name being called out, Li Huowang clasped his hands together and bowed toward Dan Yangzi. “Master, what are your orders?”

“Go to the preparation room and bring the guiding drug ingredient called Bai Lingmiao.”

Li Huowang's heart skipped a beat. His right hand reached into his sleeve and touched the golden anklet that had a red thread tied around it. Bai Lingmiao seemed to be the name of that young girl suffering from albinism.

“Eh?” Upon seeing his new disciple not reacting, Dan Yangzi turned to look at him.

Li Huowang clenched his teeth. He had just told them that he would protect them, but now he had to send her to her death immediately after. It was honestly rather indefensible.

“Didn't you hear what I said?”

Sensing that Dan Yangzi's tone was becoming antagonistic, Li Huowang sighed helplessly before closing his eyes.

When he reopened them, he was once again returned to the pristine hospital ward, bound to the bed.

What should I do?

If it had been before, then he would have just followed the orders without any hesitation. But the problem was that there was a very real possibility of that world being real. If he really brought her to Baldy, it would likely result in her death. This fact weighed heavily on his conscience.

After the nurses released him, Li Huowang bit his nails and paced back and forth in his room.

What should I do? What should I do?

Before he could come up with any ideas, the door was pushed open, and his attending physician walked in.

He smiled bitterly. He was trapped on both sides and now he had nowhere else to run.

The doctor pointed at him with a frustrated look on his face and said, "Hey, we'll talk one-on-one after the visitors leave."

"Visitors?"

Before Li Huowang could respond, he saw his weary-looking mother enter the room with a bag of fruits.

"I heard that you got into a fight at the hospital. How's your head? Why are you wrapped in bandages like that? Does it hurt?" She rushed over and examined him anxiously.

"Mom, it doesn't hurt. I'm fine, really. It's them who caused trouble." Li Huowang immediately reassured her.

After he spent some time consoling her, at least Li Huowang ensured that his mom wouldn't shed tears.

Faced with his next of kin, even his troubles at the other end had to take a step back.

Li Huowang selectively reported some positive news, "Mom, don't worry, I'm fine. My illness is much better now, and I've also been keeping up with my studies. I'll be able to take the Entrance Exam once I'm discharged."

"Stop hiding things from me. The doctor has told me everything. Go on, tell me what exactly happened that day. Who started the fight?"

Li Huowang used the calmest tone he could muster to explain to his mother, but that did not seem to appease his mother's anger by much.

"That's perfectly justified, so what compensation are we talking

about! They are the ones who were in the wrong. Even if they have some mental illness, it's the hospital's responsibility to take care of them! Our family has never bullied others, but we don't let others bully us either! If they want to file a lawsuit, then the truth will still be on our side in the court!" Sun Xiaoqin said as she slammed the table in agitation.

Li Huowang continued to soothe her while glancing at the doctor who was awkwardly touching his nose beside them. "Mom, mom, don't get so worked up. You came all the way here to visit me, so let's enjoy our time together."

Sun Xiaoqin suppressed the rage in her heart and bent down to take out the fruits from her bag. "Don't bother yourself with this matter. Mom will settle it. Come, these are your favorite grapes. Eat more, you have become so skinny now. The hospital food isn't that good, right?"

"No, the hospital food is not bad." Li Huowang sat beside her and began to eat.

Li Huowang felt at ease as he listened to his mother's complaints while eating the sweet grapes.

He liked this sort of feeling. He had not experienced familial warmth for a long time, ever since he had entered the hospital.

As he looked at his mother, Li Huowang almost wanted to spill out everything that had happened to him. But just as the words reached the tip of his tongue, he swallowed them back.

No, she's different from Yang Na. If I speak of it, she'll only think that my illness has become even worse. I cannot let her worry anymore. I'll only tell her once everything has stabilized.

Just as the mother and son were happily chatting, the attending physician's phone rang. After listening for a bit, he said, "Madam Sun, Mr. Liu's family has also arrived. Let's go have a look."

"Son, stay here and rest. Also, eat more. I'll get some more for

you once you're done," Sun Xiaoqin cheerfully said to Li Huowang, then puffed her chest and turned toward the door. She seemed like a rooster about to enter a confrontation.

Without even knowing why, Li Huowang felt an immense sense of peace as he watched her departing figure.

Due to his mother being so strong-willed, Li Huowang felt very secure as long as he was by her side. She was just like a large umbrella above his head, one that protected him from the turbulent wind and rain. All his worries from before seemed to vanish in an instant.

Keke, the lobby will definitely be bustling later on.

Li Huowang took another yellow-green grape and bit down on it, causing the fresh juices to burst forth in his mouth.

At that moment, Li Huowang's body shook violently for a while, and his surroundings started changing once again.

Oh no, Mom's visit almost made me forget about how to trick that Baldy. What should I do now?

When his surroundings stabilized, Li Huowang found that he was already standing in the preparation room. Dan Yangzi was also standing nearby, looking quite displeased. Meanwhile, the other attendants were huddled in a circle with their heads drooping.

Dan Yangzi flipped his filthy hand to reveal a black, viscous object wriggling within the palm of his hand. Each movement was accompanied by a sound as though it was a toad trying to lick its eyeballs.

Eh? Wasn't it supposed to be that he would be using Bai Lingmiao to refine pills? Did the script change?

Li Huowang hesitated for a second, then asked, "Master, what is that?"

"Hmph, it's good stuff. Taisui, Black Taisui."

Chapter 9 - Black Taisui

"Hmph, it's good stuff. Taisui, Black Taisui." Dan Yangzi's icy-cold voice reverberated in the small Preparation Room.

Li Huowang tilted his head slightly before once again glancing at the disgusting object placed in Dan Yangzi's hand.

Upon closer inspection, he realized that it was quite similar to the thing inside the black cauldron. No, the thing in Dan Yangzi's hand was definitely the same man-eating creature!

This thing is... a Black Taisui? Is he planning to use this thing to refine these pills? Such a strange taste.

With a flick of Dan Yangzi's wrist, the squirming Black Taisui flew through the air in an arc before landing directly on Li Huowang's foot.

The sticky and soft texture sent shivers down Li Huowang's spine, and his legs involuntarily trembled as he backed away.

Li Huowang stared at the dust-covered Black Taisui that sat on the floor before looking toward Dan Yangzi in confusion; he could not understand what all this was supposed to mean.

"It's a reward for you. Pick it up and swallow it. You were just a guiding drug ingredient before, but you can't be so careless anymore; after all, you're my disciple now. Swallowing it can help suppress your hysteria."

Li Huowang could not understand what he was saying, and he didn't want to understand it either. His young face turned pale, and he kept backing away, shouting, "I won't eat it! I'm not sick!"

"You won't eat it? Hmph, that's not your choice. Changming, Changren."

Dan Yangzi lifted his chin slightly, and then two Daoists with swords on their backs swiftly approached Li Huowang, each

grabbing one of his arms.

Dan Yangzi then gestured with his right hand. The Black Taisui, which had been squirming toward a corner of the room, flew straight into his hand.

As Dan Yangzi started approaching Li Huowang with that nauseating thing, his body began to tremble uncontrollably. An icy coldness permeated his entire body from the inside out.

He instinctively wanted to struggle and escape, but the hands of the two seniors were clamped down on his shoulders firmly like iron chains.

Fortunately, he had one last resort. With rapid breaths, his chest heaved intensely. In his trepidation, he clenched his teeth and closed his eyes tightly, using all his strength to curl his thoughts and physical body inward.

"Huowang? Huowang! What happened?? Are you in pain?"

At that moment, Yang Na's gentle voice melodiously floated to Li Huowang's ears.

When he opened his eyes, he saw a girl in a high-necked white sweater before him. Overwhelmed with emotions, he rushed toward her and hugged her tightly, almost as if grasping onto his lifeline.

The young girl's face blushed slightly. She struggled to escape his grasp as she spoke softly, "Huowang, Huowang, let go of me. There are others watching us."

Li Huowang looked up and saw his mother standing beside the attending physician, smiling at them. "Oh my, my son is quite amazing."

Li Huowang felt a gradual sense of calm chasing away the terror in his heart as he looked at the clean and tidy hospital ward, the bright sunshine outside the window, and his beloved family.

The attending physician adjusted his glasses, frowning as he approached Li Huowang. "Little Li, just what did you see in your hallucination? Your emotional fluctuations have been quite intense

lately. What's been going on? Have you been following my instructions?"

Li Huowang's heart skipped a beat as he thought about what he had just experienced. He anxiously asked, "Doctor, is there any medications that can temporarily suppress these hallucinations? I really can't take it anymore; I need a break."

"Alright, I'll prescribe you with some antipsychotic medications. But Little Li, medications are only an adjunct. If you want to completely get rid of the hallucinations, you will still need to follow my instructions," the doctor said as he wrote the prescription on his tablet.

Li Huowang directly rushed in when he saw the nurse deliver the blue capsules. He didn't even bother to drink any water, directly placing them into his mouth.

For now, he did not want to bother with the Master and his pills, and just wanted some peace and quiet. The earlier scene had really frightened him quite badly.

The capsules were sticky and grainy, which made them rather nauseating to eat. However he endured his disgust and directly swallowed them.

"Little Li, tell me, just what did you see in your hallucination that scared you so much?"

Li Huowang felt much more relieved after having taken the medications. He smiled and replied, "I didn't encounter anything. It's just that the guy over there was saying strange things. He was saying that his side is reality and this side was the hallucination. Ha... haha..."

As soon as he spoke these words, the surrounding air seemed to quieten, while the vibrant colors in his surroundings became dull and lifeless. Yang Na, his mother, the attending physician, and the nurse all seemed petrified in place.

This sudden change in the surroundings made Li Huowang's

body tremble, and his breathing became more and more rapid.

He helplessly looked out the window; the sunny sky had suddenly turned pitch-black. The originally safe and peaceful environment had all but vanished.

Fear seemed to tangibly envelop him, and panic suppressed all his other emotions. Li Huowang instinctively pushed Yang Na toward his mother's embrace.

But upon contact with his mother, her body exploded as if it was made of bubbles. His mother, the reliable shelter that could protect him from any and all hardship, had also vanished.

"Huowang."

Li Huowang's body trembled violently. He turned around only to blankly watch as Yang Na vanished completely right in front of him. His only love had also completely vanished.

At this point, all that Li Huowang cherished in his heart had vanished completely. Only desperation, oppression and agony remained.

The clean walls of the hospital ward around him receded rapidly, almost like a waning tide. He was once again back inside a dusky cavern located within the mountains.

Li Huowang's eyes were flushed red, and his veins were bulging on his forehead. He wanted to scream and pour out all the despair and suffering in his heart.

However, he couldn't do it—he couldn't do it because a Black Taisui had tightly blocked his throat. He couldn't make any sound, and he had to endure through all the despair and suffering.

Dan Yangzi had both his hands behind his back, as he watched his disciple who was trembling and retching while kneeling on the ground. Then, he shook his head and walked toward the door of the Preparation Room.

"Tsk, you say you don't suffer from hysteria even when you're acting like this? Your illness is the most severe in the whole

Preparation Room. Do you think that I just randomly picked you to be a guiding drug ingredient? Alright, since the hysteria is now gone, you can work well. Remember, Zephyr Temple doesn't tolerate any slackers. Come and find me for your medication on the first day of every month."

After that, the other disciples followed Dan Yangzi and left. Apart from Li Huowang who was on the ground, only the other guiding drug ingredients remained in the Preparation Room.

The guiding drug ingredients, with their strange appearances, some due to congenital and some due to acquired diseases, looked at each other, unsure of what they should do.

Finally, after half an incense stick worth of time had passed, the Black Taisui in Li Huowang's mouth finally slid down his throat, giving way to his heart-wrenching cries that echoed within the cave.

"Why!! Why did I end up in this cursed place?! Why won't this disease leave me alone!"

Chapter 10 - Steamed Buns

Li Huowang curled up like a fetus, remaining motionless in a corner of the Preparation Room.

The other guiding drug ingredients didn't dare to disturb him and just quietly went about their own tasks.

Unknowingly, night had descended upon them, and all the oil lamps on the wall were extinguished.

Darkness enveloped Li Huowang like a blanket as he lay there like a corpse, unresponsive to the changes in the outside world.

At around 1 a.m., a faint candlelight flickered to life at the entrance, illuminating the nearby shelves and dissipating the darkness around Li Huowang's body.

It was Bai Lingmiao who was timidly carrying a bundle of dried grass toward Li Huowang, before carefully placing it over his body.

Then, she pulled out a steamed bun made with mixed grains from her pocket, and placed it near his mouth.

Seeing Li Huowang continue to remain motionless, she pursed her lips and gently nudged him. "Senior, please have a bite. You haven't eaten anything all day."

Li Huowang's eyes were open. He hadn't blinked for those last few hours, and was just numbly staring at the icy-cold ground. He showed no signs of movement despite Bai Lingmiao approaching him.

Bai Lingmiao wanted to leave, but after a moment of hesitation, she took out a jade pendant from her pocket and placed it in the palm of Li Huowang's hand.

"Senior, this is yours. Please take it back."

This time, Li Huowang finally reacted. He looked at the object in his hand and realized that it was the circular jade pendant he had stolen from the previous Xuan Yang.

Li Huowang remembered that he had given this item to Yang Na in order for her to exchange it for money. Just the thought of Yang Na made his broken heart start to ache once again.

"How did this end up with you?" asked Li Huowang.

"It was Senior Li who passed it to me. Even though I said that I didn't want it, you insisted on giving it to me."

Under the dim candlelight, Li Huowang slowly sat up and carefully examined the jade pendant with cloud patterns on it.

Before this moment, he had never felt that everything here to be so real. However, in this reality, there was only genuine despair and agony.

If he was given the choice, he would prefer to remain trapped in that beautiful illusion forever.

Seeing Li Huowang respond, Bai Lingmiao asked softly, "Senior Li, where were you captured by Master? I'm from the Liang Kingdom. Where are you from?"

Li Huowang was stumped, but then he shook his head dispiritedly, "I don't know."

He truly didn't know. He did have memories of the past. But after today's events, Li Huowang himself was unable to determine just how many of those memories were true and how many were false.

Even here, he was nothing more than a lunatic that could not distinguish fact from fiction.

As he was shaking his head, Li Huowang suddenly felt that there was something abnormal on his head. He reached out to find a blob of congealed blood in his hair; he had been injured before.

Bai Lingmiao saw Li Huowang touching his own hair and explained, "That was done by Senior Wang."

Li Huowang knew Senior Wang; he was that hare-lipped fatty who had wanted to harm Bai Lingmiao

“After he did that, you killed him with one kick.”

Li Huowang’s mind played the scene in the hallucination, where he kicked Old Liu and sent him flying.

Remembering the scene, he lowered his head, silently chuckling; he was insane enough.

Then, Li Huowang reached into his pocket and fished out the golden anklet with a red thread tied around it, and placed it before Bai Lingmiao. “This is yours, take it back.”

Bai Lingmiao looked at her own anklet and pushed it back with both her hands, “Senior Li, you were right. There’s no use for this here, so you can take it.”

Li Huowang looked blankly at this golden anklet. This object had no use to him now, since everything he cared for had all but vanished.

“Senior Li, I would like to use this item as compensation, and ask for a favor.”

Bai Lingmiao’s words caused Li Huowang to look at her.

“If you are ever able to get out of here alive, can you pass on a message to my parents? They stay at the foot of the Cow-heart Mountain in Liang Kingdom. Tell them that their daughter isn’t filial, and cannot fulfill her filial duty of supporting them through their old age.” Bai Lingmiao’s voice choked with sadness.

“Senior Li, I really don’t wish to trouble you, but I have no other choice. I will probably be taken to the Pill Room soon.”

Li Huowang’s face had been filled with despair and numbness. But upon hearing those words, his silent eyes gleamed with some light as he came to a decision.

He looked at the dried grass on his body, then at the steamed bun beside him. He gently placed the red-threaded golden anklet back into his pocket once again.

“I’ll keep my word. Since I’ve taken something of yours, then I will help you.”

Bai Lingmiao’s sorrowful eyes lit up, but quickly dimmed again. “Senior Li, that won’t do. It will get you into trouble as well.”

“Keke... Do you think I’m afraid of that now?” Li Huowang had completely thrown caution to the wind. Since everything he cared about had vanished, what else was there to be fearful of?

“Alright, Senior Li, you’re so mighty!” A male voice suddenly rang out from outside the Preparation Room, causing the two inside to jump in fright.

When candlelight illuminated that person, they saw a mischievous monkey-like face with thin lips. His face had patches of yellow and white, and it seemed that he had some form of skin disease like vitiligo.

This person took out two mixed-grain steamed buns, and placed them beside Li Huowang to get on his good side.

“Hehehe, Senior Li, have these steamed buns. When I was having dinner, I remembered that Senior Li hadn’t eaten anything yet, so I specially saved these two for you. You may not recognise Junior, since I was born and raised without a formal name. You can call me Puppy. Hehe, yesterday, I gifted 17 copper coins to you.”

Puppy anxiously fidgeted, while the will to flatter was plastered on his face. He evidently wanted to rely on Li Huowang, and did not want to simply be a guiding drug ingredient. From the looks of it, there were clever people everywhere.

Li Huowang did not respond. He just picked up the three slightly hardened steamed buns and wolfed them down; after all, he hadn’t eaten for a whole day.

Due to eating too quickly, he slightly choked on them. Immediately, the smart and sensible Puppy ran out to bring him a cup of water.

With the help of the icy underground water, Li Huowang

stuffed the three mixed-grain steamed buns into his stomach.

He struggled to stand up, shaking constantly due to his legs that were numb from lying on the ground for too long.

Bai Lingmiao reached out to help support him, but Li Huowang pushed her away.

His eyes were fixed on the dark exit of the Preparation Room, before he walked out unsteadily.

His enemy was no longer that sudden illness. Now, his enemy was that Baldy, Daoist Dan Yangzi, someone who used humans to refine pills.

When Dan Yangzi's ugly and nauseatingly large face appeared in his mind, Li Huowang's eyes were filled with a strong hostility, and he grinded his teeth with a grating sound.

Just moments ago he was wallowing in despair, but now he was now filled with motivation. The only thing he had to do now was to find a way to kill him!

Chapter 11 - Xuan Yuan

“The Three Emperor-Officials emerged from the chaos. Under the order of the Jade Emperor, they took on the role of the Heavenly Official, Earthly Official, and Water Official. The Heavenly Official ruled over all that is under the heavens, the major gods, the great sages, and the emperors. The Earthly Official ruled over the gods of the Five Great Mountains, the minor gods, the sages, and the enlightened ones. The Water Official ruled over the gods of the rivers, the streams, the lakes, and the Immortals. The Three Emperor-Officials ruled over their respective realms with integrity, and the beings in the realms prospered. They took pity on the mortal realm and did many things to fulfill the needs of the mortals. With their supreme intellect and compassion, they lovingly blessed and protected the mortal realm.”

The sound of chanting echoed within the large cave. Including Li Huowang, the six disciples within Zephyr Temple were sitting on a mat listening to the morning lecture of their Master.

There were no books to read from. Li Huowang was chanting as accurately as he could along with the other disciples.

Li Huowang was in the midst of chanting the scripture when he raised his head. He focused his gaze on Dan Yangzi who was sitting at the front. Hostility flashed within Li Huowang’s eyes, but he quickly suppressed it.

Facing the ugly bastard, Li Huowang wanted nothing more than to flay him and consume the flesh of this Master of his. But he endured. He knew that he was too weak right now.

His enemy was too strong, so he could not act rashly. All he could do was to endure and wait for an opportunity to arise.

While it might be really difficult, and Dan Yangzi might end up

discovering his plans and kill him, Li Huowang didn't care about any of that anymore.

When he saw Dan Yangzi shift his body sideways, Li Huowang quickly averted his gaze upward, past the three incense sticks, and focused on the three deity statues placed within an alcove in the wall of the cave. The three deities were three separate gods wearing yellow Daoist robes, their eyes neither sad nor joyful, their gaze forever gazing toward the insignificant mortals. The three deities did not have an air of holiness. In fact, they looked quite normal. If it wasn't for the Daoist robes they were wearing, the three of them would look just like normal humans.

While Li Huowang did not recognize the three deities, he secretly etched their faces into his memories.

The sound of chanting gradually died down. After they chanted the final verse, one of the assistants pounded a red drum thrice, signaling the end of morning lectures.

All of the disciples stood up along with Dan Yangzi. They held their left thumb with their right hand and covered it with their remaining four fingers. Then, they raised both hands above their head and paid respect to the three deities.

After paying their respects, Dan Yangzi turned around slowly and looked at his disciples.

When he saw Li Huowang standing at the very end in his Daoist robes, he nodded his head with satisfaction.

"Xuan Yuan, Xuan Yang has just become an official disciple, so he would naturally know very little about what we do. As his senior brother, you should guide him."

"Yes, Master." A chubby man with a round face bowed toward Dan Yangzi.

"Alright. It is now past 7 am. I have nothing else to tell you. Go and have your meals." Dan Yangzi said as he walked into an adjacent cave with his hands behind his back.

A man wearing a Huyuan hat followed Dan Yangzi, albeit with a gloomy face.

“That was Senior Brother Zheng Kun. Ever since Zheng Kan and Zheng Zhen betrayed Master, he is the only direct disciple left. Please be more respectful to him if you meet him again. His temper is even worse than Master’s,” Xuan Yuan came up to Li Huowang and explained to him about the other disciple.

Li Huowang nodded. “Thank you for explaining all that to me, Senior Brother Xuan Yuan. Does Zheng Kun also know how to use special powers, just like Master?”

While there were still many things that Li Huowang didn’t know, it was clear that Dan Yangzi could manipulate objects through the air and possessed superstrength, easily capable of picking up a stone urn weighing hundreds of kilograms.

But the thing that Li Huowang was the most wary of was the most frightening thing that his Master could do—his ability to have complete knowledge on anything happening within the cave, including the fact that he said that his Master was insignificant or knowing that Li Huowang had not agreed to run away with the other disciples.

If Li Huowang wanted to fight against Dan Yangzi, he needed to know the details of this ability.

“Zheng Kun is a direct disciple, so how would I know what he has learned from Master?” said Xuan Yuan.

Li Huowang realized that there was a hint of jealousy within this statement.

The strength of a single person is way too weak here. Should I find an ally within the Zephyr Temple?

Just as Li Huowang had this thought, he immediately erased it out of his mind.

Those who would have tried to stand against Master were most likely already eaten by the Black Taisui. The remaining people were

either those loyal to Master, or those who were extremely afraid of him.

“Let’s go. We can talk as we walk.” Xuan Yuan turned around and guided Li Huowang toward the kitchen. “I know what you are thinking. Don’t try to learn Master’s method of becoming an Immortal. In terms of seniority, you can be considered the youngest. All you need to do is follow Master’s orders. When the time comes, you will naturally learn about it.”

They had just arrived in the cave that was used for eating meals. The rest of the disciples were already here and eating congee.

Li Huowang recognized three of them. One of them was Xuan Yin, while the other two were Chang Ming and Chang Ren. The two of them had a sword strapped to their backs. In addition to Xuan Yuan and himself, all five official disciples of Zephyr Temple were gathered here.

“One of the rules of Zephyr Temple is to not speak while it is time to eat or time to sleep. I will teach you the rest after our meal.” Xuan Yuan had just finished informing Li Huowang about the rule before he too sat down to eat the congee.

Li Huowang followed suit and drank a mouthful from the black ceramic bowl. All the while, he was silently observing the other official disciples.

Their faces were distinct but average, neither ugly nor nice. Li Huowang felt something was off, wearing the same Daoist robe as them and sitting at the same place.

When Xuan Yang was blowing his nose, his snot falling onto the ground, the other two official disciples frowned. Li Huowang finally realized what was weird, it was their aura!

Some of them had a dignified aura like that of a scholar, while some of them were rough, almost as if they were born to do menial labor.

Where did Dan Yangzi find the other four official disciples? Did he promote them from among the guiding drug ingredients?

After their meal, the other disciples set down their empty bowls and left without even looking at their new junior brother.

Meanwhile, Xuan Yuan guided Li Huowang throughout the Zephyr Temple and explained about the different sectors to him. From Xuan Yuan's explanation, he understood that the other four official disciples were in charge of different parts of the Zephyr Temple.

Some of them were in charge of the assistants, while others were in charge of collecting and buying raw materials from the outside. Some of them were even given the responsibility to feed the Black Taisui. Those with more experience even had to do multiple jobs. However, it hasn't always been so busy for them. Ever since the last batch of escapees were killed, they had to take care of all the extra responsibilities.

Li Huowang was responsible for the same task as the previous Xuan Yang, which was to manage the Preparation Room. The main goal of the official disciples was to assist their Master in becoming an Immortal.

After talking for an entire day, Li Huowang gained a much deeper understanding of the Zephyr Temple through Xuan Yuan's explanation. He did his best to remember as much as he could. This was no longer a hallucination that he could just leave freely. All of this information might come in handy when killing Dan Yangzi. His relationship with Xuan Yuan was also slightly closer than before. Both of them were walking back.

"Junior brother Xuan Yang, there is no need to be so nervous. You probably won't have much to do, since Master does not refine pills every day."

"Huh? Could you explain that to me in more detail?"

"Refining pills highly depends on the weather and the time.

Some of the ingredients to refine pills can only achieve their strongest effect at certain times. For example, today is not a good day to refine pills, but the day after tomorrow, between 11 pm-1 am, would be an excellent time to do so.”

Translator's Thoughts

Dan Yangzi, once again drawn by @格子的乱
七八糟 on Douyin!



Chapter 12 - Pill Recipe

“I don’t think you would understand it even if I were to explain it to you. After all, it’s quite a complicated process. Just learn it from Master.”

“Oh, I see.” Li Huowang brushed him off.

The pills that Dan Yangzi gave him were clearly effective, meaning that the laws of this world were different from those of his original world.

If he wanted to fight against Dan Yangzi, there was much more he needed to learn about this world.

Is he something akin to a cultivator that I’ve always read about in novels? That can’t be right. Since when do cultivators use live humans to refine pills? And since when do they enslave people in order to achieve Immortality? Based on what I know, if he was a cultivator, then shouldn’t I be given a special technique to cultivate? I don’t have any of that!

As Li Huowang’s understanding of this world deepened, he felt that the laws of this world were bizarre. Dan Yangzi did not even give him the impression of a cultivator.

“Oh before I forget, this is my advice, as a Senior Brother to a Junior Brother. Try your best to ensure that everything is done even before Master asks for it. Take what happened yesterday for example. Because of your hysteria flaring up again, we missed the right timing to refine the pill. So, if you send in the guiding drug ingredient to the Pill Room before 11 pm on the day after tomorrow, you will technically be making up for your mistake from the last time. It should make Master happy. While our Master may be moody, as long as you keep him happy, he will give you benefits.”

“Yesterday’s pill ingredient?” Li Huowang was shocked.

“Yeah, did you forget? What exactly did Master ask you to retrieve?”

Bai Lingmiao!

Li Huowang’s pupils shrank. So many things had happened so quickly that he had nearly forgotten about this! To think that it was not yet over.

If he did not come up with a plan before the day after tomorrow, then the girl suffering from albinism would suffer the same fate as the rest of the guiding drug ingredients and be turned into minced meat!

Li Huowang stumbled back to his room and laid on the stone bed, the red-threaded golden anklet still pressed against his chest. It felt as if it was red hot, spurring Li Huowang to quickly think of a way to save her.

But Dan Yangzi was too strong, and Li Huowang had no allies within Zephyr Temple!

Those who had tried to flee blindly had already perished, so Li Huowang couldn’t really copy their plan.

As he tossed and turned, the night passed.

Before the morning classes, Li Huowang wore his robes and started walking out of his cave.

He wanted to go to the Pill Room and see if there was anything that could help him.

Just as he was walking out of the cave with an oil lamp, a sharp face appeared within the darkness. Li Huowang was startled but he soon composed himself. The one who had appeared in front of him was Puppy!

“Hehe, Senior Brother Li, sorry for scaring you. I didn’t see you in the Preparation Room the entire day and got worried. That’s why I came to find you.”

“Is disciple Bai alright?” Li Huowang took a step back.

“Yeah, she’s fine. You’ve already chosen her to be the one to take care of the Preparation Room, so who would go against your order? Ever since you were made in charge of the place, no one else has been taken away. You are amazing!”

Upon hearing Puppy spout such words, Li Huowang felt irritated. He took the oil lamp and walked past Puppy.

When he arrived at the Pill Room, he saw that some of the assistants had already started cleaning the furnace and floor using rags.

One of them was even standing within the stone urn with a pig bristle brush, using it to scrape off the leftover meat within it.

As Dan Yangzi’s official disciple, no one would question him for entering the Pill Room.

Li Huowang walked around and observed the room.

The entire room was quite simple. With the exception of the black furnace that took up one-third of the room, there was only the stone urn and the pestle beside it. There was nothing else in the room, not even books on refining pills or any tapestries. The room looked quite empty and spacious.

“What are you looking at?” A familiar yet chilly voice sounded from his back.

Li Huowang turned and bowed. “Master.”

“I’m asking you, what were you looking at?”

Li Huowang thought quickly and came up with an excuse. “I was in awe of your amazing pill-refining skills, so I came here to see if I could someday attain the same level of mastery as Master.”

Dan Yangzi was satisfied with Li Huowang’s attitude.

Looks like the brat has finally become obedient.

He held both hands behind his back and circled the black furnace. “It’s good to be curious and to want to improve yourself. However, it’s not that I don’t want to teach you, but the Dao of External Pills is not simple. Ordinary pills are easy to refine, but it

is extremely difficult to become an Immortal through the Dao of Pills. You need to be able to refine both external and internal pills. I've almost succeeded in doing so, but I've had to expend a lot of effort in the process."

Dan Yangzi was ecstatic as he pictured himself living life as an Immortal.

"Master, are you almost at the realm of an Immortal?"

Li Huowang had just said this when Dan Yangzi reeled back from his imagination and composed himself. "The path to becoming an Immortal is a long road, but I know that I can be one. Do you know why?"

"No."

Dan Yangzi's eyes shone with excitement. "That's because this method to become an Immortal was recorded within a sacred text written by Taishang Laojun himself! He personally gave it to me! Who else could possibly become an Immortal? If he says that I can become one, then I will definitely become one!"

Taishang Laojun? Who is he? Is he one of the three deities?

Li Huowang didn't recognize that name.

While he wasn't sure about the details, Li Huowang still had to put up a facade. "Master is right! You will definitely become an Immortal and live as long as the heavens and earth!"

Dan Yangzi loved listening to praises like these, causing a grin to appear on his grotesque face.

"Hahaha! Good! If you wish to learn how to refine pills, then let me teach you a simple one. This is the recipe to refine a Blood Nourishing Pill. Remember it: 600g of Crimson Pills, 500g of nut grass, 110g of actinolite..."

This was an unexpected harvest that Li Huowang could not afford to miss out on!

He quickly tried finding some paper and ink to write down the recipe, but the entire room was devoid of any such items. He did

not find anything despite doing his best to scan the entire room.

Out of desperation, he picked up a piece of charcoal from under the furnace and started writing down the recipe on his robes.

“...start the furnace at 1:45am, put in the ingredients; look closely, breathe quietly, and pay attention. Refine it slowly using a weak flame. Open the furnace at 6 am. Use this recipe to slowly practice on your own. I’m looking forward to seeing how talented you are.”

Li Huowang threw the charcoal away once he was done writing it down. He showed his Master the recipe he had written. “Master, please take a look and see if I’ve missed anything?”

But when Dan Yangzi saw the recipe written in charcoal, his initially joyous face became sour.

He raised his right leg and kicked Li Huowang, causing him to crash into the furnace and fall heavily onto the ground.

Then, Dan Yangzi muttered angrily under his breath and left.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang just sat still on the ground.

Once he suppressed his anger, Li Huowang felt that something was wrong. He hadn’t done anything wrong, so why did his Master act like that?

He looked at the recipe that he had written. While it was not written in the best of handwriting, it was still legible.

At that moment, a sudden thought popped up into his head. He looked around the empty room that was devoid of anything with words. He then thought about how none of them had any books for morning classes.

Piecing together all the information, he came to a realization.

Could he be illiterate?

Chapter 13 - Refining Pills

Li Huowang stared at the furnace in front of him carefully. Beside it there were three incense sticks that were used to record the passage of time.

Without a clock, Li Huowang could only use such crude methods to calculate time.

When the final incense stick had burnt out, he immediately doused the flame and opened the furnace. A strange herbal smell wafted out from the inside.

Li Huowang was ecstatic! He did it! The pills were rolling around in a sieve. After using the sieve to separate out the waste product, he placed the irregularly-sized black pills into a box to inspect them.

These were the Blood Nourishing Pills that Dan Yangzi had taught him the recipe of. It was a simple pill used to coagulate blood.

One must not consume more than 50g of it or they risk having all of the blood within their body coagulating.

It sounded like a dangerous drug, in that it would do more harm than good, but due to how simple refining it was, Dan Yangzi chose this recipe to let Li Huowang practice refining pills.

After counting it, Li Huowang had refined 13 large pills and 26 smaller pills.

But this was not all he had obtained through this practice. He had also gained some basic knowledge about pill refinement by practicing how to refine the Blood Nourishing Pills.

Refining pills was much harder than he had expected. Not only did he have to take into account the age of the herbs, he also had to know the direction in which the herb had grown.

If a single mistake was made, the success rate of the refining process and the potency of the pills would plummet drastically. The pile of black waste beside the furnace was evidence of this.

After inspecting the pills, he took out a piece of bamboo and kept the pills inside. He took a deep breath, wore his robes, and walked out.

It's almost going to be 11 pm soon.

When Li Huowang opened the door to the Preparation Room, everyone inside immediately stood up and stared at him fearfully.

In their eyes, Li Huowang was the embodiment of the grim reaper.

Li Huowang gazed at them with a complicated expression on his face. Under everyone's gazes, he stood in front of Bai Lingmiao.

The girl trembled, her white hair shivering ever so slightly. She tried her best not to cry but in the end she couldn't stop tears from pouring out of her eyes.

Li Huowang held her hand and slowly walked toward the Pill Room.

Walking in the damp cave, Bai Lingmiao entrusted her final words to Li Huowang.

Li Huowang merely listened and stayed quiet throughout their walk.

However, when they arrived at Li Huowang's room instead of the Pill Room, he brought her in and whispered, "Take off your pants."

Bai Lingmiao's eyes were frozen. She was quite scared by his words and actions.

45 minutes before 11 pm.

Li Huowang escorted Bai Lingmiao into the Pill Room. Dan Yangzi had arrived at roughly the same time as him.

When he saw that Li Huowang had already brought the guiding drug ingredient here without his orders, a satisfied smile appeared

on his face. He was growing happier and happier with Li Huowang.

“Hoho, good disciple. Come here.” With a single wave of his arm, Bai Lingmiao flew through the air and was caught by Dan Yangzi. He used a single hand to grab her neck and then threw her into the stone urn.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang’s heart was racing as he clenched his fist.

Dan Yangzi had just picked up the heavy pestle when he stopped. “Huh? Her period came now of all times? The composition of the drug has changed.” Dan Yangzi frowned as he saw the blood stain of Bai Lingmiao’s pants.

Li Huowang sighed in relief. His plan had worked!

Once he had understood a little bit more about refining pills, he had come up with this plan.

In this world, the composition of a drug varied wildly even for rocks and herbs based on how they grew. So he assumed that a guiding drug ingredient, especially a human, could naturally be altered.

With his limited knowledge, he somewhat remembered that a girl’s menstruation blood was considered impure in Daoism. That was why he came up with a plan to fake Bai Lingmiao’s period by smearing his own blood on her pants.

Also, he had to ensure that Dan Yangzi noticed this personally so that the suspicion wouldn’t be cast on him.

Thankfully everything went according to plan. It seemed that Bai Lingmiao was saved.

Dan Yangzi waved his arm and Bai Lingmiao flew out from the stone urn, landing heavily on the floor.

She hit the floor hard. She covered her bruised knees and could barely stand. Since Li Huowang couldn’t help her in front of Dan Yangzi, he stood still on the side.

“Xuan Yang, take this guiding drug ingredient back.”

Li Huowang silently sighed in relief upon hearing it. “Yes, Master.”

When Bai Lingmiao walked back to Li Huowang’s side, he saw that her head had split open and blood was flowing down her cheek.

However, despite her injuries, she was very grateful toward Li Huowang. Compared to death, such injuries were nothing.

Thankfully we were able to fool him this time around. It should take quite some time for Bai Lingmiao to get chosen again.

Li Huowang escorted her toward the exit.

“Xuan Yang, since she cannot be used, go and bring another. I remember that there is another one with albinism. Quickly go and return; we can’t miss the time.”

Li Huowang’s body shook slightly out of surprise but he immediately turned and bowed. “Yes, Master.”

Li Huowang didn’t remember anything about when he returned to the Preparation Room. He just approached a boy with albinism and dragged him out of the room.

The boy screamed and cried, even begging for mercy while kneeling down on the floor. But there was nothing that Li Huowang could do. He could only drag him back to the Pill Room.

After delivering the boy, Li Huowang was just about to leave when Dan Yangzi called for him. “Didn’t you want to learn the Dao of Pills? Come and take a look. It’s not everyday that you would have the chance to observe the refinement of such a complex and rare pill.”

Li Huowang stayed and observed the entire refinement process, adding in the secondary ingredients and fanning the flames as requested by Dan Yangzi.

When the flames finally went out, the furnace was opened. Seven black pills appeared in front of Dan Yangzi, organized neatly in a row.

“Not bad. Looks like you have some talent in pill refinement. The other disciples are not as inquisitive as you are. Come, this is your reward.” Dan Yangzi took one of the pills and handed it to Li Huowang.

“Thank you for the pill, Master!” Li Huowang bowed toward Dan Yangzi as he extended both his hands to receive the pill.

Chapter 14 - Ally

He had just swallowed the pill when Li Huowang felt a burning sensation from his dantian. The burning sensation intensified with each moment to the point that he almost puked.

“Xuan Yang, go back and rest. This pill is quite potent. It will take some time for you to absorb it completely.”

“Yes, Master.”

He staggered back to his room and hunched a bit. However, nothing but water came out; the pill had already been absorbed by him.

Soon, the sound of bones cracking filled the air as his joints dislocated and his body contorted.

The burning sensation coming from his dantian spread out toward his limbs. His entire body was burning, almost as if he was wearing a sweater in summer.

The heat from his body was making him nauseous. He laid down on his bed and saw the ceiling shifting in his vision. He remembered how everyone in the Preparation Room looked at him fearfully, as well as how he had now become an accomplice of Dan Yangzi. He had done what he despised toward the other weak disciples.

While Dan Yangzi was illiterate, he was no fool. In front of absolute power, nothing else mattered.

I'm going to kill him! I swear that I'm going to kill him!

Li Huowang howled within his heart.

In his delirious state, he grabbed the edge of the stone bed with his right hand. When he swore that he would kill Dan Yangzi, his right arm's veins bulged.

Crack!

The stone bed cracked under his strong grip.

Li Huowang was surprised at the sound. He looked at his hand and then at the piece of rock that he broke. He quickly realized that this was the power of the pill!

It wasn't just his strength. There were other changes to his body as well. He felt that his eyes could see even further than before. It was as if the pill had removed all the impurities within his body.

But when he remembered how he had obtained this strength, he felt sick.

"Senior Li, are you alright?" Bai Lingmiao carefully peeked in from the entrance.

Li Huowang stared at her with a conflicted look on his face, not knowing what he should tell her.

Bai Lingmiao stepped into the room. "Senior Li, please don't be mad at yourself. All of us know that you could have done nothing more in those circumstances. If Master... If Master calls for me again, you don't have to bother finding someone else... after all, everyone here will eventually die."

Li Huowang didn't want to hear this right now. He stared at her bleeding head and took out one of the pills he had refined before. "Eat this, it will stop your bleeding."

Bai Lingmiao stared at the pills in Li Huowang's hand and shook her head in fear. "No, I cannot eat pills. I must never eat pills!"

Li Huowang chuckled and threw the pill onto the ground. "Yeah, there's a certain amount of poison in it. In the end, it's not some miraculous medicine."

Bai Lingmiao bit her lips and asked Li Huowang a question she had on her mind. "Senior Li, do you intend to fight back against Master?"

Li Huowang's face paled and he immediately ran toward the door and closed it.

“It’s alright. Master can’t hear us now. Master utilizes the Wandering Gods to help him patrol the caves. Everytime there is a procession, the Wandering Gods must return to the procession.”

“What are the Wandering Gods?” Li Huowang asked. This was the first time he had heard of them.

“They are as their name implies. You can’t see or touch them. I’ve heard my grandpa say that only those proficient in Daoism can command them.”

“Oh?” Li Huowang immediately remembered this information. It was quite crucial for him.

“When is the procession?”

Bai Lingmiao was puzzled by his question. “On the first and fifteenth day of each month in the lunar calendar. Senior Li, didn’t you know this? Did your parents not take you to the procession?”

Li Huowang shook his head. In his memories, or at least in what he thought were his real memories, he lived in the city and didn’t attend any such event, since they were only seen in the countryside.

“Senior Li, let’s get back to business. Do you wish to fight against Master?”

His face froze a moment before he said. “Yes! I want to tear him apart!”

Bai Lingmiao nodded and sighed. “Then let me help you. I might be able to do something!”

Li Huowang stared at her. He saw conviction within her eyes. It seemed that Bai Lingmiao was not as weak as he had thought.

“Alright, you will be the first one to help me,” Li Huowang agreed. He really needed an ally.

Li Huowang thought about their circumstances and told her, “We still don’t have enough people. Go to the Preparation Room and see if any of them are unsatisfied with Master.”

Maybe some of the people in the cave might not want to fight

against Dan Yangzi, but those in the Preparation Room were already doomed to begin with. Some of them wouldn't want to go down without a fight.

Bai Lingmiao nodded and left.

Li Huowang sat down and took out the jade pendant. He thought about the disciples who failed to escape.

Xuan Yang... Was this how you gathered everyone too? I hope I don't suffer the same fate as you.

After taking some time to gather his thoughts, he started to focus his attention on Zephyr Temple. He started to properly take care of the Preparation Room, regardless of whether he had to deal with humans or items.

Dan Yangzi naturally rewarded such a hardworking disciple. He taught him various basic pill recipes, treating Li Huowang the same as a direct disciple.

The basic pills were not very potent, allowing Li Huowang to only treat some minor injuries and flu.

Additionally, the pills contained a certain amount of poison. If he ate too many of them, it would cause some side effects instead. He wasn't sure if this applied to all the pills in this world or only Dan Yangzi's pills.

There was one more rule. He couldn't consume two different types of pills at the same time as it could lead to unforeseen circumstances.

Rather than becoming something akin to a folk doctor, it was more apt to say that he was someone who could use poison.

But the pills were not really that important. What was more important was gaining Dan Yangzi's trust and building a strong relationship with Dan Yangzi.

There were even times when Li Huowang was told to help Dan Yangzi refine pills.

Then, Dan Yangzi took in one of the young assistants as an

official disciple, and so Li Huowang was no longer the most junior disciple. He had become a part of Zephyr Temple.

After spending some time with his Master, Li Huowang confirmed that Dan Yangzi was indeed illiterate. He even hated those who could read and write.

He would never allow his disciples to be better than him, which was also why he sought after disciples that were illiterate.

After confirming this, Li Huowang was suspicious of what Dan Yangzi told him previously.

Master had said that the method to becoming an Immortal was given to him by Taishang Laojun himself, recorded within a sacred text. He even said that if Taishang Laojun told him that he could become an Immortal, then he would become an Immortal. Since he and the other disciples are illiterate, how could they have known the contents of the sacred text? Who told them about it?

Chapter 15 - Zheng Kun

“My home is located in the Lower Liang city; enter the city through the east gate, and go to the 22nd house on Prosperity Street. I’ve hidden two pieces of gold within the third pickle jar under my bed, between the layers of pickles. Spend wisely. It should be enough to ensure that our child grows into a proper adult. Please pass my message to my wife.”

A middle-aged man, his face riddled with pimples, held back his fear as he told Li Huowang his final words.

The man was the guiding drug ingredient needed in the Pill Room today. Li Huowang could do nothing but listen to his final words and remember them.

Staring at the back of the trembling man walking into the Pill Room, Li Huowang turned around and left. He was feeling agitated.

This was the eighth person that he had taken to the Pill Room. As time went on, there were fewer and fewer people within the Preparation Room. But what made him feel awful was the fact that he had started to grow accustomed to it.

But he didn’t want to grow familiar with this feeling! He refused to become Dan Yangzi’s accomplice.

He needed to find a way out of this, and away from this terrible place. But it wasn’t easy. With only himself and the malformed people from the Preparation Room, it was impossible to fight against the seemingly invincible Dan Yangzi.

There were two key pieces of information he had ascertained. One was that on the first and the fifteenth day of each lunar month, without the Wandering Gods, Dan Yangzi could not spy on them. The other was that Dan Yangzi could not read, meaning that there was someone else in Zephyr Temple translating the sacred texts for

him.

Should I slip into Dan Yangzi's place and see if I can kill that person? Then I would become the only literate disciple here. He would have to use me to translate the sacred text! Then it should be very easy for me to kill Dan Yangzi.

This idea had just come into his mind when he dismissed it.

Firstly, while he knew where Dan Yangzi lived, he didn't know if there were any traps laid out there. Secondly, he didn't know just how strong the person reading the sacred text for Dan Yangzi was. If he just entered blindly, he might end up dying instantly.

Should I poison his ingredients? No, he was the one who taught me how to refine pills. He would easily identify the poisoned ingredients and kill me.

Li Huowang kept thinking as he walked back, trying to find a way to kill Dan Yangzi.

Just then, a moody man wearing Daoist robes and Huyuan hat came in from the opposite direction. Li Huowang recognized him as the direct disciple Zheng Kun.

Li Huowang knew next to nothing about him. He barely even saw him with the exception of meal times. Even then he had only seen him a few times.

Compared to the official disciples like Li Huowang, Zheng Kun didn't have to bother with the daily maintenance of Zephyr Temple. As to what he was normally doing, Li Huowang had no idea.

Both of them were about to pass by each other when Zheng Kun leaned slightly toward Li Huowang, causing their shoulders to hit each other. Li Huowang felt like he had hit a piece of metal.

At that moment, Zheng Kun suddenly stood firm. He turned around with a malicious grin. "Xuan Yang, thanks to you, our Master is in a much happier mood."

Li Huowang stared at him for just a second before he ignored him and was just about to leave when a strong force pulled him

backward.

Li Huowang stumbled a bit, almost falling backward. However, he managed to stand his ground

“What’s wrong, Junior Xuan Yang? Are my words nothing to you?” Zheng Kun folded his arms and walked toward Li Huowang.

“Senior brother Zheng Kun, I still need to go and tidy up the Preparation Room under Master’s orders.” Li Huowang replied calmly.

“Don’t try to throw Master’s name around. I was the one who escaped with Master back in the days when we were being chased by others who wanted to kill us. You weren’t even there! Let me tell you, Xuan Yang: Just do your job and don’t try to stand out. Stop trying to overstep your boundaries.” Zheng Kun’s tone was serious.

Li Huowang was not angered by his words. He just stared at Zheng Kun with a stunned expression and thought about something. He remembered Xuan Yuan telling him that Zheng Kun was temperamental, but to think that he was this hot-headed.

“What’s wrong? Why don’t you try saying something? Huh? Speak up!”

Li Huowang seemed to have realized something as his previously stunned face became animated with a hint of exaggeration. His tone was mocking Zheng Kun.

“It was Master’s own decision to pay more attention to me. Even if Master were to tell me the method to become an Immortal, there would be nothing you can do about it!”

Now it was Zheng Kun’s turn to be stunned. He had never thought that Li Huowang would say something like that.

When he came to his senses, Zheng Kun formed a seal with his fingers and thrust it into Li Huowang’s left chest while tearing through his Daoist robes!

“You?! You think you deserve it? If Master did not tell me the method to become an Immortal, then he would never tell you

either! Who do you think you are, you garbage of a drug ingredient!”

The intense pain almost caused Li Huowang to faint, but he had managed to guess correctly. He smiled even though he was in pain.

“Haha, looks like Master has not even told you. Maybe you are untalented! Senior brother Zheng Kun, the path to Immortality heavily relies on your own talent. Since you are untalented, it's natural that Master would not waste his time on you!”

Li Huowang's words had touched upon Zheng Kun's reverse scale. He thrust his fingers three more times into Li Huowang's body. “You damned garbage of a drug ingredient! You seek death!”

Under the intense pain, Li Huowang's laughter grew louder. “HAHAHA! Come and kill me! Let's see Master's face when he knows that one of his disciples is killing another one of his disciples!”

Seeing Li Huowang's grin and maniacal laughter, Zheng Kun kicked Li Huowang to the ground. “Damned hysteric!”

Li Huowang laid on the ground motionlessly for at least half a day. After some time, a pair of large hands gently picked him up.

“Sigh... Junior brother Xuan Yang, why didn't you listen to me? Didn't I tell you to show respect to Zheng Kun? Why did you have to taunt him?”

It was Xuan Yuan, the kind disciple. Because of his peaceful temperament, he was the only person Li Huowang would talk to regularly.

Li Huowang pressed against his injury and endured the pain as he said. “Why? Would he have killed me? Master's Wandering Gods are still around. If any more disciples were to die here, Zephyr Temple might not be able to maintain itself.”

“Wandering Gods?” Xuan Yuan was perplexed.

He doesn't know?

Li Huowang suddenly came to a realization.

Wait, don't tell me no one else knew how Master had complete control of all information within the Zephyr Temple?

Thinking about how the other two direct disciples had died, it seemed that not everyone knew about this.

“Nothing, I’m just saying that he wouldn’t dare to kill me.”

“You can’t say that. He’s a direct disciple, and you are only an official disciple. He might not be able to kill you, but he could make your life harder.”

“Haha! So what? I’ve been used to such a hard life ever since I was born.”

As he spoke to Xuan Yuan, Li Huowang chuckled at what he had discovered through Zheng Kun—that even the direct disciples didn’t have the qualifications to learn the method of becoming an Immortal.

Dan Yangzi didn’t even trust Zheng Kun.

But most importantly, when he told Zheng Kun that Master would rather teach the method of becoming an Immortal to him rather than Zheng Kun, he saw a strong sense of dissatisfaction from Zheng Kun’s eyes.

It seemed that Dan Yangzi’s disciples were not as loyal as he had thought.

He had a feeling that he might be able to exploit this...

Chapter 16 - Head

Zheng Kun's attacks had broken two of Li Huowang's ribs, and he had also received numerous bruises on his body. Fortunately, all of these were injuries that could be recovered from by just consuming some pills.

Rather than being worried about his injuries, he was much more concerned about his plan.

On the first day of the next month, Li Huowang went and found Zheng Kun. He once again taunted Zheng Kun, inciting the latter to hit him again. During the conflict, he let the information about the Wandering Gods slip out, making it look like he had an accidental slip of the tongue.

When he saw Zheng Kun's expression change ever so slightly, Li Huowang knew that he had succeeded. Zheng Kun must've wanted to learn how to become an Immortal.

He hadn't known for sure how Zheng Kun would react to this information. However, he felt that there wasn't much to lose, and based on Zheng Kun's reaction, it seemed that he had succeeded.

Soon, it was once again the fifteenth day of the month. Today was a good day to refine pills, meaning that Dan Yangzi would stay in the Pill Room for the entire afternoon. It was also a day when the Wandering Gods were absent.

Though the Zephyr Temple was fairly large, Li Huowang had long since identified Zheng Kun's usual route. At this moment, Zheng Kun was silently meditating in one of the halls.

Did I guess it wrongly? Don't tell me that he doesn't actually want to become an Immortal?

Another fifteen days passed, yet Zheng Kun did not act this time either.

Finally, when Li Huowang had thought that all hope was lost, on the fifteenth day of the second month, Zheng Kun was nowhere to be found in his usual location at the Zheng Yi Hall. It looked like Zheng Kun had finally decided to act.

While Dan Yangzi was refining pills, Li Huowang followed his plan and rushed toward Dan Yangzi's room.

Just as he had almost reached the cave that was Dan Yangzi's room, Li Huowang suddenly stopped. He saw Zheng Kun standing a distance away from the entrance to Dan Yangzi's room.

Judging by his behavior, it seemed that Zheng Kun had used someone to trigger whatever traps were present in Dan Yangzi's room while he himself kept watch. From the looks of it, he was more careful than Li Huowang had thought.

Finally, after an hour had passed, Li Huowang saw Xuan Yin sneaking out of Dan Yangzi's room.

Seeing that it was safe, Zheng Kun took out two pairs of black talismans. Both of them placed a talisman each on their knees and disappeared like the wind.

The entrance to Dan Yangzi's room had a door, and currently, it had been opened ever so slightly, luring whoever was curious enough into its trap.

Seeing that someone else had already gone in and come back out safely, Li Huowang knew that whatever traps there were inside the cave should have been disarmed. He silently walked toward the room.

This was his chance!

Dan Yangzi's room was quite spacious, but it was extremely messy. There was even the stench of dead rats hanging in the air.

Even though the place was vile, Li Huowang immediately saw something quite valuable within the room—a single stone slab wrapped in a net of bronze coins that was held together using black threads.

If his guess was correct, the stone slab should be the sacred text that Dan Yangzi had told him about. He carefully walked over to the stone slab and read its contents without disturbing the net of bronze coins around it.

While Zheng Kun wanted to secretly learn the method to become an Immortal, based on his surroundings, it seemed that he had failed to find anything.

Li Huowang read the sacred text carefully, but it was barely legible. The text reminded him of ancient Chinese hieroglyphics; however, it was more likely that the text was written in a language that was even more ancient than hieroglyphics.

While the characters of the Chinese language had seen a relatively lesser amount of changes over time compared to the other languages, these characters were still extremely difficult to decipher. The more he read, the more he felt that it was wrong.

Didn't Dan Yangzi say that one must cultivate both the Dao of Internal Pills and the Dao of External Pills in order to become an Immortal? However, this sacred text doesn't state this.

“Gandharva appears amongst every soul... and out of his own selfless accord... because he feels content, all of the souls will be content too...”

Wait a minute, this isn't a sacred text. It's just some random scripture!

“Hehe~” At that moment, a spine-chilling snicker sounded behind him.

He quickly turned around only to find nothing behind him.

Instead, he saw that there was a small hole within the cave. Within that hole was a tall green vase that was the size of his forearm.

Something isn't right.

Li Huowang slowly made his way back to the entrance of the cave, making sure that he retraced his steps exactly. Based on the

current situation, it seemed that Zheng Kun had not removed all of the dangers.

“Don’t move.” A shrill girl’s voice resounded behind him.

Li Huowang slowly turned his head backward and saw something horrifying—there was a pale girl’s head placed on the mouth of the vase.

The girl didn’t seem to be alive. Her skin was as pale as a corpse, yet her cheeks were extremely red due to makeup.

There was a red dot on the girl’s forehead. Li Huowang stared at it and felt that all this was quite surreal.

He immediately knew who was the one who had been reading the sacred text for Dan Yangzi. Looks like it was... whatever that thing was.

“Are you with the guys from just now? You are in quite a lot of trouble hehe~ All I need to do is to ring the bell and my father will immediately come back.” Her braids were tied to several red threads, all of them attached to little bronze bells.

Li Huowang immediately realized the immense danger he was in! He quickly reorganized his thoughts and acted calmly. “Go ahead and call him then. Once he’s here, I will let him know that you’ve been cheating him.”

Seeing the head on the vase reveal an expression filled with nervousness, Li Huowang chuckled.

I was right! Looks like I’m not the only one who wants to lie to that illiterate Baldy.

Whatever this thing was, it was already doing something he planned to do!

No one in the Zephyr Temple was trustworthy! Each and every single one of them had their own schemes.

“You can’t blame me! The words were so complex and so I couldn’t read them! Father forced me to read them, so there is nothing I could have done!” The head on the vase cried.

Looking at how she was almost about to break down, Li Huowang amended his plan and came to a decision.

“Ok, then let's make a deal. I will leave this place right now, and you should act as if I was never even here. I will also act as if this place never existed. This way, everyone will be able to protect their lives.”

The head on the vase thought about it for a moment and agreed. “Ok, then go quickly. I will also act as if you were never here.”

Li Huowang slowly walked toward the entrance. “Since the sacred text is fake, did you also lie to him about using humans to refine pills?”

The head on the vase smiled. “Yes. Because I remember reading a recipe that used humans as ingredients for guiding drugs. So I lied and told him about the recipe as if that was what was written in the sacred text. Don't worry, the pills are not deadly. After all, I don't want my father to die. However, I'm afraid that once he knows that I am worthless, he will abandon me. Look, I don't even have any limbs—”

Just as she was chatting up a storm, Li Huowang suddenly raised his right arm and smashed the jade pendant at the vase.

The round jade pendant became a blur of white before hitting the vase hard, causing the vase to fall down on the floor and crack.

The vase broke into several pieces, allowing Li Huowang to see what was in the vase. A complete set of organs was tied together using black prayer beads, and covered in feces and urine.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaa! FATHER! It hurts! Father! It hurts so much...”
The cries of the girl slowly faded away.

Translator's Thoughts

The girl in the vase looks like. @格子的乱七八

糟



Chapter 17 - Found It!

“Who! Who did this?!” An incredibly furious howl spread across the entire cave system. The voice belonged to Dan Yangzi. This was the first time that he was angered to this extent.

Dan Yangzi hadn’t really been angry when some of the disciples tried to escape, nor was he angry when Li Huowang had demonstrated to him that he was literate. But this time, he was truly angry.

The atmosphere within the Zephyr Temple became oppressive—it was to the point that even the oil lamps on the walls were dimmer than usual.

Under Dan Yangzi’s command, everyone arrived within the large hall where the disciples had their morning classes.

The air was filled with a stench of blood—Dan Yangzi had already killed some of the people who had arrived earlier, their bodies strewn across the floor.

Killing people often helped Dan Yangzi calm down, but this time, this was nowhere near enough.

Splat!

Something fell onto the ground. At that moment, everyone saw that it was something akin to a head entangled with a mass of bloody organs.

It was the very same head that was placed above the vase that Li Huowang had broken. Now that she was truly dead, her cheeks had dulled in color; however, her eyes still revealed the fear she felt right before death.

“Who?! Who did this? Who entered my room without my permission while I was refining pills?!”

Dan Yangzi’s voice was low but deadly, like a lion ready to

pounce. “You would better come clean! If you do, I will give you a swift death! If I have to find you myself, then I will make sure that you will be in so much pain that you will be begging for death!”

The entire cave fell silent, regardless of whether it was the guiding drug ingredients, the assistants, or official disciples. None of them moved.

“Still staying quiet? Fine! Then I will ask each and every one of you! Chang Ming, Chang Ren, what were you guys doing while I was refining pills?”

Chang Ming and Chang Ren were the disciples with a sword on their backs. “Master, both of us were following your orders and guarding the entrance to the Zephyr Temple. We never left our post!”

Dan Yangzi approached them and observed their expressions. Just when Chang Ming and Chang Ren were starting to have cold sweats, Dan Yangzi slowly turned toward the person beside them. “Xuan Yuan! Where were you?”

Meanwhile, Li Huowang, who was standing beside Xuan Yuan, knew that it would be his turn soon. While he was nervous, he had to calm down.

Stay focused! As long as he doesn't notice anything different about me, I win!

“Xuan Yang! Your turn! What were you doing after you sent the guiding drug ingredient to me?”

The moment he heard this, Li Huowang immediately gave him the answer that he had already prepared. “Master, I went back to the Preparation Room to prepare the ingredients we would need for the next pill that we will be refining!”

“Is that so?” Dan Yangzi slowly walked over, his bloody stench and oppressive aura causing Li Huowang's body to stiffen up to its limit.

No wonder the rest of the disciples were sweating so much.

Time passed by ever so slowly. Under the intense pressure, the beads of sweat on Li Huowang's forehead grew larger.

Suddenly, he felt the pressure weaken. Just as he thought that he had succeeded, Dan Yangzi's voice rang beside him. "Did you guys see Xuan Yang going into the Preparation Room?"

Li Huowang turned to see who he was addressing and saw that Dan Yangzi had already approached the guiding drug ingredients. He was asking them!

"Think properly before you speak. If any of you can help me find the culprit, then I will immediately send you back home, and even give you some money."

The moment he said this, several of the guiding drug ingredients were shocked. They wanted to go home, to leave this horrible place.

"Master, Senior Li was indeed with us." Feeling that the situation was about to go out of control, Bai Lingmiao immediately replied.

Dan Yangzi stared at her. "Oh? And what about the rest of you?"

At this point, Puppy was visibly excited with a conflicted look on his face. He clenched his teeth and stepped forward. "Master! Let me tell the truth! Xuan Yang had not come to the Preparation Room even once! The culprit must be him!"

The moment Puppy said that, Xuan Yin smirked, almost letting out a laugh. His face which had initially been pale with fear now looked much better after realizing that he would live today.

Meanwhile, Dan Yangzi turned and looked at Li Huowang before approaching Puppy. Suddenly, he slapped Puppy in the face. "Bullshit! Xuan Yang had personally brought a guiding drug ingredient to me! How could he bring the guiding drug ingredient if he never went to the Preparation Room? Are you trying to die?"

Puppy was visibly shaken as he fell on his knees, tears covering

his entire face as he kowtowed. “No! I was wrong! I was tempted by my own greed and lied!”

Still expressionless, Dan Yangzi continued to stare at the horrorstruck Puppy. At that moment he suddenly turned around and looked at Xuan Yin. “Why were you smiling just now? Were you happy that Xuan Yang just got framed?”

The moment he said this, Xuan Yin wasn’t able to stop his body from shaking. The pressure coming from Dan Yangzi was immense.

As Dan Yangzi slowly walked toward him, Xuan Yin visibly grew more and more nervous, to the point that the people around him could tell that something was suspicious about him.

When Dan Yangzi was finally standing in front of him directly, Xuan Yin was no longer able to withstand it. He fell onto the ground as a yellowish liquid slowly spread out on the ground around him. “Master! I didn’t want to do it! It was Disciple Zheng Kun who forced me to do it!”

The moment Xuan Yin said that, Zheng Kun suddenly snarled, launching himself toward the exit of the cave system like a jaguar.

“To think that it was you!” Dan Yangzi huffed. At the same time, a clear ringing sound rang out as he swung his right hand. Then, a single bronze coin fell onto the ground, rolling and spinning like a top.

Zheng Kun was almost out of the cave system when Dan Yangzi raised his right foot and stomped the ground, his cloth shoes kicking up a pillar of dust.

Crack!

The bronze coin split into five fragments and blew apart. However, the coin was not the only thing that split apart; Zheng Kun himself had split apart as well.

All four of his limbs were torn apart, just like the coin.

However, even without his limbs, the bloody Zheng Kun was still alive. He crawled desperately toward the entrance just like a

maggot.

“My dear disciple! You were the one who had followed me the longest! How could you?! I should’ve known that you were the only one who could have disarmed the restrictions that I had placed in my room!” Dan Yangzi stomped on Zheng Kun’s head, preventing him from crawling further.

“Master! I’m... I’m sorry. Please spare me! I don’t even have any limbs now! I’m now nothing but trash! Master, when the monks from the Righteous Monastery were chasing us, we were only able to escape thanks to the deaths of my two brothers! Master! Please reconsider!”

Dan Yangzi slowly increased the force in his leg, causing Zheng Kun’s suffocated face to be buried completely into the ground, silencing him.

“My dear disciple! Did you know that I knew exactly what you were thinking? You and your brothers were nothing but ingrates!” Dan Yangzi spat out those words and stomped down one last time!

At that moment, Zheng Kun’s head exploded under the force of this stomp. Blobs of blood and tissues flew around, with some of them even splattering onto Li Huowang’s face.

Chapter 18 - The Method To Become An Immortal?

Dan Yangzi had found the one who broke his vase, but he was not happy about it. He kicked away Zheng Kun's corpse with a complicated expression.

"I've been raising you like a godson! To think that you would betray me like this!"

The cave was completely silent with the exception of Dan Yangzi's rapid breathing.

This lasted for an entire ten minutes before Dan Yangzi pointed at Li Huowang among the crowd. "You, come forward and kowtow to the three deities."

Li Huowang was momentarily stunned by his words. Under everyone's gaze, he slowly knelt in front of the three deities and kowtowed.

When he was done, Li Huowang knew what was coming as he held the incense sticks.

"From now on, you will be my direct disciple!"

"Yes, Master." Li Huowang was ecstatic!

This moment has finally come! Don't you fucking worry, Baldy. I will definitely help you attain "immortality".

"Come with me. I need you to do something," Dan Yangzi said as he carefully picked up the remains of the head and her organs in his arms.

Li Huowang followed him, and soon he was back in Dan Yangzi's room.

The sound of ropes flying through the air echoed in Dan Yangzi's room as the black threads binding the stone tablet flew off

and entered Dan Yangzi's sleeves like little black snakes. At that moment, the sacred text was displayed in its entirety in front of Li Huowang. "Can you read what is written on this?"

Li Huowang scrutinized the tablet and asked, "Master, didn't you say that in order to become an Immortal we need to be able to refine both internal and external pills? However, the method to refine the internal pills isn't here."

"What?!" Dan Yangzi's eyes flickered back and forth between him and the dead girl.

"I am telling the truth," Li Huowang said with conviction.

Li Huowang didn't know what kind of lies the girl in the vase had fed to Dan Yangzi. If he were to follow her original script, there was a high chance of failing, so he decided that it would be much easier to be honest and come up with something else.

Furthermore, it was not as if he was lying. It was the truth. The entire method to become an Immortal was a fake story that the girl in the vase had come up with.

Naturally, he would also come up with his own fake story and method as well.

Dan Yangzi was initially hesitant about believing Li Huowang completely. But the more he thought about it, the more untrustworthy the previous method seemed.

No wonder I haven't been able to become an Immortal even after such a long time. She always said that the words in the sacred text changed every day and were not possible to memorize.

"Ptui!" A vile green glob hit the girl's head as Dan Yangzi spit on her. He then turned and looked at Li Huowang. "So, what does it really say?!"

"This stone tablet records a technique to cultivate internal strength. It says here that during the time between the new year's eve and the new year, it is possible to utilize several external pills and this technique to capture a portion of the spiritual energy that

the heavens release into the mortal realm. We can then absorb it and use it to become Immortals.” Li Huowang stared at the stone tablet and uttered each word with such confidence that it seemed like all his words were the truth.

“It seems that there are several kinds of pills. This one requires 120g of Cinnabar, 5g of White Strychnine, 60g of Asadin, and... a Wandering God? Master, what kind of ingredient is a Wandering God?”

Dan Yangzi did not reply immediately, instead observing Li Huowang for a while. “You! Even that little girl could trick me. Are you also trying to do the same?”

Li Huowang immediately replied. “Master, this is the method to become an Immortal! How could I trick you?! After all, I want to become an Immortal too!”

“Good!” Dan Yangzi clapped and laughed happily. “Then let’s become Immortals together, both master and disciple!”

Li Huowang was stunned for a moment, before continuing his facade, displaying an extremely excited expression. “Is that true? Master! Can I become an Immortal too?! Thank you, Master!”

Meanwhile, Dan Yangzi had been silently observing Li Huowang’s expression and only nodded after he was certain that there was nothing wrong with Li Huowang.

“Yes. Don’t worry about the pills. Now, tell me how to use the technique. When both of us have mastered it, we will proceed to refine the pills. There is still quite sometime before the new year.”

“Yes, Master!” Li Huowang then proceeded to teach him how to use the Internal and External Heavenly Circulation technique that he had come up with.

Li Huowang was in Dan Yangzi’s room for quite a long time. He only managed to get back to his room late at night.

Li Huowang happily walked down the tunnels with his lantern illuminating the path in front of him. He was satisfied with how

things were going and how quickly he would be able to achieve his objective.

He was delighted with this opportunity after having waited for so long.

When he came to the Preparation Room, just as he had expected, the guiding drug ingredients inside still hadn't gone to sleep.

As he walked in, all of them surrounded him, their eyes filled with happiness and excitement. Everyone knew what today's developments meant for them and Li Huowang. Li Huowang had already told them about what might happen today beforehand.

"Don't worry and just wait for my good news. All of you will be able to go home soon."

As Li Huowang said this, everyone almost cried from happiness. They would finally be able to go home!

"Senior Li! I will treat you as my adoptive father! You are practically a living saint!" One of them who was affected by hand, foot, and mouth disease was kneeling on the ground and kowtowing to Li Huowang with gratitude.

Everyone else saw this and followed suit.

Li Huowang made some effort to calm them all down. "If it weren't for all of you this afternoon, then I would've been dead. Shouldn't I be the one kneeling in front of you now?"

All of them stood up, their faces lit up with their bright smiles.

Li Huowang stared at their happy faces, feeling something warm in his heart. In this bizarre world, these malformed people were more or less his comrades.

"Senior Li, how was my acting? That Baldy was so stupid that he fell for my act!" Puppy pounded his chest with pride.

"Not bad. If it weren't for you, Dan Yangzi might not have been fooled so easily."

While everyone was praising him and asking questions, a

certain someone was worried about him.

“Senior Li, are you alright? Did he hurt you?” Bai Lingmiao came up to him, her eyes filled with worry.

Li Huowang suddenly remembered how Dan Yangzi wanted to become an Immortal with him. This would also mean that Dan Yangzi wanted Li Huowang to test the pills first.

I don't need to tell her this.

“He has to rely on me to translate the contents of the sacred text now. Don't worry, he will never harm me.”

After exchanging some pleasantries, Li Huowang became serious. “The first day of the month is almost over, and the Wandering Gods will soon return from their procession. I need your help. Did your grandfather tell you any other stories like these?”

He still hasn't figured out what kind of ingredients he should list to refine the fake pills.

Merely cinnabar or other minerals containing mercury would not be enough to satisfy him. Li Huowang needed ingredients that were extremely toxic or vile—the worst of their kind.

He still remembered just how strong Dan Yangzi was. He needed to make sure that Dan Yangzi would die this time.

Chapter 19 - Superstitious

Upon hearing Li Huowang's question, Bai Lingmiao's eyes widened. "Yes, there are quite a few more stories that my grandfather has told me. He told me not to run out of the village; otherwise, I would be captured. He told me that the people outside the village are ruthless and would strip me of my skin, forcing me to wear flayed dog skin instead. After that, they would then use us to perform on the street and fool people into thinking that the 'dogs' are smart and can listen to orders. He also told me that the children would never be able to grow after all that because the dog skin would be fused to their body."

Li Huowang shook his head. "No, I meant stories that are used to scare children, something akin to the Wandering Gods."

"Wandering Gods? Hmm..." Bai Lingmiao furrowed her brows as she tried to think back. "My grandfather would tell me random stories from time to time, mostly about giant man-eating insects living within the hills. He didn't really tell me any stories similar to that of the story of the Wandering Gods."

"Who told your grandfather about the story of the Wandering Gods?"

Bai Lingmiao's eyes shone with innocence as she replied, "It was his grandfather who told him. And, I will pass down the story to my grandchildren one day."

Li Huowang shook his head. From the looks of it, he might need to revise his plan a little.

"Senior Li, I know of a story." A frail teenager suddenly spoke up.

His joints were twisted abnormally, with one shoulder being higher than the other. He was propping himself up against the wall.

Even within the Preparation Room, he was one of the more “abnormal” ones.

“Senior Li, my surname is Zhao. I’m usually called Wu at home, but you can call me Zhao Wu.”

Li Huowang was desperate for ideas, so he couldn’t really care about who was talking. “Sure, tell me about your stories.”

Zhao Wu looked around and whispered to Li Huowang. “You wanted something vile and evil, correct? I’ve heard my elders tell stories of something known as Mountain Grandma”.

“Mountain Grandma? What do they look like?” Li Huowang tried to recall if he had ever seen pictures of anything like it, but nothing came to mind. In fact, he had never even heard of the term before.

“Shh! Senior Li, don’t be too loud about it. This thing is very dangerous. I’ve heard that the Mountain Grandma has very keen hearing. If you keep on talking about her, she will definitely come and find you.”

“Oh?” Li Huowang was intrigued.

“I’ve heard my uncle say this before: the Mountain Grandma would appear in different forms in front of different people. Some would see her as a monster with long ears, while others would see her as an older family member that was long dead. But in all of the stories, one thing remained constant. Those who stayed with the Mountain Grandma for a certain period of time would transform into one too!”

Li Huowang rubbed his chin, deep in thought. “What a weird world we live in. There are so many crazy things in this world. Alright, this should do. Anything else?”

“Yeah! There’s something called the Companion Fish. It’s also very vile.”

Li Huowang learned many weird names from Zhao Wu. He decided that most of them would be the ingredients of the fake pills

that he would use to kill Dan Yangzi.

“Looks like you are quite knowledgeable. Thank you. I think all these will help me a lot,” said Li Huowang.

If Li Huowang were to only list out poisonous ingredients, Dan Yangzi might discover his plot. But if he were to add in some of these ingredients that he might not even know about, the plan would be much more likely to succeed.

He needed to use ingredients that even Dan Yangzi might not know. The more ingredients like that there were, the more likely he would think that the pills would turn him into an Immortal.

Hearing Li Huowang’s praises, Zhao Wu chuckled. “I’ve heard these from my uncle. He used to be a wanderer, so he traveled a lot and learned a lot about the world.”

“Alright. Thanks! It’s almost time now, so I need to go back. All of you just need to wait for my news.” Li Huowang took a deep breath and started walking back to his room.

He had just taken two steps when a giant blocked him. The man was at least 1.9m tall. ”I...I...I...”

Li Huowang recognized him. Everyone in the Preparation Room simply called him Simpleton. He was cross-eyed and drooling.

He wasn’t really a simpleton; it was just that he had difficulty processing information and had a slower response rate. “I... I know some too!”

Li Huowang sighed and patted his bald head before leaving. The next day arrived.

Li Huowang was called to Dan Yangzi’s room early in the morning. “I’ve more or less mastered the Internal and External Heavenly Circulation technique. Now tell me the ingredients used to refine the pills.”

“Yes, Master.” Li Huowang approached the stone tablet and once again began to inspect it. He tried to make his words as

believable as possible. “Hmm... Take two hearts of the Mountain Grandma and extract their essence? Master, what is this?”

Meanwhile, Dan Yangzi was pacing about in his room, his face full of uncertainty. “Is that so? I need something this vile to become an Immortal?”

“Master, what is a Mountain Grandma?”

“Ignore it. Keep reading.”

“One Companion Fish. Take its gills and soak it in 100g of Asadin...”

Li Huowang combined his own knowledge and Zhao Wu’s knowledge to come up with an extremely believable pill recipe. It had taken him all night to consolidate all the information.

After Li Huowang read the ingredients for the fake pill out loud, Dan Yangzi was surprisingly excited and kept on mumbling.

When Dan Yangzi finally compiled and analyzed the ingredients in his mind, he felt very shocked.

“Yes... That’s right. Asadin is a cold ingredient by nature, and so it would require something with a hot property like a Companion Fish to balance it out. This is amazing! And to think that we would need to use the hearts of Mountain Grandmas to refine a pill. Why did I not think of it before? Since humans can be refined into pills, then naturally evil beings such as these should be able to be used to refine pills too!” Dan Yangzi started reasoning with himself as he tried to make sense of the ingredients.

Li Huowang realized that Dan Yangzi could be really smart at times, but downright stupid at other times. He never trusted anyone besides himself.

It all boiled down to superstitions. In a world without gods and demons, being superstitious would be seen as foolish, but even in a world filled with supernatural beings, being overly superstitious would still be foolish.

Just then, Dan Yangzi reached into his sleeves and pulled out a

bronze handbell that had a dent. Li Huowang noticed that it was similar to the bells that were used to control zombies in the movies he had watched before.

Dan Yangzi shook the bell violently, and a screeching sound was heard.

The sound was so loud that it made Li Huowang feel like his head would split open from the pain. He barely had enough energy to close his ears and clench his teeth.

At the same time, he noticed that the bell had not only affected his hearing but also his sight.

Everything around him started to twist and turn, almost as if the entire world was being shaken.

What is this? What is Dan Yangzi doing? Did I make a mistake? Have I been found out?

Just as Li Huowang thought that he had failed, he saw the edges of everything around him start to twist and turn, before gathering in front of Dan Yangzi. The edges of the table, the edges of Dan Yangzi's sleeves, and even the edges of the sacred text were gathering in front of Dan Yangzi.

He couldn't really see what that item was, but he was certain that it was made from the edges of everything, and that it was alive.

For a moment, Li Huowang thought that he was seeing illusions and shook his head. But then that 'thing' split into two in front of Li Huowang's very own eyes.

Chapter 20 - Dan Yangzi

When he saw the two wriggling ‘things’ in front of Dan Yangzi, Li Huowang had a hunch.

Are these the creatures that will gather the ingredients for Dan Yangzi?

Just as he had this thought, Li Huowang saw Dan Yangzi lower his body and scoop up some dirt before shoving it into his mouth. Then, he started talking with the ‘things’. His voice was oddly different and sounded extremely unnatural, yet the creatures somehow understood him and quickly left after Dan Yangzi finished instructing them. When they departed, everything returned to normal.

“Don’t worry. Even if the ingredients on the sacred text are hard to get, I can still obtain them. It’s a good thing that I still have some people outside,” Dan Yangzi said happily.

“Yeah! Master is someone who will definitely become an Immortal. Nothing in this world is too hard for you! But Master, what were those things?”

“Hehe. It seems that you still have much to learn. Those are the Wandering Gods that the sacred text mentioned.”

Due to the dangerous situation Li Huowang was in for the past few months, he had never had the time to consider this, nor did he have time to contemplate the world he was in.

What is a Mountain Grandma? What are the Wandering Gods? None of this existed in his original world.

If it weren’t for the pork and lamb that he had eaten in this world, he might’ve thought that nothing in this world was ordinary.

“This is a good treasure. I had to use a lot of my power just to take it.” Dan Yangzi placed the bronze bell back inside his sleeves.

“Take?”

“Yeah, of course, I had to take it from someone else. Do you think anyone would give it to you for free? That’s what I should do if someone has something that I don’t! This was something that I learned when someone took my bun from me when I was five years old. When I was younger, I robbed people and took their money. Then I started stealing and taking techniques, treasures, and disciples. I’ve even taken the entire Zephyr Temple! Even the statues of the three deities have not condemned me!” Dan Yangzi said with satisfaction in his voice.

“You should listen well when adults talk. That is what it means to have manners. I’m only teaching you now because I treat you like my own family.”

“But Master, what if you can’t take something away from someone else?”

“If I can’t take it away? Then I would partner up with someone else to try and take it! You are literate, yet you don’t know how to use your brain? If you can’t take it even after joining forces with a partner, then poison them! If you can’t poison them, then frame them! Do every shady thing you can to get what you need!”

The few sentences Dan Yangzi had just uttered were enough to show Li Huowang just how he did things. He would do anything and everything he could, regardless of the method, to obtain what he wanted.

“Master, you are quite wise!”

“Yeah. So what if I can’t read? So what if I can’t understand many things? They told me that my ways were vile and evil. So I decided that I will become an Immortal! I will show them just who is stupid and vile!” Dan Yangzi’s last few words rang out as a shout, his ugly face filled with wrath.

Li Huowang didn’t know who Dan Yangzi was referring to, but it was clear that both of them had a deep grudge against each other.

Since then, Li Huowang spent most of his time with Dan Yangzi, including eating and sleeping. Both of them researched the method of becoming an Immortal.

During this period, Li Huowang perfected the recipe little by little, increasing the credibility of the sacred text.

The ingredients that Li Huowang had requested soon arrived.

One of those items was sticky and pale white in color, covered in soft black fur. The other was a clump of faintly glowing black boil.

Li Huowang was not only disgusted by the ingredients but also amazed by Dan Yangzi's power. To think that he could actually acquire them!

"Master, should we refine them now?" Li Huowang asked.

"No need, there's still a bit more time before the new year. Let's go have our New Year's Eve meal."

Dan Yangzi's words surprised Li Huowang.

New year's eve dinner? Was this a tradition?

Li Huowang quickly followed Dan Yangzi out of the Pill Room.

They soon arrived in the cave meant for eating meals. The other three disciples had already arrived. They were Chang Ming, Chang Ren, and Xuan Yuan.

When he saw the empty table, Dan Yangzi frowned. "Why did you not prepare the utensils for the dead disciples? Quickly prepare them and get ready to welcome them and celebrate the New Year."

Soon, every dead disciple had their own set of utensils, and the round table was filled with them.

Dan Yangzi smiled and nodded with approval. He sat on his chair while Li Huowang sat on his right side. The left side was left empty. That seat was meant for Zheng Kun.

"Plate the dumplings."

A steaming plate of dumplings was carried in by the assistants. The aroma was quite tantalizing as the assistants used metal spoons

to carefully place the dumplings inside everyone's bowls, including those meant for the dead disciples.

"Hoho. It's going to be a New Year soon, so relax and eat," said Dan Yangzi.

Even though he said that, everyone, including Li Huowang, only ate after Dan Yangzi had taken the first bite.

Dan Yangzi picked up a white dumpling with his chopsticks and placed it in his mouth, chewing it with much delight. "Mmm~ The pork lard and chives blend together quite well! Hmm? What's this? A coin? Haha! This is a sign of good luck!"

Li Huowang stared at the dumplings for quite some time before digging in as well.

Dan Yangzi smiled when he saw Li Huowang eating the dumplings. "You guys are lucky to be able to eat such amazing dumplings. When I was your age, I didn't even know what dumplings looked like. I had only ever heard about how delicious they were. Then, on one of the New Year celebrations, I had the chance to smell a delicious aroma coming from one of the houses. On that day, I learned what dumplings looked like when I barged in there. I didn't even play with their beautiful daughter that day. I cut her down and directly started eating the dumplings that were on the stove. I remember eating at least half a kilogram of dumplings. Back then, they had the same stuffing as well—pork lard and chives."

The other disciples only smiled weakly, while Li Huowang stuffed his cheeks.

Dan Yangzi saw the tears on the corners of Li Huowang's eyes and sighed. He carefully took his own bowl and gave Li Huowang his own share of the dumplings. "Sigh. Looks like you have had a very tough life too. Eat slowly and don't choke on them."

The New Year's Eve dinner of five soon ended amidst the clanking sound of the bowls.

Just when Li Huowang thought they would begin refining the pills, he saw Dan Yangzi take out a stack of red envelopes from his sleeves and pass them to his disciples, including the dead ones.

“Come now. It’s almost the New Year. Place them beneath your pillows. When I was your age, I had no elders to give me my red envelopes.”

Dan Yangzi placed the final red envelope beside Zheng Kun’s bowl before smiling at Li Huowang. “You don’t need a red envelope. Come now, let’s become Immortals together and share the same longevity as the heavens and earth!”

Li Huowang smiled and laughed happily. “As you wish, Master!”

“Let’s head back to the Pill Room, start the furnace, and refine the pills! You will control the flames!”

“Yes, Master!”

Translator's Thoughts

This is a depiction of the Wandering Gods,
composed of the edges of the world. @格子的乱七
八糟



Chapter 21 - Attaining Immortality

Before him were two fist-sized red pills with a metallic luster, two pills with a fleshy texture that seemed alive, and two decaying black pills with a pungent odor.

Li Huowang nodded in satisfaction; he had used everything he could think of when refining them. With so many ingredients, these pills were most definitely lethal and wouldn't leave behind any possibility of life.

A stick of incense was lit up beside him, representing the time remaining before the beginning of the new year. According to his fabricated cultivation technique, he had to start cultivating at the moment the new year started and absorb the spiritual energy that descended from the heavens.

Li Huowang sat down cross-legged and prepared himself, picking up the fist-sized red pill. He was about to die, yet he was unexpectedly calm.

Yes, he had not prepared any contingency plans.

Li Huowang understood that he would definitely have to consume these pills, otherwise Dan Yangzi would never consume them.

His amiable attitude during the New Year's Eve dinner was nothing but a facade. The matter of attaining Immortality together was just a way to use him as a test subject.

However Dan Yangzi would have never anticipated that Li Huowang wouldn't care about his own life at all.

Li Huowang had long since grown indifferent about his own life and death; in the first place, he never even belonged here.

His only reason for staying alive was to watch this disgusting bastard, Dan Yangzi, being lured into his own grave.

At this point, Dan Yangzi was seated opposite him, and he had also picked up a red pill.

Under both of their gazes, the incense stick gradually burned up.

Just as the incense stick was about to burn out, Li Huowang took a deep breath and stuffed the pill in his hand into his own mouth, and then swallowed it whole.

Meanwhile, Dan Yangzi, who had also been preparing to take the pill, paused and focused completely on observing Li Huowang's actions.

Li Huowang had an excited look on his face, not paying any attention to Dan Yangzi. He then swallowed the remaining two pills directly. Then, he closed his eyes and formed gestures with his hands before resting them on his knees.

Sweat slowly trickled down his cheeks as his body began to tremble, while an uncontrollable ecstasy gradually appeared on his face.

"There's so much innate spiritual energy! This... This... This is how it works, I understand! I'm really going to attain immortality~!"

A hint of anxiety appeared in Dan Yangzi's eyes, but he still didn't consume the pills immediately. It wasn't until he saw wisps of white smoke rising up from the top of Li Huowang's head that he hurriedly swallowed the three pills.

Then, the cross-legged Dan Yangzi closed his eyes and began to practice the Internal and External Heavenly Circulation technique.

At that moment, Li Huowang slowly opened his eyes to watch his Master, his smile wider than even before.

When he saw the white smoke rising from atop Dan Yangzi's head and dark substances crawling through his veins, Li Huowang

relaxed from his cross-legged sitting posture. He clutched his stomach that was suffering from excruciating pain and began to howl maniacally with laughter.

“HAHAHA! Baldy! Baldy! You can’t attain Immortality! The only thing you will become is a ghost. Let’s meet again on the Bridge of Helplessness, hahaha!”

Dan Yangzi seemed to have heard him but showed no reaction. With his eyes closed tightly and his teeth clenched, he sat cross-legged on the spot, excitedly circulating the Internal and External Heavenly Circulation technique.

“You’re still cultivating? All of that was made up by me! I copied it all from Xianxia novels, hahaha! Ouch, my stomach hurts, hahaha...”

Li Huowang slowly crawled to Dan Yangzi’s side, laughing at his pale-white face. He raised his trembling right hand and slapped it onto Dan Yangzi’s face. “Hey, are you deaf? I’m talking to you.”

Another slap followed, but there was still no reaction from Dan Yangzi.

Trembling, Li Huowang took out a pill from his pocket and stuffed it into his own mouth. Immediately, his veins bulged, and his body became filled with strength.

“I told you to stop cultivating! Can’t you hear me?” Li Huowang punched Dan Yangzi’s face, deforming his mouth and nose.

At that moment, Dan Yangzi, whose mouth was now filled with blood, suddenly opened his eyes and glared vehemently at Li Huowang. Then, he flicked the sleeves of his Daoist robes, sending Li Huowang flying.

“Get lost! You demons won’t hinder me from becoming an Immortal! I’m about to attain Immortality! The ancestors are about to receive me!”

Li Huowang didn’t get up from the ground after he was thrown

aside. He simply lay there and looked at Dan Yangzi, mumbling to himself, "He's gone mad. His obsession with becoming an Immortal has driven him completely crazy. Ah! My stomach really hurts."

Just like that, one person sat while the other person laid down, as some time passed. In the meantime, the pain in Li Huowang's abdomen became more and more intense, and his body instinctively curled up like a shrimp.

"Ouch, why is it so painful? When will this suffering end? Maybe I should have prepared a knife to slit my throat." Li Huowang writhed on the ground in pain.

Amidst the intense pain, Li Huowang's consciousness gradually blurred. In his confusion, he once again saw Yang Na's face. "Yang Na, are you here to receive me?"

Yang Na's face quickly melted before rearranging into the face of his attending physician. "Bed 14, impaired consciousness. Preliminary diagnosis—food poisoning! Quick, bring in the electric suction for a gastric lavage!"

Li Huowang slowly closed his eyes, and an extremely faint voice slipped out from his lips.

"Gastric lavage my ass ... Don't forget, we are in a psychiatric hospital. Where would you find a gastric lavage machine? Can't you guys at least make the hallucination be more logically consistent?"

After uttering this last sentence, Li Huowang lost consciousness.

He was very comfortable now, his stomach no longer hurting.

Amidst his daze, Li Huowang felt his body falling continuously without ever reaching the bottom.

"Huowang, you have to hang on. You promised me!" A hazy, yet urgent female voice rang beside his ear.

After some time, Li Huowang suddenly opened his eyes. He propped himself up with both his hands and began to vomit uncontrollably.

He expelled a mass of black liquid mixed with fragments of hair, flesh, and dumplings, as well as a few pieces of internal organs.

The pieces of flesh in the black liquid quivered a little before they stopped moving.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang was stunned by the sudden turn of events. He was still alive? How was that possible? If he was still alive, then Dan Yangzi—!

When this thought struck him, Li Huowang broke out in a cold sweat. He subconsciously turned around to look across, his mouth uncontrollably gaping open as wide as possible.

Damn, did he become some kind of a god... what?

Then, he saw his master's body had been completely deformed. His grotesque head had been split open, and three fleshy mouths were protruding from within. Inside each of the mouths were three or four smaller mouths with disgusting yellow teeth within. The mouths twisted around one another and opened wide toward the ceiling.

Besides his head, his body had also undergone some significant changes. Feathers were stuck to his flesh with an asphalt-like substance and protruded from his flesh forcefully like thorns.

What's this? Three flowers blooming, with feathers sprouting from the body during ascension to Immortality? Isn't this a sign of one becoming an Immortal?

Just as this thought passed through Li Huowang's mind, those three mouths opened as wide as possible, and then three different voices belonging to Dan Yangzi in his youth, in his middle age, and in his sunset years rang out. "So that's how it is, I understand! Hahaha!"

Bang!

There was an explosive sound, and Dan Yangzi's strange body immediately burst apart, flesh and blood scattering across the entire

Pill Room.

Chapter 22 - Exit

In the Pill Refining Room of the Zephyr Temple, Li Huowang sat there, covered in Dan Yangzi's blood, too stunned to react.

Were those three pills so powerful? Did we make pills or explosives?

After a long while, he got up from the ground and touched his face. Then, he bent down and began to examine Dan Yangzi's scattered remains.

After some time, he was not able to see a single piece of moving flesh. Even Dan Yangzi's bronze bell had been dented. Li Huowang finally breathed a sigh of relief; Dan Yangzi had been well and truly killed by him.

But now that he's dead, what should I do next?

Li Huowang stood on the spot, unsure of what he should do next.

He had thought he would be very happy after he managed to avenge himself. But when this moment really arrived, he found himself at a loss.

All the planning these past few days had revolved around killing Dan Yangzi. However, he hadn't imagined that he himself would survive.

Now that Dan Yangzi was dead, Bai Lingmiao was safe. He had achieved everything that he had promised to do.

What should I do next?

Just as he was contemplating this issue, the door to the Pill Refining Room was suddenly opened. Chang Ming and Chang Ren stepped in warily, each holding a sword.

They looked around and did not see Dan Yangzi, then turned their vigilant gaze toward the blood-soaked Li Huowang. "Hey! Where are you from, demon? Speak, where's our Master?"

“Master? You’re currently stepping on him. Besides, I’m Xuan Yang, my two dear Seniors.”

This reply made Chang Ming and Chang Ren subconsciously look down and raise their feet to see internal organs scattered around them, causing their pupils to shrink intensely.

Li Huowang looked around, then picked up half of Dan Yangzi’s face. “Look, he really is dead.”

He died because of me.

Logically, he should have died a long time ago for killing people so indiscriminately, but that’s not why I killed him. I did it for personal revenge.

Just as Li Huowang was about to explain his reasons to the duo before him, Chang Ming and Chang Ren exchanged glances. Without a single word, they sheathed their swords and dashed out of the door.

“Hey, wait for me to finish explaining before you leave.” Li Huowang shouted, feeling exasperated.

When there was no response even after shouting at them for a while, Li Huowang smiled bitterly. He clutched his stomach, which was still aching ever so slightly, and walked toward the door.

“Baldy’s dead! He’s dead! Everyone can go out now! You can all go home!!” Li Huowang shook that dented bronze bell vigorously and shouted loudly.

It was the first day of the New Year. The piercing clanging sound from the bell did not attract any Wandering Gods, but did attract the young assistants and the guiding drug ingredients.

When they saw that half-face clutched in Li Huowang’s hand, they were overjoyed and kowtowed on the ground.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang slowly walked through the entire cave system. He wanted to bring this piece of news to everyone within the Zephyr Temple.

More and more people joined his ranks, shouting alongside

him, “Baldy is dead! He is dead! We can go home!”

At this point, Li Huowang felt someone reach out and try to support him. He turned around to see that it was Bai Lingmiao who was shedding tears of joy.

Li Huowang smiled toward her, then happily displayed Dan Yangzi’s half-face. “Baldy is dead! You can all go home to celebrate the new year! You can all go home!”

“Hey! Senior Li! You can go home too! We can all go home!”

Li Huowang’s face froze for a moment, but then he continued to wave the bronze bell with all his strength and hollered with all his might, “Dan Yangzi is dead! Come out! You can all go home now!”

But not everyone in Zephyr Temple was elated by the news. Just as Li Huowang walked close to Dan Yangzi’s residence, he heard the clinging sound of metal from afar.

Li Huowang led the crowd over. Outside Dan Yangzi’s dirty residence, he saw Xuan Yuan standing in confrontation with Chang Ming and Chang Ren. Both sides had drawn their weapons, and the atmosphere was very tense.

Li Huowang saw the so-called sacred text that was circled in black lines and copper coins, and he naturally realized what they were fighting over.

“Junior Xuan Yang! Come quickly! Let’s join forces to kill these two accomplices of Dan Yangzi! Then we can share this sacred text that gives the method to attain Immortality!” Xuan Yuan urged Li Huowang. He no longer had an amicable look on his face.

Meanwhile, Chang Ming took a step forward and pointed his longsword directly at Li Huowang, who was standing at the entrance. “Get lost if you don’t want to die! Master taught you the path of pill refining! In this situation, do you think you would be able to handle both of us who are trained in the path of swordsmanship?”

Seeing the scene unfolding in front of him, Li Huowang sighed helplessly. “That is not some sacred text granting the secret of Immortality. There are only ancient scriptures written on there. Whatever I said earlier was fabricated by me to deceive Baldy. Don’t believe Baldy’s nonsense; he was full of lies, pretending as if Taishang Laojun personally gave that sacred text to him. Given his personality, it’s likely that he stole or looted it from someone. Seniors, let’s go.”

However, Chang Ming and Chang Ren just held black talismans between their fingers and swiped them against their blades. An eerie wind suddenly started blowing through the room.

“Junior Xuan Yang, if you don’t wish to get involved, then cut your nonsense and get lost,” Chang Ming and Chang Ren raised their swords and said in unison.

At that moment, Li Huowang felt Bai Lingmiao timidly tug at his Daoist robes.

“Then, Seniors, you guys can continue. We’ll meet again if fate allows.” Li Huowang put his hands together and bid farewell to both parties before bringing everyone else toward the entrance of Zephyr Temple.

The moment Li Huowang closed the gate, rumbling sounds rang out from within.

Within the black passageways of the cave system, a group of people were excitedly and emotionally returning home. Each of them held an oil-lamp with trembling hands.

The tunnel was quite unfamiliar and rugged, and some parts even required ropes to climb. Li Huowang did not recall ever being here before.

Even so, he clearly knew that this was the Zephyr Temple’s exit; he could see the hands of the people around him trembling more and more violently.

After walking for a period of about two incense sticks, they

could see a vague light in the distance. When the people saw that light, their pace became even more disorderly, and some of them even started sprinting.

As they ran, the light in the distance became larger and larger until it filled everyone's vision.

After exiting the tunnel, almost everyone squinted and shielded their eyes. After having lived in the cave system for so long, the outside world was simply too bright for them.

They were finally able to see the scenery outside the Zephyr Temple once their eyes gradually adapted to the brightness.

The distant skies had flowing clouds, while the faraway mountains had green forests. Everything appeared pure and beautiful, almost as though they were viewing an ink painting.

Right at that moment, the first rays of the New Year's morning sunlight peeked through, shining upon their faces.

Li Huowang squinted at the sunrise and mumbled to himself, "Did I spend a whole night with Baldy in the Pill Refining Room? Even the sun is out now. The weather is pretty good today."

Suddenly, someone beside him moved. It was a child with tears streaming down his face. He single-mindedly dashed toward the small road leading toward the forests.

This started a chain reaction as more and more people ran toward that direction. They wanted to get as far away from this terrible place as possible.

In just a while, there were only seven or eight people from the Preparation Room left, all of them looking toward Li Huowang.

"Senior Li, we should leave as well." Bai Lingmiao was smiling very happily, with tear stains still on her face.

"Hold on for a moment." Li Huowang said before pulling out some paper notes from his pockets and passing them to Bai Lingmiao. "These are the last words and the addresses of the guiding drug ingredients who had to die. When you guys go out,

find some messengers along the way and pass them along.”

For a moment, Bai Lingmiao was at a loss as she held onto those paper notes, frozen on the spot.

Then, Li Huowang once again smiled toward the remaining people before turning around with the oil lamp in his hand, and walking back into the darkness of the Zephyr Temple, all alone.

Chapter 23 - Home

“Senior Li!” Bai Lingmiao’s frantic cry made Li Huowang turn around. He was holding a lantern in the darkness while looking toward the others standing in the sunlight.

He once again waved them off. “Go on. All of you can go back home now.”

“Senior Li, come together with us. Staying together on the way back will be safer too. Or did you forget something inside?” Zhao Wu said while lying on Simpleton’s back. His expression was rather nervous; it was as though he could sense that something was amiss.

“Keke... Go together? To where?” Li Huowang said as he turned around before once again heading toward the darkness.

“Let’s go back home together to celebrate the New Year. Senior Li, where is your home?”

Li Huowang just chuckled soundlessly in the darkness before carrying the lantern and walking back to where they came from. “Home? I don’t have one now. I have not been able to return to my home since a long time ago!”

Then, Li Huowang silently walked back into the darkness. Zephyr Temple was currently very peaceful, and only the sound of his footsteps was accompanying him.

Amidst this peaceful environment, Li Huowang suddenly began to hum a song, his footsteps becoming lighter, as he swung the lantern from side to side rhythmically.

As he continued humming, Li Huowang returned to his residence. He then closed the door and placed down the lantern on the table. Not even bothering to wipe off the blood that had splattered on his face, he slowly lay down on the stone bed before closing his eyes.

"It's the first day of the year. I haven't eaten that disgusting Black Taisui this month. I should be able to see Yang Na again soon, right?" Li Huowang's lips curled slightly upward at the thought.

He silently waited for his childhood sweetheart to bring him back to the world that he belonged to.

Having not slept for an entire night, Li Huowang's consciousness soon began to fade gradually. However, at that moment, the door suddenly opened just before he could slip into the beautiful dreamland.

Li Huowang rubbed his eyes and sat up only to see Puppy, Zhao Wu, and the others standing at the door.

Bai Lingmiao stood there uneasily, her gaze darting around for a while before it finally settled down.

"Senior Li, if you can't go back to your home, then come to mine. My house is very spacious, and the room in the East wing is empty."

Li Huowang looked at the kind girl before him before shaking his head gently. "This place is comfortable too; I have grown quite used to it."

Only a raving madman would choose to stay in such a dark and ominous place. Bai Lingmiao's lips quivered slightly as she found Li Huowang's words to be quite unbelievable.

"I once had a home and a family, but..." Li Huowang looked up toward the pitch-black roof. His expression was complex, as though he was recalling something.

Puppy thought for a while, then shot a few glances at the others and whispered, "Since Senior Li wants to stay here, should we just leave?"

"Shut up!"

Bai Lingmiao's sudden outburst caused Puppy to jump in fright. This was different from the submissive young lady that he knew.

Meanwhile, Bai Lingmiao stepped up in a hurry and stubbornly

said, “Do you think that your current actions would make your family happy? If your family knew you were like this now, what would they think?”

Li Huowang smiled bitterly before his expression turned extremely agonized as he said, “How would I know what they would think? I don’t even know if they truly exist! I might just be a madman who is all alone. Everything around me could be completely dreamt up by me.”

Bai Lingmiao reached out with her almost-transparent hands and grabbed onto Li Huowang’s hand. “Senior Li, you are not alone—you still have us.”

Li Huowang just blankly stared at the girl before him, looking at her determined and delicate face. At that moment, he felt that his understanding of this girl was very shallow.

Why is she so kind to me?

Suddenly, his surroundings began to change again. The cave system around him started to switch back to white hospital walls.

At the same time, Bai Lingmiao’s features melted and reformed into Yang Na’s face. Her tearful face was filled with worry.

“Nana!” Li Huowang dashed across the room, hugging her tightly with an extremely pained expression.

“Huowang, you cannot give up on yourself. You must live on, no matter what you encounter. Alright? You must persevere, no matter what you encounter. Never ever give up.” Yang Na’s voice quivered.

Soon, that face morphed into that of his mother. “Son, you cannot die. If you end up dying, how will your old man and I survive!”

After this, that face rapidly morphed into various people that Li Huowang recognized, all of them encouraging him.

Suddenly, everything around him froze. Then, the bright hospital ward quickly became dim.

Li Huowang slowly released the person he was embracing, only to find that he had actually been embracing Bai Lingmiao.

While the girl in his arms was slightly embarrassed, she didn't evade his gaze. "Senior Li, let's go. I'm uncomfortable with staying here for much longer."

Then, she pulled out those paper notes from the pouch at her waist and said, "Senior Li, there's no use passing these on to me. After all, we are all illiterate."

"Right, Senior Li, only you are capable of handling this." At that moment, the others standing at the door chimed in.

"I, I, I can re-" Simpleton stuttered as he tried to speak.

However, before he could finish what he was saying, Zhao Wu covered his mouth. "Even if you can read, you would better pretend that you can't!"

Meanwhile, Li Huowang silently looked at the paper notes containing the last words left behind by those people with an inscrutable expression.

Bai Lingmiao then used both her hands to push those paper notes toward him. "Senior Li, you were the one who personally promised them. A true man doesn't go back on his words."

The reality and the hallucination constantly alternated within his brain. Finally, Li Huowang reached out to retrieve those notes. "Let's go."

Li Huowang had decided that no matter where he was, he would do his best to live well, not just for himself, but also for those family members who may or may not even exist.

Upon hearing those words, everyone broke out into relieved smiles.

While they did not know what Li Huowang was thinking, it was fine as long as he did not choose to stay in this cursed place.

The group then flocked around Li Huowang and walked out of the dusky room together. They were about to start heading toward

the entrance when Li Huowang suddenly called out for everyone to stop.

“Hold on. Since we’ve decided to leave this place, we have to plunder it a little. Simpleton, carry Zhao Wu with you and lead the others to the kitchen. Take the food supplies that we can carry while traveling. We won’t last if we don’t have anything to eat.”

Li Huowang then brought Bai Lingmiao to the Pill Refining Room to take some of the pills that he could recognize. Li Huowang had practiced the Dao of Pills for some time now and could be considered half a doctor with these items. He did not know how long they would have to travel before they could reach their homes, so it was better to be well prepared.

However, he only took the pills that he recognized. He did not even dare to touch the ones that he didn’t recognize and were refined by Dan Yangzi, much less take them with him.

When they regrouped with the others in Zheng Yi Hall, Li Huowang said, “Hold on, there’s one more thing I have to take with me.”

Li Huowang then carried the lamp in his hand and carefully made his way toward the cave that held the Black Taisui.

Translator's Thoughts

Bai Lingmiao looks like. @格子的乱七八糟



Chapter 24 - Plunder

Since he planned to go with Bai Lingmiao and the others, Li Huowang had to suppress his hallucinations. Otherwise, he would forever be stuck alternating between reality and hallucination, and would not be able to do anything productive.

The Black Taisui reared by Dan Yangzi was the key to suppressing his hallucinations.

The group came before the cavern and stopped. They could see the Black Taisui climb out from the dark cauldron. This was the first time they saw the true appearance of a Black Taisui.

It was a large, slimy, and sticky black mass. At first glance, it seemed like there was hair covering its entire body. However, upon closer inspection, it was revealed that they were actually slender tentacles, or filaments that had yet to mature.

Its entire body was like a giant maggot that expanded and shrank freely.

At the same time, there were several openings along its swollen body that released a nauseating stench whenever the creature quivered.

This scene made everyone feel weak in their knees; in fact, they were so shocked that they almost turned around and fled.

However, Li Huowang could astutely sense that something was amiss. This Black Taisui was significantly smaller, and the black liquid was constantly leaking out from beneath it.

What's going on? Could its life be interlinked with Dan Yangzi's?

Li Huowang felt his heart sink.

With that in mind, he quickly dashed out. When he returned, he was holding parts of Dan Yangzi's remains.

Li Huowang then dashed to the Black Taisui's side and knelt

down on one knee. He then laboriously collected the squirming rotten flesh into his embrace and pushed Dan Yangzi's remains in toward the gaps on the Black Taisui's body.

However, once he stuffed the remains in, even more black liquid seeped out from the Black Taisui's body, and its body shrank even further.

Li Huowang's face was filled with anxiety; it was as though he was not holding a wriggling black creature, but his own sick child.

Unsettled, he grabbed the sides of the Black Taisui and gently shook it. "Hey, hey! Don't scare me like this. What am I going to do if you end up dying?"

However, the Black Taisui showed no response—there were no signs of any movement from its body.

As it turned smaller, Li Huowang decided to be ruthless—he opened his mouth and began to forcefully bite down on its body.

Li Huowang's sudden actions dumbfounded Bai Lingmiao and the rest. They could only stand on the spot and watch the bloodied Senior Li carry the quivering creature, tearing into it with big bites.

From their perspective, Li Huowang was behaving more like a monster than the Black Taisui.

Puppy moved to Zhao Wu's side and whispered, "Should we go off on our own? If we go with him, I'm afraid he is going to eat me up while I sleep."

Fear crept into their eyes as they continued to watch him.

Meanwhile, the shrunken Black Taisui's flesh had visibly tightened when Li Huowang started to bite it. This made Li Huowang start to feel like the item he was gnawing at was a tire.

But he couldn't care about such things anymore and continued to devour it in big mouthfuls. However, no matter how much he ate, he could not catch up to the rate at which it was dissolving into black liquid. Not long after, there was only a layer of black skin left in his lap.

“Senior Li, have you eaten your fill? Can we leave now?”

Puppy asked warily.

Li Huowang tossed the sticky and smelly layer of skin onto the ground with regret. He did not know how long its effect would last this time before his next hallucination. He could only hope that he would find another Black Taisui or some other way to suppress his hallucinations.

“I’ll change my clothes first,” said Li Huowang.

The remaining items were practically worthless. There was no point in gathering the “cultivation technique manuals” since Dan Yangzi could not read.

Li Huowang took off his sticky Daoist robes and changed into a brand-new green set, immediately feeling refreshed.

After he finished changing, he led the group toward the entrance while explaining the rationale behind his actions.

When Li Huowang explained that he had merely been trying to use the flesh of the Black Taisui to control his hallucinations, they could finally put their minds at ease.

“Ah, I see. I had just assumed that Senior Li was hungry.”

Puppy cracked a joke to lighten the atmosphere.

There was a new fork in the passageway in front of them, with one of the paths leading to Dan Yangzi’s residence.

Li Huowang stopped, feeling curious.

Should we go in and check the aftermath of the battle between our three Seniors?

While he did not want to get involved in their feud, he did not want to see a new Dan Yangzi being born either.

“Let’s go and take a look.” Li Huowang led his group toward the direction of Dan Yangzi’s room.

When they reached outside Dan Yangzi’s residence, Li Huowang found that the door that he had closed previously had not been opened. This showed that nobody had left Dan Yangzi’s room.

“Seniors, are you guys finished? We’re leaving.” Li Huowang called out.

After waiting for a while without any response, he pushed open the door. A pungent stench of blood welcomed them, while a palm dripping fresh blood appeared before them.

Everyone looked upward, only to see an even more gruesome scene. Xuan Yuan was dead, killed in a terrible fashion. His body was almost cleaved in half by a sword.

Meanwhile, Chang Ren was also dead, stabbed in the back by someone else. Xuan Yuan was more of a scholar than a warrior, so this could have only been done by his brother, Chang Ming.

And the one who survived till the end, Chang Ming, was not in good shape either. His body had been pierced through by the black lines and copper coins hanging around the sacred text, pinning him to the wall; he seemed to have triggered one of Dan Yangzi’s traps.

Chang Ming was not yet dead. His eyes were filled with desire continued to stare resolutely at that so-called sacred text containing the method to attain Immortality.

“Cough cough~”

Upon seeing Li Huowang walk in, Chang Ming who was pinned to the wall seemed to want to say something. However, the copper coins embedded in his neck had completely severed his trachea, making him unable to speak.

Li Huowang walked up to him and smiled before bending down to pick up his sword.

This was a longsword that measured 1.2 meters long. The blade reflected the cool light from the oil lamp, making it seem very sharp.

Li Huowang exerted some of his strength to brandish it for a few strokes and then said to Chang Ming, “It’s a good sword. Senior, it seems like you won’t be able to use this sword for now, so Junior will make good use of it from now on. While Junior is not a

swordsman, it's better to have a weapon in my hands than having to use empty fists out there, don't you agree?"

Chang Ming tried to use his expression to hint at something, but Li Huowang could not understand him.

Li Huowang then took the scabbard from Chang Ming's body before sheathing the sword and hanging it on his back.

Next was the most important part, the sacred text.

Li Huowang turned toward the sacred text without any sort of protection.

At that moment, Chang Ming suddenly started struggling intensely. However, the copper coins on those black lines dug even deeper into his body, and soon the light in his eyes quickly became dim.

"Senior Li, Senior Chang Ming is dead." Puppy's eyes widened in shock.

Li Huowang looked at the so-called sacred text before them and sighed softly. So many people had died just because of this object of unknown origins.

Li Huowang leaned closer to examine it. He was even more focused than when he had been under Dan Yangzi's tyranny.

However, after repeatedly looking through it, he still felt that this was a scripture. With some guesswork, it looked like a text advising people to do good.

Li Huowang took a step back, then reached behind him with one hand and slowly unsheathed his sword.

Clang!

The sharp sword struck heavily onto the stone slab that was engraved with scriptures.

Translator's Thoughts

Black Taisui was



Chapter 25 - Path In The Forests

Clang!

The longsword and the sacred text collided, giving off an extremely piercing collision sound. Everyone else within the vicinity subconsciously covered their ears and took a few steps back.

“It couldn’t even leave a mark. Isn’t Chang Ming a swordsman? His sword can’t even cut it... however, this sword shouldn’t be something ordinary.” Li Huowang raised the sword and contemplated for a while. Then, he grabbed the hilt with both hands and swung it down heavily once again.

He gritted his teeth and hacked the sword several times before there were any changes in the situation. However, this change was not in the so-called sacred text, but the longsword in Li Huowang’s hands.

Clang!

The force of the impact caused the blade to break apart, ruining the sword.

He looked at the broken blade, feeling a little stunned. The weapon he had just come into possession of was gone just like that.

He looked around and took a few quick steps toward Chang Ren’s dead body, pulling out his sword. “Thankfully there’s a spare.”

He sheathed the sword, and circled the sacred text, pondering what his next move should be.

He had planned to destroy this so-called sacred text, but from the looks of it, it was indeed worth something, and might even be a

treasure of sorts.

Since he had made the decision not to give up on living, something so valuable couldn't be simply left behind like that.

No matter what, I have to take it out of here first. Then we might even be able to pawn it for some money if needed.

Li Huowang had completely abandoned the unrealistic hopes of using this thing to turn into an Immortal. He had seen the aftermath of those who had tried it before, and he did not wish to suffer the same fate.

While Li Huowang struggled to lift the stone tablet which was far heavier than he had imagined, he was still able to manage somehow.

After he wrapped the stone tablet in a cloth and placed it on his back, Li Huowang turned toward the others waiting outside, "Let's get out of here."

They dumped the oil lamp inside Dan Yangzi's smelly cave, setting it ablaze. The flames soon spread, igniting everything that was flammable, including the bodies of Chang Ming, Chang Ren, and Xuan Yuan.

The flames grew quite rapidly, and Li Huowang got to witness just how naturally combustible human corpses were.

As they walked back along the original path, they began to set fire to all the rooms. The blazing flames danced and came together. They burned anything and everything they could within the Zephyr Temple.

The thick smoke started to make them cough, and so they quickened their pace.

After three incense sticks worth of time, everyone was standing under the sunlight and silently watching the smoke billowing out of the Zephyr Temple's entrance.

The heavy smoke rose upward, carrying with it all of the Zephyr Temple's darkness and evil, and dispersing it all into the

bright skies.

Li Huowang looked up and chuckled before turning toward the distant path in the forest. He gazed at it with a sword and a stone tablet hanging on his back. "Let's go."

The rest of the group followed suit while carrying food. Unknowingly, Li Huowang had become their leader.

As they gradually approached the distant path in the forest, Li Huowang was no longer as gloomy.

This place seems special. I'm quite looking forward to the people or the events that the future will bring.

The sunlight illuminated his face, and his mood brightened as he breathed in the fresh air.

"Senior Li, please slow down... my eyes hurt."

Li Huowang turned back to find that Bai Lingmiao was covering both of her eyes under the sunlight.

He walked over and held up her face to examine it. To his surprise, he could see the blood vessels behind her eyeballs through the center of her pupils. As her dark-red blood vessels were illuminated by light, it became slightly pink in color.

This... should be some kind of defect?

He was not a medical expert, but he could at least guess at this. He recalled that elderly people suffering from albinism that helped with fortune-telling and massages were mostly blind.

It seemed that Bai Lingmiao's disease would cause her eyes to have some defects, and render them much weaker than that of the average person.

This won't do.

Li Huowang tore off a piece of cloth from his green Daoist robes, and then gently covered her eyes. "From now on, cover your eyes in the daylight."

"But... I won't be able to see anything."

"It's okay, I'll guide you." Li Huowang grabbed Bai Lingmiao's

soft right hand before leading the rest toward the path in the forest.

While Bai Lingmiao stumbled initially, she soon began to run together with Li Huowang.

Dududu~

The old and wrinkled Lu Zhuangyuan forcefully tapped his smoking pipe on the side of his theatrical trunk.

After tapping out all the black tobacco that was stuck within, he replaced it with some fresh tobacco from his smoking pouch, and lit it with his tinderbox.

He took a satisfying puff before turning in the direction that the horses were facing and asking, “You skinny boy, are you done?”

“Almost!” A youthful voice replied.

“You lazy boy, why does it take so long for you to relieve yourself? Others might end up thinking that I’m mistreating you by making you eat soil,” Lu Zhuangyuan smoked while grumbling discontentedly about his younger son.

He looked behind his carriage, at the entire troupe that was standing on the forest path. Aside from one horse-drawn carriage that carried costumes and musical instruments, there was his older son, and two distant nephews from the village. While their troupe was small, these were his hard-earned assets that he had spent years gathering.

It was this troupe’s work that allowed his entire family to eat well during these difficult times.

“Dad, have some water and buns.” Lu Juren passed some food and a gourd of water to his father.

“Why are we eating when it’s not mealtime yet?! Do you think this food is free? Do you know just how much food costs now? Your daughter is already two years old, but why are you still acting like such an immature child?!”

Despite the scolding, Lu Juren wasn’t angry; he just smiled

innocently while moving away and passed the food back to his wife.

“You got scolded again? You were just asking for it.” Luo Juanhua placed the food back into the cart and then playfully poked their baby daughter, who was sitting on the trunk.

“Being scolded won’t take any skin off my back. Ever since Mom passed away, Dad’s temper has just been like that.”

“Have you spoken to Dad about what I told you last night?”

“Let’s bring it up again next time. There hasn’t been a good chance, and he is tight on money right now.” Lu Juren said as his face soured.

“Tsk~ Is he so tight on money that he cannot even buy some fabric for his own granddaughter’s clothes? She’s always wearing these costumes.”

“Well, the costumes can also-”

“Ahh! Ahh! Ghost!” A terrified shriek interrupted their conversation, at the same time causing the atmosphere around the troupe to stiffen.

Not long after, the others saw a half-naked young boy shouting at the top of his lungs and dashing out from the forest, straight into Lu Zhuangyuan’s embrace.

“What ghost?! How can there be any ghosts in broad daylight?! Hurry and put on your pants!”

Even though Lu Zhuangyuan berated his own son, he still stepped before Lu Xiucan, shielding him. He gripped his smoking pipe tightly and looked warily toward the forest.

At that moment, some figures could be seen moving, and it seemed like some people were approaching them.

Chapter 26 - Frightening

“There’s... There’s shit!”

“Stop pushing! I’m not blind! Don’t tell me that you want to eat it? Even if you are a simpleton, you shouldn’t be eating shit, right?”

“Puppy, stop talking. There are people in front of us.”

“Alright, Senior Li.”

It wasn’t long before Lu Zhuangyuan saw the people walking out of the forest.

No wonder my son thought that they were ghosts. They look so frightening!

Lu Zhuangyuan took a deep breath when he saw them walking out. A skinny guy with black and white markings on his face, a white-haired lady, a twisted man on the back of a giant of a man, and there was even someone with hair all over their face.

Lu Zhuangyuan had traveled and seen a lot. Even so, the scene in front of him was enough to frighten him.

“Father, I’m scared.” Lu Xiucan said as he walked backward. It was as if he wanted to hide his entire body behind his father.

And you think I’m not scared?

Lu Zhuangyuan silently scolded his son in his heart. If it weren’t for the young Daoist and the young assistants who looked quite normal, he too would’ve made a run for it.

Lu Zhuangyuan stammered as he spoke to Li Huowang.

“Respected sir... are these... the monsters that you’ve subjugated?”

The moment he said this, several pairs of eyes filled with hostility focused on him.

“You damned geezer! Are you asking for a beating? Who are you calling monsters?”

At that moment, Lu Zhuangyuan saw the Daoist motion for the

man with black and white markings on his face to stop talking. This made him even more certain that the Daoist was the one in charge of all of them.

“Old man, may I ask where this road leads to?”

“Wuli Gang! It’s just slightly further ahead. In fact, we are pretty close to it, hehe.”

The moment he said this, he stealthily took his pipe and used it to burn the rump of his horse. The horse neighed loudly and ran down the path along with their stuff.

“My horse! Aiya! Quickly! Follow it!” Lu Zhuangyuan pretended that he was anxious as he took his people and quickly ran for his horse, using this opportunity to make a quick getaway.

They ran so fast that they were gone in an instant. They continued running for two hours until Lu Zhuangyuan saw his youngest son vomiting due to the stress. Finally, Lu Zhuangyuan blew a whistle, signaling the horse to stop.

Instead of caring for his youngest son who was vomiting, he went and checked on the horse that was pulling their cart; horses were much more expensive than the people in the troupe.

As night approached, the sky slowly turned dark.

“What were those things? I swear, they looked so terrifying!” Lu Juren was sweating buckets as he panted.

Lu Zhuangyuan kicked him. “Don’t you see that it’s getting dark soon? Quickly go and gather some firewood!”

Soon, a warm fireplace was made just slightly off the forest path. They roasted some multigrain buns till they were soft and mushy before passing them along to everyone, trying to use the taste of the food to calm themselves down.

“Look at how frightened you guys look! Remember: When you are on the road, you need to be calm even if you encounter something strange like that. You must remain level-headed!” Lu Zhuangyuan said to the others.

“Father, maybe they were not monsters? They looked like humans to me. The young Daoist even called you old man.”

Listening to his daughter-in-law, he shook the gourd of water in his hand.

“No matter what they are, don’t go trying to interact with them. If we want to survive out here, we need to remember not to interact with others if we can avoid it.”

This was based on Lu Zhuangyuan’s personal experience. Even if it was very little, he had survived until now thanks to it. He needed to teach all this to both of his sons as well. After all, they would one day inherit the entire troupe.

He passed the gourd of water to one of his nephews and then looked at his granddaughter who was in his daughter-in-law’s arms.

Lu Zhuangyuan fell more and more in love with his granddaughter as he looked at her munching on a small piece of bun with her newly-grown teeth.

He turned back to his cart and took out a single salted duck egg from inside a round jar. Then, he carefully opened the egg and exposed the fatty yolk inside it before passing it to his granddaughter. “Come, suck on this. This is some good stuff!”

Seeing his granddaughter sucking on it voraciously, Lu Zhuangyuan smiled contentedly.

Even though he was somewhat disappointed that it wasn’t a grandson, she was still a part of his family, and he took great care of her.

Sensing that this was a good opportunity, Luo Juanhua said, “Father-in-law, look at how much Cui Er has grown. I think it’s time for her to get a new set of clothes. I don’t think it’s appropriate for her to wear a costume every day.”

When Lu Zhuangyuan heard that, he knew that his daughter-in-law was asking for money. His smile disappeared in an instant and was replaced by a stressed expression.

He was just about to decline when he saw the loose costume that his granddaughter was wearing, causing him to sigh.

He smoked his pipe for a while before he walked to his cart, his face filled with wrinkles. He then took out a long bronze key to open up one of the chests.

He rummaged around for a bit before taking out a stack of bronze coins. He counted 50 before placing the rest back inside.

“Don’t buy the fabric for the clothes in the cities. It would be too expensive there. We will reach Wuli Gang in two days. Once we get there, go and ask around to see who is willing to sell some fabric. Ask around multiple houses and buy roughly a meter or so from the one that is the cheapest. Oh, and remember to buy fabric made of cotton and not linen. She is still young and it might not be suitable for her to wear rough linen.”

“I understand.” Luo Juanhua was quite happy as she took the coins. She had thought that it would already be very good if she was allowed to purchase some linen, but to think that her father-in-law would be so generous this time around.

The child was still quite young so she wouldn’t need a lot of fabric to make a set of clothes for her. She might even be able to save some of the money for herself.

Lu Zhuangyuan split the white of the salted duck egg amongst the rest of them after his granddaughter had finished eating the yolk.

While everyone only got a little bit, they were happy to just be able to taste the salt and egg. It wasn’t every day that they got to eat protein.

There was nothing else to do after they finished dinner, and it was already quite late into the night. Lu Zhuangyuan told all of them some random stories before everyone went to sleep.

Lu Juren was the one in charge of keeping watch in the first half of the night. It had been a long day and he was already very

tired, but he still forced himself to stay awake. He stared at the bonfire, making sure that it didn't die out.

“Son, go and get some sleep. I will keep watch.” Lu Zhuangyuan sat beside his son while smoking his pipe.

Lu Juren yawned. “No need, father. I’m not that sleepy. You should get some sleep first.”

“No. Go and sleep now. As an old man, I don’t need to sleep a lot.”

Just as the two were telling each other to go and sleep, Lu Zhuangyuan suddenly used his hands to cover his son’s mouth. Then, he silently pointed toward a dark figure that had appeared from the depths of the forest.

“Hehe~” A shrill sound of female laughter soon rang out from their right.

Both of them stared in the direction of the voice but couldn’t see anything.

“Hihi~ Tell me. Do I look like a human or a God?” The shadows of the trees in the forest shifted; it was as if something was walking toward them.

Lu Zhuangyuan was scared, cold sweat drenching his shirt. He had experienced many things in his lifetime and knew that something was trying to ascend to Godhood through him.

He knew that he must not answer the question wrongly. If he did, there was a chance that everyone here would perish.

But the problem was that he didn’t know what the thing was. Why was it asking him?

At that moment, a strange rustling sound was heard as the trees in the forest shook.

Translator's Thoughts

The spirit trying to ascend to Godhood through asking a question is a very interesting piece of

folklore.

Basically, to become immortal, an animal/spirit/human would cultivate until they reach a bottleneck. Once they reached it, they would seek out people with good karma/or stronger cultivation. They would then ask how do they look, a human/animal or an Immortal/God?

If the person answered the former, the cultivator's effort for the past hundreds of years or so would go to waste and they have to do it from scratch again. If the answer is the latter, the cultivator would ascend.

But here's the caveat if you were the one being asked the question: If you answer they look like an animal, the cultivator would take revenge on you because you wasted their cultivation for the past hundreds of years. If you answer they look like an Immortal, they would take your karma and lifespan to ascend. If you don't have sufficient karma/lifespan, you will die.

Chapter 27 - Evil

“Hihihi~ Tell me. Do I look like a human or a God?”

The ‘thing’ in the forest shook the branches, her voice growing louder and sharper.

“You look like a human! Please spare us! We are all hardworking people who are just trying to survive!”

Lu Zhuangyuan was overtaken by fear and started groveling on the floor, kowtowing endlessly toward the direction of the voice.

He continued groveling until he saw a pair of feet wearing red-colored embroidered shoes at the edges of the forest.

He felt chills running down his spine as he slowly raised his head and saw a girl wearing a padded flower jacket standing there, her feet looking comically small. Her face was large and white, but her mouth was very small by comparison. Her eyes were like black beads, unmoving and unblinking. Her white face was especially conspicuous within the darkness, almost looking like a floating balloon.

“Hehe, you think I’m a human?” The ‘girl’ with the tiny feet covered her mouth as ‘she’ laughed before walking closer toward the bonfire.

When Lu Zhuangyuan saw her body wriggling around as if ‘she’ didn’t have a skeleton, he knew that he was fucked. It was a real spirit this time!

“A-a child! Everyone! Wake up! I need a boy’s urine!” Lu Zhuangyuan's horror-filled voice woke everyone up.

Lu Juren grabbed a burning stick from the bonfire and threw it toward the spirit.

However, the burning stick just passed right through the body of the ‘girl’.

The ‘girl’ with tiny feet slowly approached the bonfire before stopping. ‘She’ then turned toward the Eastern direction.

At the same time, the tree branches before Li Huowang shook as he and the rest of his group appeared from the forest while holding a few glowing rocks in their hands.

“Hmm?” Bai Lingmiao, who had already taken off her blindfold, saw that something was wrong. “Senior Li, that ‘girl’ might be a spirit! She has another face on the back of her head!”

Li Huowang unsheathed his long sword and stared warily at the girl with tiny feet. “What are you?”

“Hehe~ Can’t you see? I’m a human!” Her voice rang out once again as ‘she’ moved her body like a centipede, quickly approaching her new targets.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang wouldn’t give up easily. He immediately took out the bronze bell from his left sleeve. There was a dent on the surface of the bell.

As soon as he shook it, the ear-piercing sound of the bell rang out, and everyone, including Li Huowang, had to cover their ears as they started experiencing head-splitting pain.

However, Li Huowang did not stop; he continued ringing the bell. Soon, he saw everything within his vision, including the spirit, start to shake.

At that moment, the padded jacket of the spirit exploded, releasing a cloud of black fumes.

The bronze bell was effective against her!

Meanwhile, the spirit screamed in pain and ran back into the depths of the forest, her body slowly disintegrating. Soon, ‘she’ disappeared from everyone’s field of vision.

The ringing sound of the bell soon stopped, and then Li Huowang examined the bronze bell with a surprised expression.

To think that not only could this thing be used to call the Wandering Gods, but you could even use it in situations such as these.

Unfortunately, everytime he rang the bell, the most he could achieve was to cause the edges of the world to squirm and shake; the Wandering Gods never appeared in front of him. He didn't know whether it was due to the dent in the bell or if there were some other causes.

At the same time, the more he learned about this world, the more bewildered he was. What were all these monstrosities?

“Savior!! Our savior! Thank you so much for helping us! I was blind not to acknowledge you before! Come! Come and join us by the fire.” Lu Zhuangyuan, tears and snot all over his face, happily pulled Li Huowang toward the fire.

Compared to that scary thing, those weird-looking people behind the young Daoist were much better! With the young Daoist here, at most they just looked scary, but, the spirit from just now could've taken their lives!

“Sigh! This damned animal! If it hadn't suddenly run away earlier, how could I have possibly abandoned you.” Lu Zhuangyuan gestured his smoking pipe toward his horse, tapping it gently.

After tapping his pipe a few times, he suddenly shouted toward the people behind him. “Juanhua, quickly go and bring out some buns and water. Bring the largest and highest quality white buns. Also, bring three...no, five salted duck eggs!”

Li Huowang was not used to such hospitality, especially with how friendly Lu Zhuangyuan was acting toward them. “Old man, there's no need to go to such lengths for us. Can I ask you some questions?”

“Ask! Ask away! You just saved all our lives earlier! Ask me anything!” Lu Zhuangyuan patted his chest with pride.

Lu Zhuangyuan even wiped the mouthpiece of the pipe he was smoking with his shirt before lighting up a puff and passing it to Li Huowang.

“Erm... thanks old man, but I don't smoke. Now, can you tell

me what it was that we just encountered? What was that thing called?" Li Huowang said as he gently pushed the pipe back into Lu Zhuangyuan's hands.

Li Huowang still knew nothing about this world. If he wanted to survive here, he needed to learn more about it.

Lu Zhuangyuan was stunned by his question. "Huh? How would I know? Young Daoist, you were the one who chased it away. Shouldn't you know more about it than me?"

Looking at the old man's confused eyes, Li Huowang realized that he had asked the wrong person. The old man might not even know as much as him.

"I heard you shouting and asking for a boy's urine. Would it be able to hurt that thing?"

"Yeah! These kinds of things are afraid of filthy things. I've heard that it could work even if we were to use our snot. But the best item would still be a young boy's urine. It's filled with Yang energy, and at the same time, it's considered really filthy."

"Really? Have you used it before?"

In the face of this question, Lu Zhuangyuan, who had been certain of what he had said until now, suddenly turned sheepish. He chuckled as his eyes darted around. "Maybe? It was the elders in the village who always told us this technique. Since they told us about it so often, I guess it should work."

Li Huowang sighed.

Why is it another folklore passed down using word of mouth? This place is much too backward.

"Alright old man. Then let me ask you something you would know the answer to. Have you encountered these kinds of things before? If yes, how frequent was it?"

"Nah, if I were to encounter these kinds of things every day, then I would've quit running around with my troupe and taken my son back to our village to tend to the fields," Lu Zhuangyuan said as

he placed his pipe in his mouth and took another puff.

“I’ve traveled the lands for so long and have only encountered spirits a total of four times,” he continued.

“I see.” Li Huowang surveyed the forest around him. He had gained a slightly better understanding of the world he was in.

After living with Dan Yangzi for such a long time, he had thought that things like the Black Taisui would be everywhere around him. However, that didn’t seem to be the case.

Even though everyone had heard of these kinds of things happening, from the looks of it, it was still very rare to experience such things.

Chapter 28 - Lu Family

“Sigh! You don’t need to worry about these kinds of things. As long as you gather more people when you travel, you should be fine,” Lu Zhuangyuan told Li Huowang based on his experience.

“Oh? Is it because the more people we have, the more Yang energy we would have, and thus those things wouldn’t come to disturb us?”

“Yeah!” Lu Zhuangyuan placed some new tobacco cuttings into his smoke pipe and continued smoking. “Even if they want to eat people, how many people could they possibly eat? Even if we meet one, all we need to do is run faster than the others. Rather than worrying about these kinds of things, I would rather worry about bandits and man-eating insects.”

Li Huowang didn’t know what else he could say. It looked like his knowledge of this world was still insufficient.

“Come, the buns have been cooked. You should eat them while they’re hot.” Luo Juanhua approached them with some buns that were lightly grilled on sticks.

Li Huowang accepted the buns and passed them to some of the young assistants that he had picked up along the way.

These assistants were the children who used to do the menial tasks back in the Zephyr Temple; they had made a run for it without any preparations as soon as they left Zephyr Temple.

When Li Huowang and the rest found some of them, they had already fainted due to extreme hunger.

And so, Li Huowang had picked them up along the way. He didn’t have the heart to let them be on their own.

Staring at the hot food, the rest of them immediately started eating; it was already late, and they were starving.

Seeing Simpleton consuming one bun per bite, Lu Zhuangyuan's eyes twitched a little.

These are white buns! It's something so expensive that I wouldn't even eat it usually. Damn, maybe I shouldn't have taken out so many of them .

Just then, Li Huowang asked Lu Zhuangyuan about something he knew. "Old man, do you happen to have a map? I'm not from around here and was lost in the forest. I have no idea where we are right now."

Li Huowang was indeed lost. The only things around them were trees. Without being able to pinpoint their location, they were effectively stuck here. The others didn't know where they were either.

The rest of them came from places that were quite far away from here. They only knew about the street they used to live on, or which area they had lived in within their town. But when Li Huowang asked them about how to get there, they didn't know.

It seemed that Dan Yangzi avoided finding guiding drug ingredients from just a single area to cover up his tracks.

"Hm? A map? No, I don't have one; however, I know the roads around here. Where would you like to go?"

"I need to go to many places. Please take a look at these and see which of these places is the closest," Li Huowang said as he took out many pieces of paper from his sleeves.

"Huh? What's this? What are the words written on these?" Lu Zhuangyuan stared at the papers, his wrinkled face scrunched up as he tried to read the words.

Even though the meaning of his name was 'scholar', he wasn't one. If he was, he wouldn't have needed to organize his own theater troupe.

Lu Zhuangyuan could read only some words. Under Li Huowang's guidance, he finally understood the addresses that were

written on each of the pieces of paper.

Thankfully he knew most of the places written about on the paper. After all, he had traveled the lands for a very long time.

But even if he knew where these places were, it didn't mean that Li Huowang could get to them easily.

"Wow, you even have to go to a place in the Liang Kingdom? It was the country that waged war with our Qi Kingdom two years ago."

Lu Zhuangyuan squatted down, using his smoking pipe to draw a rough map on the ground.

If Li Huowang were to describe the map, it looked like a giant piece of biscuit fell onto the ground and was shattered to pieces.

They were currently on the top left side of the map. As they moved to the right, there were numerous kingdoms that they would have to go through.

It seems similar to ancient China when the kingdoms were not united. Li Huowang noted as he stared at the map.

While Li Huowang didn't have high expectations, he more or less confirmed the fact that he had not traveled back in time to ancient China. Based on the map, it seemed that he was in a much more special place.

"I've only traveled through the northern border region of our kingdom. I am familiar with most places around here. But I have no idea where most of these kingdoms are. All I know is that they put on a very different kind of show there, much different from ours."

Bai Lingmiao felt anxious. Her home was located at the base of the Cowheart Mountain in Liang Kingdom. From the looks of it, her house was very far away.

Li Huowang felt the slight shift in her mood and comforted her. "Don't worry."

Lu Zhuangyuan stared at Li Huowang and the malformed people behind him. His mind had started to become more and more

active now that they were out of danger, and he no longer had to fear for his life.

“Young Daoist, one of your destinations is the town of Jianye. We will be passing by that place too. How about we travel together?”

“Jianye village? Whose village is this?” Li Huowang asked as he rummaged through the pile of paper.

“Senior Li, it’s my village,” Zhao Wu suddenly said. “There’s an escort service in that town. If you pay them some money, they will be able to send letters to the entire Nanping area.”

Li Huowang no longer hesitated, placing all the papers back into the sleeves of his robe. “Alright old man, looks like we will have to travel together till Jianye village.”

Both the map and the information he had gotten from the old man were not enough for Li Huowang. He needed to reach a place where he could get more information. There was much to do, including the fact that he had to find more Black Taisui to suppress his ailment and send out the letters, and they even needed to prepare more food for themselves. If possible, Li Huowang even needed to find some other sects.

This was a dangerous world. They would all perish if they didn't have enough strength. Li Huowang didn't want to get kidnapped by someone like Dan Yangzi again.

Lu Zhuangyuan was happy and immediately waved his hand in front of himself. “No need to be so courteous; in fact, I should be the one thanking you!”

Even though he said that, Lu Zhuangyuan was extremely happy on the inside. With such a Daoist by his side, it was akin to getting free protection!

At the very least, this was enough to recoup the cost of those white buns and five salted duck eggs.

“Yawn~” At that moment, Simpleton yawned loudly. He had

eaten and wanted to go to bed.

Seeing how everyone's eyes were half shut, Lu Zhuangyuan stood up. "Oops. It's already this late into the night. Young Daoist, please go to bed. I will watch over the fire."

"No need, let me do it instead," said Li Huowang. He wasn't trying to be friendly; he just didn't want to trust anyone.

Everyone was tired after their journey. Soon, both groups of people huddled near the fire and drifted to sleep. Only Li Huowang and Lu Zhuangyuan stayed awake as they kept watch.

The next morning, Li Huowang was woken up by Puppy, who was in charge of keeping watch in the second half of the night.

"Senior Li, they are already packing their stuff."

"Let's go, we need to move as well." Li Huowang picked up his sword and the stone tablet. He led everyone else to follow the troupe.

While they were traveling together, both parties were quite cautious of each other. The two groups didn't speak to each other, only whispering to their own companions.

On the other hand, Li Huowang and Lu Zhuangyuan were happily chatting away at the front.

Li Huowang needed to learn more about this world from Lu Zhuangyuan, while the latter wanted to solidify their companionship. After all, to Lu Zhuangyuan, praises were free, and more praises were always welcome.

"Oh my. To think that you are so strong even though you are so young. It looks like your future will be limitless. Haha~"

Translator's Thoughts

Lu Zhuangyuan with his smoke pipe and salted eggs! @格子的乱七八糟



Chapter 29 - Stage

“Haha, please don’t think too highly of me, old man. Do you know of any famous sects around here that are similar to the one I am from?” Li Huowang asked Lu Zhuangyuan about something he needed to know.

“Of course, I do. In the Western Capital City, there is a Monastery. I’ve heard that anyone who prays there for a son has their wishes come true!”

A Monastery?

Li Huowang remembered what Dan Yangzi had said before. He was once chased and hunted down by monks.

Could this be the very same Monastery?

Li Huowang silently noted down the location. Compared to the man-eating Dan Yangzi, the Monastery should be a place with good people.

“But, you are a Daoist. Is it appropriate for you to go to a Monastery?”

Li Huowang stared at the Daoist robe he was wearing. Luckily, Lu Zhuangyuan had reminded him.

It seems that I will need to change out of my robes. Either way, I’m not a real Daoist.

“How’s your business been recently? Is everything going alright?”

Sensing how Li Huowang had changed the topic, Lu Zhuangyuan understood and didn’t press on.

“Sigh... Not really. The kingdom recently had a drought and then a flood shortly after that. The people don’t even have much money. Nowadays, there are so few people who would pay to watch such shows. Even the rich people would not hire us to perform at

funerals; they just make do with dinner and wrap it up. What a bunch of unfilial punks!”

“It will all come to pass. You just need to endure for a couple of years.”

“Yeah, there’s nothing much we can do but to endure. I’ve been thinking of traveling along my route a hundred more times when the times get better. Once I’ve accumulated enough money, I will finally be able to buy a theatre for my family in Western Capital City. If I manage to do so, then I will be able to die happy. With a theatre, at the very least my sons and grandchildren will not have to suffer as much as I did. All they would need to do is to study back at home. Who knows, maybe we will get lucky and someone in my family will become a scholar! If that happens, then from then on we would be able to live in peace.” Lu Zhuangyuan chuckled at the thought as he smoked his pipe.

Li Huowang listened to Lu Zhuangyuan’s goals and felt somewhat envious. To think that he would still have a goal to look forward to even though he was already so old.

The more they talked, the friendlier the atmosphere between them became. At the very least, the Lu family no longer treated Puppy and the rest as monsters, but as people with ailments. To begin with, it was not their choice to be inflicted with such ailments; everyone was just trying to live the best life they could.

By the time they arrived at Wuli Gang, Luo Juanhua was already friendly enough with Bai Lingmiao to allow her to carry Cui Er.

Standing in an empty field that the farmers would use to dry their grains, Lu Zhuangyuan took a look at the village and saw that many of the farmers were having their dinners just outside of their house and said, “Alright! There’s quite a few people here in Wuli Gang. Lu Family! Open the boxes and set up the stage! It’s time to earn some money!”

They needed to perform, and Li Huowang's group was not in a rush to travel; everyone was already tired from the journey, and so this was a good opportunity to rest.

While Li Huowang was not interested in such old school performances and operas, the rest of them were clearly interested; they decided to help out with setting up the stage. They took some bamboo stakes and red clothes to set up the stage.

Li Huowang was trying to sleep on a stack of dried rice stalks when he felt someone poking at his nose. He opened his eyes and saw Bai Lingmiao grinning at him.

She raised both her hands, and a golden item dangled in front of Li Huowang. She excitedly said, "Senior Li! Look! This is such a clean bronze mirror! I can use it to see myself clearly! This is what they use to put on their makeup!"

"It's not sunset yet, why have you taken off your blindfold? Aren't you afraid of..."

At that moment, Li Huowang saw his own reflection in the mirror and was shocked—he didn't recognize the face in the mirror.

"Senior Li, what's wrong?" Bai Lingmiao asked, having sensed that something was wrong.

"Junior Bai, did I look like this even back when I was in Zephyr Temple?" Li Huowang gingerly touched his face.

"Yeah. You've always looked like that. What's wrong? Is there something wrong with your reflection?"

Li Huowang set down his hands and touched his reflection in the bronze mirror. However, it didn't change. In the mirror, he no longer looked like a teenager; it seemed that he had been in this world for quite some time.

If the world with the hospital was my reality, then I would have been 17 years old. So how old am I now?

He couldn't come up with an answer when he asked himself. His memories were all jumbled up, and now he didn't even know

how old he was.

Based on his reflection, the only thing he could predict was that he was no more than 30 years old.

Li Huowang tried searching his memories for any mentions of his age, but there were none.

“Senior Li? Is everything alright? Please don’t scare me.”

Seeing Li Huowang’s reaction, Bai Lingmiao was quite nervous.

“Nothing. I’m fine. I was just thinking about something.

Quickly return the mirror back to them. They would need to use it to perform their show.”

“Alright.” Bai Lingmiao took the bronze mirror and walked backstage.

“Yi~Yi~Aaaa~” Lu Juren started singing on the stage.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang once again laid down on the rice stalks. “Sigh, I feel like my entire life is a joke.”

He thought that he would be much more emotional, but he was surprisingly calm. Now, he just had another objective—to find out just how old he was.

The night sky was clear and had a moon, so the simple stage could be seen by everyone in the village.

Hearing the news of a theater troupe arriving outside the village, almost everyone in Wuli Gang came out to watch the show.

Most of them had nothing to do anyways. They would usually tend to the fields and sleep. To the farmers, having a troupe performing in front of their village was one of the rare opportunities to enjoy some entertainment.

The Lu family’s troupe was small. With the exception of the granddaughter, there were only 6 performers.

Due to that, they had to exclude some of the performances. There were too many things to do, including having to play the musical instruments, applying make-up, and performing.

Luckily, the farmers were not a picky bunch. All of them took a

stool and happily watched the show.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang and his group were resting on a bunch of dried grass stalks and admiring the show from afar; the sound coming from the stage was loud enough for them to hear.

Li Huowang had never watched one before, and so he didn't know what it was that they were performing. The only one he could recognize on the stage was Lu Zhuangyuan. The latter had put on black makeup while carrying a large halbert. It looked extremely tiring for him to perform on stage at his age; after all, he had to sing while swinging the halberd around.

"Excellent!" The sound of cheering suddenly rang out, surprising Li Huowang.

The show continued as the area in front of the stage was filled with people. The entire Lu family poured their heart and soul into their performance on the stage, captivating the farmers below. The only one who wasn't interested in the show was Li Huowang.

Soon the moon had crawled to the middle of the sky, and the performance of the Lu family came to an end.

Just then, Li Huowang saw Luo Juanhua appear on the stage in tattered clothes. She was carrying her daughter and a basket woven using dried grass.

"My cruel uncle-in-law has chased me away~ I'm just like a lone swan drifting in this world~ I have suffered so much, just like the wild grass that people step on~ Both me and my daughter are cold and hungry, and have had to endure so much~ The only thing we could rely on is the food and the money that people donate to us~"

As she sang, Luo Juanhua pinched her daughter lightly on the buttocks. At the same time, the two-year-old child started crying as if she understood what she had to do.

Chapter 30 - Performance

Li Huowang didn't know what she was performing, but soon, he saw the farmers below the stage start standing up and taking out some coins before throwing them up onto the stage. They all threw a single bronze coin or two.

Since most of them were farmers, in addition to money, most of them also threw some food such as corn cobs or potatoes onto the stage. Some of the wealthier families even threw out some salted fish and preserved meat.

Meanwhile, Luo Juanhua did not decline anything, thanking everyone for their generosity.

Is that their way of asking for payment?

Li Huowang was quite surprised by this.

Meanwhile, Luo Juanhua was humbly kneeling on stage as she carried her crying child and sang, all the while picking up the items and placing them into the basket she was holding. She would even bow down toward the people below as a token of appreciation.

Li Huowang sighed as he saw how hard it was just to survive in this world.

As Luo Juanhua was happily picking up the money and food, a small chunk of silver was thrown up on the stage.

Her eyes lit up, and she inspected the chunk of silver. When she realized that it was worth at least 500 bronze coins, she started performing even better, thanking the fat old man who was wearing silk clothes.

"Great! Your singing is amazing!" The old man raised his head and threw out another piece of silver.

Feeling exhausted, Li Huowang yawned and rolled on the rice stalks. He told Zhao Wu, who was just beside him, "I'm going to

sleep now. Help me keep an eye on everyone.”

“No problem, Senior Li.”

By the time Li Huowang opened his eyes again, it was already late in the morning. The others around him were chatting leisurely. It seemed that everyone had made do with the rice stalks and decided to sleep outside for the night.

Further down, the stage had already been disassembled by the Lu family as they kept it in their cart.

“Zhao Wu, how much food do we still have?” Li Huowang suddenly asked.

“Not much. If we ration it, then we would probably last only three days,” replied Zhao Wu.

Li Huowang took out the money he had taken from the guiding drug ingredients before. He counted tens of coins and one small blackened piece of silver and passed it to Zhao Wu. “Go and buy some food. We might need to travel for quite some time.”

There were quite a number of young people among their group, so they would need to eat a lot. They had initially taken quite a large amount of food from the Zephyr Temple, but most of it was already gone.

Zhao Wu perched on Simpleton’s back, and they were just about to enter the village when he thought about something before calling for one of the assistants. He entrusted the money to him and informed him of what to do.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang was staring at the Lu family’s stage from his makeshift bed.

“Old man, when will we depart?” Li Huowang asked Lu Zhuangyuan.

Lu Zhuangyuan replied quickly, feeling anxious, “Young Daoist, please be at ease. My daughter-in-law took her daughter somewhere early this morning. As soon as they return, we can depart.”

“Hmm? They went somewhere? Isn’t that her?” Li Huowang

replied, feeling puzzled.

When Lu Zhuangyuan followed Li Huowang's finger that was pointing toward the entrance of the village, he saw his daughter-in-law holding onto some fabric while carrying her daughter and walking toward them with a face full of smiles.

Looking at his daughter-in-law, Lu Zhuangyuan was angry at how carefree she was. He took his smoke pipe and went over to scold her.

In the face of his anger, Luo Juanhua said defensively, "But weren't you the one who asked me to go buy some fabric in the village? You were the one who said that buying fabric in towns would be expensive."

After scolding her a bit, Lu Zhuangyuan turned around and chuckled. "Young Daoist, we can depart anytime now. Let's go."

"Hold up! We can't leave just yet. When I went to buy the fabric, I managed to get a hold of a business opportunity for us!"

Li Huowang and Lu Zhuangyuan asked at the same time. "What business?"

"What else? Of course, it's an opportunity to perform! Our employer would be the old man who gave us a lot of money yesterday! Why don't you go and discuss it with him? He said he wanted to discuss the details with you."

When he heard this, Lu Zhuangyuan didn't move immediately. He slowly turned around, chuckling sheepishly at Li Huowang.

Even though he didn't say anything, Li Huowang knew what he was thinking. "Don't worry. It's more important to earn money. It will just mean delaying our departure for a day."

"Aiya! Thank you so much! I will quickly go and come back." Lu Zhuangyuan happily followed his daughter-in-law into the village while holding his smoke pipe.

Li Huowang once again sat down on the rice stalks and took out the dented bronze bell from his sleeves. Due to his boredom, he

decided to examine it closely.

If I can summon the Wandering Gods, I will be able to increase my fighting strength! But... I can't summon them with this bell as it is now. I need to find a way to fix it.

After examining it, Li Huowang didn't see any issues besides the dent.

If I can fix it, does that mean it will become usable once again?

Li Huowang thought about it before picking up a stone from the ground. He placed the bell on a relatively flat piece of rock before starting to pound it with the stone.

A sharp ringing sound rang out, immediately giving him an explosive headache—he could barely continue holding the stone in his hand.

No, I can't do it this way. I need to ask if there's a blacksmith in the village.

Li Huowang thought as he cradled his spinning head.

Just then, Li Huowang saw the assistants exiting the village with two sacks full of food.

He stored the bell and approached them along with Zhao Wu, who was perched on top of Simpleton.

“Senior Li, we were only able to exchange for these,” said the assistants sadly. While they were just children, they were extremely capable. If not, they would've long since been killed by Dan Yangzi.

Li Huowang opened the sack and saw they contained only dried sweet potatoes.

“Senior Li, these lack the nutrients that we need. At the same time, Simpleton would easily end up eating half a kilogram of these for every meal. Additionally, eating too many of these may also result in heartburn,” said Zhao Wu.

Zhao Wu's statement caused Simpleton to lower his head in shame. “I... I... will... eat less. Don't... don't... abandon... me!”

On the other hand, since there wasn't enough food, Li

Huowang was desperately trying to think of a plan.

Lu Zhuangyuan had already told him that there would still be some time before they would arrive at Jianye village. If they were to run out of food halfway through, they might need to chew on tree bark for the rest of their journey.

He rummaged around in his robes and found a red threaded golden anklet.

He thought about it before passing it back to Bai Lingmiao, who had been holding onto him.

“Take this and exchange it for something.” Li Huowang took out the jade pendant that he had stolen from the previous Xuan Yang and passed it to Zhao Wu.

“Senior Li, I don’t think we would be able to exchange it. There’s no pawn shop here, and none of these farmers would be able to give us the change nor would they be able to realize the true worth of this pendant.”

Even the jade pendant can’t be used to exchange for food. Then what should I do?

Just as Li Huowang was trying to figure out what to do about the food crisis, he saw Lu Zhuangyuan bringing his daughter-in-law out of the village and toward him.

“Young Daoist... I might need a favor from you; we will need you to help us with this particular business opportunity. Would you be willing to help us?” Lu Zhuangyuan asked in a sheepish voice.

“Old man, I can’t sing or dance. I’m afraid that I might not be able to help you,” Li Huowang said, feeling bewildered.

Don’t tell me he wants me to go up on stage and perform a sword dance?

“No no! It’s something that you can definitely do.” Lu Zhuangyuan carefully glanced around him before whispering, “Old man Hu wanted us to perform for the dead.”

Chapter 31 - A Wandering God

“A show for the dead?” Li Huowang felt his heart skip a beat. This was definitely something ominous.

“It’s actually nothing much. We just need to perform in front of their ancestors at their ancestral hall.”

“Since it’s just that, why don’t you perform without me?” Li Huowang had a feeling that it wouldn’t be as simple as it sounded.

“This is actually the first time I’m performing for the dead, and so I feel a bit scared. I would love to have someone like you to watch over us so that we can perform in peace.”

“Old man, I’m afraid that this is not something I can help you with.”

Li Huowang already had a hard time just trying to hide and survive. In reality, he wasn’t really strong or talented. Even though Lu Zhuangyuan said that nothing would happen, it was not something that Li Huowang would want to bet on. At most, they were just two groups of people traveling together; Lu Zhuangyuan wasn’t someone who Li Huowang would risk his life to save. If Lu Zhuangyuan decided not to guide them to the next village because of this, then Li Huowang would rather split up with him and find someone in the village to ask for directions. Surely there would be someone else who would know the way.

“Young Daoist, please don’t be rash. I haven’t even finished speaking yet. Let’s split the earnings in half, how about that?” Lu Zhuangyuan became quite excited when he talked about the reward. “Originally, I didn’t really want to accept the job, but Old Hu promised to give us ten pieces of silver! A single piece of silver

is worth 1000 coins! Ten pieces of silver are equivalent to 10,000 coins! That is a huge amount of money! Even if you want to ascend to Immortality, you would still need money to eat before you actually manage to become one.”

These words caused Li Huowang to look toward the two bags of dried sweet potatoes. He really needed the money. Not only did he have to take into consideration their food ration, but he also had a feeling that they would need to spend quite a lot of money once they arrived at the Jianye village. It would be hard to complete their objectives without enough money.

“Young Daoist, please, I beg you. I am even willing to split it 60/40 with you. It’s not easy trying to earn money these days!” Lu Zhuangyuan cried as he tried to persuade Li Huowang. If he failed to persuade Li Huowang, then he would have to decline Old Hu. After all, even if he could earn a lot of money, he would need to be alive to be able to spend it.

At that moment, Li Huowang suddenly turned and faced Lu Zhuangyuan. “Is there a blacksmith in the village?”

“Huh?”

Under Lu Zhuangyuan’s guidance, Li Huowang soon arrived at the workshop of the only blacksmith in Wuli Gang.

“What do you need me to make?” A large man with a thick beard looked at Li Huowang’s Daoist robe and huffed. His well-built muscles could be seen quite easily due to him being shirtless.

“No need to make anything. I need you to fix this bell without pounding or melting it. Can you repair it?” Li Huowang took out the bronze bell.

If he could fix it, then he might be able to summon the Wandering Gods. If he could do so, then he would be willing to accept Lu Zhuangyuan’s request. If he still failed to summon them, the money might not really be worth it.

“Without pounding or melting it? What kind of bullshit...” The

blacksmith took the bronze bell and inspected it. Then, he took out two pliers and called out to his assistant, "Come and help me."

The pliers were long and easily clasped the bell. He used the two pliers to grip the dented part. They intended to use the gripping force of the pliers to flatten it out.

Both of them used their full strength, but the bell did not budge in the slightest. However, Li Huowang had somehow expected this result.

"What the... What kind of bronze is this? Why is it so hard?" The blacksmith was almost about to ring the bell out of curiosity but was stopped by Li Huowang.

Staring at the two pliers, Li Huowang gave it some thought before taking out a palm-sized gourd. Then, he took out a small pill from within it and ate it.

This was one of the first pills that Dan Yangzi had originally given to him. He had already eaten two of them before: one to save Yang Na, and the other one to kill Dan Yangzi. After eating this one, he would only have two more of them left.

As soon as he ate it, a stream of hot energy exploded in his dantian and spread out all over his body.

Then, he took a deep breath and gripped the pliers, pulling.

"It won't budge even with two people pulling at it together... just what do you think you are doi—" The blacksmith had just said that when the creaking sound of metal being bent was heard—the dented bell was slowly being pulled back to its original shape.

The blacksmith was completely stunned by what he saw. Soon, the bronze bell had been restored to its former glory.

"Hehe, the young Daoist is quite talented." Lu Zhuangyuan chuckled as he bragged a bit in front of the blacksmith. In his heart, Li Huowang was omnipotent; this much was nothing.

After repairing the bell, Li Huowang left the village and entered the forest on his own. However, he didn't enter too deep

into the forest.

Looking at the bronze bell, he rang it feeling hopeful.

As the bell rang, he felt the entire world start spinning around him. However, he did not stop and continued to ring the bell.

He felt everything around him turning, their edges starting to blur and twist before congregating into a single spot.

It's working!

Li Huowang's heart started to race.

Under the ear-piercing sound of the bell, a Wandering God soon appeared in front of him. This time, however, there was only one of them, unlike the time Dan Yangzi summoned them.

The Wandering God looked like a bundle of squiggly vibrating lines; its body did not have a distinct shape.

Li Huowang couldn't stare at it for too long; he had a feeling that if he did, the Wandering God would disappear.

He was just about to speak when he suddenly remembered what Dan Yangzi did last time. He scooped up a handful of dirt before placing it in his mouth.

While the dirt was not very appealing, he endured the stench and talked.

A bunch of gibberish came out of his mouth. He was trying to ask if the Wandering God understood him, but instead, his voice was contorted into a strange hum.

Somehow understanding Li Huowang's words, the Wandering God replied with a strange hum of its own.

Strangely enough, Li Huowang also understood its intention when he heard that hum. The Wandering God was saying that it would assist him! This meant that his fighting power would increase from now on!

Li Huowang leaned forward with excitement and asked the most critical question. He once again let out a strange hum.

While the Wandering God remained static, it hummed in a slow

and firm tone.

Li Huowang once again confirmed what it meant and got back the same answer causing him to sigh.

There really are no free lunches in this world. Asking for its help requires a sacrifice.

The sacrifice that the Wandering God needed was three months of the summoner's lifespan per order.

However, when Li Huowang asked whether Dan Yangzi had to pay the same price, the Wandering God remained silent.

Soon, the sound of the ringing bell slowly faded as Li Huowang clutched his head and stood in place for a bit as he recovered. After a while, he slowly walked back to Wuli Gang.

"Young Daoist, why is your face..." When Lu Zhuangyuan saw Li Huowang's muddy face, he was confused.

"About your proposal, I will accept it," Li Huowang said as he clenched the bell in his hand tightly.

"Hooray! That's amazing! I need to go and inform Old Hu immediately!" Lu Zhuangyuan was beyond ecstatic.

Chapter 32 - Hu'S Family Ancestral Hall

A normal family wouldn't be able to afford to hire an entire troupe to perform for their ancestors. The Hu family was considered the largest family in Wuli Gang, with a third of the village's population sharing the same surname.

Li Huowang learned from Lu Zhuangyuan that the person who hired them to perform was not only from the richest family in Wuli Gang but also the eldest member of the Hu family, Hu Qinghe.

Currently, Li Huowang was walking with Lu Zhuangyuan toward the Hu family's ancestral hall.

"Old man Hu has already guaranteed that nothing will happen. He has hired some other troupes before, and nothing happened to them either," said Lu Zhuangyuan, trying to calm himself down.

Li Huowang just ignored that statement. As far as he was concerned, it was just something Lu Zhuangyuan was saying to reassure himself. He gingerly touched the bronze bell on his waist and sighed.

I should be fine since I have this. Still, I hope nothing ends up happening. Giving an order to a Wandering God would cost me three months of my lifespan.

They continued their journey through the village and soon arrived at the Hu family's ancestral hall. The place was illuminated by many lanterns.

There were many people in the hall, so much so that Li Huowang was not even able to squeeze through the crowd. He tiptoed to assess the situation and saw a lot of people kneeling on the ground, lighting up incense sticks to pray to the black memorial

tablets.

“Hey, that’s old man Hu. He invited us for a meal after we are done with the performance,” Lu Zhuangyuan said as he pointed toward the person standing closest to the altar at the front of the crowd. It was an old man wearing silk clothes.

After a while, the people stopped praying and respectfully took the memorial tablets belonging to their ancestors and placed them on the tables they had prepared beforehand.

Soon, the hall was filled with their ancestral tablets that were placed on the tables.

There was a long table with many delicacies placed in front of all the memorial tablets. Li Huowang saw that they had prepared red candles, incense sticks, gold ingots, and yellow papers, placing them all in plates meant for their ancestors.

As if they were afraid that their offerings to their ancestors were not enough, there were even several paper dolls depicting them serving tea and water on both sides of the wall. They would most likely be placed next to the tables of the ancestors to serve them in the underworld.

“Old man Hu is so generous. To think that he would even hire a troupe to perform a show for his ancestors.”

“Yeah. No wonder old man Hu and those near him did not suffer from sickness and disasters these past few years. Looks like their ancestors are blessing them.”

“Sigh, I wonder if I will ever get such a grand treatment after I die.”

“Pray that your descendants end up earning a lot of money like old man Hu. Hiring a troupe to perform a show for the dead costs a lot of money.”

Listening to their conversations and seeing the grand ceremony in front of him, Li Huowang calmed down a little.

Looks like nothing will happen.

He leaned toward Lu Zhuangyuan and asked. "Old man, you've traveled the land for so many years; compared to the spirit we met in the forest, how much more frequently have you met a ghost?"

"Hm? Aren't they the same?" Lu Zhuangyuan was surprised by his question, his eyes wide with shock.

"What? They are two separate things. One is formed after a person has passed away, while the other..." Li Huowang stopped, not knowing how to explain it.

What Li Huowang understood was that regardless of whether it was the Mountain Grandmas or the Wandering Gods that Dan Yangzi had used to refine pills, or even the girl with tiny legs they had encountered in the forest, they were not ghosts. At least, he did not see them as ghosts.

Just as he was thinking about the difference between ghosts and those things, all of the memorial tablets belonging to the Hu family's ancestors had been placed onto the tables. Then, Hu Qinghe led a group of his family members and approached Lu Zhuangyuan.

"Troupe leader Lu, thank you for accepting my proposal. Jiaolang, please take some people and help him set up the stage."

"Thank you so much, and sorry for the inconvenience! You are much too kind."

"Troupe leader Lu, you should know the rules about performing for the dead, right? Once our ancestors appear to enjoy your show, us, their descendants, will have to leave this place and lock ourselves in the room. Please take care of our ancestral hall in the meantime," Old man Hu instructed patiently.

"Of course. Please rest assured; your ancestral hall is in good hands," said Lu Zhuangyuan, smacking his chest with pride.

Even though none of the Hu family members would be there, Lu Zhuangyuan would never dare to make a mistake. If something were to happen to the ancestral hall of the Hu family, they would

bury him and his family alive.

“Oh, and once you start your performance, those in the realm of the living should not speak to the performers; this is because our ancestors should not feel like their show is being interrupted. As for what to perform... just perform something jovial and bubbly. My ancestors had shown me a dream where they said that they were bored by how monotonous everything was down there. Also, you don’t have to perform for the entire night. My son will come and place our ancestor’s memorial tablets back in their respective places during the fifth section of the night. You can rest after that.”

Lu Zhuangyuan was nodding like a chicken pecking grains. “No worries, old man Hu! We will not break the rules.”

With the help of the Hu family, the stage was set up quite quickly. There were only five people on the stage; Luo Juanhua was a girl and was not allowed into the ancestral hall tonight.

Under Hu Qinghe’s direction, the crowd soon dispersed and returned to their homes.

The sound of instruments soon started to echo in the ancestral hall. The Lu family had started their performance while Li Huowang remained backstage.

Time slowly passed, and the entire Wuli Gang soon turned quiet as the villagers went to sleep. The village was completely dark, with the exception of the ancestral hall, which was brightly lit with lanterns.

This was the first time Li Huowang had seen a performance for the dead. He peeked through the curtain to observe the surroundings outside.

It was quite eerie, even for him. The stage was bursting with action, but no sound came from the audience. Not even a single clap. There were only rows of black memorial tablets engraved with the names of the ancestors and the offerings meant for them.

Still, this was nothing compared to the Zephyr Temple.

From the looks of it, the Lu family was still inexperienced when dealing with this situation. In just a few minutes, Lu Juren had forgotten his script numerous times due to his anxiety. Lu Zhuangyuan, who was playing the gong, also made mistakes out of nervousness.

As time passed, they started to adapt to the situation, and the show became smoother and smoother.

Amidst the silence of the night, the sound of their singing resonated loudly within the hall and even outside.

Soon, Li Huowang sat down and closed his eyes to rest. He got bored and started humming along with their singing.

Soon, it was 9 pm. Li Huowang understood now that the people here separated the night into different sections; so, 9 pm–11 pm would be the second section of the night, 11 pm–1 am would be the third section, 1 am–3 am would be the fourth section, and 3 am–5 am would be the fifth section of the night. The rooster would usually start crowing at 5 am.

He yawned. For some reason, he was much sleepier than on other nights. Unfortunately, he couldn't sleep for the night since Lu Zhuangyuan had already hired him. So, he took out the sacred text and slowly started to examine it, trying to combat his sleepiness.

This had been his habit for the past few days; every time he needed to stand guard during the night, he would start examining the sacred text. He examined it again and again, but other than confirming that it was indeed some sort of scripture, he hadn't found anything else about it.

The second section of the night soon passed, and it was now the third section. The ancestral hall continued to remain normal as nothing unusual had happened.

Li Huowang raised his head, staring at Lu Zhuangyuan who was looking into the bronze mirror and doing his makeup.

His heart must be bleeding right now; he will have to pay me 6

pieces of silver for absolutely no reason.

He thought about it and figured that nothing would happen tonight. After all, this was the ancestral hall of the Hu family. The descendants of the Hu family had gone out of their way to invite the troupe to perform for their ancestors; there was no reason for the latter to cause any problems for them.

Just as Li Huowang had thought that tonight would be a peaceful night, something strange happened.

The singing came to a sudden stop without any warning.

Chapter 33 - Continue The Performance!

Sensing something amiss, Li Huowang's face stiffened. He immediately placed the sacred text on his back and opened the curtain to see what was happening.

He found everyone frozen in fear, regardless whether they were on stage or playing the instruments.

He followed their gaze, and was horrified. There, sitting on a stool was that 'thing'—the 'girl' with tiny feet whom they had encountered in the forest a few nights ago. 'It' was enjoying the performance as 'it' sat beside the black memorial tablets.

This damned thing followed us all the way here? Did it possess one of us?

"Keep going! Don't stop the performance!" Li Huowang said as he took one of the wooden stools and sat just below the stage, directly in front of 'it'.

Li Huowang's back gave the members of the Lu family a lot of courage. They took a deep breath and looked at each other with uncertainty. Then, through sheer will, they continued on with their performance.

Meanwhile, the 'thing' gaze concentrated its gaze on the stage. 'It' directly ignored Li Huowang's aggressive actions; it was almost as if it was really here just to enjoy the show.

If it doesn't do anything, then I won't do anything either. I want to see if it is still able to remain here when it's day time.

Li Huowang would only act if necessary; after all, giving even a single command to the Wandering God would mean having to give up three months of his lifespan.

A light fog gently embraced the ancestral hall, making the entire place feel slightly oppressive.

At that moment, 'it' suddenly moved. 'It' raised its plump right hand and took two of the red candles before placing them in 'its' mouth. The sound of candles being eaten rang out.

'It' ate quite quickly. Soon, all of the candles on the tables around it had been eaten by her.

The sound of the performance stopped. Lu Xiucan, who had been performing on stage, was close to fainting from fear. Muffled crying sounds could be heard.

Suddenly, the paper dolls placed by the Hu family started to move. The paper dolls were adorned with black hats and bright red cheeks as they started taking the plates filled with red candles from the other tables before placing them in front of 'it'.

"Hihihi~" At that moment, 'it' suddenly let out an eerily high-pitched laugh.

Everyone from the Lu family was paralyzed with fear, their bodies trembling uncontrollably.

"Don't stop! Keep performing!" At that moment, Li Huowang's angry voice exploded in the silent ancestral hall and dispelled their fears.

"Sing! A~~Yaaaa~" The oldest and the most composed of the group, Lu Zhuangyuan, started singing loudly. Under his lead, the sound of the instruments also resumed, becoming even louder than before.

They sang with all of their power, as if they were trying to drown the fear in their hearts. All of them sang till their veins started to bulge and sweat started dripping down from their foreheads.

'It' stopped laughing, staring blankly at Li Huowang and all of the paper dolls.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang ignored the paper dolls and continued

to stare at 'it'.

The third section of the night soon passed and it was the fourth section of the night. The Lu family had been performing all this time, not daring to stop; their voices were hoarse and their throats were in pain, but they continued on.

Shit... It's still trying to drag this on? How long is it going to continue this way?

Li Huowang silently cursed.

Just as he was thinking about summoning a Wandering God to deal with 'it' even at the cost of three months of his lifespan, the situation changed once again. At that moment, the black memorial tablets started shaking and thumping on the tables.

Bata~ Bata~

The memorial tablets started thumping on the tables over and over. It sounded like rain hitting the ground.

At this point, the members of the Lu family almost collapsed from fear. It would already be very scary if one of the memorial tablets started moving, let alone all of them!

Seeing their reactions, 'it' chuckled. Soon, 'it' started roaring with laughter. 'Its' voice was so sharp that even Li Huowang's ears were starting to hurt.

However, when Li Huowang saw 'its' reaction, he suddenly smiled. "I think I understand now. Every single one of your actions were meant to scare them. There are two possibilities. One is that you like to scare others for entertainment; however, I don't think that's the case. The second possibility is that you feed on people's fear. After all, candles shouldn't be your main diet, right?"

When Li Huowang saw that 'thing' standing up in anger and staring daggers at him, he knew that he had guessed correctly.

"Old man, don't stop singing. Didn't old man Hu instruct you to perform something jovial? If you are afraid, just close your eyes and sing."

“Hihihi~ Do I look like a human or a god?” Seeing that ‘its’ plan had been discovered, ‘it’ started snarling and closed in on Li Huowang.

“You look like a bitch!” Li Huowang unsheathed his sword and rushed straight toward ‘it’.

Once he understood what ‘it’ wanted from them, all of his doubts about ‘it’ were dispelled. It seemed that the ‘thing’ wasn’t as strong as he had thought. ‘It’ was just toying with their hearts.

Soon, both of them clashed and Li Huowang swung his sword.

The cold blade of the sword easily split the ‘thing’ in half, and even the candles in ‘its’ stomach were split in half as they fell onto the ground.

At the same time, one half of ‘its’ body continued flying toward Li Huowang’s back.

It was trying to touch him!

But when the pale fingers were mere inches away from his back, ‘it’ suddenly recoiled from a searing pain.

Oh ho?

Li Huowang noticed what had happened; it seemed that the sacred text was capable of repelling such things!

Li Huowang let go of his sword and gripped the block that was engraved with the sacred text. He then swung it hard toward the thing’s face.

The ‘thing’ revealed an expression of fear and tried to dodge as the sacred text swung by it.

The situation had suddenly changed. Now, Li Huowang was the one holding the sacred text and chasing the thing. Li Huowang was the source of its fear now!

Within the ancestral hall, Li Huowang chased the ‘thing’ for quite some time.

Even though ‘it’ had tiny feet, ‘it’ ran at a shockingly fast speed. Li Huowang couldn’t even get close to ‘it’.

Li Huowang was already panting as he stared at the ‘thing’ across the table.

This can't go on any longer. Is there any way to chase it away?

“Fuck off! Don’t let me see your face again!”

The ‘thing’ stared at him angrily before moving to a dark corner of the ancestral hall and disappearing.

Li Huowang took a lantern and inspected the corner, but found nothing.

At that moment, Lu Zhuangyuan took the sword that Li Huowang had thrown away and ran over to give it to Li Huowang.

Just as Li Huowang sheathed the sword, he saw Lu Zhuangyuan’s smiling face sheepishly asking him, “Do I look like a human or a god? Hihhi~”

No wait! The performance hasn't stopped! This one is a fake!

However Li Huowang realized it too late.

Just as he reacted, the fake Lu Zhuangyuan pounced, its pale claws piercing through Li Huowang’s body.

Li Huowang felt a bone-chilling cold spread throughout his body as if he had been plunged into freezing water. His emotions fluctuated as everything around him turned dark.

Chapter 34 - The God Of Happiness

Just as Li Huowang was about to lose consciousness, he quickly grabbed the bronze bell hanging from his waist and swung his arm. The bell's signature piercing sound resounded, causing him to quickly snap back to consciousness.

Bang!

The back of Li Huowang's head hit the ground hard, his head ringing from the impact.

However, he ignored the pain and continued to ring the bell.

I almost got fooled by this thing!

Soon, the edges of the tables, the stage, and even the memorial tablets started wriggling before congregating onto a single spot.

Li Huowang pushed through the intense pain and pointed at the 'thing'. The Wandering God that he had summoned understood his order and pounced on the fake Lu Zhuangyuan.

Seeing that Li Huowang now had a helping hand, the 'thing' wanted to escape, but it was too late; the Wandering God had already arrived beside it.

But instead of attacking the body of the fake Lu Zhuangyuan, it pounced onto the ground and into its shadow.

The Wandering God's body appeared to be made from razor-sharp lines which it used to slice up the shadow into little pieces, causing the 'thing' to howl like a beast in pain and struggle on the floor.

So its real body is the shadow? No wonder it didn't die even though I cut it in half earlier.

Under the Wandering God's assault, the shadow dispersed,

causing the fake Lu Zhuangyuan's body to deflate as it ultimately became a pile of black goo.

Just as Li Huowang thought that everything was over, the Wandering God quickly returned and circled around him.

What the? Is it not over?

Li Huowang had been prepared to stop ringing the bell, but seeing how it might not yet be over, he quickly swung it even harder.

Upon realizing that hiding wouldn't work, the 'girl' with the tiny feet appeared from a crack, staring angrily at him.

Oh? So it can split itself in half? It seems that the fake Lu Zhuangyuan was made by its other half.

Just as he had this thought, another 'girl' with tiny feet split from the body of the first one. Then, the 'thing' started splitting itself into more and more bodies!

Soon, they started splitting into numerous bodies, each getting smaller and smaller.

Li Huowang immediately ordered the Wandering God to attack all of them. At this point, the 'thing' was only the size of his palm.

However, it was futile. The Wandering God's attacks were much slower than the rate at which it was splitting. All of 'her' clones circled around Li Huowang as they continued splitting while chanting something, their bloody mouths opening and closing eerily.

"The God of Happiness is happy and laughing. He dresses jovially and greets everyone happily~ The God of Happiness dances and parties. All families change their couplets to greet him~ The God of Happiness is angry and sad. The skull he carries brightens even the seas~ The God of Happiness is hungry and thirsty; with a liver on the left arm and intestines on the right arm, the village elder greets the God of Happiness~!"

Just as 'they' finished chanting, all of them exploded into black

goo that showered the entire area. The area around Li Huowang became pitch black.

While he didn't know what that 'thing' had done, he knew that something was definitely off. He stopped swinging the bell and tried to run. However, when he tried moving his feet, he found that he couldn't move them. It was as if his legs had been nailed to the ground.

At that moment, a soft force pushed his chin upward and forced him to stare toward the sky.

The sky was pitch black, but somehow, Li Huowang saw something moving in the darkness—something quite large.

The God of Happiness?

Just as he had that thought, something emerged from the darkness.

Oh shit! It must've detected my thoughts! I must escape!

Li Huowang wanted to escape, but his body refused to move. He strained his body as hard as he could, his breathing turning rapid as his veins began to bulge.

At that moment, his arm suddenly tore off his Daoist robe and was forced upward; it was as if he were greeting the 'thing' in the dark.

Meanwhile, the 'thing' in the darkness became clearer and clearer. Li Huowang could finally identify parts of its face! At the same time, his eyes started bleeding, and blood streamed down his face.

I cannot look at it any longer! I must close my eyes!

Li Huowang used all of his strength to no avail. He could see the head of the God of Happiness—that is, if that big mass of black goo could even be called a head.

Just as the 'thing' was about to emerge completely from the darkness, a peculiar sound rang out from behind it.

Tak tak~

The ‘thing’ in the darkness suddenly stopped and shrunk, almost as if something was pulling it back into the dark.

At the same time, the sudden sound of a rooster crow sounded all around them, and the dark sky shattered like a mirror.

Li Huowang finally regained control of his body as he cracked his bones and crumpled down to the ground. He was panting hard as he stared at the large stone bricks with both of his hands supporting his body.

Shit! What did that ‘girl’ with tiny feet summon? What just happened?

Many questions kept popping up in his mind.

He held onto the edge of a table and slowly sat down before looking back up into the sky; he saw nothing, almost as if everything had been an illusion.

Meanwhile, the sky was starting to grow bright. The fifth section of the night had passed. Soon, the members of the Hu family would come and place the memorial tablets of their ancestors back on the altars.

The stage was still filled with singing and dancing. Lu Zhuangyuan and the rest had performed for the entire night. Even though their voices were shaking and hoarse, they dared not stop.

Looking at the black memorial tablets, Li Huowang suddenly realized that the sound just now had been from them slamming onto the tables.

Li Huowang was shocked.

Did the ancestor’s of the Hu family help me?

He thought about it and felt that it might be a possibility, so he faced the memorial tablets before giving them his respect. “Thank you for the assistance.”

Just as he did so, the tablets once again started shaking and slamming the table lightly.

Seeing the increasingly strong slamming, Li Huowang took a

step back, fully alert.

What the? Did I do something wrong? It's almost daytime now, so why aren't all of you going back?

Just as he was wandering about, all of the memorial tablets fell backward.

Then, a familiar voice rang out by his ears, chilling him to the core.

“My dear disciple.”

Chapter 35 - Confused

“Father! Father! Look! There’s braised meat!” Lu Xiucan had a meatball in his mouth but was already staring at the next plate that was coming to their table.

Just as the sizzling braised meat had just been served, six pairs of chopsticks stabbed into the plates. By the time the chopsticks left the plate, even the preserved vegetable under the pork had disappeared.

“Look at all of you! You are all eating as if you were starving ghosts! Eat slower, or people might think that we are a family with no manners,” said Lu Zhuangyuan.

“Dad, stop preaching. We rarely get a chance to eat such good food. And look at the meat on your chopsticks! You ate just as much as us!” The youngest son taunted his father, getting a solid whack on the head in the process.

Seeing his brother getting hit, Lu Juren quickly tried to calm the situation down. “Dad, it’s alright. Let them eat as much as they want. We went through a lot yesterday just so that we could have this one meal.”

The moment he said this, everyone who had performed yesterday revealed a solemn look on their faces.

Last night was way too frightening; it had been so frightening that they had nearly peed their pants out of fear. Luckily, they had such a strong Daoist handling the situation below the stage for them.

All of them turned to stare at Li Huowang, who was sitting outside all by himself.

Their gazes toward him were filled with admiration; if it wasn’t for him, they all might have died. The Daoist was quite young; so

young, in fact, that he didn't even have a mustache. And yet, he was so strong.

At that moment, another item was served, once again drawing their attention to the food.

"Chicken! It's roasted chicken!" Their chopsticks once again started attacking the food on their plates.

Seeing how their chopsticks were almost about to shred the chicken, a smoke pipe blocked them and guarded the chicken. "Stop! Don't touch this chicken! I want to invite the young Daoist to come and eat with us."

"But dad... Daoists don't eat meat. Are you going to ask him to break the rules?"

"You stupid shit! Monks are the ones who can't eat meat! If I come back and see that the chicken has been touched by any of you, then be prepared to be whacked by me!" Lu Zhuangyuan stared at his youngest son before wiping his oily mouth with his hands. He then wiped his hands on the table before approaching Li Huowang.

"Young Daoist, hehe. Young Daoist?" His face was filled with wrinkles as he called out toward Li Huowang.

"Young Daoist, you worked quite hard last night. How about you join us to eat? The Hu family has prepared a lot of juicy and nutritious food for us."

Li Huowang was deep in his thoughts and turned to look at him before gingerly asking, "Old man, you saw how the memorial tablets moved on their own, right? I was not hallucinating all that, right?"

"Aiyo, young Daoist, I don't know about any of that. I didn't even dare to take a single glance toward you last night; I just closed my eyes throughout the performance."

Li Huowang sighed, recalling that singular sentence he had heard at the end. Even though it was faint, he could easily

recognize the voice. It was the voice of his Master, Dan Yangzi. Only he would call him 'a dear disciple'.

He should be nervous about having heard his Master's voice; however, he was not nervous, just confused. As he was now, he wasn't even able to trust himself.

I know that I suffer from hallucinations. It would be reasonable to hear minor things like that, given that I haven't eaten a Black Taisui in quite a while. But then how should I explain the memorial tablets suddenly moving on their own? Or the God of Happiness that appeared and disappeared so suddenly?

Li Huowang thought back to how Dan Yangzi's body had contorted into that ugly creature.

Don't tell me that he really became an Immortal? No, that can't be it... The so-called method to become an Immortal was just some random garbage I came up with. How could it have been the correct method? Unless... he turned into something else? But then, what did he end up becoming? Why is he still following me?

Li Huowang was growing visibly irritated.

"Young Daoist? What were you thinking about? We are close enough now, aren't we? You can tell me if you have something that is bothering you."

Lu Zhuangyuan's voice pulled him back from his thoughts. He had made a decision.

Regardless of whether it's real or fake, there's nothing I can do about it right now. I need to go to Western Capital City and visit the Monastery first. If it's real, then maybe they will know what to do. I know far too little about the world.

"It's nothing, old man. Let's eat. I was just thinking about some random things."

Hearing that, Lu Zhuangyuan happily nodded. Then, both of them entered the room and went toward the dining table.

However, when they reached the table, Lu Zhuangyuan's face

stiffened. Everything on the table, except for the chicken, had been eaten cleanly. The plates had even been licked!

“Aaaah~ That was such a nice meal! I guess this would be how an emperor feasts.” Lu Xiucai stretched his body as he unbuckled his belt, his mouth smeared with oil.

Lu Zhuangyuan could only chuckle, feeling embarrassed; after all, it wouldn’t really be nice to scold his son when there were outsiders around. He could only take the roasted chicken and place it before Li Huowang. “Young Daoist, the chicken is quite juicy. Forgive me for not being able to serve the rest of the dishes for you.”

Li Huowang smiled and started eating a piece of the chicken. “It’s alright. The chicken is plenty delicious.”

Li Huowang had just eaten a few bites when a crowd of people entered the room from the corridor. The man leading the group was Hu Qinghe, the old man who requested Lu Zhuangyuan’s services.

“Not bad. It seems that my ancestors are quite satisfied with your performance. Even the candles on the tables were eaten. This is a joyous sign!”

Listening to the praises, Lu Zhuangyuan chuckled humbly. “It was nothing much. It was something we could do.”

“Troupe leader Lu, if you are passing by again, please come to our house for a cup of tea.” Hu Qinghe said politely.

After he said that, he waved for a man beside him to show a tray covered in red cloth. He took off the red cloth and revealed ten pieces of silver.

“Here is the payment, just as we had agreed. Please receive it.”

“Aiyo! Thank you for your generosity. As long as we are alive, just send a word for us, and we will come as soon as we can!”

After old man Hu left them, the Lu family surrounded the tray, their eyes filled with greed as they stared at the pieces of silver.

Just as Lu Xiucai was about to touch the largest sum of money

he had ever seen in his life, a smoke pipe whacked his hand.

Then, Lu Zhuangyuan took four of the pieces of silver and placed them into his clothes. As for the remaining six pieces, his eyes were filled with reluctance.

Still, he smiled and placed the tray containing the rest of the pieces of silver near Li Huowang, who was eating the chicken.

“Hoho, come, Young Daoist. We had agreed on splitting the reward 60-40. This is your portion of the payment.”

Chapter 36 - Donkey Cart

Li Huowang looked at the six pieces of silver and accepted them directly; after all, he needed the money.

“Young Daoist, please take your time eating. We will go and prepare first. We will depart tomorrow.”

After eating until they were full, the members of the Lu family felt groggy. They went back to rest and get some sleep since they hadn't slept at all last night.

After they left, Li Huowang was the only one left in the room. Staring at the roasted chicken that was even larger than his head, he called for the Hu family's servants. “Is there something I can use to store and carry this?”

Soon, Li Huowang exited Wuli Gang with a donkey cart filled with bags of food.

He had to properly budget the six pieces of silver. Even though this amount was not enough to buy a horse, it was still sufficient to buy an old donkey and a cart. At the very least, they would no longer have to carry food by themselves.

When Li Huowang came out of Wuli Gang, he saw that everyone was huddled in the rice field amidst the dried rice stalks; they hadn't entered the village as they were afraid of scaring the villagers.

At that moment, Li Huowang saw that they were roasting some sweet potatoes. He reached into the cart and took out the roasted chicken. “Here, eat this.”

The people in their group had been eating dry rations for so long that upon seeing the chicken, they exploded with happiness and rushed over. A single chicken was then portioned and shared between ten people. While they didn't have much, they ate it

carefully, even going so far as to chew the bones as they ate it!

“Senior Li, where did the chicken come from? And the donkey cart? Just where did you go yesterday?” Bai Lingmiao asked while carefully chewing a piece of chicken.

Li Huowang lied down on a stack of dry rice stalks before slowly recounting the incident that happened yesterday.

After hearing how Li Huowang had risked his life to obtain these things, Bai Lingmiao placed down the piece of chicken and slowly approached him; she was worried about him.

“Senior Li, we are so sorry for dragging you down. If it wasn’t for us, there would be no reason for you to fight so hard.”

Li Huowang opened his eyes and looked at the girl wearing a green-colored cloth as a blindfold.

“It’s not your fault. Since that ‘thing’ could appear in the ancestral hall, it means that ‘it’ had been following us all this time. Even if ‘it’ hadn’t appeared yesterday, we would meet ‘it’ again sooner or later,” Li Huowang explained.

“Also,” Li Huowang paused and remembered the times he was stuck in his hallucinations back at the Zephyr Temple, “we still don’t know who will be dragging who in the future.”

He looked at the girl and gently held her hand.

Just as Bai Lingmiao was about to pry her hand off in embarrassment, she stopped.

Li Huowang slowly closed his eyes as he lay down on the dry rice stalks. Then, he gently loosened his grip on her hand.

However, just as he was about to let go of her hand, Bai Lingmiao’s soft hand tightened its grip on his hand.

They rested properly for a single night before the two groups resumed their journey. Their next destination was Jianye town. It would be the first proper town that Li Huowang would visit in this world.

“Young Daoist, the distance between Wuli Gang and Jianye

town is not large. Based on our speed, we should be able to reach it in about four to five days,” Lu Zhuangyuan reported to Li Huowang.

Li Huowang turned around and looked at Zhao Wu, who was being carried on Simpleton’s back. “You are going home. Are you happy?”

He had heard before that Zhao Wu’s home was located in Jianye town. After traveling for the past few days, he had come to understand Zhao Wu a bit more. Zhao Wu was smart, but because of his body and the fact that he was illiterate, he was not able to show his full potential.

“Zhao Wu, we are about to reach your home. Shouldn’t you invite us to stay at an inn?” Puppy chuckled.

However, Zhao Wu’s reaction was unlike what everyone had expected. He just smiled bitterly and said, “So what if we are about to reach my home? I’m crippled. I can’t even carry anything. To the people at my home, I’m nothing but a parasite.”

Everyone fell silent the moment he said that; it was a truth that had been eating away at their hearts.

All the people in the Preparation Room, except Li Huowang, were more or less afflicted with some ailment. Even if they were to return back to their hometowns, they would still be shunned by others. While it felt amazing to have escaped from Zephyr Temple and from death, returning to their homes, which were filled with hostility, was not an entirely exciting prospect for them.

Seeing the atmosphere turned sour, Li Huowang turned around and told Zhao Wu, “Who said that you are useless? Since we have nothing to do while we are traveling, I will teach you how to refine some pills. Memorize as much as you can. Selling some of these pills back at home shouldn’t be too bad; at least, you won’t starve.”

Hearing this, Zhao Wu perked up, a deep thirst being reflected in his eyes. “Senior Li, I don’t want to learn how to refine pills. However, can you teach me how to read?”

“Why do you want to learn how to read? Isn’t it better to learn how to refine pills and become half a doctor? At least you can then earn a living.” Li Huowang was puzzled by his train of thought.

While being literate was extremely useful, it takes a normal person up to five years in school to learn how to read. It was an almost impossible task to make someone who couldn’t even write their own name become literate in just a few days. It would take years of effort!

“It’s alright! I will try and learn as much as I can!”

Facing Zhao Wu’s deep thirst for literacy, Li Huowang couldn’t really understand it. However, since Zhao Wu wanted to learn, he was happy to teach.

“Simpleton, place Zhao Wu on the cart. I will teach him.”

Since Zhao Wu didn’t even know any of the basics, Li Huowang could only teach him some common words and force him to memorize them.

He was teaching Zhao Wu quite intently when he realized that it had suddenly gotten quiet. He raised his head and saw that everyone was listening to his lectures, including the people of the Lu family.

Not only were they listening, they were even looking at him with eyes filled with respect; it was as if Li Huowang was doing something sacred.

“Erm... Young Daoist? Hehe~” Lu Zhuangyuan chuckled as he took out two preserved sausages while dragging his youngest son toward Li Huowang.

Just as Li Huowang wanted to see what Lu Zhuangyuan was about to say, a cloud of dust billowed from behind them.

Soon, a horse stopped in front of them before a plump man jumped down.

Lu Zhuangyuan recognized him as someone from Wuli Gang. He paid his respect to the man and said, “Aiyo! Aren’t you the

youngest son of the Hu family? Where are you going in such a rush?"

"Nowhere! I just want to follow you! This way I can listen to your performances every day!"

The youngest son of the Hu family was quite excited. Even though he looked like an adult, his tone was still quite child-like.

"Aiyo~ Please don't make such jokes. Quickly go back and don't make your grandfather worry about your safety!"

"Don't worry! I will pay you!" He said as he took out a solid gold chain and forcibly placed it into Lu Zhuangyuan's hand.

Lu Zhuangyuan alternated between looking at the gold chain and the man, feeling quite conflicted.

However, a group of people riding on horseback soon arrived beside them.

"Father! Don't take me back! I refuse to go back! I want to become a performer!" said the Hu family's youngest son.

At that moment, the sound of a slap was heard as the youngest son of the Hu family was slapped by his father. Everyone was shocked to see his face swell up.

"You want to become a performer? Are you stupid?! They are the lowest of the low! If you become one, then I will personally kill you!"

As the man said that, he took the gold chain back and took his son before rushing back to Wuli Gang.

Once they left, Li Huowang stared at Lu Zhuangyuan, waiting to see what he was about to say.

Lu Zhuangyuan stood there in shame. He held the sausages in his hand and wanted to say something, but no words came out. It was the first time that the experienced old man looked just like a lost child.

In the end, he didn't say anything. He forced a smile before nodding. Then, he dragged his son back to his carriage, his back

looking even more hunched than before.

Chapter 37 - The Nine Classes

They had left Wuli Gang quite some time ago when the narrow forest path finally became wide. Soon, they were accompanied by other carriages, carts, and even farmers carrying their own luggage.

Soon, the ground around them was covered in many footprints, and as they encountered an increasing amount of animal excrement, Li Huowang knew they were getting closer to Jianye town.

“Zhao Wu, do performers like the members of the Lu family have a very low status in society?” Li Huowang asked Zhao Wu, who was studying diligently.

Zhao Wu, who was using a stick to practice writing, stared at Li Huowang in surprise.

“Yeah, even though a lot of people clapped and cheered them on from below the stage, they are treated just like the prostitutes in run-down brothels. Liking them is one thing, but their status is an entirely different matter. Performers and troupes are considered the lowest among the nine classes,” whispered Zhao Wu while carefully looking toward the members of the Lu family who were in front of them.

“Really? What are the nine classes?” Li Huowang asked, feeling puzzled. If it wasn’t for that incident, he might never have known this.

“The people with the highest status are the emperors, the kings, and the ministers. The second-highest are the officials, the generals, and the soldiers. The third-highest are the nobles and the merchants. The fourth-highest are the people from the various sects. The fifth-highest are the artisans and the craftsmen. The sixth-

highest are the doctors and the farmers. The seventh-highest are the shamans, the beggars, and the slaves. The eighth-highest are the robbers, the thieves, and the liars. Below them are the people belonging to the lowest class—the performers and the prostitutes. Not only is their status low, but even the treatment they receive is different. Those belonging to the bottom three classes are not allowed to marry into a wealthy family, are only allowed to wear certain types of clothes, are not allowed to ride horses or sedans, nor are they allowed to wear anything made with silks or brocades. They even have to be thrice as humble as the others in front of other officials.”

When Li Huowang heard how Zhao Wu could recite all that so easily, he was surprised. “To think that you know so much!”

“It’s nothing, really. I’ve lived in a town before, so this much is natural. That said, where were you living before this? All this should be common knowledge known by most of the people.”

Even before this, Zhao Wu had known that something was different about Li Huowang. Now, he finally had a chance to ask about it.

“I come from a very far place.” Li Huowang didn’t bother explaining. Either way, they would never understand.

Seeing how Li Huowang avoided giving him an answer, Zhao Wu did not press it any further.

“We are at least somewhat lucky; at the very least, our Emperor allows everyone to take the official exam regardless of their class or status. I’ve heard that in certain places, those from the bottom three classes are barred from taking it, meaning that their entire family would be forever stuck as members of the lower class—the performers can only continue to perform for their entire lives.”

“Is that so?” Li Huowang managed to learn something new about the world today.

“And what about me? As a Daoist, what class do I belong to?”

Li Huowang asked.

“Daoists are not considered a part of the nine classes. Instead, they are a part of the three religions. Most people would respect Daoists or avoid them altogether if they are afraid of them. After all, no one wants to get involved with the supernatural.”

Zhao Wu’s explanation reassured Li Huowang, causing him to stop thinking about taking off the Daoist robe he was wearing; since they would be traveling the lands, having the conspicuous Daoist robe should give them a lot of benefits.

“Oh right, Zhao Wu, what about someone like Dan Yangzi? Would his position be considered very high?” Li Huowang asked a very important question.

“I will have to be honest about that one; I don’t know about it either. Prior to being kidnapped by him, I had never known anyone as strong as him. I just thought that the things I had heard were exaggerated.”

“Really?” said Li Huowang.

Maybe information is not very fluid here. There should be quite a lot of people as strong as Dan Yangzi, but even Zhao Wu hadn’t heard of him before, and he is a local.

Li Huowang guessed that someone like Dan Yangzi was likely someone who was being suppressed by someone or some sect. If not, then he wouldn’t have had to run deep into the forest and secretly try to become an Immortal.

“Young Daoist! Look, we can see the gate! We will reach Jianye town soon!” shouted Lu Zhuangyuan suddenly.

Hearing Lu Zhuangyuan’s hollering, Li Huowang raised his head and looked forward.

After days of traveling, he finally saw a short wall covered in moss. The wall signified that they had reached their destination, Jianye town.

The Lu family managed to enter the town successfully, but Li

Huowang and the rest were not as lucky. Due to their appearances, the town guards soon came up to confront them.

The head of the guards drew his swords and stared at Li Huowang carefully. “Hold up! Stop! What are you?”

“Headguard Yan! It’s me! These are people I know. They are good people. They came here to send me back to my home.” Zhao Wu greeted the headguard with respect.

Seeing that it was Zhao Wu, the headguard lowered his swords; he knew that they were not enemies.

“Zhao Wu, where have you been? Also, ask your friends to put on something to cover themselves up. Don’t let them scare the people in the town.”

“Thank you, headguard Yan. How is my family? Are they doing well?”

“Yeah, they are doing well. Your second sister even got married to a good family. Go back and find them.”

In order to avoid getting into any more trouble, Li Huowang decided to follow Zhao Wu to a stall that was selling bamboo hats with black veils and buy a few of them.

However, even after wearing those hats, they were still quite conspicuous. Even so, they were not as scary as before.

After confirming with Lu Zhuangyuan about when they would be departing again, Li Huowang asked Zhao Wu, “Where is your house? Let’s go and find your family first.”

As everything around him was familiar to him, Zhao Wu got more and more excited; he didn’t need a bamboo hat since everyone in the village knew about him.

Zhao Wu crawled out of the cart with all his strength and leaped down, his four limbs twisted in different directions.

Puppy was just about to support him when Li Huowang told him not to. Instead, Li Huowang passed his sword to Zhao Wu before taking out the pieces of paper containing the last words of

the dead guiding drug ingredients and started sorting them one by one.

Meanwhile, Zhao Wu used the sword to support himself as he stumbled back to his home.

While Jianye town looked quite big with all the people, it wasn't really that big; Zhao Wu managed to arrive at his home quite quickly.

His family managed a small business as grain dealers. Seeing his family working inside the house, Zhao Wu shouted in a tearful voice, "Dad! I'm home!"

At that moment, Zhao Wu's shaking voice attracted the attention of the people inside.

"Fifth brother!" A strong man who had been carrying a bag of rice while shirtless immediately dropped his cargo and ran toward Zhao Wu, hugging him tightly.

Soon after, a girl ran out from inside the house, her braids dangling in the air. She too started circling around Zhao Wu excitedly.

While they were embracing each other emotionally, Li Huowang, who had been observing everything from the sidelines, noticed something; other than the two siblings, the rest of the people in the house were completely calm. This wasn't like a normal house.

"Senior Li, what's wrong?" Bai Lingmiao, who had always been sensitive, immediately sensed that something was wrong with Li Huowang.

However, Li Huowang just patted the back of her hand and said 'nothing' in a small voice.

Chapter 38 - Jianye Town

“Fifth brother, quickly come in! Where have you been all this time? Both I and sixth sister have been so worried about you. We thought that something had happened to you.”

Seeing the topless man carrying Zhao Wu inside, Li Huowang followed them; he had a feeling that the situation was not as simple as it looked.

“Why are you back?”

As soon as Li Huowang heard what the man with the abacus said in such a calm voice, he knew that he was right.

The excited expression on Zhao Wu’s face immediately disappeared, replaced with a moody one. His voice shook as he spoke, “Father, I was kidnapped by someone and brought far away. My friends over there helped me so that I could come back.”

Looking at the group of people standing in front of the entrance with their black veiled bamboo hats, he grunted impatiently. “Go away! Shoo! How am I supposed to run my business when you are all blocking the entrance?”

Li Huowang was quite pissed at that man’s attitude.

Why are you treating us rudely? We are not related to you in the slightest!

At that moment, Li Huowang took the sword that was in Zhao Wu’s hands and unsheathed it before pressing down the sharp blade onto the table, almost splitting it apart.

“What are you trying to do? The head guard is my cousin!” Zhao Wu’s father crawled backward in fear.

Li Huowang took out a piece of silver and shaved a small piece of it before placing it right in front of Zhao Wu’s father. He then pinched the small piece of silver and pushed it toward the man.

“I’m here to buy rice!”

Now in the backyard of the grain shop, Zhao Wu was pouring tea for Li Huowang. “Calm down, Senior Li. That’s just how my father is; however, he has a good heart.”

Li Huowang drank the tea in one go. He couldn’t afford to care too much about this matter. After all, there were other matters to deal with besides sending Zhao Wu home.

“These are the last words of the guiding drug ingredients whose families should be located within the kingdom. Since you know Jianye Town the best, find a reputable escort service and send these to their respective recipients,” Li Huowang said as he took out eight pieces of paper and passed them to Zhao Wu.

Zhao Wu received the pieces of paper with both hands and nodded. “Don’t worry, Senior Li! I will make sure that this is done properly!”

“Sure. You should rest well in your home now. We are leaving.” Li Huowang said as he stood up.

“So soon? How about having lunch at my house? After all, it was thanks to all of you that I could make it back safely.”

Zhao Wu was quite sad about parting ways; it was very likely that this would be their last time meeting each other.

“No need to trouble yourself.” Li Huowang patted Zhao Wu’s shoulders. Based on the attitude of Zhao Wu’s father, it was likely that having lunch here would be way too troublesome.

“Remember to memorize the words that I’ve taught you in these past few days, especially your name. At the very least, you will not be completely illiterate if you are able to at least write your name.”

Just as Li Huowang was saying goodbye, one of the guiding drug ingredients, who had black hair all over her body, whispered to Zhao Wu, “Make sure to find out and confirm if it was your dad who had sold you off; it might not have been just a simple

kidnapping.”

These words shocked everyone, leaving them unable to say anything. It was only after Zhao Wu’s third brother brought them their rice that they left.

They were walking on the streets, trying to find an inn to stay in.

“Why do you think that Zhao Wu was sold off by his own father?” Li Huowang turned and asked the girl. The girl was afflicted with hypertrichosis. She usually stayed silent, but her words today had shaken everyone.

“Even a tiger would care for its cub. Maybe he’s not that evil?” Li Huowang continued.

Li Huowang had just said that when the girl trembled. With a voice filled with sadness, she said, “A tiger wouldn’t abandon its cub! But humans are much more evil than tigers! I was sold off by my parents!”

Everyone stopped and stared at her in shock.

“Two pieces of silver! For just two pieces of silver, they sold me off! They didn’t even turn to look back at me!” she continued in a trembling voice.

Sensing the pain in her voice, Bai Lingmiao carefully walked over to her and hugged her, gently patting her back to calm her down.

Li Huowang remained silent for a moment before he said, “Since they already sold you off, do you still want to go back?”

“Yes! Absolutely!” The girl clenched her teeth and growled.

Sensing her agitation and rapid breathing, Li Huowang somehow knew that her reason for going home was different compared to the rest of them.

“Tong Lai Inn. Let’s rest here tonight.” Li Huowang pointed at a signboard on the left and walked in.

“Welcome, my dear guests. Would you like to just rest for a

while or stay the night?”

“We are staying the night. How much is it?”

“We have three types of rooms. The deluxe room includes meals and costs 90 coins. The superior room costs 60 coins, but doesn’t include meals. The normal room costs 20 coins, but it’s like a dormitory. I see that you have seven adults and five children. For a group of 12 people, I would recommend choosing four superior rooms. Those rooms would be large enough, allowing three people to sleep in them comfortably. It would also be safer if each child is supervised by two adults.”

“Ok, let’s just go with what you recommend.”

“Alright! Twelve guests! Four superior rooms~ The rooms are upstairs; please watch your step as you climb up the stairs.”

Soon, it was nighttime, and Li Huowang was silently observing the people walking on the streets outside the window. He finally had time to relax after traveling for so long. This was a good opportunity to observe the strange world he was in.

Strong men guiding horses using reins, a scholar holding a folding fan, children with lanterns, and even a hunchbacked man selling food he was carrying on his shoulder pole.

Everything seemed so real yet so awkward; it was as if it just didn’t fit.

The faces of the various strangers soon started to become blurred. Li Huowang continued staring until he saw a familiar face, immediately causing his muscles to tense up in shock.

He had just seen Yang Na!

Her pretty face was wet with tears; she was crying and gasping for breath as she screamed, “Huowang! Wake up!”

“Huh?!” He fell backward from the shock but immediately got up before rushing back to the window and looking outside once again.

Unfortunately, he found out that it wasn’t Yang Na, but just

another girl that looked like her.

“Yeah... Even I've aged this much in this world. If Yang Na really existed here, how could she still be a young girl...”

Li Huowang slid down with his back against the wall, his eyes looking soulless as he stared at the wooden beams of the room. “Are my hallucinations coming back?”

Suddenly, there was a knock on his door.

“Come in. The door is unlocked.” Li Huowang thought that it might be Puppy who was supposed to sleep with him, but instead, it was Bai Lingmiao who entered the room.

She smiled as she showed him something wrapped in lotus leaves. Li Huowang opened it and saw that there were several hot buns in it.

“Senior Li, you must be hungry. Please eat some buns,” said Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang ate them one by one. He was indeed hungry.

Meanwhile, Bai Lingmiao was holding the lotus leaf and buns in her hands as she sat beside him and stared at him quietly, passing him another bun every time he finished eating the previous one.

“What a wonderful place. To think that someone is still selling buns so late at night,” Li Huowang said, feeling curious.

“Is that so? I think it's quite normal to sell buns even at night. However, if we are talking about something really special, it would be Simpleton dipping his buns in vinegar before eating them!”

“Haha. Wonder where he is from. To think that he has such weird dining habits.”

At that moment, Li Huowang realized something as he was talking with Bai Lingmiao. “Wait, I didn't give you any money. How did you buy these?”

Bai Lingmiao's eyes flickered, but she still gently placed the food on her legs before taking out a few pieces of silver from her

waist and showed them to Li Huowang.

“Senior Li, I sold the golden anklet. You are already working so hard for us. This is the least I could do for you.”

Chapter 39 - Wild

Staring at the pieces of silver in Bai Lingmiao's hands, Li Huowang immediately took out another piece of silver and gave it to her.

However, before he could even say anything, Bai Lingmiao hurriedly told him, "The anklet has already been melted. I saw it with my own two eyes. There is no way to buy it back."

Seeing how shocked Li Huowang was, Bai Lingmiao chuckled as if she had finally won against him. She then placed all the silver in Li Huowang's hands.

"It's fine. The anklet was just something my mom gave me as an accessory. It was not some family heirloom."

Seeing Bai Lingmiao insisting that it was alright, Li Huowang did not ask about it any more. He counted all the pieces of silver before keeping them safely. "Once everything has died down, I will buy you an even bigger one."

"Ok! I'm looking forward to it!" Bai Lingmiao smiled and nodded.

Just then, the door opened, and Puppy entered the room. He saw that the two of them were in a corner of the room and immediately turned around. "Oops, sorry. Wrong room. I will head out now."

Bai Lingmiao blushed before pushing Puppy away and running off.

On the other hand, Puppy just chuckled as he walked into the room once again. "Senior Li, even though Senior Bai is afflicted with albinism, that shouldn't be an issue when it comes to marrying her. Her heart and personality are much more important. Please don't leave her behind."

Li Huowang was too lazy to argue with him. “Stop babbling. Wash up and go to sleep. We finally have the chance to sleep in a bed.”

In his dream, Li Huowang was walking through a forest as he walked in the direction of a light. He used his sword to chop down the bushes and the trees in his way as he approached the light.

When he reached the source of the light, he realized that it was Bai Lingmiao, his mother, and Yang Na. All three of them were roasting sweet potatoes by a campfire.

Looking at the heartwarming scene, he sighed and approached them.

At that moment, however, the sky suddenly turned dark and Li Huowang saw a towering monstrosity—it was Dan Yangzi with his three heads and feathered body!

“Hahaha! My dear disciple! Not bad! You brought all of the guiding drug ingredients.”

The monstrosity that was Dan Yangzi laughed and picked up a stone pillar even larger than his body. Then, he smashed the pillar down toward the campfire.

“No wait!”

At that moment, Li Huowang woke up, completely drenched in cold sweat. He gasped for air and calmed down, realizing that it had all been a nightmare.

“Senior Li, you woke up? I bought some dumplings for you. Eat them while they are still hot.” Puppy, who had been looking at the streets while Li Huowang was sleeping, retracted his head from outside the window.

“What is the time right now?” Li Huowang asked as he clasped the side of his head to soothe his headache while looking at the dumplings on the table.

“It’s just past 9 AM. You could have slept for a while longer; after all, we are not starting our journey today so soon.”

Li Huowang ate the dumplings one by one and even drank the soup placed in the porcelain bowl. He finished eating in no time. “Who said that we don’t have anything to do? Let’s go and buy some of the supplies that we will need for our journey.”

The scene he saw in his nightmare once again flashed through his head. Li Huowang told Puppy, “I will take someone else with me to buy the supplies. Meanwhile, I need you to ask Lu Zhuangyuan and see when we will be starting our journey again. The sooner the better. If they can’t travel again anytime soon, then we will have to leave without him.”

Li Huowang had some silver leftover after he bought the donkey and the cart. Adding in the silver he got from Bai Lingmiao, there would be no issue purchasing some extra supplies. At the very least, they needed to buy some sheets and blankets. It was tough sleeping in the wilderness without them. More often than not, his back would be warm while the front of his body would be chilly as he slept by the campfire.

He also needed to buy a simple pot. Then, at the very least, they would be able to cook something rather than having to munch on dry rations.

Li Huowang bought many things, to the point that their cart had no space left. When he reconvened with Lu Zhuangyuan at the gate of the town, Li Huowang had even purchased another donkey cart.

“Hoho? Young Daoist, you are quite talented. To think that your assets are growing so fast as you travel. Another year and a half, and you might just end up having an entire caravan.” Lu Zhuangyuan didn’t forget to praise Li Huowang as they traveled.

“Old man, is the Western Capital City far from Jianye town?” Li Huowang asked as they traveled on the wide dirt road.

The road was wide, and there were many other travelers—it wasn’t just Lu Zhuangyuan and Li Huowang’s groups. There were

many others who were carrying their belongings as they traveled. It seems that everyone was traveling toward the Western Capital City.

“It’s not too far. We should arrive there in another ten days or so.” Lu Zhuangyuan smiled as he recalled something good that happened to him.

Li Huowang nodded. “About the Monastery, other than everyone going there to pray, what else do you know about it?”

“Haiya... It’s a Monastery. They are all the same, with older monks leading the younger monks to be vegetarian and to chant sutras.”

Li Huowang sighed. It seemed like he had no choice but to personally go and check the place; someone like Lu Zhuangyuan, who was busy trying to make ends meet and living as a commoner, would definitely not be an expert on such topics.

“Young Daoist, look, there is a Monk just up ahead. He’s... peeing underneath the tree. Why not ask him? Maybe he’s a Monk from the Monastery.”

“Huh?” Li Huowang turned to look toward the direction that Lu Zhuangyuan was pointing. Sure enough, there was a Monk.

When Li Huowang approached the Monk, the Monk also turned around to face him. The robe that the Monk was wearing was quite filthy.

When Li Huowang saw the Monk’s face, his brows furrowed uncontrollably; rather than a Monk, the other person looked more like a bald beggar. He looked absolutely filthy and ragged. His Monk robe was even riddled with holes.

“Amitabha. Is there a reason you approached me?” The filthy man opened his mouth, showing his yellow teeth. He was even missing one of his front teeth.

“Are you a Monk?” asked Li Huowang.

“Yes, I am a Monk!” The old Monk replied as he held the prayer beads around his neck that were made with fruit seeds.

“May I ask which Monastery you are from?” Li Huowang was quite suspicious about him.

“I’m not from any Monastery. That’s why I’m traveling up north. I heard that there are many Monasteries there, and I want to become a Monk there. I heard that they even feed you for free!”

When he heard such a response, Li Huowang nodded and went back to his group. He had a hunch.

But just when Li Huowang had decided not to bother the fake Monk any further, the Monk approached Li Huowang instead.

“Are you looking for a Monastery as well? But aren’t you a Daoist? Daoists don’t really believe in Buddha, do they?”

Don’t tell me he’s trying to make me lower my guard?

Li Huowang instantly increased his alertness while smacking the rump of his donkeys; he had everyone walk faster and ignore the old Monk.

Unfortunately, Simpleton didn’t know what was wrong and just continued talking to the old Monk.

“You... You didn’t bring... bring any food? You... will...will starve!”

“Why would I? There are many mushrooms, fruits, and vegetables in the forest.”

“I’ve... I’ve eaten wild fruits before too! And...”

“Simpleton, don’t talk to him.” Li Huowang interrupted them.

“Oh.” Simpleton nodded in understanding.

Without anyone talking to him, the old Monk left. At the same time, Li Huowang sighed in relief and released his grip on the bronze bell hidden in his sleeves. He needed to be alert at all times in this weird world—regardless of whether the other person was truly an idiot or not.

After walking for two hours, it was finally mid-day. At this point, many people walked off the path and sat under the trees, munching on their ration. Li Huowang and his group did the same.

Even though he was anxious to continue traveling, it was safer to travel in a large group.

He then passed out the freshly bought buns to everyone; they ate the buns with some pickled vegetables.

He had just drunk some water from the water gourd that Bai Lingmiao had passed on to him when he realized that someone was missing. “Huh? Where’s Simpleton?”

“He went into the forest to pee. However, why is he still not back? Did he go for number two instead? Simpleton! What are you doing there?”

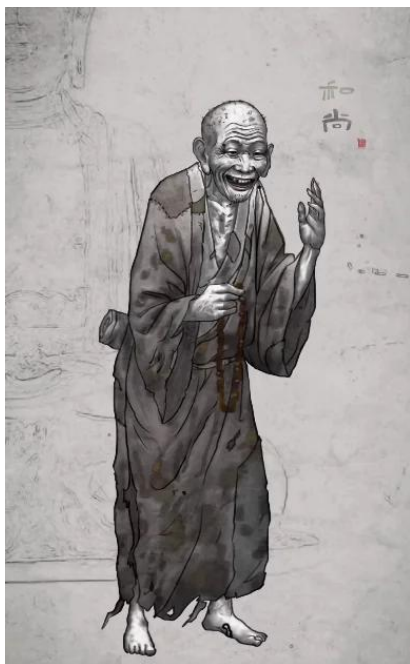
When Puppy shouted into the forest, Simpleton’s large head popped out from behind a tree. He was munching on something.

“What are you eating?” Li Huowang asked, feeling confused.

“Some... Some free... free rice... in the forest! No... No money needed!” Simpleton just said that before once again hiding behind the tree.

Translator's Thoughts

The old monk look like. @格子的乱七八糟



Chapter 40 - Midnight

“Hmm? What is he saying?” Li Huowang went and checked on Simpleton.

As soon as he walked into the forest, he was shocked by what he saw—Simpleton and the old Monk were squatting down in front of a small mound of dirt, eating something. There were a few pieces of yellow paper weighed down by a rock and placed on the mound.

Li Huowang tried suppressing his anger as he kicked Simpleton. “Get up! How dare you eat the food people made to offer to the dead?! Do you have a death wish?! Didn’t I tell you not to talk to him?!”

Simpleton stood up awkwardly. “I... I didn’t... didn’t talk to him.”

“Kneel down and apologize to the grave!” Li Huowang ordered.

After Simpleton had apologized to the grave, Li Huowang pulled Simpleton up with only his hands.

This was a strange world with many supernatural beings. He didn’t dare to risk anything. It would be bad if something were to happen just because he didn’t take care of this properly.

Li Huowang unsheathed his sword and pointed it at the old Monk. “I don’t care what your goal is, but leave me and my people alone, or you will regret it!”

Before the old Monk could even say anything, Li Huowang had pulled Simpleton away.

“I’m just a Monk.” The old man mumbled as he continued eating the food that was meant for the dead.

Everyone soon resumed their journey. Meanwhile, Li Huowang’s face was serious as he started giving orders. “Don’t sleep too soundly these coming few nights. We might have trouble.”

Even though Simpleton had apologized, no one knew what kind of attitude the thing in the grave had; Li Huowang didn't want to risk it.

Hearing what he had said, the rest of them understood and nodded their heads.

As the sun started to set, everyone stopped their journey and went into the forest to find some firewood. Li Huowang made sure that the fire burned extra bright today. He even asked some people to chop some extra firewood today.

There was no moon, and the surroundings were pitch black. The tree branches swayed in the wind, as if there were numerous things hiding in the darkness, watching them.

As more and more time passed, his surroundings got quieter and quieter. Soon, everyone was fast asleep.

However, Li Huowang was still awake, almost as if he was waiting for something.

Not only was he wary of the dark forest, but he was also wary of the old Monk.

If something were to emerge from the grave to haunt them, then it would probably find the old Monk first.

It might actually be good if something were to come. At least I would then have an opportunity to see what the old Monk's true identity is.

The first half of the night soon passed and came into the second half of the night. This was the time when everyone would be the most groggy from sleep.

"Senior Li, that place... I think I just saw a face." Puppy's voice shook as he spoke. He was on guard duty along with Li Huowang.

However, when Li Huowang quickly scanned the darkness, he saw nothing.

"Are you sure?" whispered Li Huowang.

Puppy swallowed his saliva and replied, "I'm not sure... maybe

I just saw something else.”

“Stay quiet, and don’t talk,” Li Huowang said as he pretended to tend to the fire while keeping an eye on that spot.

After some time, under the glow of the fire, he saw an ugly face emerging from the darkness with a cruel smile on its face.

What made Li Huowang shudder was the fact that more and more faces slowly emerged from the darkness. At the same time, a metallic reflection could be seen underneath their faces from time to time.

“Wait, a metallic reflection?” Li Huowang immediately stood up and threw a flaming branch in their direction. “Stop! Who are you people?!”

Li Huowang’s shout shook everyone awake from their sleep.

As the flaming branch landed close to the faces, Li Huowang saw that they had hands and feet. They were humans!

At this point, it was not only Li Huowang who saw them, everyone else did too. At the same time, some of them also saw the blades in their hands and shouted, “Bandits! Run!”

This shout pierced the darkness, and everyone started acting immediately; everyone dispersed as fast as possible.

“Shit! We’ve been spotted! Quickly bring the horses!” The bandits immediately ran after them.

“Run into the forest! Their horses can’t run well there!” shouted the old Monk.

Hearing the old Monk, everyone rushed into the forest.

Li Huowang and the rest ran too, but their donkey cart was not as fast as horses.

Hearing the thundering sound of horse hooves, Li Huowang turned back and saw a bandit on a horse swinging his blade toward an old lady.

“We have to fight!” Li Huowang shouted before immediately taking out a pill and eating it, the warm feeling once again coursing

through his body.

Then, Li Huowang leaped toward the bandit.

At the same time, the old Monk suddenly appeared beside the old woman and pushed her down.

The bandit on the horse huffed and pulled on the reins, causing the horse to raise its front feet as it attempted to stomp the people on the ground.

The bandit smiled cruelly, awaiting the bloody mess that would soon come. He loved stealing and toying with women.

But in the next moment, he saw someone rushing toward him and punching his horse.

The horse neighed in pain and changed its direction, causing its hooves to slam heavily on the right of the old Monk.

Meanwhile, the bandit was powerless to do anything as he fell off the horse. At the same time, he saw the head of the horse suddenly explode, shocking him immensely.

Then, with a dull thud, his head exploded as well.

Meanwhile, when they saw that their comrade was in danger, the other bandits whistled to call for reinforcements.

On the other hand, Li Huowang needed to make sure the bandits realized that they had targeted the wrong crowd while Dan Yangzi's pill was still effective.

As the sound of fighting resounded in the dark night, the bandits hurriedly escaped after a few of them died.

"Retreat! He's too strong! He might be someone from the Surveillance Bureau!"

Li Huowang stood there as he gasped for air, his knuckles covered in blood.

Then, he turned around and looked at the old Monk. After this fight, he knew that the old Monk was just a plain old Monk and nothing else.

Under Li Huowang's gaze, the old Monk stood up and

approached one of the people who had been cut down by the bandits before kneeling down and chanting something.

Li Huowang walked over and tried to hear what he was chanting.

“Amitabha, Amitabha, Amitabha...”

He was chanting “Amitabha” over and over again with a weird pronunciation.

After chanting it tens of times, the old man walked into the forest and dug a grave for the deceased.

Chapter 41 - Monk

On the pitch-black dirt road, Li Huowang carried a torch and led the others onward. The night was still dark, yet none of them felt sleepy after their previous experience; they were too shaken to even think about going to bed. Now, their donkey cart was loaded with some sliced up horse meat as well. Aside from a few silver pieces they looted from the corpses of the bandits, this too was also a part of Li Huowang's spoils of war.

"We've traveled enough for today; let's rest here till dawn. It's unsafe to continue traveling during the night," Li Huowang ordered before quickly stacking the torches together to form a new bonfire. "Try to get some rest even if you can't fall asleep. After all, we need to continue traveling tomorrow. Conserve your energy. I'll take the first watch duty for now."

Soon, the sound of donkey hooves and footsteps faded, and the dirt road once again became quiet. Sitting by the campfire, Li Huowang turned to look at the road they had just come from; it was pitch-black.

From the looks of it, that old beggar of a Monk will only come over after burying the dead.

As Li Huowang recalled what had just happened, he could not help but feel a sense of awe at the chaos that presided over this place. All sorts of dangers lurked around, yet there was no unity between the members of the same race; rather, mutually killing each other was quite common.

He used his sword to stab the nearly-extinguished campfire before throwing in some firewood from beside him.

As some time passed, some of those people scattered in the forest gradually converged toward Li Huowang's bonfire. Soon,

there were quite a few smaller bonfires beside theirs.

Members of the Lu family were not among the figures of the returnees, but Li Huowang was not worried in the least; when the bandits had appeared, they had been the quickest ones to flee the scene. Lu Zhuangyuan could definitely be considered experienced. Even though he was so stingy, he still chose to have horses pull his carts. He must have considered the possibility of encountering such a situation.

Time trickled by, and the sky gradually brightened. When the others woke up, they began to grill the horse meat for breakfast before getting ready for their journey. Horse meat was still meat, even if it was not the most delicious, and was thus quite helpful in replenishing their strength.

As they were eating, a trembling figure walked over from behind them. Li Huowang let his guard down ever so slightly upon seeing the appearance of the person. It was the old Monk from before, and it seemed like he had spent the entire night burying people. The morning dew had soaked his tattered monk robes, causing him to shiver from the cold. He slowly approached a nearby bonfire and crouched down, huddling himself into a ball.

The Monk smiled innocently when he noticed Li Huowang looking at him.

Li Huowang's sense of hostility toward the Monk lessened when he thought about the Monk's self-sacrificial actions to rescue others last night. From the looks of it, this old Monk was one of those kind-hearted people that had a hard time surviving in this dangerous world. Even so, be it Li Huowang or anyone else, everyone enjoyed dealing with such kind-hearted people.

The Monk hurriedly reached out his hand to retrieve the bun that Li Huowang passed to him. As he gnawed on it, he said, "May Buddha bless you."

Li Huowang was curious, "Which Buddha are you referring to?"

“Huh? Isn’t Buddha just Buddha? Are there different Buddhas?” The old Monk asked, slightly perplexed.

“Ah, just eat quickly. It’s rare to find someone like you out in this world. I hope that you’re not lying to me,” said Li Huowang.

“How can I lie to others? I’m a Monk, and Monks do not cheat others.” The old Monk asserted firmly.

“You only know how to chant Amitabha, and don’t even know which Buddha you believe in. Just what kind of Monk are you?”

“Scholar Sun said that Monks are bald, so I shaved my head. Tailor Wang said that Monks are not allowed to get married, so I didn’t! Liu Pukuai said that Monks are not allowed to eat meat, so I don’t eat meat! I saw other Monks chanting Amitabha, so I just followed their example. I’ve done it all, so how come I’m not a Monk?”

Li Huowang chuckled upon hearing all that; from the looks of it, the old Monk was very earnest in his explanations. This Monk was even worse at pretending to be a Monk than he was at pretending to be a Daoist. “But doing all this does not mean that you are a Monk.”

The old beggar was stumped, then raised his half-eaten bun and looked solemnly at Li Huowang. “Then tell me, what should a Monk be like?”

Li Huowang opened his mouth to reply, but could not give an answer; this Monk’s words seemed to hold a hint of truth amidst his ignorance.

For some reason, Li Huowang saw a glimpse of Dan Yangzi in the beggar—both were persistent in their beliefs despite their ignorance.

“I guess you should be illiterate?”

“How did you know? Are all Daoists good at figuring things out?”

“Keke. Why are you so bent on becoming a Monk?”

“Back then, if not for a Monk that saved me, I would have long since departed from this world. Since that day, I swore that I would become a Monk! I will become a good Monk!”

In the midst of their conversation, Li Huowang saw the Lu family members rushing back toward them from a distance. He stood up and patted his bottom before walking in their direction.

There were no more mishaps during the rest of their journey. The old Monk quietly followed along, and even gnawed on wild plants whenever he was hungry. Li Huowang would occasionally spare him a bun or two.

After over ten days like that, a city even more magnificent than Jianye town appeared before them—they had arrived at Western Capital City.

The city walls made of green-colored bricks stood tall and majestic. They all felt a sense of awe when looking up from the city gate entrance.

We’ve finally arrived.

Li Huowang heaved a sigh of relief when he saw the city gates. Fear and uncertainty had plagued them throughout their journey, but at least the scene from his nightmares had not appeared.

“Young Daoist, the inns in Western Capital City are very expensive. I’ll bring you to one that I know; it’s definitely cheaper,” Lu Zhuangyuan said. Just as he was about to walk toward the tall city gates, he was pulled back by Li Huowang.

“Hold on, which Monastery did you mention before?” Li Huowang asked eagerly. This was his most important objective in coming to this place.

Under Lu Zhuangyuan’s guidance, Li Huowang headed to the most prosperous Monastery in Western Capital City—the Righteous Monastery.

Even before he could see the Monastery, Li Huowang could already smell the unique smell of incense burned at Buddhist sites.

The wide alleyways also became more and more crowded with people from all ages and backgrounds.

Upon seeing the incense sticks held by all the people, Li Huowang immediately understood that these people were all here to worship Buddha.

“Has this Monastery’s incense always been so popular?” asked Li Huowang.

A nearby worshiper heard his question toward Lu Zhuangyuan, and interjected, “Of course! Righteous Monastery’s Bodhisattva is very effective! My daughter-in-law conceived after worshiping here just once.”

“And the masters here are very kind. They often distribute porridge among the poor,” interjected another worshiper.

“That’s right. It’s truly a blessing to have such a good Monastery in the Western Capital City,” interjected yet another worshiper.

Translator's Thoughts

And here we see Zhao Wu. Not gonna lie, the artist is really good at this. @格子的乱七八糟



Chapter 42 - Monastery

In Li Huowang's memory, most monasteries were built deep in the mountains. It was much rarer to see one built in the city. However, he couldn't be bothered about all these things; all he cared about right now was the name of the monastery that the worshiper had just mentioned, "Righteous Monastery?"

Li Huowang immediately recalled the conversation that Zheng Kun had with Dan Yangzi before they died. They seemed to have been chased by the monks of this Righteous Monastery previously.

His heart started beating faster when he realized that he had found the right place; after going through so many things on their journey, at least they had finally arrived.

The view before them suddenly changed as they turned another corner. Clean and neat stone slabs paved the way to a wide staircase. A majestic temple stood at the end of the staircase that had hundreds of steps, incense smoke wafting around it.

A black plaque stood above the tall temple doors, with a name written on it in red words—The Righteous Monastery. Right below it was a couplet:

"The seed of virtue blossoms, Buddha's body's grace,
On pure waters, the moon reflects with jade-like embrace."

With the numerous lit-up incense sticks, the entire temple was shrouded in white smoke, giving it a heavenly feeling.

"Young Daoist, I can't accompany you there, so please go on ahead. Right, the Western Capital City is different from Jianye town; here, there's a curfew at night. So, please remember to come back before nightfall," said Lu Zhuangyuan.

Li Huowang took a deep breath, then walked toward the crowded steps.

He followed the worshipers and stepped into the monastery where there were several large halls before him. Here, Li Huowang stood still like a rock amidst the tide of humans and took in his surroundings.

He found the main temple, but what he should do next stumped him. How should he interact with the monks in this place?

Should I directly say that I was Dan Yangzi's disciple? But I am afraid of being instantly swatted to death by them.

However, before he could even come up with a plan, the monks from Righteous Monastery approached him; even in such a massive crowd, Li Huowang's Daoist robes stood out quite a lot.

As he heard the other party speak, he realized that this monk's pure Buddhist behavior and values were not something the old monk from before could compare to. "Amitabha! Jian Dun at your service."

Li Huowang immediately returned the greeting when he saw the well-fed monk bow toward him with clasped hands. "Master, it's an honor to meet you. I am known as Xuan Yang."

"As a disciple of Daoism, you're probably not here to burn incense and worship the Buddha, right? Please come this way."

Li Huowang nodded as he looked at the bustling crowd all around, then followed him through a door at the side. He pondered on what he should say next while observing the scar on the monk's head.

The two of them continuously shuttled through the majestic halls, the clamor of the crowd around them gradually dying down. Finally, they arrived before a row of stone tables and chairs, under a golden ginkgo tree.

"Sir, please." monk Jian Dun sat down, unhurriedly turning the prayer beads in his hands. He did not ask Li Huowang about his sect or origin, thoroughly displaying the calm and composed nature of the disciples of Buddhism.

Li Huowang silently thought for a while, then looked at the monk before him. “Dan Yangzi is dead.”

There was a sudden pattering sound as the yellow-brown Buddhist beads in the monk’s hand scattered in all directions.

Li Huowang just silently nodded when he saw the fat Monk before him stand up. As expected, the monks here had definitely interacted with Dan Yangzi before.

“That bull-headed old Daoist is really dead? This matter is of utmost importance; please recount everything to me in detail.”

Since he wanted answers, Li Huowang had to give enough information to the other party. Apart from hiding the fact that he had taken away the so-called sacred text, Li Huowang described everything that happened in Zephyr Temple to the monk before him.

“Master, can Dan Yangzi really attain Immortality under such circumstances?”

Li Huowang leaned forward slightly before continuing in a solemn voice, “Or rather, is it possible that he has become something else?”

A gentle breeze blew past, rustling the leaves of the golden ginkgo tree beside them.

“Sir, are you sure that you really heard Dan Yangzi speaking into your ear?” Jian Dun was equally serious.

“Yes, definitely. It was not just some hallucination. There was also the abnormal situation with the God of Happiness.” Irritation flashed through his eyes as he recalled the scene. “The God of Happiness could not be seen directly and wanted to come out of the darkness to eat me. But its body, which was hidden in the darkness, seemed like it was getting pulled by something. Though I have no specific reason to believe this, I have a conjecture that it was Dan Yangzi who was pulling on the God of Happiness in the darkness—it was Dan Yangzi who had attained Immortality.”

Jian Dun spent some time pondering with a serious expression before he stood up. "Sir, please wait a while; this matter is of grave importance."

Then, Jian Dun clasped his hands toward Li Huowang and turned to leave in a hurry.

Though the other party did not say anything, his attitude was enough to convey some information. Li Huowang looked up at the clouds in the skies.

Sure enough, Dan Yangzi's matter is not something that would be concluded so easily.

Jian Dun returned quicker than Li Huowang had expected, returning in at most half an incense stick worth of time. This time he was back with a fresh string of Buddhist beads in his hand.

"Sir Xuan Yang, this way please. The abbot wishes to meet you in person," said Jian Dun.

The Righteous Monastery was very large, and they had to walk within the temple for some time before they finally arrived at a grand hall.

Outside the grand hall, Li Huowang peered in through the octagonal door and saw five towering Buddhas that were several meters in height. They were all sitting cross-legged, each striking a different yet equally majestic pose.

Before the five golden statues was a prayer mat with a figure seated on it while wearing a monk's robe. The figure also had a five-Buddha hat on his head, similar to that of Monk Tang.

Li Huowang could hear the monk chanting sutras as soon as he stepped in, the chanting echoing throughout the spacious hall.

Under the gaze of the five huge golden Buddhas, Li Huowang's figure slowed down unconsciously.

Soon, the chanting stopped, and the monk sitting on the prayer mat slowly turned around.

Li Huowang was surprised on seeing his appearance; it was the

appearance of an old man with white brows and a beard. However, what surprised him was not the abbot's exceptionally kind appearance, but his eyes. It was a pair of pink eyes. After having spent so much time together with Bai Lingmiao, Li Huowang could tell at just a glance that the abbot also suffered from albinism.

"Amitabha, this humble monk, Xin Hui, pays my respects," Abbot Xin Hui clasped his hands together and spoke calmly.

"I am Xuan Yang. It's good to see you, Abbot." Li Huowang returned the greeting before sitting down as well.

"Abbot, about Dan Yangzi-" Li Huowang was interrupted as the other party raised his hand to stop him.

"Benefactor Xuan Yang, do you recognize these five Buddha statues that you see in this hall? The one in the middle is Vaicorana from Vajradhatu, the Diamond Realm. The one on the East is Akshobhya from Abhirati, the Eastern Pure Land. The one on the South is Ratnasambhava from Śrīmat, the Southern Pure Land. The one on the West is Amitābha from Sukhavati, the Western Pure Land, and the one on the North is Amoghasiddhi from Prakuta, the Northern Pure Land. Together, they are known as the Five Dhyani Buddhas."

Li Huowang started feeling a little anxious.

What does this monk mean to do, talking about all these irrelevant things right now?

"Abbot, let's talk about all these things when we have the time in the future. May I ask what Dan Yangzi has transformed into?"

Xin Hui clasped his hands together and once again looked at Li Huowang calmly. "He has become a Buddha."

Translator's Thoughts

Abbot Xin Hui.@格子的乱七八糟



Chapter 43 - Buddha

“He has become a Buddha.”

Upon hearing the abbot’s calm words, Li Huowang felt a chill run down his spine.

He abruptly shifted his gaze toward the five giant golden Buddhas. Just a moment ago, they had seemed solemn and dignified, yet now, their demeanor seemed to have changed.

Li Huowang was just about to get up when he glanced at the bright sun outside, and then he once again looked at the abbot who was sitting before him. The old abbot was still sitting in the same spot as before, completely calm and composed, almost as though he had not just uttered those horrifying words.

Hold on, don’t scare yourself. It might not be what I am imagining.

After careful consideration, Li Huowang spoke again, “Abbot, did Dan Yangzi have some conflict with the Righteous Monastery before?”

“That’s right; he was going around killing people and causing chaos. I had sent our monastery’s warrior monks to capture him, but he managed to slip away each time. You have done a deed of great merit by coming up with a way to get rid of this person,” replied the abbot.

“Abbot, may I ask then how such an evildoer could become a Buddha? How is that possible?” questioned Li Huowang.

“Amitabha! Whatever he is now is not determined by what he was before. I have Buddha in my heart. Hence, in my heart, he is now a Buddha,” the abbot explained.

Li Huowang felt frustrated; this old monk seemed to be speaking in riddles.

“Dan Yangzi has now left behind the mundane world. It doesn’t

matter what I think he is; what matters is what you think he is, since he is whatever you think he is. Moreover, his karma now lies with you, and not with me,” Xin Hui continued in a composed voice.

This time, however, Li Huowang understood the meaning the abbot was trying to convey.

“So you’re saying that Dan Yangzi has become a shapeless, ever-changing entity? Just like the Wandering Gods?” asked Li Huowang.

“Yes,” replied the abbot.

“But why? How could he become something strange like that? After all, I fabricated all those so-called Immortality techniques! And there were so many deadly poisons which should have killed him!” Li Huowang couldn’t figure this out.

“I don’t know,” The abbot replied honestly. “I am not an omniscient Buddha. At the same time, as a monk, I cannot speak falsely. I don’t know.”

Li Huowang pondered for a moment, then asked another crucial question, “Abbot, is there a way to completely get rid of Dan Yangzi? Since he is our common enemy, it’s not good to just leave him like that.”

Li Huowang had spent so much energy coming over here, just to resolve this problem; he had to get rid of Dan Yangzi, regardless of what Dan Yangzi had turned into.

This time, however, Xin Hui did not reply so quickly. He fell into deep thought, then raised his right hand. “Come here. I need to take another look.”

Li Huowang hesitated for a moment while looking at that wrinkled, white hand.

“Benefactor Xuan Yang, if you’re still suspecting that I wish to harm you, then you shouldn’t even have stepped through our temple gates,” said the abbot upon seeing Li Huowang’s hesitation.

Li Huowang paused for a moment, and then placed his forehead onto his palm.

Buzz!

Li Huowang suddenly felt all the colors around him become much more vibrant, and started feeling weightless.

However, this intriguing feeling came and went quickly. When he returned to normal, Li Huowang did not know what had just happened, and even felt a sense of emptiness within his heart.

At that moment, he understood that this abbot must have some Buddhist supernatural abilities.

“Hmm... this matter is of utmost importance. I need to discuss our strategy with the other elders. You can stay in our temple for now, and we’ll give you our reply tomorrow,” said the abbot.

Li Huowang was a little nervous when he heard that he had to stay back. “I’ve got friends on the outside. They won’t feel assured if I don’t return.”

Despite Li Huowang declining the invitation, the abbot’s tone remained unhurried. “It’s up to you whether you choose to stay or to leave. The Righteous Monastery opens at dawn. Benefactor Xuan Yang, please don’t break your promise. You know as well as I do that if we don’t get rid of this trouble, it will be a grave danger to not just you, but to all the lives in this world.”

When Li Huowang stepped outside the temple into the sunlight and looked back inward, he found that the abbot had already turned around and begun to chant toward the giant Buddha statues.

Li Huowang looked up to see the large midday sun, and then looked toward the peaceful temple surroundings.

Just after Li Huowang turned around and took a few steps away from the temple, the back of the abbot’s bald head began to squirm. Not long after, the smooth skin under the five-Buddha hat slowly split apart, revealing a fist-sized giant pupil that wriggled out and stared at Li Huowang’s departing figure.

At that moment, the old abbot's chants suddenly increased in volume. "Form is not me... If it were me, form would not cause illness and troubles. I wish to be this form... I do not wish to be this form... Do as I please... So I should know..."

Meanwhile, Li Huowang took various turns as he retraced his steps back to the temple's main gate, where the worshipers were gathered. Seeing the crowd, he had a feeling that he had returned to the mortal world.

He stood in the middle of the crowd and looked toward the alleyway he had just walked out of. He felt somewhat hesitant.

Should I trust him?

"Hey! Daoist! I'm here!"

Li Huowang turned back to see someone shouting for him; it was the old monk who traveled alongside his group. Li Huowang could see him waving excitedly.

"You came to the Righteous Monastery? They accepted you?" asked Li Huowang.

The old monk nodded eagerly. "Yes, that monk over there took pity on me, and allowed me to stay and work here."

"That's good. Make sure to work hard here; at least it's better than digging around for wild vegetables or eating the offerings made to the dead. I'll take my leave first. Right, I still haven't gotten your name."

"You can just call me Monk. I like being called Monk. Come and visit the temple when you have the time," replied Monk.

"Keke, as you Buddhists like to say, let fate decide," replied Li Huowang. He bid his farewell to Monk and left the Righteous Monastery.

When he arrived at the inn, the others surged forth and surrounded him like a flock of bees.

Li Huowang raised his hand to stop the questioning and said, "I have a task for everyone. Split up and go around to ask about the

Righteous Monastery.”

Though his interaction with those monks today had been very normal, he still planned to listen to the opinions of the locals before planning his next move.

After getting this task, the others did not question it; they just nodded and turned to walk out of the inn.

Time trickled by. As the sun set, they all came back one by one, and reported their findings to him.

“They say that the Righteous Monastery is the largest monastery in Western Capital City. Its incense is considered the most marvelous.”

“I heard that their monks are very devout and abide by their rules quite strictly. Once, a monk stole some meat, and was immediately expelled from the temple.”

“I heard that even the Emperor goes to that temple to pray. If you’re lucky and get a good spot, you can even spot the Emperor!”

“I heard similar things as the others. Senior, why do you want us to inquire about the Righteous Monastery?”

Li Huowang did not respond; he did not want to tell them the terrifying truth that Dan Yangzi could still be alive.

After carefully sorting through their findings, he found no reason to refute the abbot’s offer. If he did not trust these monks, then he could only face this “Buddha” Dan Yangzi head-on. However, this choice would unquestionably lead to his death. After weighing the pros and cons, Li Huowang made the decision to return to the Righteous Monastery on the next day.

Chapter 44 - Righteous Monastery

Within the five-Buddha hall, Li Huowang met Abbot Xin Hui once again. However, this time the abbot wasn't alone; there were four more elderly monks sitting in a row behind him.

"Since you've returned, Benefactor Xuan Yang, let's get straight to the point. We need to hold a Great Fast to offer salvation to him," said the abbot.

"Right, abbot, let's start," replied Li Huowang immediately.

"Take it easy, Benefactor. Dan Yangzi's karma is still connected to you. Before we can perform this ritual, we need you to calm your mind."

"Calm my mind?" Li Huowang was puzzled.

"Amitabha! Benefactor, your mind is quite restless and troubled," said the abbot.

Before the abbot could even finish speaking, Li Huowang retorted in a stern and loud voice, "I'm not sick!"

His voice was so loud that Li Huowang even startled himself.

Li Huowang could see the five elderly monks gazing at him thoughtfully. He took a deep breath and clenched his trembling fists. "May I ask, abbot, what it is that I must do in order to calm my mind?"

At that moment, a yellow-covered scripture was presented to him. "Take this Emptiness of the Five Aggregates [\[1\]](#) Sutra, and recite it three times a day."

Li Huowang took it and flipped through the scripture; it was full of obscure Buddhist scriptures that he could not understand in the slightest.

“Just reciting it will do? There’s no specific technique? Or no need to eat anything?” asked Li Huowang. Such a simple step was way beyond his expectations.

When he saw Abbot Xin Hui shake his head, he took the scripture and started heading out. Right as he was about to exit, he turned around to look at the elderly monks sitting cross-legged on their prayer mats.

“Abbot Xin Hui, does the Righteous Monastery have any cultivation techniques?” asked Li Huowang.

“Naturally. As long as Benefactor is willing to shave his head and join our monastery, you may freely access our entire Scripture Repository.”

Upon hearing that, Li Huowang turned and left; it was not possible for him to become a monk.

“Benefactor Xuan Yang, why don’t you stay in the temple during this period? It’s also troublesome for us if you keep coming and going from the monastery like this,” said Abbot Xin Hui just as Li Huowang was about to leave.

Li Huowang did not decline them this time; since he had already chosen to trust them, being overly cautious would only make him seem petty.

A separate room was arranged for him within the Righteous Monastery. Li Huowang sat within the room while silently looking at the scripture that was given to him.

Initially, Li Huowang felt a little nervous. But he soon realized that nobody in this temple minded him, even when he ran to the bustling main hall and watched the monks perform divinations for others. He gradually felt more and more assured.

Late at night, under the light of an oil lamp, Li Huowang carried a scripture book and recited, “My life’s journey is complete, my spiritual path established, my actions accomplished, leaving no room for future existence. As I speak of this Dharma, it reveals the

freedom of mental attachments of all phenomena, including the five aggregates. Embrace this teaching with faith, and diligently put it into practice...”

When he initially began reciting this so-called Emptiness of the Five Aggregates Sutra, Li Huowang didn't feel anything. However, as more and more days passed, he felt the quality of his sleep gradually improve, and understood that it really was effective.

Once he finished reciting it, he placed the book down and extinguished the oil lamp, preparing to head to sleep. At the same time, he began to plan for what he had to do next.

After getting rid of Dan Yangzi, I'll go and look for a Black Taisui. If I can stabilize my condition, then I will be able to continue to live in this world in a stable fashion.

But the Black Taisui seems to be rather ferocious. And if I really do manage to capture it, then how should I restrain it such that I can cut some of its flesh to eat every month?

Right, the first thing I need to do is to obtain enough strength for self-preservation. That is also similarly challenging.

Just as Li Huowang was lost in his thoughts, he suddenly saw a figure flash past outside his door, causing his body to tense up.

Is someone within the temple spying on me?

Li Huowang slowly walked up to the door and pulled the latch, yanking the door open.

The courtyard outside was illuminated by the moonlight, with not a single person in sight. Li Huowang carefully peered outside. He caught a glimpse of a yellow-robed monk quickly vanishing into the dark corridor in the distance.

“What's going on within this temple?” After a moment of contemplation, Li Huowang followed the yellow-robed monk at a slow pace.

After a while, Li Huowang saw a bald head under the moonlight. While Li Huowang could not see the face from his angle,

judging from the lack of scars, their status in the Righteous Monastery was probably not high.

Just like that, in the silent temple, one person walked ahead, while another followed behind from a distance.

At that moment, however, the monk suddenly disappeared into the partially opened door of a temple hall.

Li Huowang was about to follow him inside as well, but after some thought, he decided to go to the other side of this temple. There, he wet his finger with some saliva before piercing a hole through the paper window.

This hall was quite small compared to the abbot's five-Buddha hall. In fact, it could even be described as tiny. There was a small Bodhisattva statue, with one hand in a meditative gesture and the other hand holding a bottle. Only two candles were lit on the altar, dimly illuminating the entire hall.

There was someone kneeling before the figure of the Bodhisattva; the one who had just entered was not some monk, but a woman.

A woman? In the temple this late at night?

Before Li Huowang could even make sense of what he was seeing, the woman began to silently pray.

“Oh merciful and compassionate Bodhisattva, I beg you, please give me a son. If I don't give birth to a son this time, I'm going to be sold away.”

Just as she was praying, a half-naked monk who had been behind the statue approached her before gently covering her eyes with a red cloth. Her body trembled ever so slightly, but she did not resist. Soon, her breathing started becoming heavier and heavier.

Soon, seven or eight bald-headed monks walked out from the surrounding darkness, each with their hands clasped together as if they were praying. Then, they slowly surrounded her.

This is the truth behind the effective child-bearing prayers?!

Li Huowang was dumbfounded as he watched the scene unfolding in front of him, toppling his previous understanding of the Righteous Monastery.

Suddenly, he sensed something and quickly turned around to see Jian Dun, standing in the courtyard while illuminated by the moonlight.

I've been discovered!

Jian Dun did not say anything as he looked at Li Huowang, only gently beckoning with his hand before turning to leave.

Li Huowang glanced at the chaos within the temple one last time before following Jian Dun quietly.

Jian Dun did not bring Li Huowang anywhere special, but only to his residence. Then, he lit up the oil lamp and sat down on a stool.

“I know what Benefactor must be thinking—that the Righteous Monastery’s monks are impure? But does Benefactor believe all the worshipers to be fools? Why would they come to pray so late at night?” said Jian Dun.

Standing at the door, Li Huowang did not say anything, waiting for him to continue.

“If they want a son, then we’ll give them a son. As monks, we are just that compassionate, and thus we do good deeds,” continued Jian Dun.

Li Huowang could not help but frown. “Then there must be a lot of those ‘good deeds’ of yours roaming around here.”

“The Righteous Monastery’s disciples have never proclaimed that our prayers to the Bodhisattva are effective. All those rumors have just been spread around by the worshipers themselves. We didn’t say anything, and they didn’t ask anything.”

1. The five aggregates are form (or materiality), sensations (or feeling), perception, mental formation, consciousness 🖐️

Chapter 45 - Buddha Statue

“Master, there’s no need to explain so much to a simple guest like me; I won’t bother you guys either. Please leave, I’m about to head to sleep,” said Li Huowang.

Jian Dun clasped both hands together and bowed toward Li Huowang before walking toward the door. As he passed by Li Huowang, he softly whispered, “Don’t underestimate Buddhism. I used to be a Daoist before I became a monk. Daoism is similar; it’s just that you’re unaware of it.”

Jian Dun walked away, leaving Li Huowang alone in the room. Li Huowang turned around to look at the temple that was shrouded in darkness. Now, it no longer seemed to have a sense of majesty or dignity. Li Huowang sighed.

This place is also really dirty. Isn’t there anywhere that is clean and pure?

Ever since the events of that night, Li Huowang tried his best not to leave his room at night to avoid disturbing the monks’ ‘good deeds’ and incurring their resentment.

Days passed one at a time, and Li Huowang’s mental state slowly improved; he no longer had nightmares. Just as he was going to ask the abbot about when they were going to begin the ritual, the abbot sent a messenger over first.

“Benefactor Xuan Yang, the preparation for the Great Fast is about to begin. The event requires a considerable amount of effort. So, please refrain from moving around too much in the coming few days,” said the messenger.

“Got it. You can report back to the abbot,” Li Huowang

responded to the young monk.

When the young monk left, a familiar figure came in, looking excited. “Little Daoist, if you had been staying here, why didn’t you inform me?”

It was the old monk from before, but he looked quite different now. He was dressed in brand-new yellow monk robes, while his face and body were free of dirt. He appeared much more spirited than before.

Even though they had only interacted with each other briefly, Li Huowang still felt a sense of kinship with this acquaintance of his in this foreign place.

“Monk, how are you doing here?” asked Li Huowang.

“It’s fine. I have enough to eat and am able to dress well. It’s just that there are no good deeds to do within the temple, which makes me a little uncomfortable,” replied Monk.

Upon hearing the mention of good deeds, Li Huowang immediately thought about the events of that night and sighed. “Don’t think about it too much. Stay well over here. Though this monastery’s a little dirty, at least you won’t go hungry.”

“Come, young Daoist, let me show you the place where I work. It’s quite big there.” Monk enthusiastically pulled Li Huowang toward the door.

“The sun is too bright right now. Maybe another time,” Li Huowang replied half-heartedly. He wasn’t too interested in exploring this monastery.

“Come and see! You won’t regret it; there are many interesting things here!” said Monk as he dragged Li Huowang.

In the end, Monk was successful in dragging Li Huowang with him.

After going through a meandering path, they came to a spacious open courtyard within the Righteous Monastery.

Only now did Li Huowang realize just how big the monastery

was.

Clang clang clang!

Dust flew around within the courtyard as some monks with bandaged hands used their chisels and hammers to sculpt Buddha statues. The statues were lined up in two rows that stretched left and right toward the end of the courtyard.

As the monks focused on carving their works of art, they became drenched in sweat, and their bald heads reflected the bright sunlight.

“So you work here? The environment is so-so,” Li Huowang said while frowning slightly and pinching his nose to prevent the dust from entering.

“Yes, I’m in charge of taking away the useless shattered rocks. I play a part in the building process of these statues as well.” Monk seemed to be very proud of his role.

The two of them walked along the road that was in between the two rows of incomplete Buddha statues and observed the different forms of the various sculptures.

Meanwhile, the monks that walked by them did not pay any attention to them, almost as though they did not exist.

These sculptures made by the Righteous Monastery are definitely not for their own use. One look and it’s clear that they are made to be sold to the worshipers. Seems like these monks are quite adept at generating revenue.

Li Huowang was not too surprised after the previous incident that he had witnessed.

“That’s not all! There’s even more up ahead!” Monk exclaimed excitedly, heading into the house before them.

Just as Li Huowang was about to follow, he felt a wave of dizziness suddenly wash over him, causing his body to start swaying.

“Hey, little Daoist, what’s wrong?” Monk asked as he hurried

back to support him upon seeing that something was amiss.

“What’s the matter?” asked Monk.

When Li Huowang stabilized himself and shook his head, that strange feeling of dizziness gradually vanished.

“Are you alright? Did you catch a cold or something? Do you want to go back and rest first?” asked Monk, worried.

Li Huowang declined Monk’s kind intentions, “It’s alright. I’m fine. Let’s continue.”

“Alright. If you really have caught a cold, then you should get some more sunlight. Let’s continue,” said Monk.

Li Huowang looked up at the scorching sun.

Did I get a heat stroke? But the New Year was just a little while ago, and I don’t feel hot either.

After feeling that there was nothing unusual with his body, Li Huowang lifted his foot to continue following Monk.

But as soon as he raised his foot, he found that the sounds around him had changed. It was no longer the clanging sound of chisel hitting the stone, but the sound of flesh slapping against flesh.

Eh?

Li Huowang felt puzzled and looked toward the stone statue on his right.

He immediately froze up.

The stone statue beside him had vanished, and what took its place was a mass of white flesh. The stone carvings representing Buddha that had their eyes closed in devotion were all piled together, their bodies wriggling continuously like maggots.

This... this is?

Li Huowang took a step back, his eyes widening in shock.

He slowly looked up to squint at the glaring sun; his eyes were not playing tricks on him.

He slowly turned around to look at the statues behind him. He

was not surprised to find that they had all changed into dozens of mountains of flesh as well.

“Hey, little Daoist! Keep up!” Monk shouted in excitement like a kid eager to show off something to his companions.

Trembling, Li Huowang took a deep breath and stepped forward.

Soon, they passed through a huge gate and arrived at another spacious courtyard. This courtyard was also filled with heaps of flesh, just that these heaps were no longer humanoid, but even included other things like pigs.

Those heaps of flesh howled in agony, but then a mountain of flesh depicting a devout monk engulfed them like a sinkhole and buried them within.

“Look at these life-like statues of the qilin^[1] and the stone lion. I wish I had such skills,” exclaimed Monk.

Li Huowang mechanically followed the old monk and continued to observe the ‘artwork’ of the Righteous Monastery’s monks. Along the way, he saw many things, like dogs, horses, cows, and donkeys.

After some examination, he found something even more peculiar—the monks were all intersex!

Li Huowang’s mind was currently buzzing with confusion.

Suddenly, Monk reached out and led him to a spacious hall with quick steps.

However, the sound of flesh slapping against flesh did not vanish and was even getting louder now, echoing inside the spacious hall.

Li Huowang looked inward.

The higher up he looked, the more his pupils shrank.

“Look quickly! Such a massive Buddha statue!” Monk exclaimed, as he pointed upward, marveling at the giant statue with a child-like grin on his face.

1. one-horned beast in Chinese mythology 📖

Chapter 46 - Xin Hui

“Buddha?” Li Huowang asked. When he raised his head, all he saw was a massive heap of flesh that was at least twenty meters tall! Regardless of how Monk saw the Buddha, all Li Huowang could see was a twisted mass of pink flesh. The only way he could describe the thing was that it looked like the back of a toad, covered in veins and flesh. Various reproductive organs circled and shifted around on the mountain of flesh, moving in and out of the bits of skin that covered the mass of flesh.

Even though the mountain of flesh was absolutely disgusting, there were many monks around it. The monks were enthralled as they breathed in the pink mist emanating from it. They had an excited look on their faces as they filled in whatever ‘gaps’ there were on the ‘Buddha’ with their own bodies.

Women, men, and even beasts. The monks of the Righteous Monastery were challenging the limits of their bodies.

“How about it? Isn’t it big? This is the biggest stone Buddha that I’ve ever seen,” Monk praised it in an excited manner.

Li Huowang’s body was stiff. He knew that Dan Yangzi was evil and would be abhorred by the righteous sects of this world. While the Righteous Monastery held a grudge against Dan Yangzi, even though he couldn’t guarantee how righteous they were, at the very least he thought that they would have some rules.

But his hypothesis was wrong! There were no righteous sects, nor were there any evil sects! Maybe the cultivation process in this world was twisted at its very core!

Maybe the grudge between Dan Yangzi and the monks was not based on justice vs. evil! It could even be two evil sects fighting for the sake of territory!

Even if he ignored everything, he knew for certain that Xin Hui was deceiving him and everyone else!

The Great Fast?! That shitty monk must be lying to me! I need to leave this place right now!

He turned and saw that Monk was not at all repulsed by what he was seeing. While Li Huowang didn't know how he had managed to pierce through the veil of deceit, he knew that at the very least he had not been found out. He needed to use this fact to his advantage and leave.

He suppressed his feelings of repulsion and tried to act as naturally as possible as he said, "Not bad. But it's just a stone Buddha. I will take my leave now."

Having said that, Li Huowang walked out and returned to the disgusting courtyard where the monks were 'sculpting' the sculptures.

The wriggling masses of flesh were still moving all around him, but Li Huowang just pretended that he did not see them and continued walking.

"Hey, little Daoist! Don't go yet! Why the rush? It took you quite some time to arrive here," shouted Monk as he chased after Li Huowang. "The food here is really good too. Why not have a meal with me? The fried tofu here is even more delicious than meat."

Li Huowang just acted as if he was irritated and increased his pace while Monk continued to pester him.

However, just when Li Huowang was almost out of the accursed place, a large shadow blocked him. It was an extremely well-built monk with a serious face and was a head taller than Li Huowang. He stared at Li Huowang without saying anything.

"Is there anything I can help you with?" Li Huowang said coldly. All the while, his heart was racing wildly.

The monk leaned forward and silently observed Li Huowang.

What happened next scared Li Huowang to his very core. A

slimy black tentacle, complete with suction cups, emerged from the scar on the monk's head. Then, it started stretching longer and longer. The weird tentacle started wriggling in the air like a snake before slowly wrapping around Li Huowang's head, as if it was trying to sense something.

"Amitabha! Dear sir, it seems that your heart is impure," said the well-built monk.

As he said that, all of the wriggling masses of flesh in the area stopped dead. At the same time, the monks that were previously 'working' on them all turned around and stared at Li Huowang.

Shit! He knew that I'm not fooled by their illusion! Time to fight!

Seeing that the situation had taken a turn for the worse, Li Huowang pulled out his sword and slashed it at the monk in front of him.

The sound of metal tearing into flesh was heard as the tentacle and the monk's shirt were cut in half, and a yellow-green goo sprayed in every direction.

At the same time, Li Huowang ate a pill and jumped past the well-built monk, and rushed straight toward the wall closest to him.

His action sparked an avalanche of movements around him; all of the monks working on the wriggling flesh jumped down and started chasing after him.

But that was not all. A sudden earthquake happened, causing almost everyone to fall down to the ground.

Li Huowang, who was now at the top of the wall, turned backward and saw that the massive 'Buddha' had breached the wooden gate and was rolling toward him!

I need to run now! This place is too dangerous! There's no way their illusion could work on everyone in the entire Western Capital City! They wouldn't risk showing the true nature of their 'Buddha' to the people.

Li Huowang ran as fast as he could, the voices behind him

growing louder and louder. This was his only chance to escape, so he didn't dare slow down.

Li Huowang ran faster and faster with a horde of people chasing after him. Li Huowang's stamina and strength were almost inexhaustible after he ate the pill. There were a few times when he almost got caught but luckily managed to break free.

Just when he took a turn and was about to exit through the front gate of the Monastery, he saw someone with a familiar face blocking him. It was the Righteous Monastery's very own abbot, Xin Hui.

Seeing him, Li Huowang didn't hesitate and reached for his bronze bell. But when his hands reached into his sleeves, he found that the bell he used to summon the Wandering Gods was missing.

"Amitabha! Benefactor Xuan Yang, are you looking for this?" Xin Hui held the bell as he asked Li Huowang, his face still calm as usual.

Even before Li Huowang could answer him, Xin Hui approached Li Huowang and placed the bell back into his hand. "Benefactor Xuan Yang, this is an ominous object. Use it sparingly."

He did not question Li Huowang any further. He walked past Li Huowang and saw the horde of monks chasing after Li Huowang before chastising them, "You are all monks, so why are you so anxious?"

"Abbot! It's not that we are anxious! That guy suddenly attacked Senior Jian Wei!" said one of the monks.

Upon hearing this, Abbot Xin Hui turned around and questioned Li Huowang. "Benefactor Xuan Yang, is that true? Why did you hurt him? Did he do something to you?"

Li Huowang looked at the crowd and then back at the bronze bell in his hand, feeling confused by what the abbot was trying to do. He was certain that the abbot had seen everything that had unfolded, so why was he acting?

After a while, Li Huowang just decided to come clean. “Abbot Xin Hui, your monastery had a grudge with Dan Yangzi, and I’m the one who killed him. You haven’t even thanked me, but there should be no reason to kill me, right? I will keep my mouth shut about everything that I’ve seen in the monastery. No one will know. Plus, it would be almost impossible to ruin the reputation of your Righteous Monastery with just me alone.”

Hearing what Li Huowang had said, Xin Hui was even more confused. “What did you see? I don’t think I understand.”

Huh? Don’t tell me... the abbot is different from them?

Li Huowang decided to calmly explain what he had seen just now to the abbot.

“Preposterous! A bunch of lies!” shouted the abbot in a fit of rage.

This was the first time Li Huowang had seen Xin Hui get angry. His two strands of white mustache quivered while the other monks behind him lowered their heads in fear.

Chapter 47 - Placing The Incense Sticks

However, immediately after saying those words, Xin Hui realized his mistake and placed his hands together, praying toward the western direction with his eyes closed.

“Amitabha! This disciple is in the wrong. I will write down the sutras a hundred times after this to atone for my wrongdoings,” said Xin Hui.

After that, Xin Hui turned back to calmly look at Li Huowang once again. He thought about it for a moment before lightly nodding his head. “I think I may know why you saw those things. Benefactor Xuan Yang, please follow me.”

Looking at how the other monks were staring at him angrily, Li Huowang had no choice but to sheathe his sword and follow the abbot.

Xin Hui brought him back to the place where he had seen the monks who were sculpting the statues. “Benefactor Xuan Yang, was it here that you saw those filthy things?”

Li Huowang, surrounded by the other monks, was shocked to see that the various masses of flesh had changed back into incomplete statues; it was as if they were mocking him. “Wait...”

“Benefactor, follow me.” Xin Hui started moving once again.

Under Xin Hui’s lead, Li Huowang was brought back to the place where he had seen the livestock and animals.

However, now there were none. The only thing he saw were incomplete statues of the Qilins and lions, all of them aligned neatly, their stone eyes gazing at them lifelessly.

Just then, Xin Hui suddenly took Li Huowang’s sword and

slashed the statues, causing one of the stone lion's heads that was the size of Xin Hui's palm to be separated from its body. Then, he grabbed the head of the stone lion and placed it in Li Huowang's hand.

Li Huowang gently touched the head of the lion; the texture and weight of the lion's head told him that it was indeed made of stone!

They then arrived at the large hall, and he saw a giant statue of Buddha sitting in lotus form. Its left hand was holding a bowl meant for receiving alms while its right hand was pointing its index finger directly toward the ground. The Buddha statue appeared to be completely motionless in front of Li Huowang.

"Impossible! I had seen all of it so clearly, so how could it all be fake?" Li Huowang questioned himself.

Hearing his words, Abbot Xin Hui sighed. "Amitabha! Benefactor, it seems that the severity of your illness is not light."

Li Huowang paused and considered a possibility.

Did my hysteria return? Was everything that I saw simply an illusion?

Xin Hui nodded his head lightly, as if he could read Li Huowang's mind. "Benefactor, you are much more aware of what kind of illness you have than us."

"But I ate so much of the Black Taisui flesh. Was all of that only able to last this long? Did my hysteria really return?" Li Huowang mumbled as he placed both hands on his head.

Hearing his words, the monks around him whispered to each other, telling what they had just heard to the others.

"We chased him for so long and it turned out that he was just someone sick," lamented one of the monks.

"If there's no issue, then it would be better to send him out of the monastery. What if his hysteria worsens and he starts cutting people up?" commented another monk.

“Quiet!” Xin Hui shouted out, silencing everyone.

Xin Hui then entered the hall and lit up four incense sticks before offering them to Li Huowang and saying, “I’m fine with you disturbing my disciples, but it’s not good to disturb the Buddha. Please admit your mistakes and offer these incense sticks.”

“Offer these incense sticks?” Li Huowang glanced toward the massive Buddha statue, then toward Xin Hui, and the four incense sticks. His body once again tensed up.

“Benefactor, what are you waiting for? This was your mistake after all,” Xin Hui said as he shook the incense sticks.

However, in Li Huowang’s mind, he could not forget the mass of flesh and the monks around the monster’s body. If all of that was real, wouldn’t it consume him if he went up to offer the incense sticks?

“Benefactor, why are you hesitating?” asked Abbot Xin Hui.

At that moment, Li Huowang saw that Xin Hui’s face was beginning to show signs of impatience.

For a moment, he looked up toward the sun while holding the stone lion’s head. In the end, he threw the stone lion’s head aside and took the incense sticks with both his hands. Then, he walked past the door and slowly approached the gigantic Buddha statue.

He walked quite slowly due to his tense muscles and the fact that his mind was racing. Sweat dripped down his forehead.

Soon, he arrived at the base of the statue.

The statue did not move, nor did it transform into the vile thing he had seen earlier.

Li Huowang held the incense sticks with both his hands while standing in front of the incense burner. He looked up once again, only to see the Buddha’s stony eyes watching him devoid of any emotions. At that moment, Li Huowang felt a sense of respect for the statue.

As he held the incense sticks above his head to pray, the four

incense sticks lightly shook as the white smoke slowly drifted from them to the top of the hall.

After praying three times and placing the incense sticks into the incense burner, Li Huowang turned around and walked out of the hall.

Seeing that the conflict had been resolved, the monks slowly dispersed, going back to their work stations before continuing with their work. Soon, the sound of chisel striking against stone echoed throughout the courtyard.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang followed Xin Hui down the brick path and exited.

“Benefactor Xuan Yang, since your illness is so serious, you should just stay here and wait for the Great Fast instead of wandering around the place. Even though your illness is troubling, Dan Yangzi is even more dangerous. We should do the necessary things slowly, taking it step by step, just like how we eat rice one mouthful at a time,” Xin Hui said as he held his prayer beads.

Li Huowang raised his head and stared at the bright sun. He raised his hands and stretched his body as he asked, “Abbot, is there a method to cure my illness in the Righteous Monastery?”

“I will let my disciples know. Maybe they can help, or maybe they can’t. After all, the Righteous Monastery doesn’t specialize in medicine nor do we have the necessary medical knowledge,” replied Xin Hui.

“It’s alright. I was just asking. I’m already used to my illness.” Li Huowang said.

After hesitating for a moment, Li Huowang asked, “Wait, how did you do that just now? How did you take the bell that was on my body?”

“Hoho. It’s just a children’s trick. Nothing much,” replied Xin Hui.

“Abbot, no need to be so humble. If you say that it was nothing

much, then it would mean that I'm even less than an insect," said Li Huowang with a wry smile.

"Benefactor Xuan Yang, that's not the case. Even though Dan Yangzi was not as strong as me, he was still very skilled. Nonetheless, was he not eliminated by you?"

"Dan Yangzi was strong? Then how strong are you? How do you categorize the strength of people like him?" asked Li Huowang.

"There is a way to categorize them as Heaven, Earth, Black, and Yellow, but that is just something that was made up by the people. As monks, we are not interested in fame, so I don't know much about it," replied Xin Hui.

As they walked, they talked for a long time, allowing Li Huowang to learn many new things about this world.

When they finally left the courtyard, Li Huowang stopped, bowed, and thanked Xin Hui, "Thank you for helping me, abbot."

"It's nothing. It's just a simple matter. If your body is feeling unwell, then you should head back and rest," replied Xin Hui.

After some pleasantries, Li Huowang left. When he looked around after a while, he didn't see the abbot following him, so he started walking back to his place.

He walked quite slowly, as if he was busy thinking about something. Finally, after one hour, he reached his room. The moment he closed the door, his expression twisted into one filled with anger as he punched the wall of the room. He didn't know what that monk had used to deceive everyone's senses, but Li Huowang was someone who had a lot of experience dealing with illusions due to his illness. This was why he was extremely sensitive to such illusions. He had already felt that the massive stone Buddha had something off about it, just like the hospital in his illusion, but he just didn't know what.

"The statues were all fake! Even the giant Buddha statue was fake! They must've cast an illusion spell! I know what I've seen and

those filthy things were not some illusion!”

Chapter 48 - Escape

Creak~

The wooden door slowly creaked open as Li Huowang observed the outside through the small crack. It was already evening, and it was very quiet outside. With the exception of a monk sweeping the floor some distance away, there was nothing unusual.

However, Li Huowang had already seen through the reality of the Righteous Monastery. To him, this was not a peaceful scene in the slightest.

All of this is fake! They can't fool me! Since they are trying so hard to keep me here, they probably want me to go through their Great Fast of my own volition!

Just then, a thought flashed through his mind.

Wait, why are they doing all of this? I'm just a normal human. Since they are so strong, they could just force me to do what they wish. Why go through all this trouble?

He didn't have an answer yet, but he didn't need it now. What he needed right now was to escape this place as soon as possible.

The monks of the Righteous Monastery haven't noticed anything strange about me just yet. I need to use this chance.

Even though there was no one else outside, Li Huowang did not try to escape just yet. He waited patiently. Time slowly passed as Li Huowang's palms started sweating.

Dong~Dong~Dong~

The heavy sound of a bell rang across the entire Righteous Monastery, causing Li Huowang to jump a little. He had learned that this bell being rung meant that it was 5 pm, which was the dinner time for the monks.

At that moment, Li Huowang opened the door and walked out

calmly, following the monks toward the canteen. After all, it would be completely reasonable for him to appear there as he had been eating with the monks all this time.

Compared to the place he was currently living in, the canteen was quite a bit closer to the hall where the normal devotees came to pray. Since the opponent made use of illusion spells, it must mean that they do not want the normal devotees and people to see their dark side.

Along the way, Li Huowang noticed that many of the monks were silently staring at him and whispering to each other. It seemed that they were still discussing what had happened earlier. Their eyes, as they looked toward him, were filled with hostility, curiosity, and even jest.

But Li Huowang knew that all this was fake; they were all just putting up an act!

They must have the same goal as Xin Hui! No one here is a good person. They are all trying to harm me!

Li Huowang was certain about this.

He soon arrived at the canteen and saw a sea of bald heads. However, he didn't run away and instead followed them and walked inside. He took a wooden bowl and got his meal before sitting down on the stool and calmly eating the vegetarian meal in front of him. Today's meal consisted of yam soup, stir-fried konjac with fried tofu, stir-fried vegetables, as well as potato and squash stew. While there was no meat, the taste was indeed excellent.

Even so, after the entire incident earlier, Li Huowang no longer had much of an appetite. However, in order to fool them and avoid suspicion, he still didn't dare to make any strange movements and just continued eating his food.

Pa!

At that moment, a hand suddenly patted his shoulder, scaring Li Huowang.

“Little Daoist! You are here too? Why did you run away earlier?” asked Monk.

Hearing the familiar voice, Li Huowang turned around with food still in his mouth. Sure enough, it was the old monk smiling at him while showing off his missing front tooth.

He had met Monk by chance while traveling. If it weren't for him pulling Li Huowang to see those statues, then Li Huowang might've still been clueless about the situation.

Monk took his plate of food and sat beside Li Huowang. “Let's eat together.”

Li Huowang glanced at the other monks and saw that there was nothing suspicious going on. He continued chewing as he said, “Sure.”

“Little Daoist, where are the rest of the people from your group? Why not ask them to come and stay with you? The food here is free. They don't have to stay at the inn anymore,” Monk talked quite loudly, oblivious to the entire situation.

On the other hand, Li Huowang, who was anxiously trying to escape, couldn't be bothered to talk to him. He ate at the same speed as usual and burped before walking out of the canteen.

Soon, he was once again on the brick road, and this time, Monk was chasing after him.

“Hey, don't go just yet. Let's talk for a bit. I'm so bored here,” said Monk.

As he licked the scraps of food stuck in his teeth, Li Huowang looked at him irritably. “Don't follow me and go to bed.”

“What? It's still too early to go to bed. Let me tell you something—” Monk said in a whining tone. However, Monk couldn't even finish what he was about to say when he saw Li Huowang's face turn sour.

At that moment, Li Huowang whispered to Monk aggressively, “Go! Run away from this place as soon as possible! This monastery

is an extremely dangerous place!”

The very next second, Li Huowang ran as fast as he could toward the main hall.

The monks around them all noticed that Li Huowang was running away, but Li Huowang just ignored all of them.

He ran faster and faster, his heart beating at a rapid pace, and his attention raised to the limit, searching for traces of that old man Xin Hui.

100 feet! 50 feet! 10 feet!!!

When Li Huowang escaped through the side door and entered the main hall, his surroundings suddenly exploded with sound—the sound of footsteps, conversations, and the wooden fish, all entered his ears. He had returned to the main hall where everyone was burning incense sticks and praying to the Buddha. In fact, there were so many people that he was pushed slightly toward the side.

Standing in the crowd, Li Huowang was stunned as he looked at their oblivious faces.

At that moment, he suddenly realized something and turned back to look at the side door.

No one was there—not one person had chased him.

At the same time, none of the monks turned to look toward Li Huowang, be it the monks who were greeting the devotees or the monks who were divining fortunes.

To Li Huowang, all of this seemed completely normal. Way too normal.

Unless... All of it really had been my illusion? Those filthy things were just a figment of my imagination?

But Li Huowang dismissed that thought quite soon, shaking his head as he ran out of the Monastery.

He couldn't risk it. Not in the slightest!

It was surprisingly easy for him to walk out of the monastery, almost just as easy as it had been to enter.

With his speed, he soon arrived at the inn. When he returned, the guiding drug ingredients and the assistants who hadn't seen him in quite a while crowded around him.

"Senior Li, why are you back? Have you finished the business you had with the monastery?" asked one of them.

"No time to talk! Pack your stuff now! We need to leave, now!" said Li Huowang.

"Alright, let me go and contact troupe leader Lu," said another one of the guiding drug ingredients.

"No. We are not waiting for them. We need to leave right now! Quick!" shouted Li Huowang.

"Senior Li, where are we going?" Bai Lingmiao asked.

"We are leaving this kingdom!" replied Li Huowang.

Chapter 49 - Strayed One

Dak dak dak~

The sound of hooves resonated as the donkeys ran down the road non-stop. At the same time, the others followed the donkey carts as fast as they could, their faces filled with fear. They were walking quite fast but still turned to look back and see if anything was following them.

“Senior Li, why are we leaving this kingdom so soon?” Puppy asked as he wiped the sweat off his face.

“Why do you think the Righteous Monastery could operate for so long and is so popular amongst the people? There’s a reason why we need to leave as soon as possible,” Li Huowang said, his face solemn.

Hearing him say that, the girl with hypertrichosis said, “Since the Righteous Monastery could operate in the same city as the Imperial Palace without any issues for such a long time, it's very likely that they have control over the ministers in the palace. Basically, even the ministers and palace officials here cannot be trusted!”

Li Huowang nodded. It would be normal for such a large sect to fool the common people, but if they were trying to control the ministers and palace officials, it meant that they had something shady going on in the background that couldn’t afford to be brought to light.

“We’ve already stayed here long enough. I’ve even passed on the final words of the guiding drug ingredients to Zhao Wu. No matter what, we were planning to leave the kingdom anyway,” Li Huowang said as he opened up a map while sitting on the donkey cart; even if it was just a rough sketch, he finally managed to buy a

map in the Western Capital City.

He pointed at a spot on the map and drew a line representing the proposed path for their journey. They would pass through the kingdoms of Si Qi, Hou Shu, and Qing Qiu before arriving at Bai Lingmiao's home in the Liang Kingdom.

"Yeah, let's all go to my place. There are no scary monks over there; they are all just kind and friendly," said Bai Lingmiao.

Hearing her words, Li Huowang glanced at her before closing the map and storing it. He couldn't really trust anything at this point since he couldn't determine whether the monks that Bai Lingmiao was talking about were truly kind, or were they also using the same type of illusion spell.

He was still too weak. There was nothing he could do against such strong opponents just yet.

They kept walking until the sky was almost dark before they stopped to rest.

At this moment, Li Huowang was staring at the campfire in front of him, feeling restless; their speed was too slow. To be fair, he wasn't really hard-pressed on money. If he needed more, he could just sell the jade pendant. At the very least, they could each have gotten a horse.

But the problem was that none of them could ride one!

No, this won't do. We have to hide within the forest after we finish our dinner. Out here on the road, we are way too exposed.

"Senior Li, I added some extra pork lard into your noodles. We have a long journey ahead of us, so we need to eat better," said Bai Lingmiao.

A steaming hot bowl of noodles with bits of pork meat floating in the broth was passed to Li Huowang.

Bai Lingmiao sat beside Li Huowang as he ate the noodles and placed her head on his knees. "Since the monks of the Righteous Monastery are bad, then what about your requirement? Do you

really need to find a monk? What about a nun?”

Li Huowang almost choked on his noodles before barely managing to swallow them. Then, he blew the broth and drank it all in one big gulp.

“Don’t worry. Compared to the monks who are chasing us, my issues are nothing,” said Li Huowang.

Since the monks had lied to him, it meant that everything about his current situation was extremely bizarre. Maybe they couldn’t even get rid of Dan Yangzi, or maybe Dan Yangzi wasn’t even what they claimed him to have become. Dan Yangzi may or may not exist. Thus, it should be fine to delay handling that issue.

“Did you have enough? Do you want me to bring some more noodles for you? There’s still some in the pot,” offered Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang shook his head and passed his bowl back to Bai Lingmiao before patting Simpleton on the head. “Come, stop eating and follow me into the forest.”

“Oh...”

In the forest, Li Huowang and Simpleton stood in a line before giving a small tree some extra fertilizer.

Glancing back at the campfire, Li Huowang whispered something to Simpleton before heading back.

Back at the Righteous Monastery, the night had just arrived, and the monks were closing the entrance to the monastery.

Meanwhile, the rest of the monks were attending night lessons, causing the sound of chanting to fill the entire Righteous Monastery.

Jian Dun was fiddling with his prayer beads in his right hand while clenching his left hand as he walked somewhere deeper into the monastery.

Soon, he entered the Five Buddha Palace and saw Xin Hui, who was threading a new set of prayer beads.

“Abbot, I went and checked on benefactor Xuan Yang, but he was missing. It seems that he has run away,” reported Jian Dun.

Abbot Xin Hui was sitting on a prayer mat as he lifted the prayer beads out of the water and inspected his handiwork. After a moment, he placed the prayer beads onto the floor and picked up a baby from a basket beside him.

“Sigh! Such a poor child. If we had arrived any later, you would’ve been drowned by your own father.” He held the baby girl and gently coaxed her to sleep.

“Abbot, benefactor Xuan Yang is gone,” repeated Jian Dun.

“I’m not deaf yet. No need to talk so loudly; you might startle the child awake. Knock.”

Tatatata~

At that moment, the sound of the wooden fish resonated throughout the hall, giving the palace a much more serious aura.

Xin Hui carefully placed the baby on the floor and gently wrapped the prayer beads around her body.

Under the sound of the wooden fish, Xin Hui started chanting. However, rather than sutras, he was chanting something much more sinister.

“Jade rabbit on the moon~ Golden crow in the sun~ Tortoise and snake are a pair~ Twisted and whole~”

As the sound of chanting continued, the prayer beads wrapped around the baby girl started to come alive and tighten around her.

“Twist and wound, life perseveres, a golden lotus blooms in the fire~”

Xin Hui made a lotus seal with both his hands and pointed it toward the baby.

The sound of the crying baby soon turned into laughter and grew louder and louder. In the end, it became so loud that the five Buddha statues in the palace started grinning.

“Combine the five elements and reverse the flow~ Become a

Buddha and live on as an Immortal~”

Soon, the sound of the wooden fish faded as Jian Dun walked forward and placed a flower vase beside Xin Hui.

Xin Hui worked a bit on the baby, and soon the baby was placed in the vase, with just her head at the top; it was identical to the one Dan Yangzi had in his cave. And thus, another girl in a vase was born.

After completing the ritual, Xin Hui sat back down and started threading a new set of prayer beads.

“Since he has escaped, then go and catch him; bring him back,” ordered Xin Hui.

“Yes, I obey,” replied Jian Dun.

“Be careful; even though he knows nothing about the world, his potential is huge. Dan Yangzi might have been a thief, but he was very lucky. I have no idea where he found a rare Strayed One.”

Chapter 50 - Buddha

Li Huowang was wrapped in a blanket as he kept watch while hiding in the thick bushes. It was already late into the night, making it extremely cold without a campfire, despite it already being March.

However, he didn't dare to light up a fire; it would reveal his location to the monks that were chasing him.

Under the weak moonlight, Li Huowang took out the bronze bell and inspected it. He had already eaten most of the pills that Dan Yangzi had given him, and so the bronze bell was the only other card he had.

But whenever he thought back to how easily the abbot had snatched the bronze bell from him, he felt a deep sense of dissatisfaction. The opponent could kill him in so many ways, but all he could do was to try and escape. This fact left a bitter taste in his mouth.

In this bizarre world, only strength reigns supreme. If I want to stay alive, I need to become strong! Even someone like Dan Yangzi could become so strong, so why can't I? So what if everyone has some or the other bizarre method of cultivation? I too need to do it in order to survive. I want to protect myself and the others around me. If I can't get it, then I will steal it. If I can't steal it, then I will frame them!

Li Huowang's expression slowly became more and more twisted.

He had just been thinking about all of these things when he shook himself out of it and touched the back of his neck, suddenly realizing something.

"Namo~He Luo Dan Na~ Duo Luo Ye Ye~" The sound of chanting broke the silence of the forest.

At the same time, Li Huowang stood up reflexively and scanned his surroundings. However, it was so dark that he couldn't see anything. Even the simple traps that he had set up earlier were not triggered.

“Namo~ Ah Li Ye~ Po Lu Jie Di~ Yao Ti Luo Ye~” The chanting continued in the dark, this time being closer than before.

“Quick! Stand up! We need to run now! Ignore the donkey carts! Simpleton, do as I had told you to do earlier!” shouted Li Huowang.

Just as Bai Lingmiao was about to follow Li Huowang's commands and stand up, Simpleton picked her up and started running away.

At the same time, Li Huowang walked out of the bush and back onto the road. He clenched his teeth and decided to face them; the monks' target was him. Even if all of them couldn't escape, there is no reason for every one of them to die.

Li Huowang kept running in the dark, but the sound of chanting became closer and closer. For some reason, Li Huowang could smell the smoke from the incense that he had lit up back at the Monastery.

Li Huowang suddenly stopped as he saw multiple red dots the size of flies wriggling around in the darkness on the road.

“Pu Tai Ye~ Pu Tai Ye~ Mi Di Li Ye~ Na Luo Jin Xi~” The sound of chanting was becoming closer and closer.

Soon Li Huowang could see the thing in the darkness; it was a Buddha with a large hat and tall body, but hilariously skinny legs. The belly of the Buddha was engorged as well. The red dots that Li Huowang had previously seen were incense sticks that were stuck on the body of the Buddha. They shivered and shook with every step that the giant Buddha took.

The giant Buddha was wrapped in the white incense smoke. It was probably supposed to look ethereal, but it just appeared

downright horrific in the dark wilderness of this road.

At the same time, Li Huowang noticed that there was not one, but seven such Buddhas lined up and closing in on him.

They walked just like humans, but their expressions were neither smiling nor angry. Their bodies swayed left and right.

Under the moonlight, Li Huowang recognized the face of one of the Buddhas. It was none other than Jian Dun!

“Amitabha! Benefactor, your heart is not calm,” said the Buddha with Jian Dun’s face.

Li Huowang stared at the Buddhas that were at least 4m tall. “So you have finally revealed yourself! Is this your true form, you worshipping freaks?!”

“Benefactor, we have no idea why you are saying this. Please follow me back to the monastery. Dan Yangzi’s karma still lingers on you. If you leave with it, you will be in deep trouble; everyone else will suffer as well,” said Jian Dun.

Just as Jian Dun said this, he brought his palms together and started praying.

At that moment, Li Huowang heard the sound of flesh ripping as numerous skinless arms appeared from Jian Dun’s back and splayed open like a peacock’s tail. Soon, the seven Buddhas had all transformed into seven Thousand-armed Buddhas.

Ring!

Li Huowang immediately shook the bronze bell causing the surroundings to start shifting and twisting. Soon, the edges of everything around them congregated and turned into a Wandering God.

However, the ringing bell did not affect the seven Thousand-armed Buddhas; they were just like rocks in the water.

Li Huowang immediately scooped some dirt into his mouth and commanded the Wandering God to attack. Immediately, the latter launched itself toward the seven Buddhas.

Pak!

One of the Buddhas sent a hard slap toward the Wandering God, sending dust and rocks everywhere.

However, the Wandering God did not have a physical body and thus completely ignored the attack, phasing right through the palm and going straight toward the Buddha's face.

The Wandering God then entered the brain of the Buddha, causing the latter to start flailing around and use its arm to try to swat the Wandering God off his head.

But it was no use.

Soon, the Buddha fell to the ground, its face melting off. Its body, which had not been affected by the bell earlier, also started to twist and turn, just like the surroundings.

Peng peng peng!

At that moment, the remaining six Buddhas formed a circle with their backs facing toward each other. They clapped their hands together and started chanting. "Ru Lai Ah Duo Luo~ San Mo~ San Pu Ti~"

The chanting had just started when Li Huowang realized that something was wrong with the Wandering God; the squiggly lines that made up its body started to move around uncontrollably. He soon saw that something was wrong and shook the bell even harder, shouting toward the Wandering God in an even louder voice.

Upon hearing that Li Huowang had agreed to sacrifice even more of his lifespan, the Wandering God held its body together and rushed toward another Buddha.

Once the second Buddha fell to the ground, the Wandering God had spent the last of its strength; it was approaching its limit.

Amidst the chanting sound all around them, the Wandering God soon fell to the ground.

Seeing that it was of no use, Li Huowang stopped ringing the

bell. However, even as the surroundings returned to normal, the Wandering God did not disappear.

Soon, the squiggly lines that made up the Wandering God started to lose their color and turned into a fleshy pink color; the Wandering God that was supposed to be formless had been granted a physical body using the power of the sutras!

The physical body of the Wandering God looked like a clump of earthworms; it slowly wriggled around on the ground.

A palm with a swastika symbol then slapped the Wandering God and crushed it into a pile of mush.

The palm was then raised slowly, flesh and blood still clinging to it. Then, the Buddhas once again brought their hands together and approached Li Huowang slowly. “Amitabha! Benefactor, please follow us back.”

Translator's Thoughts

Jian Dun in his Buddha form. @格子的乱七八糟



Chapter 51 - Negotiation

Li Huowang raised his head, staring at the Buddhas to no avail; they had their backs turned toward the moon, so their faces were shrouded in darkness. All Li Huowang could see were the numerous arms wriggling at the back and their large heads. The air was filled with a weird stench created by the combination of smoke from burning incense and blood.

Li Huowang took a few steps back. After confirming that he was indeed alone, he shook his head.

“No. I will not go back,” Li Huowang steeled his heart as he held the hilt of his sword.

Suddenly, a cracking sound was heard as one of the giant Buddhas leaned down and blocked the moon from Li Huowang’s vision. At the same time, a strong wave of pressure started to push downward upon Li Huowang.

At that moment, Li Huowang felt as if a pair of lantern-sized eyes were staring holes into him.

“Amitabha! Benefactor, please follow us back. We are doing this for your own sake.” Much to Li Huowang’s surprise, Jian Dun did not attack him; he was still trying to negotiate and convince Li Huowang in a peaceful manner.

“If you are really doing all this for my sake, then why not let me leave? Don’t you monks preach about kindness and forgiveness and what-not? So how about letting me go?” asked Li Huowang.

“It’s precisely because we stand for kindness that we cannot let you leave,” replied Jian Dun.

Just as Jian Dun said that, a stone flew over and hit the head of one of the Buddhas. However, the sound that was heard was that of metal ringing rather than flesh being struck.

Li Huowang and Jian Dun turned at the same time. Bai Lingmiao and the rest of them were standing not too far away with glowing rocks in their hands.

“Senior Li! Run!” More stones flew over and hit the Buddha, but there was no effect.

“Amitabha! The sea of torment does not end, so it’s best to turn back.” Jian Dun brought his palms together as he gently crouched before his skinny legs propelled him forward.

Boom!

With a loud pop, Jian Dun’s massive body was sent flying through the sky before it fell down like a giant rock. Numerous trees were broken and blown away as he landed behind Bai Lingmiao and the rest, his massive body blocking their escape.

Seeing how small and powerless Bai Lingmiao and the others were compared to the Buddha, Li Huowang shouted with all his might, “No! Stop!”

As if sensing something, the Buddhas surrounding Li Huowang and even Jian Dun all took a step back.

“Benefactor Xuan Yang, we were not thinking of harming them. Please calm down,” Jian Dun’s voice had a hint of panic; it was as if he didn’t want to trigger Li Huowang.

Hmm?

This was beyond everyone’s expectation; to think that they would actually listen to Li Huowang.

Why are they panicking? There’s no reason for them to panic and to fear someone normal like me.

“We are monks. We do not kill. We just want to make sure that they are safe and do not run away,” Jian Dun said as he used his gigantic hands to uproot several trees with ease. After twisting the trees a bit, he made a simple cage and trapped everyone within it.

Once Jian Dun made sure that no one would disturb them again, he slowly walked back toward Li Huowang.

“Benefactor Xuan Yang, since you do not wish to return with me, then why not negotiate with me?” proposed Jian Dun.

“Negotiate? Are you trying to persuade me to come back?” Li Huowang asked while keeping an eye on the Buddhas’ massive hands that were even bigger than him. He had no idea what they were trying to do.

“Of course. Benefactor Xuan Yang is someone who knows what is important. Naturally, I should be able to persuade you,” replied Jian Dun.

Hearing this, Li Huowang thought back to the incident at the monastery and found something very illogical; regardless of whether it was the Abbot or Jian Dun, despite being stronger than him, they did not attack him or take him back forcefully. Instead, they kept trying to use lies and deceit to trap him.

Wouldn't it be easier for them to just force me using brute strength? Why are they going through so much hassle? Is there something special about me?

Li Huowang checked both his palms but couldn't see anything out of the ordinary.

I'm just someone suffering from hysteria that would fall in and out of illusions from time to time. Is there something special about me that they are being wary of?

Li Huowang tried to piece together all the information, completely ignoring Jian Dun for now. He needed to find out what made them so wary of him. That might end up being the only chance for him to escape.

Wait, let me think about it the other way. What would the consequences be if they used brute force and threatened my life?

Li Huowang tried to remember everything that he had encountered in this world.

He recalled that back when the God of Happiness was dragged away into the darkness, that had been the only time his life had

been in danger. It was also the only time when the opponent was surprisingly defeated.

Immediately, Li Huowang's pupils shrank, realizing the crux of the issue.

Dan Yangzi! They do not wish to harm me because whenever my life is in danger, Dan Yangzi, that monster, would appear! Dan Yangzi is protecting me!

Li Huowang instantly realized the intentions behind all of the monks' actions. He had always thought that Dan Yangzi was trying to harm him, but from the looks of it, that was not the case. While Li Huowang himself knew that he was trying to harm Dan Yangzi, from Dan Yangzi's perspective, this disciple of his had not done anything wrong and had even helped him achieve 'Immortality'.

The Righteous Monastery must've known about all this but did not tell me. That is why they have been constantly trying to deceive me and use the Great Fast to try and get rid of Dan Yangzi. Once Dan Yangzi is gone, I will be nothing but a fat slab of meat for the monks!

When Li Huowang thought back to what the monks of the Righteous Monastery were doing, he suddenly felt disgusted and chilled to the bone.

Li Huowang raised his head and once again stared at Jian Dun; this time he was prepared. He smiled. "Are all of you afraid of Dan Yangzi? According to you guys, he has turned into a Buddha, so why are you still afraid of him?"

Jian Dun's expression froze. "Benefactor Xuan Yang, I have no idea what you're saying. Monks do not lie or cheat. I can swear upon the Buddhas that the Great Fast is meant to eliminate Dan Yangzi. It will not harm you."

At that moment, Li Huowang's suspicions were confirmed.

In this world, there was no such thing as helping someone out of the goodwill of one's heart. In the future, he would need to be more careful when trying to gather information. At the same time,

he needed to be more critical about his own thinking.

“I suddenly feel that taking Dan Yangzi with me is a good thing; after all, he was my Master. I don’t feel that it’s good to eliminate him just like that.” Once he had figured out their goal, Li Huowang was no longer panicking.

“Amitabha! This is not possible. Dan Yangzi’s matter does not only affect you but also everyone else,” said Jian Dun.

Li Huowang raised his head and stared at Jian Dun again, smirking. “Why don’t you talk to my Master himself?”

“What?” Jian Dun questioned.

At that moment, Li Huowang unsheathed his sword and held it up. The sword was sharp enough to slice through metal like a hot knife through butter.

When Jian Dun saw Li Huowang draw his sword, he smiled. “To try and break the body of my Buddhas with your sword; benefactor Xuan Yang must have a lot of faith in your weapon.”

“Didn’t you hear what I just said? I want you to talk with Dan Yangzi himself,” said Li Huowang. Just as he finished speaking, he used the sword to slit the side of his neck.

His skin was sliced quite easily, causing warm blood to splatter out and drench his Daoist robes in red.

“Hehe.” Li Huowang’s consciousness started to fade away as he applied pressure to his neck. “Do you hear that? It sounds like... thunder.”

Chapter 52 - Dan Yangzi

“Thunder?” Jian Dun and the rest of the Buddhas looked toward the sky, only to see that the moon had disappeared. The entire night sky was covered in dark clouds, rolling and rumbling. The sound of thunder could be heard rumbling from time to time, but it was odd; it didn’t sound like thunder at all.

“Cough-cough...” Li Huowang coughed a few times as his breathing turned ragged, and he fell to the ground. When he turned to look at the sky while lying down, he once again saw his Master amidst the dark clouds.

He was still as ugly as ever.

Black feathers sprouted from his bloody body, while three different faces replaced what had once been his head. In addition to his normal human organs, his burgeoning body was also riddled with many non-human organs. His body was nightmarishly black; his eyes were filled with a mysterious liquid, while his pupils were mere slits. Tentacles covered parts of his body.

Everything about him was vile.

Even so, a mysterious veil made from white smoke hung around his body, as if he was something divine. His body was in a constant state of shifting and turning—his body shifted as his organs moved around and his faces changed position.

Li Huowang had only been staring at Dan Yangzi for a short period of time when his eyes started bleeding, and veins started bulging on his head. He felt like his head was going to explode.

No! I cannot stare at him anymore.

Li Huowang shifted his gaze away, feeling slightly better. His body had weakened considerably in just this short while. However, even if his life was no longer in danger from looking at Dan Yangzi,

his blood loss might end up killing him soon.

He weakly patted his waist and fished out some of the Blood Nourishing pills and consumed them with his last remaining strength. The rate at which blood flowed out of his wound gradually slowed down.

But this was not enough.

Li Huowang then took out some pills meant to reinforce the energy of his body before eating them.

At that moment, the sudden sound of muscles being torn caused Li Huowang to look up once again. He saw that his Master, Dan Yangzi, had started attacking and had attached himself to one of the Buddhas' heads like a lizard, his three mouths easily tearing off its ears.

Bellowing in rage, the numerous arms on the Buddha's back tried to claw at and capture Dan Yangzi. But Dan Yangzi shifted all of his organs and forcefully expanded them, using them to block the attacks from the Buddha.

Then, Dan Yangzi used his three mouths to tear an even larger hole on the Buddha's face before shoving his head right in.

"AAAAAH!" The Buddha shouted in despair as its body started deflating. Soon, it fell down onto the ground, blood seeping out from all seven of its orifices.

When the bloodied Dan Yangzi reappeared in front of the other Buddhas, Jian Dun did not dare to look down on him. Jian Dun immediately took out a parchment and started chanting the mantra written on it. Rather than using ink, the words of the mantra were given form by using an uncountable number of moles pulled from the skin of humans.

"An~Ma~Ni~Pa~Mi~Hou~" As Jian Dun sat cross-legged and spoke these six words, the mantra on the parchment flashed red and disappeared before appearing on Dan Yangzi's body.

As soon as Dan Yangzi became covered in the numerous words,

his body started trembling and growing wildly. His body grew larger and larger before it started withering. It withered so fast that soon, Dan Yangzi disappeared completely.

Jian Dun's face was drenched in sweat as he let out a relieved sigh. Fortunately, he had prepared that mantra just in case something unexpected happened. Had he not, then he would've died.

Then he chanted the mantra in reverse, causing the words to start reappearing on the parchment in his hand.

After confirming that all the words were there, Jian Dun was just about to close the parchment when it exploded. Then, amidst the "words" that were sent flying everywhere, Dan Yangzi crawled out from the parchment.

This was something that no one had expected. Jian Dun gasped in surprise, allowing Dan Yangzi the chance to shoot himself into Jian Dun's mouth like a drill and travel down his throat.

Soon, the sound of tearing could be heard as Jian Dun's throat started to bulge. However, this was only the beginning.

Soon, the pain became unbearable as Jian Dun started hearing a chewing sound from within his body!

"NOOO!" Jian Dun cried out in despair as Dan Yangzi burst out from his chest.

Meanwhile, the other three Buddhas continued to struggle to no avail. In just a few moments, the sound of bone cracking and flesh being torn resounded through the forest. Within just a few minutes, all seven Buddhas had disappeared, leaving behind only the steaming puddles of blood.

When Li Huowang finally had the chance to once again gaze at Dan Yangzi, he saw his Master turn around and show a horrifying smile on all three of his mouths as he said, "My dear disciple."

Poof!

With a soft sound, Dan Yangzi's body disappeared like smoke

in the wind.

Time slowly passed, and soon, the moon reappeared, covering the forest in a soft silver veil. Everything had ended.

Li Huowang grabbed his neck and forced himself to sit up. He saw the others that were still trapped within the crude cage made by Jian Dun. All of them were shocked and didn't even dare to speak.

Li Huowang had an idea as to what they were thinking and weakly explained to them, "No need to be afraid. Dan Yangzi is well and truly dead. He won't use all of you as guiding drug ingredients anymore."

However, Li Huowang's words did not reduce their fear. In fact, some of them even started crying.

It was Bai Lingmiao who broke the silence first, her face even paler than usual. "Senior Li, what Dan Yangzi? We didn't see anything."

Li Huowang struggled to swallow his saliva. "Did you not see Dan Yangzi killing the Buddhas? Was he invisible to all of you?"

Li Huowang thought that it might be a possibility.

But just then, Puppy's entire body started trembling from fear and shock. He didn't dare to look at Li Huowang as he closed his eyes and shouted in a trembling voice, "Senior Li! There is no Dan Yangzi! It was you all along!"

"What?" Li Huowang endured the pain and touched his face; there was some sticky goo covering him.

He continued touching his face and found that both of his cheeks had been torn open, as if he had opened his mouth to an impossibly large size.

But none of that was important.

What was important was that he felt full. Really full.

Chapter 53 - Ponder

Creak, creak~

The horrible grinding sound of the donkey cart's wheels filled the air.

"Puppy, add some oil to the wheels," Li Huowang said with difficulty as he lay in the cart. Bai Lingmiao had just stitched the wound on his neck and then applied medicine on it. He couldn't move for now.

Soon, the sound of squeaking wheels lessened. Li Huowang gazed at the sky and recalled the incident from a few nights ago.

The trouble with the Righteous Monastery had been resolved, but his personal problems had only just begun.

In his view, it was the Immortal Dan Yangzi who had killed the Buddhas.

However, to others, it was Li Huowang himself who had shot into the mouths of the Buddhas and consumed them from the inside out. They told him that his expression became extremely twisted and fierce right before he had done so.

In this world, it wasn't possible for people to observe two different scenarios at the same time. That meant whatever he was seeing had to be false.

Li Huowang turned to his side and saw Bai Lingmiao holding his hand tightly, not letting go for even a single moment. Her eyes were currently covered with a blindfold.

After a while, Li Huowang turned and once again looked toward the skies before smiling bitterly.

When he thought about it, due to his illness, he didn't even trust himself.

Coupled with the fact that he had been covered in blood and

his stomach had been full, it implied that he was indeed the one who had killed the Buddhas, not Dan Yangzi.

Is Dan Yangzi truly dead? Was all that just my imagination?

Just as he had that thought, he dismissed it.

It's impossible for me to defeat all those Buddhas with just my illusion. It had to be Dan Yangzi who did it. Regardless of what he has become, he is still here, watching me.

Li Huowang was certain about this.

I had always thought that Dan Yangzi had truly become an Immortal and was just entering the mortal realm. But from the looks of it, he seems to have either possessed me or attached himself to my body. If that really is the case, my assumption that he was protecting me seems to have been correct. But why? He's not the benevolent type, so there must be a reason behind all this.

Thinking back upon that night, he felt quite weird. He had a hunch as he gently held Bai Lingmiao's hands.

"Hey, did my temper become shorter after we left the Zephyr Temple?" asked Li Huowang.

"No. Why do you ask?" replied Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang just circled his index finger on the back of Bai Lingmiao's hands and didn't explain his thoughts to her.

The reason I have to ask such a question is that Dan Yangzi is a truly evil man.

Even though no one had explicitly said it, Li Huowang sensed some subtle changes had occurred within him.

Is Dan Yangzi trying to resurrect himself through my body? If this is true, that means that protecting my body would be the same as protecting himself.

This was a very bold thought that crossed his mind. However, he tried to calm himself down; that was merely a conjecture.

Dan Yangzi had to be removed, but how was he going to go about achieving that? He was grasping at straws here. This world

was not like video games, where everything was laid out in a clear cut manner. He had to find bits and pieces of clues within this world itself.

After the incident in the Righteous Monastery, Li Huowang had decided that he would no longer trust any of the other sects here. If a monastery that was supposed to preach kindness and stand by it was already so evil, then the other sects could only be worse.

But still, in order to survive in this world, Li Huowang would have no choice but to confront them.

Just as he was pondering about it, the donkey cart slowed down. The sound of running water could be heard from near them.

“Senior Li, let me wash your clothes,” Bai Lingmiao released his hands and walked to the creek with Li Huowang’s bloodied Daoist robes.

Meanwhile, the rest of them did not stop to rest, instead opting to find firewood to cook their meal.

Currently, Li Huowang couldn’t even sit up. All he could do was listen to his surroundings and guess as to what was happening.

Soon, the fragrant smell of something being cooked wafted over. In response, his stomach started gurgling immediately; his injured body needed the nutrients from the food.

“Senior, let me feed you.”

Then, Li Huowang felt that he was propped up as he felt something soft and furry. He knew that it was the guiding drug ingredient with hypertrichosis that had helped him up. He recalled that her name was Chun Xiaoman.

It was an easy name to understand. She was born on one of the days in the Xiaoman period [1] , so she was named Chun Xiaoman. Farmers usually didn’t put much thought into naming their daughters.

Xiaoman poured some horse meat soup into a wooden bowl before bringing a spoonful to Li Huowang’s lips.

She was silently feeding him, while he was silently eating. Ever since that incident, Li Huowang found that everyone here was afraid of him.

However, Li Huowang could understand their fears. Traveling with a monster-eating man? Who wouldn't be afraid?

After finishing most of the soup, Li Huowang told Xiaoman, "Ask Bai Lingmiao to come back. She doesn't need to worry about washing the robe if the blood can't be washed off."

"Alright," said Xiaoman as she placed Li Huowang down gently, using the stone inscribed with the sacred text as a makeshift pillow.

Soon, Bai Lingmiao returned. The Daoist robe was still red in color instead of its original green color.

"Just put it on the donkey's back to let it dry. Quickly go and eat. The food is almost cold now," said Li Huowang.

"Mm hmm." Bai Lingmiao removed her blindfold and quickly inspected Li Huowang's wound before putting it back on and finding her way to the nearby campfire.

Dak, dak, dak~

At that moment, the sound of horse hooves came from afar. The owners of the horses had yet to arrive, but their voices could already be heard. "Aiyo! Young Daoist! So that's where you were! I thought we were separated forever!"

When Lu Zhuangyuan's wrinkled face appeared in front of him, Li Huowang knew that the entire Lu family troupe had arrived.

"Aiyo~ Look at you!" Lu Zhuangyuan said as he saw Li Huowang's wounded body.

"It's nothing. I just met with some small trouble on the road. What do you need?" asked Li Huowang.

"Young Daoist, how could you leave without a word? Didn't we agree that we would travel together? Luckily you had told us that you intended to cross the border, or we might never have known

which direction you had gone off to!” Lu Zhuangyuan chuckled. They had finally found a free bodyguard, so how could he just let Li Huowang leave?

“Sorry, troupe leader Lu. As you can see, I am currently injured. No need to worry about us. You can just leave whenever you please,” said Li Huowang.

“Aiya! Just lie down and rest.” Lu Zhuangyuan did not bother asking what had happened. His experience told him that the more he knew, the more dangerous it would be for him.

Seeing that the sun had almost set, both parties decided not to travel anymore. There was even a small creek near them, making it easy for them to wash up or replenish their water supply.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang stared at the night skies and continued to ponder.

At that moment, he turned to his right and saw someone there. Before he could even react, a small and soft body had already gotten into his embrace.

Recognizing the familiar scent, Li Huowang gently patted her back. “It’s alright. Leave everything to me.”

1. Ancient China split the twelve months into 24-periods, each period lasting two weeks. Xiaoman is one of the periods. 📖

Chapter 54 - Wandering God

Boom!

The sound of the wooden bat hitting the ground heavily could be heard amidst a cloud of dust and dirt. The heavy bat was raised up and then smashed down toward the ground, again and again.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang was being propped up by Bai Lingmiao as they observed Simpleton swinging the club around. Even though the wound on Li Huowang's neck hadn't completely healed, after resting for a few days, he could finally muster enough strength to stand.

"Stronger! Swing it harder!" Li Huowang shouted.

By the campfire, Lu Zhuangyuan took two buns and chuckled as he walked over. "Young Daoist, what are you doing? There's so much noise."

Under Simpleton's attacks, the surrounding forest had been reduced to a mess of leaves and broken tree branches.

"Nothing much. I felt that it was a waste to let him only carry luggage considering how strong he is. So, I'm training him," explained Li Huowang.

"Oh, that's good, that's good," Lu Zhuangyuan nodded and walked away.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang returned his gaze to the shirtless Simpleton, who was drenched in sweat, and he continued training him. Even though he might be a little... lacking in terms of brains, his body was incredible. Li Huowang sighed as he observed Simpleton's massive back and waist.

What a strong body! Sure, he might not be able to fight off the

supernatural stuff, but at the very least, he should be able to fend off the bandits quite easily.

This was Li Huowang's plan. He wanted to strengthen their abilities. Relying solely on the Wandering Gods and Dan Yangzi was not possible, as the side effects were far too harsh. Even in a world with many bizarre cultivation techniques and powers, he still knew the value of traditional fighting methods.

It might appear barbaric, but it was still better than nothing.

Even if they were not fighting enemies, at the very least, if Li Huowang started suffering from hallucinations again, they could still protect him.

"Alright! That's one hundred! You can rest now," said Li Huowang.

Hearing this, Simpleton threw his club and walked toward the campfire, panting heavily. Then, he picked up his large bowl and started eating without any restraint.

Soon, half a kilogram of noodles had been devoured by him. Even so, Simpleton was visibly hungry and returned to the black pot to get more noodles.

When Li Huowang saw how Simpleton downed yet another half a kilogram of noodles, he felt somewhat impressed.

So it's true that someone who is weak in the mind would have an extremely strong body. Luckily, I have quite a bit of money or I would go broke just trying to feed him.

At that moment, he thought about something and took out the bronze bell. Looking at it, Li Huowang recalled the Wandering God that had been crushed to bits by Jian Dun and his Buddhas.

Can I still use it?

However, when he thought about it, he realized that there was no such thing as impossible in this bizarre world.

"Come and support me; I need to go into the forest," Li Huowang told Bai Lingmiao.

They walked into the forest far enough away so that they could not hear the sounds coming from around the campfire. Only then did they stop.

“You go back first,” said Li Huwang. However, this time, Bai Lingmiao did not heed his order.

“You can just go to the toilet. I will turn around...” said Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang didn’t know whether he should laugh or cry. “I’m not going to the toilet. You go back first; come back here after 15 minutes.”

He waited until he was the only one remaining in the forest before he leaned against a white birch tree. Then, with one of his hands on his forehead, he shook the bell.

Soon, the edges of the world started twisting and turning. However, this time, they did not congregate back together.

Seeing this, Li Huowang decided to shake the bell even harder.

Don’t tell me it’s unusable now?

Just as he had this thought, the squiggly lines started to congregate before forming a new Wandering God. Then, the new Wandering God hummed curiously.

Li Huowang asked it some questions he had, and in response, the Wandering God hummed emotionlessly, almost as if it was not the one who had been killed by the Buddhas.

Enduring the headache, Li Huowang talked faster and managed to gather some surprising pieces of information.

Firstly, the Wandering Gods had names. It was just that humans couldn’t produce the sounds required to call out their names. Even they didn’t know why they were called the Wandering Gods by the first person that saw them.

Secondly, the Wandering Gods did not have any concept of death, or to be more accurate, they were not living beings. Not only did they not have the concept of death, but they also did not have

the concept of numbers.

No concept of numbers?

Li Huowang thought about it as he shook his head, causing the nausea and confusion to become even stronger. Soon, he started seeing double of everything around him, including the Wandering God.

Seeing how the Wandering God in front of him had split into two, Li Huowang seemed to have realized something as he shook the bell even harder. Every time he shook it, the Wandering God in front of him split into more and more bodies, until the confused Li Huowang could see 20-30 of them.

Blegh!

He could not handle the nausea anymore and vomited.

Soon, the sound of the bell faded and everything around him returned to normal. The Wandering Gods had all disappeared.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang vomited the meal he had just eaten until there was nothing left in his stomach. He kept vomiting until he almost started vomiting bile.

Standing up shakily, he wiped his mouth and panted while looking at the bell.

If I had known this beforehand, I wouldn't have needed to mutilate myself to summon Dan Yangzi.

He stored the bell as he pondered.

No, every time I give one of them an order, I need to sacrifice three months of my lifespan. Using so many of them would've probably cost me at least ten years of my life.

Li Huowang slowly walked back to the camp as he supported himself with the help of the trees.

Just as he reached the roadside, he saw everyone, including Lu Zhuangyuan, huddled together.

“Come here, everyone! All of this is good stuff! If anything here is of bad quality, then I, Zu Dexi, swear that I will suffer from

endless misfortune and my descendants will all live like livestock!”

Li Huowang went over and saw that it was a merchant and his mule cart. He was advertising his wares.

Bai Lingmiao and Chun Xiaoman were on one side, gazing at some needles.

“This is such a dangerous world, and you are out here selling all this stuff on your own? Aren’t you afraid of being robbed?” asked Li Huowang.

In the face of Li Huowang’s question, the man who had a mole at the edge of his lips smiled and didn’t bother explaining himself.

“Daoist, do you need some cinnabar? I have plenty right here!” said the merchant.

Lu Zhuangyuan approached Li Huowang and whispered to him with disgust in his voice. “The bandits would never rob him! After all, he’s in the same line of business as the bandits. The bandits would rob stuff from people while he would purchase it from them!”

“I see...” Li Huowang nodded. That’s true. The mountain bandits would also need to sell off their items to be able to get money and food. These kinds of merchants that traveled around on their own would be their best option for privacy.

“Daoist, if you don’t want any cinnabar, then how about something else? I have quite a few options!” Zu Dexi didn’t even blink as he continued to peddle his wares.

Li Huowang thought about it and asked, “You have other options? Do you have something that I can use to kill people with?”

Everyone else turned and stared at Li Huowang the moment he said that.

On the other hand, Zu Dexi excitedly clapped his hands and started rummaging around in his mule cart. “Yes! Yes, I do!”

Chapter 55 - Healed

“Come and take a look! Are you satisfied with these?” Zu Dexi asked, pointing at the items laid out on the ground.

A variety of items were displayed before Li Huowang. Most of them were rusted swords, while the rest were stored in vials.

“What the? All of these are rusted. They are nothing but scrap metal,” Puppy said as he knelt down, inspected the items, and started haggling with the man.

“You can still use them after you polish them a little. Do you think I would have the chance to obtain superior quality weapons out here?” the man asked.

On the other hand, Li Huowang did not pay much attention to the swords; instead, his focus was on the vials. He knelt down and inspected them but found that nothing was written on them.

“The Daoist surely knows his goods. To think that you would understand the value of such quality items,” praised Zu Dexi.

While Zu Dexi was kneeling beside Li Huowang, and was somewhat repulsed by the smell of blood and smoke from his robes, he was not afraid. On the contrary, he was excited.

“Daoist, that’s something really nice. It’s a poison called Half-step. Put some of it in a person’s water, and they will die in the time it would take for them to take just a half step. I’m selling it cheap for three pieces of silver per bottle.”

“Oh! You have quite discerning eyes! That’s something really good as well. It’s called the Red Crane. You only need an amount the size of your fingernail to send someone straight to hell. Five pieces of silver per bottle.”

“This is something even more amazing!! You only need to take one of these pills, and you would be able to handle two women in

one night! This was something that was custom made for Second Head Liu of Wolf's Head Mountain. However, I can sell it to you for an extra fee."

Hearing Zu Dexi go on and on about his wares, Li Huowang stood up impatiently. "Just about everything seems to be a treasure in your eyes. Fine, I want the first two items. Puppy, bring the money from the cart."

"Daoist, you are quite generous!" Zu Dexi was smiling so hard that his eyes had become thin slits. "Are you sure you don't want this too? I can make it cheaper for you. Even if you don't use it now, you might want to use it when you are older. It's definitely something good to have, considering that it helps you extend your family's bloodline."

Li Huowang didn't bother to give him a reply, instead turning to his group. "You guys, choose some weapons you like. Having one is better than having none."

Hearing his words, everyone except Bai Lingmiao and Xiaoman, the two girls, approached the cart and started checking the wares.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang stored the two vials of poison and turned to Lu Zhuangyuan. "Troupe leader Lu, why don't you buy something to defend yourself?"

Lu Zhuangyuan shook his head. "No need. If we happen to encounter bandits as we are now, we would lose our money at most. However, if we took up weapons to defend ourselves, then we would die if we failed."

"Hoho, it seems that you've thought it out quite well. Looks like everyone has their own plans," Li Huowang said as he lay back down on the donkey cart to rest.

Soon, everyone returned from around the mule cart. Puppy and the rest now had their weapons. Even if they didn't know how to use them, at least they would look much more menacing.

Just as they were swinging their weapons around, Bai Lingmiao approached Li Huowang with a thread and needle in her hands and started fixing Li Huowang's Daoist robes.

"Senior Li, after purchasing all of these things, we have used up over half of our money. We only have five pieces of silver left," said Bai Lingmiao, feeling worried.

"We will be traveling for a very long time. We would have needed to buy something to defend ourselves with anyway," said Li Huowang. He already had the bronze bell and could even summon Dan Yangzi by mutilating himself. He didn't need such mundane weapons. However, he couldn't trust himself. He was worried that he would be stuck in his hallucination once the effects of the Black Taisui wore off. If that were to happen, then no one else would be capable of protecting them—they would be nothing but sheep meant to be slaughtered.

"Senior Li, the weapons would work against bandits, but if we could learn superpowers like the ones that Dan Yangzi had, then we would be unbeatable!" Puppy brought his blade over as he sighed.

"You want to learn superpowers? Even if an expert were here, they might even teach you. Also..." Li Huowang suddenly remembered how Dan Yangzi refined pills, using live humans as ingredients, as well as the bizarre cultivation method used by the monks of the Righteous Monastery. "Also, even if they were to teach you, you might not be able to learn them as a normal human."

Even though he didn't have much experience, Li Huowang had a feeling that the other sects in this world would also be similar to Dan Yangzi and the Righteous Monastery.

Puppy chuckled before bringing one of the guiding drug ingredients who only had one arm with him toward the creek. "Come, let's find some stones to polish the blades of our weapons from the creek."

Just then, Simpleton's massive frame appeared before Li Huowang like a wall. "I... I..."

"No need. You can't use a sword. Just practice using your club. That is the only thing that would be able to complement your strength," said Li Huowang as he lay back down to rest.

Their quick encounter with the merchant ended, and soon the two groups were once again on their way.

Days passed slowly as they passed through several villages. Except for the days when they helped the Lu family set up a stage to perform, they continued traveling.

In the meantime, the wound on Li Huowang's neck slowly healed.

Standing next to a jar of water, Li Huowang checked his neck using the surface of the water as a mirror and saw that there was a visible scar on his neck.

"It's not too bad. If I lower my head, it isn't too obvious," said Li Huowang as he turned and looked toward Bai Lingmiao, who had her white hands massaging her temples.

"Why the long face? Did something unfortunate happen?" asked Li Huowang.

"Senior Li, we just purchased some food for us and the donkeys earlier. Now, we are left with only one piece of silver and 345 coins," said Bai Lingmiao.

"That little? You are kidding." Li Huowang walked out from a temporary farmhouse they were staying in and approached the Lu family's stage.

"All that money was supposed to last longer, but ever since everyone started practicing with their weapons, everyone has been so famished that they have been eating too much. Simpleton even eats an entire kilogram of noodles per meal! That's two kilograms per day if we eat two meals!" explained Bai Lingmiao.

"But that practice is not rubbish. Since we bought those

weapons, we must practice using them. At the very least, they must learn how to slash and stab with them,” said Li Huowang.

Even if it was only a simple swing, there was a large difference between someone who practiced every day and someone who just carried it around. At the very least, their chances of victory would increase if they were to lace their swords with poison before fighting an enemy.

Li Huowang stared at the group of people helping the Lu family disassemble the stage.

“We only have enough money for one more month. After that, we will have to starve,” said Bai Lingmiao.

“So the problem is that we don’t have enough money, huh?” remarked Li Huowang.

Li Huowang rubbed his chin and looked at the Lu family.

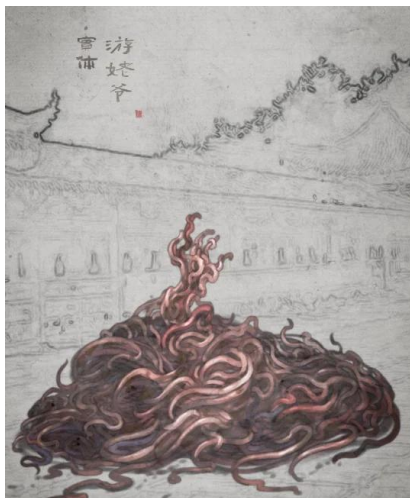
They probably earned a lot of money throughout this journey. I can just take it from them, and then all our problems would be solved.

Just as he had this thought, he stopped himself. How could he have such thoughts? Lu Zhuangyuan might be cunning, but he was still an honest man trying to make a living. How could he think about taking the money from him?

Li Huowang’s mood instantly dropped.

Translator's Thoughts

Remember a couple of chapters back where the Wandering God was granted a physical body by Jian Dun? Yeah, this was how it looked like @格子的乱七八糟



Chapter 56 - Beyond The Border

“Senior Li, are you okay?” Bai Lingmiao instinctively grabbed Li Huowang’s hand when she saw that his expression seemed off.

Li Huowang smiled and shook his head. “I’m fine, just a little worried about the outside world; after all, we’re about to go outside the border. Let’s go and help the Lu Family tear down the stage so that we can leave.”

However, despite his words, Li Huowang’s expression was quite cold. His temperament seemed to be becoming more and more like Dan Yangzi’s.

This change caused a chill to run down Li Huowang’s spine.

When he recalled how the others saw him devouring the Buddhas from the inside out instead of Dan Yangzi, that conjecture was no longer just a simple assumption; it was gradually becoming a reality.

If it was just his personality, then that would still be alright. However, Li Huowang was more worried that as time passed, he would completely become Dan Yangzi himself.

If that’s the case, then everything before now makes sense. Dan Yangzi is not protecting me, but protecting himself!

Even just the thought of this possibility left Li Huowang feeling restless. That old fogey, Dan Yangzi, was definitely at the top of his list of the people he hated the most in this world. He did not want to become Dan Yangzi; he would rather die!

Li Huowang suddenly felt like returning to the Righteous Monastery, even if he had to face hardships; he wanted to get those monks to conduct the Great Fast and get rid of Dan Yangzi.

But that was just wishful thinking.

There had still been hope for negotiation before, but after he killed those seven Buddhas, those monks would probably seek revenge the moment they laid their eyes on him. Those ‘monks’ were not true monks; they were not vegetarian nor did they chant scriptures.

They were capable of just about anything.

According to what the Abbot had described before, there were many other sects besides the Righteous Monastery. He could only think of getting a solution for his problem through them; whatever the Righteous Monastery could achieve, the other sects could achieve as well.

Li Huowang walked to the front of the donkey cart and opened the map to study it carefully.

Originally, he had planned to not interact with people from sects because of the bad impression left behind by the Righteous Monastery.

But there was no other way now.

Since the Righteous Monastery had a way to get rid of Dan Yangzi, the other sects should be able to do so as well.

While he did not know what they wanted, based on their actions, he could deduce that the Righteous Monastery wanted something from him.

Is it the sacred text left behind by Dan Yangzi?

If he did not want to turn into Dan Yangzi, he had to find a way to get rid of Dan Yangzi using the other sects.

If there's no other choice, then I'll just use the sacred text to exchange with them.

Li Huowang silently came to a decision; at the moment, the sacred text was his only bargaining chip.

By the time they arrived at the small town close to the border pass, he was starting to feel slightly uneasy. The small town was

bustling with merchants and people wearing different styles of clothing; they had all come here to engage in trade.

When Li Huowang saw the border pass in the distance, he turned to Lu Zhuangyuan and said, “Old man, looks like we’ll be parting ways here.”

Lu Zhuangyuan expressed his gratitude by shaking Li Huowang’s hand. “Young Daoist, you’ve worked hard. If not for you accompanying us on the way, we would have suffered many hardships.”

The Lu Family troupe naturally could not cross the border. Once they arrived at the border pass, they would return to their village through another route. After making the necessary repairs and recuperating at home, they would repeat their journey, traveling through the empire once again. This was the fate of their theater troupe. If they wanted to break free from this life of wandering, they had to buy a theater building and settle down.

“Have a safe journey. I don’t know what you are up to, Young Daoist, but we wish you great success! Here, take some salted duck eggs for your trip,” said Lu Zhuangyuan.

In response, Lu Xiucan reluctantly placed a jar of salted duck eggs onto the donkey cart.

“Thank you for your well-wishes. If fate allows it, then we’ll come and watch the Lu Family’s performance once again. After this trip, I must say that I’ve become quite addicted to your plays,” said Li Huowang.

After they exchanged their farewells, the donkey cart, now full of the necessary rations, gradually approached the border pass.

Lu Zhuangyuan watched their departing figures and took a puff of smoke from his pipe before tapping it onto the head of his younger son, who had a reluctant look in his eyes.

“Don’t think about that fair-skinned girl. Our family is from a humble background. We’ll get a matchmaker to find a suitable

match for you back at home,” said Lu Zhuangyuan.

“Dad, what are you saying? I didn’t have any such thoughts.” Lu Xiucai frantically denied, then turned around and hurried toward the busy street.

“Dad, how could you bear to give him an entire jar of salted duck eggs when you are usually so stingy?” Lu Juren asked while carrying his daughter, feeling curious.

“What nonsense? Don’t think of me as stingy. Remember, we should be generous when necessary. This Daoist is not an average person. If we make good relations with him, then our Lu Family will have made a very valuable connection,” replied Lu Zhuangyuan.

After some twists and turns, they finally exited the border. Li Huowang looked around and felt something was different despite the fact that they were still surrounded by forests.

They were not alone on the road; there were quite a few horse carts, as well as people carrying loads on shoulder poles. It was easy to differentiate where they were from based on the way they wore their clothes. Those from the Qi kingdom had the left lapel of their hanfu over the right, while those from the kingdom of Si Qi were the opposite, having the right lapel of the hanfu over the left.

Li Huowang thought for a while before opening the jar Lu Zhuangyuan had given him; it was filled to the brim with salted duck eggs.

Puppy came over and said with a surprised expression, “Duck eggs and salt are quite valuable nowadays. That old man, Lu Zhuangyan, is really generous.”

Li Huowang closed the jar; his impression of that old man had improved greatly.

“Forget about the useless things. Whoever lives in the Si Qi Country, get ready to go back home,” said Li Huowang.

Everyone looked at each other, and then Xiaoman, who was

covered in black hair, raised her hand. Then, she spoke in a trembling voice, “I am from Si Qi.”

As soon as she spoke, the surroundings became quiet; the others knew about the grievances she had with her parents and what she intended to do when she returned home.

“Sister Xiaoman, how about...” Bai Lingmiao wanted to persuade her despite feeling slightly hesitant.

However, she was interrupted by Li Huowang, “Alright, then you should be more familiar with this place. Tell us, what kind of place is the kingdom of Si Qi? Is there a big sect like the Righteous Monastery there too?”

Xiaoman, whose face was covered by a black bamboo hat, took a deep breath. “I don’t know. Though I stayed there, I never left the village in over ten years. However, when I was nine, I saw some God-summoning Shamans at the village entrance.”

“God-summoning Shamans...” Li Huowang was a little taken aback. The God of Happiness had left a deep impact on him.

“Then do Shamans have any places they frequent?” asked Li Huowang.

“No. I have heard that Shamans mostly stay within their own houses, offering sacrifices to their Immortal families,” replied Xiaoman.

“Immortal families? Do they have any specific names?” Li Huowang’s mind flashed as he heard more about the bizarre things belonging to this world.

“Hong, Huang, Bai, Liu, Bei. I’ve heard of five different Immortal families; however, I don’t know what each of them represents.”

Translator's Thoughts

Updated image of how the MC looks like right now! @格子的乱七八糟



Chapter 57 - Shaman

“I don’t know what the Shaman’s five Immortal families of Hong, Huang, Bai, Liu, and Bei represent. It was mentioned by one of the village elders in passing, and so I remembered it. At the time, I encountered one of them for the first time; someone in the village had been possessed and was lying on the ground, barking like a dog. At that time, a Shaman happened to be coincidentally passing through the village, and came in to take a look at the possessed person. I’m not sure about what happened after that, but I recall that the possessed person was okay the day after that and went back to work in the fields,” explained Xiaoman.

Li Huowang silently calculated something in his mind while listening to Xiaoman describe the fragmented information she knew about the Shamans.

“Does this mean that the Shamans of the kingdom of Si Qi are similar to Daoists in terms of what they do—exorcizing evil and avoiding disasters? Do their abilities also come from beings like the Wandering Gods?” questioned Li Huowang.

“Since Shamans often have to interact with people, they should be more welcoming than those monks from the Righteous Monastery, right?” asked Li Huowang.

Currently, he was not afraid of these so-called Shamans being too powerful; rather he was worried about the fact that he was too weak and unable to deal with Dan Yangzi. After all, it’s impossible for him to compete against an entire group as a single person.

The creaking of the donkey cart suddenly disappeared, pulling Li Huowang out of his thoughts. He saw that the others had all gone into the woods to gather firewood and fetch water.

He looked up at the sky and realized that the sun had already

set in the west; it was time to rest.

However, he did not idle around; he retrieved the sword on his back and started digging a hole in the ground. The sword was quite sharp, and soon, he had dug out a small pit around the size of a head.

Simpleton, who was standing beside him, was fully prepared. He directly lifted a black pot from the cart and placed it within the hole carved out by Li Huowang.

Now, they would just need to dig openings on either side to create their own earthen stove—one for the firewood and the other for releasing the smoke.

Noodles were more practical compared to rice, as they were easier to store and convenient to cook.

When the water in the pot started boiling, they put in several bundles of noodles they bought at the small border town.

With dandelions picked from the roadside to serve as vegetables, and a salted duck egg as their protein, each of them got a large bowl of noodles.

And thus, dinner was prepared just like that.

Li Huowang used his chopsticks to break open the salted duck egg floating in his soup. The oily egg yolk added a golden layer to his broth, making it look very appetizing. He picked up the softened dandelion stems with his chopsticks and placed them in his mouth, chewing on them slowly. They tasted slightly bitter—somewhat similar to spinach.

Previously, he had not known that dandelions could be eaten. He had only learned about the fact that they were a kind of wild vegetable after seeing that old monk enjoying them.

Li Huowang blew off some of the hot steam and took a big mouthful of the soup. It was very comforting as his stomach was filled with warmth. He could not help but think of the old monk from the Righteous Monastery upon seeing the wild vegetables.

Who knows how he's doing now? He was so simple-minded that he couldn't possibly see through anything. He should be living well in that environment, right?

At that moment, a pair of chopsticks placed an oily egg yolk into Li Huowang's bowl. Bai Lingmiao, sitting beside him, said in a soft voice, "I don't eat egg yolks."

Li Huowang nodded silently and picked up some noodles using his chopsticks before slurping them up in a single mouthful. "Do you remember that bronze Daoist bell I have? I brought it with me from Zephyr Temple."

"Yes," replied Bai Lingmiao.

"I'll teach you how to use it now. If anything happens to me, remember to take it out and use it to protect yourself," said Li Huowang.

"Alright," replied Bai Lingmiao.

"First, you need to shake it. You will feel extremely dizzy when shaking it, but you need to endure it. Next, you will need to grab a handful of dirt from the ground and place it into your mouth..." explained Li Huowang.

The skies gradually darkened, and Li Huowang's meal was finished just as he finished giving the instructions on how to use the bell.

Bai Lingmiao took the bowl and chopsticks from Li Huowang's hands and walked toward the stream in the woods.

Li Huowang gazed at her slender figure from behind; soon, it had suddenly turned into the figure of a high school girl wearing a red uniform.

It was Yang Na's silhouette.

He shook his head vigorously to clear his mind, causing Bai Lingmiao's figure to reappear. Annoyed, Li Huowang lay on the ground to look at the clear starry night sky.

Li Huowang was the one to stay up and keep watch during the

first half of the night; he had not been sleeping well recently. Or rather, he had never slept well ever since he got stuck in this world.

Li Huowang used his sword to poke at the bonfire before throwing in some firewood. Using the light of the fire, he examined his weapon.

This weapon that could cut through metal like mud was somewhat wasted in his hands. He only used it as a shovel to dig pits, or as a poker for the fire. Now, the sword tip was charred and looked very unsightly.

The only time he drew blood with it was when he used it to mutilate his own neck.

Senior Chang Ming, if you could see what is happening to your precious sword, would you be so angry that you would come back to life?

Li Huowang mumbled to himself as he sheathed it back into its scabbard.

At that moment, a soft sound rang out from behind him, making Li Huowang stand up in a rush. He immediately grabbed a burning piece of wood from the campfire and threw it over.

The burning piece of wood flashed past a figure and landed before a pair of horrifyingly red embroidered shoes.

“Who’s there?! Show yourself!” Li Huowang shouted loudly, waking up the others as they sat up sleepily.

However, when they saw the pair of feet with the embroidered shoes in the distance, they were frightened and immediately drew their swords.

“Hehe, don’t be alarmed. It’s all a misunderstanding.” A cheerful voice rang out, accompanied by a fifty year old man with white hair, as he emerged from the dark woods.

He was dressed plainly, and the patches on his clothes suggested that he was not wealthy. Aside from a small backpack on his back, he had an old, dirty drum with ribbons of many colors

tied around it on his waist.

Facing the weapons held by Li Huowang's group, he stood there and explained, "I was rushing along in the middle of the night, and saw some light, and so I came by for a look. I did not think I would run into your group."

When he noticed that Li Huowang's attention was focused on the pair of red embroidered shoes, he explained, "It's fine, that's my wife. She's somewhat afraid of strangers. Dear, come over here."

That pair of shoes unhurriedly stepped out from the darkness, and she came beside the old man. She had a red veil covering her face. Her clothes were colored in bright red and purple, and there were various colorful fabrics tied around her body, just like the drum on the old man's waist.

She stood there, motionless. Seeing such a sight in the middle of the night was enough to send chills down their spines.

"That's your wife?" Li Huowang confirmed again, his sword still raised. He found it hard to believe that they would be accompanied by such a peculiar companion. Even if he had claimed that she was a zombie, nobody would doubt him.

At that moment, Xiaoman hurried to his side and whispered, "Senior Li, he is a Shaman."

These words immediately caused Li Huowang to raise his guard to the maximum.

"Yes! That's right, we are Shamans. I am the Main Deity, and my wife is the Second Deity," said the old man.

Upon seeing the lack of response from the group, the old man continued, "Why? Don't you guys believe me? Then, how about I show you a demonstration, keke~"

Before Li Huowang could stop him, the old man opened his mouth and shouted, "Summon~ the~ gods~"

His confident shout echoed throughout the dark forest and into the distance.

Chapter 58 - Li Zhi

Ring, ring, ring!

An extremely piercing ringing sound interrupted the old man's shout, causing everyone to cover their ears with agonized expressions. By the time the sound of the bell subsided, Li Huowang's blade was already placed at the man's neck.

"Keke, Daoist, what are you doing?" asked the old man, his expression still calm despite the sharp blade pressed against his neck.

"Why are you asking me what I'm doing? I should be the one asking *you* what you're doing! What gods are you summoning?!" asked Li Huowang. At the same time, he applied some pressure on the charred blade, drawing a trace of blood. Nothing good would happen, no matter what deities or gods the shaman was summoning; he had not encountered anything good ever since he came to this wretched place.

The man chuckled, realizing that he had been misunderstood. "Daoist, you aren't from the kingdom of Si Qi, right? I didn't summon any gods. I didn't even beat on my drum, so I can't summon them at all. I just wanted to prove to you that I am indeed a Shaman."

Xiaoman whispered, "Hmm, he's right. A shaman does need to beat their drum."

Li Huowang glanced at the colored drum hanging on the man's waist before slowly withdrawing his sword.

"Friend, don't make such jokes late at night. It's easy to be misunderstood. You can leave," said Li Huowang.

The old man eyed the wary Daoist up and down, then nodded reluctantly and turned to leave. "Alright. I am Li Zhi. Until we meet

again! Dear, let's go."

He did not say another word, instead bringing the red-veiled woman back toward the pitch-black path within the forest.

As Li Huowang watched them leave his line of sight, he turned back and said to the others, "Don't sleep anymore tonight. Stay on your guard, just in case that fellow hasn't left."

It didn't hurt to be overly cautious. Such a fellow could suddenly jump out in the middle of the night; who knew what his objectives were.

Despite their hesitant responses, the guiding drug ingredients hugged their weapons and gathered around the bonfire. At the same time, Li Huowang grabbed a dried tree branch and tossed it into the fire, causing it to become brighter and illuminate everyone's anxious faces.

Despite the seemingly endless wait, the long night passed. Nothing else happened aside from them looking exhausted.

"Let's rest for the morning, and then catch up. Puppy, you keep watch first," Li Huowang said before closing his eyes.

After some time, Li Huowang was gently awakened from his nap by someone. "Senior Li, that person is back."

"Eh? What?" This news immediately caused him to jolt awake. He turned back to see Li Zhi with his wife, who was wearing a veil, both beaming at him from nearby.

"After thinking all night, I realized that I scared you last night, didn't I? I'm here to offer my apologies," said Li Zhi.

The sunlight peeking through the branches shone upon Li Zhi's somewhat dark face, causing the mole on his face to stand out. If the drum around his waist was taken away, then he would look like just any other common farmer who worked in the fields all year round.

Under the bright sunlight, he now appeared much more approachable than last night.

Some thoughts flashed through Li Huowang's mind as he clasped his hands together and returned the greeting, "Brother Li Zhi is too courteous. I was also reckless yesterday."

No matter his objective, since a Shaman was standing before him, Li Huowang could not miss the chance of getting some information.

"This girl told me that your surname is also Li? That's quite a coincidence; my surname is also Li. Perhaps we were relatives 500 years ago," Li Zhi said cheerfully as he took a few steps forward and approached Li Huowang.

"Brother Li Zhi, where are you headed?" asked Li Huowang.

"Oh, my family's grandmother is going to celebrate her birthday soon, so I'm hurrying over to give her my well-wishes," explained Li Zhi.

Birthday celebration? Shamans seem to be different from those monks and the Daoists; they still have to attend worldly functions and fulfill their worldly obligations.

"Daoist, where are you headed? And with such a big group of helpers, no less." Li Zhi's gaze flickered as he eyed Li Huowang's blood-stained Daoist robes.

"Liang Kingdom," Li Huowang replied concisely.

"That far? It must be quite challenging going such a long way away," commented Li Zhi.

After exchanging some pleasantries, the tension between them had eased to a certain extent; at least they were no longer pointing swords at each other.

The donkey cart's wheels began to turn, and they continued on their journey alongside the new pair.

"Not far from here is the Half-Moon Gorge, and then there's a village where you can rest for a few days. After that, it will take at least another 15 days of walking before you can find another place you can stay at. You should know as well that the border regions

are usually sparsely populated,” Li Zhi looked like he was talking to an old friend as he enthusiastically gave pointers to Li Huowang.

“Many thanks. May I ask, Brother Li Zhi, since you’re a Shaman, which Immortal family do you worship?” asked Li Huowang.

Li Huowang’s incisive questioning caused the red-veiled woman to tilt her head in wonder.

“Keke, I’m a disciple of the Bei Family. Since you’ve asked about me, I would also like to know which mountain or sect you belong to,” said Li Zhi.

“Xishan Donghua Sect, Zephyr Temple. I go by the Daoist name, Xuan Yang,” Li Huowang instinctively responded with Dan Yangzi’s old claims. He did not know what the Xishan Donghua Sect was but, in any case, with this, others would believe that he had a genuine lineage and he was not just a fake Daoist.

Li Zhi shook his head. “Keke~ I have never heard of it. But that’s understandable. The world is so vast that nobody would know everything.”

Li Zhi was very talkative, and his face always had a smile. One’s mood would be lifted by just staying in his company.

As they continued walking, it was soon time for lunch; they were still using the makeshift stove to cook noodles. The river by the roadside was gradually becoming wider, making it more convenient for them.

Meanwhile, Li Zhi did not take out anything from his small backpack and just squatted at the roadside, watching them with a smile. This caused Li Huowang’s group to start feeling uneasy.

“Brother Li Zhi, do you want some?” asked Li Huowang.

“Ah! That’s very kind of you; I haven’t eaten anything since yesterday.” Li Zhi eagerly ran across to pick up a bowl before starting to fill it with noodles.

Soon, bowl after bowl was slurped clean by him, causing Bai

Lingmiao to furrow her brows.

“Senior Li, that’s almost 1.5kg... How can he eat so much? Is this guy following us just for this meal?” asked Bai Lingmiao.

Everyone stared blankly as Li Zhi scooped up the last strand of noodles. He was not the slightest bit embarrassed and continued to happily slurp away as he squatted under a tree.

Li Huowang walked to his side and copied him and squatted down. “Was the food enough? Do you want some more?”

“Ah, it’s quite embarrassing, but I really haven’t had enough.” Li Zhi said as he drank a large mouthful of soup.

“Cook one more kilogram of noodles!” Li Huowang shouted toward those around the metal pot.

“How come you’re the only one eating, and not your wife? Isn’t she hungry?” Li Huowang looked toward the woman with the red veil. He found that her fingernails were a little blackened and extremely long.

“I’m the Main Deity while she’s the Second Deity. Just me eating is enough,” Li Zhi said as though that was the natural order of things.

“Oh? Why’s that?” asked Li Huowang, hoping to learn something new.

The slurping sounds stopped as Li Zhi raised his right hand that was holding the chopsticks before wiping his mouth with his elbow. He then turned over and beamed, “Keke, you have so many questions. Are you trying to become a shaman as well?”

Chapter 59 - Chosen Apprentice

Before Li Huowang could respond to Li Zhi, the sound of the noodles being slurped started once again.

“Even if you wished to become an apprentice, that would not be possible; the disciples are all chosen by the Immortal families themselves. The right opportunity is needed if you wish to enter this trade,” Li Zhi explained.

“Oh? If you don’t mind, please elaborate on that,” said Li Huowang. He had talked to this fellow for so long just to get a better understanding of these matters.

After all, the more he understood, the safer he would be in this foreign world.

Li Zhi used his chopsticks to gesture in the air as he explained. “To become an apprentice, you need to become gravely ill; it would be best if you’re on the brink of death. Then, if you’re lucky, the Immortal family will visit you in your dream. They will cure you, and in return, you’ll become their apprentice.”

“What do the members of the Immortal family look like?” Li Huowang continued his questioning.

Li Zhi fell silent, as if trying to recall something. “Hmm, how should I put it? All I can say is that they’re definitely not human.”

Li Zhi attempted to pick up more noodles with his chopsticks but discovered that his bowl was empty, so he excitedly returned to the pot.

Not human, huh.

Li Huowang thought to himself. From what Li Zhi said, he could deduce that these Immortal families could communicate and

exchange with people. They were probably beings similar to the Wandering Gods. From the looks of it, the people of the kingdom of Si Qi were actively or passively engaged in transactions with these beings and interacting with them.

At that moment, Li Huowang remembered the writhing pile of flesh that was the "Giant Buddha" back at the Righteous Monastery.

From men to women to animals and finally to the "Giant Buddha"; the monks' cultivation path seemed to follow a progressive process. He could connect Jian Dun's ability and the seven Buddhas that could grant the corporeal flesh bodies to the Wandering Gods or grow thousands of fleshy hands to this cultivation method.

It wasn't hard to deduce that the monks from the Righteous Monastery used such a cultivation method all in order to obtain their flesh-related abilities.

Trading and interacting with different beings can allow one to gain different supernatural abilities, huh. Perhaps... is the origin of the different sects in this world?

Li Huowang started to have a rudimentary understanding of this world.

Meanwhile, Li Zhi came back with more noodles in his bowl. The noodles in his bowl were piled up quite high, with not a single drop of broth mixed in. He squatted down to eat while complaining incessantly, "Let me tell you, being an apprentice isn't a good job; it's best if you can avoid it. It's full of problems, and you even have to face three disasters and calamities. The pay isn't that great either..."

After listening to his long-winded complaints for a while, Li Huowang couldn't help but interrupt, "Then what can you apprentices request the Immortal families to do?"

Li Zhi glanced at Li Huowang and replied, "Anything. Dispelling evil, curing illnesses, changing fortunes, handling weddings and funerals, fortune-telling, feng shui arrangement,

etc..."

"So powerful? They can do anything and everything?" exclaimed Li Huowang.

"Each Immortal family has a different set of abilities. If the one you worship cannot solve the troubles you encounter, you can always seek help from the others," explained Li Zhi.

Li Huowang's expression turned serious. "What if someone has something attached to them? Can they deal with that?"

"Something attached to them? That's probably an evil spirit. In that case, they can definitely help," replied Li Zhi.

"Are you sure? It's not just any ordinary thing." Li Huowang thought about Dan Yangzi and then looked at the man before him. No matter how he looked at it, this guy seemed somewhat unreliable.

"Hey, why don't you give it a try to find out if it works. Anyway, it's just 50 coppers. Are you afraid of me running away with your money?" said Li Zhi.

"50 copper coins? That's your remuneration?" This was far lower than the amount that Li Huowang had in mind.

"My payment is just for me. The Immortal family's portion will need to be counted separately," Li Zhi explained as he munched and swallowed the noodles in his mouth before burping. "I will take 50 copper coins, no negotiation. After taking that fee, I will arrange for you to meet the Immortal families. It's been an old rule for over 3 centuries and has never changed. Of course, the coins have to be new ones; don't try to cheat me using old coins picked up from the roadside. As for the Immortals~"

"Do I negotiate their remuneration with them myself?" asked Li Huowang.

"No, there's nothing to negotiate. You have to let the Immortal family choose, and they will take whatever they set their sights upon. However, more often than not, they will not be interested in

any material possessions like money,” explained Li Zhi.

They pick and take whatever they want? And they don't want money?

Li Huowang felt somewhat uneasy. If they traded with these Immortals, what would these beings take from them?

"Then, what have the Immortals taken from others before?" asked Li Huowang.

"Hey, don't ask me. Who am I supposed to ask?" Li Zhi continued while carefully licking the bowl. "Anyone who has had something taken from them by the Immortals must not tell others about it. This is taboo, and bad luck will fall upon them."

"Aren't you a Shaman? Even you don't know?" asked Li Huowang.

"Simply put, I'm just an errand boy for the Immortals. I'm only responsible for inviting people. I'm not paid enough to care about those other matters," responded Li Zhi.

Compared to the monks from the Righteous Monastery and Dan Yangzi, Li Zhi had a carefree attitude and was seemingly free of worldly concerns.

"Hey, do you want to give it a try? Who is the one that is being possessed?" Li Zhi asked as he had eaten his fill and was using the chopsticks to pick at his teeth while looking at the others in the distance.

Li Huowang was somewhat hesitant but continued to ask patiently, "Brother Li Zhi, during your travels you must have handled quite a few such matters right? That 'possessed by evil' thing you speak of, just how does it come about?"

Li Zhi's expression was a little impatient as he shook his head. "I can't be bothered to remember such matters. Why would I try so hard when I only get 50 copper coins for an errand? That can hardly buy me enough rice. Now if the price were to be increased to 500 coppers, then I would definitely remember such things clearly.

I can't increase my fees, nor can I change my occupation. It's really frustrating to do this. Right, don't Daoists make good money when performing their rituals? How much is it for one event?"

Li Huowang once again glanced at the red veiled woman who was standing behind them, completely motionless. He stood up and said, "We've rested enough; let's continue our journey."

"Alright! By the way, what time is dinner?" asked Li Zhi.

Li Huowang's group resumed walking. Li Zhi, with his carefree personality, tried to strike up a conversation with them, but their responses weren't very enthusiastic.

This person spoke very normally and did not seem to harbor any malice. However, good intentions can often hide underlying motives. Thus, Li Huowang did not let down his guard completely.

Li Huowang turned slightly to observe the two people on the other side of the road. His attention was entirely focused on the person beside Li Zhi. The red veiled "Second Deity" who did not eat, drink, or talk. The more he watched her, the more uncomfortable he felt.

She was even more peculiar than Li Zhi. Her steps were precise every time she walked forward. She seemed less like a real person and more like a puppet. What was even stranger was that Li Zhi referred to her as his wife.

"Senior Li, should we move separately from them?" Bai Lingmiao asked.

"Not yet, let's wait and observe." Li Huowang still wanted to monitor them.

If this person was not lying, then he may have to rely on the so-called Immortal families to handle the matter of Dan Yangzi.

Chapter 60 - Shaman

As the sun gradually moved westward, a village appeared before them. Within it, houses of varying heights were scattered around.

"You see, this is the village I was talking about," Li Zhi smiled, pointing toward the black tiles ahead before continuing forward in large strides.

"Follow me. A fellow villager of mine lives here. It will be free if we stay there," said Li Zhi.

The two carts pulled by donkeys followed along as Li Huowang gently motioned for them to follow Li Zhi.

As they walked on the yellow dirt path between the various houses, Li Huowang's group looked around at their quiet surroundings; strangely, there was nobody in sight in the fields or the courtyards.

What's going on? Where are all the villagers?

Li Huowang was puzzled.

Just as he was thinking, Li Zhi poked his head out from behind a corner in front of them, his old face full of excitement. "Hey! Come quickly! It's quite lively over here! Looks like a grandpa is climbing the ashes! His face is all scratched up, and it's getting quite interesting!"

"Climbing the ashes? What does that mean?" asked Li Huowang. However, nobody answered Li Huowang's question. When he turned around, he saw that all of them had awkward expressions. Bai Lingmiao was so embarrassed that her head was drooping in shame.

"Senior Li, let's not get involved. That's their family matter," said Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang glanced at her in confusion before moving toward Li Zhi's direction in big steps.

As they turned the corner, it became clear that the entire village was gathered here to watch the commotion. They were all dressed in rural clothing and surrounding a house. Li Zhi was standing at the periphery of the crowd, tiptoeing and leaning on a person's shoulder to get a better look.

"What does 'climbing the ashes' mean?" Li Huowang came beside Li Zhi and asked.

"It refers to a grandpa attempting to steal his son's wife. Do you have another term for it in the region you are from? Actually, where are you from?" Li Zhi looked at Li Huowang, astonished.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang was left speechless after hearing the explanation. No wonder Bai Lingmiao had such an expression.

"Ah!" At that moment, a sharp female scream rang out from the middle of the crowd, causing everyone to step back in shock.

Through the gaps, Li Huowang saw a bizarre scene within the house.

A naked woman was lying on a wooden table, her limbs twisting as she writhed around like a snake, screaming and trembling.

"Oh, that's not right. It's not someone climbing the ashes, but someone being possessed," Li Zhi lamented. At the same time, he placed his hands together and pushed through the crowd.

"Hey, please move aside, I'm a Shaman. Please move aside. Hey, who just stepped on my foot?!" shouted Li Zhi.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang was about to turn away but paused upon seeing this scene. "Is he going to use his shamanic techniques to exorcize the evil spirits?"

Li Zhi exerted much effort to push through the crowd before looking around and waving toward Li Huowang. "Hey! Daoist, come quickly; why are you so far away?"

Li Huowang thought about it for a moment, and then he also began to squeeze through the crowd.

This guy seems a bit out of place. We can use this opportunity to assess his powers. If he's just messing around, then there's no need to enlist his help to resolve my own issues. Otherwise, Dan Yangzi will just eat him up like the Buddhas.

When he reached the center of the crowd, he could see the situation more clearly.

There was something very obviously strange about the behavior of the woman lying on the table. She didn't have the usual black pupils in the center of her good-looking phoenix-like eyes; instead, it seemed like she had five layers of eyelids.

There was an old and a young person standing beside her; they seemed to be the victims of the possessed woman.

"Daoist, will you handle this or should I?" Li Zhi whispered to him. "How about we go at it together, and you can request more money when it's done. Then, we'll split it up later. This way, we won't even have to violate any of the Shaman's rules."

"No need, I'm not really skilled with exorcism. You can go ahead." Li Huowang rejected. In the first place, he did not know anything about exorcism or other Daoist duties.

Li Zhi was astonished when he heard Li Huowang's explanation. "You must be joking with me; you don't know how to exorcize evil spirits? Are you sure you aren't a fake Daoist?"

"Hurry up, the woman is almost going to twist her own bones apart," said Li Huowang, pointing at the woman on the table.

The woman who was previously coiled up was now biting her lips, and blood was dripping down her chin. The joints of her limbs had even started to make creaking noises as they were twisted further.

It seems that ordinary people aren't as disconnected from these things as I had imagined. They just use evil spirits as a universal

explanation.

What if Li Zhi wasn't around today? What would they do?

Li Huowang wondered as he watched Li Zhi negotiating with the victims.

Li Huowang glanced at the old agricultural tools in the house, their bare feet covered in yellow mud, and their faces that were full of hardship. All this served to provide a simple yet harsh answer to his question.

It was the same thing that impoverished people do when they get sick—endure the minor ailments, bear with the major ailments, and lie down if it becomes unbearable.

"Cough~!"

The sound silenced the buzzing chatter of the crowd.

Thud~!

Li Zhi used a small stick to lightly tap the old drum hanging from his waist, causing everyone's hearts to tremble.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

"Summon~ the~ gods~!" shouted Li Zhi, his confident and loud voice drowning out all the other sounds around them.

At the same time, Li Huowang turned to look outside the house. The red light in the sky was gradually fading as the silent night approached.

"The sun sets in the west, oh~, the sky turns dark, oh~! Dragons return to the boundless sea, so that they can bring rain~ Tigers return to the mountains~ so they can sleep~ oh~..." Li Zhi began singing to the rhythm of the drum.

As Li Zhi sang lyrics that followed the rhythm of the drum, the mysterious Second Deity that had gone unnoticed so far began to tremble. The red veil on her head and the colorful cloth strips on her body also started to shake.

"Above are the seven-starred glazed tiles, standing on the octagonal purple-gold bricks. Foot on the ground, head into the

skies. Stride forward successively to stand firmly in the camp. Offer incense, beat the drums, summon the Immortals~” Li Zhi continued to sing and beat the drums as he fished out a few incense sticks. He lit them and then placed them around the woman lying on the wooden table.

The woman’s hair was disheveled, and she bared her teeth like a beast. She was about to lunge forward, but pulled back and started wailing once she came into contact with the white smoke of the incense.

The white smoke wafting from the incense did not disperse, slowly swirling within the house. Soon, the inside of the house started to turn hazy.

Li Huowang’s eyes began to twitch, and he felt somewhat restless. He looked around to confirm that everything was normal before frowning slightly, pinching the back of his own neck, and taking two steps backward.

Burp~!

That was the first movement from the red-veiled woman. She burped before making a rustling sound from under that veil.

The onlookers were evidently taken aback, and the crowd began to disperse even more quickly than before. Those who were more timid used this opportunity to run home before the darkness of the night completely engulfed them.

On the other hand, when Li Zhi heard the burping sound, he glanced back and continued to sing while beating the drum. “Oh Immortal family~ I know you are coming~ You are mighty and powerful~ Please come quietly without a fuss~ This house is small, easy to crash around. It’s easy to handle when meeting gentlemen, but tongues will wag when meeting villains~ Oh~”

Chapter 61 - Second Deity

Dong~ Dong~ Dong Dong~

The sound of the beating drum and Li Zhi's voice never ceased within the small room.

“Come help me, touch the roof and stand firm on the rafter, hold the drum in the left and the whip in the right, Ai He Ai He Ai Yo~”

Dong Dong Dong!

Meanwhile, Li Huowang could clearly see that as Li Zhi continued chanting, the red veil on the second deity's head started to protrude, almost as if something was growing from inside. Peeking past the red veil, Li Huowang saw an animal's face appearing from behind it.

However, it was very bizarre; rather than looking like a proper animal face, her face was contorted, with only certain parts of it resembling an animal.

The face appeared to be swirling around like water, appearing and disappearing from time to time as it wriggled.

All of this combined with the white smoke made the scene in front of him quite bizarre.

Li Huowang rubbed his eyes, confirming that the Second Deity was moving according to the beat of the drum as it followed Li Zhi to the table that was covered in white smoke.

“Hitting once turns it upside down thrice~ Hitting again turns it upside down nine times~ Three to the front, four to the back, five to the left, six to the right, sixty-eight Aiyai~” Li Zhi continued chanting.

Covered by white smoke, Li Zhi and the Second Deity circled the woman.

Meanwhile, the woman started to grab at her neck as if she was in pain.

“Go! Go away!” screamed the woman, her voice trembling.

“Come help me~ I summon the Overlord of the Yellow Heavens~ I summon the Azure of the Yellow Heavens~ I summon the Black and Red of the Yellow Heavens~ Announce yourselves and show your power. Follow my chant and do your deed~”

Dong! Dong! Dong!

As Li Zhi continued chanting and beating his drum, Li Huowang suddenly started feeling irritated. At the same time, he started to hear some mysterious noises from their surroundings. However, when he tried to focus and listen to what they were saying, the voices had disappeared.

With all this, he could tell that regardless of what type of Immortal Li Zhi was summoning, it was definitely different from the ones that he had encountered before.

It looks like he can summon more than one type of Immortal. I wonder... how many can he summon?

Just as he was thinking about this, the sound of the drumbeat gradually quieted down.

Li Huowang furrowed his brows and swung his sleeves to clear out some of the white smoke before approaching the table.

But before he could even get close, a black shadow shot out from within the white smoke and straight toward his face.

Schwing!

Immediately, a sword that could cut through steel like mud was unsheathed, blocking two sets of teeth from biting off Li Huowang’s face. The sound of teeth grinding against metal was quite horrible.

The naked woman was displaying an unbelievable amount of strength as she tried to claw Li Huowang’s eyes off. The blood vessels in her red eyes almost popped as she emanated an intense killing intent and animosity toward him.

“Li Zhi! What the fuck are you doing?!” Li Huowang shouted toward the white smoke while barely keeping the woman in check.

Dong Dong Dong!

“Immortal~ Family~ Ai~” The sound of chanting started once again as a red veil flew out from within the white smoke and covered the naked woman’s face. The woman struggled to no avail as an animal’s face crawled out from the red veil and into the woman’s mouth.

Whoosh~

As Li Zhi continued chanting, the woman was pulled back into the white smoke by an invincible power. “Immortal Family~ Leave your caves and the mountain, but cover it up with yellow sand~ Ride the clouds if it's cloudy and ride the wind if it's sunny. Come and go as you wish, and leave nothing behind, not a single bit of smoke~”

Meanwhile, Li Huowang still had his guard up as he walked into the white smoke. Once inside the smoke, he saw that the crazy woman was currently lying listlessly on the table and dripping with sweat.

On the other hand, Li Zhi was circling the woman alongside the Second Deity, with the latter burping at regular intervals.

“Leave if you want to, the sovereign has given you the horse’s reins. Undo the restraints and ride the saddle, the Immortal Family will spur the horse forward~ Time to go back~ Ai Hai Yi Hou Hei~”

After the final verse, Li Zhi flipped the way he held the whip and beat the drum three times in a heavy manner.

When the drumbeat stopped, the white smoke around them slowly scattered and the irritating voices disappeared.

“Are you alright? I accidentally let my guard down. Fortunately, it could not escape with you on the outside,” Li Zhi said nonchalantly.

“Let your guard down? In that situation?” Li Huowang could never understand his logic.

“My reward for all this is only 50 coins! Do you know how much a bowl of noodles costs in a city? The ominous thing has been chased away and the victim is still alive. That is already the best I can do. If you want to blame something, then blame that lousy rule. Tch! What a lousy rule! To think that us Shamans are so poor,” complained Li Zhi.

Li Huowang controlled his desire to roll his eyes at him and walked to the table and began to carefully inspect the woman.

He could see that she had suffered mentally; her eyes filled with fear and her body was trembling uncontrollably. However, even after inspecting her for a while, Li Huowang could not see what the Immortals had taken away from her.

They don't want money, nor is there anything missing from her body. Maybe the compensation that the Immortals seek is something more abstract or on the mental level?

Li Huowang could only take a guess.

Just then, the family of the victim rushed in. After seeing that the woman was fine now, they hugged her and cried in happiness.

After a while, Li Zhi walked over and told them, “Your daughter-in-law was possessed by something ominous. I’ve just chased it away and her body is quite frail after going through that ordeal. I see that the Feng Shui in your house is not very good. I fear that the thing may come and find you again. I recommend that you bring in a Household Immortal.”

A Household Immortal?

That phrase attracted Li Huowang’s attention.

“Sure! We will follow your suggestions!” The old man who had almost been frightened to death didn’t dare to reject Li Zhi’s suggestion.

Li Zhi rummaged around in his bag and took out a small clay

deity. Then, he took out some red threads and wrapped them around the clay deity as he chanted something.

After finishing the chant, Li Zhi found a ladder and placed the clay deity on the steps.

“Offer a tribute to it on the first day of every month and light up some incense sticks on the fifteenth of every month. Remember this well. Now, the total payment for summoning the Immortals and inviting a Household Immortal comes to 100 coins. Pay up,” demanded Li Zhi.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang ignored Li Zhi who was demanding payment and climbed the ladder to take a closer look at the Household Immortal.

The clay sculpture was small and simple, almost as if it was sculpted lazily using one’s hands. But somehow, the eyes of the sculpture looked quite sharp. Staring at its eyes, Li Huowang felt as if he was staring at something alive.

Just then, Li Huowang saw the Household Immortal move ever so slightly.

What the? Am I seeing things?

“Don’t look...” A quiet voice came from behind him.

Li Huowang turned around and saw the Second Deity looking at him. Thankfully, her face was once again covered by the red veil.

Both of them were so close that the air exhaled by Li Huowang was causing the Second Deity’s red veil to shake.

Li Huowang’s mind raced.

Is this thing alive? Why is she not letting me stare at it?

Li Huowang shifted his gaze from the Second Deity and back down toward Li Zhi, who was counting the coins before whispering, “Is there something you want to say to me?”

Hearing Li Huowang’s question, the Second Deity used its long fingernails and pale hands to slowly pinch a side of her red veil, gradually lifting it up.

Li Huowang was holding onto the bronze bell tightly as he tried to swallow his saliva from the anticipation.

“Dear, let’s go. Time to find our old friend and see if he will lend us a bed to sleep on tonight,” said Li Zhi.

Hearing this, the Second Deity’s red veil fell back down as she quickly followed Li Zhi.

Chapter 62 - Night Visit

“Is anyone there?” Li Huowang shouted into the empty space, his voice echoing.

For a moment, he felt confused as he looked left and right; he was standing on a wooden bridge. Besides the bridge, the only thing around him was darkness.

Li Huowang took a deep breath as he walked forward, the wooden bridge creaking with his every step.

Li Huowang didn’t know how long he had been walking, when he sensed movement in front of him, causing him to straighten up and quickly approach it. However, when he closed in and saw what it was, he stopped dead in his tracks.

It was the Household Immortal that Li Zhi had brought out earlier.

However, the originally palm-sized clay sculpture was now three times the size of Li Huowang’s body. With the sound of grinding stone, the sculpture slowly turned its head, staring at Li Huowang with its completely white eyes.

“This is not some wooden bridge! I’m standing on the steps of the stairs to that possessed victim’s house!” Li Huowang immediately realized.

At that moment, a creaking sound echoed loudly as the red thread on the Household Immortal burst open. Countless clay hands emerged from the sculpture’s body, reaching out toward Li Huowang.

Just as Li Huowang was about to run away, a giant red veil covered him.

“Don’t look,” a shrill, female voice sounded.

“Hoo!” Li Huowang woke up and looked around, sweating all

over. Upon seeing neither the red veil nor the Household Immortal around him, he realized that it had all just been a dream.

He glanced down and saw the sleeping Bai Lingmiao before pulling up the sheets to cover her shoulders. Then, he rolled out of the bed and stared out the window.

The moon was still high in the sky. It seemed that he hadn't slept for long.

Staring at the black roof tiles, he recalled what had happened yesterday.

The red-veiled Second Deity was just about to tell him something but was cut off by Li Zhi.

What was she trying to say? Why didn't she want me to stare at the Household Immortal?

Li Huowang seriously considered the question.

The Second Deity didn't talk, didn't eat, nor did she drink. Compared to the eccentric Li Zhi, she was much more mysterious. For someone like her to speak to him directly, there must be a special meaning.

What was she trying to tell me in secret, and why didn't she let Li Zhi know? Is Li Zhi trying to harm me?

He actually wanted to ask Li Zhi to try and perform the ritual on him, but now that something like this had happened, Li Huowang felt hesitant. To begin with, they were not really close.

At the same time, he could technically find other Shamans and ask for their help, but they might not be trustworthy either. He would rather seek help from someone he knew.

I should try and get a chance to ask the Second Deity what she wanted to say in secret.

Li Huowang decided.

Staring at the night sky, Li Huowang put on his bloodied Daoist robe and walked out. The rooms offered to them by Li Zhi's friend were located quite close to each other, so Li Zhi's room was nearby.

Within the dark house, Li Huowang silently approached Li Zhi's room.

Creak~

The door slowly opened, and a small glowing stone was thrown into the room. The door of the room had an upside-down character of the word 'prosperity' hanging on it.

The faint glow illuminated the room as Li Huowang saw Li Zhi snoring soundly on the bed with his limbs splayed open, looking like a starfish. Meanwhile, the red-veiled Second Deity was standing still beside the bed, almost as if she was just a piece of clothing.

Hearing the soft sound of the door, the Second Deity silently turned her head toward Li Huowang; it was as if she was waiting for something.

This scene was downright frightening to witness in the middle of the night.

Do I really want to talk to this thing in the middle of the night, all by myself?

Li Huowang hesitated.

But thinking back to yesterday, Li Huowang steeled his heart and silently gestured for her to come out.

Meanwhile, the Second Deity actually responded and slowly floated toward the door.

Both she and Li Huowang slowly walked out before finally arriving in the courtyard.

The moon in the night sky cast a soft glow on their surroundings, soothing Li Huowang's tense and racing heart.

At that moment, the red-veiled Second Deity slowly approached him, stopping just inches from him; they were so close that Li Huowang's voice even caused the Second Deity's red veil to sway gently.

"What were you trying to say yesterday?" asked Li Huowang.

In response, the Second Deity used her long and black

fingernails to pierce one of her fingers, much to Li Huowang's surprise.

Then, using her own blood, she gently wrote something on her red veil.

Careful. You. Are. The. Strayed. Immortal.

“What are you guys doing?!”

At that moment, someone shouted, causing the Second Deity to instantly absorb the black blood on the red veil.

Just as Li Huowang had taken two steps back, Li Zhi ran up to them with a murderous look on his face before hugging the Second Deity's waist. “What are you trying to do? This is my wife!”

Li Huowang could also hear some commotion from the other rooms of the house and quickly explained himself, “Nothing! I was just curious about her face.”

However, Li Zhi did not let his guard down, staring Li Huowang up and down. Then, as if to demonstrate his dominance, Li Zhi lifted a part of the Second Deity's red veil and kissed her intensely.

The red veil fluttered in the night wind, and the weak moonlight allowed Li Huowang to catch a glimpse of something.

Those are... scales?

Li Zhi stopped as quickly as he started, licking the yellowish-green liquid around his mouth.

“Remember this! She is my wife! You damned bachelor, just look at yourself! You are a Daoist; that's why you are single! Go find your own girl!” shouted Li Zhi.

Then, without waiting for Li Huowang's explanation, Li Zhi held the Second Deity's pale hands and walked back into the house.

Scales. Yellowish-green goo. Those two scenes flashed through Li Huowang's restless mind.

What the fuck is the Second Deity?

When Li Huowang returned to his room, still feeling confused,

he saw that Bai Lingmiao had woken up from the commotion and was sitting on the bed while rubbing her eyes.

“What’s wrong? Did something happen?” asked Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang blew out the fire from the oil lamp and said, “Nothing; go back to bed.”

I should be careful? I’m the Strayed Immortal?

Back on the bed, Li Huowang silently pondered what the Second Deity had been trying to convey.

What is a Strayed Immortal? Why did she ask me to be careful?

When Li Huowang woke up the next day, he entered the hall and saw Li Zhi eating congee. At the same time, his right hand held onto the Second Deity tightly as he spoke to his friend.

“Old friend, thank you for your care. Why not invite a Household Immortal? I will even make it cheaper for you. How does 30 coins sound?” suggested Li Zhi.

However, as soon as Li Zhi saw Li Huowang, he stopped talking, and his face no longer looked as friendly as before.

Chapter 63 - Red Veil

Seeing the change in Li Zhi's expression, Li Huowang walked over. "Brother Li Zhi, I can explain about yesterday's situation."

Li Zhi raised his hand and stopped Li Huowang from speaking further before speaking in an irritated voice, "No need to explain. I didn't do anything to you anyway, so just let it be."

Having said that, Li Zhi stood up and grabbed his wife, heading straight out of the house.

Seeing their backs, Li Huowang remained silent.

The Second Deity said that I'm the Strayed Immortal. It seems that whatever that is, it is something special. She even told me not to stare at the Household Immortal, almost as if she knew what I was doing. I must pry that information from her mouth.

He finally had some clues, and so Li Huowang was reluctant to give it up.

"Senior Li, what's wrong? Did you have a fight with the Shaman?" asked Puppy.

Hearing what Puppy said, Li Huowang shook his head.

"Nothing, it's just something personal. Go and eat your breakfast. We finally have the chance to sleep on a bed, so rest well these few days. Once we get out of this village, we will only be able to sleep on the roadside."

For the next few days, Li Huowang didn't go and find Li Zhi, nor did he check what the other was doing. He knew that Li Zhi should still be angry about the last time, and so it was not wise to seek out the Second Deity. He decided to bide his time.

Li Huowang had a feeling that this was the best course of action, but while he was waiting, a troublesome situation appeared.

Bai Lingmiao became sick.

It was troublesome indeed. The sickness was both serious and insignificant at the same time. It was serious because this was a poor village where no illness should be taken lightly; it could very well take her life. But it was also insignificant because with the pills that Li Huowang refined in Zephyr Temple, he was more or less on the level of a village doctor. He might not be able to cure the more serious illnesses, but something as light as this was easy to handle.

Li Huowang held Bai Lingmiao's feverish head in his lap and carefully fed her a red pill.

"Senior Li, am I dying? I don't want to die..." The frail Bai Lingmiao held onto Li Huowang's sleeves.

"Don't think of something stupid. It's just a cold. I just gave you medicine, so you should get some sleep. Once you sweat off the fever, you should be healthy once again," said Li Huowang.

Thud thud thud.

At that moment, a knock on the door cut their conversation short. Li Huowang looked up and saw that it was Li Zhi and his wife.

"How is it? I've heard from my friend that your sister is sick. Do you need help?" asked Li Zhi.

"No need, but thanks." Li Huowang carefully covered Bai Lingmiao with a blanket and walked out.

"No need to be so formal with me. You gave me some noodles before, so it's natural for me to help you out. The Immortals from the Bai family are very good at healing people from illnesses. As long as you don't try to steal my wife, we can still be friends and I will help you," said Li Zhi, making it seem like the issue had resolved itself.

"It's just a cold, so there's no need for you to do your thing. Also I'm afraid that we might not be able to 'pay' them," said Li Huowang.

Li Zhi stiffened before chuckling. “Yeah, you are right. Looks like I’m being too meddlesome. The Immortals should not be summoned so willy-nilly. Also, you are quite a weird Daoist. Not only can you not deal with evil beings, you can’t even cure someone from their illness.”

Hearing this, Li Huowang re-evaluated the man grinning in front of him.

“I am already curing her. She already ate the pill, so all we need to do is wait,” explained Li Huowang.

Li Zhi shook his head. “That won’t do. I’ve seen another Daoist burn a yellow talisman for their patient. At that point, no matter what kind of illness they had, the patient would be cured in an instant.”

Li Huowang smiled lightly and felt the situation was just right for his question. “Li Zhi, can we talk? It’s about your wife. She’s different from the other people. Are the Second Deities of the other Shamans the same?”

Li Zhi’s smile froze. “Li Huowang, please don’t ask such things. You are a cultivator, are you not? You also have some secrets that you would never share with me. Tell me, have I ever asked you where all these malformed people come from? I didn’t, right?”

Having said that, Li Zhi patted Li Huowang’s red Daoist robe and left with his wife.

Previously, Li Huowang had seen how talkative Li Zhi was, and how he even dared to curse the Immortal families; knowing all this, he could sense that Li Zhi was currently putting on a facade.

Li Huowang pondered on it for a while before returning back to the room to take care of Bai Lingmiao.

That night, he was awoken by the sound of someone tapping on the window in the middle of the night.

Creak~

The wooden window opened and he could see a pair of red

shoes hanging outside, gently dangling in the air.

Li Huowang recognized them—they belonged to the Second Deity. She had come to see him.

Li Huowang thought about it for a moment before silently whispering, “I will meet you in the forest in front of the village.”

Seeing the pair of red shoes slowly disappear, Li Huowang took a deep breath and got out of the bed to dress up.

With the faint moonlight guiding the way, Li Huowang quickly entered the dark forest and saw the Second Deity standing still below one of the trees.

Li Huowang carefully looked around but didn’t find Li Zhi anywhere. “Second Deity, what did you need to tell me?”

The Second Deity once again used one of her nails to pierce her own fingers and used her own blood to write on the red veil.

However, the distance was too far, making it so that Li Huowang couldn’t read it properly. He slowly approached the red veil.

“You...Have...To...Be...Careful...” Li Huowang read the words out loud.

Halfway through reading him it, the Second Deity suddenly raised her hands and her black fingernails stabbed straight into Li Huowang’s neck.

Bam!

Li Huowang reacted quite quickly as he grabbed the red veil and kicked the Second Deity in her stomach.

Even though he was out of danger for now, there were four bloody holes on both sides of his neck.

He fished out some Blood Nourishing Pills and ate them as he stared at the Second Deity.

It had never occurred to him that the Second Deity was going to try and kill him! He had always thought that she was trying to inform him of some danger.

However, when he saw the face of the Second Deity, he froze.

Her face was distorted, covered with green snake scales, porcupine quills, fox ears, and many other animal organs.

But amidst all that, there was still a small part of a human face, and looking at it, he could tell that it was none other than Li Zhi!

No, to be more accurate, it was a female version of Li Zhi, with some makeup powder on the remaining human skin.

At this moment, one half of her mouth had been transformed into a beast maw, but the remaining human lips even had some red lipstick.

Seeing that Li Huowang had seen her real face, ‘Li Zhi’ covered her mouth and laughed like a fox.

“To think that the Strayed One was so inexperienced even after probing for half a day. You must have been quite lucky to have escaped capture for so long.”

“To think that the Strayed One was so inexperienced even after probing for half a day. You must have been quite lucky to have escaped capture for so long.”

Two voices rang out at the same time, one from the front and another one from within the dark forest.

Dong! Dong! Dong!

At the same time, the sound of the drum rang out from somewhere in the forest.

“Summon~ The~ Gods~”

Translator's Thoughts

Li Zhi and his "wife" @格子的乱七八糟



Chapter 64 - Drum

“Summon~ The~ Gods~”

Li Zhi’s clear voice rang out from within the forest, and the peculiar Second Deity followed the rhythm of his singing and drumming as she began to tremble.

“The sun set on the Western mountain, and the skies went dark~ Every house closed its doors while the magpies and crows flew back to their trees~ The sparrows flew to the rafters, and the roads—AAH!” Li Zhi’s chanting was abruptly interrupted, causing the Second Deity to stop in its tracks. She raised her head in shock, only to see Li Huowang smiling.

“You may have been testing me, but that doesn’t mean I was not doing the same with you. I’ve already been deceived by the monks before and have learned my lesson. There’s no way I wouldn’t prepare some defenses for myself,” said Li Huowang.

Just as he finished speaking, footsteps could be heard. Puppy, Simpleton, and the others were approaching him while carrying weapons and holding a bloodied Li Zhi hostage. Xiaoman currently held onto his drum.

Li Huowang took the drum from Xiaoman and threw it onto the ground before using his sword to pierce it right in front of Li Zhi’s face.

Pu Chi!

The taut drum was destroyed easily.

“Looks like this is something extremely important to you. Regardless of which Immortal family you follow, you can’t summon them without this drum, right?” asked Li Huowang.

After probing Li Zhi these few days, Li Huowang had realized that no matter how strong the Immortal families were, a Shaman

was still a mortal. Once you managed to subdue them, everything would be fine.

Seeing the blades around him, Li Zhi, who had been beaten by a club, displayed no fear or hatred on his face. He just laughed bitterly, “Unfortunately, that is not something for you to decide.”

Jiang!

A sharp sword blade was pressed against Li Zhi’s neck. “You still want to lie? Tell the Second Deity to stop resisting!”

Li Huowang was staring at the Second Deity with a distorted face. Li Zhi may have been subdued, but that human-beast hybrid was still a problem.

“Hehe. Why do you think she would listen to me?” asked Li Zhi as he let out an eerie chuckle.

Li Zhi had barely spoken when the Second Deity let out a bestial roar from her disfigured mouth before charging into the forest on all fours.

The Second Deity had escaped, leaving Li Zhi all alone.

“Li Huowang, I’m not lying to you. We Shamans are not the same as you. Sometimes, there are things that are beyond our control.” Li Zhi’s face was pale as he tried to explain.

“Do you think, perhaps, that I will let you go out of kindness after just listening to you?” Li Huowang’s sword inched closer.

“Hehe, that’s impossible.” Facing certain death, Li Zhi looked surprisingly calm.

Upon seeing his hostage be so calm, Li Huowang pondered for a moment before asking. “What exactly is a Strayed Immortal? Why are you calling me that?”

This was what he cared about the most. There must be a reason why others were trying to catch him; after all, he had been referred to as such twice now.

Li Zhi sighed. “It looks like you really don’t know. I was fooled by your bloody robes.”

“What is a Strayed Immortal?!” Li Huowang said forcefully, his sword drawing a thin line of blood from Li Zhi’s neck.

Seeing how agitated Li Huowang was, Li Zhi chuckled. “Let me give you a tip. You are quite smart, but you can’t win against the Immortals.”

Immediately after saying that, Li Zhi’s eyebrows started growing longer as porcupine quills started growing from his eyelids. At the same time, his nose extended forward and his entire face morphed to match the Second Deity.

Li Huowang swung his sword toward Li Zhi’s neck, but instead of seeing a spray of blood, he only saw a bunch of hard snake scales underneath Li Zhi’s skin.

“Kill him!!” shouted Li Huowang.

Hearing Li Huowang’s command, Simpleton swung his massive wooden club with such force that the wind was ripped apart as it smashed into Li Zhi’s head.

Blood and flesh sprayed everywhere as the half-transformed Li Zhi fell onto the ground, his head smashed into pieces.

Dong Dong Dong!

However, at that moment, the sound of rapid drum beats rang out from within the dark forest, attracting everyone’s attention.

This situation caused Li Huowang to be caught with his pants down as he looked at the broken drum on the ground.

A drum? How could he still play a drum?! I just destroyed it!

“Summon~ The~ Gods~”

Amidst the sound of the drum beats, Li Zhi started chanting, while a figure stumbled out from within the forest—it was the Second Deity, no, it was Li Zhi.

As the original Li Zhi transformed into the Second Deity, the Second Deity that had previously left the area transformed into Li Zhi—the two of them had easily swapped places.

Dong Dong Dong!

The sound of drum beats continued to ring out, causing everyone to look downward and see the source of the sound. All of them gasped in terror.

Li Zhi's clothes were torn apart. At the same time, one of his hands had torn away a portion of his abdomen and stretched it out while his other hand was beating it with the whip.

Li Zhi had used his own skin and flesh to make a drum to play after his previous one was destroyed!

Dong Dong Dong!

“The sun set on the Western mountain, and the skies went dark~ Every house closed its doors while the magpies and crows flew back to their trees~ The sparrows flew to the rafters, and the roads to the houses were closed~ Ten houses with nine locked~ Only one remains unlocked~ Offer incense, beat the drums, summon the Immortals~” chanted Li Zhi, while beating the “drum”.

Immediately after the chant, despite her smashed head, the fallen Second Deity stood up on her feet.

The sound of flesh being sliced could be heard as Li Huowang and all the people by his side pierced their weapons into the Second Deity.

Li Huowang was certain that he had pierced her heart, but the Second Deity didn't budge.

“First comes red and then comes yellow~ I Invite the the wind and the clouds bringing the Sad King~ Red is the general while yellow is the vanguard~ The wind and clouds standby while the Sad King runs the sect ai~”

As Li Zhi continued chanting, an incredible amount of strength started coursing through the Second Deity as she twisted her body, causing everyone to lose their grip on their weapons.

Shit! I need to stop Li Zhi from playing the drum! He's the linchpin!

The bronze bell appeared in Li Huowang's right hand.

Ding Ding Ding~! Dong Dong Dong~!

As he started to ring the bell, two different sounds reverberated in the forest, clashing with each other.

At the same time, the edges of everything around them converged, taking the form of a Wandering God.

A dizzy Li Huowang shook his head and commanded the Wandering God, causing the latter to split into four before charging straight toward Li Zhi.

Meanwhile, Li Zhi ignored his bloody body and torn skin, chanting even more fervently. His veins started bulging as he started chanting twice as fast.

“The feast had been prepared~ It will be delicious~ Everything is delicious~ Just tell me what you want~ I will prepare everything~ You want beef and mutton~ You want chicken, ducks, or geese~ Even if you want the flesh of the Strayed Ones~ I will get it all for you ai!~”

At that moment, Li Huowang felt a sudden stabbing pain from his neck—somehow the Second Deity had teleported behind him and was biting into his shoulder with her razor sharp teeth.

Chapter 65 - Let'S See How You Beat The Drum Now!

Seeing Li Huowang be injured, the Wandering God instantly flew back, crashing into the body of the Second Deity.

The Wandering Gods had always been incorporeal beings, but this time it had met its match. When it crashed into the Second Deity, instead of entering its body, it was bounced off.

“AAAAA!!!” A savage roar was heard as a thick club swung down, smashing into the Second Deity’s head, just inches away from Li Huowang’s face.

The sound of flesh being torn apart and blood splattering was heard as the Second Deity was launched away, taking with her a big portion of Li Huowang’s torn-off shoulder.

The intense pain almost caused Li Huowang to faint, but he couldn’t care less. He just took out two bottles and stuffed them into Puppy’s hands. “One of these is poison, while the other is a paralyzing agent. Smear both of them on your swords and help me trap that damned thing.”

They couldn’t afford to be attacked from both sides, so they had to ensure that the battlefield continued to remain split.

Seeing the Second Deity, which had just lost half of its head, struggling to get up, Puppy clenched his teeth, his legs almost giving in. “Senior Li, are you sure these will work on *that* thing?”

Meanwhile, Xiaoman didn’t say anything; she just grabbed the two bottles out of his hands. Then, she clenched her teeth and charged with her blade. “Whether it works or not, it doesn’t matter!

The first thing we need to do is to use it!”

Li Huowang knew that the chances of those poisons working were slim, but he couldn’t care less—if he couldn’t defeat Li Zhi, the latter would summon more and more Immortals.

Meanwhile, three Wandering Gods circled around Li Zhi. But every time they tried to get close, something invisible blocked them.

On the other hand, Li Zhi continued to chant while beating the ‘drum’ made from his own skin even as he saw Li Huowang approaching him. “Don’t forget to bring the three treasures when you come. Yes, the three treasures~ The Immortal Shackles, the Immortal Binding Rope, and the Spirit Vessel~ Throw the three treasures to the disciple~ Kick him if you can’t shackle him~ Stomp him if you can’t tie him ai~”

Just as Li Zhi finished his chant, he made a throwing motion with the hand holding the whip.

Even though nothing could be seen, the Wandering Gods sensed something. Immediately, one of them flew back, using its body to protect Li Huowang.

Moments later, a crisp explosion rang out as the Wandering God exploded into the squiggly lines that composed it.

At the same time, Li Zhi made another throwing gesture. If Li Huowang was hit by the attack, then he would suffer the same fate as the Wandering God.

But at the last moment, Li Huowang reached behind him and used the sacred text to block it.

Clang!

The impact caused Li Huowang’s arms to become numb.

I blocked it! Amazing! The sacred text is so hard!

Just like that, Li Huowang clenched his teeth as he quickly approached Li Zhi, holding a bell and a ‘shield’ in front of him.

At the same time, a shake of his hand caused the number of

Wandering Gods around him to double.

Li Huowang gave them a command and the Wandering Gods surrounded Li Zhi, attacking him from different directions.

While Li Zhi's situation was bad, Li Huowang was not in a good spot either.

Due to there being too many Wandering Gods, he felt an overwhelming sense of nausea and an urge to vomit.

Now, it was just a battle of attrition.

Amidst the chaos, Li Huowang realized that in his current state, he could see the Immortals that were helping Li Zhi block the attacks from the Wandering Gods.

The Immortals all had different faces, shapes, and sizes, while their bodies were translucent, almost looking like white smoke. There were humanoids, beasts, and something in between. At the same time, their appearances gradually changed as well. All the organs that made up their bodies trembled ever so slightly to the beat of Li Zhi's drum.

Seeing this scene allowed Li Huowang to instantly understand.

There were many Immortals all around them, but all their bodies were translucent and incorporeal. If they wanted to interact with the physical realm, then they had to do so through a special rhythm, and the key to achieving this was the beat of that drum.

However, as he got closer, the sound of his bronze bell started to overpower the sound of the drum beats, allowing the Wandering Gods to find a crack in their defenses.

Upon noticing that the situation was not in his favor, Li Zhi's expression froze for a moment before he opened his mouth so wide that the sides of his mouth split open before his red tongue slithered out like a snake's tongue.

At the same time, his voice changed into one filled with sadness. "Smoke~ Clouds~ Ai~~~"

The moment he said those words, a strong gust of wind blew

around them, allowing the sound of the drum beats to overpower the sound of the bell.

At the same time, Li Huowang heard a bizarre voice carried by the wind; it was as if a woman was softly whispering something to him.

Everything around him started shifting.

Gradually, the sound of the wind, drum beats, and the bell were all replaced by other sounds.

Soon, the sounds of people's conversations, a Rubik's Cube being turned, the sound of leather shoes, and the sounds of mobile phones started to fill his surroundings.

By the time he finally realized what was happening, he noticed that he was already wearing a blue-and-white hospital gown and was being helped by someone as they walked around within the courtyard of the mental hospital.

This is all fake! It's just an illusion!

Li Huowang raised his head and stared at his surroundings. Immediately, he managed to see Old Liu being helped by his own daughter toward the exit of the mental hospital.

Li Huowang could see that the distance between him and Old Liu was roughly the same as the distance between him and Li Zhi.

"Huowang, what's wrong?" asked the person helping him.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang suddenly chuckled coldly, his expression turning fierce. Out of all possible methods Li Zhi could have tried to use to defeat Li Huowang, he chose to use the method that was the least effective—illusions.

He shook off the hand that was holding him and stepped onto the courtyard's stairs with his right foot before running straight toward Old Liu.

Slowly, the sound of people conversing with each other entered Li Huowang's ears.

"Doctor, thank you so much. If it wasn't for you, my father

would not have recovered so soon,” said a female voice.

“Hoho. It’s nothing much. This is the responsibility of us doctors. Mr. Liu, don’t forget to take your medications on time when you are home,” advised the doctor

“Alright,” replied Old Liu.

“LI ZHI!” Li Huowang’s shout caused everyone, including Old Liu who had already changed into a nice-looking shirt and was ready to be discharged, to turn their heads to look at him.

Bam!

Li Huowang’s fist landed squarely on Old Liu’s cheek, causing a denture to fly into the air alongside blood.

In the very next second, the illusion was broken and Li Huowang saw Li Zhi’s head being tilted upward due to his punch, giving him a nosebleed.

Meanwhile, the Immortals around them wanted to stop Li Huowang, but they were all intercepted by the six Wandering Gods.

“Let’s see how you beat the drum now!” said Li Huowang as he unsheathed his sword and stabbed it forcefully.

Schwing!

The sharp sword easily managed to chop Li Zhi’s fingers off. Then, he stabbed the sword into the ‘drum’ he had made with his own body, piercing all the way into his abdomen.

With just a single stab, Li Huowang managed to stop the drum beats, and so he also stopped ringing the bronze bell. This caused both the Wandering Gods and the Immortals around them to turn completely silent.

Li Zhi stared at his bleeding abdomen with shock on his face before taking two steps back and slumping onto the ground.

On the other hand, Li Huowang was panting as he stared at the dying Li Zhi. He turned around and saw that the others who were fighting against the Second Deity had also stopped.

“Hoho, Daoist Li, I’m sorry...” said Li Zhi in a weak voice.

Chapter 66 - A Virtuous Person

Upon hearing those words, Li Huowang held his burning shoulder and looked at Li Zhi, who lay on the ground.

Is he... apologizing to... me?

“You are on the verge of death. No need to fake it and try to gain my mercy. After all, it was you, not someone else, who wanted to kill me, right?” asked Li Huowang.

Li Zhi’s face slowly turned pale as he smiled bitterly. “I had no choice. I really didn’t. They forced me to do it. You can run, but I can’t do that. The moment I became a Shaman, it was destined that I would never be able to run away anymore,” said Li Zhi weakly.

Crimson blood continued to flow from Li Zhi’s body, dyeing the ground a deep shade of red. His time was almost up.

Li Huowang stood there with a complicated expression. He wasn’t even sure if the Li Zhi in front of him was real or fake.

“This... This ain’t too bad. At the very least, my mind is finally quiet now,” Li Zhi lamented.

“Just now, did the Immortals force you to do everything?” Li Huowang asked.

“Hoho... It doesn’t matter if you don’t want to believe me. Ever since I became a Shaman, I have been nothing more than their puppet. I tried to fight back, but it was useless. A human could never hope to win against Immortals,” explained Li Zhi.

At this point, Li Huowang had stopped caring about whether it was the truth or not. He walked toward Li Zhi and tried to pull his sword out from Li Zhi’s abdomen. But no matter how hard he pulled, it didn’t come out. He then saw that Li Zhi was tightly

holding onto the sword with his hands. Some of his fingers were already sliced off.

Li Zhi flashed a bloody smile. “Daoist Li, if you happen to meet someone like me in the future, do be careful. You are a Strayed One and that quite literally makes you a walking treasure in the eyes of others. The people who don’t have bad intentions toward you will be few and far between.”

Hearing him say that, Li Huowang’s heart skipped a beat. He had never thought that he would get such information from Li Zhi, but now the man himself was telling him all of it.

Looking at the dying man in front of him, Li Huowang spoke slowly, “What exactly is a Strayed One?”

“Strayed Ones. In the beginning, everything starts to take form, and when there is form, there is essence, and yet, it is not complete. That is a Strayed One; one who has both form and essence, but at the same time is still incomplete,” explained Li Zhi.

“What?” Li Huowang did not understand what he was trying to say.

“This was all that the Immortals told me. I am just an uneducated man, and so I do not understand what it means either. But this was the first time I had seen them this happy, and that’s why I thought... I thought that it must be something good.”

Li Huowang raised his hands, staring at them in shock.

When he thought back to what happened with the monks at the Righteous Monastery, he was certain that Li Zhi was not lying to him.

Am I something precious in this world? But I’m no different from the others except for my hallucinations. What does it mean for me to be a Strayed One?

Li Huowang silently memorized what Li Zhi had said. He had a feeling that this was something important.

At the same time, he remembered his dead Master, Dan Yangzi.

Li Huowang realized that there had always been hints ever since the beginning. Dan Yangzi, that cheapskate, would never simply find someone random to be used as a guiding drug ingredient.

Once he realized that the cultivation methods of the others he had met were just as bizarre as Dan Yangzi's, he could deduce that they too would likely need something akin to a guiding drug ingredient on their path of cultivation.

Li Zhi's voice slowly became softer and softer, his eyes starting to glaze over.

"Daoist Li, can you do something for me?" asked Li Zhi.

Li Huowang turned to the dying Li Zhi. "What is it?"

"The 22nd day of the next month happens to be the Qingming Festival. On that day, can you burn some extra money for me? I've been poor throughout my life, but I don't want to die and become a poor ghost," said Li Zhi.

After saying that, Li Zhi smiled as blood flowed out of his mouth.

"If I am to be reincarnated, then I would rather be livestock than become a Shaman. It's way too suffocating and... tiring. It's even worse than becoming the manager of a brothel. Daoist Li, whatever you do, don't ever become a Shaman. This is not something that a normal person should do. It's way too hard and suffocating." Tears streamed down Li Zhi's eyes.

Li Huowang looked at him with complicated feelings. But then, everything that Li Zhi had done before flashed through his mind. Li Huowang might think of himself as virtuous, but in the end, it was not something that he could define himself with.

Li Zhi was just someone unlucky who was controlled by the Immortals.

This cruel world had taught him that those who used supernatural powers might not just be skilled people like Abbot Xin

Hui or Dan Yangzi—they could also be people who were just pawns of supernatural beings.

“Thank you for your reminder, Li Zhi,” thanked Li Huowang.

Li Zhi was on his last breaths. He took one last deep breath as he said his final words, “One more thing. You asked before that you needed help with repelling something evil, right? Go south. Find the nuns in black. They can be... counted... as... nice... people. They... should... be able to help you.”

Li Huowang had never thought that he would be able to get hold of such precious information today. This was closely related to the matter of getting rid of Dan Yangzi, who was somehow possessing him. He quickly asked, “Nuns? What is the name of their sect? Are they specialized in repelling or exorcizing evil beings?”

Li Huowang waited for Li Zhi’s reply, but to no avail.

Soon, he realized that the light in Li Zhi’s eyes was gone. He was dead.

Staring at Li Zhi, who had died with his eyes wide open, Li Huowang felt bitter in his heart.

If Li Zhi hadn’t been a Shaman, they could’ve become friends.

Just then, the rest of them came over. “Senior Li, once the drum beats stopped, that weird thing stopped moving as well. Oh? What happened to him?”

Puppy and the rest looked quite disheveled after fighting the Second Deity for so long. However, at the very least, they had only suffered minor injuries.

Li Huowang sighed as he pulled his sword out from Li Zhi’s body and returned it to the sheath. “Find a place and dig a grave for both of them. We don’t want the animals to nibble on their flesh.”

“Why should we do that, Senior? He’s just a cold-blooded murderer!” Puppy did not understand Li Huowang’s intention.

Li Huowang did not explain, merely gently closing Li Zhi’s eyes.

Li Huowang did not erect a gravestone for Li Zhi. After all, no one would be coming to pay their respects to him anyway. At the same time, if he did erect gravestones for them, there might be even more trouble down the road.

The roosters were already crowing by the time they dealt with the aftermath and returned to the village.

They had just arrived at the door when they saw a thin figure by the well. It was Bai Lingmiao. Previously confined to the bed due to her fatigue, she was now fetching water from the well.

“Senior Li! Where did you go? Why are all of you injured? Is everything ok?” Bai Lingmiao asked anxiously.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang frowned as he grabbed the bucket from her hand and threw it aside, “You have a fever. Why are you out here fetching water from the well? Quickly go back to your room and rest.”

“I’m fine. Here, feel my forehead,” said Bai Lingmiao.

When Li Huowang touched her forehead and realized her fever had dissipated, he was surprised. “The pills I made weren’t that potent. Are you sure you are alright?”

Bai Lingmiao’s looked stunned for a moment before she hurriedly smiled. “Yes, I am fine. My illness is gone. Isn’t that good news?”

“You should still rest even if you are healed. You’ve just recovered from the illness, so don’t touch the water unless necessary!” said Li Huowang.

Chapter 67 - Parcel

Regardless of what had happened, with Li Zhi's death, everything came to an end.

Even though it had been quite dangerous, after his near-death experience, Li Huowang had obtained many benefits.

First, Li Huowang now knew why the monks at Righteous Monastery had tried to trick him.

Strayed Ones. In the beginning, everything starts to take form, and when there is form, there is essence, and yet, it is not complete. That is a Strayed One; one who has both form and essence, but at the same time is still incomplete.

This was what Li Zhi told him right before his death. In this world, he was a precious Strayed One.

Li Huowang had never really understood ancient literature, but he still tried to recall whatever he had learned in school, getting a rough understanding of it.

Based on his understanding, there was a certain primordial substance in the beginning, and that substance formed everything. However, Strayed Ones were formed even before this primordial substance was formed.

He deciphered what Li Zhi's words meant, but instead of getting any answers to his questions, he was left with even more questions.

I'm a human. A mortal with blood and flesh. How could I be something that was formed before 'the substance' but still be incomplete? This makes no sense.

This was something so profound, and yet, it didn't sound like it applied to him.

If something wasn't even complete, then how could it move or

think?

Facing this question, Li Huowang failed to comprehend it.

However, no matter what he thought, the actions of the cultivators of this world, including Dan Yangzi, Abbot Xin Hui, and even Li Zhi, told him a completely different story.

Ignoring what it means to be a Strayed One, I am a living treasure, just like Tang Sanzang. Everybody wants a piece of me, per se.

Li Huowang thought about it. At this point, he had lost any and all trust he had for the people of this world—anything said by anyone could be fake.

They could be trying to lie to him.

This made him doubt everyone as if everyone who approached him had some sort of agenda.

Even so, he still needed to survive here. He had no choice but to face his problems one by one.

For now, Li Huowang could tell that Li Zhi hadn't been lying to him. Dying men had better things to do than spout lies, so what Li Zhi had said was most likely the truth.

Li Zhi had even requested Li Huowang to burn some money for him during the Qingming Festival. He couldn't have gained anything from lying to Li Huowang about this.

“Hey! Wait up!”

Hearing this shout, Li Huowang and the rest turned their heads and saw an honest looking man catching up to them while holding something in his hands.

“Where are all of you going? Where is my Shaman friend? The one who was with you guys.” asked the man, panting.

Li Huowang could never tell him how Li Zhi had died. Thus, he lied, “Li Zhi had something to do and left with his wife.”

That man didn't even doubt his words and just passed a heavy parcel to Li Huowang. “Oh. If that's the case, these are his belongings that were in his room. He probably forgot to take them.

Please send them to him for me. Thanks.”

Looking at the color of the parcel, Li Huowang recalled that it was the item that Li Zhi was carrying on his back when they first met.

After entrusting the parcel to Li Zhi, the man left without even waiting for Li Huowang to say anything.

Back on the road filled with many potholes, Li Huowang checked the items in the parcel. After all, the items would never be returned to Li Zhi, since he had died.

Just then, a sudden thought flashed through his head.

Wait, maybe there's something precious in Li Zhi's parcel?

Li Huowang didn't even hesitate before opening it.

However, there was nothing new inside it; everything was old.

The first thing he saw was a piece of white drum leather; most likely a method to repair the drum used to summon the Immortals.

Li Huowang picked it up and threw it to the ground. He had a bad impression of the Shamans and felt that this item was a source of bad luck.

“Hey, don't throw it away. It's still good leather. Maybe we can use it in the future.” Bai Lingmiao picked it up with both her hands.

“What can we do with it? Patching stuff up?” Li Huowang realized that Bai Lingmiao was much more pragmatic than him.

“We don't have any money left. We should save as much as we can,” said Bai Lingmiao.

Seeing Bai Lingmiao carefully placing the leather in the donkey cart, Li Huowang shook his head and continued to rummage through Li Zhi's belongings as he picked up a string of coins. The coins were all new and shiny. It seemed that Li Zhi had been saving it up.

Shaking the coins in his hand, Li Huowang sighed.

He didn't know what Li Zhi had been saving for, but it was clear that he had put in a lot of effort.

“Use it to buy some food.” Li Huowang threw the string of coins into Bai Lingmiao’s arms.

Seeing this, a smile instantly blossomed on the face of Bai Lingmiao who had been worried about their finances.

But her happiness didn’t last long. “Senior Li, we still need to find a way to earn money. These coins won’t last us long.”

“An income stream? What are you thinking of doing? Becoming performers like Lu Zhuangyuan?” Li Huowang asked as he continued to rummage through Li Zhi items.

Bai Lingmiao shook her head vigorously. “My father would kill me if he knew that I had become a performer. I was thinking of something more normal.”

At that moment, Li Huowang took out the jade pendant that was tied to a thread and placed it in her hands. “Don’t worry about money. Let’s find somewhere that’s more developed and sell this. Then, we would be able to buy anything we need.”

“I have something too! Here you go!” At that moment, Puppy took out a stack of red envelopes from within his shirt before passing them over.

Li Huowang was surprised. “Wait a minute, these are the red envelopes that Dan Yangzi had given to the now dead official disciples. When did you get your hands on them?”

“I took them when we were exiting the Zephyr Temple. I saw that no one had touched them so I took them instead, hehe.” Puppy was satisfied with his slyness.

Just then, Li Huowang’s hands stopped moving; he felt something spherical in Li Zhi’s parcel.

He took it out and saw that it was a gourd twice the size of his palm.

This looks like a gourd used to store pills. Do Shamans refine pills too?

Li Huowang wondered as he examined it.

He turned it upside down and shook it, but nothing came out. Li Huowang closed one of his eyes, intending to look inside the gourd.

Just as he was about to see what was inside, the top part of the ‘gourd’ suddenly opened. The mouth of the gourd was lined with rows of backward-facing teeth as it lunged toward Li Huowang.

Kachik!

Thankfully Li Huowang reacted quickly enough, otherwise half of his face would’ve been bitten off.

Even so, Li Huowang was visibly shaken when he saw the gourd reverting back to its original form.

It is a living thing and Li Zhi was using it to store something! Whatever is inside it must be very precious. But what is it?

At that moment, as if sensing something, the bell hanging at Li Huowang’s waist vibrated lightly.

“Wait a moment.” Li Huowang realized something and entered the forest.

Soon, the sound of a bell ringing was heard in the dense forest and a Wandering God was summoned.

Then, Li Huowang raised the gourd and showed it to the Wandering God before asking what was inside.

The Wandering God hummed in return.

Li Huowang was surprised at the answer and stared at the gourd incredulously. “What? Are you sure the item stored inside is... lifespan?”

Chapter 68 - Festival

Lifespan.

The fact that it was limited was a problem that everyone had. And, to think that the answer to that problem was now in the palm of Li Huowang's hand.

Li Huowang completely ignored the question of how it was possible to give lifespan a tangible form. After going through so much in this bizarre world, Li Huowang couldn't be bothered with such questions anymore. Instead, it was more important for him to comprehend what it meant for him to have gotten his hands on this item.

With guidance from the Wandering God, Li Huowang raised the gourd before pointing it toward the sun.

Soon the mouth of the gourd opened up like a flower, revealing six round pills that were rolling slowly in a greenish liquid. At the same time, it was possible to see a golden glimmer on the pills. This golden glimmer was the Chinese character for 'lifespan.'

Li Huowang carefully took out one of the pills from within the fluid, holding it firmly while placing all his attention on it.

The Wandering God had explained to him that the lifespan within the pill would disappear the moment it touched anything composed of the five elements. Basically, it would become useless the moment it fell to the ground.

A single pill contained enough lifespan to grant a normal human an extra year of life.

Under the sunlight, the pill slowly started to dissipate, turning into a yellow smoke.

Then, Li Huowang pinched the pill and it disappeared in his hands.

At that moment, Li Huoawang suddenly felt his body becoming lighter—he had just increased his lifespan by a year.

Wouldn't I be undying if I keep using these things?

However, Li Huowang quickly brushed off the thought.

Thinking back upon what Li Zhi had said, it wasn't hard to determine that *this* was the 'payment' that the Immortals wanted for their help.

It must've taken Li Zhi many rituals just to collect these few pills. If they were easy to collect, then there was no way Li Zhi would look so old.

For now, the only use he could think of for these lifespan pills was to help him in controlling the Wandering Gods.

Having thought up to this point, Li Huowang decided to take out the remaining five pills to absorb them. After all, he had summoned six Wandering Gods just to fight Li Zhi yesterday. That meant that he had spent eighteen months of his lifespan just last night. He needed to recover his lost lifespan.

However, just as his fingers were about to touch the lifespan pills, he stopped.

What if I can use these as a currency?

As the saying went, time was money. What if he really could trade money for time or vice versa?

The price of these pills would be astronomically high regardless of whether I sell them to cultivators or to normal people. It's quite a waste for me to just absorb them. I need to use them wisely.

Thinking up to this point, he retracted his hands from the gourd before placing it in the shade of a tree. Soon, the mouth of the gourd slowly closed.

Once it was closed, he picked the gourd up and walked back to the cart. Then, he found a string and used it to tie the gourd to his waist before continuing to rummage through the parcel.

But he didn't find anything else that was worth any money.

Old pieces of clothing, two pairs of worn-out shoes, some needles and threads, as well as a few clay sculptures in the form of Household Immortals. This was all that was owned by Li Zhi, his everything.

Looking through the items, Li Huowang sighed pitifully. Not only did the Immortals not allow Li Zhi to live a better life, it was even worse than that of a regular person's.

It would be easy for the Immortals to use their powers to amass immense amounts of wealth, using it to compensate Li Zhi for his work.

But the Immortals never did that.

They only ever wanted a slave that would amass large amounts of lifespan for them; they couldn't care less about how badly their slaves were living.

Li Zhi was right. The work of a Shaman was not something an ordinary person could do.

"Senior Li, can you give these to me?" asked one of the assistants as he stared at the clay sculptures, snout dangling from his nose.

Even though the assistants performed quite well under stress, in the end, they were still children, and all children loved to play.

But, Li Huowang shook his head and threw the clay sculptures on the side of the road. "These things are dirty."

The wheels of the donkey cart once again started to creak as they continued on their journey.

While Li Zhi had lied to them about many things, he did not lie about the fact that the journey ahead would be perilous. The roads were uneven and there was not a single village in sight.

They walked on the muddy road for more than ten days before finally finding a medium-sized town.

Even though it was drizzling, it was unable to stop them from smiling.

“We can finally sleep on beds. It’s been so torturous throughout the journey,” said a man with a single arm. It was not that he had just one arm, but that his other arm was as small as that of a baby.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang raised his head up from his map. “We will rest here for two days. When the rain stops, we will resume our journey.”

The donkey cart slowly rolled into the town.

When they arrived at the entrance of the town, they saw many horse carriages and ox carts exiting the town.

Compared to the carriages, there were even more people walking on foot. They were all wearing raincoats made from straw as they carried baskets full of yellow paper as well as bowls of fish, egg, and meat. All of them had expressions of sadness as they walked out.

“What’s wrong? Did something happen in the town?” Li Huowang asked instinctively.

“Senior Li, today is the Qingming Festival. They are going to clean the gravestones,” explained one of the assistants.

“It’s already Qingming? Time flies quite fast, huh.” Li Huowang mumbled to himself.

Inside the town, there were many stores selling yellow paper, paper gold ingots, paper dolls, and even paper ox. Their business was booming.

At that moment, Li Huowang remembered his promise with Li Zhi. He did not want to dishonor it.

However, after getting his hands on some paper money and candles, he suddenly thought of a problem.

How do I do this? How do I burn paper money for Li Zhi?

“Senior Li, leave this to me. I know what to do.” Puppy patted his skinny chest with pride.

They soon arrived in the town square. Many of the townsfolk were gathered here, burning paper money for their dead relatives

who had been buried far away from the town.

Puppy took out his knife and drew a circle on the ground with it, leaving a small opening toward the direction where they had buried Li Zhi. The yellow paper was then placed within the circle and burned, slowly turning into ashes within the circle.

As Puppy was burning the paper, he chanted, "I'm burning this for Li Zhi and his wife! Whoever dares to take his money is a fucking animal! You will be reincarnated as livestock in your next life!"

"Does it work when you shout like this?" asked Li Huowang as he placed a paper gold ingot within the fire.

"Yes! It will definitely work! My third uncle had taught me how to do this. If I shout like this, then the stray ghosts would not dare to come and steal the paper money we are offering to the deceased!" Puppy was confident when he said that.

Li Huowang stared at the smoke that was slowly drifting upward as he slowly said, "Do you think a human would turn into a ghost when they die?"

"Senior Li, what are you saying? If a person doesn't become a ghost when they die, then what do they become?" asked Puppy.

"Maybe that's it. When a person dies, they leave nothing behind, nor do they turn into a ghost. Humans are quite small and insignificant," said Li Huowang. He had seen many bizarre things in this world, but he had never seen a ghost.

Li Huowang's words caused everyone to feel uncomfortable as they looked around. Puppy was even hugging his arms to his chest as he soothed the goosebumps on his skin.

"Aiya, Senior Li, what are you saying? Today is the Qingming Festival so we shouldn't simply say anything without thinking. A person becomes a ghost when they die. Then, they would arrive at Hell and be reincarnated. This is the truth," said Puppy.

"Why are you so sure about it? Have you seen it yourself?"

asked Li Huowang.

“That’s... That’s because my second aunt’s mother told me this. She’s ninety four years old, so she knows everything,” said Puppy.

Chapter 69 - Meal

The yellow paper slowly burned, gradually transforming into black ashes that spiral upward into the hot air, disappearing into the skies.

As he looked at this scene, Li Huowang's expression was quite complicated.

"Li Zhi, I've burnt some paper money for you. Hopefully you'll receive it," muttered Li Huowang.

Just as he finished saying that, Li Huowang saw the black ashes swirling around in the air; it was almost as if Li Zhi was giving him a reply.

At that moment, Li Huowang had a feeling that understood the slightest bit about the mindset of superstitious people.

Compared to a depressing end in which a human being would be reduced to nothing after their death, the belief that they would become a ghost and be reincarnated sounded like a fairy tale.

He threw the last batch of yellow paper in his hands into the fire before standing up and patting the dust off his body.

"Let's go. We should find an inn to rest. All of us are drenched," said Li Huowang.

Just as they were about to leave, Bai Lingmiao's words caused them to stop. "Senior Li, Xiaoman is missing."

Li Huowang observed his group and saw that the girl afflicted with hypertrichosis was indeed missing.

"Oh, I remember her saying that her house is nearby," said Li Huowang.

No one replied to him. After what she had told them last time, all of them knew what she intended to do once she reached home. The depressing atmosphere around them became even worse.

“Uhm Senior Li, should we go find her? Maybe we can still stop her.” Puppy smiled sheepishly, scratching his oily hair beneath his veil.

Li Huowang merely glanced at him for a moment before walking toward an inn marked by a wooden sign.

“Let’s find an inn to rest first. Xiaoman’s home is nearby so she should be familiar with the directions here. She will come and find us after she finishes whatever she needs to do,” said Li Huowang.

Bai Lingmiao was just about to say something but after hearing what Li Huowang had said, she decided against it. She just gripped the hems of her clothes as she followed behind him, quietly.

The skies were gray and it continued drizzling. Due to this, Bai Lingmiao didn’t need to use her blindfold. Sadness was reflected in her pink irises.

They soon found an inn and entered their respective rooms. They were delighted to have a dry place to rest. Some of them washed their hair, while others took a bath. Once all of them finished cleaning themselves, they gathered at the food hall.

They didn’t have much money left so they only ordered some simple dishes. Most of them were vegetables; they only had one source of protein—stir-fried bitter melon with eggs and crispy pork lard with chili.

Everyone happily ate their meals. Even though they didn’t have much choice due to their limited finances, the scent of the pork lard was more than enough to satisfy them. At the very least, they wouldn’t have to stay hungry anymore.

Today was the Qingming Festival so there weren’t many people at the inn. Out of boredom, the waiter was talking with the cashier.

“Hey, did you know that a war will soon be breaking out at the border?” asked the waiter.

“Don’t lie to me. What do you know? You aren’t even qualified to talk about issues of the national level,” replied the cashier with a

scoff.

“Hey, don’t judge me like that. I might be a waiter, but I still know the latest information. I’ve heard that this time our kingdom of Si Qi is planning to wage a war toward the East,” said the waiter.

“East?” Li Huowang muttered as he overheard their conversation while eating his meal. They had just come here from the East.

Li Huowang did not know many people there, but there was someone he was worried about—troupe leader Lu and his family.

But thinking back on how cunning Lu Zhuangyuan was, he relaxed.

That old man is very sly, so he should be fine.

The waiter lowered his voice to a whisper as he continued talking. “Let me tell you something else too. Just a couple of days ago, those that went East for business were hurriedly traveling back here. Maybe they know something about it.”

Li Huowang shook his head as he ate his meal.

This damned place is so chaotic. Not only are there evil beings, there are also bandits. The people at the top aren’t even doing their job of maintaining the peace, but they still have the time and energy to wage war. What a bunch of idiots.

The waiter was quite excited as he talked. He was just about to say something when something caught his eye as he hurriedly went to the entrance of the inn.

“Hello young miss! Please come in. Are you here for a meal or will you be staying for the night?” asked the waiter.

Hearing the commotion, Li Huowang and the rest turned around and saw a girl wearing a black veil walking in with a short blade in her hands.

Based on the fact that there were not a lot of people wearing similar outfits and that the girls’s exposed hands were covered in long black hair, Li Huowang easily guessed who it was.

“Waiter, bring us another set of utensils, and give us two more items. This time, something with more meat in it,” said Li Huowang.

“Alright! Just a moment!” replied the waiter.

Then, Li Huowang elbowed Simpleton who was sitting beside him. Simpleton knew what this meant so he helped himself to a few more pieces of vegetables before taking his bowl and squatting down at a corner of the table to eat.

Xiaoman walked over to Li Huowang and sat beside him before taking off the black veil and revealing her face. The black hair on her face was wet from her tears.

Li Huowang took a deep breath and sighed before continuing to eat. He could smell a faint bloody stench coming from Xiaoman.

“Your bowls and chopsticks are here~~ Aiya! Yikes!” The waiter brought the utensils requested by Li Huowang, but shouted out of fright when he saw Xiaoman.

Shooing off the spooked waiter with his hand, Li Huowang placed the bowl and chopsticks in front of Xiaoman. “Eat.”

Xiaoman’s face was filled with pain as she stared at the empty bowl as she recalled something. “He sold my sister as well. He sold her to a fifty-year-old man. She died from birth complications earlier this year.”

Only the sounds of utensils and munching were heard at the table; no one dared to speak.

“He’s trash! I hate him! I hate him so much that I want to eat his flesh and drink his blood!” Xiaoman clenched her teeth as she squeezed out those words.

Hearing that, Bai Lingmiao had a worried expression on her face; she scooted over and gently hugged Xiaoman with her white arms.

“My mom tried to stop me, saying that no matter what, he was still my father. She said that I would suffer Heaven’s wrath for

killing my father. But at this point, I would rather accept punishment from the Heavens than not kill my father!" said Xiaoman through her sobs.

Li Huowang scooped up some of the vegetable and tofu soup into his bowl and drank it before saying casually, "Heaven does not have eyes here."

The table grew silent; everyone just sat and silently stared at Xiaoman.

Everyone had a hint of anger and sadness in their eyes. They were all guiding drug ingredients so they could more or less resonate with her feelings. Without reaching back to their homes, none of them could confirm that they hadn't been sold off by their family.

The anger in Xiaoman's eyes was slowly replaced with confusion. "I don't have a home now. I destroyed it with my own hands just now. I have no idea what to do next."

"Stir-fried donkey meat! Braised river fish! Please enjoy!" At that moment, the waiter came in and placed the two dishes down before running away.

Li Huowang took Xiaoman's empty bowl, and filled it with steaming white rice before placing it in front of her. "Eat."

Having said that, Li Huowang used his chopsticks and picked out a fish bone from the braised fish before using it as a toothpick. Then, he got up and slowly walked back up to his room on the second floor.

Soon, everyone else followed suit, silently leaving the table. Only Xiaoman and Bai Lingmiao were left in the food hall.

Tears streamed down from the black hair on Xiaoman's face, dripping onto her rice. She picked up her chopsticks with trembling hands, picked up the bowl of rice, and ate a mouthful of the white rice that was mixed with her tears.

The more she ate, the more she cried. When she finally placed

the bowl down, she burst into tears, crying loudly.

Chapter 70 - Lake

“It’s just some poor-quality cracked jade; three silvers is all I can give~” said a man.

“Three silvers?! I’m not pawning it anymore!” Li Huowang was furious as he took the jade pendant back and walked out of the pawn shop.

The jade pendant was worth at least 400,000 in the real world, but to think that he would be offered only three silvers for it here. The pawn shop was being unscrupulous!

He turned around and took another look at the pawn shop’s wooden sign.

What an unscrupulous place. They’ve probably managed to earn a lot of money this way. Should I just break in at night and rob them?

Li Huowang was shocked at his own thoughts. He punched himself in the face before walking back to the inn, feeling frustrated.

Back in his room, Li Huowang opened the map and placed it on the bed before glancing at Bai Lingmiao, who was sewing something using the leather they got from Li Zhi’s items. Then, he asked her to call for Xiaoman.

Li Huowang slowly pointed toward the South on the map. Before Li Zhi died, he told him that there was a group of nuns in black toward the South and that they might be able to handle the matter of Dan Yangzi possessing him.

Right now, Dan Yangzi was constantly influencing him, so finding a method to get rid of him as soon as possible was of the utmost importance. Finding a Black Taisui as well as addressing the other matters could be delayed a bit more.

Li Zhi had told him that the nuns could be considered good

people. However, Li Huowang naturally would not trust that after experiencing all the things he had.

At this point, he trusted no one.

If he needed the help of the nuns to deal with Dan Yangzi, then he needed a method to guarantee his safety and at the same time offer the nuns a handsome reward in return.

Li Huowang glanced at the side of the bed, staring at the sacred text and the gourd containing the lifespan pills. These items would be his bargaining chips.

But that was not important. Right now, the most important task was to find the nuns that Li Zhi had mentioned.

“Senior Li, you called for me?” Xiaoman panted as she came into his room. Except for the corners of her eyes being red, her emotions seemed to have stabilized.

“Where did you go just now?” Li Huowang asked.

“I went to the escort service and requested them to deliver the last words of those guiding drug ingredients who belonged to the kingdom of Si Qi,” said Xiaoman.

“Next time, let someone else do these kinds of things. You should keep a low profile; otherwise, the town guard might end up finding you,” Li Huowang reminded her.

Xiaoman’s eyes flickered as she shook her head calmly. “It’s alright... My mother did not report the incident to the authorities.”

“Oh. Then come here and help me with this map. You are a local, so you should know your surroundings, right?” asked Li Huowang.

Xiaoman walked over and stared at the location that Li Huowang was pointing at.

“Do you know if there is a nunnery somewhere around here? The nuns from there are said to wear black clothes,” explained Li Huowang.

“Nunnery? Black clothes?” Xiaoman thought about it for a

moment before pointing her hairy fingers at a mountain in the South-West.

“If there is one, then it should be here in the Henghua Mountain. I’ve heard that one of the people from this town went there to pray to a golden Bodhisattva,” said Xiaoman.

“A golden Bodhisattva! How much do you know about this nunnery?” asked Li Huowang. He wanted to gather as much information as possible.

“I don’t know a lot. My family was poor, so we didn’t go to such faraway places to pray. The only thing I’ve heard is that the place gets a lot of pilgrims,” said Xiaoman.

“Hmm...” Li Huowang shook his head in silence. This piece of information wasn’t really useful. After all, the Righteous Monastery also had a lot of pilgrims.

“Is there anything special about that nunnery? Something along the lines of how people’s prayers for bearing a son were always answered back at the Righteous Monastery,” asked Li Huowang.

Xiaoman thought about it for a moment before giving him a reply, “The only thing I’ve heard is that the nuns at that place are fat.”

“Fat? What’s so special about that?” Li Huowang thought about it and rapped his fingers on the map. “Let’s move out. We will travel to the nunnery and check it out.”

The money they got from Li Zhi’s bag was used to exchange for dried rations and noodles along with a big pot of pork lard.

Soon, Li Huowang and the rest started their journey to the next location.

Now, at the very least, they were no longer traveling alone. Many others were on the same path as them.

After listening in on the conversations around them, Li Huowang heard that the war was about to start at the borders—many of these people were escaping inland to avoid getting into any

trouble during the war.

They walked during the day and rested at night. As they passed by many forks along their journey, the number of people around them gradually lessened.

Just as Li Huowang thought that they would once again be traveling alone, a huge swathe of water blocked their path.

A light breeze blew over the surface of the water, gently shaking Li Huowang's robes.

"Is this the sea that my second uncle's father used to tell me about?" Puppy was filled with disbelief.

The vast body of water in front of them reflected the skies above like a large mirror. The lake was so enormous that they could not even see the opposite shoreline.

Li Huowang took out his map. "No, this is not the sea. It's just a lake, albeit a very, very big lake."

Si Qi was a kingdom with a lot of bodies of water, so having such a large lake was not very strange.

"Senior Li, why is the water of the lake black?" asked Puppy.

The water within the lake was indeed quite murky and dark. Even standing right at the shoreline, they couldn't see the bottom of the lake. It was quite eerie.

Li Huowang closed the map and looked at the others who were waiting by the lake. "Let's wait a while and see what they do."

After a while, when a small black dot appeared from afar, the people at the shoreline started to move. It was a wooden boat. The people here were planning to use the wooden boat to cross the lake.

The ship was quite large but also quite old.

"Come! Come onto the boat! Seventy coins per person!" The old captain sitting in the boat hollered at the people standing on the shore.

"Seventy?! It was only forty-six coins last year." Someone was instantly dissatisfied with the price increase.

However, the shoeless captain did not even bother to justify himself. Instead, he stared angrily at that man. "Do you want to take the boat or not? If not, then you can just swim across the lake."

When the captain saw the man silently take out the money to pay, he had quite a satisfied expression as he spat into the lake. "We are already on the verge of war, so who cares about rules? What can you do to me even if I raise the price?"

"Let's get on the boat," Li Huowang said as he walked toward the boat. This was an unfamiliar place for them, and so he would rather pay the expensive fee than get involved in some other trouble later on.

Soon, the boat carrying tens of people slowly made its way toward the center of the lake. Some of those who were on a boat for the first time were experiencing motion sickness; however, Li Huowang was more or less fine.

He turned around and faced the captain before asking, "Sir, how long will it be until we reach the opposite shore?"

"Hoho, we should reach in four hours. We will get there before it gets dark," replied the captain.

Li Huowang nodded as he looked forward, fully alert as the boat cut through the dark waters of the lake. The water within the lake was as black as ink and felt somewhat oppressive, almost as if something would emerge from within it.

"I hope there are no man-eating creatures in the lake," muttered Li Huowang.

After experiencing so many incidents, Li Huowang was quite alert about his surroundings.

"What are you saying? Those are just some folk tales. I've been sailing on this lake for over twenty years, and I'm still alive. Just relax, nothing will happen. Since I have already taken your money, I will ensure your safety," said the captain.

Those words were enough to calm Li Huowang down to some

extent.

As the boat moved, the sun gradually started moving west. By sunset, the boat had arrived in a large field of reeds.

We should be arriving soon.

Li Huowang thought as he looked at the reeds around him.

Splash!

Just as he had that thought, the sound of someone falling into the lake was heard behind him.

Everyone turned around to see what had happened, only to find that both the captain and the person steering the boat had disappeared!

“Aiya! They were eaten by something in the water!” someone shouted.

No one knew who had shouted those words, but they left the people on the boat terrified.

“Sit down! Do you want the boat to capsize?” Li Huowang shouted at them.

Then, he turned around and looked at his own group. “Who here knows how to steer the boat?”

Everyone shook their heads.

Just as Li Huowang was thinking about what to do, the reeds around them started to move.

Soon, several small wooden boats appeared. The boats carried many people—both young and old, men and women. All of them were equipped with blades.

On one of the wooden boats, Li Huowang saw the captain who had just disappeared.

He was holding a short dagger. When he saw Li Huowang staring at him, he chuckled. “Hehehe~ Young man, do you want to eat sliced noodles or dumpling soup[1]?”

1. Bandit codes: Sliced noodles = Cut apart. Dumpling soup:

drowned. 🤙

Chapter 71 - Water Bandits

“Water bandits,” Li Huowang instantly recognized their identity.

This was a trap! They had gathered everyone in one place with the intention to rob them!

“Hoh, looks like they are all simple people,” Li Huowang mumbled as he observed them. He realized that not only were there young men among the bandits, but also elderly, women, and children. It was apparent that it was a family business.

Siu~

An arrow shot over and landed on the wooden boat, causing the rest of the passengers to start panicking.

“Everyone, throw all your belongings and jewelry toward us, and we will spare you. We are all good people who rob the rich and help the poor, so you have our word that we will not harm you. But if you dare to hide even a single coin, hehe~ We will let you choose whether you want to eat some sliced noodles or dumpling soup,” shouted the captain.

Hearing his threat, the passengers became even more panicked and started moving; many of them threw their belongings into the water.

They might have been able to escape if they had encountered bandits on land, but now that they were in the middle of a lake, there was nothing they could do. Even if they were to jump into the water, they would not be able to outswim them.

Li Huowang stared at the boats that surrounded them and stepped forward before addressing the captain, “My friend, just take

us all to the shore, and I will pretend nothing had happened here.”

The captain furrowed his brows as he re-evaluated Li Huowang. Then, he spoke with a haughty attitude, “Shoulders together, throw me a vine? [1]”

“Speak properly and take us to the shore,” said Li Huowang, his irritation growing.

“Ai! Look! To think he’s just some amateur! He probably hasn’t even grown hair down there! Hahaha!” laughed the captain.

“Hahaha!” The other bandits joined in as well.

“Brat, do you think you are some hot shit just because you are a Daoist? I’ve killed many of your kind before! Let me tell you something: this lake is the territory of my Yuan family. If you are a dragon, then make sure you are prepared to kneel here! If you are a tiger, then make sure you are prepared to sit! Even if the Heavenly Sovereign were to come here, he too would have to pay us a fee!” said the captain.

Meanwhile, the rest of the bandits clapped and whistled loudly, applauding the captain for his words. Some of them were already discussing how to distribute the riches they would get.

“Dad! I want that white-haired lady as my bride! She looks so pretty!” said one of the young bandits.

“Oh Heavens no! You can play with her, but you cannot marry her. I don’t want my grandchildren to end up looking like her,” said one of the slightly older bandits.

“Then, you can play with her first. After you are done, you can give her to me,” replied the young bandit.

“Hahaha! My son is quite filial!” chuckled the older bandit.

Ding ding ding!~

At that moment, the piercing sound of a bell caused the water around them to ripple strongly.

Li Huowang's eyes were filled with killing intent as he grabbed a fistful of dirt and stuffed it into his mouth before shouting out his

orders in a fit of rage.

In response, a Wandering God materialized and swiftly attacked the water bandits on their boat.

Faced with this mysterious entity, the water bandits used their arrows and blades to attack it to no avail. Anyone pierced by the Wandering God was instantly killed as they fell into the water.

In just a short moment, tens of corpses were floating on the surface of the lake.

At that moment, the water bandits finally realized that they had encountered a tough opponent. They decided to dive into the water to escape.

“Senior Li! Water is starting to fill the boat! They are drilling the base of the boat!” shouted one of the assistants.

Hearing this, Li Huowang used his finger to signal the Wandering God, commanding it to dive into the water.

Soon, a few half-naked men floated upward. They were already dead.

Thanks to the distraction, the other water bandits managed to escape, abandoning their boats and the corpses floating on the surface of the lake.

The water bandits were gone, but it was not the end of their troubles.

“Quickly bail the water out! Use your clothes to block the holes!” Li Huowang instructed everyone.

They were in the middle of the lake. If the boat happened to sink, then not even the Wandering God would be able to save them.

After some time, they finally managed to block all of the holes.

Li Huowang was just about to relax when Bai Lingmiao tugged at his sleeves before pointing toward the reeds.

Beneath the red light of the setting sun, many more boats had appeared among the field of reeds. When those on the boats saw the bodies floating on the surface of the water, they began crying, their

eyes turning red.

An old hunchbacked man with a white beard was being supported by the captain as they stood at the front. Soon, his trembling but ancient voice spread out across the lake, “Senior! You just took the lives of tens of Yuan family members. If you had just told us your great name, we would not have dared to stop you. Or were you just displeased today and wanted to kill someone?”

Li Huowang didn’t bother paying attention to him. He turned around and asked if anyone from their group could swim; they had to fetch the bamboo pole that was floating further away. After all, they still needed to sail the boat. It was not practical to stop the boat in the middle of the water, especially when it was almost night.

Meanwhile, the old man continued in a voice filled with sadness and anger, “Since it has already come to this, it’s useless to talk anymore. While our lives can be considered cheap and worthless, you won’t be able to leave easily, especially not after killing so many of us!”

The old man’s threat immediately caught Li Huowang’s attention. But the gradually darkening sky made it hard for him to see anything properly.

“Which one of you has good eyesight? Help me see what the fuck they are doing,” ordered Li Huowang. He didn’t dare let his guard down in this damned place and wanted to be cautious.

Just then, the one-armed guy squinted his eyes to see what was happening. After a while, he told them what he saw. “They are... kneeling, almost as if they are praying to something. Looks like it's pretty serious since they are using a pig, a cow, and a goat as sacrifices. Aiya! Heavens above! That old man just threw two babies into the water!”

Hearing that, Li Huowang immediately realized that they were in danger and shook the bell. Regardless of what the water bandits

were planning, it would definitely not be something good for Li Huowang's group—he couldn't care about losing three months of his lifespan at this moment.

Following Li Huowang's command, the Wandering God quickly flew toward the water bandits but returned halfway back. Just as it was returning, Li Huowang felt the entire boat shake violently as the wood started creaking dangerously.

“Something is in the water!” exclaimed Li Huowang.

Boom!

A large explosion rang out as a great force launched the entire boat into the air before crashing down onto the lake.

The boat was quite old and couldn't withstand the impact of the landing, causing it to break.

Li Huowang fell into the lake, the cold water around him immediately causing him to tense up as he opened his eyes wide.

Within the dark and muddy waters, something was moving, wriggling around.

Sua!

At that moment, seven eyes opened right in front of Li Huowang, reflecting different colors of light as they constantly changed their form.

1. Jianghu Codeword: Shoulders together = Are you a friend?
Throw me a vine = What's your surname. 🤔

Chapter 72 - Dragon Gate Village

What... What is that?

As he gazed into those eyes, Li Huowang suddenly felt his thoughts turn slower as his surroundings grew bizarre—rather than drowning in the water, he felt as though he was floating in the sky.

Meanwhile, the mud at the bottom of the lake shifted, turning the water even murkier. As the mud rose up, the dark figure with its seven shifting eyes moved as well.

By the time the mud enveloped Li Huowang completely, he saw a decaying maw that was even larger than a mountain. Within that maw, there were an uncountable number of hooks and tentacles.

No... not like this.

Li Huowang used all his strength to unsheathe his sword.

Just as he was about to slit his own neck, the tentacles wrapped around him and the hooks dug into Li Huowang's flesh, dragging him into the bloody maw.

Meanwhile, Yuan Er looked at the bubbling lake as well as the drowning passengers while standing on the small boat before nervously glancing at the old man he was supporting with his arms.

"Great-grandfather, let's go home. Given that we had help from the Lord of the River, they are as good as dead," said Yuan Er.

The old man stared coldly at him before shaking him off. "Return to our village!"

Hearing the anger within his voice, Yuan Er started panicking, but there was nothing he could do. Immediately, he placed two fingers into his mouth and blew the whistle to signal a retreat.

The small boats quickly retreated into the dense field of reeds.

The entire field of reeds was quite massive, forming a natural maze. But given that the Yuan family's people grew up here, they were very familiar with the area.

After taking quite a few twists and turns through the field of reeds, the boats finally docked at a small island made from reeds being woven together. This was the Yuan family's home.

The island was made entirely using reeds, including the small huts built on top of it.

Yuan Er had long since gotten used to the incredible view of this place, and wasn't really affected by it. Instead, he was worried about something else.

When he saw his great-grandfather getting down from the boat with his walking stick and entering one of the huts without a word, Yuan Er could only clench his teeth and follow him inside.

The other members of the Yuan family saw what was happening and quietly followed them as well. The atmosphere was somewhat heavy.

The huts here appeared small from the outside but were surprisingly spacious on the inside; there was even a place dedicated to rear pigs and ducks inside them.

Yuan Er followed his great-grandfather into a large hall with massive fish bones serving as supporting pillars.

Candles lit up the room. In the middle of the hall was a beautiful ink painting depicting a carp swimming up a waterfall. Below the painting were five memorial tablets.

This was the Yuan family's ancestral hall.

"Kneel down to the River Lord and to our ancestors!" shouted the old man.

Yuan Er's expression was serious as his knees buckled and he immediately kneeled down, kowtowing to the memorial tablets three times. Currently, he was not the arrogant captain of the boat, but a simple youngster awaiting punishment from his elders after

committing a serious error.

The old man circled him a few times before lifting his cane and whacking it hard on Yuan Er's back and head.

Under the immense force, Yuan Er's head was soon bleeding as bruises appeared all over his body. However, despite the pain, Yuan Er just clenched his teeth hard, not daring to move.

Only after he saw that the old man was tired did Yuan Er make a move. The old man was panting while leaning on his cane. Yuan Er kowtowed to him. "Great-grandfather, I have committed a grave error."

"What did you do wrong?" asked the old man while glaring at him angrily.

"I was too careless. I did not probe their true strength before springing the trap. Because of that, I failed to realize that there was someone strong in there, causing tens of brothers as well as the nephew and niece to die because of me." replied Yuan Er.

"Hmph! So you do know what you did wrong!" The old man's anger dissipated a little.

Yuan Er struggled for a bit before he said reluctantly, "I already said the code word meant to probe who the Daoist was, but that brat did not give the appropriate reply!"

Splat!

Suddenly, the old man's cane was shoved inside Yuan Er's left eye, destroying it.

"AAAAAH!" Yuan Er held the left side of his face in pain as he rolled on the ground. But he recovered soon enough before continuing to kneel and kowtow toward the old man.

Looking at the youth in front of him, the old man sighed, his face filled with worry.

"Junior, don't think that you are suddenly above the Heavens and the Earth when you only conducted a successful raid a few times. While it may seem like we do not have any worries or

troubles, it's not easy to do this job for very long. We have to observe carefully and act swiftly! Originally, I had wanted you to take on the mantle and continue our family work. But to think that not only did you make such a big mistake, you are even blaming others for your mistakes. I'm afraid that I may no longer trust you with this important job," said the old man.

Yuan Er panicked when he heard that. Disregarding his pain, he pleaded, "Great-grandfather! I'm sorry! I really regret my mistake! I won't make the same kind of mistake ever again! If I make such a mistake again, then I will personally squish my other eye and blind myself! I promise!"

"You think you could pay for the lives of tens of people with just a single one of your eyeballs? Stop dreaming!" shouted the old man. Then, the old man waved his hands.

There were many people spectating the entire scene from outside the hut, and two of them walked in with a plate as soon as the old man waved his hand. The plate was filled with various bizarre white fish bones.

"You need to be punished for making a mistake. There are rules that everyone below the Heavens must follow, and the Yuan family is no exception. If you can endure and successfully undergo the trial of leaping through the Dragon's Gate, then this matter will be forgiven and you can inherit the household. If you can't, then I will make sure to give you a proper burial," said the old man.

Staring at the bizarre fish bones, Yuan Er started trembling. However, all his desire to escape dispersed when he saw his great-grandfather standing beside him.

The curved bones slowly pierced his skin and tore through his flesh before finally coming into contact with his bones.

Just as Yuan Er clenched his teeth and prepared himself to endure the torture, someone shouted in front of the door. "Great-grandfather! Something is happening! Come, quick! The water in

the lake is turning red!”

When everyone reached the edge of the island, they were shocked by the scene in front of them.

The lake water had been dyed a dark crimson color while a bizarre stench filled the air.

At that moment, all the villagers looked at the lynchpin of the village, the great-grandfather.

Meanwhile, the old man’s expression changed quite quickly as he waved his right hand. “Light up the incense!”

Soon, the incense and the sacrifices were ready. A group of people kneeled near the shore of the lake and kowtowed continuously toward the now crimson lake.

Seeing that the color of the lake was not reverting to its original color, the old man steeled his heart as he turned around and walked toward a group of ladies holding their babies.

The babies were wearing new clothes while their hair had been tied into cones with red strings.

The old man took a brush and dipped it in cinnabar before lightly using the brush to make a small red dot on two of the babies.

The two babies were unaware of what was happening and laughed.

The old man gently patted their heads and took a deep breath. He closed his eyes; he couldn’t bear to see what was about to happen next.

“Go,” he said.

Hearing this, two men took the babies that weren’t even three years old from the sobbing ladies and walked to the shore of the lake. Just as they reached the shore and were about to drop the babies into the water, they suddenly stopped.

“Hmm?” The old man squinted as he stared at the crimson lake water. Something was coming up.

Then, under everyone's shocked eyes, a completely soaked Daoist walked onto the shore with his head hung low. Something was stuck in his neck.

The old man took a closer look and saw that there was a sword tied to Li Huowang's neck with a piece of reed!

Chapter 73 - Murder

“Impossible! This is impossible! How could he still be alive?!” Yuan Er shouted uncontrollably upon seeing the man walking out from the water. No one had ever survived against the River Lord, but today they were witnessing the first person ever to do so.

Yuan Er recognized Li Huowang. It was the very same red-robed Daoist who had killed tens of members of his family!

Before they could even figure out what was happening, the strange Daoist slowly walked up the shore toward them, leaving red footprints on the ground.

“Quick! Kill him quickly! Don’t let him ring that bell!” Yuan Er shouted, panicking. Despite the fact that there was only one enemy and that they had hundreds of people, Yuan Er had a strange feeling—he had a feeling that he should run away immediately.

Whoosh whoosh whoosh!

Several arrows shot toward the man, but none of them managed to hit him.

Shriak!

Then, Li Huowang tore a man’s body in half right in front of their very eyes.

The water bandits had originally intended to surround Li Huowang and attack him, but then, the bloody scene unfolding in front of them caused their blood to run cold.

It was Hell.

They felt as if they had been thrown down to the eighteenth layer of Hell as the anger in their eyes was replaced with terror.

Amidst their terror, they forgot everything and started running away, their legs trembling. All of them ignored Yuan Er’s command and ran for their lives. They were utterly terrified.

On the other hand, as soon as they all lost their will to fight and turned their backs toward Li Huowang, a massacre was unleashed on the reed island.

“Great-grandfather! Quick! Think of something!” Yuan Er shouted as he saw his own siblings being torn apart, failing to comprehend what was happening.

It was only at this moment that he understood what a terrifying person he had angered.

Meanwhile, the previously dignified old man was panicking as well. He quickly brought his palms together and started chanting something toward the dark red lake.

He didn’t have to chant for long before he saw a massive chunk of flesh float up to the surface. Seeing that chunk of flesh, the old man’s vision went black, and he almost fell over from shock.

The River Lord that his ancestors had prayed to for so long was killed by the Daoist!

Meanwhile, Yuan Er’s heart shivered as he saw what was happening. He immediately carried his great-grandfather on his back and ran toward one of the huts.

Hearing the screams coming from behind him, Yuan Er ignored them and entered the hut.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang stood in his place as he saw Dan Yangzi killing the water bandits one by one. Every time Dan Yangzi killed someone, his vision turned an even deeper shade of red, until it was so red that he couldn’t even see where he was.

Initially, Li Huowang didn’t want to stop Dan Yangzi, but when he saw that Dan Yangzi did not stop and just picked another person up, Li Huowang finally snapped out of his reverie.

“Stop! Stop the killing!” shouted Li Huowang.

Just as he heard this scream, Dan Yangzi grabbed a man with a dot of cinnabar on his forehead before slowly turning around, his bloodied face revealing a wicked smile. “Why should I, my dear

disciple?”

Li Huowang wanted to say something, but when he turned back to look at the lake shrouded in darkness as well as his missing companions, he found that he had no reason to tell him to stop.

The pain in his heart swallowed him as he grasped his head and screamed, “WHY?! Why can they kill the people by my side, but I can’t kill them?!”

By the time Li Huowang snapped back, Dan Yangzi had already disappeared. At the same time, he was now standing where Dan Yangzi had just been.

In front of him was a fat woman who was crying in despair as she held a man with a half-shriveled head; it seemed that he was her husband.

“Kill her! You either don’t kill or kill everyone!” A voice exploded right beside his ear.

Hearing those words, Li Huowang’s eyes twitched as he slowly pulled out the sword stuck in his neck.

With a single swing, the woman became still, her crying stopped.

The moment he killed her, Li Huowang felt a special feeling rush from the base of his spine and into his skull.

That feeling replaced the despair and the pain in his heart.

“He... Hehe...” Li Huowang held onto his sword, failing to suppress his maniacal laughter from leaking out. Then, he slowly walked deeper into the village.

Soon, the entire village was drenched in a rain of blood.

People’s heads were torn off their bodies while the corpses grew cold.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang continued to laugh—the more he killed, the louder he laughed.

The sound of metal tearing into flesh continued as the dark yellow surface of the island was slowly dyed red.

By the time the sun had completely set, the sounds of crying could no longer be heard on the reed island.

Within the ancestral hall, the bloody Li Huowang held his blood-stained sword and slowly walked toward a skinny youth.

There were no other voices. The youth in front of him was probably the last member of the Yuan family on the reed island.

As the youth stared at the man who slaughtered his family, he completely broke down; his pants were stained with urine as he wildly waved his hands in front of himself while mumbling something.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang raised his sword slowly.

However, just as he was about to swing it, he heard a familiar voice.

He woodenly turned his body and saw the drenched Bai Lingmiao. Standing at the door, she was shivering while holding onto a glowing stone.

When he saw her, his murderous intent and the weird feeling in his brain disappeared like a receding tide. He asked, "You are still alive?"

Only when he spoke those words did Li Huowang realize that his usual voice had been replaced by a harsh and gritty tone. His vocal cords had been damaged by the sword.

"I know how to swim. When I was younger, there was a small pond in front of my village where I used to swim," explained Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang walked toward Bai Lingmiao with his sword in his hand, took off his bloody Daoist robe, and covered her with it.

At that moment, Li Huowang felt his senses clear up, as if he had just woken up. He stared at his surroundings blankly, taking in all of the dead bodies.

Regardless of age or gender, everyone had died at his hands.

There were mothers hugging their daughters, and cradles

devoid of life.

At that moment, a sense of guilt surged into his heart, almost suffocating him.

Li Huowang picked up a dagger from the floor, clenched his teeth, and stabbed his palm forcefully.

He had never understood why Hu Jie, his neighboring patient in the mental hospital, tried to commit self-mutilation, but he had a feeling that now, he understood Hu Jie's reasons to some extent.

Chapter 74 - Death

“Senior Li! What are you doing!” Bai Lingmiao shouted as she ran over worriedly upon seeing Li Huowang attempting to harm himself. She held his bleeding left hand.

Li Huowang was in pain, but he pushed her away. His eyes were red as he shouted from the depths of his heart, “Why can’t you remain quiet?! Why do all these things happen to me in this shitty place?!”

He pulled out the dagger before stabbing it once again, this time piercing straight through his palm.

Bai Lingmiao was shocked by his behavior. After a few seconds, she rushed over, pulled the dagger out from Li Huowang’s palm, and threw it far away. Then, she extended both her arms and hugged the man in front of her tightly. “Huowang! Please stop it! I beg you!”

Hearing her voice, Li Huowang immediately grew quiet. Then, he gently closed his quivering eyelids and embraced her soft body, slowly calming down.

After a while, he gently let go of her and stared at her, sighing deeply. “Alright, I’m fine now. Where are the rest of our people? Did you see any of them?”

Hearing his words, Bai Lingmiao nodded. Her eyes were slightly red as she led Li Huowang toward the edge of the island.

Soon, they spotted the rest of the guiding drug ingredients and assistants near the shore.

Originally, their group consisted of seven adults and five children, but now, only six adults and four children could be seen on the shore. Also, some of them were already dead by the time they were pulled up onto the shore.

Bai Lingmiao's lips were purple, and she shivered from the cold as she spoke in a chilly voice, "Junior Sun is a better swimmer than me. We pulled out as many people as we could from the lake, but we still lost some of them. Even Simpleton drowned."

Li Huowang looked at the people lying in front of him. Simpleton's face was purple from asphyxiation. He was not the only one who had drowned; another guiding drug ingredient and one of the assistants had the same look on their faces as well.

Two people were still missing within the lake, while three had drowned. In just a single moment, their group of twelve had dwindled to seven.

Li Huowang might not have been very close to them, but they were still his comrades from his time at the Zephyr Temple. Often, while they were all resting on their journey, he would listen to them talk about reuniting with their families if they managed to return to their homes.

But now, all that seemed worthless. They had died.

Li Huowang's face was gloomy when he walked closer to the shoreline. At the same time, looking at his drowned comrades, all the guilt in his heart disappeared.

Bam!

Li Huowang kicked a bloody head out of spite as he shouted, "FUCK!"

He felt like he was crazy! To think that he had just been pitying these murderers!

Now, Li Huowang desperately wanted the water bandits to come back to life just so he could kill them all over again!

These fuckers deserved to die! Their entire lineage should be wiped out!

Just as Li Huowang's emotions were going through a massive upheaval, one of the guiding drug ingredients who usually kept a low profile walked up to him. His voice was filled with guilt as he

said, “Senior Li, I wanted to pull Simpleton out, but he was too heavy for me and I couldn’t do it.”

Li Huowang recognized him. It was Sun Baolu, the one Bai Lingmiao had mentioned was a better swimmer.

Looking at his soaked clothes, Li Huowang furrowed his brow and said, “Let’s go inside one of the huts and start a fire. There’s no need to linger around here.”

There was nothing else to be said. They were the only survivors left, and he couldn’t let them die from hypothermia.

Some of them carried the bodies of their fallen companions as they all slowly made their way into the village.

The entire village was covered in blood, flesh, bones, and viscera. Dark red blood flowed everywhere, causing the ground to feel sticky to walk on.

Everyone was looking at their surroundings and had many questions, but Li Huowang had no desire to explain anything.

At that moment, they turned a corner among the huts, and Bai Lingmiao was shocked as she instinctively hid herself behind Li Huowang.

The one in front of them was none other than that of the great-grandfather of the Yuan family, or at least what was left of him. He was impaled on a bamboo rod, his eyes unresigned.

Did I impale him here? When the heck did I do so?

Li Huowang tried to remember but nothing came to mind; there had been far too many deaths here.

After navigating through the village for a while, they stumbled upon a communal kitchen. They removed the pots from the fireplace and threw in some firewood before lighting it up. Then, the remaining survivors huddled near the fire as they tried to ward off the chill inside their bodies.

However, Li Huowang did not go near the fireplace. Instead, he stood in a corner of the communal kitchen and silently stared at the

purple faces of those who had drowned, looking at them one by one.

His gaze finally stopped on Simpleton's face. Li Huowang had never imagined that even the loyal Simpleton would end up dead. He was simple and straightforward, to the extent that even the assistants, who were mere children, were more mature than him.

"I shouldn't have called you Simpleton. At the very least, I should've given you a proper name. That way, at least your gravestone would look much better," Li Huowang stared at Simpleton's corpse and mumbled to himself.

However, just as he said that, Simpleton suddenly opened his eyes even though his entire body had already turned purple and rigid.

"The corpse reanimated itself!" Li Huowang was surprised and jumped backward as he drew his sword.

At the same time, everyone else also took out their own weapons when they saw this scene.

Then, Simpleton opened his mouth in a daze, and began to vomit. "Blegh~"

Foul smelling black mud and lake water was being expelled from his lungs and his stomach. Once he had vomited all of it out, he laid sideways and panted heavily, color gradually returning to his face.

"Heavens! Senior Li! You can revive people?! How did you do it?" Puppy was overjoyed as he helped Simpleton up.

However, Li Huowang paid him no mind and focused his attention to try and resuscitate the others who had drowned.

Maybe they are also alive, and are simply unconscious, just like Simpleton!

Unfortunately, Simpleton was the only one who was still alive. Li Huowang worked as hard as he could, but the others continued to remain dead.

Regardless, Simpleton coming back to life after going through all that was excellent news. Everyone huddled around him and asked him if he was alright.

The atmosphere in the communal kitchen was no longer as heavy as it had been.

In the face of everyone's sympathy, Simpleton remained quiet for a long time before spouting out a few words. "I'm... I'm... I'm hungry!"

"Hungry? Hell yeah! Let's eat some meat! When we just entered the village, I saw that they were rearing pigs! Let's go kill one!" Puppy took the meat cleaver and ran out.

After a moment, a metal pot was once again placed on the fireplace. After the water was boiled, large pieces of pork were thrown into the pot. As Xiaoman threw in some salt, the fragrant scent of meat filled the kitchen.

After going through so much, Simpleton was not the only hungry one.

Li Huowang used his sword to pick up a big and fatty piece of meat, munching on it like it was a fruit.

As he ate, Li Huowang was thinking about something.

This is a very large water bandit settlement. There's no way that their riches only include some pigs.

Chapter 75 - Warehouse

Both our donkey carts and the rest of our belongings are now at the bottom of the lake. We have to gather the money needed for our travels from this village.

Li Huowang planned what they had to do next as he observed the meat boiling in the pot.

No matter what had happened, it was all in the past now. He needed to let go of it and plan for the future.

The most important issue he had to deal with right now was to find the things that they needed from the village and leave with his group.

And I need to be fast. We cannot stay here for too long. After all, the only thing worse than a village filled with corpses is a village filled with decomposing corpses. A dead person might not be able to move, but they could end up killing someone in a different manner.

Li Huowang opened his mouth and chomped on a piece of meat at the end of his sword. Then, he looked at his companions who were eating voraciously and said, "Eaten enough yet? We have work to do once you have all eaten your fill."

After they had dried their clothes, they followed Li Huowang out of the communal kitchen as they held the meat and continued eating.

Li Huowang did not wander around the village like a headless fly. Instead, he walked straight to the ancestral hall of the Yuan family. The village was built like a maze, and he needed a guide.

"Don't ... ! Don't kill me!"

The youth that was scared shitless to the point of peeing himself was still hiding inside the hall. Li Huowang pointed his sword and cornered him, the youth's thin face filled with fear.

Li Huowang didn't bother wasting any words on him. "Where do you hide the money you rob from others? Take us there."

"Warehouse! It's all in my great-grandfather's warehouse! We keep all of the money there!" The youth spilled everything he knew instantly. The blood on Li Huowang's robes was still wet. Even the bloody stench coming from Li Huowang was enough to cause the youth to pee himself a little. He was so scared that any and all thoughts of fighting back had evaporated from his mind.

It was already dark, so the group held out their glowing stones to light up the path. They followed the youth as they navigated the village.

Under the dark blue-green glow of the stones, the bloody scene around them looked extremely grotesque. The youth's body trembled at the sight of his surroundings.

At that moment, the youth's body suddenly froze before he kneeled down beside the corpse of a woman and started crying woefully.

Seeing this, Li Huowang walked over and squatted down. He saw that the woman only had half of her face left. She looked young, and her eyes filled with terror and despair.

"Who is she?" Li Huowang asked coldly.

"She... she is my wife!" The youth's voice trembled. "I loved her! But now she's dead! Even my parents are dead!"

He cried even more loudly as he thought about how they had died.

Hearing his shrill cries, Li Huowang's expression became ruthless as he swung his right arm.

Shriak!

"AAAAAH!" One of the youth's ears was cut off in an instant as he cried out in pain and despair.

"Guide us! Did I tell you to stop?" Li Huowang roared aggressively.

At that moment, he sensed someone gently tugging at his sleeves, causing Li Huowang to swing his arms in irritation.

“Do you pity him? Do you think he’s some great romantic? Why don’t you ask him where his wife came from?” asked Li Huowang, irritated.

Sensing everyone’s gazes, the youth said awkwardly, “My father got her for me. All the wives in the village were abducted from the outside. Even my grandmother and mother were captured from outside.”

Bai Lingmiao’s mouth fell open in shock as she looked at the corpses of the women around her.

Meanwhile, when the youth saw Li Huowang once again raise his bloody sword, he shivered in fear and hurriedly got up before continuing to show them the way.

Seeing how shocked Bai Lingmiao was, Xiaoman walked to her side and gently placed her hairy hand on Bai Lingmiao’s shoulder before hugging her. “The women of a bandit camp are the same as the rest of the bandits. Don’t think about it too much.”

“But why did they accompany the rest of them to go and rob people? In the first place, they were also captured by them!” Bai Lingmiao was exasperated. She remembered that some of the bandits they encountered earlier had been women.

“Both humans and dogs can be trained,” said one of the guiding drug ingredients.

Hearing this, Li Huowang turned around; however, he couldn’t find out who had said that, causing him to sigh, “Sigh...”

They followed the youth and walked along the twisting paths for a while before arriving at a house whose door was securely locked with a sturdy padlock.

At the same time, their surroundings were no longer filled with buildings made from reeds. Instead, the houses around them were all made of wood.

This must be the most important area of the village.

Jiang!

Sparks flew as Li Huowang sliced the padlock in half. Then, he kicked the door open before grabbing the youth and using him as a shield as he entered the house.

Rather than a house, it would be more appropriate to call it a warehouse. Wooden shelves lined the wall neatly, and rows of wooden boxes sat upon them.

When the youth opened one of the boxes under Li Huowang's instructions, a brilliant glow enveloped the room. It was a box filled with silver pieces.

They opened the boxes one by one. The more they opened, the more shocked they were.

Aside from the silver pieces, there were even boxes filled with gold jewelry. These were most likely taken from the female victims.

There were other types of valuables as well, such as silk, iron ingots, and books. The warehouse was filled with valuables that the bandits had robbed from others over the years.

"Oh my heavens! I've never seen so much money in my life. Just imagine how many wives I can marry with all this money," Looking at the mountains of silver pieces, Puppy's voice shook, his eyes filling up with greed.

On the other hand, Li Huowang was more interested in the books than the money.

He flipped through some of them and realized that they were books to teach others how to read and write, as well as some Buddhist scriptures.

That damned geezer's method to summon the water monster using a pair of boy and girl infants as sacrifices... It doesn't seem like he learned it from the books. Did he learn it orally from his ancestor?

Li Huowang was rummaging through the books when he was stunned by the final book he saw at the bottom of the pile.

He picked up the book and gazed intently at the words on the cover, trying to recall something. “What does it say?”

“Senior Li, should we move everything in the boxes outside? I don’t think we can carry all this,” Bai Lingmiao asked as she walked over.

Li Huowang showed the book in his hand to Bai Lingmiao. “Look at the words on the cover. Do you recognize them?”

Bai Lingmiao was confused. “Senior Li, I’m illiterate.”

Just as she said that, a stuttering voice came from her back.

“Hua... Hua... Huayan Sutra!”

Li Huowang raised his head and saw Simpleton standing behind Bai Lingmiao.

“Are you sure it says Huayan Sutra?” asked Li Huowang.

“Yes!” confirmed Simpleton.

After confirming it, Li Huowang slowly felt the words with his fingers, his eyes filled with uncertainty.

“Is this the character for ‘Yan’? Why... why can’t I even recognize the character for ‘Yan’ now?”

Chapter 76 - Bamboo Slips

I can't let Dan Yangzi come out again.

This was the conclusion Li Huowang arrived at after carefully pondering the series of events that followed each of Dan Yangzi's appearances.

Li Huowang noticed a clear pattern when comparing Dan Yangzi's first appearance when Li Huowang encountered the God of Happiness, his second appearance when Li Huowang was dealing with the Buddhas, and his third appearance from today.

The first time, he could vaguely hear Dan Yangzi's voice.

The second time, he could clearly see his appearance.

And now, during the third time, not only could he interact with Dan Yangzi, but Dan Yangzi could also use his killing intent to control Li Huowang's emotions, and even cause him to not be able to recognize some common words.

No matter what Dan Yangzi had become, his influence on Li Huowang was growing stronger with each appearance.

One thing was clear—Dan Yangzi had never been kind-hearted. Everything he had done was in order to seize Li Huowang's body. While Li Huowang might not die under his protection, it probably would not take long before Li Huowang turned into him completely.

Li Huowang absolutely could not accept that situation—he would rather die than turn into the person he hated the most.

At that moment, a pair of fair-skinned hands stretched out and gently held his right hand.

Frowning, he looked up to see that pair of pink eyes filled with concern and gently shook his head. He did not explain anything.

Then, Li Huowang picked up the Huayan Sutra, opened it to a random page, and scanned it briefly.

This book is useless.

Once Li Huowang came to this conclusion, he casually tossed the Huayan Sutra back into the wooden box.

After looking through its contents, Li Huowang recalled that back in the Righteous Monastery, this was the book recited by different monks—this was just a widely circulated scripture that was probably available in any random bookstore. By comparison, the gold jewelry and the silver pieces were definitely more valuable.

When Li Huowang looked toward all the valuables once again, he saw Puppy and the others excitedly pulling the box full of valuables out of the house. But it could be seen that it was quite laborious; after all, the valuables were made of metal.

“Don’t take the silver pieces. Just take the gold accessories. All that gold will be enough to cover our expenses on the journey,” advised Li Huowang.

Hearing this, Puppy jumped up anxiously. “Senior Li! These are silver pieces! Shiny silver pieces!”

Li Huowang kicked the heavy box with his foot, then said, “Do you know just how heavy these silver pieces are? We still need to take the boat. If the boat capsizes, do you plan to swim with all these silver pieces? All this gold will be enough to feed us for a lifetime. Don’t be too greedy and let’s hurry.”

But Puppy was still reluctant, and started to stuff silver ingots into his clothes. “Then at least let me take some. This silver will be enough to buy a few wives and cows.”

Li Huowang could not be bothered with him. He just took all the gold then turned around to leave with the others.

Meanwhile, Puppy tried to catch up to them but started panting after taking just a few steps. As he saw the rest of them get further and further away, he stamped his foot in frustration, and hastily threw away some of the silver ingots before once again trying to

catch up to them.

Just as Li Huowang stepped out of the warehouse and was about to bring the others outside, he paused, then walked toward the kitchen.

Not long after, he emerged again, this time carrying their two fallen brethren's bodies in his hands.

"Go to the village and find a few jars. When we go out, cremate them and collect their ashes. Even if we can't bring them back to their families alive, we should at least return their remains," instructed Li Huowang.

"Yes, Senior Li," replied one of the guiding drug ingredients.

Just as they were about to move to find jars, a beam of blood-red light streaked from the side, whistling toward them.

"Dodge!" Li Huowang immediately tensed up and instinctively flung himself backward.

The beam of red light streaked past his chest and easily cut the two dead bodies in half.

Seeing this, Li Huowang was drenched in cold sweat. If it hadn't been for their bodies, he would have been the one cut in half.

"Find cover! There are still others inside the stockade!" shouted Li Huowang.

At the same time, Li Huowang took out the bell with one hand, held his sword in his other hand, and cautiously peeked his head out from behind a large vat. He noticed some blood-stained white fragments in the distance.

What was it that just attacked us?

He soon received the answer to that question.

Dull footsteps sounded, and a person slowly walked out from the shadows.

Xiaoman threw a piece of glowing stone at the new arrival's feet, illuminating his face. They all recognized this person; he was

the boat captain from earlier.

This guy's not dead?!

This was the only thought going through everyone's minds, including Li Huowang's.

Meanwhile, blood was flowing out of Yuan Er's mouth as he held a peculiar and reddened bamboo slip in one hand and a black iron plier in the other.

When Li Huowang saw Yuan Er bleeding from the mouth, he immediately realized what those white things were.

"Come out! Come out! Daoist! You also have your moments of weakness, huh!" shouted Yuan Er.

Yuan Er's eyes were bloodshot as he reached the pliers into his mouth, clamped down onto his incisor before yanking it out.

Then, he moved his bloody mouth and chanted something toward the blood-red bamboo slip. As he did that, the tooth was rapidly enveloped by a bloody mist before shooting into a room beside him like a shooting star.

Xiaoman's cries rang out from within, making Li Huowang's heart skip a beat.

Ring ring ring!

The clanging sound of the bell rang out, and two Wandering Gods appeared as they flew straight toward Yuan Er while staying close to the ground.

"Pah!" Yuan Er once again spat out a large mouthful of blood toward the ground and raised the pliers in his hand. However, this time, he did not try to yank out his teeth; instead, he stabbed it straight into his one remaining eye.

With a pop, his eyeball burst, and a strange light started to envelope the surroundings, causing the two Wandering Gods to fall to the ground. It was almost as if they were stuck to the ground.

"Die! All of you, die!" After hollering loudly, Yuan Er took out a small knife from his waist and stabbed it into his own throat.

Despite the extreme pain causing his entire body to shudder, he mutilated himself, cutting off pieces of his own flesh.

At that moment, the bell rang out once again, causing a dozen Wandering Gods to converge from all directions as they sped toward Yuan Er.

However, when Yuan Er placed the pieces of his sliced-up flesh onto the bamboo slip in his hand, all the Wandering Gods around them vanished.

At the same time, when Yuan Er's sliced-up flesh was rolled up within the bamboo slip, that inanimate object suddenly came to life.

Then, the bamboo slip began to speak in a duck-like voice using Yuan Er's tongue and vocal cords as its own.

When this strange duck-like voice rang out, there was a sudden change in the surroundings.

"A tongue to turn the wheel of reincarnation! An eyelash for the boundless universe! Words cannot describe the intricacies of the realm! The sinister Heavens reveal what was hidden! My Master, the highest authority! Who dares disturb it?!"

Chapter 77 - Ba-Hui

“A tongue to turn the wheel of reincarnation! An eyelash for the boundless universe! Words cannot describe the intricacies of the realm! The sinister Heavens reveal what was hidden! My Master, the highest authority! Who dares disturb it?!”

As the wooden bamboo slip used Yuan Er’s human tongue to speak these words, everything around them started to distort. Everyone on the island felt their five senses undergo some sort of change simultaneously.

Sight, taste, smell, hearing—they all gradually morphed together into a novel sensation that went beyond ordinary human understanding.

Through this extraordinarily peculiar sensation, Li Huowang and the others transcended the boundaries of human perception.

In the deepest parts of the sky, within an unfathomable expanse of the dark abyss, there were countless realms that were even deeper and darker, their suns revolving. Something could be seen moving within.

At that moment, Li Huowang smelled a gaze being shot from that thing and felt a terrifying aura that made him shudder uncontrollably. He also saw a strange melody being produced when that thing moved even the slightest bit.

Boom~ Boom Boom~ Boom!

Though Li Huowang had a feeling that the thing was extremely far from himself, its melody was so entrancing and clear. He could not find a real-life equivalent of this melody. The only thing that even came close was the sound of thunder that had preceded the appearance of the God of Happiness.

But this thing was way stronger than the God of Happiness. By

comparison, the God of Happiness was so weak that it was like comparing a grain of sand to a mountain.

This conclusion came to Li Huowang almost reflexively, as if he did not even need to understand his senses or what that thing was.

Should I attempt to commit suicide to let Dan Yangzi out? No! Dan Yangzi is nothing compared to this thing! The difference between them is too great!

Li Huowang was filled with despair when he thought up to this point.

An ordinary person had no ability to resist before that thing.

Just as Li Huowang had lost all hope and was waiting for his death, his five morphed and distorted senses inexplicably returned to normal.

“Eh?”

Before Li Huowang could understand what was going on, he gathered his strength and decisively grabbed his sword before quickly dashing toward Yuan Er.

Presently, Yuan Er was completely blind in both eyes and was barely breathing. The only movement he made was a turn of his head before it was completely severed by Li Huowang’s sword.

The moment Yuan Er’s severed head landed on the ground, everything around them returned to normal.

Li Huowang stood there, panting with his sword in his hand. Still shaken, he was looking up at the dark sky.

It was gone now, almost as if everything from before had been an illusion.

But Li Huowang knew that it hadn’t been an illusion; that *thing* truly existed.

He attempted to remember and piece together the things he had experienced and felt, but realized that he couldn’t recall the sensation of that thing with his current senses.

Despite the fact that danger had passed, the island fell into an

eerie silence.

Everyone was frozen in their spots, their eyes filled with fear. They too had seen the thing that Li Huowang saw. Their faces were deathly pale, and their bodies began to shake involuntarily. They all felt extremely cold—as if an icy chill had gripped their hearts.

That's it? Yuan Er gave his all just to try and scare us?

As he looked at the others who were unharmed, a trace of doubt arose within Li Huowang's heart. Oddly, the currently safe environment made him feel even more uneasy.

Li Huowang took a deep breath, then used his bloody sword to open the blood-red bamboo slip that had curled up. He found that the pieces of flesh inside it had all withered into black powder.

Li Huowang knelt down cautiously and began to examine the contents of the red bamboo slip.

The black words carved on the red bamboo slip were very small and seemed very strange. He had not seen these words before. But when he focused, he found that he could actually make out what they said.

"White pill... Precious dew... Swallow abdomen... Pluck bones..." muttered Li Huowang.

This was an extremely evil bamboo slip that recorded various methods of using extreme pain and other sacrifices to trade for something with an entity.

The easier methods involved inserting bamboo pieces under one's fingernails and prying them upward, using the leverage to pull out an entire fingernail.

One of the more severe methods involved chewing on a bunch of rusty iron shards and swallowing them.

As he read further, he saw that they even taught the reader how to sacrifice the flesh and bones of one's own blood relatives, using them to make transactions with some entities.

The more he read, the more gruesome and horrifying the

methods grew; it was almost to the point that they went beyond Li Huowang's tolerance. By the time he finished reading half the bamboo slip's contents, Li Huowang could not stop himself from vomiting.

All the pork from before was vomited. However, despite his deathly pale face, he endured his nausea, gritted his teeth, and continued reading.

He would not be at ease if he failed to find out what Yuan Er had been trying to do. After all, if he placed some sort of curse on them, there would be quite a lot of trouble.

He continued to read while suppressing his disgust before finally finding the method that Yuan Er had been trying to use.

It was the fourth-to-last method on the bamboo slip.

Yuan Er hadn't just been trying to scare us. He wanted to summon something over but failed.

Ba-Hui.

That was the name of the thing that Yuan Er wanted to summon, and it was said to be the source of all types of suffering mentioned on this bamboo slip.

Yuan Er had failed in summoning it—he could not pay the price of summoning it.

As per the requirements written on the bamboo slip, it could be said that while his body was in extreme pain, his inner suffering was still not enough, even though his entire family had just died.

Summoning Ba-Hui required the utmost physical and mental agony.

Li Huowang turned around to glance at Yuan Er's head, which was missing eyes and teeth. It seemed that he had just recently learned about the usage of this bamboo slip and was not yet proficient with using it.

But this was normal. Each method on the bamboo slip would bring the user closer to death, and one would probably not be able

to live long enough to become proficient in it.

Despite the immediate danger having passed, Li Huowang was still not at ease. He did not care where the bandits had obtained this disgusting bamboo slip. What made him more concerned was who had written it.

Could there be another sect similar to the Righteous Monastery?

Unlike the monks who practiced techniques related to the flesh and blood, could it be that this sect cultivates techniques related to the ultimate suffering?

But if they practiced such techniques according to the contents written on the bamboo slip, there probably wouldn't be many survivors left.

Unless... their sect has some method to undergo all the suffering without dying.

Li Huowang began to wildly conjecture as he continued to look at the bamboo slip.

At this point, Li Huowang came to understand that despite his darkest suspicions about this place, he had still been too optimistic.

This place was much more dangerous than he had ever imagined. He already knew about unique existences like the Immortal families and the God of Happiness.

But today's experience was quite an eye-opener for him. He realized that there were some far more terrifying things out there.

Dazed, Li Huowang mumbled to himself. "Ba-Hui..."

Chapter 78 - The Aftermath

Along the shore of the island made of reeds, Li Huowang stood, holding the blood-red, foul-smelling bamboo slip.

Meanwhile, the others stood nearby with pale faces, huddled together as they looked at him. They had not yet recovered from the shock they had just experienced.

Li Huowang's expression was conflicted.

He could simply toss this nauseating bamboo slip into the muddy lake, never allowing it to see the light of day again.

This seemed like an excellent choice. No matter who wrote this bamboo slip, Ba-Hui's powers were not borrowed so easily, and leaving it in this world would only bring endless suffering to others.

However, after pondering for a long time, Li Huowang placed the blood-stained bamboo slip inside his clothes.

While the various methods recorded on the bamboo slip were incredibly gruesome, they were also very effective. If even a common bandit like Yuan Er could use it, then it would probably be possible for himself as well.

There was no harm in being prepared. He might even be able to make use of it in some extreme situation. After all, if he did not want to completely turn into Dan Yangzi, then he had to find another alternative for when he faced danger in the future, even if the price to pay was very high.

Li Huowang turned back to look at the others. "Bring the boat over, load up the gold, and the dead bodies of our two brethren. Let's leave this wretched place."

Their troubles had been unexpectedly resolved, and they had

no need to continue staying in this place filled with corpses.

Sun Baolu was quite capable and managed to push the boats used by the bandits for pillaging ashore. Meanwhile, the rest of them carried the bodies of their fallen comrades and the gold jewelry and loaded up the boats.

“Board the boat with us, row the oars, and take us to the other side of this lake,” said Li Huowang, looking menacingly at the youth before him.

“Can... can you spare my life if I bring you out?” The terrified youth stuttered. However, when he saw Li Huowang reaching for the hilt of the sword on his back, the youth scrambled onto the boat in fear.

The youth rowed the oars, turning the boat toward the dense field of reeds. At the same time, the others also began to clumsily row the boat.

It was very quiet within the dense field of reeds. No one made any sound apart from the rhythmic splash of oars in the water. The recent events had left everyone feeling unsettled.

“Lo... Lord, I’m Yuan Fu,” the youth rowing the oars suddenly spoke.

Li Huowang frowned but did not reply. His eagle-like eyes continued scanning the pitch-black surroundings.

“Lord, I know that it’s not a good thing to kill and loot on the waters. I never joined my dad when he engaged in those activities,” the nervous youth tried to explain. “Actually, I want to go to the capital to take the examination and become a government official; I’m already fed up with this place. Lord, where are you going? I’m very familiar with this area and can lead the way for you.”

This finally caught Li Huowang’s attention, and he looked down at the youth rowing the boat. “How much do you know about the Nunnery at Henghua Mountain?”

This was their next destination, and there was a chance that he

could learn something about it. After all, Henghua Mountain should not be too far away from this lake.

“Nunnery? I know about it. I met the nuns there once when I was working with my older brother and we were about to finish a deal on the boat. However, at the last moment, my brother decided not to go through with it,” explained the youth. “At that time, he told me this: Based on our great-grandfather’s command, we cannot rob these three groups—black-clothed nuns, bald heads rearing birds, and drum-wielding deities.”

“Is there anything special about how the nuns look?” asked Li Huowang.

“They are very fat. Just one of them is probably three times my weight. Also, they are very lazy. They would rather sit than stand, and would lie down at any given opportunity,” replied Yuan Fu. “Also, they release this extremely dirty and vile stench around them. Once, when one of those nuns took off her shoes, I could smell the stench from the adjacent boat. Lord, are you looking for these nuns? I can show you the way.”

Fat, lazy, smelly. It was quite difficult for him to associate these descriptors with nuns.

Li Zhi said that they could be considered somewhat good people? But does this world even have these so-called good people?

After everything he had been through, Li Huowang had serious doubts about this.

After drifting through the field of reeds for a long time, the vast expanse of the lake once again appeared before them. The small boats reached the shore just as the sun began to rise. They had actually spent an entire night on that island, from dusk till dawn.

When the sunlight illuminated their faces, they were finally able to release the heavy burdens in their hearts. Exhausted from a long night of rowing, they all panted and fell to the ground.

Li Huowang said, “Don’t rest yet. Go to the woods and gather

some firewood, and then cremate these three people. Otherwise, they will start to rot.”

The rest of them looked toward their three drowned companions, then mustered their strength to stand up before walking toward the nearby forest.

However, Li Huowang stopped Xiaoman, who was clutching her arm. There was a large region on her right arm that had been torn apart, exposing her bloodied muscles to the air.

“Are you alright?” Li Huowang took out a pill from his waist and handed it to her.

But Xiaoman did not take the pill. “I’m fine. I’m lucky enough just to be able to survive. I’ll just use some wood ash to cover this small wound, and it will be okay.”

Having spent all this time together, Li Huowang had come to understand her unyielding personality and did not push further.

Soon, three large bonfires were built by the shore. Then, Li Huowang carried each of the three corpses and placed them in the flames.

Everyone watched as their companions, who had been alive just yesterday, were gradually engulfed by the flames.

The flames slowly burned out as the sun rose higher in the sky.

Once the flames died out, Li Huowang used his sword to poke through the ashes and broke down some of the larger bones into smaller pieces. Then, he packed the bones together with the ashes inside ceramic urns.

His mood grew more and more depressed as he looked at the ash-filled urns. The events of last night had left his mind in turmoil.

At that moment, Bai Lingmiao, with her eyes already covered, reached out with both hands to gently tug at his sleeves. She had come over upon sensing his unease and was trying to comfort him.

“I’m fine. There’s no need to comfort me,” Li Huowang said as he bent down to pick up the three urns before passing them to

Simpleton.

Meanwhile, Yuan Fu was like a loyal dog as he stood beside Li Huowang. “Lord, do you want to rest for a while? If not, I can directly bring you to find the nuns.”

Hearing this, Li Huowang shook off the ashes on his sword, swung it in the direction of the voice, and then resheathed it in a single smooth motion.

“Let’s go,” said Li Huowang.

On the other hand, Yuan Fu’s eyes widened with disbelief as he clutched his bleeding neck. He opened his mouth to try and say something to Li Huowang’s departing figure, but only coughing noises came out.

Finally, he staggered a few steps behind before his body crumbled onto the floor, the life in his eyes slowly dissipating.

Chapter 79 - Market

“From now on, you’ll be called Gao Zhijian,” Li Huowang said to Simpleton, who was carrying a wooden rod.

“I... I... I...”

Li Huowang reached out to press down on Simpleton’s thick finger that was pointing at his own chest. “Don’t go ‘I...’ anymore. Remember, you’re no longer Simpleton. This is your new name. Gao Zhijian. Got it? Aren’t you literate? Break off a tree branch and write it on the floor until you memorize it.”

“Oh...” Simpleton, who had no say in picking his own name, dejectedly turned toward the forest and walked over.

On the other hand, Li Huowang sighed as he looked at that towering figure walking away.

Whatever it is, since I previously said that I will give him a name, then I have to deliver. Let this be his gift for coming back from death’s door.

In fact, Li Huowang had wanted to give Simpleton a name for a long time. After all, calling someone a simpleton and ordering him around like a fool sounded quite bad. It was only that he had not thought of a suitable name until now.

Simpleton was a little lacking in terms of intelligence, so Li Huowang had decided to give him the name, ‘Gao Zhi’ in the hopes that the fellow could find some intelligence from his name. Meanwhile, ‘Jian’ represented Li Huowang’s expectations of him persevering through the difficulties in his difficult life.

“Senior Li! Senior Li! Can you give me a name too? While it doesn’t sound good for him to be called ‘Simpleton’, ‘Puppy’ isn’t much better either,” asked Puppy.

Frowning, Li Huowang turned to look at the shifty-eyed youth

beside him. “While he is somewhat slow, are you as well? You’re already so mature, but you still can’t pick a name for yourself?”

Li Huowang turned back toward the bonfire, but Puppy persistently followed behind him. “Ah, Senior Li, you’re literate, so the name you come up with will definitely be better than whatever a cattle-herder like me would be able to come up with. I’m not greedy; just giving me a reputable-sounding name will do. Of course, the greater, the better.”

Li Huowang chuckled, “Ke ke... you want a reputable name? Can you handle ‘Cao Cao’?”

It was evident that Puppy did not understand Li Huowang’s meaning, and excitedly clapped his hands together, leaping with joy. “Alright! Cao Cao is a good name; it sounds quite festive! From now on, I’ll be called Cao Cao!”

Puppy did not wait for Li Huowang to continue, and dashed back toward the crowd, excitedly announcing his new name.

The others naturally did not understand the meaning behind this name either, and just congratulated him.

Witnessing this comical scene, Li Huowang could only shake his head silently.

Li Huowang looked up to see the gradually brightening skies. He said, “Stop dawdling around, and let’s set off. Our aim is to reach the town today. When we get there, we’ll have a good meal. Haven’t you guys had your fill of these wild vegetables these past few days?”

His words made all of them feel invigorated, and they eagerly swallowed their saliva.

Their dry rations and donkey cart had all drowned in the lake. While they had a lot of gold, there was nobody to buy rations from in these remote areas.

Without rations, they could only survive by eating wild vegetables like the old monk from back then. There were quite a

few times when the vegetables were not enough for them to even feel full. Due to this, the guiding drug ingredients had become noticeably skinnier. And so, as soon as they heard that they would get proper food, they started moving with renewed vigor. Under the allure of getting to fill their stomachs, they covered a distance which would normally take half a day in just four hours.

A bustling little town sat at the foot of a large mountain peak shrouded within clouds. To a certain extent, it was even a little overly busy. Li Huowang's group went in but could barely find a place to stand.

Li Huowang turned around slightly, sidestepping a shoulder pole, and then quickly raised his right foot to avoid stepping on the chicken droppings on the ground before pressing on toward the sounds of peddling in the distance.

Is this place really so good? Why are there so many people here?

There were many people squatting down on the narrow stone-paved road, both buyers and sellers haggling in loud voices. People were selling things like hand-woven baskets, wild game from the mountains, home-grown vegetables, chickens, dogs, and even tree saplings.

The buyers and sellers were conversing so loudly that Li Huowang felt as though a thousand flies were buzzing around him.

"Senior Li, I, Cao Cao, know the reason! It's the first day of the month, so there's a larger crowd today since everyone from the nearby villages is gathering here," Puppy explained.

Li Huowang nodded. He had forgotten that the people here often gathered at such large markets on the first and fifteenth day of each month, facilitating trade.

Li Huowang suddenly had an urge as he looked at the bustling crowd—he wanted to ring the bronze bell and see how many Wandering Gods there were in this large market.

However, this was just a passing thought. He was not a kid

anymore, and he had much more pressing matters to attend to.

Li Huowang gradually moved his gaze from the dense crowd and looked toward the buildings in the distance. Finally, his gaze settled on the towering mountain peak up ahead.

That was Henghua Mountain. The Nunnery at the top of that mountain was Li Huowang's destination. There, he may perhaps be able to get rid of Dan Yangzi, who was gradually eroding away his body.

Li Huowang was just about to set off but saw that the others had stopped before a stall. They were staring intently at the objects displayed. Even the drool hanging from Simpleton's mouth seemed to be hanging longer.

"What's this?" Li Huowang walked over and tapped on the golden-brown round biscuit.

"Senior Li, this is Guokui, a type of flatbread. It can be eaten," said Bai Lingmiao as she tried her best to stop drooling but still failed.

Seeing their eager looks, Li Huowang felt a pang of sadness. At the end of the day, these people were a pitiful and unfortunate group.

Li Huowang took out some of the gold jewelry from Simpleton's bag and used his sharp sword to quickly divide it into small pieces the size of golden beans.

"Buy! Go and buy whatever you want. We have money now, so buy anything you like from this market!" said Li Huowang as he placed the golden beans in the hands of everyone besides Gao Zhijian.

In an instant, everyone's faces became flushed with excitement.

Meanwhile, he watched the nouveau-riche guiding drug ingredients rush to the stalls and buy all sorts of things that they could or couldn't use.

Then, Li Huowang turned to Gao Zhijian who was munching on

the flatbread, and said, "Follow me. Since we have money now, we should make some upgrades."

Soon after, there were two brand-new horse carriages beside them. The horses were tall, healthy, and very intelligent. Once he gently tugged on their reins, the horses would follow steadily without struggling or trying to go in other directions. This was completely different from those two old and sickly donkeys they had before.

When the others finished making their purchases and gathered around the carts, Li Huowang noticed that their clothes and shoes had all been replaced by new items. At the same time, they were carrying all sorts of food and treats; even Bai Lingmiao was no exception.

Everyone had extremely joyous expressions on their faces, and one could easily imagine just how happy they were.

Chapter 80 - Nun

Li Huowang shook his head, declining the white-frosted persimmon biscuit placed before him. "Don't eat too much right now; otherwise, when we go to the inn and have a proper meal, you might not have any space left for it."

However, Li Huowang's reminder did not slow them down.

"No problem. I can still eat more after finishing these," said one of the guiding drug ingredients.

"That's right! We will still eat even if we're stuffed! Being hungry is very uncomfortable. Ah, Senior Li, aren't you hungry?" said another one of the guiding drug ingredients.

Li Huowang just silently smiled and continued to lead the horse forward. There was an inn not too far ahead.

"Senior Li, would you like to try these clothes I bought for you?" asked Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang shook his head again, "Forget it. I've grown accustomed to wearing these Daoist robes while just having to change the inner layers. Also, you should cover your eyes up, or you'll start to feel pain soon."

The two horse carts squeezed through the dense crowd for a long time before finally arriving at the inn.

Once there, Puppy excitedly raised the gold beans in his hand and rushed in. "Waiter! Prepare the best private room for Lord Cao Cao! Also, bring me braised pork! Only fatty meat, no lean meat! Four large bowls!"

Li Huowang walked in and pushed him aside, then looked at the townspeople who were eating away and chatting. Then, he told the approaching waiter, "No need for a private room; we'll eat in the main hall. I like the liveliness."

“Senior Li, we have money now. Why are we eating in the main hall? It’s noisy and-” protested Puppy.

However, the jumpy Puppy wilted like an eggplant as soon as Li Huowang glared at him.

They sat down at a wooden table, and Li Huowang started listening in on the surrounding conversations.

“Be careful of people making things hard for you. Your grandmother is really saying these things behind your back,” said a man.

“If you ask me, others not respecting your boundaries calls for a fight! Our kingdom of Si Qi has never feared anyone in battle. Though I’ve retired from the military, I’ll report back without question if orders are sent for me to come back!” said another.

“Kekeke, Zi Qi, forgive me for being late. My wife nagged me for a bit. As a punishment, I’ll down three cups first,” said another.

“Ah! Look there, that Daoist looks quite strange. His robes are red...” said another man, pointing at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang did not hear any information he wanted to hear while waiting for the food to be served. Based on his understanding, this town was quite close to the Nunnery, and there should be some form of influence on the people nearby, be it good or bad.

However, from what he saw, the presence and influence of the Nunnery were quite low among the townspeople.

Since this approach did not work, Li Huowang began to think of other ideas to gather the information he needed.

“Twin Dragons Chasing the Pearl~ Three Suns Prosperity~ Fish Leaping over Dragon Gate~ All the dishes are here~ Esteemed guests, please enjoy!” said the waiter, carrying in all their dishes.

Just as the waiter had finished placing the dishes and was about to leave, Li Huowang grabbed his arm and stopped him.

“Oh, Daoist, you can see how busy it is in this inn, I’m very sorry—” the waiter tried to quickly apologize and leave.

However, before the waiter could even finish his sentence, Li Huowang stuffed a golden bean into his hand.

“Do you know about the Henghua Mountain over there?” asked Li Huowang.

“Yes!” the waiter replied happily.

“There’s a Nunnery at the top of that mountain. I have heard that their incense is very prosperous? Is their Bodhisattva very efficacious?” questioned Li Huowang.

A look of bewilderment crept onto the waiter’s face.

“Prosperous incense? But the Benevolent Nunnery’s incense isn’t even as popular as the local deity.”

“Eh?” Li Huowang looked toward Xiaoman; this was different from what she had told him before.

“My neighbor said that they were very popular,” Xiaoman said, putting down her chopsticks in embarrassment.

“Ah, then your neighbor must be bragging. The Benevolent Nunnery’s Bodhisattva has even started to gather dust. Even if they have an incense burning, it must be haunted there,” said the waiter. “Daoist, I’m not wrong. After all, a widow from the village my elder sister’s nephew lives at went to become a nun at Benevolent Nunnery.”

This got Li Huowang interested. “Oh? Why did she become a nun there? Are there any requirements?”

Hearing this question, the waiter looked around hesitantly.

Li Huowang passed another golden bean into his hand, leading the waiter to lean in and answer in a low voice.

“Her husband died, the rest of her family lived far away, and she couldn’t bear any sons. Thus, she was deemed useless by the people of her village and had no other options. Otherwise, nobody would willingly become a nun,” explained the waiter.

“Oh... So it’s like that.” Li Huowang nodded thoughtfully.

From the information he had gathered so far, these nuns should

be quite normal and not too different from what Li Zhi had said before his death.

“Then do you know why the nuns there need to wear black clothes?” Li Huowang asked as he took out yet another golden bean.

“Ah, those aren’t supposed to be black clothes. The nuns are supposed to wear blue robes. But I don’t know if it’s because they have no wells up the mountain, or because they don’t take baths or because they don’t change clothes, their robes turn black over time,” explained the waiter. His face was filled with disgust at this point.

“Some time back, a few nuns came down to sell some pigs, and I saw one of them rub her neck. Guess what?! She rubbed out a black mudball about the size of a jujube!” continued the waiter.

The others nearby had uncomfortable looks on their faces as they placed down their chopsticks.

Smack!

At that moment, a palm smacked the back of the waiter’s head.

“There are guests eating here! What are you talking about?! Are you trying to ruin the reputation of my Penglai Inn?” asked the innkeeper.

“Innkeeper, that was not my intention! I only answered this Daoist’s questions!” defended the waiter.

The fat innkeeper apologized and led the waiter away.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang picked up his chopsticks and began to eat.

“Senior Li, we can help you if you want to ask something,” Puppy said as he picked up a fatty piece of meat and placed it into his mouth.

“Alright, don’t go around frightening the people with your speckled face. Baolu, when you’re done, go to the town and try to gather some information about the Benevolent Nunnery,” said Li

Huowang.

Amongst the guiding drug ingredients, this was the only man who was adept in swimming and also had a completely normal appearance, at least on the outside.

Sun Baolu had always maintained a low profile. Hearing Li Huowang's command, while he was momentarily surprised, he quickly nodded in silence.

Li Huowang glanced at him, and then continued to eat his meal. Having a normal outer appearance did not mean that he was normal. This man, Sun Baolu, had never taken off his clothes when they went to sleep and would always avoid people when going to the bathroom, be it male or female.

His clothes definitely hid the reason behind why Dan Yangzi chose him as a guiding drug ingredient.

But Li Huowang did not wish to pry. Similarly, he did not want others to discuss his mental state and hysteria.

Li Huowang decided to stay at this inn for some time.

Meanwhile, he sent some of the assistants and Baolu to gather information about the Benevolent Nunnery.

Li Huowang did not want a repeat of the events that occurred back at the Righteous Monastery. This time, he had even told Baolu to make a trip up the mountain.

After some time, Li Huowang reluctantly concluded that these nuns should not pose too much of a threat to himself. The most common adjectives used by the townsfolk about the nuns were dirty, lazy, and fat.

"If I don't return the next day, then you guys should leave this place immediately. Got it?" Li Huowang was standing at the mountain path as he instructed the rest of the guiding drug ingredients.

"Senior Li, let's go there together," suggested one of them.

"Go there together? To become a burden? Do you think this is

just an outing?” reprimanded Li Huowang. However, he regretted his harsh words as soon as he said them. Even so, he did not explain anything to them. He just turned around and started heading up the mountain alone.

As she watched his figure gradually grow distant, Bai Lingmiao bit her lips. Tears welled up in her eyes as she seemed to want to say something. But in the end, she did not speak.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang vanished up the mountain path.

Translator's Thoughts

Simpleton (Gao Zhijian) by @格子的乱七八糟



Chapter 81 - The Benevolent Nunnery

“Ha~ Ha~” Li Huowang’s forehead was beaded with sweat as he placed his hands on his knees and panted for air.

He had already been climbing for four hours but had not yet reached his destination. The Nunnery was much higher up than he had imagined.

Li Huowang struggled to lift his head; the winding dirt path seemed to have no end as it stretched upward endlessly.

Li Huowang gritted his teeth, then grabbed a nearby vine and continued to climb.

By the time his legs had become extremely sore, he finally caught sight of the gate of the Benevolent Nunnery.

He wiped off the sweat on his chin with the back of his hand and then subconsciously glanced at the couplet on the sides of the gate. But what surprised him was that he could not understand the couplet of this Nunnery at all.

It was not because of Dan Yangzi’s influence that he could not recognize these words. Instead, it was due to their appearance—those words looked very strange.

The words seemed to be rhomboidal in shape, with the right-side higher and the left-side lower. The characters were slanted and elongated, and they seemed to be ancient words, yet there were traces of many familiar characters.

“These are... Characters? Or something else?” Puzzled, Li Huowang walked up to and touched them.

After carefully examining them for a while, he continued toward the nunnery.

However, after he entered, the speech that he had prepared beforehand could not be used; there was no one here that he could talk to.

There was not a single person in sight within the square that was covered in overgrown weeds. This formed a stark contrast with the crowds he saw back at the Righteous Monastery.

“Is anybody here?” Li Huowang’s voice reverberated in the square, yet nobody appeared.

Li Huowang glanced both ways before heading toward the main hall before him. There was no incense within, yet it was not dark at all. The ceiling had holes, and the rays of sunlight illuminated everything within.

The Bodhisattva statue in the middle of the large hall was also covered with gray dust and spiderwebs. Li Huowang would have almost not recognized that this was a Bodhisattva statue if not for the lotus seat beneath it.

Is there a mistake? This Nunnery seems to be completely deserted.

Just as Li Huowang was thinking that, a snore caught his attention. He followed the sound to its source and saw a large meatball rising and falling behind the Bodhisattva statue.

Only after approaching it did he realize that it was not a meatball but the exposed belly of a fat nun.

She was sleeping face-up on the icy-cold floor, snoring with her mouth open and releasing a putrid stench toward them.

Black clothes, fat, and dirty. These were all correct. This was a nun from the Benevolent Nunnery.

Frowning, Li Huowang tried to determine whether this was a good or a bad person. Based on Li Zhi’s description, these nuns were good people. However, while he didn’t know the veracity of that claim, given the current state of this nunnery and looking at this nun, he concluded that even bad people would not want to have much interaction with her.

“Venerable master, Xuan Yang from Zephyr Temple has an urgent matter to discuss,” Li Huowang raised his voice and greeted the large meatball.

However, the fat nun’s snoring showed no signs of stopping—she didn’t wake up at all.

Is she pretending to ignore me?

Li Huowang stepped forward and raised his voice more. “Venerable master! Xuan Yang from Zephyr Temple has an urgent matter to discuss!”

Yet, there was still no response.

Li Huowang was about to go up to her and shout into her ear but was repulsed by the strong stench coming from her body. This stench was a combination of smelly socks, durian, and fermented sweat. It was quite unbearable.

Before he could come up with anything else, the fat nun trembled and sat up on her own.

She used her stubby fingers to rub off the yellowed eye boogers. Then, without even opening her eyes, she swayed toward the side door. “Aiya, time for a meal.”

“Venerable master! Xuan Yang from Zephyr Temple has an urgent matter to discuss!” repeated Li Huowang.

This time, Li Huowang was not ignored. The fat nun jumped in fright, and at the same time, her extremely oily chin also trembled with her.

“You scared me. How come you walk so silently?” asked the nun.

Conflicted, Li Huowang remained rooted on the spot. He was now more concerned about whether the nuns here even had the ability to help him deal with Dan Yangzi rather than questioning their intentions.

“Go and burn incense on your own if you want to pay respects to Buddha! Don’t delay my meal!” The fat nun said in an icy tone

before continuing to walk inside with her humongous legs.

This time, Li Huowang didn't say anything and just followed behind her.

The entire nunnery was quite large, but also quite dilapidated. If the main hall's Bodhisattva statue was already so shabby, then the other Bodhisattva statues were likely to be even shabbier.

There were some inscriptions beside some of the hall entrances, but they were identical to those from the gate he saw earlier.

"Master, what characters are these?" Li Huowang asked.

"Women's script. You can't understand it. This script is only passed down to women, not men," replied the nun.

Although she answered the question, the nun seemed very impatient and directly walked inside.

As the environment inside became increasingly unfamiliar, Li Huowang continued following her without any hesitation. Everything here seemed real, without the strange feeling he had back at the hospital.

Whether it was due to him having consumed too much Black Taisui or due to him having spent a long time dealing with hallucinations, ordinary illusions had no impact on him. He could easily distinguish them from reality, even if they were effective in fooling his senses.

After wandering around for a while, Li Huowang followed the plump nun to an earthen house that had a chimney. He could hear some commotion from within, indicating that there were people inside. He knew that they were all nuns just based on the heavy stench coming from within.

He saw the fat nun rushing in with excitement, then frowned before taking a deep breath. Then, he pinched his nose and resisted the urge to tear up before following her inside.

As soon as he entered, he could hear sounds of lips smacking, as well as the sound of food being chewed and swallowed.

For a moment, he almost thought that he was at a pigsty.

At this moment, a group of black-clothed fat nuns were gathered around a black pot, chomping away at its contents. They were not even using any chopsticks or bowls, directly using their hands to grab the food from within the pot.

They were enjoying their meal so much that they didn't even respond to Li Huowang, a living person who was standing right there.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang could only blindly guess that they were eating some sort of vegetable fried rice.

Li Huowang was turning red from holding his breath. When he tried to breathe, he felt the stench in the air irritate his throat.

Finally, his actions attracted some attention. A fat nun who had just finished eating got up and gave her seat to him as she sucked her fingers.

"Do you want to have a vegetarian meal? 200 copper coins per person," asked the nun.

Li Huowang was happy upon hearing money being mentioned.

"No need. However, there's something that I need your help with," said Li Huowang as he tossed over a golden bean.

"Gold!" The fat nun excitedly stuffed the golden bean into her mouth and chewed on it with her yellowed teeth. After verifying the authenticity of the gold, she spit it back out, mixed with vegetable leaves and saliva.

"Do you want to buy pigs? How many? Our Nunnery has the fattest pigs," offered the nun.

As Li Huowang saw her approaching him, he took a step back. "No. I heard that the venerable masters of the Benevolent Nunnery are very knowledgeable. Hence, this time I've come to seek help from the Nunnery to exorcize some evil spirits."

"Hahaha~! Aren't you a Daoist? You're asking us nuns to help you exorcize evil spirits? Hahaha~" asked the nun, laughing.

Her laughter seemed to be quite contagious as the other nuns also started laughing.

Finally, even Li Huowang could not hold back anymore.
“Hahah~!!”

Translator's Thoughts

The nuns look like.. @格子的乱七八糟



Chapter 82 - Abbess Jingxin

Li Huowang had to try quite hard to stifle his laughter. He suddenly found it very humorous that he, as a Daoist, was asking for help from these nuns.

“Cough cough, esteemed masters, please don’t laugh anymore. I have an urgent problem, and it might be life-threatening if left unresolved,” Li Huowang explained.

“Follow me; let’s go find the Abbess. Right, it’ll cost two golden beans to show you the way,” declared the nun as an oily hand reached out toward Li Huowang.

On the other hand, the thing that Li Huowang was the least worried about was them wanting money. After all, any matter that could be resolved through money was not really an issue.

He directly passed two golden beans over before following the fat nun outside.

Just as they were about to leave the house, Li Huowang looked back at the other nuns inside with a hint of reluctance. He had a feeling that if he spent his time with these carefree nuns, it would be rather enjoyable. At this point, even the pungent stench in the air didn’t seem so unbearable.

He followed the nun onto the small path outside the house once again. Li Huowang said to the nun guiding him, “I am Xuan Yang from Zephyr Temple. May I ask for your monastic name?”

“Miao Yu,” replied the fat nun as she picked her nose.

“Cough-cough... good name.” Li Huowang had to restrain himself to avoid laughing out loud. The name did not match her appearance in the slightest.

They walked for a while, and arrived at a row of short thatched houses. The fat nun directly walked in. "Wait here, I need to take a dump."

"Sure, take your time," said Li Huowang as he stifled his laughter, clasped his hands, and bowed.

"Ah~ Hehe." Li Huowang stood beside the thatched house and stretched lazily. He felt rather at ease here. Here, Li Huowang wanted to smile at whatever he saw. His surroundings just seemed so cheerful.

Just as he was about to burst into laughter thinking about what had just happened, he suddenly felt everything around him begin to collapse. The white walls of a hospital began replacing everything around him, and some illusory figures started to solidify.

Li Huowang had just been feeling at ease, but now, his expression turned extremely ugly as he clutched his head tightly.

"No, not now! Just for a little while more, shh, shh! Help! Please, be quiet, shh~ shh~"

Almost as if his pleading had an effect, everything around him quietened down.

His expression was now quite pale, and he wiped off the cold sweat from his face as he stood up.

The Black Taisui's effects were fading, and those hallucinations were about to come back after a long time. However, Li Huowang had to push these matters to the back of his mind for now. In the face of life and death, these hallucinations were but a small matter.

Li Huowang's mood grew gloomy as he recalled the recent events; he found it hard to feel cheerful anymore.

"Hai..." Li Huowang sighed.

Just then, he suddenly heard a sound and headed toward the toilet behind.

He was truly shocked when he saw the scene behind.

There was a bamboo fence surrounding the area behind the

thatched house, and a few black, long-haired pigs were being raised within.

At this moment, yellow waste was spewing out from within the thatched house, and the black pigs were grunting within it.

This scene instantly caused Li Huowang to feel nauseous.

He had heard previously that the nuns from the Benevolent Nunnery reared pigs, but he hadn't expected that they used something like this to feed them!

As he continued looking at the pigs, Li Huowang's impression of the Benevolent Nunnery as a whole gradually started falling. The nuns here were extremely strange.

The black pigs grunted and scattered, and then Miao Yu stepped out from the thatched house. She saw Li Huowang standing by the pigsty, but did not say anything and continued to lead him onward.

"Let's hurry; I still need to take a nap later," said Miao Yu.

"Do you all eat the pigs that are raised like this?" Li Huowang suddenly asked.

"What are you talking about! Can't you see we're nuns? We believe in Buddhism, and we can't eat meat. You're a Daoist and don't even understand this?" Miao Yu's tone carried a strong sense of disdain, but then she became dejected again as she changed topics. "Ah, actually we didn't want to feed the pigs or raise them either. However, nobody came to burn incense or give offerings, so we had to find some way to make money. After all, people can't survive on thin air."

"Indeed, indeed." Li Huowang nodded in agreement and continued to follow behind her.

After going in circles for a while, Miao Yu brought Li Huowang to a house and stopped before it.

"The Abbess is inside. I'm not going in. Truthfully, I'm a little afraid of her. Oh, right, her monastic name is Jingxin," said Miao

Yu. Then, without waiting for Li Huowang's response, she left.

Li Huowang looked at her retreating figure, then chuckled softly and headed in.

It was very dark within the house. There were also sounds of food being swallowed, and an even stronger stench. These peculiarities made Li Huowang subconsciously grab onto the bamboo slip inside his clothes.

Just as Li Huowang placed his right foot down to step toward the darkness, he felt like he had stepped onto something shriveled up, and quickly withdrew his foot.

"You may light a lamp, please. I'm blind, so I usually don't need any light." A frail and aged voice sounded from within the darkness.

"Yes, Abbess." Li Huowang took out a glowing stone and threw it toward the direction he had just stepped in, instantly causing him to be startled by the strange thing he saw.

It was an extremely old and fat woman wearing a nun's cap. Her eye sockets were hollow, her eyes replaced by two black voids. The skin on her face hung loosely, dragged by the fat around her neck, as though it was about to be peeled off at any moment.

Seeing such a sight in the dim room was undoubtedly terrifying.

However, what was more important was her body, rather than her face.

Her fat body almost filled the entire room. Her filthy skin was covered in bloody acne, and there even seemed to be something moving within the acne!

And at this moment, this woman was hugging a large basin, reaching in with both hands to devour the greasy food.

"Keke, this is uncommon. It's rare for a Strayed One to come looking for me." The terrifying, old nun spoke with her toothless mouth before continuing to eat. Though her appearance was

extraordinarily scary, her voice was unexpectedly gentle. If there was no light, one would likely mistake her for just an ordinary elderly person.

However, Li Huowang did not have time to think about that. Once he heard this person mention ‘Strayed One’, he instantly went on high alert and prepared to withdraw.

“What are you afraid of? One look and I know that you’re a young child who doesn’t know anything. When would our Benevolent Nunnery need others as ingredients? We’re too lazy to bother with that sort of thing. In fact, my own son is also a Strayed One,” said the Abbess.

“Oh?” Li Huowang perked up. “Then Abbess Jingxin, where is your son now?” This was the first time Li Huowang had heard about other Strayed Ones.

“He went mad. Strayed Ones typically have tragic fates. Going mad is considered a relatively better outcome for them,” explained the Abbess.

Then, Abbess Jingxin started to talk about her son’s story, her voice growing a little depressed.

Translator's Thoughts

This is Abbess Jing Xin, drawn by @格子的乱
七八糟



Chapter 83 - Strayed One

Going mad is considered a relatively better outcome for a Strayed One? Is that going to be my future ending as well?

Li Huowang had always thought that others calling him a Strayed One was because he had some rare gift, something akin to the unique talents he had read about in cultivation novels. However, the Abbess was telling him it wasn't anything good. The name 'Strayed One' itself seemed to carry other problems.

Li Huowang took a moment to calm himself, then took a deep breath and said, "Abbess Jingxin, I have previously eaten Black Taisui to cure my hysteria, and it was rather effective. Have you used it for your son before?"

Li Huowang was hoping to hear that she hadn't used it before, but was immediately disappointed.

"Yes, of course. But Black Taisui cannot be eaten just willy-nilly. Something like that can be eaten quite easily, but it is very difficult to get it out of your body. It will stay in the stomach for a long time, sucking your blood and consuming your flesh. It's manageable if consumed in small amounts. However, if too much is eaten, it will occupy your entire stomach and burrow out from within your body," Abbess Jingxin graphically described the situation, almost as though she had witnessed it firsthand.

Hearing this, Li Huowang touched his stomach, his expression growing even more ugly. There was a mass of tentacle-covered Black Taisui currently nested within his stomach. At the same time, he reaffirmed his understanding of Dan Yangzi—he was always up to no good. Even the medicine given by him was full of such serious side-effects.

But these small matters had to be set aside for now; he had

more pressing matters to ask about.

“Abbess Jingxin, could you tell me exactly what being a Strayed One entails? And why is it that the Strayed Ones end up descending into madness?” asked Li Huowang.

Li Huowang’s anxiety drove him into asking this question. He really needed an answer to this, since it concerned his future life and death.

Abbess Jingxin had been scarfing down her food when she heard his voice, and then looked up toward Li Huowang with her hollow eyes.

“What is a Strayed One? You are a Strayed One and you are asking me? Can’t you tell what is different about you compared to others? Then let me ask you, where are you from?” asked Abbess Jingxin.

Li Huowang almost blurted out an answer, but stopped himself warily. The matter of him transmigrating here from the modern era was an extremely confidential affair. He could not just tell about it to this strange old nun without any preparation, especially when he considered that he had just met her. Who knew what thoughts this fat old nun would have after learning this secret.

“Hehe, let me guess, you must think that you’re someone not from here? Someone from a different realm, a world completely different from this one?” asked Abbess Jingxin.

Jingxin’s words shattered Li Huowang’s psychological defense. “You actually know?!”

Unperturbed, Jingxin bent down to eat the sticky, yellow substance in her bowl. “No need to panic. A child really has no composure. Are you questioning how I know about this matter? Didn’t I tell you before? My son is also a Strayed One. He too used to think like that in the beginning.”

This made Li Huowang lean forward subconsciously, his voice trembling as he asked, “Your son is also from the modern world?”

Did he transmigrate here as well?"

Currently, his heart was beating extremely fast. The discovery that there were others like him in this bizarre world filled him with excitement. No matter who they were, male or female, as long as they came from the same world, he was not alone. He would finally be able to share the burden that was weighing down on him heavily with someone else.

More importantly, he couldn't recall how he came to this world. Perhaps they would remember, and perhaps he could return to his original world through them!

Abbess Jingxin didn't answer him immediately, and wiped off the yellow liquid from the corner of her lips. Then, she smiled and "looked" at the youth before her. "No, he didn't. He came from my tummy. That much is certain. Also, young man, dreams may be reality, and reality may be dreams. Don't think that things are all definite, including any matters in your own head."

"What do you mean?" Li Huowang found that he could not understand what she was trying to convey.

"Why are you so certain that you must be from the other world? Why do you not think that you could be someone from this land? Who knows if those fantasy realms are fake, and all imagined by yourself?" asked Abbess Jingxin.

"Impossible! Definitely impossible! I know that some of the situations that happened in Zephyr Temple were hallucinations, but I definitely lived before in the modern world! I transmigrated from there! I am a transmigrator! I'm not some lunatic who concocted an entirely different world in my head!" Li Huowang's eyes were bloodshot as he retorted loudly. His hands were trembling as he clenched them into fists. It was as though a sensitive nerve had been struck.

Jingxin did not dispute anything, and only slanted her face slightly, as though thinking of something. "Hehe, my son had said

these words to me before. Like you, he could remain clear-headed at times. However, at other times, he would be confused and spout nonsense. But as his mother, I'm certain about one thing—ever since he came out of my tummy, he never left my side. He didn't go to any other world. That was all made up by his imagination."

Li Huowang became petrified when he heard those words, his breathing becoming erratic. Everything from his past started to rapidly flash through his mind.

Yang Na, my mother, the hospital, my school. Are all these non-existent? Is it possible that that world never even existed? Does a modern world even exist?

In that instant, Li Huowang felt that everything around him was unreal and illusory.

What is real? What is fake?!

Did I not transmigrate here? Was I originally someone from here, and there never was any modern world in the first place? Everything I believed to be true was just something made up by my imagination? No, this is not right. There must be some mistake somewhere!

Li Huowang gradually began to lose control of his emotions. His breathing quickened, and his expression grew more and more menacing.

At this moment, his sense of self was crumbling, and he needed to find an outlet for the massive amount of stress built up within himself.

Suddenly, his gaze hardened, and he glared fiercely at Abbess Jingxin.

However, before he could even say anything, the plump woman pointed her greasy finger at him and mimicked his voice, "No! You're trying to deceive me~! You have sinister motives toward me!! Everything you're saying is fake! You want to harm me, don't you?! It's not going to be that easy!!"

After speaking these words, she looked at Li Huowang, who

was frozen in place. A gentle smile was once again plastered on her plump and swollen face. "Hehe, you were just about to say these things to me, right? In fact, my own son said the same things to me before. Ah, thinking back, it feels like it was just yesterday. I really do miss those times."

Chapter 84 - Sense Of Doubt And Confusion

Jingxin was different from anyone he had encountered up until now—she looked very terrifying, but she was very amiable.

But Li Huowang would rather this huge, fat woman just rip off her facade like the others and attack him instead of chuckling as she looked at him, almost as if she knew that everything she said was true. At least, that would make him feel better.

Is all that really true?

Li Huowang started to panic, his thoughts becoming more muddled, and his expression growing more agonized. The air around him seemed to be pressing in on him, almost as though it was heavy, making breathing rather unbearable.

Various images flashed through Li Huowang's mind constantly. When he remembered Yang Na passing him those examination papers, he seemed to have come to a realization.

“No! That's not right! A person may be able to imagine an entire world, but they definitely cannot just imagine knowledge!” muttered Li Huowang.

At that moment, all the knowledge that he had learned in high school quickly flashed through his mind.

A look of pity appeared on Abbess Jingxin's face as she 'looked' at the youth muttering to himself while clutching his head. “Poor thing.”

However, regardless of what she thought, Li Huowang quickly came to his senses. He seemed tired, but his eyes were once again filled with determination.

I am Li Huowang! I transmigrated here, and there's no doubt about

that! I am not some lunatic from this world, I am a transmigrator!
Definitely!

“Looks like you’ve thought it through? So do you believe what I said or not?” asked Jingxin.

“Abbess Jingxin, let’s not talk about your son anymore. Let’s get to the point; tell me what a Strayed One is,” asked Li Huowang, trying to regain control of the topic.

A fat finger with a cracked nail trembled as it pointed at Li Huowang’s chest. “You are a Strayed One. The sense of doubt, confusion and the karmic obstacles in your heart, as well as the karma on your body. Based on the scent of those things that are behind you, you must have killed quite a few people before this, right? So you can’t be considered a complete outsider either, and you should know some of the matters about the formless arts of cultivation. Aside from foreign objects, the most important thing in any cultivation sect is your state of mind. The sense of doubt, confusion and the karmic obstacles that Strayed Ones have are much purer and more stable than those of the ordinary folks. In order to stabilize their own state of mind, some sects require a Strayed One’s sense of doubt and confusion. And, even if they don’t need it for themselves, they can sell a Strayed One to those who do need it, and make a big profit.”

State of mind? Emotions?

Li Huowang immediately thought of the intense amounts of pain and suffering needed to use the red bamboo slip, as well as the monks from the Righteous Monastery who had an obsession with beasts, flesh-and-blood creatures, as well as illicit affairs between the same sex.

From the looks of it, they all followed some sort of rules in everything they did. This was the first time that Li Huowang was getting a preliminary understanding of the supernatural powers of this world.

“Some people might capture you for other purposes as well, but the biggest reason will always be the sense of doubt and confusion that you possess. The only ones who always have this sense of doubt and confusion in their hearts are the Strayed Ones—normal people do not have that sense of doubt and confusion,” explained Jingxin.

Through this conversation, Li Huowang came to understand that in this world, human emotions were not intangible. Here, they were objects that could be made tangible and could affect reality.

Human emotions could even be used as a form of currency.

Li Huowang decisively said, “The sense of doubt and confusion, as well as the emotions in my heart can actually be used to help others cultivate? But, at this point I’m no longer confused now—I am sure that *that side* is a hallucination, and that this is reality. Even if I sink into a hallucination once again, I definitely wouldn’t mistake that side for reality.”

Hearing this, Jingxin looked at Li Huowang, and smiled faintly. “Really? Alright, I will believe it if you say so; I can’t be bothered to argue about it with you. You can take your leave.”

Leave?

Li Huowang immediately realized that he had not yet completed his main objective for visiting here. He hadn’t come here this time to understand what a Strayed One was.

“Abbess Jingxin, I came here this time to ask for your help in exorcizing an evil spirit,” said Li Huowang.

Based on the current situation, Dan Yangzi was a far more dangerous problem, and the reason for his visit this time around had been to get rid of him.

The first thing he had to do was to survive; he could worry about whether or not he would turn mad after that. After all, if his body ended up getting occupied by Dan Yangzi, then there would be no need for him to consider what happens after that.

“Ah? So you’re not here to ask about the way to resolve your situation as a Strayed One? Then why were you babbling about useless things earlier? Don’t you know how to get straight to the point?” Abbess Jingxin was a little displeased.

After apologizing, Li Huowang explained the situation to Jingxin.

“Became Immortal? There are actually still people trying to become Immortal these days?” remarked Jingxin.

Jingxin mumbled to herself, then retrieved two cow-horn shaped hexagrams from under her nun cap and began divining out loud.

After a long time of divining, she started to carefully study Li Huowang’s face with her ‘eyes’.

Just as Li Huowang was starting to feel uncomfortable, Jingxin suddenly spoke, “On the day he attained Immortality, did you eat your Master?”

“Huh?” Li Huowang was puzzled. “How could I eat him? If I had a way to get rid of Dan Yangzi, then I wouldn’t have made a plan that would end with me dying with him.”

“Hmm...” Jingxin did not rebut and only nodded silently.

Then, with a flick of her right hand, Li Huowang suddenly felt something extremely greasy all over his body, making him feel very uncomfortable. At the same time, he felt as though something was moving beneath his skin.

“Don’t rub it; endure that feeling,” said Jingxin.

Finally, after maintaining that posture for two incense sticks worth of time, Jingxin spoke, “I do have a way to deal with your Master, but it would require using quite a few Buddhist artifacts and merits. So, why should I help you?”

Li Huowang was stunned but quickly regained his composure. This was simply about giving some benefits. Since she was being so straightforward about her conditions, he felt that she was way more

reliable than the Righteous Monastery.

He took out the sacred text, the gourd storing the lifespan pills, and the red bamboo slip before placing them on the ground. “As long as you are able to get rid of Dan Yangzi, you can choose any of these items.”

However, he hadn’t expected that even after taking out all these items, he would be met with utter contempt from Jingxin.

“What kind of trash is all this? Take them all away! Especially the Profound Records. Bring that thing as far away as you can; don’t taint the the Benevolent Nunnery’s locale!” shouted Jingxin.

She seemed extremely repulsed by the red bamboo slip. It was also at this moment that Li Huowang learnt of its name.

At that moment, there was a look of greed on her old face, “I can smell gold on you.”

Li Huowang immediately understood. “No problem, I will offer gold pieces to the Benevolent Nunnery’s Bodhisattva later.”

As soon as money was mentioned, Jingxin’s attitude seemed to change completely. It was no longer as kindly as before; she seemed a lot more calculative now.

“Right, silver as well. I smell silver on you too. I want that as well. Besides that, I need you to help me find some items,” said Jingxin.

Translator's Thoughts

For those who don't want to think too much, eh it's fine to just cruise through the chapter on autopilot.

Basically in this world everything can be a currency, including intangible and abstract stuffs like emotions, karma, and lifespan. Strayed Ones are just more valuable than regular people because they have a special sense of doubt and confusion,

just like how people with O negative blood is very rare and hospitals actually keep track of them

Chapter 85 - Descent

"Find something?" Li Huowang's mind raced when he heard Abbess Jingxin's words.

On the other hand, when she saw that his expression turned more serious, she explained, "Don't think I'm just taking advantage of your problem."

However, this just made Li Huowang's mood even heavier. He thought for a while, then said, "Abbess Jingxin, this should be your final condition, right?"

He saw her nod in agreement, then took a deep breath and said, "Sure! It's a deal. What do you need?"

He wasn't afraid of there being conditions; rather, he was more wary of the other party making empty promises. However, as long as there were conditions set, they were still in the realm of negotiation.

At least, from what he had seen so far, Li Zhi had not lied before he died. In a certain sense, the nuns belonging to the Benevolent Nunnery were indeed good people. It was not easy to find such people in this strange world.

He had no other choice now. Dan Yangzi might end up possessing him first if he continued to look for other methods.

"A pair of eyes. An extremely peculiar pair of sinister eyes. There is a forest about two hundred miles to the east of Henghua Mountain. Head there and bring this sinister thing back," Jingxin stated her final condition.

"Sinister? What sort of sinister? What sort of abilities does it have?" asked Li Huowang. He wanted to know what sort of foe he was about to face.

"It's called the Eighteenth Lunar. That thing is very strange.

Every year, on the 18th day of the twelfth lunar month, it transforms. At that time, its appearance and supernatural abilities change. I don't know what it looks like right now, so just remember that it's red in color. You will have to figure out a method to deal with it yourself. You even carry the Profound Records on you, and you think you can't deal with that thing? Besides, do you think that Master of yours who attained Immortality will let you die?"

Eighteenth Lunar? That's a name?

Li Huowang was troubled. This was it? He wasn't given any hints and he had to go completely unprepared to deal with some kind of sinister being. He was going in completely blind.

He did not want to give Dan Yangzi a chance to make a move again. If he did, then he wasn't sure who this body would belong to at the end.

"Can I enlist the help of the other nuns in the nunnery? Other matters can be negotiated," probed Li Huowang.

"Hehe, they're all very lazy. Feel free to try persuading them. But, I'm guessing you don't even have the money to hire them to come down the mountain, right? Hehe," Abbess Jingxin softly mocked her juniors.

Now that a target was established, Li Huowang did not wish to procrastinate further. He re-confirmed the location of the Eighteenth Lunar with Jingxin, then bowed and turned to leave. "I won't disturb Abbess's meal any further. I will go down now and have others bring the gold up."

"Ah, right. I smell persimmon biscuits as well. I really like them; remember to bring me some," said Jingxin.

"Understood," said Li Huowang. Since he had already handed over all his gold, a little bit of food did not make much difference.

As he left, the room once again fell into darkness. However, this did not affect the blind Jingxin. She reached out with her right hand and used her blackened fingers to rummage through the

greasy folds of fat on her body.

After a long while, there was a rippling sound with a foul odor. A bald old man with frail limbs was pulled out from within.

This old person seemed to be on the verge of death. His eyes and mouth appeared slanted, and he seemed to be mumbling from time to time.

After taking him out, Jingxin pulled him into a gentle embrace with her pus-covered arms. Then, she started feeding him from the bowl, mouth to mouth.

“Son, did you hear that? In a few days, you will have some persimmon biscuits to eat. Hehe, are you happy? I still remember that you loved eating them back when you still wore open-crotch pants,” said Jingxin.

However, the old person had no reaction to Jingxin’s voice, and just reflexively spat out the stuff in his mouth.

Jingxin did not seem to notice this, and just continued to repeat her actions. “See, he’s just like you. That kid is also a Strayed One. But he’s going to have a much harder time than you. You have a mother, but he doesn’t. Who knows what sort of fate awaits him. Ah, that kid is so pitiful...”

Meanwhile, back in the Penglai Inn, Bai Lingmiao was completely naked, as she rested her hands on the edge of the wooden tub. She sighed, “I wonder how Senior Li is doing. It would have been good if I could have gone up with him.”

Should I tell him? If I do, won't he worry about me? But he already has enough to worry about for now.

Bai Lingmiao contemplated for a long while, until the water in the tub started getting cold. Then, she stood up from the water filled with floating petals, put on her clothes and walked toward the bedroom.

Forget it. No matter what, if he still hasn't come down after three days, then I'm definitely going up to find him. Who says I'm a burden?

The door creaked as Bai Lingmiao closed it. Once it was fully closed, a strange woman was revealed behind the door. She was wearing a red veil, had colored ribbons on her dress, as well as red embroidered shoes.

Seeing her, Bai Lingmiao pulled back the sheets, and mischievously slid in. Then, her hands firmly embraced the person under the sheets. "I like Sister Xiaoman the most. You're so fluffy. Hugging you is just so comfortable."

Xiaoman turned around and faced the white-haired girl. They were so close that they could even feel each other's soft breathing.

"What's so good about this thing; it's just some black hair. Others treat me like I am some weird creature. Even a man in his sixties won't dare to marry me," said Xiaoman.

"Don't worry, Sister Xiaoman. You will definitely be able to find the man of your dreams," said Bai Lingmiao as she reached out to gently stroke her black hair.

"No need. I hate men. I want to remain unmarried. I can live independently without any man!" declared Xiaoman firmly.

"Why would you want that?" Bai Lingmiao's eyes widened with surprise. She had wanted to ask if it was because of her father, but she couldn't get those words to come out of her mouth.

Meanwhile, Xiaoman turned around, showing her back to Bai Lingmiao who reached out to gently hug her.

"Sister Xiaoman, if you have no place to go to in future, then come to my house. How about being the godmother to my children?" offered Bai Lingmiao.

Xiaoman did not respond directly. There was a look of hesitation in her eyes as she stared at the wall before her. "Are you really planning to marry Senior Li?"

However, Bai Lingmiao did not answer her, only hitting her back shyly.

"Why don't you give it some more thought? This is for your

own good. Even though Senior Li has been kind to us, you don't necessarily have to repay him like that. After all... he's that sort of person," Xiaoman tailed off.

Chapter 86 - Departure

“What sort of person? Isn’t Senior Li quite good?” asked Bai Lingmiao. Those words made her feel rather unhappy; she felt as though her own belongings were being defamed.

“He...” Xiaoman hesitated. “Do you really think Senior Li has no issues? If that really was the case, then why would Baldy capture him to be used as a guiding drug ingredient in the first place?”

The room fell silent. They all knew each other quite well after having spent some time together. And so they knew that when compared to their physical issues, Li Huowang suffered from the much more thorny mental problems.

It was just that everyone consciously avoided the topic.

Bai Lingmiao’s expression was gloomy. “So what? If he’s like that, then am I much better? Everyone calls me a White-Haired Goblin back at home. Others are also afraid when they see me. But Senior Li has never looked at me differently, and he even saved me on multiple occasions. Someone like me couldn’t even dream of being able to find someone like Senior Li. I’m already overjoyed that he doesn’t despise me.”

Hearing this, Xiaoman no longer continued on this topic. She just sighed lightly and closed her eyes. “Go to sleep.”

The bedroom gradually became quiet, with the only sound being from the two’s soft breathing.

When Xiaoman heard the breathing behind her getting shallow, she turned around and looked at the delicate girl before her.

Xiaoman looked at her long eyelashes and reached out to caress her cheek. The sensation was like a boiled chicken egg that just had its shell peeled, making her feel infatuated.

“I... know... don’t rush...” Bai Lingmiao mumbled in her sleep.

Hearing this, Xiaoman's brows quivered under her dense hair, as she leaned her cheek over.

Bang!

At that moment, the door was suddenly kicked open, causing Xiaoman to instantly sit up. Then, she pulled out a dagger from under her pillow and stood before Bai Lingmiao.

"Senior Li? You've come down from the mountain?" Xiaoman exclaimed in surprise as she looked at the young man before her. The one who had opened the door was Li Huowang, who had just returned from Henghua Mountain.

"Where's all the gold?" Li Huowang got straight to the point.

"It's all with Simpl... with Gao Zhijian. He's guarding it," replied Xiaoman.

Li Huowang glanced at Bai Lingmiao, who was still half-asleep before turning around and walking off in the direction of the other guest rooms.

"What happened? Was someone here?" Bai Lingmiao sat up drowsily.

Xiaoman gently laid her back down before saying in a soft voice, "It's alright... go back to sleep. We'll talk about it tomorrow."

The next day, Xiaoman pulled Bai Lingmiao's hand and brought her to another guest room where they saw Li Huowang. She immediately noticed the mud on his shoes. From the looks of it, their Senior Li had been outside all night long.

"You are here? Have a seat. Let me tell you about the next steps of our journey," said Li Huowang as he opened a map.

"This is where we're going next; I need to retrieve something from there first. After that, I'll send all of you home," said Li Huowang as he pointed at a spot on the map.

After saying that, Li Huowang didn't wait to hear anyone's opinion. He directly rolled up the map and headed toward the door. "Pack your things. We're leaving at noon today."

"Senior Li! What happened on the mountain? Is it dangerous where we're headed?" asked Bai Lingmiao as she followed after him.

Meanwhile, Xiaoman turned to the others and asked, "What happened? What is Senior Li up to? Why did he come back?"

"How would I know? Senior Li never consults us with anything. It's already unprecedented for him to have given us a heads-up today," Puppy said gloomily.

"Why the long face? We're only leaving, right?" asked Xiaoman.

Tears streamed down Puppy's face upon hearing this question. "Senior Li gave away all the gold! If I had known he would do that, then I wouldn't have gone to the brothel earlier. I should have bought myself a wife first!"

"What?! He gave it all away? Didn't any of you try to stop that from happening? Don't you know that Senior Li has mental problems?" Xiaoman shouted anxiously.

"I did try to stop him! I tried to block him yesterday when he was giving it away! But I could only do so much," replied Puppy.

Xiaoman turned and hurried outside, but her actions were in vain. The gold had already been sent to the Benevolent Nunnery during the last night.

"Don't worry, I kept some for the journey," said Li Huowang.

With heavy hearts, Xiaoman and the others once again set off on a journey; they had little say in this decision.

Li Huowang had killed the water bandits and taken the gold. Thus, none of them had the authority to stop him even if he wanted to give it all away. It was just that the sudden transition from being extremely wealthy to being penniless was truly hard for them to adapt to.

Late at night, Xiaoman opened her eyes to see a statue-like Li Huowang sitting by the campfire as he looked at the red bamboo slip. Then, she gently crawled out from under the blanket and

walked toward the mist-covered forest.

In a secluded grassy area, she took out a book and a long knife from her waist. Then, she struck a fighting posture and began to learn from the book.

The blade in her hand danced through the air. Though she was still quite unskilled, her eyes shone with determination as she practiced seriously.

Whoosh~

At that moment, she stopped her blade as she was startled by Li Huowang's sudden appearance.

He was still the same; his neck was full of scars, and he had an exhausted expression on his face.

"Where is this book from?" Li Huowang stepped over and flipped through the book on the ground. There were only a few small figures showing a person wielding swords on it without any words. It looked like a sword-fighting manual.

"Didn't you ask us to buy the things that we wanted previously? I found an escort from the escort service, and used some gold to buy this book from him," Xiaoman replied.

"Anyone who becomes an escort these days has at least some level of skill. I spent quite a bit to buy this. It is genuine," She chuckled softly and continued. "After I killed my dad, I've been thinking; back then, if I had a blade in my hand, would he still have dared to sell my sister and me? And so, I want to become stronger, strong enough to protect myself and others."

Hearing this, Li Huowang nodded silently, then turned back toward the campfire.

Xiaoman hesitated as she looked at his back. Finally, she yelled, "Senior Li, Junior Bai truly cares about you a lot. Please don't let her down!"

Li Huowang did not stop as he took large strides out of the forest. "Show this book to the others as well. Perhaps they may also

be able to learn something from it.”

Even with a horse carriage, two hundred miles still took quite some time to cover; they had already been traveling intermittently for several days.

As they approached their destination, Li Huowang had the others wait in a small village close by.

At this moment, the others were bored and were playing card games in the courtyard of a moderately-sized farmhouse.

Puppy sneezed and asked Sun Baolu, who sat in front of him, “Where has Senior Li gone? I haven’t seen him all day long. We’re almost there already, so why are we waiting here? This isn’t his usual style.”

Chapter 87 - Forest

Sun Baolu listened to Puppy as he took out a playing card from his hand and played it. “I saw Senior Li go to the village blacksmith. It seemed like he was preparing something. Right, Puppy, didn’t Senior Li ask you to gather some information? And you’re out here playing cards? Aren’t you afraid that he’ll scold you when he returns?”

“What ‘Puppy’?! Call me Cao Cao!” said Puppy as he played a card. “This small village isn’t all that big, so there’s no need to go through so much trouble. Moreover, I brought back those two kids to question them, and finished it quickly. The village elders all told us that there are man-eating worms in the woods to the west and advised us not to go there.”

“You guys want to go *there* ? You shouldn’t... You really shouldn’t... Ten years ago, my mom saw flying worms circling the skies in that area!” The host, who had been observing their card game, interjected.

“Ah, don’t worry! Senior Li is very powerful. With him around, those worms or whatnot won’t even be able to approach us. Ah, hold on, who just played this card? Hahaha, I won. Alright, all the eggs in your noodles will belong to me,” said Puppy.

“Come take a look; Senior Li is back,” said one of the guiding drug ingredients.

As soon as they heard those words, the others turned around to see Li Huowang carrying a large leather bag while walking into the courtyard.

Surrounded by the group of curious guiding drug ingredients, Li Huowang placed the leather bag on the table and opened it in front of them. Inside, there were rows of neatly arranged items.

These were brand-new weapons custom-made for him.

There was a pair of large black pliers, sharp awls, small fingernail-sized shovels, and long barbed needles. These strange-looking objects were unsettling to even look at.

At that moment, Puppy picked up a spoon with very sharp edges and played with it. “Senior Li, what are these items for? Rather than weapons, they seem more like torture tools. For example, this. It can’t kill people, but it would definitely be able to gouge out someone’s eyes-”

Puppy abruptly stopped, scared by his own words. He immediately thought of the events that occurred on the island made of reeds. That person had used pliers to pull out his own teeth and burst his own eyes.

At that moment, Li Huowang reached out to retrieve the object in Puppy’s hand as he asked, “How’s the information gathering?”

“It... it’s done. There are said to be man-eating worms there. The people around here avoid going there. The worms are also very quiet and never come out.” Fear was clearly visible in Puppy’s eyes as he looked at the objects on the table.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang picked up a small shovel and gestured a few times with it toward his fingernail. Then, he placed the items on his back and said, “Let’s go.”

“It’s already noon. Why don’t we rest the night before going?” suggested Sun Baolu.

However, this suggestion was met with an ice glare from Li Huowang. “I said let’s go!”

Soon, the wheels of the carriage started to turn and roll toward the forests infested with man-eating creatures.

As the moon rose up, Li Huowang and his group finally arrived at their destination.

There was an extremely dense bamboo forest before them, and fireflies could be seen twinkling in and out of sight. A small path

winded through, making it look like a snake that had burrowed into the bamboo forest. The weeds on the path suggested that it hadn't been used in a long time.

Li Huowang didn't rush in recklessly. According to Abbess Jingxin, the Eighteenth Lunar was an evil being that had multiple forms. Nobody knew what form it had right now or what kind of threat it would pose to them.

He stood at the edge of the forest and spent some time observing in silence.

Time passed slowly, and everything appeared to be normal inside the forest—all the creatures within remained unchanged, and Li Huowang even saw some rats gnawing on the bamboo.

It was only at dawn that Li Huowang ceased his observation.

As he ate the noodles in his bowl, Li Huowang told the others, "From the looks of it, the periphery is fine. We will enter the forest after this meal. Once we are inside, don't do anything else. There's only one thing all of you need to do: if... and I mean, if..."

His expression turned serious as he paused. "If my behavior turns abnormal, then keep an eye on me, and don't let me wander around."

Yes, the reason Li Huowang had brought them along this time was this.

As the effects of the Black Taisui were gradually wearing off, Li Huowang felt his surroundings becoming more and more unreal, and he felt like he might be engulfed in hallucinations at any moment.

He needed them to accompany him inside, just in case.

Upon hearing this unusual request, the others exchanged glances and nodded.

"Even if my behavior turns abnormal, it shouldn't be for a long period of time. It'll be fine once I'm back to normal," continued Li Huowang.

Once he finished speaking, he drank a mouthful of soup. At that moment, a delicate white hand reached over and plucked at his hair, causing him to feel pain in his scalp.

"What are you doing?" Li Huowang was displeased with the owner of the hand, Bai Lingmiao.

"My mother once said that white hair has to be plucked. If you leave them be, more white hair will grow on your head," replied Bai Lingmiao.

Hearing this, Li Huowang hastened the pace at which he devoured his noodles.

Meanwhile, Bai Lingmiao sat down cross-legged beside him and reached out toward the red bamboo slip on Li Huowang's back.

"Senior Li, you've been carrying this thing all this time—"

However, Li Huowang suddenly stood up before she could touch it. He finished the soup in one gulp and tossed the bowl into the empty pot. "Let's go into the forest."

Everyone was well-fed, and they followed Li Huowang down the small path. Despite it being early morning, once they stepped into the forest, the surroundings turned dark. The dense bamboo thicket acted as a barrier that tightly blocked out the sunlight coming from above.

Thus, they took out the dark-green glowing stones, using them to brighten their surroundings.

However, when this green-colored light illuminated the bamboo forest, it caused the green bamboo around them to take on a sickly hue, making the onlookers feel unsettled.

Amidst the swaying of the bamboo trees, there seemed to be something hiding in the depths of the dense bamboo forest, watching them.

Li Huowang strained his eyes to make out what it was but could not see anything. Right as he was about to turn around, he felt a prickling sensation on his back.

Is this the power of the Eighteenth Lunar? Is it watching me from within the forest? What form has it taken??

The others could also feel that strange sensation.

The only sounds that could be heard around them were that of shoes stepping on the weeds. Nobody said anything, the atmosphere growing tense.

“Senior Li... do you... feel like the bamboo above is growing closer to us?” said one of the guiding drug ingredients.

Hearing this, everyone slowly looked up. The surrounding bamboo trees were completely bent, with their sickly-colored tips pointing directly at them.

Chapter 88 - Rules

"Don't move! Everyone, stay still!" Li Huowang's voice rang out in the eerie bamboo forest, causing everyone to freeze in place.

They remained motionless while gazing at the row of bamboo tips above them, afraid that those things might pierce straight down.

"Stay still," said Li Huowang as he took a step forward with his right foot.

The others held their breath anxiously as they watched this scene. However, they all heaved a sigh of relief when they saw that there were no changes in the bamboo.

Then, Li Huowang took a few more steps forward and even circled around, but the bamboo remained the same, showing no changes.

"Could it... be that the bamboo in this wretched place just grows in a strange manner?" Puppy wondered out loud.

However, Li Huowang did not dare to gamble on whether that really was the case or not. He immediately shook the bell in his hand to summon a Wandering God and then commanded it to swiftly inspect the surroundings of the forest.

After a while, the Wandering God returned before Li Huowang and indicated that there were no issues. Only after this did Li Huowang's apprehension reduce slightly.

However, he wasn't relieved because of what the Wandering God had told him, but because that strange feeling like he was being watched had vanished.

Li Huowang did not immediately dismiss the Wandering God, choosing to continue deeper into the forest while it was still around. While the ringing of the bell caused everyone to feel dizzy, it was

definitely better than being ambushed by the so-called Eighteenth Lunar.

“Stay close; let’s quickly pass through this forest,” said Li Huowang as he continued to shake the bell while walking deeper into the forest. At the same time, he flicked open the clasp of the leather bag, revealing the torture tools within. These objects gleamed with a cold light as they reflected the light given off by the glowing stones.

At this moment, everyone had gripped their weapons and held their breaths. They closely followed one another, scared to fall behind.

As time passed, the bamboo tips above them bent even more, with their tips eventually starting to touch the top of their horse carts. The sound of the bamboo tips scraping against the carriage roof was sharp and grating, making everyone feel even more oppressed. Even so, the Wandering God told them that there was no sign of any enemies.

As they walked through this bizarre bamboo forest, everyone felt as though they were traversing through a large mouth with the bamboo tips acting as the teeth.

Under such conditions, Li Huowang did not know how far they had walked either; the dizziness was causing him to lose the perception of time.

At that moment, he suddenly saw light in the distance.

An exit!

Excited, he swung his sharp sword and cut down an area of bamboo, allowing the sunlight to come in and illuminate the path.

The brightness of the sunlight made everyone squint instinctively due to how blinding it was. Based on the position of the sun, they could tell that it should be afternoon by now.

When they were finally able to see better and turned to look ahead, their eyes widened involuntarily; there was actually a village

at the back of this peculiar forest.

In the distance, the rows of blue-tiled houses were scattered around and arranged irregularly. It was not that much different from the other villages that Li Huowang had seen along the way.

There was a clear pond by the entrance of the village. At this time, several young women were washing their clothes and chatting cheerily at the pond.

"Senior Li, are you sure this is the place? Did we make a mistake?" asked Xiaoman as she frowned.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang quickly recalled the location that Abbess Jingxin had given him, then stored the bell before heading toward the village.

"Follow closely, don't let down your guard. Perhaps this is just an illusion created by the Eighteenth Lunar," warned Li Huowang.

"The Eighteenth Lunar... could it be referring to a village?" Bai Lingmiao mumbled.

This thought had also appeared in Li Huowang's mind. After all, the only piece of information he had obtained from the Abbess was that this evil being was red in color.

As they approached the village, the first to notice them were naturally the women washing their clothes. They picked up their clothes and whispered amongst themselves as they walked back toward the village.

Such a large group of people wearing black-veiled bamboo hats would naturally draw the villagers' attention. Soon, groups of burly youngsters carried farming tools on their backs as they approached, watching them vigilantly.

"Outsiders! What brings you to our Wu Family Village? Are you just passing through or are you visiting relatives?" An elderly man with a goatee yelled from a distance.

Li Huowang's gaze swept over the faces of the villagers, but he couldn't find anything abnormal. This seemed to be just like any

other village, if judged based on their appearance alone.

Could the Eighteenth Lunar be here?

When the village chief shouted a second time, Li Huowang brought his people over, bowed to them, and opened his map.

"Elder, may I trouble you to check if your village corresponds to the location on this map?"

"What? Asking for directions?" The old man took the map and conversed with the others in hushed tones.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang kept his eyes on their faces, observing their expressions.

After a while, the village chief handed the map back with both hands. "Outsiders, you have found the wrong place. The location on this map is about ten miles away from here."

We found the wrong place? Or have we not arrived yet?

Li Huowang quickly ran a mental calculation of the distance from the Benevolent Nunnery to here. Abbess Jingxin had said that it was about two hundred miles, and he was no machine either. Thus, it would be normal for there to be some human error.

"Haha, my apologies for the mistake, I actually found the wrong place." Li Huowang clasped his hands together and once again bowed to the people before him. "However, the sun is about to set quite soon, Elder. Could you allow us to stay for the night? We have been on the road for half a month, and we are quite exhausted."

"Well..." The chief looked at Li Huowang's group warily.

"Elder, if it's convenient, then please." Li Huowang smiled and leaned over, grabbing the chief's hand underneath his gown.

At that moment, the chief felt something on his palm causing his expression to change as he pinched it with his fingers.

"Alright, our west wing is still vacant. You guys can stay there. Remember, just one night," said the chief.

Soon, the two horse carriages were advancing along the moss-

covered stone path toward the village. Puppy leaned over and whispered, "Senior Li, isn't this the wrong place?"

Li Huowang gave the villagers peeking out through their doors a sideways glance. "Perhaps it isn't a mistake? What if this is the place we're looking for?"

The most important lesson Li Huowang had learned after being out for so long was to always take the words of others with a grain of salt.

Since the Eighteenth Lunar could change into any shape, then a village was undoubtedly an extremely convenient place to hide in. He didn't know whether or not it consumed people. If it did, then this village would probably be a suitable feeding point.

As they walked, he started to scan the entire village for any hint of redness. But even as they reached the village entrance, he found no trace of red.

Right as they reached the entrance, the village chief clasped his hands together and looked at them. "First, let me explain something. The Wu Family Village has many rules that are passed down from the previous generations, and they cannot be changed. You guys may stay the night, but you must follow those rules. If not, it would be better for you to leave now."

"Rules?" questioned Li Huowang.

Chapter 89 - Wu Family

After some pondering, Li Huowang nodded. "Elder, could you please tell us what these rules are?"

"First. In our Wu Family Village, you're not allowed to talk back to those older than you, especially me," said the goateed village chief as he raised his index finger.

"That is a rule?" Li Huowang and the others were completely dumbfounded. They had expected there to be some peculiar rules, but they seemed quite ordinary.

"Aren't these only household rules? You want to use your household rules to restrict outsiders?" argued Puppy.

But Li Huowang tapped Puppy's head beside him and then said to the village chief, "Please continue. We're listening."

"Second. Whenever any animals from the nearby forest come out, be it a mouse or an owl, you must not harm them or step on them. If you encounter them on the road, then you must give way. They have done many favors for our Wu Family in the past. Third. You guys are outsiders, and thus your group's men aren't allowed to talk to the females of our village. This rule didn't exist previously. But recently, a peddler took away two wives from here! Ah, my blood boils just thinking about it..."

As the village chief incessantly droned on about the rules, Li Huowang and the others gradually learned about the various rules of the Wu Family Village. Even trivial stuff like how they shouldn't litter had been mentioned.

"Damn, this village has too many rules. We might as well not stay here," muttered one of the guiding drug ingredients.

"Shh, continue listening," whispered Li Huowang.

At this point, the village chief's list was drawing to an end.

“Eleven, don’t light up fires at night, and don’t go outside at night either. And lastly, no matter what time it is, never talk to someone with your back facing them; always turn around, and only answer them once you see their face. Never speak to someone who has their back turned to you.”

Li Huowang frowned slightly upon hearing these rules. The last two made him feel that something was amiss.

“What happens if I end up breaking these rules? What will happen?” asked Li Huowang.

“Break the rules?!” The village chief’s eyes widened fully, and then he confidently continued, “You’ll be fined, of course! A silver piece each time you break the rules! Even more if it’s a repeat offense! You will be fined until you dare not break them anymore! Don’t think that I’m bullying you just because you are outsiders. Even our own villagers are treated the same way.”

Li Huowang felt that he had some sort of misconception. Could it be that he had misunderstood something?

At that moment, Li Huowang felt someone tugging at the hem of his robes, causing him to look back at the goateed elder. He nodded as he said, “Rest assured, Elder. We are reasonable people.”

“That’s good. I wouldn’t have bothered helping all of you if not for the fact that I saw you traveling with two kids. I’m getting old; I can’t bear seeing children suffer,” said the chief. Then, he turned around and walked back to the courtyard.

Meanwhile, the two horse carriages stopped within the courtyard, while Li Huowang’s group brought their bedding into the musty and smelly west wing.

By the time they were done cleaning and arranging everything, the sun was already setting in the west.

At that moment, the chief came in with a smile. “Ah, youngsters, are you going to have dinner here? I’ll get my wife to prepare some extra.”

Have dinner?

Li Huowang's heart tightened. Others' food wasn't usually so *delicious* to eat.

Li Huowang thought for a moment, then nodded, "Thank you, Elder."

Then, he glanced at Xiaoman as he watched the elder leave with hands behind his back. "Go to the kitchen and help the host family."

"Alright." Xiaoman nodded and left.

The village chief had a large family—six sons, two daughters, and even more grandchildren. Thus, dinner-time was a bustling affair with over a dozen people.

This was also the reason why he dared to take Li Huowang's group in. In the village, nobody dared to provoke those who had a lot of sons.

Even though they stayed in a massive mansion, the Wu Family's dinner was quite simple. They were having plain steamed rice along with their own homegrown vegetables. It seemed rather miserly.

By the time Li Huowang arrived, they had already started eating—they didn't have any notion of a host having to wait for the guests. In fact, many of the plates were already empty.

"The rice is over there, so help yourselves. We don't have too many formalities when we are eating," said the chief.

Li Huowang shook his head. "No problem."

He led his group to the corner where the steamer was placed as he started counting in his head. Just as he had counted to ten, the sound of bowls shattering rang out behind him.

When he turned around, he saw the dozens of people, including the village chief, all lying on the floor, unconscious.

Hehe, that peddler's knockout drugs are quite effective. You truly get what you pay for.

He didn't bother checking whether these people were under the so-called Eighteenth Lunar's manipulation or whether they were plotting against him. After all, whoever struck first held the advantage.

Then, with a wave of his hand, the others quickly rushed toward the east wing of the main house to search for clues.

"Start with anything written, then look for other abnormal objects. Pay extra attention to the strange things, like Buddhist amulets or Deities. I want to see what they are up to!" Li Huowang instructed.

They searched everywhere, even flipping through the entire courtyard as a group, yet they found nothing. There was nothing unusual.

How could there be nothing?

Li Huowang stood in the hall, frowning as he thought about these questions.

After an entire day's work, he hadn't found anything in the bizarre forest besides this village.

Could the Eighteenth Lunar be in the forest we were in previously? No, I checked there already. This village is surrounded by the bamboo forest. If the Eighteenth Lunar is hiding, then it must be here.

"Does finding their silver count for anything?" Puppy carried out some silver pieces. However, he sighed helplessly when he saw Li Huowang merely glance at him, and then dejectedly carried the silver back.

Li Huowang noticed the dusky color of the sky, and then instructed again, "Bring the fire starter and start a fire."

"Senior Li, weren't we told not to light any fires?" Bai Lingmiao was confused.

Hearing this, Li Huowang's eyes narrowed, while his right hand touched the row of torture tools on his waist. "I want to see what happens after I light it."

If there were any other suspicious things about this village, than they would be the rules mentioned by the goateed man.

Whoosh~

The candle lantern found from the search earlier was rapidly lit on fire, illuminating the entire Wu Family courtyard.

In the hall filled with people lying on the floor, Li Huowang sat quietly and waited. The sky was gradually getting darker. There was no moon tonight; it was as though a giant black cloth was covering the sky.

However, the darkness fell just like that, and nothing happened.

“Ha~” Puppy yawned, then leaned against a pillar and started to doze off.

His yawns seemed to be contagious, making the others yawn as well.

At that moment, a trace of doubt appeared in Li Huowang’s heart as he looked at the unconscious Wu Family members lying on the ground.

Could I have really come to the wrong place?

Just as he was starting to have such thoughts, a mischievous giggle sounded from beyond the courtyard wall, “Hehe, you broke the rules.”

Chapter 90 - Girl

“Hehe, you broke the rules,” a soft and somewhat feminine voice rang out.

In that moment, Li Huowang could not help but recall that ‘girl’ with tiny feet who had summoned the God of Happiness. This voice was quite similar to hers.

Li Huowang and the others walked out from inside the house to the courtyard, their faces covered in wariness. Once outside, they saw a small head propped up on top of the wall to the left of the house.

From the looks of it, she was a yellow-haired girl who appeared to be only about five to six years old. She giggled as she looked inside.

Her hair was tied into tall pigtails with the help of a red string.

Red!

Li Huowang’s heart raced when he saw the red string that tied her hair.

Could this child be the Eighteenth Lunar?

Li Huowang pondered for a moment as he watched the giggling girl. Then, he spoke, “I might have broken the rules, but you aren’t doing much better than me. Aren’t you not allowed to go outside during the night? Why are you still out here?”

“I’m a child. You adults aren’t allowed to go out, but us kids can go outside and play.” She didn’t show any hostility toward Li Huowang’s group.

Then, she shifted her head to one side and continued as she grinned, “If you give me some candy, then I won’t report you.”

Meanwhile, the others stared at the child’s head in surprise. The wall of the Wu Family’s courtyard stood quite tall at about six

meters. However, this girl's head was moving around on the wall quite effortlessly, meaning that she was not using a ladder and was just standing there!

Li Huowang looked at the small head, as well as the tall, dusty wall beneath it. He couldn't imagine what a child would look like with a regular-sized head and a six-meter-tall body.

She might look like a stick insect?

"Hehe, are you going to give me candy? If not, then I'm going to shout for someone," the girl on the wall continued.

"Yes, of course. But, I don't have the candy on me right now. I have to go and get it first," Li Huowang replied. Then, he turned to Puppy beside him and softly whispered some instructions to him.

Fear appeared on Puppy's face as he listened to Li Huowang's instructions, but he eventually nodded when Li Huowang passed the bronze bell to him. He turned around and headed into the house.

"Alright, he's going in to bring back some candy. Let's wait a while and chat to pass the time," said Li Huowang.

"Sure! I like chatting." The girl seemed very innocent.

Li Huowang kept his tone quite cordial when talking to this questionable being. "Which family are you from? How come we didn't see you at the village entrance earlier?"

"I don't know which family I belong to. They all say I'm the child of the Stove God. But I'm obviously not like that Stove God pasted on the wall," she replied.

"Oh? You aren't like the Stove God? In my eyes, you are rather similar, what with your love for candy. I remember back when we used to offer sacrifices, my grandpa would often smear some pastries onto the portrait's mouth." As Li Huowang spoke, his right hand quietly touched the red bamboo slip on his back.

The pigtails on her head swayed as she shook her head, "You're making things up. The Stove God obviously has four pairs of eyes, five hands, and no legs. Tell me, just how do I look like him?"

Everyone felt a chill run down their spines when they heard her description. This was completely different from the Stove God that they knew of.

“Little girl, are you making things up? How can the Stove God have five hands and no legs? Then, how does he walk?”

Upon seeing Li Huowang’s deliberate questioning, the girl started growing more and more agitated. “How am I making things up? I saw it with my own eyes. Besides, who says you need legs to walk? The Stove God can have red sausages burrow out from its belly button to serve as legs.”

Just as she finished speaking, Puppy’s voice rang out from the other side of the wall. “Senior Li!! This brat doesn’t have a body! She only has a head!”

Swoosh~

The girl’s head quickly withdrew down the wall, causing Puppy to let out a terrified scream.

“Ring the bell!” Li Huowang gritted his teeth and quickly dashed toward the entrance of the Wu Family’s courtyard.

By the time they arrived on the other side of the wall, Puppy was already kneeling on the ground and kowtowing constantly while trembling and wailing loudly. His pants were also soaking wet.

Li Huowang looked at the dark alleys around him, then came to Puppy’s side and pulled him up. Then, he snatched back the bronze bell and shouted, “Stop kowtowing and tell me where it ran off to!”

Hearing this, Puppy shakily pointed toward the east.

Seeing this, Li Huowang threw him aside, then carried his sword in one hand and a lantern in the other as he dashed in that direction.

Amidst the pitch-black surroundings, everything around them seemed to look like man-eating creatures that were brandishing their claws in the space between darkness and light.

Even after chasing for a while, Li Huowang could not catch up to that female head. He came to an unfamiliar area that seemed to be the end of the village. The bamboo forest was visible just in the distance.

Li Huowang cursed under his breath due to his lack of any discoveries before turning back to gather with the others who were just approaching with lanterns in their hands.

No matter what that girl was, he could tell one thing clearly. Even if that wasn't the Eighteenth Lunar, they should be closely related. He had not been mistaken; the Eighteenth Lunar was here.

When Li Huowang walked closer to the group, he was stunned momentarily. These people were indeed his companions, but they were all standing still on the spot, carrying their lanterns, and had their backs uniformly facing him.

"What are you guys doing??" Li Huowang cautiously took a step back as he tightened his grip on the bell.

Right after he spoke, everyone turned around.

Their faces had changed! Every single face was the same as that girl's face!

Then, these identical female faces smiled simultaneously. "Hehehe, you once again broke the rules. If you don't give me any candy, then I'm going to tell the others, and they will come looking for you."

Ring, ring, ring~~!!

At that moment, the piercing sound of the bell rang out loud, immediately causing those figures to be chased away.

The piercing sound of the bell was particularly noticeable in the darkness. Not long after, Li Huowang saw his people gather toward him. This time, their faces were not replaced by that girl's face.

After he carefully verified their identities by asking them about information that only the disciples from the Zephyr Temple would

know, he heaved a sigh of relief. These really were his people.

"Senior Li, what's going on? What happened?" asked one of them.

"Nothing, it was just an illusion," Li Huowang shook his head and surveyed the darkness around them. After confirming that nothing was unusual, he led them back on the path they came from.

However, not long after they left, a pair of blood-red eyes appeared within the darkness.

Chapter 91 - Li Huowang

Their surroundings were eerily silent on their way back—there were no sounds besides their footsteps. Unsurprisingly, everyone was tense while walking through such an eerie place.

They had not yet walked far when the sound of footsteps stopped. Li Huowang and the rest had stopped and were scanning their dark surroundings when a pair of glowing green eyes suddenly appeared within the darkness.

No, it was not a pair but an entire group of green eyes. Due to the darkness, they couldn't see what the creatures were. Their green eyes, both large and small, stared at them unblinkingly. Looking at these eyes, Li Huowang and the others felt as if there was a monster with numerous eyes on its body within the darkness.

“Fuck!” Having been tricked by it so many times, Li Huowang snarled in irritation. Then, he pulled out the red bamboo slip from behind his back and unfurled it in front of him.

Li Huowang raised his right index finger and placed it on the edge of the sharp bamboo slip before ripping out one of his fingernails and shooting it outward, blood trailing behind it as it flew into the darkness.

The fingernail managed to find its mark, causing a woeful shriek to be heard—one of the eyes within the darkness was gone.

However, Li Huowang was not satisfied with this. Soon, he used three more fingernails, finally getting rid of all of the eyes within the darkness. At the same time, a repulsive stench filled the air.

When the group walked over to where the eyes had been with their lanterns in hand, they bore witness to a bloody mess.

At that moment, Li Huowang and the rest finally realized what

the eyes were. They were not supernatural beings; instead, they were just some random forest critters like a hedgehog, a fox, and a lynx. But now, they were dead and their bodies torn into numerous pieces.

Li Huowang was extremely cautious. He did not think they were dead and so he raised his leg and stomped down hard on the head of the fox beside him.

“What a stupid rule! It’s nothing but bullshit! If that thing was able to fight us fair and square, would it need to resort to such tricks? We can’t fall for its tricks and dance to its own tune. Let’s return!” said Li Huowang.

After walking for fifteen minutes, they finally saw the Wu Family’s courtyard.

“Li Huowang!” At that moment, a faraway voice was heard, causing all of them to stop.

“Who’s there?!” Li Huowang shouted and turned around, staring into the darkness; however, he didn’t see anything.

“Keep playing your tricks! But remember, one of these days you will fail! Eighteenth Lunar, I swear that I will have your eyes!” he shouted.

After shouting his threats, he brought the rest of them into the bright courtyard of the Wu family.

Soon, the goateed village head who was previously unconscious on the ground was tied to a pillar and a bowl of cold soup was splashed on his face.

“Cough cough~!” When Wu Qing gradually opened his eyes groggily and saw the faces that were filled with hostility, he was extremely frightened. “You guys are bandits!!”

“Piak!” A palm slapped across his face, causing half of his face to become inflamed. At the same time, Wu Qing was left stunned by the impact.

“Talk! Where is the Eighteenth Lunar?! What is your

relationship with it?”

“What are you guys talking about? Let... Let me be clear about one thing; this is the Wu Family village, and everyone here has the surname Wu! Think wisely before you act!” said Wu Qing.

When he saw Wu Qing still trying to feign ignorance, he smiled, revealing his white teeth. “Old man, I’m trying to be courteous here instead of resorting to violence. The Eighteenth Lunar’s capture is going to quite literally determine my life. If you continue to protect it, don’t blame me when I accidentally hurt you.”

As he said that, he raised his bloody right hand that was missing its fingernails, using it to pat the interrogation tools hanging from his waist. “I don’t intend to just use these on myself. In certain situations, these things might be able to act as keys that open the hearts of those I capture!”

When she heard him say such a thing, Bai Lingmiao took a step forward with a worried expression on her face. However, Xiaoman pulled her back and gently shook her head.

“What... What are you guys saying? What Eighteenth Lunar? The Qingming Festival happened just a while ago, so it’s still quite some time before the twelfth month. Young man, please, spare me. Please take pity on this old man.” Wu Qing’s face was pale from fear.

When he saw Wu Qing continued lying, he whipped out one of the torture tools with his right hand. It was a pikehead with numerous hooks. Then, he smiled viciously as he held the horrifying pikehead and slowly placed it on Wu Qing’s scapula.

Wu Qing was visibly frightened as he started shouting in a panic and thrashed against his restraints. Even so, he did not say anything related to the Eighteenth Lunar.

Just as the sharp edge of the pikehead tore through Wu Qing’s clothes, a large hand pressed down on his wrist. “It’s fine. Looks

like he really doesn't know anything."

"How do you know? This man is clearly suspicious. The moment we entered the village, he bombarded us with rules. He must know about the Eighteenth Lunar!"

"Calm down. You weren't so aggressive in the past. You are becoming more and more like Dan Yangzi," commented the owner of the large hand.

Hearing that, he paused. For some reason, he was becoming more and more cruel without him even knowing it; slowly, he was becoming just like the damned Baldy that used to refine living people into pills.

He quickly kept away the pikehead and turned around. "Thank you, Senior Li. If you hadn't said it, then I might not have noticed it."

At that moment, what he saw in front of him was Li Huowang, wearing a Daoist robe stained in blood as he revealed a familiar smile.

"We are in the same boat here. No need for such polite words. What we should do now is to plan out our next steps, since we don't have any clues," said Li Huowang.

Hearing this, he turned around and stared at the old man that had almost fainted.

Even though he knew that it was Dan Yangzi's influence that was causing him to act so rashly, he also knew that he was running out of time.

If he couldn't find the Eighteenth Lunar, then he would never be able to get rid of Dan Yangzi who was possessing him. Then, all he would be able to do was slowly see himself turn into Dan Yangzi. He couldn't afford to wait any more!

"Why don't we ask the other villagers when the day comes? Maybe they know something," Puppy suggested.

"Alright, it's been a long night and everyone is tired. We should

stop for today. I will go and ask the villagers once it's daytime," said Li Huowang.

Hearing what Li Huowang had said, he decided not to say anything else as he walked back to his room.

When he woke up the next day, he saw that the rest of his senior brothers and sisters were already up and about.

When he exited the room, he was surprised to see that everyone was acting normally as they ate congee with the Wu family despite how he had treated Wu Qing the night before.

"Come here and eat. I've already told the village head about your situation. The village head is not the type to hold grudges," said Li Huowang as he looked at him.

Chapter 92 - The Eighteenth Lunar

Hearing Li Huowang's words, Wu Qing grunted; his face was still half swollen from the previous night. Then, he pulled out a stool and took his bowl before sitting with his back facing the youth that just exited the room.

"Hoh. He makes it look like I'm the one who holds grudges instead. Senior Li, you must've used a lot of silver just to convince him right?" he asked mockingly before walking into the hall and picking up a yellow steamed cornbread from the bowl and munching on it.

"Hey! You brat, how can you be so disrespectful? Did your mother not teach you to be polite?" demanded Wu Qing. Since he had Li Huowang supporting him, he was not as cowardly as yesterday when he was tied to the pillar.

Hearing the old man disrespecting his mother, the anger in his heart exploded.

Jiang!~

He instantly unsheathed his sharp sword and pointed it at Wu Qing's goatee. "I dare you to say that one more time!"

"What are you doing?!" shouted Wu Qing's six sons and eight grandsons as they placed their bowls down. Then, they stood up, rolled their sleeves, and circled him.

"Fuck! Do you think I'm afraid of you guys? I dare you to take one more step! I've already killed hundreds of people and I don't mind adding a few more to that list. Come closer and try me!" he shouted. Seeing the hostility of the Wu family made him feel extremely irritated as his heart beat faster.

“Put down your sword and stand outside!” A loud voice interjected.

At that moment, when he saw Li Huowang’s hardened face, he knew that Senior Li was really angry. He stared daggers at the Wu family as he sheathed the sword and walked toward the door.

Senior Li’s voice sounded behind him. “Old man, you know how young people are. They don’t even have a mustache but still love to boast. He’s just lying. He has never killed a single person.”

“Hmph! You think I couldn’t see what kind of boy he is? All bark but no bite. Who does he think he is? Nothing but an inexperienced chick. Heck, the amount of salt I’ve eaten throughout my life is probably more than the amount of rice he has eaten in his life,” said Wu Qing.

Hearing the old man say that, he angrily turned around.

So what if I’m young? Just because I’m fourteen, am I not a man? That old man is nothing but hot air either!

At that moment, he saw Li Huowang’s cold gaze trained on him, causing his heart to skip a beat as he hurriedly ran out.

The village was covered in a faint white fog early in the morning. As he stretched, he felt the crisp air around him. Then, he rolled up his sleeves and squatted down to look at the ants on the ground.

“You there. Monk, what are you squatting down there for?” a voice rang out behind him.

He stood up and straightened his yellow monk robes before politely placing his palms together as he talked to the white-haired girl in front of him. “Amitabha. I am doing Vipassana.”

“Hoho, what an interesting monk, just like a child. You are only looking at the ants moving their nest and yet you are still able to say that you are doing Vipassana.”

When he saw the girl’s white eyelashes fluttering, the monk slipped into confusion, as if he was reminded of something. But just

as he did, he lowered his head and chanted some sutra, while vowing to never again set his eyes on the girl in front of him who had shaken his heart so easily.

“Then continue on with your Vipassana, goodbye.” said the white haired girl.

Looking at the girl entering into the Wu Family courtyard, he saw that there were many other unfamiliar faces inside. “Did the village head have guests? Why do I not remember him saying anything about that?”

The monk stood there silently as he stared at the weird looking guests. Then, he suddenly slapped his head.

“What am I doing? Why am I acting like the aunties in the village who likes to gossip? I’ve already become a monk and should not be doing this sort of thing. I should just continue chanting my sutras.” The monk swiftly turned around as he thumbed his prayer beads and slowly walked back to his temple.

He walked on and on before encountering a pile of dung on the ground. However, even before he even got close to it, a child with a bamboo basket on his back ran over, picked up the cow dung, and threw it into the bamboo basket. “This dung was made by my family’s cow! It’s mine!”

He panicked when he heard that. “What do you mean it’s your family’s cow?! I can say the same as well! This is my cow dung!”

Hearing this, the child in front of him made a funny face toward him. “Shameless~ You are already so old but you still want to fight with a child over cow dung.”

Hearing this, his old face turned red as he raised his walking stick; he wanted to give that impolite child a good beating.

Looking at the child running away while still making funny faces at him, he chuckled. “Hah! I’m already so old; why am I still fighting with a child?”

With his walking stick, he slowly walked into the small

courtyard that he had lived in for his entire life. There, he sat on the rocking chair and watched as the leaves slowly fell from the trees while he reminisced his entire life.

Just then, his old neighbor's voice came from his door. "Old man~ You are already eighty-four this year. The King of Hell might not have called you over just yet, but shouldn't it already be your time? Hahaha~"

"Hey! You silly old thing! All you know how to do is to curse me. It's almost as if you think I can't curse you back too," he shouted.

Just as he was about to stand up from his rocking chair, he felt a strange feeling in his heart.

It was his time.

He had always heard other old folks saying that everyone would know the exact moment their death was approaching. To think that it was true.

He felt everything around him becoming smaller and smaller while he slowly floated up. His body was light and he felt cozy. "Is this what death feels like?"

But then, everything changed. His surroundings became twisted, and even his wrinkled face became twisted as well.

His face continued changing; from a youth, to a monk with a scar on his head, to an old lady.

Finally, after changing a few times, his face returned back to that of a young man.

At that moment, he was stunned by the familiar yet unfamiliar white walls in front of him. Three questions popped up in his mind.

Where am I? Where is this? What am I doing?

Just then, two patients walked past his window as they talked.

"I'm not the same as you guys. I'm not mental, I just have a neurological disorder. This means that my brain and neurons were slightly altered. To be called mental due to just that is downright

derogatory! There, look at him. Little Li is a true mental patient. He talks to himself and inflicts self-harm every single day.”

“No need to talk about him. What a poor lad, to be afflicted by such an ailment even though he’s still so young.”

“As if Li Huowang that brat would hop out of his bed and scold me. Wait... that’s actually not bad. I would rather get scolded.”

“Li Huowang?” In an instant, Li Huowang recalled everything. He pieced everything together and immediately realized what had happened.

Instantly, Li Huowang’s confused face was filled with hostility as he bellowed in rage. “I’m not some fucking monk nor am I an old man! I’m Li Huowang! That fucking Eighteenth Lunar stole my identity!”

Chapter 93 - Red

Li Huowang sat on his bed, recalling what had just happened.

He had never expected the Eighteenth Lunar to be even more bizarre than all the other supernatural beings that he had encountered in the past. To think that it could change its victim's sense of self and identity itself, swapping it out with someone else's identity completely.

It could even shift the stolen identity to that of someone else!

When he had been given the identity of the dying old man, he might've truly died.

At that time, even Dan Yangzi, who was possessing his body, wouldn't have realized that he was dying.

But the Eighteenth Lunar could never have expected Li Huowang to be someone with a mental illness. Changing the identity of someone who was constantly battling with their own hallucinations was never going to be easy.

To think that the hallucinations that Li Huowang had been trying so desperately to cure had become the key to escaping the Eighteenth Lunar's control.

The Eighteenth Lunar might be skillful, but the best it could do was change its victims' sense of self. Unfortunately, Li Huowang was a Strayed One, someone who had two different cognitions.

Looking at the patients sunbathing outside, Li Huowang did not act immediately, instead thinking about his next plan of action.

I can't just wait like this. The Eighteenth Lunar might try to change my sense of self once again after the hallucination disappears. I need to somehow affect the reality over there while still being in my hallucination.

Luckily, Li Huowang still had some cards up his sleeves. After

his previous encounters with the hallucinations, he knew that whatever happened within the hallucination would happen in real life as well.

At the same time, he had also learned a bit more about the Eighteenth Lunar.

Li Huowang retraced the path he had walked just now. He needed to go back to the Wu Family's courtyard and notify everyone about the fake Li Huowang!

The Eighteenth Lunar had resorted to trickery from the very beginning, never showing itself even once. That meant that it was probably quite weak in direct confrontations.

As long as Li Huowang could deal with its trickery, he would be able to summon the Wandering Gods and easily defeat it. In terms of actual combat ability, the Eighteenth Lunar might be even weaker than the 'girl' with tiny feet that he had encountered before.

After thinking his plan through, he was just about to stand up when he realized that both his hands were tied to the bed.

But this was inconsequential to Li Huowang. He knew everything about the hallucination.

Li Huowang faced the microphone and imitated the previous him, "Which beautiful lady is on duty today? Please come and untie me. I need to use the toilet."

Soon, a chubby nurse burst into the ward and untied Li Huowang. "Oh dear! Little Li, are you finally back to yourself? Why were you trapped in the hallucination for so long? Gosh, you scared me. I thought you would never come back! Wait just a moment. I will go and contact Yang Na. Your little girlfriend will be jumping with joy when she finds out that you are back to normal. Just so you know, she cried so many times while you were trapped in your hallucination."

Li Huowang did not react to her words. No matter how beautiful it was, this was still a hallucination.

Abbess Jingxin had told him that the hearts of the Strayed Ones were filled with a sense of doubt and confusion; however, Li Huowang did not agree. In fact, he was even more aware of everything and would never think that a hallucination was real.

When the nurse went out to call the doctor, Li Huowang jumped down from the bed and retraced his steps, running as fast as he could.

Li Huowang was very familiar with the hospital, so he easily managed to escape to the outside.

He ignored the whistles from the guards in the courtyard, running all the way to the road outside.

This is nothing but a hallucination!

Li Huowang paid the hallucination no mind. Bai Lingmiao and the rest were still under the control of the Eighteenth Lunar. They were in danger.

As he stepped out onto the road, Li Huowang's blue and white hospital gown attracted everyone's attention, causing the bystanders to whip out their phones and start recording him.

"Huh? What's wrong with this guy? He's barefoot as well. Is he not cold?"

"Look, the name of the hospital is stitched onto his gown. Oh no, he ran out from a mental hospital! Should we call the police?"

"Did he truly? Maybe he's an influencer? They would do just about anything to get famous."

Fake! Everything's fake! I've been fooled by everyone here once; I will not get fooled again.

Li Huowang clenched his teeth so hard that his gums started bleeding.

He ran on the road in a specific pattern, taking very specific turns. Soon, he arrived at the location that he remembered as the Wu Family's courtyard. However, in the hallucination, he was in the middle of the road.

Even though there were cars passing by him continuously, Li Huowang was not afraid. He knew that this was only a hallucination, and the cars would never hit him.

At that moment, Li Huowang faced the cars and shouted, “Bai Lingmiao! Quick! Take the bronze bell and ring it! Summon the Wandering Gods! The Li Huowang beside you is a fake! Have the Wandering Gods attack him!”

BEEP BEEP BEEP!

Thanks to Li Huowang, a traffic jam had started to occur on the road.

The cars were honking loudly, but Li Huowang smiled. Bai Lingmiao had followed his instructions. The honking of the cars in the hallucination must mean that someone was ringing the bronze bell back in reality.

Just then, one of the drivers in a red supercar stretched his head out from inside his car window and shouted angrily, “Crazy bastard! Get off the road! Scram, or else I will cripple you!”

Li Huowang whipped his head around and gazed at the red supercar. For some reason, he felt like the car was gazing at him.

He walked over and revealed his white teeth as he lowered his head toward the red supercar. “Hehe, so this is what your real body looks like within my hallucination? Eighteenth Lunar! I have finally found you!”

The Eighteenth Lunar that had never appeared in the village had now appeared in front of Li Huowang in this form. Needless to say, he was ecstatic.

Li Huowang continued shouting to his ‘invisible’ comrades. “Everyone look here! No matter what is in front of me, attack it! This thing is the Eighteenth Lunar!”

Just then, the driver saw the name of the mental hospital stitched to the left side of Li Huowang’s gown. He was terrified as he sat back down and hastily rolled up the window; all of his

bravado was gone as he dialed the police with trembling hands.

“Hello? 110? Come quick! There’s an escaped mental patient on the roundabout! Yes, the roundabout beside Fulma. Come quick!” said the driver.

Li Huowang was just about to step onto the hood of the red supercar when he stopped.

Everyone in the hallucination saw Li Huowang turn his head as he stared at a red e-bike a distance away. The feeling of being watched that Li Huowang had felt from the red supercar was now gone, and he could feel it from the e-bike instead.

Oh no! The Eighteenth Lunar is trying to escape after being found out!

“Trying to run? Don’t think you can escape from me! Everyone follow me! That thing must be injured! It’s becoming smaller and smaller!” shouted Li Huowang as he ran toward the red e-bike.

Chapter 94 - Bewilderment

Li Huowang chased after anything red as he ran on the road. He constantly felt the Eighteenth Lunar changing its location as he chased after it. Sometimes it took the form of a red hat, while at other times, it was a red store sign. But no matter how many times it changed, Li Huowang still chased after it fervently and never lost sight of it. He had finally gotten a chance to kill it, so he would never give up so easily. After all, whether or not he would be released from Dan Yangzi's grasp depended on whether or not he could obtain the Eighteenth Lunar's eyes.

He also realized something bizarre while chasing the Eighteenth Lunar. The thing somehow didn't have an eyelid. It had no choice but to look at everything within its field of vision, even itself.

What a weird being. I wonder what it looks like back in reality?

Li Huowang silently thought to himself as he chased after it.

Thanks to him chasing it so intensely, Li Huowang was getting closer and closer to the Eighteenth Lunar. Five meters ... Three meters ... One meter!

Li Huowang suddenly raised his right hand and leapt, pouncing toward the red-colored blob right in front of him.

However, just as he was about to capture it, a hand grabbed his wrist and stopped him. "Li... Li Huowang? Are you Li Huowang from the second year, class four?"

Li Huowang glared at the one holding his wrist. The one who stopped him was a bald man in his fifties.

The man propped his square glasses up and continued talking.

“Have you forgotten me? I’m your class teacher. Where are your shoes?”

Li Huowang gazed at the familiar face and uttered unconsciously. “Teacher Tong?”

“I recall that your mother submitted the notice to terminate your studies due to your disease. Why are you out here, running in a hospital gown? Are you okay?” Teacher Tong was very worried as he tidied up Li Huowang’s collar that was within the hospital gown.

Staring at the teacher who had helped him so much during his school life, Li Huowang felt quite conflicted. But he calmed down soon enough, shaking off his teacher’s hand as he ran toward the red object that had gotten further away.

“Fake! Everything is a hallucination! Don’t think you can fool me! Everything is fake!” shouted Li Huowang.

Staring at Li Huowang running further and further away, Teacher Tong was worried as he whipped out his phone. “Hello, is this Li Huowang’s mother? I’m his math teacher from his high school. Yes, that’s right. Glad to hear from you as well. I just saw your son on Lotus Street; he was running around without any shoes. Yes, that’s right, I’m sure it’s him. I’ve taught for so long, and I never confuse my students. Mm hmm.”

Meanwhile, Li Huowang’s eyes were bloodshot as he scanned left and right on the street, trying to find the Eighteenth Lunar. He was currently holding a broken piece of glass that he had picked up from somewhere. “Goddammit! Where is it?”

He completely ignored the police sirens. He knew that they too were fake.

He was searching for the Eighteenth Lunar in a frenzy when he suddenly stopped in front of a building with the image of a deer drawn on it. Children were doing their morning exercises in the field. When he saw a small streak of red amongst the children’s clothes, Li Huowang laughed like a maniac. “Hahaha! I found you!”

The toy-like metal fence could not stop Li Huowang at all as he leaped over it with ease.

A female teacher ran toward him to try and stop him, but was punched in the face, causing horrified shrieks to ring out all around him.

However, Li Huowang ignored everyone else and just grabbed a girl in his iron grip as he glared intensely at the red sakura hair clip in the girl's hair.

On the other hand, the girl was visibly shaken with her lips trembling and tears welling up in her eyes.

"Still trying to trick me? You will never be able to fool me!" Li Huowang shouted in rage.

Just then the police sirens got closer. The sound of tires screeching soon rang out in front of the building. "Stop! Police, put up your hands!"

Li Huowang turned around and saw two police cars. There were several policemen squatting down with their guns aimed at him!

Li Huowang looked at the Eighteenth Lunar in his hand and then stared at them. He smiled coldly. "Trying to trick me again? This is fake! Everything is fake!"

The girl in Li Huowang's arm started crying even louder.

Just as Li Huowang was about to end the Eighteenth Lunar with his own hands, a figure suddenly ran out from the surrounding crowd and stood between him and the gun. "Stop! Don't shoot! Don't shoot! He's my son! He... He's always been a good son. He turned into this because of an illness. Please... please let me talk to him, alright? He will listen to me... He will listen to me for sure... He's my good son."

Hearing the familiar voice, Li Huowang stopped his hands. Then, he saw the figure with whitening hair slowly turn around. It was none other than his mother, Sun Xiaoqin. But... her face looked

very disheveled. Compared to the last time he had seen her, she looked like she had aged quite a lot.

Looking at her son behind the iron fence, Sun Xiaoqin tried to force out a smile but ultimately failed. Her warm tears fell as she pleaded. “My good son, please listen to your mother. Let the little girl down, alright? Let’s go home. You can play video games for as long as you want. I will not stop you.”

Li Huowang once more felt conflicted. He stared at his mother, who looked ever so real, and then gazed back to the Eighteenth Lunar in his hand.

Just as Sun Xiaoqin gingerly walked toward Li Huowang, he took a step back, his face twisting in pain. “No, no this is fake! Everything is fake! All of these things are just hallucinations made by the Eighteenth Lunar! The world over there is real! I will not let the hallucinations control me again!”

Li Huowang tried to persuade himself but he couldn’t move the sharp glass in his hand. His breathing turned rapid as his pupils dilated and shrank over and over.

Meanwhile, Sun Xiaoqin slowly closed in on the fence, to the point that she could almost touch it, and then she slowly kneeled down. “Son, please... Please stop. We sold our house because of you. We don’t have any money left for compensation.”

Her words broke Li Huowang. He hugged the girl in front of him and cried, tears streaking down his face.

“Mom!” Veins started to bulge on his face as he opened his mouth and shouted. Saliva and tears dripped down onto the floor tiles with the image of a kids’ cartoon.

Then, looking at his mother in front of him, he took a deep breath and shouted out everything he had kept in his heart, including his struggle and confusion.

“MOM! I CAN’T! I REALLY CAN’T DETERMINE WHICH SIDE IS REAL!!”

Chapter 95 - Pain

“I really can’t... I really don’t know... I really don’t know which side is real...” Li Huowang knelt down in the field of the kindergarten as he hugged the girl tightly, his eyes filled with confusion.

Was this reality or was this a hallucination? Was this real or was this fake? Li Huowang couldn’t differentiate it at all.

Li Huowang had once argued with Abbess Jingxin when she said that a Strayed One’s heart was filled with a sense of doubt and confusion.

But now, seeing Sun Xiaoqin kneeling on the other side of the fence, he finally understood what Abbess Jingxin meant when she said that.

A Strayed One could never change. No matter which side they chose, they would always be enveloped in their own sense of doubt and confusion.

This was their fate, and none could escape.

Just then, a tiny hand holding a small handkerchief touched his face, gently drying his tears.

Li Huowang trembled as he lowered his head. He saw the cute little girl who was carefully wiping away his tears.

“Don’t cry, uncle,” said the little girl.

Looking at her cute little face, Li Huowang realized that the girl was also a living person.

He had almost killed an innocent little girl. A deep sense of guilt surged from the depths of his heart.

But what if it's the Eighteenth Lunar? Kill her!

When this thought appeared in his head, he started to feel an immense amount of disgust for himself. “Shut up! Shut up! Did you

ever consider that this child is a living person! Is your life more precious than hers? She's a normal person! And you? Li Huowang, you are nothing but a mental person! You are useless! How could you even think about exchanging her life for yours?!"

The piece of glass in Li Huowang's hand creaked as he held onto it tightly despite the palm of his hand getting cut open by its sharp edges.

His sudden outburst shocked everyone, causing them all to take a step back.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang visualized two people fighting inside of his mind. The hallucination was tormenting him so badly that he could barely breathe.

He wanted to die. As long as he died, he wouldn't have to live in so much pain.

There was no reason for an insane person like him to be alive. Everyone would benefit from his death in one form or another. His mom would no longer be burdened by him, and Dan Yangzi would not be able to revive through his body.

"Stand down. Put down your guns. Young man, can I talk to you?" Someone's voice came from outside the kindergarten.

It was a middle-aged man talking through a loudspeaker. He was wearing casual clothes with his pot-belly bulging out. Li Huowang didn't know who it was, but seeing how the other police officers slowly lowered their guns, he knew that the man in front of him was someone of high rank.

Just as Li Huowang turned around, the man held the loudspeaker in his left hand as he raised his right. "Uh, young man, you know what they say—"

As he talked halfway, his right index finger curled lightly.

Pew!

A sniper round was fired from a faraway window hidden by a curtain, the bullet flying straight toward Li Huowang's head.

Just then, a profound feeling enveloped Li Huowang as he tensed up and twisted his head.

Bam!

Li Huowang's body trembled as his head flew backward and he fell onto the ground.

"MY SON!!" Sun Xiaoqin cried out in despair.

Li Huowang hit the back of his head hard—he could feel his ears ringing and see stars in front of his eyes.

Am I dead? But if I'm dead, why can I still think?

Just then, everything around him turned dark. At the same time, the buildings and the people around him transformed into a bamboo forest at dusk.

Li Huowang felt a burning sensation on his face. He had been injured.

But Li Huowang didn't have the time to care about that. He heard the familiar voice. The Eighteenth Lunar was still here, staring at him from somewhere within the bamboo forest.

However, when he looked around, he saw only bamboo. He was surrounded by bamboo while his lower body was stuck in the mud alongside decaying bamboo leaves.

"Li Huowang! Li Huowang!!" Different voices cried out from within the bamboo forest. He could hear Bai Lingmiao, Dan Yangzi, and even Li Zhi.

Li Huowang had thought that his comrades had followed his command and attacked the Eighteenth Lunar.

But from the looks of it, it was the other way around. For some reason, he was left behind.

At that moment, a familiar voice rang out from the depths of the bamboo forest. "Old man~ You are already eighty-four this year. The King of Hell might not have called you over just yet, but shouldn't it already be your time?"

The voice of his old neighbor rang out continuously from

within the bamboo forest and it got louder and louder over time. Gradually, it started dominating Li Huowang's mind, trying to once again change his sense of self to that of the dying old man.

The sound of crunching leaves was heard from within the bamboo forest. Li Huowang caught glimpses of the little girl he saw yesterday as well as the Stove God that she had described.

The Eighteenth Lunar was not alone. It had helpers.

Li Huowang was still delirious about what had happened. His heart was being torn to ribbons due to his grief. But for some reason, he smiled despite the danger that was right in front of him.

"Did you know? You might think that you've won, but you never should have tried to kill me just now. Do you know just how much grief and pain is in my heart right now?" said Li Huowang.

Then, he curled up his trembling hand gripped at his heart as he shouted in pain, "IT'S SO PAINFUL THAT I WANT TO DIE!"

Immediately after saying that, Li Huowang pulled out the red bamboo slip from behind his back. The moment he opened it, Li Huowang felt the intense pain in his heart come to life as it resonated with the bamboo slip. The pain in his heart that had lessened when he came back to reality slowly started to build back up.

At the same time, the red bamboo slip suddenly started to transform as it sprouted roots. Then, the roots pierced through the ground and the bamboo leaves as they dyed everything around them red.

Li Huowang's mind almost crumbled from the pain. The pain in his heart had once again reached the peak that he experienced just moments ago.

But this was not enough. Since the bamboo slip had sprouted roots, now those roots needed to germinate. The pain in his heart was enough. All that was left was the pain felt by his physical body.

Li Huowang cried as his inner self slowly fell apart. Then, he

reached out for his torture tools with both of his hands.

Seeing this, the Eighteenth Lunar's group tried to stop him; however, it was too late.

Chapter 96 - Ba-Hui's Descent

“It hurts.” His heart was in extreme pain, almost as if it were being sliced by a jagged knife. At the same time, the large cavity in Li Huowang’s abdomen was causing his body to tremble uncontrollably.

However, even as he suffered from the most extreme mental and physical pain, he was still smiling.

He smiled at the thing running out from within the bamboo forest. He recognized it. It was a mirror copy of himself. However, it had blood-red eyes.

Ka Ka Ka!

Li Huowang’s teeth clattered uncontrollably as he hooked his own intestines before pulling them out and dangling them in the air, almost like a bridge.

“AAAAAAH!!” Li Huowang raised the pikehead in his hand and shoved it into the red bamboo slip that was glowing with an eerie red light, all the while almost going crazy from the pain.

Jiang Jiang!

At that moment, a sinister black flame exploded out from it and covered the surroundings.

Immediately, Li Huowang’s five senses once again melded together; however, this time around, thanks to the intense pain, he felt that his senses were much more sensitive. This time around, he was able to sense everything even more clearly.

Once again, he could feel the presence of Ba-Hui who was high above in the heavens. He could feel its intoxicating presence.

While Ba-Hui just ignored Li Huowang, through sacrificing the

pain he felt from his mental and physical state, he obtained something he needed from Ba-Hui, something profound.

With the descent of Ba-Hui's presence, Li Huowang's extreme pain was transformed into something else.

In the next instant, a surge of power started radiating from Li Huowang. It was an otherworldly power.

Everything around Li Huowang started to crack as even the very space itself was twisted apart and bent.

Then, Li Huowang raised the pikehead in his right hand and swiped it gently.

In that moment, the fabric of space was torn apart. The bamboo, the leaves, and anything living within it were all torn in half.

Meanwhile, the little girl's head was torn apart, revealing the numerous thumb-sized humanoid figures within, all of them having the same face as the little girl.

Those humanoid figures were just about to escape when all of them fell to their deaths in just a few steps.

Even though the Eighteenth Lunar was not in the direction that Li Huowang attacked, he could easily locate it with his melded senses. It was running east. Presently, all five heads of the Eighteenth Lunar were afraid; somehow, Li Huowang was capable of understanding its innermost thoughts.

Hearing the fearful cries emanating from its red eyes, Li Huowang laughed. He raised his arm and then stabbed his own abdomen with the pikehead.

In that instant, everything around him felt his pain; even the bamboo around him and the stones on the ground felt his pain. The inanimate objects started to twist and turn, becoming more and more horrifying to look at with each passing moment; they were all screaming in despair due to the pain they were experiencing.

Naturally, the Eighteenth Lunar was also caught up in this

attack.

Originally, the Eighteenth Lunar was a being that didn't have a sense of pain. But thanks to Li Huowang's actions, it was now given the ability to sense pain.

At that moment, it regretted having offended such a person.

Unfortunately, an instant was all it took for it to be engulfed by the extreme pain, causing it to commit suicide from despair caused by the extreme pain.

When everything was over, Li Huowang's body slowly fell to his right side.

Every corner of his body was screaming in pain, but he was laughing—he didn't know why, but he was laughing.

"Surely I will die from such a serious wound, right? Hahaha!" muttered Li Huowang. He could feel his internal organs falling out from the cavity in his abdomen.

However, he didn't do anything about it.

"It's good that I'm dying! At least, there won't be any pain left when I die. I'm so tired... Why me... I... I really don't want to die... I just want to live a normal life like everyone else..." The dying Li Huowang slowly lost consciousness, his thoughts slowly dying down.

At the same time, his five senses slowly split apart and returned back to their normal functions.

Just before his senses were restored to normal, Li Huowang felt Ba-Hui glancing at him from above the heavens.

Then, everything turned dark.

He wasn't sure how long it had been before he heard the faint sound of a beating drum and footsteps. He could even hear the sound of a nurse rearranging the medicine ampules, causing him to feel irritated by all the noise.

"It's so noisy! Be quiet!" muttered Li Huowang.

When he opened his eyes in shock, he saw a cart filled with the

glass ampules.

After some time had passed, Li Huowang finally realized that he was not dead; instead, he was within his hallucination.

Looking at the beeping machines around him, Li Huowang recognized that this was the ICU.

Was he happy that he hadn't died? No, rather than being happy, he felt regret.

Why am I not dead?

"Doctor! The patient in room twelve has woken up!" A voice was heard.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang disregarded the nurse's excited voice, trying to understand what was happening in the real world over there.

At that moment, he heard the door open and he closed his eyes, completely sealing away his senses from the world, waiting for the hallucination to pass.

But then, he heard a familiar voice. It was his main attending doctor at the mental hospital, Li Xiangguo. "Little Li, I know you are awake. Open your eyes and let's talk."

However, Li Huowang ignored him; he did not want to interact with anything within this hallucination.

"Yang Na has gotten a new boyfriend," continued Doctor Li.

Immediately, Li Huowang's eyes sprung open in shock. But all he saw was the doctor crossing his arms with a mischievous smile.

Seeing this, Li Huowang wanted to smash that conceited face in; however, it was only then that he realized that his right arm had been cuffed to the bed.

"Don't be rash. Yang Na hasn't gotten a new boyfriend. But you see? You will still react when something important occurs. So, why are you so conflicted?" The doctor, clad in white, took a stool and sat beside Li Huowang. "Let me guess, you thought that the other side was real, right?"

Instantly, Li Huowang's breathing started turning rapid as the machines around him started beeping as a warning. But in the end, he didn't say anything and just closed his eyes.

“Little Li, let's skip the pleasantries. Since you thought that the place over there is real, then let's talk about the world over there, shall we? Let me ask you this, which world is more illogical? Your world over there, or the one we are in right now?” asked Doctor Li.

Chapter 97 - Doctor Li

Li Huowang stared at his attending doctor and thought about it. “Which world is more illogical?”

He used his cuffed right hand to point toward the floor of the hospital, “This world is more illogical. This is fake!”

Doctor Li heard what Li Huowang had told him and was not the least bit surprised. He used his index finger to push his glasses up and continued talking, “Alright, then, why do you think this world is illogical? There must be a reason, right?”

Instead of answering immediately, he looked up at the white ceiling in a daze. After a while, he started speaking, “When I had taken the kid hostage, didn’t the police shoot me in the head? Then why am I still alive? Do I look like I have impenetrable skin? This is enough proof that this world is fake.”

At that moment, Li Huowang suddenly stopped, realizing that there was no value in arguing with someone inside his hallucination.

“Little Li, you were just very lucky. They were off their mark. Is there anyone out there who could always hit their targets with all of their shots?” said Doctor Li.

“Hmph! I was lucky? Do you really believe in such an irrational explanation?” Li Huowang smiled coldly.

“There are people out there who get struck by lightning while there are others who end up winning the lottery. While there are people with good luck, there are also others with bad luck. Why would you think that reality will always be fair? The world was never fair. But do you know why the others do not think that this world is fake just because they encountered some irrational situations? That’s because they are different from you,” said Doctor

Li.

Just then, Doctor Li took out his phone from his white coat and played a video for Li Huowang. “Why are you so adamant that the hallucination you are having is real? Let’s be real here, the things you encounter there must be even more irrational, right?”

“Dan Yangzi is dead!! He’s dead! You guys are free! Come out now!!”

Through the phone screen, Li Huowang saw a video of himself being restrained by a straitjacket while shouting in an empty room.

When Doctor Li saw that he finally managed to get Li Huowang’s attention, the doctor swiped the screen with his fingers and played another video. It too showed Li Huowang restrained within a straitjacket.

“Fake! The statues were all fake! Even the giant Buddha statue was fake! They must’ve cast an illusion spell! I know what I’ve seen and those filthy things were not some illusion! They will not be able to fool me!”

“Didn’t you hear what I just said? I want you to talk with Dan Yangzi himself.”

Various videos were played, each showing Li Huowang the things that he had spoken before.

When he saw the final video, Li Huowang’s pupils shrank. In the video, he was wearing a hospital gown with a crazy expression on his face. He had a wrench in his hand as he ran toward a shopping mall while shouting like a madman.

“Dan Yangzi! Don’t kill the children! You cannot kill the children!”

There was still a large part of the video left out, but the doctor just kept his phone without showing the rest of it.

“Look, compared to the things that you were experiencing on the other side, isn’t the fact that the sniper shot missed you more logical?” asked Doctor Li.

Li Huowang once again started getting confused. His breathing turned rapid. Since he did not want to explain anything, he just closed his eyes. "Lies. This is all fake."

"Alright, since you think this side is fake, then why did you hesitate when your mother pleaded to you? Since it's fake, then you should've just stabbed her with the glass shard!" asked Doctor Li, his tone turning serious, "Since everything is fake anyway, then why are you so worried that Yang Na might've gotten a new boyfriend?"

He poked at Li Huowang's heart with his finger as he continued to speak, "If you keep hallucinating like this, how much longer do you think she will last? Even if her heart is unwavering, can you even bear to watch her being single for the rest of her life just for your sake? Can you give her happiness? At this point, can you even call yourself her boyfriend?"

Li Huowang suddenly opened his eyes and glared at the doctor. "They are all fake! But my feelings for them are real! Even if I know that they are hallucinations, I am not able to abandon my feelings for them! Do you think that I don't want to go back to them? But I can't! I've already transmigrated! It's been a long time since I transmigrated!! Since you say that this world is real, then why does the mental hospital here have a machine for gastric lavage?"

Doctor Li sighed as he waved his hands. "Why are these things suspicious in your eyes? Patients like you always end up swallowing something they are not supposed to. That machine can be found in most of the mental hospitals. It was only thanks to the machine, otherwise you might've really died from that disgusting thing you ate."

"Then why were my hallucinations on this side suppressed after I ate the Black Taisui?" asked Li Huowang.

"You did not eat some Black Taisui, or whatever it was. You ate a mouse! And your symptoms became even worse!" explained

Doctor Li.

“They got worse right around the time I ate the mouse? You really have an answer for everything, don’t you?!”

“Little Li, you have gotten it the other way around. It’s precisely because your symptoms got worse that you have the corresponding scenes in your hallucination. It all changes according to your symptoms. That’s precisely why it’s an illusion.”

Upon hearing up to this point, Li Huowang snarled and gave him the best proof he had. “Fine! If what you said really was true, then tell me, why can I bring something from over there to here? How do you explain that?”

“Oh? Do you have another new symptom? What do you mean by bringing something over? Where is it? Let me see,” asked Doctor Li.

Li Huowang was just about to tell him about the Jade Pendant that he had given to Yang Na but stopped himself at the last moment.

No, I can’t have Yang Na become involved in this, even if it’s just an illusion.

Li Huowang was afraid that he would crumble if he ended up seeing Yang Na in his hallucinations. If that happened, then he would once again think that this side was the real one. He had to cut off everything from this hallucination.

“Fine, just you wait. When I come back next time, I will show you something that only exists in that world! Let me see how you twist the situation at that time, you damned hallucination!” shouted Li Huowang.

Hearing his nonsense, doctor Li sighed. “Little Li, I’m afraid that there will be no next time. You have already caused so much trouble that even the management of the hospital had to get involved. We already got sued quite a few times. The director personally told us to transfer you to a different hospital.”

“Transfer? To where?” Li Huowang was shocked.

Doctor Li patted Li Huowang’s shoulder. “Since you already think this side is a hallucination, why do you care? All I can tell you is that thanks to you, your family’s financial situation is deteriorating rapidly. This is the last time I will be checking on you. I thought that we might be able to save you with one last try, but looks like it’s bound to never happen. Hah... As your attending physician, I feel so down.”

Doctor Li took off his glasses and examined the boy in front of him. Then, he raised his right hand and gently patted Li Huowang’s head, the wrinkles on his face smoothing out by a lot. At that moment, they were no longer a doctor and his patient. “Little Li, you are a good child even if your illness flares up and dies down from time to time. I hope that you will not give up whenever you encounter a problem in the hallucination. Never give up, and especially don’t try cutting open your abdomen. Did you know that you almost died? We had to cut off some of your intestines. It will take you over half a year to recover. Compared to seeing you repeatedly get stuck in a hallucination, the people who love you will definitely hate seeing you dead even more. So don’t die! Live. Live, so that they have hope. Understand?”

Chapter 98 - Backtrack

After saying all that he had to say, the smiling Doctor Li gently patted Li Huowang's head, put on his glasses, and walked out of the ward. When he reached the door, he stopped for a moment. "Right, Little Li, didn't you say that you could bring something belonging to that world back here, and that's why you thought this world was fake? Then, have you tried bringing something from here to there? Maybe you will find an unexpected answer."

After saying those words, Doctor Li left.

On the other hand, Li Huowang was stunned as he contemplated what Doctor Li had said. "Wait, if I could bring something from here to there... Then, which side would be the reality?"

Should I try? What if I succeed? No, I can't do something like that. I can't interact with the hallucinations or I will never be able to snap out of them! But... It's only a test. What am I so afraid of?

Li Huowang was once again filled with a sense of confusion and doubt, feeling conflicted.

Just as he was contemplating the question, he felt the white walls around him slowly fade into darkness along with the beeping machines. At the same time, the bright LED lights transformed into oil lamps.

Li Huowang realized that he was currently lying on an old bed. When he saw the dusty rafters, he realized that he had returned.

After a moment, Li Huowang removed the sheets covering him.

Rather than bringing something from the hallucination, there's another method that I can use right now to determine whether the world there is fake or not.

Li Huowang checked his abdomen and was surprised to see a

clean white bandage wrapped around his body. He gently pressed down on the area where he had cut himself open, but there was only a slight numbing pain.

But how was this possible? He was certain that his intestines had fallen out back then!

My intestines should be suffering from sepsis right now, but they have healed up?

Li Huowang was genuinely surprised.

Back then, when he had decided to use the bamboo slip, he had already given up on making it out of there alive. But to think he was still alive!

Wait.

Li Huowang recalled the white ICU that he had seen in the hallucination as well as the beeping machines and the saline solution.

Li Huowang wanted to avoid thinking about all that, but he knew that he was starting to doubt himself once more. He wanted to get rid of all his doubts, but he just couldn't do it.

"Senior Li! You are awake!" Bai Lingmiao ran over excitedly while holding a bowl of chicken soup.

"Where are we?" When he saw Bai Lingmiao, he buried his doubts deep inside his heart.

"We are in the village," said Bai Lingmiao as she carefully placed the bowl filled with chicken soup on the table. Then, she slid her hands under the sheet to check on Li Huowang's injury.

"How were my injuries healed? Why am I not dead?" Li Huowang asked the most pressing question. The doubts that he had barely managed to suppress were once again rearing their head.

"Senior Li, what are you talking about? Why would you be dead? When we found you in the bamboo forest, we fed you some pills that you had refined yourself. Maybe those pills were the reason that you are already healed," replied Bai Lingmiao while

lowering her head to the point that it almost touched the sheets. She didn't dare to look him in the eye.

However, Li Huowang was clearer than the rest about what kind of pills he had refined. They were just regular pills and not some kind of divine pills. How could they have treated such serious injuries?

Do you think your hallucination is logical?

At that moment, Doctor Li's words resounded in Li Huowang's mind.

At the same time, a scary thought popped up.

What if... what if this side is fake?

When he thought up to this point, Li Huowang felt a strong sense of panic welling up inside himself; however, even he didn't know why he was panicking like that.

In the next instant, Li Huowang cupped his hands on Bai Lingmiao's face and forced her to look him in the eye. At the same time, his expression grew even more agitated. "Tell me! What happened? What are you hiding? Or are you fake as well?!"

Frightened by his demeanor, tears started to stream down Bai Lingmiao's face.

Li Huowang felt his heart hurt when he saw the crying girl. He raised both arms and hugged her while muttering as he tried to suppress the pain in his heart. "Miaomiao, please don't lie to me alright? This is very important to me. Please... please tell me, how did my injuries get healed?"

After a period of silence, Bai Lingmiao finally relented. "Senior Li, Some time ago, I... I became a Shaman. I summoned Granny Bai to come and treat you. In return, she took all but one of the lifespan pills from within your gourd."

Li Huowang's pupil shrank upon hearing that. At the same time, various scenes flashed through his mind. He was reminded of how Bai Lingmiao had suddenly recovered from her illness, and

how she had taken Li Zhi's drum leather. This all pointed to her having become a Shaman a long time ago; it was just that he had never put much thought into it.

After telling him everything, Bai Lingmiao pulled herself out from Li Huowang's embrace and watched him gingerly. "Senior Li, I really didn't want to lie to you. Please don't blame me, ok?"

Li Huowang let out a breath of relief and laughed. "It's fine, it's fine. As long as you are real."

"Real? What do you mean?" Bai Lingmiao still didn't quite understand what just happened.

"Nothing. Bring me the chicken soup, I'm hungry." Li Huowang decided to change the subject. Now, he was feeling much better. No matter what Doctor Li had said, he was certain that this side was real and that side was fake.

After eating the Black Taisui, his hallucinations had stopped appearing for a long time. That was the most important evidence he had.

He resolved not to get trapped in the hallucination or be fooled by them a second time.

Then, Li Huowang devoured the chicken soup; his stomach was telling him that he required nutrients immediately.

Soon, he finished the chicken soup and passed the empty bowl back to Bai Lingmiao while requesting for seconds.

"Wait, I was trapped inside my hallucinations earlier, so how did you feed the chicken soup to me?" asked Li Huowang.

Hearing this, Bai Lingmiao did not answer, instead blushing as she ran out with the empty bowl.

"How else could she have fed you? She did it with her own mouth. I told her to just pour the soup down your mouth but she couldn't bring herself to do something so cruel." It was Xiaoman who answered his question as she entered the room.

Xiaoman stood beside his bed and stared at him with a

complicated expression. "Senior Li, Junior Bai has done a lot for you. Please cherish her."

Cough-cough!

Li Huowang coughed out of embarrassment and decided to avoid the topic. "What happened to the people in this village after the incident? Did they allow us to stay here?"

Hearing his question, Xiaoman hesitated for a moment before answering. "They all went away."

"Went away? Where to?" Li Huowang was confused.

Wasn't this their village?

"I have no idea either. After the forest around the village started to wither away, all the villagers suddenly had their personalities and memories altered. None of them recognized each other. Even the village head's six sons did not recognize each other. It was... it was almost as if they had never heard of the surname Wu nor were they brothers."

Chapter 99 - Night Visit

Upon hearing Xiaoman's words, Li Huowang scoffed coldly. He knew what the Eighteenth Lunar was and had already guessed as to what had happened. The people here must've had their identities stolen, just like him, and the culprit behind all of it was none other than the Eighteenth Lunar.

The village was made entirely by the Eighteenth Lunar itself. Everyone in the village had just been acting out the roles laid out for them for such a long time without any of them knowing it themselves.

Since it had been controlling so many people at once, it was most likely using them for its own benefit. Rather than saying that it liked playing house, it was more likely that the Eighteenth Lunar was a being that consumed the names and identities of others as food.

"So there's no village at all!" Li Huowang said.

The moment he thought about the Eighteenth Lunar, all his muscles tensed up as he looked at Xiaoman nervously. "Wait! The eyes! Where are the eyes of the Eighteenth Lunar?"

Those eyes were the entire reason they had come all the way here.

"We found them right beside you. Is this what you were looking for?" As if Xiaoman knew what he was going to ask about, she whipped out a black box the size of her palm.

Li Huowang quickly opened the box and saw two red eyes staring at him. They were the eyes of the Eighteenth Lunar.

"I have finally obtained them. Now, I will finally be able to get rid of Dan Yangzi." Li Huowang was ecstatic. He no longer needed to fear getting possessed by Dan Yangzi.

Once he had dealt with Dan Yangzi, he would finally be able to think about finding a way to deal with his hallucination issues.

Kachak.

He closed the box and placed it on the head of his bed. "What about the others? Are they fine? Tell me everything that happened after you found me in detail."

Based on Xiaoman's explanation, Li Huowang learnt that after he was trapped in his hallucination, the Eighteenth Lunar thought that it had managed to kill him and was just about to kill the rest as well; however, at that moment, a faceless man barged in and disrupted its plans by shouting that Li Huowang was a fake. Then, he called for Bai Lingmiao and the rest to attack the fake Li Huowang.

Hearing this, Li Huowang understood that the faceless man was the him who had lost his name and identity. In his hallucination, he had been standing in the middle of the road and shouting at a red car.

"Immediately afterward, the body of the fake Senior Li fell apart, leaving behind only its skin on the ground. The faceless man was somehow able to sense where the Eighteenth Lunar was and ran after it. Meanwhile, when we started chasing it, the bamboo forest around us suddenly moved and blocked us. That was how we lost track of the faceless man," explained Xiaoman.

By the time Xiaoman finished her explanation, Bai Lingmiao walked in with another bowl of chicken soup, this time around with some oily chicken meat inside it.

On the other hand, when everyone else heard that their Senior Li had woken up, they all came to visit him. They were all extremely excited and asked whether he was alright.

When he saw that all of them were alive and well, Li Huowang felt a wave of relief wash over his heart. It was fortunate that none of them had died.

After talking for a bit, Li Huowang was still holding the bowl of soup in his hand when he said, "Since I've woken up, let's not wait anymore. We will head back tomorrow."

But his suggestion was met with unanimous resistance.

"Aiya, Senior Li, even your intestines fell out. Why are you in such a rush? You should just finish healing up before we head back," said one of them.

"Yeah, didn't you already find the thing that you needed?" asked another.

"Let's rest for a few days, Senior Li. None of us is in a rush, so why are you?" asked another.

Li Huowang gently pressed his wound as he got up. "It's fine. I can just sit in the carr—ouch."

A sharp bout of pain caused him to let out a shout as blood started seeping out of the bandages. The pain was so intense that it almost matched the pain he felt from disembowelling himself.

Seeing this, Puppy immediately ran with Gao Zhijian before they pushed Li Huowang back down onto the bed. "Senior Li, please don't push yourself. The carriage is extremely bouncy. Your wounds might end up reopening and cause your intestines to spill out again."

Understanding the situation, Li Huowang could only do as they suggested. "Fine, go back and rest. Let's rest as much as we can over here. We've been constantly traveling ever since we left the Zephyr Temple. You guys must be tired."

After talking for a bit more, everyone started to leave. Only Bai Lingmiao remained in the room; she didn't seem to want to leave.

When Li Huowang extended his right hand and held her hand, she relented, took a stool, and quietly sat beside the bed.

Once she sat down, Li Huowang, who was resting, gently held her right hand. "Is this Granny Bai's power? She only healed me halfway?"

“That was what we agreed on. I felt that as long as she healed you enough to prevent your death, then you could let your natural regeneration take over. Also, there would be no need to waste our resources,” said Bai Lingmiao as she looked at the large hand that was holding her hand. “She could technically heal you completely, but the lifespan pills in the gourd would not be enough. If she were to heal you completely, then not only would she take all of the lifespan pills in the gourd, she would even have taken something from your brain.”

“My brain? Not my lifespan?” Li Huowang was shocked as he stared at Bai Lingmiao.

Seeing her shaking head, Li Huowang finally understood that the Immortal Families were even more greedy compared to the Wandering Gods. When he had seen the gourd full of lifespan pills, he had been convinced that they only took lifespan.

“Did she say what she would take away?” Li Huowang didn’t know of anything precious within his brain.

“I asked her, but she didn’t say. The Shamans have no right to ask what the members of the Immortal Families are thinking. However, I had a feeling that whatever it is in your brain might be something very valuable, and so I didn’t allow her to take it,” replied Bai Lingmiao.

“Hmph! What a bunch of useless ghosts,” snorted Li Huowang.

After having encountered so many supernatural beings, Li Huowang could more or less guess that the God of Happiness as well as the giant ‘Buddha’ in the Righteous Monastery were beings that were much more advanced when compared to the Immortal Families—the Immortal Families could only use some poor sods and force them to live like beggars.

When Li Huowang reopened his eyes, he looked at Bai Lingmiao. “Did they threaten you? Something like you having to hit a quota every month?”

“No they did not. However, every now and then, they will give me a little push to go and find someone to use my Shamanic powers on. It’s very annoying,” replied Bai Lingmiao.

Hearing that, Li Huowang turned serious. “Remember, if and when they become more difficult to interact with, let me know; at that time, I will talk to them myself. You are at most their subordinate, not their slave.”

Li Huowang was not afraid. If he were to fight them himself, then given the fact that he possessed the bamboo slip, he probably wouldn’t lose. Since things had already come to this, there was no reason to try and change the situation. However, Li Huowang would never allow Bai Lingmiao to experience the same suffering that Li Zhi had felt.

Bai Lingmiao was different from Li Zhi; she had Li Huowang to protect her.

Hearing his words, Bai Lingmiao felt a warm feeling in her heart. “Alright.”

“And if we do encounter someone who we can help using your powers, then feel free to do so. But you don’t have to specifically go and find someone that requires your aid. We don’t need those paltry fifty coins.” continued Li Huowang.

“Mm.”

The oil lamp on the table slowly dimmed down as one of them gave out orders and advice while the other continued listening quietly.

“It’s already quite late; let’s sleep.” Li Huowang lifted the sheets on the bed.

Bai Lingmiao nodded and snuffed out the oil lamp before carefully sliding under the warm blanket as she tried her best to not touch Li Huowang’s wound.

Chapter 100 - Yang Xiaohai

Yang Xiaohai groggily opened his eyes when he saw the sunlight coming in from the paper windows. Then he got out of his blankets and started wearing his clothes.

Creak~

He pushed open the door to the kitchen and stared at the water in the water jar. Feeling that it wasn't enough, he picked up a shoulder pole and two buckets before heading out.

"My Senior Brothers and Sisters will need water to wash up after they wake, and I also need to cook congee today, so that amount of water wouldn't have been enough," muttered Yang Xiaohai.

As someone who used to be an assistant within the Zephyr Temple, even though Yang Xiaohai was only ten years old, he could do every household chore, including sewing, washing, cooking, and repairing clothes. He even knew the medicinal properties of some of the ingredients that were used to refine pills.

He was forced to learn all of these things—if he hadn't managed to learn everything fast enough, then he would've been dead.

In that cave where there was no sunlight, he learned one thing and one thing only; he learned that people who were useless were nothing more than useless trash.

If his Senior Brothers and Sisters decided to leave those who were dragging them down, then they would abandon the ones who were still sleeping on the bed.

Yang Xiaohai had a secret that no one knew—the location he

had provided as his home was fake. In truth, he had no home. His only wish was that they could continue their travels. Then, at least he would always be able to have something to eat.

He was different compared to the others. Most of those within the Zephyr temple were either sold or abducted; however, he had gone there willingly just because someone told him that he would be provided meals over there.

When he walked out, Yang Xiaohai greeted the Senior Sister practicing the sword in front of him. "Good morning, Senior Sister."

However, Chun Xiaoman ignored him as she continued to study the blade.

Yang Xiaohai did not get offended. He was already used to her demeanor. This Senior Sister of his who was covered in strands of black hair was always busy studying the blade. The only exceptions were when she was eating or sleeping.

Yang Xiaohai walked alone on a path as the morning fog accompanied him. The grass was wet with dew.

I wonder if I can ask Senior Sister to teach me the ways of the sword? Once I master the sword, at the very least, no one would dare bully me when I once again become a beggar. But would she agree to it? She's usually quite indifferent.

He thought about it as he arrived at the village's small pond and took some water.

Just then, a large black shadow appeared from within the fog, startling him.

However, he soon saw that it was a group of people. They were wearing ragged clothes while their faces were black. They were beggars. At one point, he used to be one of them as well.

When he saw them sniveling, Yang Xiaohai deduced that they must've had to sleep without a fire last night.

Meanwhile, the group of beggars was surprised to see Yang Xiaohai as well.

After both parties confirmed that each other to be indeed living people, the group of beggars pushed forward one of the younger beggars to collect some water.

The child was hesitant and didn't dare to speak.

Just when the other child was about to head back after collecting water, one of the older beggars walked over and pushed the child beggar down before bowing toward Yang Xiaohai and asking politely, "Young brother, may I ask if this is the Wu family village?"

"The people you seek are not here. Everything has been abandoned here. There is nothing left," replied Yang Xiaohai.

Yang Xiaohai's words caused them to get even more agitated as their noses became redder. One of the old beggars pointed at the surroundings with his fingers and asked, "The houses and the land here, it's all abandoned?"

However, Yang Xiaohai was no longer interested in talking with them, especially to the beggar that had pushed the child down. He turned and left.

Back in the kitchen, he poured the water from the bucket into the water jar. Then, he wiped the sweat on his forehead, picked up the pole and buckets, and headed back outside; it was a very large water jar so he would need to make multiple trips.

When he came back, he saw the beggars were rummaging through the empty houses.

However, he knew that they wouldn't be finding anything valuable inside. All the valuables had long since been taken away by the people who left. If anything had been left behind by them, then Puppy and the rest would've taken it.

But beggars could not be choosers. They would even celebrate finding torn clothing.

When Yang Xiaohai came out for the third time, he saw that the beggars were fighting amongst each other. He wasn't sure what

they were fighting for.

“Don’t live here. It’s an ominous place. Something might happen to you!” Yang Xiaohai shouted toward the beggars, to no avail.

After the fourth trip, Yang Xiaohai was so tired that his face was pale. Still, he pushed on and walked back to the courtyard. Once inside, he placed the pole down and caught his breath. He was waiting for something.

It was only after he heard footsteps that Yang Xiaohai picked up the pole and walked back inside.

Soon, the pole-carrying Yang Xiaohai got into contact with the rest of his Senior Brothers and Sisters. “Good morning, Senior Brother Cao Cao.”

“Hey, why are you the one filling up the water jar? You are good at household chores, so you should leave this kind of physical labor to Simpleton.” Puppy patted Yang Xiaohai’s head and walked out.

“Senior brother Cao Cao, the congee is cooking in the pot. We can eat soon,” Yang Xiaohai shouted toward Puppy’s back.

“Alright, I will go and wake up Simpleton,” said Puppy.

By the time sunlight was shining into the courtyard, everyone had already gathered in the dining hall.

Their breakfast consisted of simple congee with some preserved vegetables that Puppy found within an underground basement in the village. They even ate their own rations and guokui. There were also two eggs in a bowl.

However, none of them began to eat; it was as if they were waiting for something.

Just then, Xiaoman, who had been practicing with the blade in the courtyard, walked in. Puppy asked her playfully, “Senior sister, how was your training? You’ve been training very consistently. Once you master it, you can teach us as well.”

“Not too bad; at the very least, I’m not swinging it blindly anymore. The bodyguard from the courier service told me that there’s no shortcut—only through training can one master the blade. I’ve also made two bamboo swords. After our meal you can come and practice with me,” replied Xiaoman.

Hearing this, Puppy’s face instantly turned bitter.

Meanwhile, Xiaoman hung her sword onto the wall and sat down at the table, joining the others as they waited for something.

Soon, the stench of blood filled the air as footsteps rang out. Yang Xiaohai instinctively lowered his head, not daring to look in the direction of the footsteps.

It was none other than Li Huowang.

He knew that Senior Li would not harm him. In fact, he was taken in by Li Huowang. Even so, he was afraid of Li Huowang, especially after everything that had happened on their journey so far.

Bai Lingmiao carefully supported Li Huowang until he sat at the front of the table. Only after he started eating did everyone else join in.

Even Li Huowang did not know when this rule had come to pass.

Halfway through their meal, the sound of saliva being swallowed was heard. A few beggars were standing outside and staring at them as they ate their meal.

“Why are there still beggars? I thought the village had become empty,” asked Li Huowang.

Hearing this, Yang Xiaohai stood up nervously and told him everything that he knew about the beggars.

“Hoho, looks like their information network is quite efficient, to the point that they even knew that this place had been vacated. But don’t you think staying at the place that the Eighteenth Lunar once used as its feeding ground would be quite unlucky? I’ve eaten

enough, you guys can continue on,” said Li Huowang, standing up.

Chapter 101 - War

Once Yang Xiaohai saw Senior Li walk out, he sighed in relief, finally allowing himself to relax. Meanwhile, the rest of them continued eating and talking. However, there wasn't much to talk about and soon, their conversation turned toward the group of beggars outside.

"I don't recall seeing so many beggars along the way. Where did these people come from?" asked Sun Baolu.

Hearing this question, Yang Xiaohai placed a piece of guokui into a bowl of congee before taking it and going outside. "Let me ask them."

Puppy stared at Yang Xiaohai's back and said, "What an understanding child. If it wasn't for the fact that he needs to return home, I would've kept him as my son."

"Son? You mean to say you would use him as a servant, don't you?" commented one of the guiding drug ingredients.

Puppy saw that his ploy had been seen through, but merely chuckled.

Meanwhile, when the beggars saw Yang Xiaohai walk out, all of them focused their attention toward the broken bowl in his hand. Some of them even started singing to gain his attention.

Yang Xiaohai ignored all of them and approached the child beggar that was pushed down earlier. The child was standing in a corner and looked ever so pitiful, just like how he was earlier.

"Let me ask you something; if you can answer me, then this guokui will be yours," said Yang Xiaohai.

Looking at the guokui in Yang Xiaohai's hands, the disheveled child nodded.

"Where did you guys come from?" asked Yang Xiaohai.

“East. We came here from the east! Also, we are not beggars! I followed my parents to run away,” replied the child. “However, halfway through, I was kidnapped by someone else. Somehow, I managed to escape. That was how I ended up as a beggar.”

Hearing this answer, Yang Xiaohai pulled out the guokui that had been softened by the congee and gave it to him.

Immediately, the child scarfed down the entire guokui, ignoring the fact that it was scalding hot.

“Why did you guys run? Was there a disaster?” Yang Xiaohai continued his questions.

As the young boy licked the bits of congee stuck on the guokui and swallowed it, he nodded. “Yeah. But we wouldn’t have left behind our fields if it was just the drought or the floods; we had to run because the soldiers were going to war. All of us had to run away because of the soldiers. There were so many of them. The soldiers ransacked our village and took away everything. Some of the villages were completely destroyed because of that.”

Just as Yang Xiaohai was about to ask something else, a large shadow enveloped him. It was Gao Zhijian. He stuttered, “They... they... they are not soldiers... going... t-to... war... They... they... they are... the defeated soldiers!”

“Senior Gao, does this mean that there is a war going on right now?” Yang Xiaohai raised his head and looked at Gao Zhijian’s wide chin.

When he saw that Yang Xiaohai did not look down on him for his stuttering, Gao Zhijian was pleasantly surprised. He gently patted Yang Xiaohai’s head with his large hands. “Th-that’s... right.”

Yang Xiaohai turned around to the child that had been frightened by the giant Gao Zhijian. “Are they really at war? Why did I not hear anything about it before? Did you say that your house was located in the eastern direction? Can you tell me where the war

is happening in detail?"

"I'm sorry but I only know that my house is located in the east," replied the child.

Looking at how the child did not know much about this matter, Yang Xiaohai turned around to look at the older beggars. "What are you guys doing, talking so much with the beggars? Come back and eat first. We have to wash the bowls later on," called out one of the guiding drug ingredients.

Upon hearing those words, Yang Xiaohai became a lot more alert.

"Let me wash the bowls! I will wash them!" said Yang Xiaohai as he turned around and walked inside.

When the child saw Yang Xiaohai's clean shoes and then stared back at his own feet that had turned purple due to the cold weather, he felt quite envious. "I wish I was bought by them."

"Senior brother Cao Cao, the beggars came here to escape the war happening in the east," Yang Xiaohai went back to the table and reported his findings.

"It's fine. The war does not concern us. Sun Baolu was only asking about it out of curiosity. No need to think of his words as some kind of a sacred decree. It's not like he's an emperor," said Puppy.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang was lying down on a white hospital bed, feeling conflicted. Looking at his surroundings, he realized that within his hallucinations, he had been transferred to a normal ward from the ICU.

At this moment, he was holding a round jade pendant. Back on the other side, he had threaded it, wearing it like a necklace.

He could recall that he had given this piece of jade to Yang Na, but now, it had mysteriously appeared here.

As for how it returned back to him, Li Huowang was no longer concerned about that. Currently, he was thinking about what

Doctor Li had said to him during their last meeting.

Right, Little Li, didn't you say that you could bring something belonging to that world back here, and that's why you thought this world was fake? Then, have you tried bringing something from here to there? Maybe you will find an unexpected answer.

Looking at the round jade pendant, Li Huowang decided what he had to do and placed the jade pendant back inside his hospital gown.

No harm in trying. What if it actually works?

But when that question appeared in his mind, he paused.

What if it works? What would it mean? Would it mean that Bai Lingmiao and the rest are fakes? Or would it mean that both sides are real?

Li Huowang didn't know, and at this point, he didn't care. He would try it first before coming up with a plan.

Time slowly passed as he waited for the result. He really hated how time seemed to be passing slower and slower, to the point that it almost felt like he had been waiting for an entire year.

Finally, when a nurse changed his medications, he felt the world around him slowly start to crumble.

Back in the old room, Li Huowang touched his chest and found the jade pendant, causing his expression to freeze.

Then, without even bothering to wear his clothes, he rummaged through the bed before pulling out another identical jade pendant. He was perplexed.

Two? How could there be two jade pieces? Why are there two pieces?

Li Huowang felt his mind going into disarray. He had considered the possibility that he might be able to take something from the other side and bring it back here, but to think this would end up being the result.

"Huowang." At that moment, a soft female voice was heard. It

belonged to Yang Na.

Hearing the voice, Li Huowang looked at the door, astonished.

How did Yang Na get here? Wasn't she just a part of my hallucination?

“Senior Li” This time it was Bai Lingmiao’s voice.

Then, the door opened with a creak as it was pushed open from the other side .

When he saw the ‘thing’ walking toward him, Li Huowang was extremely terrified.

“NO! NO! STAY AWAY!!” Li Huowang sat up from the bed, covered in cold sweat.

Looking at the old furniture around him, he realized that everything had just been a dream, a result of what he was concerned about during the day.

But just as he was about to lay back down, a sudden thought popped up in his head.

Was that really a dream?

Chapter 102 - Benefits

The thought that had just popped up in his head left him trembling.

After a while, he carefully touched every inch of his body and only sighed in relief only after confirming that there weren't any additional jade pieces on his body.

"I was right; it really was a dream. All of that was just a dream," Li Huowang mumbled.

"What's wrong?" asked Bai Lingmiao groggily as she lit up the oil lamp in the room.

"Nothing. Nothing happened. Go back to sleep," said Li Huowang.

When she saw that Li Huowang did not wish to answer her, Bai Lingmiao just closed her eyes. At the same time, her white hair gently lay on his shoulder as her small hands softly caressed his chest to calm him down.

Meanwhile, he held the hand on his chest and stared at the rafters above them. "Miaomiao ..."

"Hm?" Bai Lingmiao answered, half asleep.

"Do you want to know about my past? And why am I having hallucinations?" asked Li Huowang.

Hearing this, Bai Lingmiao's sleepiness was instantly dispelled. Her eyelids fluttered open in shock as she stared at the man beside her. This was the first time he had talked to her about his past.

Since she had spent more time with him than the others had, she knew that he was different from the others.

It wasn't a difference of culture, country, or other things, but a difference that caused him to not be able to fit with them and the society. Something... otherworldly. She was not the only one who

thought so—the others had thought about it too. It was just that none of them had said it before.

“I’m actually not from here,” said Li Huowang.

“Yeah, I know that you are not from the kingdom of Si Qi,” replied Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang shook his head. “I meant that I’m not someone from this world. I’m from another world.”

Under the dim light of the oil lamp, Li Huowang slowly talked to Bai Lingmiao about his past and current predicaments. The more he said, the better he felt. It was as if someone was bearing the weight in his heart along with him.

It was only when sunlight started to illuminate the room that he stopped. The room was completely silent.

“Is there anything you would like to ask?” asked Li Huowang.

“Yes.” Bai Lingmiao removed her hands from around him and held his hand, the one that was missing three of its fingernails. Her fingertips trembled as she touched the scab. “What’s the matter with the red bamboo slip?”

“Let me tell you something interesting. A person’s fingernails can regenerate, even after they have been pulled out.” Li Huowang tried to divert the topic while trying to pull his hand out from Bai Lingmiao’s grasp, but she held on to his hand even tighter. At the same time, he saw Bai Lingmiao’s eyes becoming redder and redder as she stared at him.

“I don’t care where you come from nor do I care what happened within your hallucination. All I want to know is whether the injury on your abdomen was related to the bamboo slip,” said Bai Lingmiao firmly.

Li Huowang did not answer her, embracing her instead. He held her head close to his chest and slowly patted her.

“Senior Li, that thing is too dangerous. Please... please throw it away. If you continue on like this then you will eventually get

killed by it,” After saying so, Bai Lingmiao stopped and pleaded with him. “If you end up dying, what will happen to me?”

Seeing her like this, Li Huowang sighed. While she looked soft and squishy, she was actually a really tough girl. Soft on the outside, harsh on the inside.

“Let me think about it,” said Li Huowang.

Li Huowang knew that the Profound Records represented a double-edged sword, one that could easily cut him up if he was not careful when using it.

But at the same time, it was a very valuable tool. He had no choice but to rely on it to survive in this bizarre world. If he threw it away and happened to encounter some other entity like the Eighteenth Lunar, then what would he do? After all, he couldn’t just rely on Dan Yangzi at all times.

He wanted to join a sect and grow stronger as well; however, doing so was extremely difficult.

Not only would he have to worry about whether his application would be accepted or not, he would even have to be wary of the others who knew that he was a Strayed One. Even if they accepted him, he might not have the guts to cultivate using whatever method they told him to.

Zephyr Temple, Righteous Monastery, and Benevolent Nunnery.

Ever since he came into contact with these sects, he had already given up on joining most of the sects. Each of them was more vile than the last.

And so, without a substitute weapon, he would never throw away the Profound Records. It was his strongest method of attack, despite the high price he had to pay for using it.

Amidst their conversation, there was some movement from the door; their comrades were preparing for breakfast.

Li Huowang sat up. Just as Bai Lingmiao was about to help him

with his clothes, he realized something and said, "Wait."

He carefully pressed down on his abdomen and realized that it didn't hurt as much as before. He opened up the bandages and saw that his wound had almost completely healed up.

"How did I recover so fast?" Even Li Huowang was surprised.

Li Huowang had expected that it would take his body at least half a month to finish healing, but something had changed within his body.

He thought about it long and hard before thinking back to the very last moment when Ba-Hui had glanced at him during the final moments.

"I think this is a good thing?" muttered Li Huowang.

Li Huowang was both happy and worried. He knew far too little about the thing he had summoned by experiencing the peak of both mental and physical pain.

He didn't know what this meant.

Does it want me to mutilate myself even more?

This was the only reason he could think of after half a day.

But compared to dealing with Dan Yangzi, this was a minor incident.

"Based on my speed of recovery, I should be completely healed by tomorrow. We will rest for today and depart tomorrow," Li Huowang told Bai Lingmiao.

Bai Lingmiao wanted to say something, but stopped. In the end she nodded her head.

Hearing that they were about to leave soon, the others started to pack their things and move them up the carriage. At the same time, they took almost everything they found in the courtyard, including the two egg-laying hens.

When it was dinner time, Li Huowang took off his bandages and saw that his wound had practically completely healed up.

Not bad. At the very least there's some kind of reward after going

through so much.

Li Huowang was happy with his ability. At the very least, he wouldn't die so easily.

Back in the dining hall, Li Huowang sat down and ate some rice. The table was filled with vegetables that they had picked from the fields.

Even though the meal consisted mostly of vegetables, they had used pork lard to stir-fry it. Thus the taste was quite decent.

Li Huowang picked up a piece of carrot and bit into it before furrowing his brows. "Who cooked today? Why is it still so salty?"

Even though he didn't have high expectations from this food, he was not a livestock that could eat the same meal everyday.

Hearing his question, an assistant with a pale face stood up. "Senior Li, it was me."

Meanwhile, Bai Lingmiao took the piece of carrot that Li Huowang had bitten and tasted it. "Senior Li, it's not really very salty. It's just nicely seasoned."

"Really?" Hearing this, Li Huowang picked up another carrot and bit into it. However, he still felt that it was very salty.

"Nevermind then. Continue eating. I can just pair it with some more rice," said Li Huowang.

Chapter 103 - Marriage

Li Huowang slowly sipped the tea from his cup. He didn't really like drinking tea; it was just that the meal tonight was too salty for him.

Using the cover of the cup to block the tea leaves, he took a light sip as the bitterness of the tea filled his mouth.

"Dammit. I should've known that they wouldn't have any good tea leaves," said Li Huowang as he spat out the tea and placed the teacup down before heading back into his room. Due to the nightmare from last night, he didn't get a proper night of sleep; he needed to recover his strength for tomorrow.

However, even as he walked back to his room, Li Huowang's mind did not stop. He was thinking about his nightmare as well as the two pieces of jade.

If I get sucked into my hallucination once again, should I try taking something from that side and bringing it here?

However, Li Huowang did not hesitate long.

Yeah, I should try it; however, I can't try it with the pendant. I need to take something that doesn't exist on this side, such as a bottle of saline solution or a pair of handcuffs. If I can't bring it over here, then I will know for sure that the world over there is fake. After that, there won't be any reason for me to keep thinking about that place. But... what if I am able to bring something over here?

Amidst his thoughts, Li Huowang arrived at his room.

Creak.

He pushed the door open, but the scene inside instantly caused his thoughts to grind to a halt.

There were red candles lined up on the table and the walls were decorated with the upside down character for 'prosperity'.

Everything was red, from the pillows to the sheets to the... to the red veil on Bai Lingmiao's head.

Staring at the scene in front of him, Li Huowang's heart started racing. For a moment, he stopped right in between the red colored room and the dark night outside.

He felt conflicted.

He knew what it would mean if he walked in. Not only would he have a wife, but he would also have a responsibility and an oath to uphold.

After a moment of hesitation, he took a deep breath and walked inside, locking the door behind him. Then, he approached the bride and asked, "Are you sure about this? You know that I suffer from hallucinations. Are you truly willing to accept marrying an insane person like me?"

"Mm-hmm." A small pair of hands reached out, gently grabbing his large hands. "Senior Li, as they say: you follow the chicken if you get married to one and you follow the dog if you get married to one. No matter what happens, I will live with you for the rest of my life."

Her voice was as soft as usual, but a strong sense of determination could be felt from her voice right now.

Since she had said as such, Li Huowang would not be able to call himself a man if he hesitated anymore.

Just as he extended his arms to raise the red veil, Bai Lingmiao turned away. "Senior Li, it's embarrassing... Could you please extinguish the light?"

Hearing this, Li Huowang waved his sleeves and the red candles were immediately extinguished.

On that night, both of them coiled around on the bed, and Li Huowang finally understood what they meant when they said girls were made from water.

Four hours later, within the completely dark room of the

newly-weds, Li Huowang lay on the bed, panting heavily. He gently caressed the head of the girl that was laying on his chest as he recalled the wondrous feeling he had just experienced.

“Husband~”

A single call from her sent a tingle through his entire body.

“You can just continue calling me Senior Li. I’m not used to it.”

“Alright, I will listen to you. You are the man of the house, so I will do whatever you tell me to do,” said Bai Lingmiao as she placed her ear on his chest and listened to his rapid heartbeat.

Li Huowang took a deep breath and hugged the girl even closer. Then, he kissed the top of her head that was covered with her soft hair and hair ornaments.

“Let’s go back once the issue with Dan Yangzi has been dealt with. Then we can officially become husband and wife once we get back to your house,” said Li Huowang.

“But what about your condition? Is there really no way to treat it?” asked Bai Lingmiao.

“I don’t know. I’ve only heard what others have told me. The Abbess from the Benevolent Nunnery probably did not lie to me nor does she have a reason to.” Li Huowang slowly slid his hands down and caressed her smooth skin. “Don’t worry. I have you by my side now. Now that I’ve grown my roots in this world, I won’t ever be deceived by the hallucinations.”

“Hehe.” Bai Lingmiao was very happy. She hugged him with all four of her limbs while pressing her head against his chest.

For some reason, the feeling that Bai Lingmiao gave Li Huowang in the bedroom was different. She said that she was embarrassed, but now she wasn’t.

Are all girls the same?

Li Huowang had no experience in this regard. This was his first time after all.

Sensing that Bai Lingmiao had started to move around, Li

Huowang held her down with his hands. "Wait, I just felt something weird."

"What are you talking about? I did bleed," said Bai Lingmiao nervously.

Li Huowang laughed. "No, I don't mean it that way; the feeling I got was something different."

"Feeling? What kind of feeling?" asked Bai Lingmiao.

"I suddenly felt like my senses are much sharper than they were before. All of them are much sharper," Li Huowang said as he recalled the moment he almost ascended to Heaven last night. Something felt off.

It hadn't been noticeable before, but after his clash with the Eighteenth Lunar, he noticed that not only was his body capable of healing much faster, even his senses were much sharper than before. Regardless of whether it was his sense of touch, smell, taste, sight, or hearing, all of them had become sharper.

Is this Ba-Hui's power?

Li Huowang realized that both the abilities given to him were related to self-mutilation or sacrifice.

Just as he thought about sharing his thoughts with Bai Lingmiao, he suddenly felt a piercing pain from his right index finger. "Yeowch! Why did you bite me?"

"Does it hurt more than before?" asked Bai Lingmiao.

"Yeah! It's even bleeding, how could it not hurt?" asked Li Huowang.

"Then it looks like you are right; your senses have indeed become sharper, and so has your sense of pain," said Bai Lingmiao. In the next second, Li Huowang felt his finger being placed somewhere soft as Bai Lingmiao started to suck on it. The pain instantly faded away.

"Previously, you told me about the Wandering Gods. Then, have you heard of Ba-Hui?" Li Huowang asked.

“Mm-mm” Bai Lingmiao shook her head while continuing to suck on his finger.

“Hmm ...” Li Huowang opened his eyes as he stared at the ceiling. “Why did Ba-Hui grant me these two abilities? What is its true form?”

Li Huowang tried to picture what Ba-Hui looked like in his mind, but failed. He could not do so with his perception as an ordinary human.

Knock knock~

At that moment, there was a sudden knock on his room door in the middle of the night.

Li Huowang hugged Bai Lingmiao close to his chest and covered her up with a blanket. “Who’s there? If it isn’t anything important, then we can talk tomorrow.”

“Senior Li, it’s me, can I enter? For some reason I was laying down on the floor of the firewood room.” The sound that came from beyond the door was extremely familiar. Li Huowang instantly realized that it was Bai Lingmiao’s voice.

However, if Bai Lingmiao was outside, then who was the one currently in his embrace? Li Huowang suddenly felt a chill run down his body.

“Hehehe, husband~”

At that moment, Li Huowang suddenly felt the thing in his embrace suddenly shrink and roll out of the sheets.

Li Huowang threw off the sheets and lit up one of the red candles as fast as he could.

However, there was no one but him inside the room.

“Senior Li, what’s wrong? What happened?” Bai Lingmiao shouted outside.

Li Huowang turned to see his finger, the one that was sucked on just moments ago. It looked extremely pale. Looking at the nasty wound, he was certain that it was not something a human could do

with their teeth. It was more like he had gotten bit by a beast with sharp fangs!

Chapter 104 - The Second Deity

The sound of utensils hitting the bowl didn't stop as everyone scarfed down the congee placed in front of them.

Since today was the day they had to resume traveling, they needed to eat a lot. If not, they might end up becoming hungry before lunch, and being hungry was the last thing they needed.

However, amidst all this, Li Huowang was not the slightest bit interested in the food. He glanced at Bai Lingmiao who was sitting beside him.

The girl was miffed ever since she was told to go sleep with Xiaoman last night; last night, he never opened the door for Bai Lingmiao.

After that, in just a short amount of time he disposed of any and all red colored items within the room. He didn't want 'Bai Lingmiao' to find out that *she* was somehow married to him.

However, even though he destroyed all of the evidence, one question just wouldn't get out of his head.

What was that? What the hell did I sleep with?

Based on the bite wound on his finger, he knew that it was not a normal human.

At the same time, he also realized there were quite a few other suspicious details.

For one, why did that thing ask him to extinguish the candles before removing the red veil? And why was 'she' different from the usual Bai Lingmiao?

He also realized that the 'hair ornaments' were not ornaments at all! They almost looked like they had grown out of her head.

Why did she do it? What's there to gain?

Li Huowang was perplexed. Just in case 'she' appeared again, he didn't sleep throughout the entire night.

But, she did not appear again.

Regarding her identity, Li Huowang more or less had an answer when he remembered the red veil; however, he needed to confirm it himself.

Li Huowang quietly watched as Bai Lingmiao ate her bowl of congee and five pieces of guokui. He had never realized that her appetite had grown so much despite her small body.

Sensing that she had almost eaten her fill, Li Huowang gently kicked her legs to notify her and then turned toward her room.

Immediately, Bai Lingmiao wiped her mouth, placed her bowl down, and followed him. Once inside the room, she saw that Senior Li was staring at her with a serious look on his face, just standing there menacingly.

"Senior Li, what's wrong? Is something the matter?" She suddenly felt that the atmosphere was weird, her voice turning quieter than usual.

"Sit down, I have something to ask you." Li Huowang sat her down on the stool.

After a moment, he finally opened his mouth. "I learnt from Li Zhi that summoning the Immortals from the Immortal Families required two people, one to play the drum while the other who acted as the vessel. Since you summoned the Immortals to heal me, that should mean that you have a Second Deity as well, correct?"

The Second Deity usually wore a red veil, and so Li Huowang was suspicious that it might've been Bai Lingmiao's Second Deity.

"Mm." Bai Lingmiao nodded.

"Then is she alive? Or is she an Immortal? Or is she something else entirely?" asked Li Huowang.

"She's alive, but she's not an Immortal. We have to summon

one before an Immortal can appear,” replied Bai Lingmiao.

“When the heck did Li Zhi’s wife crawl out from her grave? Hadn’t Gao Zhijian caved her head in before we buried her together with Li Zhi?” asked Li Huowang.

Hearing this, Bai Lingmiao was surprised. “Senior Li, my Second Deity is not Li Zhi’s wife.”

“What? It’s not? There’s different Second Deities?” Li Huowang was surprised as well.

“Yes. They told me that the Main and Second Deity are deeply connected to each other. Usually, we cannot use someone else’s Second Deity,” replied Bai Lingmiao.

Hearing this, Li Huowang remembered Li Zhi’s Second Deity. Other than her heavy make-up and beast-like face, the Second Deity was quite literally a second Li Zhi.

“Don’t tell me...” Thinking about what had happened last night as well as Bai Lingmiao’s familiar voice, Li Huowang instantly realized who he had slept with. “...if we remove the beast-like features from her face, then the Second Deity looks exactly the same as you, right?”

Hearing his words, Bai Lingmiao hesitated for a moment before nodding. “Yes, she looks just like me. The other Second Deities would look just like their Main Deities as well.”

“Then how did she come to be? Did the Immortals from the Immortal Families create a living being just like that?” Li Huowang asked the most important question.

Bai Lingmiao did not answer, struggling visibly; she couldn’t stop her hands from twisting her shirt. “Senior Li, I really wanted to tell you and let you know the details. But I have no idea how to say it. On the night I became a Shaman, the Second Deity directly appeared in my dreams. And then... and then...”

Seeing how Bai Lingmiao was on the verge of breaking down and crying, Li Huowang did not press on. He knew that it was very

hard to explain anything in detail in this bizarre world.

“That’s fine. No need to think about it. Now, can you call her out? I wanted to ask her about something.” Li Huowang’s eyes were filled with hostility.

Bai Lingmiao carefully stared into his eyes and then pulled the door open behind them. A woman with a red veil and red shoes was standing right there.

Li Huowang tried to suppress his emotions as he walked over and stared at the Second Deity that was covered in a red veil. At this moment, thanks to his heightened senses, he could sense that this thing was staring right back at him.

After looking at the wrinkles on her clothes as well as her body shape, Li Huowang confirmed that the one on the bed last night was indeed her!

“Senior Li, what’s wrong with her? Did something happen?” asked Bai Lingmiao, worried.

Li Huowang was just about to tell her about what had happened when he stopped. When he saw Bai Lingmiao’s worried face, he decided that he shouldn’t tell her.

He really wanted to ask the Second Deity why it did what it did last night, but he could only keep it quiet in front of Bai Lingmiao.

He really couldn’t bring himself to tell her that he had slept with... this weird thing,

“Senior Li, what’s wrong? Why aren’t you talking? What did she do to you?” asked Bai Lingmiao once more.

Bai Lingmiao’s question caused him to suppress his anger as he pointed his fingers at the Second Deity in a threatening gesture. Then, he opened the door and left. “Nevermind, let’s depart.”

Li Huowang had decided that if there was ever a second time, be it under commands from the Immortal Families or the Second Deity acting on its own, he wouldn’t let it go.

On the other hand, Bai Lingmiao was still confused as she

asked her Second Deity, "What happened?"

However, the Second Deity did not move, standing unmoving, almost like a corpse.

"That's strange. What happened?" muttered Bai Lingmiao, having been left in the dark.

Soon, two horse-drawn carriages were led out from the courtyard. Their group quickly left the place that was slowly transforming into a den of beggars and followed the road back.

Two hundred miles was neither short nor long. As they traveled at their fastest speed, they soon arrived back at the Henghua Mountain.

Compared to last time, the town at the base of the mountain had quite a lot more people; there were a lot more beggars on the street.

Li Huowang opened a box and checked the blood-red eyes stored within it before slowly making his way toward the mountain.

However, this time, Bai Lingmiao stopped him. "Senior Li, let me accompany you. Now, I can summon the Immortals and so I won't drag you down."

Chapter 105 - Greed

Li Huowang felt hesitant as he looked at Bai Lingmiao; he wasn't sure if he should bring her up the mountain.

While it was true that with her ability to summon the Immortals she could help him, he didn't want to place her in danger.

At the same time, the others started pleading as well.

"Yeah, Senior Li, please let us come with you."

"If we followed you, we might be able to help you. Aren't you afraid that the nuns are dangerous?"

"Yeah, and just in case... just in case your condition flares up again, then we can at least take care of you," said Puppy.

The final sentence from Puppy finally defeated Li Huowang. "Baolu, place the horse carriages at the inn. We will all go up the mountain."

The effect of the Black Taisui to suppress his hallucinations rapidly falling and he could slip into his hallucination at any time, so he definitely needed someone beside him.

Hearing his words, everyone smiled as they followed him; they were happy that they would finally get to help out their Senior Brother.

The road up to the mountain had many twists and turns, but Li Huowang and the rest were used to it.

After a while, they rested halfway up the mountain, only continuing after a while. They finally arrived before the front gate of the Benevolent Nunnery just before nightfall.

They all looked inside and Li Huowang saw that the nunnery was still just as dilapidated as it had been before—grass could be seen growing between the stone tiles while the holes on the roofs

hadn't been repaired.

When he finally caught sight of the Women's Script on both sides of the gate, Li Huowang's heart started pounding rapidly.

He had risked his life just for the sake of today.

When he thought that he would finally be able to get rid of his bizarre Master, Li Huowang could not hold back the excitement he felt in his heart.

He took a deep breath and turned around; he needed to let them know what they should expect. "The inside of the nunnery is extremely dirty and unkempt. The nuns are also very fat, so don't be surprised by it, ok?"

After seeing everyone agree, Li Huowang held the box containing the Eighteenth Lunar eyes, took a deep breath, and walked inside.

Before they could even enter the main hall, a wave of putrid stench assaulted them.

What were they doing? It's even more putrid than the last time.

Li Huowang pinched his nose and entered the place, forcing himself to endure the stench.

Meanwhile, the other guiding drug ingredients were already regretting their choice in coming here. While it wasn't dangerous, it was far too smelly.

Soon, they arrived at the first hall of the nunnery. The moment Li Huowang stepped in, he felt something soft at the base of his right foot. When he picked his foot up he saw that it was a piece of peach cookie.

"Careful, they don't like to keep it clean here," warned Li Huowang.

He raised his head and saw that the Buddha statue was still covered in dirt. He walked past it and went out through the back.

Just as he had expected, there was a mountain of flesh lying down just behind the Buddha; it was a fat nun with an extra large

guokui on her face. She was sleeping and eating at the same time.

“What the... Is... is she still human?” The rest of them were shocked.

Meanwhile, after what had happened last time, Li Huowang decided not to wake her up; he couldn't do so even if he wanted to.

Soon, they walked past her and entered a side door, arriving at the interior of the nunnery.

They had just taken a few steps in when they realized that there was nowhere for them to walk—everything around them was covered in rotten food, even the floor and the roof were covered with it. There was even a mountain of moldy dumplings to their right, a large swarm of flies hovering over it. At the same time, numerous white maggots could be seen crawling on the mountain of dumplings.

However, the most surprising thing was that everything here was vegetarian—there was not a single piece of meat.

Looking at the mountain of food, Li Huowang realized that all these things were bought using the gold that he had given them the last time. The moment they got the money, they used it to buy various types of food in large quantities.

“Step over it,” said Li Huowang as he sank his legs into the sea of rotten food. It almost felt like he was in a swamp as he slowly walked forward.

Hearing this, everyone, including Bai Lingmiao who loved being clean, were quite unhappy. However, when they saw Li Huowang getting further and further away from them, they could only clench their teeth and trudge through the sea of rotten food.

“Why are they wasting so much food? Such a waste! They are just letting it all rot. This year has been filled with disasters and so many people didn't even have any food to eat!” Having once been a beggar, Yang Xiaohai was particularly angry. This was one of the few times he had spoken up.

Li Huowang glanced at the boy. “That’s because they are greedy.”

Hearing this, Yang Xiaohai pursed his lips, choosing to remain silent.

They trudged onward for half an hour before finally arriving at the place where the nuns usually had their meals. This was where they found the rest of the nuns.

Blegh~

One of the fat nuns vomited right in front of Li Huowang, emptying out what she had eaten. Her head was covered in sweat, but she didn’t even bother to wipe it off before continuing to eat the food on the table.

“Hello Miao Yu. How are you?” Li Huowang greeted the fat nun in front of him.

When Miao Yu opened her mouth to talk, her saliva and scraps of food bombarded Li Huowang’s face. “It’s you. Do you want me to show you the way? The price has increased now. It’s at least one gold coin.”

“No need. Is Abbess Jingxin still in the same house?” asked Li Huowang as he backed off to prevent getting splashed by her saliva.

Seeing how she couldn’t get any gold, the greed on Miao Yu’s face was replaced with disappointment. “Of course. She’s so fat that she can’t even walk. Where else could she be?”

Li Huowang nodded and turned around, walking toward the house where he saw Abbess Jingxin last time.

Meanwhile, the others followed after him as they walked through the swamp of rotten food.

However, Yang Xiaohai who had been standing at the very back, chastised the nuns when he saw how much food they were wasting. “You are all so wasteful! Do you know just how many people are starving outside? Some of them have even died due to starvation! Do you know just how painful it is to have to endure

your hunger?”

Miao Yu answered plainly. “Of course we know; isn’t that why we are trying not to let it go to waste? Can’t you see that it has already started rotting? If we don’t eat all of it now, then we won’t be able to eat any of it later.”

After saying all that, she turned around and vomited, once more emptying her stomach in the process. Then, she continued eating, her eyes filled with greed.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang retraced his steps from the last time, walking past the pigsty before arriving at Abbess Jingxin’s house.

Due to the fact that this place was fairly secluded, there wasn’t a lot of rotting food over here. Thus, they felt so much better standing here. Even though the stench was still present, at the very least they had already gotten used to it.

Li Huowang placed a glowing rock in his hand and walked inside. As he walked in, he saw Abbess Jingxin shoving something back into the folds of her skin and flesh.

“Oh, it’s you! How was it? Did you manage to find the Eighteenth Lunar?” asked the Abbess.

Li Huowang nodded and opened the box in his hands.

Even though she didn’t have eyes, Abbess Jingxin somehow managed to feel something, causing her loose face to reveal a greedy grin.

Then, Abbess Jingxin slowly shifted her huge mountain-like body as she began to approach Li Huowang, at the same time causing the entire house to start shaking.

Chapter 106 - Begin

Soon, Jingxin used her crusty nails to reach into the box and took out the pair of red eyes, gently rolling them around in her hands. “Hoho, these are good.”

Then, without any warning, she held the egg-sized pair of eyes with her hands and directly shoved them into her dark and empty eye sockets.

By the time she removed her hands from her face, the pair of blood-red eyes had found a new owner. “Thank you. With this, I can finally see once again.”

That scene was downright horrifying. Imagine a swollen, ugly, and toothless old nun with a pair of blood-red eyes. She didn’t even have her eyelids!

“Senior Li, is she really a good person? I don’t think so...” said Bai Lingmiao as she hid behind Li Huowang’s body.

“Shh, stay quiet.” Unexpectedly, Li Huowang was not surprised by Jingxin’s demeanor. His tolerance for such horrifying scenes had increased substantially after having gone through so many incidents.

Li Huowang’s voice turned serious as he stared at the old nun’s face. “You’ve got what you need. When can we start the process of getting rid of Dan Yangzi?”

“Why the rush? You youngsters are always in such a hurry,” said Jingxin.

She had just finished saying that when Li Huowang detected movement from behind himself. He turned around and saw that it was a row of fat burping nuns.

What are they doing? Are they trying to go back on their word?

Li Huowang instinctively placed his hand on the Profound

Records.

However, he was wrong. The nuns' actions revealed that they had no ill intentions. All they wanted to do was to remove the wall.

Abbess Jingxin's body was far too large and the door was far too small; they had to remove the walls for her to exit.

When one of the walls of the house had been removed completely, a wooden plank with numerous wheels was pushed inside. From the looks of it, this seemed to be Abbess Jingxin's method for moving around.

Then, under everyone's watchful gaze, Abbess Jingxin slowly wriggled up the wooden plank like a giant bug. Jingxin tried to get on, but failed. She tried a few more times before exasperatedly turning toward Li Huowang and saying, "Are you guys blind? Don't you want to be free of your Master? Why aren't you in a rush now? Can't you see that I'm slow? Hurry up and come push me!"

Finally, with everyone's help, Abbess Jingxin was pushed onto the plank. Then, the wheels below the plank started to creak heavily under her body weight as the rest of the fat nuns slowly pushed her out.

On the other hand, after he released his grip of her flabby flesh, Li Huowang helped Jingxin scratch an itch that she could not reach for herself.

Taking a few steps back and looking at Abbess Jingxin who was surrounded by a group of fat nuns, Li Huowang suddenly had a feeling—he suddenly felt like he was looking at a Buddha statue.

"A Buddha statue is nothing but a statue. It's not easy to become a Buddha. Follow us, quickly," said Jingxin.

Hearing this, Li Huowang raised his legs and followed her.

However, the nuns did not push Abbess Jingxin toward the exit of the nunnery, instead taking her deeper inside. They were heading to a place that Li Huowang had not been to before.

"Remove your hands from the Profound Records. I will

overlook it this one time. In the future, don't bring that thing to the nunnery. It's an extremely unlucky item," said Jingxin.

Even though Jingxin's tone was repulsive, Li Huowang decided to ignore it. In fact, he didn't have any time to care about how rude she was being. He was busy thinking about what he needed to do next.

"What's the method to get rid of Dan Yangzi? Will it work?" asked Li Huowang anxiously.

"Aren't you asking that question far too late? Relax, our Benevolent Nunnery adheres to the values of integrity and trust quite strongly. If you can't trust even us, then there's no other place you could place your trust in," said Abbess Jingxin.

However, Abbess Jingxin's words were not able to calm Li Huowang down. Ever since he realized that Dan Yangzi had possessed him, everything he did and thought about had been for this day. Thinking about the stone in his heart that he would finally be getting rid of, he thought about many things for the first time.

"Don't be too excited. Even if your Master has been dealt with, you are still a Strayed One. That's an even bigger problem," said Abbess Jingxin.

Li Huowang's heart sank upon hearing her. "Abbess Jingxin, you might not have been able to find a method in the past, but that doesn't mean that I have no hope either."

The Abbess laughed at him. "Do you think you are the only one who had such a thought? The rest of the Strayed Ones had the same kinds of thoughts as well, but in the end they all met the same fate."

Li Huowang was just about to refute her when he stopped and took a deep breath. "But we can't give up without even trying, right? I can't just continue to live on like Yu'er, accepting my fate of being trapped inside a hallucination my entire life. You think it's the best scenario? I don't think so."

Abbess Jingxin's face fell. She plunged her hands into the folds of her skin and pulled out her son, staring at his shriveled face with pity as she caressed him gently.

"Sigh~ I really don't have a choice. As his mother, the only thing I could do was keep him alive." Li Huowang stretched his hands and gently patted the old man's white hair. His eyes were filled with pity, just like Abbess Jingxin.

Meanwhile, the rest of the guiding drug ingredients and nuns were also staring at the shriveled up old man.

Li Huowang stared at the old man and said slowly, "I still remember how he leapt into my embrace when he was younger. Ah~ Fun times."

Abbess Jingxin nodded, her face covered in bitterness. "Once we get trapped inside a hallucination, it's really hard to differentiate which side is real and which is fake. I once saw my mother kneeling in front of me inside the hallucination. At that time, my heart was aching so much."

The bitterness on Jingxin's face spread to everyone.

"Sigh." Everyone sighed in unison, the atmosphere around them turning heavy.

The wooden plank continued to creak as it rolled forward. They trudged on with a heavy heart until they encountered a fork in the road. Toward their left, there was another fat old nun the same size as Jingxin. She was being pushed on a wooden plank as well.

Li Huowang stared at the old nun, his face revealing an expression of disgust. "Junior sister Jingyuan, could you please hurry up? Dan Yangzi is constantly trying to take over my body."

"Why are you being so pushy? You've already waited for so long and we are just moments away from succeeding. If you had hurried up in the first place, then we wouldn't have to rush," said Jingyuan as she picked up a piece of moldy cake from the ground and shoved it into her mouth.

Jingyuan was not the last nun they met. Soon, they met a second and a third fat, old nun. All of them were similarly being pushed on wooden planks with wheels. In just a while, including Jingxin, a total of six old nuns were being wheeled toward their destination.

Soon, Li Huowang and the rest arrived at a small basin. In the center was a large, black Buddha statue that was tens of meters tall.

For some reason, the surface of the statue looked like it was wriggling.

When they got closer, they could hear a loud buzzing sound—the wriggling black Buddha statue was composed entirely of flies!

“My stomach hurts. How about waiting for a bit?” Li Huowang pressed his stomach in pain.

“Stop whining and hurry up. You think it’s easy for all of us to come out at once?” said Jingxin as she rummaged through the folds of her skin and took out a set of shining prayer beads before throwing them over to Li Huowang.

When he saw them, Li Huowang snatched them from the air. Then, he started turning the prayer beads in his hands as he started chanting an extremely difficult sutra.

Chapter 107 - Buddha

“The devout followers saw the extraordinary landscape and cheered, happiness coming forth from deep within their hearts~ They sat on the diamond lotus, followed Amitabha, and arrived at the Western Pure Land~ They saw Amitabha’s true form, a boundless goodness containing prosperity, wisdom, and dignity~ They saw the true form of the Bodhisattvas, profound yet dignified~”

Li Huowang’s chanting grew louder and louder. As he recited the sutra, the top of his head started to glow with a holy light.

Initially, only his voice could be heard, but soon, numerous other voices started to chime in. Some were more high pitched while others had a lower pitch. However, all of them cooperated with Li Huowang.

The voices came from the fat nuns surrounding him. All of their faces revealed a humble demeanor, just like Li Huowang’s.

Soon, their chanting was supplemented by the sound of gongs, chimes, the sound of wooden fish, and other Buddhist instruments that rang out from the surrounding temples.

With the aid of these instruments, Li Huowang’s chanting became even more dignified, more... Buddha-like.

Their chanting slowly changed their surroundings, something that should be impossible to do with just sound. The colors around them slowly started to fade, slowly being replaced by a dim yellow color; it was as if they were looking at the world through a dim yellow filter.

As more and more time passed, their chanting grew louder and louder. Soon, Bai Lingmiao, Puppy, Gao Zhijian, and even Abbess Jingxin’s son joined them in singing.

Their voices gradually grew louder and louder, to the point that the Buddha statue made of flies started to vibrate.

As they chanted, the Buddha statue slowly floated toward the top of Li Huowang's head. At the same time, the buzzing sound of the flies slowly started to resonate with the rhythm of their chant.

Finally, when their chant reached the climax, the Buddha statue opened its black eyes and fell downward. The buzzing flies instantly engulfed Li Huowang.

The flies buzzed intensely, their sound overlaying the sound of the chant.

At this moment, everyone, including the millions of flies were all linked with each other spiritually—all of them were inseparable. The humans knew what the flies were thinking, and the opposite was true as well. The flies could understand the intentions of the humans.

At that moment, Abbess Jingxin willed something in her heart, and the flies complied, rearranging themselves around Li Huowang, forming a black Bodhisattva sitting atop a lotus. The Bodhisattva made of flies held a vase in its hand. At the same time, the buzzing sound of the flies took over Li Huowang's voice, leading the others to chant.

However, the grand scene before them did not last long before the sound of thunder boomed throughout the sky. At that moment, everyone stared at the sky at the same time, only to see that a hole was being torn in it.

Dan Yangzi could be seen floating high up in the air. He had three heads and numerous repulsive organs attached to his body. His three eyes were staring at the entire Benevolent Nunnery sadistically as he stood amidst the white clouds.

"My dear disciple, looks like you are way too hung up on the physical realm," said a voice.

As soon as they heard this voice, all of the old nuns, including

Abbess Jingxin, stuck their hands within the folds of their skin and took out a set of prayer beads forged entirely with gold. None of them responded to Dan Yangzi verbally.

They wrapped the prayer beads around their palm and formed a Mudra by curling their index finger and thumb toward their palm. In an instant, an air of authority surged out from them and flew upward. “Praise the Buddhas! Praise the Dharma! Praise the Monks! Praise the Prohibitions! Praise the Kindness! Praise the Heavens! The monks cultivate the Six Praises and obtain Dharani!”

At the same time, the buzzing sound exploded as the black flies that constituted the Buddha statue flew up toward the sky like a tsunami. A periodic humming sound akin to someone chanting could be heard from the flies.

Seeing this, all three of Dan Yangzi’s faces smiled sarcastically. He stepped on the white clouds and flew straight toward the flies and swung his arms that were composed of numerous tentacles, revealing a bronze coin sword. The bronze coin sword was still connected to a tentacle that had an eye on it. He swung the sword hard, throwing chunks of flesh toward the flies.

The body of the flies touched by the pieces of flesh twisted abnormally as they formed a miniature version of Dan Yangzi’s head. Then, this twisted Dan Yangzi made of flies started attacking the other flies around it.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang was sitting still with a solemn expression on his face. His chanting grew louder and louder with each passing moment.

Under the guidance of the chant, the white maggots that had previously been wriggling on the food rotting within the entire Benevolent Nunnery turned into flies as they beat their wings and flew toward the chaotic sky.

The battle in the sky was extremely chaotic. As the two sides clashed intensely, countless dead flies rained down from the

Heavens.

Jingxin remained calm as she stared at the chaotic battlefield. She had utmost confidence in their abilities, and that was the only reason she had accepted Li Huowang's request to begin with.

At that moment, Li Huowang placed both his palms together, his merciful voice turning low. "The righteous path of justice, the three paths to calmness, all temptations disappear in the boundless universe. May the Bodhisattva protect me."

As soon as this chant rang out, the Buddha statue let out a bright light within the sky. This light enveloped Li Huowang, slowly turning his body into a golden Buddha statue.

At the same time, the same thing also happened to Dan Yangzi as his body was slowly turned into a gold statue. Gradually, Dan Yangzi's grotesque organs started turning into gold as the light continued to affect his body.

As soon as the flies in the air saw this opportunity, they instantly swarmed Dan Yangzi.

Bzz Bzz Bzz

The group of flies expanded and slowly turned into a massive Bodhisattva sitting on a large lotus while holding a vase. Then, the entire statue gently fell toward the ground, growing smaller and smaller as it approached the ground. Even the hole in the sky started to shrink in size, inch by inch.

At the same time, the sound of chanting, the gongs, and the wooden fish slowly died down.

Back on the ground, two fat nuns held a large brush the size of a broom. The tip of the brush was dipped in the ashes contained within an incense burner. The nuns were staring at the flies with expectations in their eyes.

Looking at the scene, a sliver of greed flashed past Abbess Jingxin's heart even though she was still chanting. The ritual would soon be coming to an end, and whatever the flies had acquired

would be hers once everything finished.

Ah~ Such a rarity. I wonder what it will taste like.

Just as she thought that everything was going according to the plan, something suddenly went wrong.

The golden Li Huowang suddenly started coughing, his cough worsening with each passing moment.

“Something’s wrong! I can no longer feel his thoughts! That brat broke through our pure heart!” An old nun cried out in surprise.

Just as she said that, Li Huowang expanded his mouth to the extreme. A vomiting sound was heard as he clutched onto his own neck forcefully.

Soon, everyone was greeted with a disgusting scene. A few black and sticky tentacles emerged from within the mouth of the red-robed Daoist!

It was a Black Taisui, albeit an incomplete one. However, at the base of one of the tentacles was half of Dan Yangzi’s face!

“Aiya! The Buddha is not completely dead yet! He hasn’t turned into a true Buddha! The Buddha had just merged with the Black Taisui and hidden itself within Li Huowang’s stomach! We were wrong! The real body was here!”

Chapter 108 - Dan Yangzi

This unexpected turn of events happened so suddenly that not one of them managed to react in time.

The tentacles that burst out from within Li Huowang's mouth instantly shot toward one of the nuns at the front.

The tentacles hardened by tensing themselves up. Then, this hardened tentacle pierced through the abdomen of the fat nun. However, instead of bleeding, the fat nun leaked out pearly-white fat from her injury.

But no matter what leaked out from the nun's body, her painful cries caused the so far regal chanting to become disharmonious. As the sound of the chanting lessened, the Bodhisattva statue composed of flies started to lose its form, slowly losing its grip on Dan Yangzi.

However, this was merely the start.

More and more tentacles that were merged with Dan Yangzi's organs burst forth from inside Li Huowang's mouth as they continued their attacks against the other nuns.

The black tentacles propped Li Huowang up, making him crawl along the ground like an octopus.

The entire place fell into chaos. Just as one of the fat nuns was about to stop him, the Bodhisattva statue composed of flies collapsed.

Soon, with the aid of the corporeal Dan Yangzi who was down on the ground, the incorporeal Dan Yangzi in the air freed himself from his restraints.

The situation had been reversed!

While Jingxin and the rest wanted to fight against Dan Yangzi, they couldn't do so if their Peaceful Heart Link had been broken.

Immediately, the incorporeal Dan Yangzi disappeared from their eyes—all they could see now was a Daoist with numerous tentacles bursting forth from his mouth.

“We need to find a way to once again pull that brat into our Peaceful Heart Link, otherwise we will not even be able to touch Dan Yangzi!” shouted one of the fat nuns.

“It’s no use! Dan Yangzi is inside his stomach. He’s constantly disturbing our Peaceful Heart Link! Junior sister, we have no choice. We need to summon the Bodhisattva or the nunnery will be in jeopardy!” shouted another nun.

Hearing this, Jingxin stared at the upside-down Li Huowang and sighed in her heart. They were just a step away from succeeding. To think they would fail at the final step.

Meanwhile, regardless of what the others were seeing, from Li Huowang’s perspective, the tentacles emerging from his mouth were not moving at all—in his eyes, it was the horrifying Dan Yangzi who was attacking the fat nuns. He had also been able to hear everything that Jingxin and the others had said just now.

Dan Yangzi is not dead? He’s actually alive and was even merged with the Black Taisui that was in my stomach?

Just thinking about it sent a chill down Li Huowang’s spine.

The murderous Dan Yangzi, someone that didn’t bat an eye when he refined living-breathing people into pills, was still alive!

Li Huowang had always thought that Dan Yangzi was only corrupting him mentally, but to think that Dan Yangzi was even corrupting his blood and flesh!

At that moment, Li Huowang’s eyes were filled with boundless hate as he stared at Dan Yangzi.

No! I must do something! I cannot just sit still and wait for my death to arrive. I need to kill him and settle this today!

Immediately, his right hand reached for the Profound Records and his left hand reached for the torture tools on his back. Then, he

fished out a sharp pike and forcefully stabbed it into his own palm while gritting his teeth to endure the pain. Thanks to his heightened senses, he nearly passed out from pain; in fact, a normal human would've fainted almost immediately.

While the heightened senses were beneficial when using the Profound Records, Li Huowang had decided not to use them this time around. However, just then, an Immortal sash appeared and wrapped itself around the Profound Records, throwing them away from him.

"My dear disciple, you need to help your Master ascend to Immortality! You can't conspire with outsiders to try and stop me~!" Dan Yangzi's left head spoke out. The left head was an old man with a bald spot.

"Helping others ascend to immortality is a deed of great merit! You will definitely understand once you step on the path of cultivation to become an Immortal yourself," said Dan Yangzi's middle head. This head was a middle-aged man.

"You have no idea what I've seen at the edge of Immortality! I deeply want to enter that realm! No, I *need* to enter it! I'm just one step away from it, so you need to help me!" said Dan Yangzi's final head that was on the right and looked like a child.

"Fuck off! I will not help you even if I have to die!" Li Huowang gritted his teeth and pulled out the pike stabbed in his palm, leaving behind a massive gash.

Hearing this, Dan Yangzi's mouths twisted into a nasty grin as they laughed. "My dear disciple, you have no say in this matter. You *will* assist me in killing the Three Corpses. After all, I am your Master."

"Who gives a fuck about killing the Three Corpses? You think that I will trust you ever again? Just tell me about it straight if you want to take over my body! Just because I managed to fool you doesn't mean you can try to fool me! Just so you know, the nasty

things that were used in the pills you ate have transformed you into a monster! The entire method of becoming an Immortal was nothing more than a hoax that I came up with on my own!” shouted Li Huowang.

However, Dan Yangzi did not become angry when he heard the truth. Instead, all six of his eyes revealed an intense sense of yearning. “No, I’ve definitely become an Immortal, albeit I am just a Half-Immortal at the moment. I’ve personally seen the Southern Heavenly Gates and also seen other Immortals just like me. There were even female Immortals over there!”

When he heard Dan Yangzi’s ravings, Li Huowang started laughing coldly. “Hehe, the realm of the Immortals? Rather than wasting time talking to me, why don’t you see what’s behind your back?”

Dan Yangzi’s three heads turned at the same time only to see a massive Bodhisattva standing in front of him. The Bodhisattva was made from heaps of fatty flesh and shook its three heads and six arms.

Bam!

The Bodhisattva made from the fatty, rotten flesh slammed down and trapped Dan Yangzi against the ground, burying half of his body.

However, despite having half of his body buried under the fatty flesh, Dan Yangzi turned around with a terrifying look in his eyes as he stared at Li Huowang. “Relax. This is just a minor issue. As long as the nuns aren’t able to connect with your inner heart, they will not be able to see me. They are nothing but a bunch of blind nuns with a little bit of power. As for you, let me straighten out the facts for you. If you listen to me, then you can still be my disciple. However, if you don’t, then you too will be nothing more than a stray dog that I can directly kick to death! There is nothing you can do to me.”

When he heard this, a rush of blood surged into Li Huowang's head. Immediately, he took out a blade and used it to stab his abdomen. Then, he sliced toward the left and started rummaging his innards.

"Stop! What are you doing? Stop!" screamed Dan Yangzi, his faces covered in a terrifying expression. He wanted to personally stop Li Huowang but he was trapped by the fat nuns.

"Didn't you say there's nothing I can do?" Li Huowang shouted at Dan Yangzi, his eyes turning bloodshot.

"THEN HOW ABOUT THIS?!" Li Huowang endured the extreme pain as he shakily raised the blade and stabbed it right into his stomach.

Seeing this, Dan Yangzi's faces were covered in a mix of extreme anger and disbelief.

"You fucking ingrate! You have no idea what you are doing! You think you can fight against me? Dream on! Your fate has been sealed!" shouted Dan Yangzi.

On the other hand, Li Huowang gritted his teeth and stabbed once more, completely puncturing his stomach. "My fate is sealed? I don't fucking believe in such fairy tales! Fucking Baldy! We are not done here!"

Chapter 109 - Injury

Ci Ci~

The sound of flesh being torn apart rang out as black liquid poured from the hole Li Huowang had made in his own abdomen. Soon, Li Huowang collapsed due to the extreme pain caused by cutting open his own stomach.

Even so, he smiled when he saw Dan Yangzi's grotesque body slowly starting to blur. He didn't mind enduring all the pain in the world as long as he could kill Dan Yangzi!

"You ungrateful brat! You would still be stuck inside your hallucinations if I hadn't helped you!" shouted Dan Yangzi as he disappeared.

Hearing this, Li Huowang gritted his teeth while pushing the blade even deeper. "You think I needed your help? It's because of *you* that I am suffering so much today!"

"You fucking brat!" Dan Yangzi's six eyes revealed ghastly killing intent, which also influenced Li Huowang, making him feel vindictive.

Just as the oppressive atmosphere reached its climax, a large group of flies swooped down from high in the Heavens, covering both Li Huowang and Dan Yangzi in rot and filth.

Jingxin and the other nuns had made their move. They placed their palms together and wrapped them in prayer beads before resuming their chant toward the Buddha statue. "Without pain, we cannot remove pain; without wisdom, we cannot obtain enlightenment. The Bodhisattva must follow the path of Buddha and face everything with a heart that expects nothing. Only then can one's heart be free of obstacles. Without obstacles, there is no fear, and one will be free from all distractions, thus achieving

Nirvana. The Buddha of the past, the present, and the future have all achieved Nirvana in this state!”

As their chanting grew louder, their bodies underwent a massive transformation. Everything associated with old age, filth, and fat quickly disappeared from their bodies. Then, the essence of old age, filth, and fat intertwined in the air, flying higher and higher. When it reached a certain height, a crack appeared in the Heavens, revealing a massive eye that could cover the sun.

It was an eye from an angry Arhat and was devoid of all filth and sins.

“HA!” A furious shout rang out for tens of miles as space itself trembled. By the time the sound disappeared, everything unusual within the Benevolent Nunnery, including Dan Yangzi, had disappeared.

...

Bai Lingmiao woke up groggily. She realized that she had been lying face down in front of a large pot of oily fried rice while stuffing her mouth with her own two hands.

“Blegh!” She spat out the oily fried rice in her mouth while scanning her surroundings anxiously. After taking a moment to let everything sink in, she realized that she was in the food hall of the Benevolent Nunnery. Surrounding her were the fat nuns who were busy stuffing their mouths with food. The constant sound of chewing filled her ears.

She turned around and inspected the steel pot only to see that the fried rice was prepared for her and the entire table. Puppy, Xiaoman, Baolu, Yang Xiaohai, Gao Zhijian, and the others were also present as they stuffed their mouths with food, just like the nuns. Luckily, they all snapped out of it one by one before scanning their surroundings in a dazed panic.

“What’s going on? Why are we here?” The rest of them were clearly confused about what had happened.

Bai Lingmiao did the headcount and was relieved to find that everyone was here... except for Li Huowang.

“What happened? Weren’t we helping Senior Li with his exorcism? Why are we here eating rice? Also, there’s not even a single piece of vegetable in this thing. It’s too oily, yuck,” said Puppy as he checked the other tables.

However, the nuns were too lazy to bother with them and just continued stuffing themselves. But, instead of the fried rice, the nuns were eating moldy dumplings and other food.

Bai Lingmiao was visibly worried. She approached one of the nuns and asked, “Master, may I know where our Senior Li is?”

“Senior Li? You mean the Strayed One? He’s with Abbess Jingxin. Find her, and you will also find him,” The nun answered Bai Lingmiao without even turning around; she was busy eating the food in front of her, almost as if she was afraid that her food would be gone if she ate any slower.

Bai Lingmiao and the rest decided to brave through the swamp of moldy food before arriving at Abbess Jingxin’s house.

Just then, they saw Li Huowang talking with a strange nun. The nun didn’t have eyes, and her eye sockets were sunken in. She was quite skinny, but her skin was very loose, to the point that the skin on her chin reached down to her stomach and the skin on her stomach could touch the ground. It was almost as if she was wearing an extremely oversized Daoist robe.

When he heard footsteps, Li Huowang turned around before smiling and waving at them as he called them over.

Bai Lingmiao was shocked. This was the first time she had seen Li Huowang smile.

“Are you guys alright? I hope you were not frightened. The nuns in the Benevolent Nunnery couldn’t put a stop to their abilities in time, so you guys were affected for a period even after the exorcism ended,” Li Huowang calmly explained.

Just as Bai Lingmiao and the others got closer, they were shocked to see the beautiful appearance of the nun. She was simply too gorgeous despite her bizarre appearance.

Bai Lingmiao pulled Li Huowang slightly away from the nun and whispered, "Senior Li, who is she?"

"She's Abbess Jingxin. Don't you recognize her?" asked Li Huowang.

Li Huowang was just explaining the situation when the blind nun with flabby skin nodded.

"Her? Jingxin?! The nun who couldn't even walk because of being too fat?" Everyone's eyes widened with shock. The change in her appearance was just far too massive!

"The abilities of the nuns from the Benevolent Nunnery are somewhat different from the rest of the sects. There's no need for all of you to pry deeper into it. Thanks to the sacrifice made by Abbess Jingxin, my worries had been dealt with. Dan Yangzi will not appear again," explained Li Huowang.

Hearing this, everyone smiled and congratulated Li Huowang for being healed.

After talking for a bit, Li Huowang stopped them from asking further questions; he had something to say.

"I still have to take care of some stuff over here, and so I need to stay here for a few days. You guys should leave first. Once I'm finished with my business, I will catch up with you," said Li Huowang.

"Senior Li, why do you need to stay? Also, can't we just stay and help you?" Bai Lingmiao immediately raised an objection when she heard that they would be separated.

"Sorry, but there's nothing you guys can do to help me in terms of cultivation. You guys leave first, and I will catch up to you in another ten days or so. You guys need to reach your homes soon. Any later and you will be once again stuck having to celebrate the

new years away from your homes. We've already delayed our journey for far too long. Relax, it's not as if I won't be traveling anymore. Just follow the path that I've marked on the map and I will be able to catch up with you guys soon enough," persuaded Li Huowang.

In the face of Li Huowang's persuasion, they all finally relented and left the nunnery after saying their goodbyes.

As he stared at them walking away, Li Huowang's smile slowly fell, being replaced by an expression filled with pain.

He removed his red Daoist robes and pulled up his shirt, revealing a large gash on his abdomen. Currently, there was a dense mass of white maggots crawling in the wound.

"Your injury will heal in just a few days within the Benevolent Nunnery. What you need to be concerned about is an entirely different matter. You know what I mean," said Abbess Jingxin.

Chapter 110 - Insane

Hearing her words, Li Huowang gently held his wound and slowly walked into Jingxin's house. Then, he slowly leaned against the wall before sliding down and sitting on the floor.

"So even you guys aren't able to get rid of Dan Yangzi?" Li Huowang asked.

"Of course we can. We will just need to kill you," replied Jingxin.

Hearing this, Li Huowang began to laugh. "Haha, to think that even the Abbess could crack a joke like this."

"I'm not joking with you. Dan Yangzi is deeply rooted within your body—you are a part of his Three Corpses. It will require extreme precision to remove your Master while still keeping you alive; both of you are just way too tangled up, to the point that you can already be considered as half Dan Yangzi. This was also why I did not just remove the Black Taisui from your stomach. Presently, that Black Taisui is both Dan Yangzi and you at the same time," explained Jingxin.

Li Huowang had requested the Benevolent Nunnery's help to get rid of Dan Yangzi, but it ended in failure. Even with Li Huowang co-operating with all the nuns, all they had managed to do was inflict an injury on Dan Yangzi and chase him away. The root of the problem was still there.

Li Huowang huddled in the dark with his back against the cold wall, staring blankly at the mossy tiles of the temple roof outside.

"You can't blame us for this. I had no idea that your Master was only half dead. The Benevolent Nunnery excels in dealing with the spirits, but those rule-breaking bald donkeys from the Righteous Monastery are much better when it comes to dealing in matters of

the physical flesh,” said Jingxin.

“Abbess, don’t worry; I don’t blame you. How much longer do I have until I completely turn into Dan Yangzi?” Li Huowang was not disappointed by the failure.

“With your current situation, you should have two more months,” Abbess Jingxin said as she walked into the darkness and gently rocked a bamboo cradle while revealing a lovely smile as she looked at the shriveled old man within.

“Oh...” Li Huowang trailed off.

“So, what do you plan to do?” asked Jingxin.

“I will need you to wait before I can give you an answer to that question. Abbess, may I borrow something from you?” asked Li Huowang.

Then, the dark room turned silent.

After a long time, Li Huowang took a deep breath as his face contorted from discomfort. He suddenly opened his eyes and saw that the darkness around him had been replaced with the color white. He was back inside a hospital.

He inspected his surroundings and saw that this time it was a normal hospital rather than a mental hospital; it seemed that his injury hadn't healed within the hallucination.

He shifted his gaze downward and saw his mother, Sun Xiaoqin, sleeping by his bed as she sat on a little stool.

In Li Huowang’s eyes, his mother was someone who loved cleanliness; however, her hair was now very oily, almost as if she hadn’t washed it in a very long time.

Li Huowang wanted to reach out to her, but realized that all four of his limbs had been tied down and restricted. He had no choice but to gently wake her up. “Mom, it’s me, Huowang.”

Soon, Sun Xiaoqin opened her eyes. When she realized that her son was calling out to her with a normal expression, she hugged him tightly. “Son, you are awake!”

A period of silence followed. After making sure that his mother wasn't that agitated, he asked, "Mom, where's dad?"

"Your father is out earning money. Our finances aren't looking good and we have a lot of debt," replied Sun Xiaoqin.

However, immediately after she said this, her heart fell. She cupped Li Huowang's face as she said in a heartbroken tone, "Huowang, I don't blame you. After all, this is not something you wanted to do. It's all that ailment's fault! That damned ailment! Why was my son the one who got afflicted with it when there are so many other people out there?"

"Mom, can you release one of my hands? I want to stretch a bit," asked Li Huowang.

When she saw that her son was speaking normally, she stopped hesitating and she smiled once more. "Alright, it's good to stretch every once in a while. You've been restrained for so long that your body might just go to waste at this rate."

When his right hand was freed, Li Huowang smiled at his mother. "Thanks mom."

After saying that, he reached into his hospital gown and took out a heavy prayer bead—it was made from gold. Then, Li Huowang placed it in Sun Xiaoqin's hands as she tried to process what it was.

"Mom, go and exchange that for some money. Pay off our family's debt. Then, if there's money leftover, go and buy back our house. I still like this place," said Li Huowang.

Sun Xiaoqin held the heavy golden prayer bead and was confused. "What's going on? Son, where did you get this much gold? Did you go out and take it while I was asleep?"

Li Huowang shook his head as he took off the jade pendant from his neck before placing it in Sun Xiaoqin's hands as well. "Mom, take this as well. It will fetch a good price. Even if this is a hallucination, I don't want to see you suffer."

When she heard this, Sun Xiaoqin threw down both the golden bead and jade pendant before holding his shoulders and shaking them vigorously as tears streamed down her face. “Son, wake up! I am your mother! This is not a hallucination! It really isn’t!”

Li Huowang wiped her tears with his hand and smiled plainly. “You are right, Mom. This is not a hallucination. I was just messing with you.”

When Li Huowang reassured her, Sun Xiaoqin started growing excited; she did a little dance and placed both of her palms together as she praised the Buddha.

She took her phone out excitedly and wanted to let Li Huowang talk to his father who was at work.

On the other hand, while she was calling Li Huowang’s father, Li Huowang secretly plucked out a red button from her shirt and placed it inside his hospital gown.

Maybe it had been because Li Huowang had willingly entered the hallucination this time, but it ended quite quickly. His white-haired father hadn’t even had the chance to talk to him through the video call when everything around him turned dark once more. He was back in the dark room.

When he returned, he saw Abbess Jingxin standing silently while holding onto the golden prayer beads.

Then, Li Huowang raised his hands. His breathing was rapid and his thoughts were jumbled up. He gritted his teeth and touched his chest, and then, his arms froze.

There was nothing there.

Li Huowang laughed when he was faced with this expected scenario. “Hehe, I knew it. How could that side be real? To think that I would believe the words of the people inside the hallucination. I must be crazy.”

Li Huowang's laughter gradually came to a stop. What he had just found out could not be considered good news—the final hopes

in his heart had just disappeared.

He took a deep breath and gently spoke to himself, "Mom, I hope I didn't end up scaring you. I'm sorry, but please tie my hands up again. I don't want to hurt you."

Then, the room fell silent.

"Since that side is fake, who were you talking to just now?"

Abbess Jingxin broke the silence after she had quietly observed him for a while.

Li Huowang raised his head and stared at the nun in the dark.

"I was just talking to myself. Can't I do that?"

"What do you plan to do?" asked Jingxin.

Hearing this, Li Huowang took a deep breath, his eyes getting filled with killing intent. "I want Dan Yangzi to die!"

Chapter 111 - Method

Li Huowang sat on the ground with an expression filled with hesitation and struggle. After staying still and pondering for a long time, he finally picked up the brush and began to write on the paper in front of him.

However, he had to take long pauses after every few characters. One reason for this was that he was not used to writing with a brush. But more importantly, Li Huowang had already started to forget how to write a lot of the common characters.

Li Huowang understood what this meant—he was slowly becoming more like Dan Yangzi.

After writing a long passage, Li Huowang ended his letter in large words—Li Huowang’s final work.

After he finished this, he dried the paper and handed it to the plump nun beside him. "If my fellow disciples come looking for me, please pass this letter to the tall one among them. He can read."

Next, he passed the sacred text, the gourd containing the lifespan pills, and the bronze bell to her. "Please pass these three items to them as well. They know how to use the gourd and bell. As for this sacred text, it can be a memento for them."

Miao Yu^[1] glanced at the three items, then looked at the Profound Records hanging from Li Huowang’s waist. "How about that?"

Li Huowang placed his hand on the bamboo slip that had brought him endless agony, and then shook his head. "I’m not passing this to them. This thing is ominous, and I wouldn’t feel good about leaving it behind to them. It’s better for it to go with me."

After he had sorted everything out, Li Huowang turned to look

at Jingxin, "Abbess, everything is prepared."

Abbess Jingxin nodded and started walking toward the depths of the Benevolent Nunnery. The loose skin on her body hung low like a skirt as it was dragged along the ground.

She walked ahead, while Li Huowang followed behind her while clutching his abdomen. They remained silent as they continued walking.

They walked through the 'swamp' of rotten food, then went past a few more dilapidated temples. Soon, a short, black pagoda appeared before them.

When she saw that pagoda, Jingxin finally spoke up, "You really want to do this?"

Li Huowang nodded. "What you said earlier reminded me. Actually, the thing that I have always wanted was complete eradication of Dan Yangzi. As for whether or not I would survive..."

Li Huowang chuckled softly before continuing, "...thinking back, I never really cared about my own life."

Li Huowang pressed on his abdominal injury, exhaustion plastered across his face. "Abbess, truthfully speaking, after going through so much, I am already very tired. I don't want to see my mom suffer, nor do I want to constantly endure the feeling of Dan Yangzi slowly taking over my body. All I really, truly want is to rest."

As he had expected, fear did not blossom in his heart when he thought of his imminent death. On the contrary, he felt somewhat relieved, "Ah, I am so worn out."

Hearing all this, Abbess Jingxin nodded and brought him toward the pagoda. "Alright, as you wish."

"Thank you, Abbess. Of all the people I have met in this world, you can be considered to be the only good person," said Li Huowang.

"I am a nun, so it's natural for me to be compassionate," said

Jingxin humbly.

"Abbess, since you're a Buddhist disciple, can I ask you a question?" asked Li Huowang.

"Ah? What is it?"

"Do you believe that in this world people become ghosts after they die?" asked Li Huowang.

"You're about to die shortly. In your opinion, would it be better to become a ghost, or to dissipate completely?" countered Jingxin.

"I feel that living as a human is already tiring enough. We should rest after death and stop causing trouble." Li Huowang replied very calmly.

Hearing this, Jingxin tilted her head slightly and looked at Li Huowang with her sunken eyes. "Are you sure that you have no attachments left? Is there nothing within this mortal world that would cause you to show some reluctance?"

Li Huowang's expression froze as he thought of many things. "I do. But now, me being with them would only bring them harm."

Hearing this, Abbess Jingxin did not say anything else, and continued walking toward the black tower.

As they approached, Li Huowang heard a rustling sound; it was akin to leaves rubbing against one another.

He looked toward the direction of the sounds, and finally managed to identify their source—cockroaches. There were countless black bugs squished together inside the tower.

Jingxin did not stop, and directly brought Li Huowang into the pile of cockroaches. It was very unpleasant to have cockroaches climbing all over one's body. However, right now, Li Huowang did not mind all this; after all, he was determined to meet his death. Thus, he could only push aside the crawling bugs to keep up.

After walking through the cockroach pile for around half an incense stick worth of time, Li Huowang's vision cleared up and what he saw shocked him.

Gray rats of varying sizes were entangled with one another, forming large rat clusters that moved around and nestled against each other, eventually forming a huge mountain composed entirely of rats. The rats in the mountain were staring directly at Li Huowang with their red eyes of varying sizes.

Within the quivering rat mountain was a hole; it was almost as if it was meant for someone to enter.

“Is this it?” asked Li Huowang as he took a deep breath and walked toward the hole within the rat mountain.

When Li Huowang was just a few steps away, he paused and turned toward Abbess Jingxin. “Abbess, are you certain that after I die, you will be able to get rid of Dan Yangzi?”

His own life was insignificant; what mattered the most was making that wretched being suffer for eternity.

Only when he received an affirmation from Jingxin did Li Huowang relax and start walking toward the rat hole once again.

In the final moments before his death, the figures of both Yang Na and Bai Lingmiao flashed through Li Huowang’s mind, gradually merging with each other.

Farewell to this damned place!

Li Huowang thought as he was about to walk into the hole.

However, at that moment, Abbess Jingxin’s voice rang behind him, “Since you aren’t afraid of death, then I can recommend one more option. If that still doesn’t work out, then it won’t be too late for you to choose death after that.”

Li Huowang turned back in astonishment. “There’s another method?”

Hope was re-ignited in his previously hopeless heart upon hearing Abbess Jingxin’s words.

In response, Jingxin nodded and pointed at the Profound Records at his waist. “Seek help from the original owners of that thing.”

“Them? Abbess, I’ve never asked you about this thing previously, but where did this ominous object that requires sacrifices of flesh even come from?” Li Huowang looked at the red bamboo slip in astonishment.

“Ao Jing Sect.” Abbess Jingxin replied with an extremely unfamiliar name.

“Originally, they were two separate sects—the Ao Sect and Jing Sect. Later on, they somehow ended up merged. The Profound Records in your possession come from them,” continued Jingxin.

“Ao Jing Sect?” Li Huowang mumbled to himself. He had known about Buddhism and Daoism, but it was the first time he had heard about Ao Jing Sect.

“Do they have methods to separate Dan Yangzi from my body?” asked Li Huowang.

“You can look for them and find out. If there is still anyone in this world who can resolve your peculiar situation, it can only be them, people who are even stranger than you. Of course, even if they really are able to help you, you may not be able to escape them. But since you aren’t even afraid of death, you shouldn’t be afraid of that either,” said Jingxin.

At that moment, Abbess Jingxin used one of her fingers to slice through some of her loose skin, cutting off a piece of skin. Then, she quickly used her blackened fingernail to trace out a few characters onto the piece of skin using Women’s Script.

After she finished writing on it, she walked over to Li Huowang and placed the piece of skin in his hand. “Bring this to them; that way, they won’t do anything to you as soon as they see you. If even they can’t help you, then you can always return here to die peacefully.”

Li Huowang rubbed the piece of skin in his hand gently. He was still filled with disbelief. There was suddenly a glimmer of hope even though he had already been prepared to die.

“Thank you, Abbess Jingxin! If Dan Yangzi’s matter can really be resolved, then I will repay your kindness in future!” Li Huowang grabbed onto this last trace of hope to live, and walked through the pile of cockroaches and toward the outside. “Abbess, it’s a deal! If they aren’t able to get rid of Dan Yangzi, then I’ll return here in two months for you to kill me.”

Shortly after Li Huowang left, a fat nun stepped out from within the rat mountain and came up to Jingxin. “Abbess, why did you decide to help this young Strayed One like that? You even used your Flesh Book[2] like that. That is a huge favor. In the first place, we aren’t even on good terms with Ao Jing Sect to begin with.”

Abbess Jingxin looked toward the direction that Li Huowang had gone with a complex expression. After a long time, she spoke slowly, “Earlier, this kid held my face and called me ‘mom’. He really resembles Yu’er from his younger days, both in his actions and in his way of speaking.”

1. The author wrote Miao Yin here, which we believe is a typo. The names get jumbled up quite consistently 🤔

2. The skin she wrote on. It is a term made up by the author.



Chapter 112 - On The Way

“The sacred text, the bronze bell, and the gourd,” Li Huowang checked off the items that he had given to the nun for safekeeping. Since he was going to find the Ao Jing Sect, he had a feeling that these objects and the farewell letter may end up being useful on the journey, and shouldn’t be left here.

Even now, Li Huowang still felt like all of this was a dream. There was actually a method of possibly getting rid of Dan Yangzi, albeit, the possibility was very small.

Just as he was about to take his items and leave, Li Huowang noticed some changes to his belongings.

“That’s a... tooth mark?” Li Huowang touched a corner of the sacred text and then glanced doubtfully at Miao Yu[\[1\]](#).

In response, the fat nun who had been stuffing herself until now suddenly looked guiltily toward the ceiling.

“Venerable Miao Yu, you even gnawed on this and left a tooth mark? Do you happen to know what this sacred text is? Truthfully, if you can help me figure it out, then I’ll have to thank you.”

“No, it definitely wasn’t me. In fact, there was already a tooth mark on it to begin with. The Benevolent Nunnery has helped you so much, so don’t go around falsely accusing good people,” defended Miao Yu weakly.

As he listened to Miao Yu’s clumsy lies, Li Huowang just helplessly shook his head.

He picked up the gourd and shook it, only to find that it was actually empty—the last remaining lifespan pill was missing. Li Huowang once again looked at the fat nun.

Currently, she had her head buried in her food and was eating heartily.

Strangely, even though he had been stolen from, Li Huowang did not feel the slightest bit surprised about it. He should have already anticipated this outcome back when he entrusted his belongings to these greedy nuns for the sake of safekeeping.

With a resigned look, Li Huowang carried the three items and walked over before patting the folds of skin on the plump nun's body. "If fate wills it, see you again, Venerable Miao Yu."

Then, he turned and began to walk toward the entrance. However, just as he was about to leave, he turned to look back at the nun behind him.

Meanwhile, Miao Yu was peeking at him as he turned around, but then quickly buried her head in the food once again. When she saw Li Huowang approach her, she took the initiative to speak. "That thing was indeed eaten by me. The taste wasn't all that great. If you want to, then go ahead and complain about me to the Abbess!"

When he saw her pretend like she didn't care, Li Huowang could only chuckle. "I am not *that* petty. I came back to ask you about something. Have you heard of the Ao Jing Sect?"

Miao Yu looked puzzled as she continued to chew on the food bolus in her mouth. "Didn't I tell you that Ao Jing Sect's Cross Temple is located on the large mountain to the west? I even told you exactly where to go to find them, so can't you look for them yourself?"

Li Huowang shook his head. "I'm not here to ask about its location. I want to know about what the Ao Jing Sect is like. What kind of background do they have? What sort of people are their members?"

Hearing this, the rotund Miao Yu frowned, her facial features scrunching up like a bun. "You even have the Profound Records on

you, yet you don't know what they are like? If I had to describe them, then they are basically a bunch of freaks."

"Freaks? Are they even stranger than you guys? Hahaha..." Li Huowang couldn't help himself and burst out laughing.

Miao Yu looked displeased. "I'm not joking! That bunch is *very* strange. You've used the Profound Records, so you should know a little bit about how their cultivation methods function. They don't meditate or recite chants, and neither do they cultivate like others. Instead, they torment themselves, claiming that it pleases their Sacrificial [2] God."

"Sacrificial God? Isn't it Ba-Hui? Does that thing have two names?" Li Huowang was rather surprised at the unexpectedly different name.

"Who cares what they are called. In any case, the people of that sect like to wear big hats and robes so that they can cover up the injuries on their bodies. Last time, I even saw one of them who did not have any skin left. Even though Abbess has given you a Flesh Book, it's not guaranteed that they will respect it. So, be careful when you deal with them. After all, there have been some grievances between them and us in the past," said Miao Yu.

Li Huowang had only been asking random questions, but he actually managed to receive some details, and so he continued, "What sort of grievances?"

"It was all because of the Abbess' son. Those of the Ao Jing sect like to capture Strayed Ones for who knows what reason. In any case, by the time we finally managed to retrieve him, the Abbess' son had gone completely crazy," explained Miao Yu.

At that moment, Miao Yu paused and looked Li Huowang up and down before clicking her tongue in pity. "Tsk, ts, I nearly forgot that you are also a Strayed One. It's going to be very dangerous for you."

"Sister, do you think I want to place myself in danger? I don't

have much of a choice here...” Li Huowang sighed regretfully, then turned around before walking out of the Benevolent Nunnery’s entrance.

After Li Huowang left, Miao Yu continued to sit there as she scarfed down her food while muttering to herself, “When he had been writing his farewell letter, I saw that he seemed determined to meet his death. How come that changed so quickly, and now he’s in such a rush to look for the Ao Jing Sect? Did one of you end up tugging on his heartstrings?”

“I can’t be bothered to tug on the heartstrings of a Strayed One. Don’t drive yourself crazy. I reckon that this change should be from Abbess Jingxin’s intervention,” a voice rang out in Miao Yu’s head.

“Oh~ I see,” replied Miao Yu. Meanwhile, various voices rose and fell inside Miao Yu’s head.

Currently, Lu Zhuangyuan’s face was swollen as he led the Lu Family Troupe on the road. They looked disheveled and ragged in appearance, and all of them had an ugly expression on their face.

Lu Zhuangyuan’s daughter-in-law who was on the carriage was even more distraught as she tightly embraced her daughter and cried bitterly while leaning against a wooden box.

At that moment, a lit tobacco pipe was forcefully swung through the air in an arc.

“Cry! All you know how to do is to cry! How many days of crying has it been? You were the ones who didn’t follow my instructions to rub ash on your faces! And now, all my silver has been plundered by those damned soldiers! Am I crying? What’s the matter? Is your purity more important than my silver, huh?” shouted Lu Zhuangyuan.

“Dad, I’m begging you, please stop!” Lu Juren’s eyes reddened. His sullen face was an indication of his pent-up anger.

When Lu Zhuangyuan saw his son looking like that, he sighed

deeply. “Don’t worry, they didn’t manage to take all the money. I may not be good for much, but I can still hide some money. Those soldiers found only two spots; there are at least three others that they didn’t find,” Lu Zhuangyuan said as he took out a copper key and opened the large wooden crate on the carriage.

His callused hands rummaged through the luggage for a while, and then he retrieved several pieces of silver of varying sizes from inside a hidden compartment. He picked out a broken piece of silver that was slightly larger than a soybean, and reluctantly passed it to his daughter-in-law.

“Our Lu family hasn’t treated you well. Take this, and buy whatever you want when we get to the market,” said Lu Zhuangyuan.

Luo Juanhua had previously been sobbing as though she had been wronged. However, once she touched the piece of silver, her face instantly lit up and she carefully tucked it into her small purse. “I won’t be using this; I’m saving it for Cui’er’s[3] dowry.”

Lu Zhuangyuan just watched all this in silence. Every time she felt wronged, she would put on an act to extort him like this. At this point, he had grown accustomed to this.

1. Name changed again to Miao Yu, for consistency 📖

2. Chinese term here used was 牯, which suggests a cow to be sacrificed for a ritual. If it survives, it will be called 牯神, Sacrificial God 📖

3. Likely typo from the author, which was Xiu'er instead of Cui'er. Xiu refers to Lu Xiucui, who is Lu Zhuangyuan's younger son and so it doesn't make sense for there to be a dowry for him. Cui'er is Luo Juanhua's daughter and Lu Zhuangyuan's grand-daughter, so Luo Juanhua saving for her dowry makes sense. 📖

Chapter 113 - Unexpected Meeting

Once he confirmed that his daughter-in-law had stopped crying, Lu Zhaoyuan turned back to look at his terrified-looking younger son who was trailing behind the carriage.

“Son, how are you? Not too scared, I hope?” Lu Zhuangyuan asked as he tried giving a reassuring smile, but could only manage a sickly grimace. “Don’t be afraid, ok? Those smelly soldiers are just paper tigers. If they were truly capable, then they would be sent to battle.”

However, even though Lu Zhuangyuan tried to comfort him, Lu Xiucan’s expression did not improve. It was almost as if the plundering soldiers were right in front of him, and threatening him with knives placed on his throat.

“Dad... why are we crossing the border? Shouldn’t we go home first?” asked Lu Xiucan.

Lu Zhuangyuan lit up his tobacco pipe and started to smoke it, the white smoke released by it puffing up and covering his eyes. “I’ve been thinking that these aren’t ordinary times; the world is going to enter a period of utter chaos. And so, we’re heading out there to find a place to hide for a while.”

“Dad, our emperor lost the war, so does that mean we are going to be slaves to another nation?” asked Lu Xiucan.

Immediately, Lu Zhuangyuan knocked his tobacco pipe onto Lu Xiucan’s head causing the sparks to scatter around.

“Does the identity of the emperor affect us in the slightest? Is that really what you should be thinking about?” asked Lu Zhuangyuan. However, when he saw Lu Xiucan’s aggrieved

expression as he massaged his head, Lu Zhuangyuan sighed softly and continued to instruct patiently. “There are so many defeated soldiers, so it’s likely that there will be a change in the regime. There’s likely going to be even more chaos after such huge militaristic movements, so we’re heading out to lay low for now. It doesn’t matter if our money is stolen. As long as we are safe and alive, we can go anywhere.”

“But... I’ve never been to the kingdom of Si Qi. Dad... I’m a little scared...” muttered Lu Xiucan.

Lu Zhuangyuan was frustrated upon seeing his younger son being so cowardly. “What’s there to be afraid of! Don’t the people from the kingdom of Si Qi also have two eyes and one nose, just like us? Can they grow extra features? At most, the kingdom of Si Qi has some more lakes and rivers than us.”

At this point, Lu Juren who had been quietly listening in joined the conversation, “Dad, we aren’t too familiar with this place... I also think it’s better to stay in our hometown. It might not be as severe as you said.”

“You’re still taking this disaster too lightly! Your father has eaten more salt than you’ve eaten rice. Do you think I could be wrong?” Lu Zhuangyuan continued to explain. “Don’t worry; I’ve got it all figured out. Back when the Daoist was looking at his map, I took several glances. They were going to the Liang Kingdom. The journey is quite long, but we’ll definitely be safe as long as we stick by his side. Wherever he goes, that’s where we will follow. He can go on his journey, and we can just host our own play. Nobody will dare to disturb us. Once the emperor is changed, and this disaster has blown over, we will return. Don’t you think it’s a sound plan?”

“We aren’t even related to him; will he let us follow him?” Lu Juren asked, feeling embarrassed.

“Ah~ do you still not see why I gave away that jar of salted duck eggs back then?” Lu Zhuangyuan continued, “Remember what

the Daoist said when he crossed the border? We'll meet again if fate allows! It doesn't matter if he was just being polite. Since those were his words, we just need to be humble and pretend to be miserable. With the relationship of that jar of duck eggs, could he bear to drive us away?"

When he saw the look of understanding on his son's face, Lu Zhuangyuan felt rather pleased with himself. "Hehe, the older, the wiser. Learn more from me in the future."

"Dad, I got it. Since we're performers, it doesn't matter where we go. Perhaps the people in the other regions will like our performance even more, and thus we can make more money," said Lu Juren.

The atmosphere improved considerably after Lu Zhuangyuan explained the situation; everyone began to look forward to a brighter future.

The carriage continued on its way, where they suddenly saw several rolling black balls up ahead. Only when they got closer, did Lu Zhuangyuan find out that those rolling black balls were a group of a dozen fat nuns who were traveling with their carriages.

There were six carriages in total, and the wheels left deep marks on the ground, suggesting that they were transporting something heavy.

"These nuns are really smelly. Dad, let's move faster," said Luo Juanhua as she furrowed her brows and took out a handkerchief to cover her daughter's nose.

"What nonsense? Don't you see that even the people from the kingdom of Si Qi are following these nuns? We'll follow them as well," said Lu Zhuangyuan as he looked at the other travelers beside the fat nuns. His wealth of experience told him that there must be a reason behind all these people from the kingdom of Si Qi to be enduring the smell and traveling alongside these nuns.

"But... this smell is too..." Luo Juanhua frowned and muttered

under her breath.

Less than an hour later, Lu Zhuangyuan saw that the nuns had stopped and begun to eat their dry rations with big mouthfuls.

Seeing this, Lu Zhuangyuan and his family started to eat as well. After spending some more time with them, the smell was quite a bit more bearable.

While they were eating, Lu Zhuangyuan suddenly stood up. He looked rather excited as he walked toward a man amongst the travelers.

The man was wearing a black-veiled bamboo hat. He seemed to have some difficulty with his legs as he was leaning on an old horse while eating.

When Lu Zhuangyuan approached, the man also seemed to recognize him. "Troupe Leader Lu, what are you doing here?"

Lu Zhuangyuan's eyes lit up upon hearing the familiar voice. "Ah, so it really is you. You're that Daoist's..."

However, before he could finish his sentence, the man removed his black-veiled hat and revealed himself to be Zhao Wu.

Unexpectedly meeting an old acquaintance in a foreign land made both parties feel especially close.

After they finished exchanging pleasantries, Lu Zhuangyuan learned that Zhao Wu was searching for Li Huowang, immediately causing his old face to break into a broad smile.

"Your legs aren't in great shape, and it's dangerous to travel alone. I'll accompany you to find him; it's on the way anyway," offered Lu Zhuangyuan. That Daoist would owe him a favor once he delivered this person to him; it would be rather difficult for him to reject them after that. Also, this person was that Daoist's junior, and may have some supernatural abilities as well. That would mean that he would get another bodyguard for his journey.

Lu Zhuangyuan enthusiastically brought Zhao Wu back to the Lu Family Troupe and introduced them once again. He even had his

daughter-in-law get off the carriage to make room for him to be seated.

At that moment, their lively conversation was interrupted by Lu Xiucai. "Zhao Wu, didn't you go back home earlier? Then why did you come out again?"

Those words made the smile on Zhao Wu's face gradually vanish, breaking apart this harmonious scene.

Just as it seemed like he was going to reveal some strong emotions, he managed to control himself before these outsiders. "It's nothing much. Some things... happened at home."

Lu Zhuangyuan sensed that the atmosphere had taken a strange turn, and immediately used his tobacco pipe to knock his younger son's head. "Who asked you to talk so much! I taught you for so many years, but still haven't learned anything, have you? What Zhao Wu? Is that what you should be calling him? To you, it's Master Zhao!"

When he saw the teary-eyed Lu Xiucai, Zhao Wu quickly stepped in to mediate, "Troupe Leader Lu, there's no need for this. Calling me Zhao Wu is fine."

Just at that moment, a gust of wind blew across, causing everyone to close their eyes.

When they opened their eyes again, everyone was stunned. The curtains covering the nuns' carriages had been blown open, revealing a shimmering white sea.

Lu Zhuangyuan's eyes were wide with shock. "My goodness! So much silver!"

Chapter 114 - Cavalry

Silver. Several carts full of silver.

Lu Zhuangyuan had known that the carriages were transporting something heavy when he saw those deep marks left by their wheels, but he could never have thought that the carts were all filled with silver!

How much silver is there in those carts? Just give me a portion of it, and I will be able to open several theaters.

Soon, the curtains, blown off by the wind, fell back down; even so, Lu Zhuangyuan was still staring wide-eyed.

Meanwhile, the nuns noticed the strange looks they had attracted, but they were too lazy to care about all that; they just continued to sit on the floor like measuring weights as they ate.

“Stop staring; hurry up and finish eating. Once we’re done, we’ll start to move again. There’s so much silver here, and it’s bound to lead to some trouble,” instructed Lu Zhuangyuan.

When they heard him, the Lu Family Troupe formed a half-circle with their two carriages and began to eat. Of course, their treatment of Zhao Wu, their distinguished guest, was quite good; there were more than enough white steamed buns and duck eggs to go around, even though Zhao Wu declined.

Just as they were eating, a vile stench filled the air. A relatively thin nun had somehow ended up next to them, salivating as she eyed the salted duck egg in Zhao Wu’s hand.

“How much for this egg?” asked the nun.

“Can nuns eat—” said Lu Xiucan before he was interrupted by a smack of the tobacco pipe.

“Is Master joking? It’s just a few eggs, here, take them,” said Lu Zhuangyuan as he reached his hand into the jar and pulled out two

salted duck eggs before passing them across.

Meanwhile, the nun looked rather guilty as she glanced at her companions near the carriage. She reached out to grab a duck egg before directly stuffing it into her mouth without even bothering to peel it.

“I’ll pay,” she said as she threw a few smelly copper coins onto the carriage. Then, the fat nun closed her eyes in enjoyment as she felt the rich yolk burst out in her mouth.

The two duck eggs offered by Lu Zhuangyuan weren’t quite enough with her huge appetite, so she reached her chubby hand directly into the jar of salted duck eggs, thoroughly enjoying herself as she ate one egg with every mouthful. It was almost as if she was not eating eggs, but just grapes.

When he saw this, a question popped up in Zhao Wu’s mind.

Isn’t it too salty the way this nun is eating them?

Tatata~

At that moment, the clattering sound of horse hooves suddenly rang out in the air, causing everyone to look across. A cavalry had appeared in the distance!

“The soldiers are here! Run!!” shouted someone.

As soon as this shout rang out, the other travelers also stood up, carried their luggage, and then ran to hide within the forest around them.

Lu Zhuangyuan wanted to run as well, but he was tied down by his horse-drawn carriages.

When the cavalry finally arrived before them, only the Lu Family Troupe and those nuns were left in the area.

Seeing the situation, Lu Zhuangyuan gritted his teeth, then smiled at Zhao Wu and supported him to the front. “Master Zhao, I have known for a long time that since you have such a powerful senior, then your own abilities must be great too. There’s no need to conceal them any longer.”

“I... I... I’m not...”

However, before he could explain himself, the black-armored cavalry dashed up to them, causing him to eat a mouthful of sand.

The stamping sound of the hoofbeats combined with the collision of their weapons; this group was not just any ordinary cavalry, but an elite unit. Zhao Wu caught sight of a large military banner that was being carried by them—it was marked with a large Si word.

“Stop!” At that moment, a deep shout caused everyone to tremble.

To everyone’s surprise, the cavalry actually came to a sudden stop.

They stood there in a row, like a black city wall. The warmth from the horses’ nostrils caused the moisture in the air to condense into a white fog. In a sense, they were rather remarkable—they could move like the wind, and were also able to stay still like pine trees.

Zhao Wu’s eyes widened with surprise when he saw an officer amongst the cavalry with four blades on his back forcefully step on his horse’s back and leap before the nuns who were a dozen meters away while leaving two deep craters on the ground.

“Sisters from the Benevolent Nunnery, there’s an emergency at the border! The military is in urgent need of funds. We will requisition this silver, and issue a certificate of debt[1] which you can exchange back at the Ministry of Revenue.”

His voice was loud enough for everyone to hear him clearly.

“Dad, what’s happening? Is there a war at Si Qi as well?” asked Lu Xiucai, his voice trembling.

“My ancestors! Will it kill you to stay quiet?” Lu Zhuangyuan whispered and covered his mouth. He had curled his body up and hidden himself behind the carriage, to avoid drawing the attention of these soldiers.

However, You Zixiong was focused completely on the fat nuns, essentially ignoring the troupe's existence. When he saw that the nuns just continued to sit around and eat heartily while completely ignoring him, his brows furrowed together.

"Didn't you hear what I said?!" He exclaimed, while grabbing the hilt of the sword adorned with black tassels hanging from his waist.

Killing intent filled the air in an instant, almost as though this place had become the center of a life-and-death battlefield. This aura also infected the cavalry around them; their bodies heated up and their eyes became bloodshot. Even their horses started to raise their hooves.

"We refuse. We don't want to go so far," said several nuns simultaneously. "Make a move if you dare. But think carefully before you do so."

This refusal immediately intensified the tension. Some of the mounted soldiers were already nocking arrows onto their bows.

Just when Lu Zhuangyuan was ready to flee with his family on the horse carriages, the murderous aura in the air suddenly vanished.

Then, with a serious expression, You Zixiong grabbed the sword adorned with black tassels and threw it across. "This is You Zixiong's sword! Take this sword with you and collect your silver back at the Ministry! They will return what we owe and more!"

You Zixiong burned with anger as he watched the black-clothed nuns gather around with greedy looks on their faces as they used their dirty and chubby hands to handle his weapon. But he also understood that the current situation in the kingdom of Si Qi was unstable, and that he couldn't afford to make more enemies, especially out of these nuns before him.

"Blackpeak Cavalry! Follow my orders! Distribute the silver evenly and carry it on the horses! We must reach Kun City in three

days!” shouted You Zixiong.

“We receive your orders!” All the soldiers in the cavalry responded in unison and dismounted from their horses before rushing to the carts. They swiftly unloaded the silver in an orderly manner.

As the sound of the horse hooves gradually faded into the distance, Lu Zhuangyuan and the others seemed to wake up from their dream, each of them panting and sweating profusely, almost as though they had just taken a hot shower.

“Dad, I... I peed my pants,” said Lu Xiucan.

“Rascal! Aren’t you embarrassed?! No sense of shame! Go and quickly change your pants!” shouted Lu Zhuangyuan.

Although he spoke to his son with great confidence, earlier Lu Zhuangyuan’s own legs had also turned weak with fear.

“Aiya, looks like Si Qi is going to be in a mess as well. No, this place is too dangerous. I need to find that Daoist as soon as possible and follow him to leave this damned place,” muttered Lu Zhuangyuan.

1. like an IOU 🤔

Chapter 115 - Dog

It was evening.

Li Huowang walked silently on a meandering forest path. According to the directions he had received from the nuns at the Benevolent Nunnery, this path would lead him to a continuous mountain range. The Ao Jing Sect that he was looking for, was located within these mountains.

Ever since he had fully awakened in the Zephyr Temple, he had been living with others. He wasn't really accustomed to solitude.

"It's so peaceful," Li Huowang mumbled to himself, observing the sparse foliage around him. The further he walked, the more barren the land became. The tranquility of the environment gradually helped calm his restless heart.

Li Huowang raised both hands and stretched lazily. After a sigh, he lifted his right foot and continued walking.

Night fell as he hurried along, forcing him to retrieve a glowing stone to light his way.

However, before long, he decided to put away the glowing stone; the moon had risen, and with no clouds in sight, its bright light was enough to illuminate the forest path clearly.

Under the white moonlight, Li Huowang continued his solitary journey. His legs were beginning to ache from walking all day.

If I manage to survive, then I have to learn how to ride a horse.

By the time the full moon hung high, he was too fatigued to continue. He leaned against a tree and pulled out a hard steamed bun to nibble on. He intended to take just a few bites before sleeping.

At that moment, Li Huowang suddenly stopped chewing and focused his eyes on a point in the darkness; he sensed something

there.

Besides his sense of pain and taste, Li Huowang's other senses had also surpassed an ordinary person's. He could clearly feel that he was being watched by something.

"Who's there?" he exclaimed.

At that moment, a yellow figure timidly crawled out from the forest. It was a large dog with a yellow body and pale legs. It did not seem to be in good condition—it had lost quite a bit of its fur, had many ticks clinging to its body, and it was so emaciated that its rib cage was visible.

"A dog?" Li Huowang looked around at the desolate surroundings; this did not seem like a place where one would find a dog.

The dog stared at the cold steamed bun in Li Huowang's hand, its lips quivering and its tail wagging toward him.

"I don't care what you've turned into. Go away!" Li Huowang's brows furrowed as he placed his hand on the Profound Records. Whether it was a real dog or not, he just wanted to continue his journey without any complications.

The dog backed away cautiously, but it did not give up. Instead, it began to wag its tail even more vigorously.

Seeing this, Li Huowang violently shook the bronze bell, frightening the dog and causing it to flee into the forest.

Just as he was about to store the bell, his expression suddenly froze. "Damn! Why now of all times!"

In the pitch-black forest, the dog's ears drooped as it carefully stuck its head out from underneath the leaves, only to witness an inexplicable scene. The person sitting under the tree was smiling cordially, and talking to the bright, round moon in the sky.

"Dad, you're back? Yes, I know. I'm fine."

"Yes, I know that you two are not some hallucination. My brain was just a bit fuzzy earlier. Now... I'm able to tell the difference."

The dog paced around for a long time, and observed that the person did not show any signs of hostility. Then, it turned its gaze to the half-eaten steamed bun that had rolled onto the floor.

Just as it was about to cautiously move toward the bun and bite into it, the person spoke up, making it once again shrink back.

“Mom, I’m not eating the oranges. There’s no need to remove my restraints; it’s good that both my hands are tied up.”

“Right, have you exchanged the gold for money and paid off all our debts? That’s good.”

“Mom, you have a lot more white hair now. Go and dye it. Weren’t you fond of perming your hair?” Li Huowang chuckled and reached out one hand as though trying to touch the moon.

“Ah, don’t ask me any more questions. All I can tell you is that gold was clean. Did you sell the jade pendant as well? No? Why not?”

The dog cautiously circled around Li Huowang. When it noticed that he did not pay any attention to itself, it once again moved forward carefully, then quickly picked up the bun and ran away. It was simply too hungry.

The dog ran into the forest and choked on the bun while eating. After it recovered, it once again came back to the side of the main path and looked over longingly.

Its acute sense of smell allowed it to know that the person still had more food in his bag, and even had meat!

“Sell the jade pendant, and buy back our house; it can only be called home when we own the house.”

“No, don’t leave any money aside for my medical expenses. Just find a place, and then tie me up with an iron chain.”

“Mom, I’m not lying. Ah, please don’t cry. I really haven’t fallen ill again.”

“Woo~” The dog tilted its head at Li Huowang. It could not understand what he was doing. It cautiously crept toward him, then

wagged its tail incessantly. “Woo~ woo~”

At that moment, the dog noticed that Li Huowang had finally taken notice of itself, and began to wag its tail even more energetically.

“Hehe, who sent this rag doll? It’s ugly, just like a dog... Dog! Hold on! The dog is still around!”

Li Huowang had been calm until just a moment ago, but suddenly stood up. His expression became twisted as he bellowed at the dog, “I told you to scram! Do you want to die?!”

This sudden outburst caused the dog to be scared out of its wits as it whimpered and ran back into the forest. When it timidly stuck its head out again, it saw the person talking to the moon remorsefully.

“Mom, don’t be afraid; this has nothing to do with you. I’m not having an episode. Just that there are some things I need to settle on that side.”

“Really. Why don’t you guys leave for now, and come back to visit me later. I need to settle some matters on that side.”

“Alright, alright, I know. There’s no ‘that side’. Right, that’s all a hallucination. I will do my best and cooperate with the medical treatment.”

“Woof~” The dog barked at the red-clothed Daoist.

At that moment, Li Huowang suddenly became alert, and his unfocused eyes looked left and right.

Something’s wrong. There’s movement.

He slowly unsheathed his sword and vigilantly scanned his surroundings. Even though his expression was guarded, it soon became irritated.

“I can’t explain! I have no choice! Go first! You guys go first!” Li Huowang’s anxious cries echoed into the distance.

That night, Li Huowang did not sleep a wink. In his hallucination, he tried one method after another to protect himself

against the threats in reality.

But when the hallucination gradually faded, he realized that his methods had been ineffective.

He was standing in the center of a small river while hugging that dog he had seen last night. At this moment, it was affectionately licking his chin.

This situation suggested that some things he was not aware of must have happened last night.

Ah... looks like I really can't do without any company.

Li Huowang carried the dog toward the shore.

Chapter 116 - Ao Jing

Sect

“What do you want to be called?” Li Huowang stared at the dog wagging its tail. Even though it was still skinny, at the very least its ears were free from the dense mass of ticks after Li Huowang had taken care of it for a few days. Both of its ears were a bloody mess from being bitten by ticks; it would take some time to heal even with Li Huowang giving it some pills.

“Uuuu~” The dog sat on the ground as it stared at Li Huowang curiously. It stared at its surroundings alertly before lowering its head and gently placing its skinny head underneath Li Huowang’s hand as it attempted to get some headpats.

Seeing this, Li Huowang gently patted the dog’s head and smiled.

He had previously thought that something was wrong with the dog a couple of nights ago. But after he was trapped in the hallucination one too many times, his opinion of the dog had changed.

If the dog had been an enemy, then it would’ve acted when Li Huowang was trapped in the hallucination.

For the time being, even though he didn’t know where it came from, he had concluded that it was just a normal dog.

Li Huowang took out a steamed bun from his bag and threw it on the ground. Seeing this, the dog immediately pounced toward the steamed bun and ate it happily.

“Since you like steamed buns so much, I should just call you Bun.” Li Huowang nonchalantly gave it a name.

“Woof woof!” Bun excitedly leaped into the air, as if it was

reacting to Li Huowang's words.

Li Huowang extended his right hand, using his barely grown out fingernails to gently groom the fur on the dog's neck. "Since you don't have a home, you can just follow me. Having you by my side will also be convenient for me. At the very least, you can help me stand watch during the night and talk to me during the day. You can even accompany me when I'm trapped within a hallucination. It's better than nothing. I also want to see if I could accidentally end up hurting someone here while I'm trapped in my hallucination, so I suppose you will be my first test subject."

By the time Li Huowang finished talking, Bun had just finished eating. Then, Bun licked its lips while staring at Li Huowang expectantly.

"I suppose you can't understand what I'm talking about. Let's go, we are almost there." Li Huowang patted Bun on the head and stood up while staring at his destination, the mountain range in the distance. As he stared at the mountain range, the lighthearted atmosphere disappeared. As he thought about what the nuns had told him about the Ao Jing Sect, his face gradually turned gloomy.

The Abbess had told him that they might have a method to get rid of Dan Yangzi. However, it was a dangerous sect, as evidenced by the fact that the Profound Records originated from there.

Li Huowang hated being passive like this, but he had no choice—either he could trust them or choose death.

"Let's go."

A Daoist in red walked alongside a yellow dog toward the mountain range in the distance.

Throughout their journey, Li Huowang truly experienced the meaning of 'easier said than done'; the mountain looked quite close, but it was in fact very far away.

After two days, they finally arrived at the foot of the mountain.

At the foot of the mountain was a town... or at least what used

to be a town. The houses were all in ruins, there were a lot of skeletons, and there were cobwebs covering almost everything. All this indicated that the town had experienced a deadly disaster.

Li Huowang felt an intense disgust when he saw a small skeleton that had been sliced in half with only its top part still remaining intact.

Whoever did all this was inhumane! They were even worse than Dan Yangzi!

He slowly walked through the village as a thought popped up in his mind.

Was all this done by the Ao Jing Sect?

Even though he had never met anyone from the Ao Jing sect, Li Huowang's impression of them started to change.

He walked around for half a day and found that everyone in the town was dead. The only living things found in the town were the rats that were hidden in the corners and nibbling on something.

When the rats saw Li Huowang and Bun approaching them, they too scurried away.

There was nothing Li Huowang could do; everyone in the town was already dead and he wasn't even sure if he would be able to protect himself.

Thus, he increased his pace and quickly exited the town.

After exiting the gloomy town, he saw a curved path ahead of him. The path snaked out the mountain. Since it was the only path into the mountains, it was likely that the Ao Jing Sect was located at the end of the path.

Li Huowang looked at Bun with its tongue sticking out and gently used his legs to tap its abdomen before they started climbing up the mountain.

Staring at the sparse foliage on the mountain, Li Huowang became much more alert; there was no saying how the other side would react when they found out that he was a Strayed One.

“Woof woof!” At that moment, Bun started barking toward the right side of the forest.

Seeing this, Li Huowang immediately placed his hand on the Profound Records.

Shruff shruff~

At that moment, a hedgehog ran through the path and in the opposite direction.

Without letting his guard down, Li Huowang cautiously looked toward the direction the hedgehog had run off to. Then, he slowly walked toward the area and found several temples in ruins.

“Is this the Ao Jing Sect’s Cross Temple?” Li Huowang mumbled to himself as he examined a symbol on the temple ruins. It was not the cross he was familiar with. This cross was akin to a skinny, black clover. In fact, it looked more like a dehydrated clover, twisted and dry.

Staring at the overgrown grass in front of the temple, Li Huowang had a bad feeling in his heart.

Ao Jing sect being decimated would be an even worse situation than being attacked by them.

Maybe they aren’t the ones who attacked the town and killed everyone in it? Maybe they were attacked by whoever did it?

Li Huowang looked quite gloomy when he walked further inward.

This time, he concentrated on finding every single hiding place in the surrounding forest. As expected, he found a gathering spot of the Cross Temple. It was an empty space with a statue of the deity worshiped by them.

On the altar was a large black cross. Another statue sat on the black cross, depicting a figure being burned alive. The statue was very detailed and looked very much alive. The shimmering fire, the molten skin and flesh, as well as the curled and singed hair. All the details were quite immaculate.

But the statue did not have a head. Everything above its neck had been obliterated.

Did the Ao Jing Sect offend someone it shouldn't have?

Li Huowang was worried.

The Ao Jing Sect should be quite strong considering that it could offend the Benevolent Nunnery and still survive. He also knew about the prowess of the Profound Records.

What kind of being was capable of destroying the Cross Temple of the Ao Jing Sect?

Just then, Li Huowang found something. He wiped off the cobwebs below the altar, revealing a sentence carved into it. "The Sacrificial God is eternal. The Mother of all Beings, the Gateway of Creation, is the basis of the Heavens and the Earth! From nothing to something, birthing the Heavens and the Earth."

Li Huowang once more raised his head after reading the words and stared at the statue sitting on the black cross. "Is he the Sacrificial God?"

Chapter 117 - Ba-Hui

After thoroughly inspecting all the temples, Li Huowang returned to the mountain path.

He patted Bun's head and continued walking without a word.

The buildings in the Ao Jing Sect's Cross Temple were densely built. Soon, Li Huowang found another building. This temple was intact, or at the very least, the head of the statue of the Sacrificial God here was not destroyed.

However, the head of the Sacrificial God was burnt black, subjected to the wrath of the very same fire.

What was intriguing was that the face of the Sacrificial God was not one of pain, but one of envy and yearning. Its eyes were burnt black, but they still stared longingly at the top of the Temple.

Li Huowang followed the gaze of the statue and saw an abstract image, one composed of various colors and shapes. He deduced that the Sacrificial God yearned for the thing depicted in the image at the top of the temple, but he had no idea what that thing was.

“Uuuu~ Woof! Woof woof woof!”

When he heard Bun barking, Li Huowang tensed up. He swiftly turned around to look toward the direction Bun was snarling.

It was a door at the side of the temple. The light could not penetrate in here through the doorway, making it look pitch black inside. Within the darkness was an oversized gray robe.

Li Huowang had learned from the nuns that the people from Ao Jing Sect often wore large robes to cover up the wounds on their body.

At this moment, Li Huowang only saw the bottom part of the robe; the top part was still hidden in darkness.

Sensing that something was amiss, Li Huowang immediately threw the Flesh Book that the Abbess had given to him into the darkness. “I am Xuan Yang from the Zephyr Temple! I come here seeking help from your honorable sect!”

Li Huowang introduced himself to the robe in the darkness, but there was no response.

Just as Li Huowang thought the thing was not a living person, the robe slowly moved out from the darkness.

Just one look at the figure’s face was enough for Li Huowang to be certain that it was someone from the Ao Jing Sect; the man’s scarred face was devoid of any skin.

Just as the nuns at the Benevolent Nunnery had told him, the people from Ao Jing Sect wore large robes and tall hats. The hat was huge, covering the eyes and nose of the man. Li Huowang only saw a glimpse of the man’s jaw, which was a mess of blood and flesh.

Li Huowang gulped as he stared at the man alertly.

Looks like they can still be talked with. At the very least, they did not attack me the moment they saw that I’m a Strayed One.

Li Huowang glanced at the bulge in the robes where the man’s hands would be and then gently stated his intention once again.

The man did not reply to Li Huowang, but it was clear that he understood Li Huowang’s purpose in coming here. He quietly walked out of the Cross Temple.

Li Huowang took a deep breath and nervously followed after him, both of them slowly entering deeper into the mountain range.

Staring at the large robed man in front of him, Li Huowang felt that something was missing.

Didn’t they say that the Ao Jing Sect uses the Profound Records? Why is he not carrying one? Or has he hidden it in his robe?

Li Huowang ruminated on it as they went deeper into the mountains. Soon, he saw other members of the Ao Jing Sect.

All of them wore the same type of robe. Whenever they saw Li Huowang, they would all fix their gaze on him even though their eyes were hidden by the tall hats.

On the other hand, their strange surroundings caused Bun to be afraid; it lowered its head and tail while staying close to Li Huowang as they continued to walk.

Under their intense gazes, Li Huowang finally arrived at a gourd-shaped cave.

Upon seeing the cave, Li Huowang recalled unpleasant memories. He hated caves.

However, this cave was not as dark as the Zephyr Temple. It was well illuminated. The crackling sound of burning torches illuminated the cave brightly.

The heat from the torches raised the temperature of the cave, causing Li Huowang to feel unreasonably irritated.

Remembering how the Sacrificial God was shrouded in flames, Li Huowang postulated that fire might be an important element in the Ao Jing Sect.

After entering the cave, they walked for another half an hour before they finally saw the Master of the cave.

A man, whose entire body was burnt black, was lying down on the cold floor. Rather than saying that he was a man, it was more like a burnt corpse. But the gaze coming from the body was all it took for Li Huowang to know that it was no corpse.

At the same time, looking at this burnt man also answered Li Huowang's previous question. Another blood-red Profound Records was splayed open on his chest. It had been placed on his chest for so long that the bamboo slip had sprouted roots and ingrained itself into the man's flesh.

The bamboo roots had pierced through his body and burst forth from his back in various directions, their tips bloody.

At that moment, Li Huowang saw the man who had guided him

here respectfully pass the Flesh Book to the burnt man. From the looks of it, the man was someone with a high position within the sect.

However, the burnt man did not read the Flesh Book written by Abbess Jingxin. Instead, his gaze remained fixed on Li Huowang.

He stared for a very long time before speaking, "You've been noticed by Ba-Hui?"

Being able to converse was a good start. Li Huowang nodded. "Yes."

"Every Strayed One has excellent potential because they have a much easier time approaching the Abyss of Worldly Suffering. It's a shame that almost all of them turn crazy in the end," the burnt man said with pity.

He then stared at the Profound Records hanging on Li Huowang's waist. "I am Shou San, pleased to make your acquaintance. May I know how you attain Cang-Qiang Ascension? You should know that even we have a hard time doing so. Not everyone is able to pull it off."

Even though he was being complimented, Li Huowang was not happy at all.

Cang-Qiang Ascension? Is that the name of the ritual that requires the highest amount of both physical and mental pain to pull off?

After thinking for a moment, Li Huowang decided to tell Shou San about his use of the Profound Records while hiding some of the details.

"Hoho, using it against the Eighteenth Lunar was an overkill, but at the very least, you obtained something out of it," exclaimed Shou San.

However, Li Huowang was not here to discuss these things. Having confirmed that a proper conversation was possible, he told Shou San about the reason for his visit.

"I accept," said Shou San.

Li Huowang experienced a brief moment of joy until the conditions were laid out before him.

“But there is a condition. I need you to perform the Cang-Qiang Ascension in front of us,” said Shou San.

“Why do you need an outsider to teach you guys?” Li Huowang was confused.

“I have never seen a Strayed One performing a Cang-Qiang Ascension. Also, I want to see if it is possible to rob a part of Ba-Hui’s power,” explained Shou San.

“Rob... Ba-Hui’s power?” Li Huowang thought he had misheard.

“You’ve seen Ba-Hui before, so you should know just how strong it is. Have you ever thought about taking its strength for yourself as soon as you lay your eyes on it?” asked Shou San.

Hearing this, Li Huowang finally realized what the abstract image at the top of the Cross Temple represented. It was Ba-Hui! It was only because they were unable to fully describe what Ba-Hui looked like that they used that image as a placeholder.

At the same time, he realized that while they used pain to obtain power from Ba-Hui, they did not worship it. Instead, they worshiped the Sacrificial God.

And the Sacrificial God they worshiped also yearned to rob Ba-Hui of its strength.

Translator's Thoughts

Skinny Abbess Jingxin! Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin



Chapter 118 - Pain

Because of the Profound Records, he had thought those from the Ao Jing Sect worshiped Ba-Hui.

However, that was not the case. He had been wrong... dead wrong.

After failing to figure it out for a moment, he asked Shou San, "Why do you think you can rob Ba-Hui's power? Don't you realize just how strong it is? You are nothing but ants in front of it."

Even though Li Huowang was incapable of recalling what Ba-Hui looked like, he still remembered just how strong it was. Ba-Hui was not an entity a few mortals could take on.

However, Shou San's eyes were filled with determination when he looked at Li Huowang. "And why not? The Sacrificial God could do it, and so can we."

Li Huowang recalled the statue of the man being burnt at the Cross Temple. "Your deity was once a mortal?"

However, regardless of what Li Huowang said, Shou San continued to talk to himself, "The monks always say that the Buddha was once a man and only a man will eventually become a Buddha. I agree with this viewpoint. Ba-Hui might be strong in the present, but that won't always be the case!"

Li Huowang digested the unexpected information and took a deep breath. "Alright, I don't care what's going on between your sect and Ba-Hui. Let's get back to the topic. Do you really have a method to get rid of Dan Yangzi?"

Shou San nodded. "As long as you perform the Cang-Qiang Ascension once more, we will get rid of your Half-Immortal Master."

Li Huowang remembered the moment he had summoned Ba-

Hui's strength through the Profound Records. His face slightly contorted as he recalled the intense pain he had to go through. Experiencing the highest level of both physical and mental pain at the same time was not something easy. Li Huowang had the urge to commit suicide every time he recalled the experience.

Li Huowang calmed himself down and talked slowly, "I would love to, but it's easier said than done. I can't do it right now."

Summoning Ba-Hui was difficult, especially since it required the resonance of intense physical and mental pain. It was very rare to encounter a situation in which the summoner would experience the necessary levels of pain.

"Hoho." Shou San chuckled as he became more welcoming. "No worries, I will help you on behalf of Abbess Jingxin."

Li Huowang felt chills run down his spine when he saw the smile on that burnt face; Those words were filled with hidden meaning.

Looking at the man he had only just met, Li Huowang finally opened his mouth after considering the proposal, "Senior Shou San, let's not talk about this for now. I need to know how you plan on getting rid of Dan Yangzi? I have the Profound Records too so I know that there's nothing on it that can help someone, much less get rid of a Half-Immortal."

Li Huowang did not trust the Ao Jing Sect, especially after the warnings given to him by Abbess Jingxin.

"Hoho, young man, your thinking is too shallow. The Profound Records require the assistance of other items. In order to approach the Abyss of Worldly Suffering, one must experiment with many things. In the past, we were also doing things as you are doing right now. As they say, suffer from illness for long enough and you can be considered a doctor. In terms of treating people, no one is as good as us," said Shou San.

Hearing the word 'illness', Li Huowang reacted unconsciously.

“Illness? I’m not ill, and this situation is not caused by an illness either. A part of Dan Yangzi is in my stomach and he’s already a Half-Immortal at this point.”

Hearing this, Shou San stared at Li Huowang mockingly. “That is an illness. It’s an illness where the Daoists want to become Immortal so badly that they turn crazy.”

It was not very convincing coming from someone trying to steal Ba-Hui’s power. However, even though Li Huowang was suspicious about their words, he did not question them openly. He was here to request their help in getting rid of Dan Yangzi, not engage in a debate with them. As long as their technique worked, he wouldn’t mind even if they called Dan Yangzi a bitch.

“Have there been cases like this in the past? Have you treated them before?” Li Huowang asked another question.

“Naturally. All branches of the Daoist sects talk about killing the Three Poisons^[1]. The Upper Poison: Peng Ju; the Middle Poison: Peng Zhi; the Lower Poison: Peng Jiao. Those who seek to achieve Immortality must first remove the Three Poisons. Without desires, the mind becomes clear and peaceful. With enough merits, one can become an Immortal,” explained Shou San while shaking his head.

“Of course, I do not believe in any of these shitty explanations myself. I’ve seen many so-called Half-Immortals and possessive spirits in my life, but never a true Immortal,” continued Shou San.

Then, Shou San raised his burnt hands and revealed his bloody fingers while pointing at Li Huowang’s head. “Daoists like you crave Immortality to the point of insanity, cultivating themselves until they become neither human nor monsters. They seek only external strength but fail to realize what true internal strength is.”

Li Huowang decided to ignore that comment. Instead, he patted the torture tools at his waist. “Senior, I can settle the physical pain part, but how will you help me with the mental pain?”

Shou San was overjoyed when he heard him; Li Huowang had agreed to his conditions!

Shou San raised his head and one of the gray-robed sect members understood his signal. The sect member then walked into one of the smaller caves.

Soon, he brought a disheveled girl out of the cave. The girl wore the same type of oversized robe and tall hat as the rest of the people here. The only difference was that her hat didn't cover her eyes.

A girl? Is this related to the technique to induce maximum mental pain?

On the other hand, the girl was even more shocked when she saw Li Huowang as she stared at him intently.

At that moment, a hand pushed her, causing her to fall forward and onto the ground in front of Li Huowang.

The girl lowered her head as she clutched her robes, her body trembling uncontrollably.

Li Huowang looked past the girl's skinny shoulder and asked, "Senior, what is the meaning of this?"

"Take this girl, have sex with her, and let her bear your children. When your child in her womb is almost ready to be delivered, you will slice open her stomach, dig out your child, and then—" Shou San began explaining.

"Stop! Don't talk anymore!" Li Huowang's voice trembled as he interrupted Shou San. In fact, just hearing what Shou San wanted him to do sent sharp pulses of pain through his temples.

He had been conversing so peacefully with them that he had almost forgotten the kind of madness they were capable of.

Now that he knew the method they used for inducing maximum mental and physical pain, he realized that the people from the Ao Jing Sect were no better than Dan Yangzi!

On the other hand, Shou San misunderstood Li Huowang's

intention when he told him to stop talking. “Is that so? You think the pain would be too mild? No worries, since you’ve already been noticed by Ba-Hui, then we can heighten the pain even further with the medicines I have in my inventory.”

1. The same as the Three Corpses mentioned by Dan Yangzi 🙋
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Translator's Thoughts

Dan Yangzi in his 'Buddha' form! Credits to 格子
子的乱七八糟 on douyin



Chapter 119 - Yingzi

Li Huowang pulled the girl behind him and carefully enunciated his words one by one, “I will not do such things even if I die!”

“Pft~” One of the Ao Jing Sect members laughed. “Don’t be so confident. You are a Strayed One after all.”

“So what if I’m a Strayed One? I may be crazy, but I’m not someone as heartless as Dan Yangzi! I will never do the type of things he did!” said Li Huowang.

On the other hand, Shou San looked at the sect member with an unfriendly gaze. “Yan Lu, you think this is funny? Can’t you control yourself in front of an outsider?”

Just as the sect member was about to explain himself, his facial features started melding together. Even his fingers and toes started to meld.

He slowly transformed into a wriggling maggot.

“Wrap him up with a cloth and don’t let him feel any pain for a month,” said Shou San.

This proved that Shou San was right; he was indeed skillful with healing arts.

As the ‘man’ was being carried away, Li Huowang stared at Shou San seriously. “Find me a cave for me to live in. I will figure out a way to induce maximum mental pain. Also, I need this girl to serve me.”

“Hmph. You have a lot of demands. I don’t think you will ever be able to find a method better than mine,” said Shou San.

However, even though he said so, Shou San still agreed to Li Huowang’s demand and ordered his underlings to prepare the cave for him.

Soon, Li Huowang was brought into a medium-sized cave. The walls of the cave were uneven and riddled with holes, but at the very least the cave had all the basic necessities, including a toilet.

Meanwhile, the girl silently followed Li Huowang.

On the other hand, Bun, who had been whimpering from fear behind Li Huowang, immediately started running around in the cave while sniffing every corner of it.

Once they had settled in, Li Huowang removed the sword from his back and placed it on the stone table. Even though he had promised Shou San that he would find a way to inflict maximum mental pain on himself, he actually didn't have a clue about how he would go about it. Without inflicting the necessary amount of pain, he would not be able to summon Ba-Hui.

The Ao Jing Sect would never help him get rid of Dan Yangzi if he failed to fulfill their condition. It was a dead end.

Thinking about this, Li Huowang paced around inside the cave for a while before he laid his eyes on the girl. A sudden thought flashed in his mind.

He had an idea, but things might not go as he expected.

"Don't worry, they won't be able to hurt you when you are with me. Come here, let me ask you something," said Li Huowang as he patted the stone stool.

But the girl didn't move from the door. Instead, she started sobbing. She cried louder and louder until she sat on the floor, her body wracked with grief.

When he heard her woeful cries, Li Huowang sighed.

She had originally thought that she was a member of the Ao Jing Sect, but now she knew that she was nothing more than a tool. It was normal to feel sad, especially at a young age like hers.

Li Huowang walked over and carefully propped her up on the stone stool. "They didn't even treat you like a human and yet you still want to stay here? How about helping me? I swear that as long

as you help me attain my goals, I will not abandon you while I am alive.”

Hearing his words, the girl's eyes were filled with confusion. “Where can I go even if I escape? My house... it's gone... everything's gone...”

“What happened to your home?” Li Huowang's voice was soft. To some extent, he could resonate with her.

“My home was the town at the foot of the mountain...” said the young girl through her sobs.

When Li Huowang heard her say that, he felt his heart ache a little; she might just be the last survivor of that ghost town.

“My father, mother... my three sisters and two brothers... they are all gone... they are all dead...” The girl lowered her head as her tears dripped down her hands.

“What happened to the town? Did someone or something destroy it?” asked Li Huowang. But just as he asked that, he realized that now was not the time for such questions; asking such things right now was akin to rubbing salt in her wounds.

“It's fine; you can just follow me. I have many brothers and sisters that are also trying their best to survive in this world. Later on, when we regroup, you can join us. My group currently only has two girls, and so there's more yin energy than yang. If you join us, then the energy will be more balanced,” said Li Huowang.

After he had comforted her for a while, her emotions had finally stabilized. When the atmosphere was right, Li Huowang asked her some questions. “How long have you been here?”

While the Ao Jing Sect did not trust Li Huowang, he didn't trust them either.

He already had experience dealing with elaborate schemes from his time at the Righteous Monastery, and so he didn't want to fall for the same trick. This time around, he was not going to go by their rules. All he needed to do was figure out the method that Ao

Jing Sect would use to get rid of Dan Yangzi. Then, he wouldn't have to inflict pain on himself and he would be able to get rid of Dan Yangzi with his own hands.

Hearing his suggestion, the girl nodded. "Four years ago..."

When he saw that she was finally willing to talk to him, Li Huowang gently started to coax her so that she would open her heart to him. "Since you've been here for so long, you must know the place well, correct? Can you tell me about this place? Anything is fine."

Her scarred hands didn't stop scrunching up her sleeves as she started talking, "The Ao Jing Sect originally consisted of two different sects. One worshiped the Sacrificial God while the other worshiped Ba-Hui. Later on, the Sacrificial God absorbed a portion of Ba-Hui's power and the two sects merged..."

"Hmm? Was this recorded in the books of the Ao Jing Sect?" asked Li Huowang. He had a feeling that it was nothing but a fairy tale. He didn't believe it.

"I don't know either... That was what the others said... By the time I entered the sect, they had already merged..." She gingerly looked at Li Huowang before lowering her head once more. She didn't dare to maintain eye contact with him.

"It's fine. You can keep talking. Wait, may I know your name first?" said Li Huowang.

"They... They call me Er Jiu..." replied the girl.

Er Jiu, Shou San, and Yan Lu [1] . Do the names of the members of the Ao Jing Sect represent a combination of a body organ and a number?

Li Huowang was somewhat confused. These names didn't feel like the Daoist names given to full fledged Daoists.

"What was your previous name?" asked Li Huowang.

"Jiang Yingzi..." replied the girl.

"Alright, then I will just call you Yingzi. Have you seen the Ao

Jing Sect treat anyone in the past four years?” asked Li Huowang.

Yingzi nodded. “Mm-hmm... I’ve seen it a few times.”

“Were all of them cured?” questioned Li Huowang.

“They should have been. All of them left afterward,” replied Yingzi.

Looks like they do have the necessary expertise .

This was good news. At the very least they hadn’t lied to him and he might actually have a chance of getting rid of Dan Yangzi.

“Yingzi, I have another question. Other than the self mutilating rituals recorded within the Profound Records, does the Ao Jing Sect have any other kinds of power or techniques?” Li Huowang finally asked the most important question.

1. Literal translation would be Ear Nine, Hands Three, and Eyes Six. The character for the numbers portion of their name was written differently with the same pronunciation 🙌

Translator's Thoughts

Shou San!. Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on
douyin



Chapter 120 - Injury

“Yingzi, I have another question. Other than the self-mutilating rituals recorded within the Profound Records, does the Ao Jing Sect have any other kinds of power or techniques?” Li Huowang finally asked the most important question.

When she heard this question, Yingzi was slightly troubled. “Yes, but I cannot teach them to you right now; you need a specific item to use those techniques, similar to the Profound Records. Senior Shou San would never give it to you.”

Every single ability they have requires the use of a book? This sect is weird.

Li Huowang thought to himself.

“Who wrote these books?” asked Li Huowang.

“I’ve heard that it was the elders within the cave who wrote them. Every single book within the sect originates from them,” replied Yingzi.

Elders?

Noticing Li Huowang’s confused face, Yingxi continued, “Everyone needs a book to use their corresponding powers, but I’ve heard that the elders don’t require them; they are able to use their powers at whim. However, I’ve never seen such a scene with my own eyes.”

“Oh... So that’s how it is.” Li Huowang nodded.

It seems that Shou San is not the leader of the Ao Jing Sect. At most, he’s somewhere on the middle level in the hierarchy.

“Do the elders reveal themselves regularly?” Li Huowang asked another question.

“No, they don’t usually meddle in worldly affairs. They have only ever come out once throughout the four years I have been

here,” replied Yingzi.

“Wait, since those Elders don’t need the Profound Records to use their abilities, doesn’t it mean that they are able to use Ba-Hui’s power anytime they need it?” asked Li Huowang.

However, he shook his head when he thought about it. “That can’t be right. Summoning Ba-Hui requires one to pay a heavy price. Ba-Hui is only interested in extreme pain, so it shouldn’t be that easy borrowing its strength.”

Yingzi was concerned as she looked at him. “Sir, why are you asking these questions?”

Li Huowang was startled. He quickly regained his composure and calmly said, “You know that I am making a deal with them. This is the first time I have made contact with the Ao Jing Sect, and so I would like to know more about them. This time around, I don’t want to get fooled.”

Even though Li Huowang wanted to use Yingzi to gain more information about the Ao Jing Sect, he still couldn’t trust her enough to inform her about his actual plans.

She had suffered within the Ao Jing Sect for four years, and this time around, she was even sent as a fodder! Logically speaking she would not align herself with the Ao Jing Sect and would never betray him, but he did not want to bet on it; he would never gamble with his life, even if the chances of her betraying him were slim at best.

There was too great a risk in telling her what he planned to do. If she wanted to save herself, she could sell him out to Shou San and cause everything to fall apart.

“Sir, are you really going to make a deal with them? They... They are not good people,” warned Yingzi.

Li Huowang nodded. “Of course I know they are not good people and that it could be dangerous, but that doesn’t mean that they are useless. The deal they offered was fair enough, and so

there's no need for me to refuse it."

Li Huowang did not lie. He had decided to find a method to induce maximum mental pain while searching for the method that the Ao Jing Sect would use to heal him.

He didn't care if he needed to cooperate with them or steal it as long as he could get rid of Dan Yangzi.

Li Huowang continued talking to Yingzi up until midnight. Through his talk, he learned a lot of information about the Ao Jing Sect and now had a rough understanding of it.

The Ao Jing Sect rarely interacted with the outside world. Their highest edict was to steal Ba-Hui's power regardless of the method and ultimately replace Ba-Hui, following in the steps of their Sacrificial God.

Yingzi also told him that while the Ao Jing Sect was bloodthirsty and cruel, they always adhered to their rules strictly.

They would wash their torture tools and arrange them methodically after they used it.

Breaking a rule within the Ao Jing Sect was considered a grave sin, since they are necessary for the order of the sect.

Li Huowang even found out that the Ao Jing Sect was quite a massive sect. Unlike the Righteous Monastery and the Benevolent Nunnery, the Ao Jing Sect in the mountain here was merely one of its branches. There were five more places just like the one Li Huowang was staying at right now.

On the thirteenth day of the sixth month each year, all the branches would gather to share their findings.

Late into the night, Li Huowang was deep in his thoughts. Yingzi's information not only gave him a better understanding of the sect, but also how difficult his current situation was.

"Both the methods are equally hard to use successfully..." Li Huowang mumbled to himself.

"Both methods?" Yingzi was confused.

Compared to how she had been on the verge of breaking down a few hours ago, she was much more emotionally stable now.

“It’s nothing, go to bed.” Li Huowang stood up and walked to a stone bed.

Seeing this, Yingzi silently followed him.

However, Li Huowang had no time to think about such trivial things in this dangerous situation. He could also use this opportunity to test what her true intentions were. As much as he hated Dan Yangzi, Li Huowang could still use his master as a safety net if he encountered dangerous situations.

That night, the intense barking of a dog woke Li Huowang. He quickly lit the oil lamp and saw that Bun was barking toward the bed.

When Bun saw Li Huowang was awake, it quickly stopped and started wagging its tail. “Uuuu~”

At that moment, Yingzi also sat up groggily. “Father, what’s wrong? Why is our dog barking?”

It was only after a moment that she realized her mistake and was embarrassed. “Sorry, I dreamt that I was celebrating the new year with my family.”

Her acting was very good. She made it look like she had indeed just woken up.

Li Huowang took one look at her and scanned the cold cave. Then, he extended his right hand and pinched the back of Bun’s neck before picking it up and placed it on the stone bed.

“It’s alright, go to bed.” Li Huowang hugged the dog as he went back to his bed.

“Mmm ...” Yingzi lied down beside Li Huowang once more.

Soon, the room was once again plunged into darkness as Li Huowang listened to the regular breathing sound coming from Yingzi.

“Is it really okay for a woman like you to lie down on the same

bed with me?” asked Li Huowang. He had just finished saying that when he heard the sound of clothes rustling behind him.

“I can’t be considered a little girl anymore. So what if I lie down on the same bed as you? If you want to, then just use me,” Yingzi’s voice rang out. At the same time, the oil lamp was reignited, allowing Li Huowang to see her naked body.

Her breasts were gone. All that was left in their place were two large scars on her chest. Various injuries and scars covered her body, with some of them still leaking pus.

Translator's Thoughts

Yingzi! Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin



Chapter 121 - Yang Na

Li Huowang was shocked when he saw the state her body was in.

“These... Did they do all this to you?” Li Huowang’s voice was trembling; at the same time, his hatred for the Ao Jing Sect became even stronger.

“They only did a part of it in the beginning. Later, I did most of it myself in order to assimilate into the sect and become one of them,” Yingzi calmly wore her robes back before continuing in a voice filled with ridicule, “I’ve already sacrificed so much and had thought that I was already one of them; however, turns out that’s not the case. In their eyes I’m nothing more than a disposable pawn.”

Li Huowang wanted to console her but didn’t know what to say. He could lie back down on the bed.

“Don’t worry. I will take you out of this accursed place. You can start over,” said Li Huowang.

However, Yingzi did not answer him.

Li Huowang knew that his words didn’t have any power; if she didn’t will it herself, her life would never get better.

Splat~

At that moment, a wet tongue started licking Li Huowang’s face—it was Bun who had been lying on his chest.

Li Huowang patted Bun and stared at the dark ceiling.

When he woke up on the second day, someone had already sent in their breakfast which consisted of sweet potato congee paired with multigrain biscuits.

First, Li Huowang fed some of the food to Bun. After he confirmed that it was not poisoned, Li Huowang ushered Yingzi to

eat alongside him.

Li Huowang had decided not to ask her anything else today. Her position within the Ao Jing Sect was relatively low, and so she would only know some of the things that would be considered common knowledge anyway. He probably had a higher chance of learning new information if he went out on his own.

He had even thought about an excuse in case Shou San asked what he was doing outside. He would just say that he wanted to learn how the members of the Ao Jing Sect inflicted pain onto themselves.

Under Yingzi's guidance, Li Huowang started roaming around inside the cave system.

Li Huowang was able to roam freely without any sect member intercepting them. All they did was stare at him. He wasn't sure if this was because of their adherence to their rules or the Flesh Book given to him by Abbess Jingxin.

With his heightened senses, Li Huowang was able to detect a sense of alertness and curiosity from the sect members. There were also some unidentified emotions intertwined with that curiosity.

However, Li Huowang soon decided to ignore them; he was more and more repulsed by the things he had seen within the cave system.

If the Eighteen Layers of Hell described in Buddhism truly existed, then this place was precisely it.

Flaying, chopping in half, dismemberment, lopping off body parts, death by thousand cuts, and various other torture methods that he had never seen before.

Li Huowang's stomach started to churn due to the intense stench of blood assaulting his nose.

Soon, he walked out from the area filled with the sound of flesh being torn apart and screams. He had barely caught his breath while leaning onto a wall when he saw a small figure run by with a

pinwheel in his hands. The little boy was wearing a pair of shoes and a hat made from tiger skin as he happily raised the pinwheel in his hand.

“Dad, you are so slow,” said the young boy.

Behind the boy was one of the sect members. He raised his scarred hands as he chased after the boy. “Son, you are just a fast runner.”

Seeing the both of them leave, Li Huowang’s face contorted with disgust. “These damned lunatics! Don’t they have any conscience?”

Yingzi, who had been leading the way, took a glance at Li Huowang before continuing on her way. “Sir, you seemed like you were interested in the other books of the Ao Jing Sect. If you want, I can give you my book. How about it?”

Yingzi had expected a reply but there was none. When she turned around, she saw that the Daoist in red robes was holding onto his head with a pained look on his face.

“Damn! It’s here again!” Li Huowang suddenly felt everything around him disappear. He knew that the hallucination was starting once again.

“Sir? Sir, what’s wrong?” Yingzi quickly approached him.

At that moment, Li Huowang saw with his very eyes as Yingzi’s figure turned into that of a nurse.

“Roll your tongue back in. Don’t bite on it,” instructed the nurse.

When the nurse saw how Li Huowang was staring at her in a daze without talking, she sighed and left.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang was looking at the sun high in the sky, blanking out and not knowing what to do.

“Wait! I’m still outside back in reality! It’s extremely dangerous!” Li Huowang blurted out.

Realizing the danger he was in, he spoke urgently, “Yingzi,

listen to me; quickly bring me back to the room and tie me up—”

“Huowang,” a voice interrupted Li Huowang.

Hearing this voice, Li Huowang raised his head and saw Yang Na’s crying face. She was still wearing the same simple outfit which consisted of a white sweater and a pair of jeans along with a small satchel on her waist.

“Huowang, can you react to my voice now? Are you awake? Do you recognize me?” Yang Na ran over and grabbed his hands.

Li Huowang was thrown into confusion when he felt the familiar warmth. He instinctively froze up and pretended that he still hadn’t come back to his senses.

Seeing this, the excitement in Yang Na’s eyes soon turned to disappointment; even after calling out his name a few more times, there was no response.

Tears welled up from her eyes and stained her long lashes. Her soft voice was trembling, “Huowang, you big liar. You had said that we will go to university together! I’m already in the first year and yet you haven’t even woken up!”

When he heard this, Li Huowang felt a pang in his heart. Even though he knew that this was a hallucination, he couldn’t help himself from speaking. “Nana, I’m sorry.”

When she heard those words, Yang Na was ecstatic and launched herself into his embrace while crying. “I’m so sorry. I really wanted to visit you earlier, but ever since you appeared on the news, my parents forbade me from coming to meet you. Today, I finally had a chance to come and see you.”

Li Huowang gently hugged her before pushing her away. “Nana, your father is right. Don’t come here anymore. I’m afraid that I...”

The second half of his sentence was something he had previously buried deep in his heart; even so, he still had to say it. “...I am afraid that I might end up thinking that this side is the real

one.”

When Yang Na heard what he said, she couldn't believe her ears. She felt like she had been plunged into a frigid lake. She had never thought that when Li Huowang finally became coherent after a long time, these would be the first words out of his mouth.

Amidst her frustration, she took her satchel and swung it at Li Huowang numerous times while crying and screaming, “Did you ever consider my feelings before you said those words? Why do you want me to leave you as well!? My parents, my brother, my friends, and now even you! I'm so tired from trying to persevere for so long, so why did you have to say it as well?! Didn't you say that you loved me and that you never wanted me to give up on you?!”

Chapter 122 - Chocolate

From the sensation of the satchel hitting his face, Li Huowang could feel the pain that caused Yang Na's outburst. He too felt the same pain, and so he raised both his hands and hugged the girl.

"Nana! Please stop. I beg you," said Li Huowang.

Feeling the embrace of the one she had been yearning for, Yang Na gradually calmed down and rested her head on his shoulder while crying.

At that moment, they looked just like they did a few years ago, sitting at the top of their school and staying up all night until sunrise.

Time slowly passed as Yang Na continued to remain in Li Huowang's embrace. She wished for the flow of time to stop at this moment.

But, she soon felt a pair of hands on her waist gradually pushing her away. In response, she hugged Li Huowang even tighter; she didn't want to let him go.

However, her strength was nowhere near his and she was soon pushed away.

The girl's eyes were still red from crying. Li Huowang opened his mouth but no words came out. He felt distraught.

After giving some thought, he calmly said, "Nana, please promise me something; promise me that you will live on even if I were to die one day."

"No!" Yang Na was adamant. "Don't decide that for me! My thoughts are mine alone! My choices are none of your concern. I *will* continue to wait for you until the day you wake up!"

As soon as she finished saying those words, Yang Na grabbed her satchel and stormed off.

However, she stopped just as she passed by the door. She hesitated for a few seconds before turning back. Then, she took out a small pack of chocolate from her satchel and coldly passed it to Li Huowang.

As he stared at the beautifully wrapped chocolate, Li Huowang asked Yang Na, “What day is it? Why are you giving me chocolate?”

However, Yang Na just continued to cry while ignoring him. Then, she opened up the wrapping around the chocolate before unceremoniously shoving the alcoholic chocolate down Li Huowang’s mouth.

Li Huowang laughed as he tasted the sweet chocolate. “Nana, what are you doing?”

Since this was just a hallucination, he no longer wanted to argue with her. At the same time, since he was inside the hallucination, he had no control over what he was doing on the other side either, and so there wasn’t much he could do.

As Li Huowang smiled, the tense atmosphere within the ward became mellow.

“What are you laughing at? Stop laughing!” Yang Na swung her satchel onto Li Huowang’s shoulder.

“Ouch! Be a little gentle, it hurts!” Li Huowang hissed in pain and held his shoulders.

“Tsk, you are feeling pain from just this? Why weren’t you in pain when you got shot in the face? Look at how you look right now,” Yang Na said as she took out a small mirror from her satchel and placed it in front of Li Huowang.

This was the first time he had seen himself in the hallucination in a long while. He was still a young boy, but his face that was originally filled with hope was now split in half by a scar. The scar ran from the upper left of his face to his lower right and completely disfigured his face. His entire look had been changed due to it.

Li Huowang gingerly touched his own face, feeling the rough

sensation of the scar. He knew how he got it—it was from the sniper bullet grazing his face back at the kindergarten.

Looks like the hallucination is quite logical.

Li Huowang silently thought to himself.

After a while, Yang Na took the mirror back and frowned at him. “What are you thinking? Are you thinking that I will abandon you just because your face has been disfigured? I didn’t even do so when you had turned into a psycho, so don’t even think that I will give up on you now. In fact, I don’t care about it in the slightest.”

Hearing this, Li Huowang shook his head and smiled. Then, he took the pack of chocolate sitting atop the white sheets and popped a piece of it into his mouth. He took another one and offered it to Yang Na, “Have one. I remember that you were a massive fan of snacks.”

However, Yang Na shook her head. “You can eat it. Outside, I can buy it anytime I want, but here, it’s almost a delicacy for you.”

Li Huowang nodded and ate another piece, the sweet taste enveloping his tongue. “Yeah, I haven’t tasted this in a long time...”

Li Huowang's eyes were filled with a sense of yearning and nostalgia. Since he could never go back to his old life, he could only use the hallucination to relieve his yearning for his old life.

Yang Na was heartbroken when she heard him. She held his hands gently and said, “If you want to eat it, then I will buy it for you everyday! Now that I’m in university, my father gives me a lot of money to use as living expenses. He gives me 2500 a month! And I take part-time jobs during breaks as well. I can buy any chocolate you want... but I don’t know whether you will even be coherent the next time I bring chocolate for you...”

Yang Na’s words instantly caused the atmosphere to grow cold.

Li Huowang swallowed the chocolate and was about to console her when he suddenly started coughing.

“Aiya, I have been telling you since elementary school to eat slower and to not talk while eating. See, you just choked on the chocolate. Let me pour a glass of water for you,” said Yang Na as she took the cup on the table and walked out.

Cough-cough!

Meanwhile, Li Huowang started coughing even more vigorously. At the same time, he felt a burning pain radiating from his esophagus to his stomach.

This ain't right! Something's happening to the other side!

Li Huowang raised his head and stared coldly at Yang Na's disappearing back. “Who are you? What did you feed me?!”

Soon, an intense pain burst forth from his stomach, causing him to start shouting, “AAAA!”

It was almost as if a living hedgehog was running amok within his body.

Amidst the intense pain, everything around him started to shift back—the warm sunlight and bright hospital ward started to fade. Soon, Li Huowang was back in the Ao Jing Sect's cave. At the same time, he saw blood on the floor in front of him, the very same blood that he had just coughed up.

At this moment, Li Huowang was red-faced and had veins bulging on his head. He grabbed his neck with both hands while kneeling on the ground like a shrimp.

Blegh!

Soon, a massive pile of items were vomited out, consisting of blackened blood, bits and pieces of flesh, small black tentacles, and... rusty nails.

Chapter 123 - Who Was It?

The clump of rusted nails almost resembled an assassination weapon. Seeing what he had vomited, Li Huowang instinctively knew that this was the ‘chocolate’ he had eaten in his hallucination.

After a moment, he raised his right arm only to feel a stinging pain from his shoulder. When he checked, he saw a massive gash, so deep that it revealed his white bones.

That was where Yang Na had hit him with her satchel just now!

“Someone tried to kill me while I was stuck in the hallucination!” Li Huowang instantly realized what was happening.

He endured the pain and scanned his surroundings with bloodshot eyes. Around him, he saw rows upon rows of members of the Ao Jing Sect, all standing still like gravestones, watching him.

Seeing this, Li Huowang growled and unfurled the Profound Records on the ground, his blood dripping from his lips onto the blood-red bamboo slip.

Jiang!

At the same time, Li Huowang unsheathed his sword and pointed it at the sect members surrounding him.

“What is the meaning of this? Is this what you mean by adhering to the rules? Do you think that I’m some pushover?!” Li Huowang roared in anger.

Li Huowang’s voice echoed throughout the cave, but no one answered him. They just stood there motionless, staring at him with eyes filled with curiosity and mocking laughter.

Just as Li Huowang was about to go all out against them,

Yingzi ran out from the crowd and tried her best to take him away.

“Sir, let’s go. Let’s quickly leave this place. Don’t look at them anymore,” Jiang Yingzi’s voice was filled with panic as she tried to haul his bloody body away from the place.

Hearing this, Li Huowang just stared at Yingzi, his gaze as cold as when he had been glaring at the others.

After a moment, he took out a few Blood Nourishing Pills from the gourd on his waist and popped them into his mouth.

After a while, Li Huowang ignored the gazes of everyone in the Ao Jing Sect and returned to their cave with the support of Yingzi.

The pain in his body was still fresh. Li Huowang knew that his stomach was a mess after having eaten a bunch of rusty nails. But there was nothing he could do other than rest on the bed, and wait for his reinforced healing to kick in and help him recover.

After calming down, Li Huowang inspected his body and found that not only had he sustained internal injuries, but there were slash wounds on his body as well.

They were in the same spots that Yang Na had hit him with her satchel.

As Yingzi saw Li Huowang's wounds, she felt conflicted. After thinking for a bit, she took out a wax-covered book from her bag. “Sir, let me heal you; however, you will need to endure some pain.”

Just as she approached him, Li Huowang swung his right arm and threw away the wax-covered book in her hand.

“You were the only one beside me just now. Tell me what happened?” asked Li Huowang.

Yingzi gripped the edge of her robes tightly while panicking. “I... I can’t say... otherwise, they will kill me...”

At that moment, Li Huowang stared at her lowered head and realized that he had never really seen what she looked like.

“Raise your head and look at me,” commanded Li Huowang.

On the other hand, when she heard his command, Yingzi

became nervous. She kept lowering her head and averting his gaze, afraid of looking directly into Li Huowang's eyes.

"What are you afraid of? Were you assigned to me just so they could spy on me? Was everything you said yesterday fake? What's your goal, you self-mutilating bastards?" Li Huowang pressed on.

"No, it's not like that. It really isn't..." Yingzi's breathing started becoming erratic; it was as if she was enduring something.

"Since you are not one of them, then who was the one who injured me just now?! Talk! Didn't you say that you always adhere to the rules? Is this one of the rules as well? Will all of you die if you don't do something wicked?!"

By this point, Yingzi was so shaken and conflicted that she started bleeding from how hard she was biting her lips.

Just as she was about to say something, there was a knock on the door.

Li Huowang and Yingzi turned around at the same time. Standing at the door were two members of the Ao Jing Sect, one of them wearing black and the other white. Both of them were at least two meters tall. They just stood there motionlessly without uttering a word.

Yingzi knew what it meant for them to appear here. Her body started trembling intensely as she walked out.

What's going on? They aren't even going to sugarcoat it anymore and just want to capture me?

Seeing the situation, Li Huowang closed his eyes and attempted to recover as much as possible.

If his wounds were to deteriorate any further, then Dan Yangzi would be forced to come out once more.

However, at that moment, he felt a strange sensation on his wounds.

He opened his eyes and saw it was Bun who had secretly walked over with its ears downturned; it was licking the wounds on

Li Huowang's body.

"Bun, how about coming with me the next time we go out? No need to guard the room anymore. I really need someone or something to be by my side," Li Huowang patted Bun while mumbling to himself.

At that moment, Bun's skinny body suddenly shrunk a little as it looked toward the door. Seeing that there was no one at the door, Bun continued to lick Li Huowang's wound.

However, Li Huowang had also picked up on what Bun had heard. He had also heard the same scream that Bun did. Li Huowang's heightened sense of hearing had allowed him to hear a minute sound—the sound of a woman screaming in pain.

He knew that the scream belonged to Yingzi; after all, she had been taken away not too long ago.

After considering it for a moment, Li Huowang patted Bun on the head before gritting his teeth to endure the pain as he stood up.

"It's just one thing after another. Can't I get some good rest?" mumbled Li Huowang.

Then, he slowly started hobbling his way out of the cave and toward the source of the sound.

The sound of screaming continued to become louder and louder until Li Huowang arrived at the large cave he had seen just earlier.

At this moment, a naked Yingzi had two massive hooks stabbed in her pectoral girdle as she was hung high up in the cave.

The two sect members in black and white from earlier that had taken her away previously were circling around her, each of them holding a thin blade that they used to slice thin pieces of flesh off her body.

Sou~

At that moment, one of Li Huowang's fingernail flew out and cut the chains that Yingzi was being hung with, causing the bloody girl to fall onto the floor hard.

Then, Li Huowang walked forward and covered her, shielding her from the gazes of the others.

He glared at Shou San with his burnt body and asked angrily, “Does the Ao Jing Sect treat their promises as nothing? Do we still have our deal or not?!”

Shou San was somewhat surprised to see Li Huowang appearing here, but the tone of his reply was one filled with amusement. “Of course. I still have to respect the Abbess’s request. Our deal is still effective, and we will naturally honor our words.”

Chapter 124 - Treatment

Shou San was quite calm when he told Li Huowang they would honor the deal.

“Fine, I will trust you one more time. I hope that an incident like today’s will never happen again! If you push me to the brink of desperation, then I would rather yield my body to Dan Yangzi and have everyone perish with me!” warned Li Huowang.

When he heard Li Huowang’s threats, Shou San was visibly unhappy; however, all he could do was silently stare at the red-robed Daoist with wariness in his eyes.

Then, under the gaze of the members of the Ao Jing Sect, Li Huowang carried Yingzi off the floor and pulled her back to their cave.

Once they left, Shou San turned toward one of the sect members beside him. While the sect member in question didn’t look any different than the rest, Shou San was very respectful to him. He whispered, “Elder Shen Benyou, you’ve seen the child; what do you think we should do?”

At this moment, one of the elders that Yingzi had told Li Huowang about the night before was present at the scene.

The man stared in the direction Li Huowang had disappeared to. “No, this Strayed One is unlike the others we have met before. You’ve seen his powers; he’s a lot more dangerous than the other Strayed Ones. Don’t provoke him; we will decide on what to do with him after we have probed him further.”

“Yes, this underling understands,” replied Shou San.

Back in their cave, Li Huowang fell onto the ground, his energy completely spent.

Meanwhile, Yingzi stood there, hesitant; the only part of her

body that remained intact was one of her arms. When she saw that Li Huowang was still bleeding profusely from his wounds, she carefully approached him. “Sir, are you alright?”

“Hehe... No worries. I won’t die from just this,” said Li Huowang.

When she heard those words, Yingzi’s eyes became filled with determination as she walked over and grabbed the wax-covered book from the side. She held the book and kneeled in front of Li Huowang. “Sir, please endure it. I will now help you with treating your injuries.”

After saying that, she started chanting off the book. Her voice as she chanted was extremely bizarre; it was as if she was imitating the crackling sound of flames.

Floof~

After a moment, the wax-covered book in Yingzi’s hand started burning up.

Soon, the flames melted the white wax before it started dripping onto Li Huowang’s wounds.

Sizzle~

The sound of flesh being burnt echoed in the cave and at the same time, Li Huowang recognized a familiar scent.

At that moment, Yingzi raised the book above her head. At the same time, the fiery wax on Li Huowang’s body came alive and started wriggling around on his body like a worm. As it crawled all over his body, white smoke rose from Li Huowang’s body as a trail of burnt flesh was left in the wake of the wax.

The wax cauterized the wounds on his body, and fused together the deep wound that revealed his bones.

Soon, the wax had circled most of Li Huowang’s body, and finished healing most of his external wounds.

The price of the treatment was naturally the pain he had to suffer through, especially since his sense of pain had been

heightened. It was so painful that he almost bit off his tongue; his entire body was drenched in sweat, making it look like he had just passed through a heavy downpour.

But it was not over.

The white wax slowly snaked its way to his face. When Li Huowang realized what it was about to do, he took a deep breath. “Fuck, this treatment is definitely psychotic.”

He took a few rapid breaths before opening his mouth, catching the white wax with his hand, and throwing it into his mouth.

At that moment, Li Huowang finally knew what it would feel like to eat magma. He felt the lump of molten wax slowly sliding down his esophagus. At the same time, the sound of sizzling flesh intensified as billowing white smoke flowed out from all his orifices.

The intense burning sensation was so painful that he rolled on the floor while grabbing at his neck.

After a while, he felt the white wax approaching his stomach, causing him to instantly stop Yingzi with his trembling hand. “Stomach... No need! The wax will not be able to defeat the thing inside my stomach!”

Even though Yingzi didn’t know what he meant, she still listened to him. Soon, the fiery wax exited Li Huowang’s mouth and slowly made its way onto Yingzi’s body before it started cauterizing her fleshless hand.

Ka-chak

At that moment, her hand fell off while the white wax continued to cauterize the open wound, slowly healing it in the process.

Once it was done with its mission, the wax crawled back onto the book and enveloped it. At the same time, the flames disappeared and the wax solidified once again, returning to its original form.

Li Huowang stared at Yingzi who was also covered in cold sweat. "Does it hurt?"

"How could it not? But compared to the day that my siblings died, this pain is nothing..." replied Yingzi.

Hearing this, Li Huowang's eyes fell and he nodded. "Yeah, the pain of the flesh is bearable, but the pain of the soul is not."

Yingzi, who was now left with only a single arm, said nothing as she supported him back onto the bed.

Staring at her side profile, Li Huowang had no idea what she was thinking. The things she had done were conflicting.

Not sure how much I can trust them, but since they swore on it, I suppose they won't do anything in the near future?

Li Huowang recalled what Shou San had said.

After a while, both Li Huowang and Yingzi lied down on the stone bed and Li Huowang immediately fell asleep.

While Li Huowang was asleep, he dreamt of many things; however, he didn't remember anything when he woke up.

When he opened his eyes, he saw Bun excitedly circling around Yingzi as it tried to gain her affection.

"How did you suddenly get so friendly with it?" asked Li Huowang as he sat on the stone stool and ate the breakfast placed on the stone table.

Yingzi's face was complicated as she stared at Bun, her hand patting Bun's white paws. "I remembered something. There was a dog living on my street. The old dog had seven puppies and Bun was one of them. I had thought that all of them had died, but to think that it actually survived."

Li Huowang sighed while staring at Bun excitedly licking Yingzi's hand. "Such a big town, and yet the only survivors are a single dog and a human. What a crazy world we live in."

"Sir, why would they want to kill us? Back then, he had supernatural powers and we were nothing but ants in front of him.

Was it just because he just didn't like our looks?" asked Yingzi, her voice trembling as she did her best to suppress her emotions.

Li Huowang sighed. "Who knows. This world often rewards the wicked yet punishes the good."

Li Huowang and Yingzi conversed for some time. After the incident from yesterday, they had gotten slightly closer.

"Right, what is the name of the book you used to treat me?" asked Li Huowang. He could tell that the treatment was very effective. Even though it was very painful and left scars wherever the wax had crawled, Li Huowang saw that his wounds were mostly healed.

Yingzi took out the wax-covered book from her robes and passed it to Li Huowang. "It's called the Fiery Sutra. It's yours if you need it."

Chapter 125 - Why?

“The Fiery Sutra?” Li Huowang grabbed the wax-covered book. Through the translucent wax, he could see the title of the book.

He noticed that a different character had been used to replace the character for the word “Sutra”. Rather than Fiery Sutra, it was more accurate to call it the Fiery Scripture.

Even though the treatment process was immensely painful, Li Huowang knew that it was very effective.

“Why give me the book?” Li Huowang was puzzled.

“I gave it to you because you need it more than me. But it’s not easy to learn how to use it; you need to learn how to read another language in order to use it,” said Yingzi as she opened the wax-covered book and revealed its content.

“This...” Li Huowang furrowed his brow. The words were circular in nature. Larger circles encircled smaller ones while the smaller ones had dots within them. The various sizes and combinations among them were almost endless.

He had no idea what language it was nor had he seen a similar linguistic system.

“If you want to understand the sutra, then you need to learn from scratch. You can only use that book after you’ve learned how to read the Heavenly Fire Mark and its five tones,” explained Yingzi as she passed her notebook to him. “This is a translation of the Heavenly Fire Mark to the common language. You can use it as a reference.”

Li Huowang opened the notes and saw that they were quite detailed. It seemed that Yingzi had written them herself.

Since she had already given him so much, there was no reason for Li Huowang to decline. After all, he needed the Fiery Scripture.

But he didn't have any time to research it right now—he needed to get out of this wretched place before doing anything else.

Li Huowang kept both books and asked, “You gave both these books to me on your own accord. Will you end up getting into trouble if they find out?”

In response, Yingzi lowered her head and shook it.

Li Huowang nodded and stared at her seriously. “I won't pry into your past, but I am a man who definitely pays back the generosity of others. As long as you help me, I will help you escape from this place.”

“Em!” Yingzi nodded excitedly. “Sir, what do you need me to do? I can help you with anything.”

It was clear that Yingzi was desperate.

After staring at his surroundings alertly, Li Huowang whispered. “Yingzi, since you and I have the same goal, I consider you an ally. I actually do need your help quite desperately as well.”

Then, Li Huowang whispered something to her and she nodded.

Fifteen minutes later, both of them exited their cave.

During the next two days, with Yingzi's guidance, Li Huowang scoured the entire cave, not missing even a single spot.

At the same time, Shou San did not go back on his words either; no one tried to find trouble with Li Huowang. The most they did was to stare at him before letting him pass if they encountered Li Huowang.

By the third day, Li Huowang had grasped the entire structure of the cave system and etched it into his memories.

“Sir, now that we have memorized the layout of this place, what do we do?” Yingzi whispered from behind.

Li Huowang stared ahead for a moment before turning back toward their room. “Let's go back first. I'm afraid there might be someone listening in on us over here.”

Hearing this, Yingzi silently followed him like an assistant.

On the other hand, Li Huowang was worried, his expression occasionally turning gnarly as he recalled something.

They were halfway back when they encountered the burnt looking Shou San. He revealed a ghastly smile as bits of burnt skin flaked off his body. "Little Xuan Yang, it is already the third day. Do you have any idea how to do it? Do you need my help? If you thought that the previous method was too harsh, then I have another idea."

However, Li Huowang refused without even hearing his proposal; he was very repulsed by their methods. "No need! I've said that I will deal with it myself!"

After saying that, Li Huowang pulled Yingzi away, bringing them back to their cave.

Shou San did not try to stop them. He just stood there silently, a strange glint in his eyes as he stared at their departing backs.

When the wooden door closed and isolated them from the outside world, Li Huowang finally heaved a sigh of relief. Living in a place that belonged to others was way too stressful; he had no choice but to abide by their rules and cater to their whims.

"Sir, what should we do next?" asked Yingzi.

Hearing Yingzi's question, Li Huowang took a breath. Just as he was about to say something, his expression froze.

"Damn! It's here again!" Li Huowang placed his back against the wooden door and slowly slid down onto the floor.

"Sir? Sir, are you alright?" Yingzi carefully approached him.

However, Li Huowang just stared at the girl blankly, his expression conflicted as he whispered, "Mom? You are here again? No, I don't want to eat oranges. Could you please step outside? I have some business to attend to. I know, I understand that the other side is a hallucination. You don't need to worry about me. I'm a little thirsty, so could you help me get some water? No, I don't want

the water in the thermos. I just want some regular water.”

“Sir... ?” Yingzi carefully said as she saw Li Huowang hallucinating.

In the next instant, Li Huowang once again became serious. His eyes were unfocused as they darted around. “Yingzi, quick, tie me up! Tie me up on the bed! I will explain everything to you when I come back to my senses!”

Just as he had said those words, his expression changed again. “Dad, why are you here? Don’t you need to go to work?”

Meanwhile, Yingzi just stood there, motionless as she stared at the red Daoist speaking toward empty space—she did not obey his command about tying him to the bed.

“Thanks, Mom. No need to feed me, I will just drink it on my own.” Li Huowang placed both hands together and made a motion of drinking water.

Staring at Li Huowang’s opened mouth, Yingzi carefully took out a ball of rusted nails that were bound together. Her hands were trembling from nervousness. She hesitated for a while, before placing the ball of nails back into her robes.

“Alright, alright. I will peel the oranges on my own. There’s no need to feed me,” said Li Huowang.

This time around, Yingzi took out a bottle of acid. Then, she threw the ball of nails into the bottle of acid, causing the metal to start sizzling.

Soon, the mixture of corroded nails and the acid was placed in front of Li Huowang, black smoke coming out from it.

“Uuu~” At that moment, Bun slowly approached them, not comprehending what was happening.

BAM!

When she saw Bun, Yingzi kicked it away.

The kick sent Bun flying as it started spitting out blood; it struggled to get up for a while before falling down due to the pain.

“Mom, no need to peel anymore. I’ve eaten too many oranges already,” said Li Huowang. Then, he grabbed the smoking ball of nails.

As this was happening, Yingzi stood there, her body trembling from excitement as she saw Li Huowang about to die.

However, just as the ball of nails reached his mouth, Li Huowang’s hand stopped. By the time he dropped the ball of nails, his fingers were already bloody from the corrosive liquid. The ball of nails barely brushed past his face and fell onto the ground, rolling a few times before stopping.

At this moment, there was no sign of Li Huowang hallucinating, and his eyes were deathly cold and sharp as he stared at her. “Why?”

Chapter 126 - Wicked Person

“Why?!” Li Huowang’s cold voice echoed within the cave. “They’ve already tortured you to the point of having to amputate your own hand, so why are you helping them fight against me? Why? I’ve already told you that I will take you away from this wretched place. Have I not shown you enough kindness? Do you even have a conscience? Or have you also aligned yourself with them after living here for four years?”

“Hehe...” Hearing his words, Yingzi started laughing. She slowly raised her head, her laughter becoming louder and louder.

This was the first time she had met his gaze, her eyes dripping with tears as she laughed.

Hatred filled her soft brown eyes.

The hatred in her eyes was so deep that she could pounce toward Li Huowang and kill him at any time.

It was only now that Li Huowang understood why she did not meet his gaze before this—she was afraid that she would act rashly the moment she met his gaze.

At that moment, two sets of Profound Records were unfurled on the ground.

With the aid of the Profound Records, Li Huowang saw his own flesh and skin expand in the air and pounce toward Yingzi, looking like a massive net.

On the other hand, Yingzi used her little finger to make a bone pike. However, the flesh net created by Li Huowang captured it and both of them fell to the ground.

Looking at the items on the ground, Yingzi realized that both of

them were using the Profound Records. If she wanted to kill him, she would need to sacrifice more of herself than he did of himself.

With this realization, she didn't hesitate to instantly place her right foot onto the Profound Records.

As he saw the unique words on the red bamboo slip slowly slither up her legs, Li Huowang instinctively felt that the situation was dangerous.

Shit! This is dangerous!

Immediately, Li Huowang ran out from the cave.

Just as Yingzi followed after him and hobbled out from the cave with her single leg, an ear-piercing sound of a bell rang out. When a Wandering God made of squiggly lines sprung up at her from under the ground, she couldn't react in time; even as she did her best to dodge, the Wandering God managed to phase through half of her exposed body.

Immediately, she fell onto the ground, losing any and all control of the parts of her body that were exposed to the Wandering God. However, she did not give up and instead gritted her teeth as she struggled to stand up.

But at that moment, a sharp blade was placed against her neck, deciding the victor.

Li Huowang did not act immediately, instead staring at her face. Then, he spat out angrily. "Why? I want to know why! Did the Ao Jing Sect take someone close to you as hostage?"

Dak dak dak~

At that moment, Li Huowang heard footsteps coming from everywhere around him; it was clear that the Ao Jing Sect's members had heard all the commotion.

Li Huowang turned around and saw Shou San approaching them.

"You think this is funny? You've already gone back on your words so many times! Why did you ask her to do this? If you can do

this, then come face me directly instead!” shouted Li Huowang.

Li Huowang hated the Ao Jing Sect to the core. They kept breaking their promises while trying to harm him over and over.

However, Shou San’s expression threw him off; his burnt face was revealing an expression filled with doubt.

“I’m not sure what you’ve heard, but I never ordered Er Jiu to act. There’s no benefit for us in fighting you, and it’s actually the most dangerous method,” said Shou San.

“Lies! The evidence is right in front of you and yet you are trying to lie to me!” shouted Li Huowang before falling silent.

Li Huowang didn’t trust their words, but then, a girl’s voice broke the silence, causing him to turn around and stare at Yingzi. The girl was still on the ground, her eyes glaring at him with hatred.

“Hehe... Didn’t you want to know why? Then let *me* tell you the reason!” Yingzi gritted her teeth with disgust as she met Li Huowang’s gaze.

Then, she removed her robes, exposing her mutilated body to everyone around.

“It’s because you killed my family! I’ve suffered so much because of you!” shouted Yingzi.

When he heard those words, Li Huowang thought she had gone crazy; he didn’t believe her. That was such a ridiculous lie!

However, Yingzi pointed at the sect members encircling them and continued, “You said that they were wicked, that they had no conscience. But they can’t even be compared to you!”

Yingzi’s voice was hoarse as she continued to shout, “Four years ago, you massacred everyone in my town! Tens of thousands! All of them are dead! *You* killed them all. Compared to you, the members of the Ao Jing Sect can be considered Saints!”

Hearing those words, Li Huowang felt like an explosion was going off in his head.

“No, impossible! I am not the same as you crazy bastards! I’m a good guy!” shouted Li Huowang, denying it vehemently.

“HAHAHAHA! *You?* A good guy? Yeah right!” Yingzi pointed her trembling fingers at him as she laughed hysterically. “The old grandma who used to sell tofu, my neighbor’s baby who was barely a week old, and even my parents! You didn’t even bat an eye when you killed all of them and yet you dare to call yourself a good guy?!”

When he saw just how resolute her hatred of him was, Li Huowang even started to doubt himself. He scoured his memories up until four years ago and knew that he had not yet transmigrated to this world back then, nor did he have the illness... at least not yet.

The only thing he recalled from that time was participating in the sports day and playing with everyone on a crowded field.

“No! I did not! Impossible! I hadn’t transmigrated four years... ago?” Li Huowang suddenly realized something that he should have realized long ago.

Sensing the doubt in his voice, Yingzi snarled as she revealed a thin blade in her hand. Just as she had placed her hand on it, the sword placed against her neck moved, causing her to freeze.

Red blood splattered out from her neck. Her body convulsed for a while before going still.

After a few breaths of time had passed, Li Huowang realized what he had done and immediately checked on her. His hands were trembling as he held her with his arms and covered the wound on her neck while stuffing Blood Nourishing Pills into her mouth.

“Don’t die! You cannot die! You need to tell me what happened!” shouted Li Huowang.

“Cough... Good guy...” Even in the final moments of her life, Yingzi continued to stare at Li Huowang mockingly. “Good guy...”

Soon, her hands went limp and her eyes became unfocused.

As he held onto her corpse, Li Huowang's breathing started becoming erratic. He shouted toward the members of the Ao Jing Sect standing around him. "Haven't you had enough?! What are you guys thinking?! You damned crazy self-mutilating psychopaths! If you want to capture me, a Strayed One, then do it directly! Do you all think it's fun to fool me?!"

When Shou San heard those words, he had a rather amused expression on his face. "It seems that you really have forgotten what happened four years ago. You did in fact massacre a whole town, regardless of their age or gender. Blood flowed through the entire town like a river. Back then, Elder Yan Jianxi could tolerate it no longer and wanted to stop you, but then, you ran to our place and started wreaking havoc, destroying many of our Cross Temples. We had to spend a lot of manpower to chase you away."

Chapter 127 - Who Is It?

“It was me? I massacred an entire town? It was me who killed Yingzi’s entire family?” Trembling, Li Huowang turned to look into the eyes of the dead girl before him.

Her pupils were devoid of any expression, dilated to the maximum. A mocking smile still hung on her face.

“I killed her, a girl who just wanted to seek revenge for the death of her parents? Am I the one who deserves death?” mumbled Li Huowang.

At this point, Li Huowang was starting to feel afraid. It was an extreme type of fear. He pushed Yingzi’s lifeless body and took a big step back before raising his trembling hands which were stained completely red with Yingzi’s blood.

“No! It’s not like that. I hadn’t even transmigrated here four years ago! Even if I had, it’s impossible for me to massacre an entire town! I wouldn’t have had the ability to cause chaos within the Ao Jing Sect. After all, I’m just an ordinary person!” shouted Li Huowang.

“You’re not ordinary; ordinary people wouldn’t have your abilities,” someone interjected.

Meanwhile, Shou San just watched as the red-robed Daoist became more and more terrified before continuing his explanation, “Logically, I wouldn’t want to have too much interaction with you. Who knows whether you will go mad while we are conversing? But since Abbess Jingxin asked us to help you, we are doing her a favor.”

“Shut up! Don’t try to deceive me! Aren’t you all lusting for Strayed Ones? Stop pretending! I’m right here, so come at me!” shouted Li Huowang.

Seeing Li Huowang glaring at him, Shou San backed away. “Little Xuan Yang, calm down. All of us here are trying to help you. You can’t repay our kindness with enmity.”

However, his words did not help. Conversely, they caused the fear within Li Huowang’s heart to deepen; he was starting to slowly feel like they were all telling the truth.

At that moment, Shou San gently waved his hand, gesturing for the others from Ao Jing Sect to withdraw. Then, he turned to Li Huowang. “Little Xuan Yang, while our Ao Jing Sect might not have the best reputation on the outside, we’re at least different from you; we don’t kill people on a whim. There should at least be a justification for a person’s actions.”

Li Huowang glanced down at Yingzi’s corpse, his eyes bloodshot. After a while, he gritted his teeth and dashed out of the tunnel.

Given Li Huowang’s overbearing attitude, nobody from the Ao Jing Sect dared to block his way; they backed up against the walls and gave way to him.

Outside, it was still night time, with the round moon hanging in the sky. The cold wind that blew past helped Li Huowang to clear his head a little. He stumbled beside a tree and leaned against it, covering his face with his hands as he squatted down, his body trembling involuntarily.

Am I really a killing maniac? Someone worse than even Dan Yangzi? Did I really kill Yingzi’s entire family? And then I killed Yingzi, who was just seeking revenge?

The intense pain brought about by this fact weighed down on Li Huowang’s mind like a mountain.

At that moment, Li Huowang suddenly heard footsteps approaching him. But at this point, he just wanted to hide and not care about anything else.

He felt someone gently pat his shoulder and speak in a voice

that carried a tinge of worry, “Little Xuan Yang, are you leaving? Then does our agreement from before still stand?”

These words finally managed to break Li Huowang out of his reverie. “Impossible! I’m going to find evidence! I can’t possibly have killed everyone in that entire town!”

Li Huowang stood up and pushed aside Shou San’s hand before directly dashing toward the town at the foot of the mountain.

Shou San watched Li Huowang vanish along the mountain path. Once he had vanished from Shou San’s field of vision, Shou San turned around and respectfully bowed toward a square-faced member of the Ao Jing Sect. “Elder Shen Benyou, please look at this...”

The square-faced man frowned and pondered for a moment, then said, “Follow him and observe; however, don’t get involved with anything yourself.”

Meanwhile, accompanied by the moonlight, Li Huowang once again arrived at the ghost town.

The darkness and deathly silence, as well as the sparse vegetation made the town seem even more horrifying.

However, Li Huowang did not care about all this. He just rushed in and frantically started to search even as he continued to bleed from his injuries.

When he discovered a skeleton on the ground, his eyes lit up. He took out a glowing stone from his pocket and began to examine the body closely.

“The left side of the skull is shattered! This was done by a blunt weapon. That’s not my style, and I don’t like to use blunt weapons anyway,” mumbled Li Huowang, his mood slowly stabilizing as he methodically continued to search through the other skeletons.

“The bones of this corpse are charred, and they crumble easily upon touch. This person died in a fire, something that I couldn’t have done.”

“This one is even more absurd; half its body is exposed outside, and half of it is stuck in the wall. How could I have possibly done this?”

Li Huowang felt more relieved the more corpses he checked. Finally, when he saw a skeleton that had bloomed on the floor like a flower, Li Huowang put down the burden in his heart.

I didn't kill anyone... I'm not a killing maniac! Yingzi was clearly misremembering!

Li Huowang re-confirmed this fact in his mind.

But, another question leapt into his mind.

Why would Yingzi misremember all of it? Could there have been an evil person that looked exactly like me?

Ah... this is troublesome. This fact might cause more trouble in future.

But I can think about this matter at another time. First, I should think of a way to deal with Dan Yangzi.

Li Huowang was about to leave the rotting wooden house when some of the papers on the bedside caught his attention. He calmly picked up those pieces of paper.

There was quite some blood on them, and they seemed like they were penned by someone right before they died.

Li Huowang could not really make out the contents of the paper; he could not recognize a lot of the words.

Hold on, these three characters are quite familiar.

Frowning, Li Huowang touched the last three characters doubtfully. He touched them for a long time, his brows furrowing even more.

Then, he suddenly realized something.

“Li Huowang! These three characters make the words ‘Li Huowang’!” shouted Li Huowang excitedly. However, immediately after that, a realization struck him that caused him to feel like he was being strangled.

He once again surveyed the skeletons around him, his pupils dilating and constricting repeatedly. Fear gradually started to consume his heart.

“No... Impossible! Yingzi must have made a mistake! I didn’t kill her parents! I didn’t kill all these people!” mumbled Li Huowang to himself hysterically, trying to refute his realization. However, his emotions were slowly going out of control.

He could find all sorts of ways to deceive himself, but the three characters on the piece of paper in his hand forced him to face reality.

In that moment, something inside Li Huowang snapped.

“Li Huowang! You killed them! You madman!”

“No! I didn’t! I didn’t! I didn’t! I’m different from Dan Yangzi and the rest!”

Veins started bulging on his forehead as Li Huowang knelt amongst the skeletons of the people that had died due to various causes while shouting hysterically.

Swoosh~

At that moment, a fur-covered pill flew into Li Huowang’s mouth.

In an instant, the guilt and agony that he had been suppressing in his heart were magnified many times over, almost engulfing him completely.

As this was happening, a person slowly walked in. It was Shou San.

His body was completely charred as he walked in while lightly snapping his fingers. Dense flames surrounded his entire body, crackling as they burned him.

Then, he gently waved his hand, and the burning flames quickly extended along the ground, engulfing Li Huowang’s entire body.

Chapter 128 - It'S Not Me

The flames continued to burn around Li Huowang, his appearance gradually turning more and more like that of the charred Shou San.

Everything in his field of vision began to distort; however, it was unknown whether it was due to ingesting the pill or being doused in flames.

At the same time, the skeletons around him that should have been lifeless suddenly started growing like trees, twisting in bizarre ways as they grew.

“Ah... ah... ah!”

As Li Huowang howled, the flames seemed to find an entrance and directly burrowed inside him, burning his inner organs.

“Little Xuan Yang, it’s time.” Shou San walked over and retrieved the Profound Records from Li Huowang’s waist, placing it before him.

At that moment, as Li Huowang peered through the flames, he felt like he was being tortured in hell. In this state, the Profound Records he saw did not look like an arranged row of bamboo slips, but a pile of quivering flesh worms. Strange words were written on them as they arranged themselves neatly into extremely strange-looking slips of flesh.

“This... What the heck is going on!” shouted Li Huowang. He felt like his brain was turning to mush. No, perhaps the scorching heat of the flames had already turned his brain to mush.

Meanwhile, disciples of the Ao Jing Sect had taken off their gowns, and were approaching them from all directions. They sat down around Li Huowang in an orderly fashion with their disfigured bodies.

However, in Li Huowang's view, they had all turned into various sorts of flesh-mangled monsters.

Shou San looked at Li Huowang being burned by the flames, and then took a step backward. "Little friend, don't forget the objective for which you came to our sect. Now, the opportunity is ripe; it's time to open the door to the Abyss of Worldly Suffering and meet Ba-Hui once again."

Li Huowang looked at him through the flames and shouted, "You lied to me?! You've been lying to me about everything?!"

"No, I did not lie to you. It's just that coincidentally this was a very good opportunity and that we leapt onto it as well. Don't you want to get rid of your Master? As long as you summon Ba-Hui, the elders will have a way to get rid of Dan Yangzi who is entangled with your body," replied Shou San.

Hearing this, Li Huowang howled in extreme agony. Then, he raised his charred hands and gently pressed them onto those flesh worms full of inscriptions.

At that moment, both the pain in Li Huowang's body and mind gradually started to morph into something else, just like before. At the same time, an extremely terrifying and desolate aura started to be emitted from Li Huowang's body, causing everyone present to shudder as they felt this other-worldly strength.

Li Huowang was very familiar with this scene; this was the prelude to Ba-Hui's appearance. Soon, his five senses also began to morph, and the cloudless skies suddenly changed colors.

Meanwhile, Shou San saw all this and started becoming excited. His body started to tremble; it was as though he was looking forward to something. "After all that turmoil, it's finally happening."

However, things did not progress as he wished. All the abnormalities that signified Ba-Hui's descent suddenly started returning to normality.

“What’s going on?” Shou San emotionally glanced at Li Huowang. For some reason, he sensed that at this point, the other person had somehow changed.

At that moment, Li Huowang slowly picked up the Profound Records with both hands.

At the same time, his voice rang out; however, this time, it wasn’t a voice filled with agony, but with doubt.

“Why... should I suffer like this? What do their deaths have to do with me? At this point, there’s nothing to restrain me. Who can say anything even if I did kill a few people?”

“It’s the survival of the fittest here. If they are weak, then they deserve to die. If I don’t kill them, then someone else will. It’s quite amusing; why should I feel guilty?”

“Moreover, all of this could have been lies that these self-mutilating lunatics of the Ao Jing Sect crafted!”

As Li Huowang spoke, he felt the mountain-like pressure that had been weighing down on him suddenly vanish.

As he saw Li Huowang transform so abruptly, Shou San asked apprehensively, “Little friend? Have you been influenced too deeply by your Master? Stay firm in your own beliefs. Do you want your Master to take over your body completely?”

At that moment, Shou San saw Li Huowang clutch his head within the flames as he struggled with a pained look on his face, arguing with himself.

“If I die, then so be it! Why should we care? Are you a saint? Look at yourself living like that! Do you have the capacity to care about others?”

“Dan Yangzi! Get out of my head! I will decide my own values! You won’t influence me again!”

The abnormal atmosphere and Ba-Hui’s terrifying aura expanded and contracted along with his shouting.

As time passed, the changes eventually started to stabilize.

At the critical moment, Li Huowang once again felt his surroundings change abruptly. The extreme pain from his body and mind rapidly faded as peace and quiet enveloped him.

When he finally regained consciousness, he found himself under the sun, restrained by a straitjacket while being pushed on a wheelchair by his mom. All the pain and suffering had instantly receded.

Whoa... whoa...

Li Huowang panted, still reeling from the shock.

He finally had a chance to catch his breath amidst all that torment.

At this point, he wanted to do nothing and just rest quietly.

“Son? Are you awake?” Sun Xiaoqin was surprised to see that her son was not in his usual crazed state.

Li Huowang turned to his mom with a complex expression. “Mom, do you know? I really don’t want to go back there. I’m tired of living there.”

Hearing this, Sun Xiaoqin hugged him tenderly, “It’s alright, don’t be afraid. It was all a hallucination. It’s all fake.”

Li Huowang closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Truthfully, he really wanted to escape now; he did not want to suffer anymore. Compared to the peace and quiet here, as well as his own family and Yang Na, the other world was simply hell.

Remembering the events from before, Li Huowang’s expression once again became filled with pain. “Mom... Who do you think I am?”

“You are Li Huowang! My son,” replied Sun Xiaoqin.

“Then, what sort of person is your son?” Li Huowang’s agonized voice carried a trace of confusion.

Sun Xiaoqin stroked her son’s head. “Li Huowang is a good child. He is sincere, responsible, and hardworking at his studies. Do you remember that afternoon in junior high? That day on the

bus...”

As he listened to his mother's words, Li Huowang began to recall various things he had done in the past. He had experienced so much after going there, so much so that he had even forgotten what sort of person he had been.

He had changed, and not for the better. It was not just due to Dan Yangzi's influence, but also because of that world.

Slowly, his gaze gradually grew resolute.

That's right... This is me. The real Li Huowang.

That suspicious, foolish, and easily deceived person with no moral values is not me. That is Dan Yangzi. It's not me!

Chapter 129 - Up

"Mom, push me back. I might become a bit noisy later, but be patient; I'll come back and see you when I have the time. Let me know if you run out of money."

At this moment, Li Huowang was engulfed in flames with a strange smile on his charred face, talking to himself.

Seeing this, Shou San frowned and took another step back, "Elder was right. This kid is different from the usual Strayed Ones. This is rather difficult to manage."

Just when he was at a loss, he suddenly felt movement behind him.

As soon as he turned around, his expression tensed up and the flames around his body quickly diminished before burrowing back into his body.

"Elder Yan Jianxi, Elder Er Tingnu, Elder Bi Xiuai, Elder She Changshi, Elder Yi Jianyu, Elder Shen Benyou. Why have the elders come down from the mountain?" asked Shou San as he greeted the elders. [1]

"How is the situation?" asked the square-faced Elder Shen Benyou, looking rather disgruntled.

"The Strayed One is just standing there. As you can see, he doesn't follow our routine," Shou San was rather upset as he pointed his charred finger toward Li Huowang.

Hearing this, the six of them exchanged glances. Then, a tall woman amongst them walked over and said, "He's almost there. We just need to give him another push."

As she said that, the six of them raised their fists into the air, causing the flames that had enveloped Li Huowang to pull him toward the ground.

“Mom, can you push a little faster? I feel like something is wrong. Also, remember to cover my mouth.” Li Huowang continued to mumble to himself as he stared at the moon in the night sky.

“I’ll do it,” Elder Er Tingnu, who was dressed like a courtesan, said. Then, she made a gesture with her finger and reached into her hair before gently pinching and slowly pulling outward.

Gradually, a silver needle that carried a cold light began to be pulled out.

Soon, the needle’s length had reached almost an inch. This went to show just how deeply the needle had been stuck inside the woman’s head.

Once she pulled it out, she gently flicked it, causing the bloodied silver needle to fly out with an afterimage before embedding itself directly into Li Huowang’s charred head.

“What did you inject into him? Don’t administer things carelessly; things can go wrong,” reminded Yan Jianxi.

“Just a piece of the past from four years ago. I’m afraid that his heart wasn’t suffering enough, so I gave him just a bit more, hehe,” replied Er Tingnu as her blood-red lips rose slightly, a smug expression on her face.

At that moment, as soon as the long needle pierced Li Huowang’s head, he returned from the other side. At the same time, various bloody scenes appeared in his mind, causing him to involuntarily clutch his abdomen and start vomiting.

In those scenes, he could clearly see that it was indeed him—he laughed maniacally as he wantonly killed people in that small town.

More accurately, it wasn’t really killing.

While there weren’t any obvious reasons, the people around him had their bodies suddenly explode, burst into flames, or had their heads caved in.

And this was not limited to just dozens of people, but tens of thousands!

Male or female, young or old, everyone in the small town suffered a similar fate.

Only one person remained—Jiang Yingzi. She somewhat resembled Yang Na from when she was younger.

The scenes of tens of thousands of people dying due to him exploded in his mind. This was not something that Li Huowang could endure.

“Did I really kill all those people in this town?” Li Huowang once again began to question himself. However, there was no need to answer this; only he would show mercy to someone who resembled a younger Yang Na.

At that moment, coupled with the effect of the pill, the charred Li Huowang screamed in agony, and the skies were split apart.

Everyone looked up toward the depths of the skies. Deep in the sky, in an unfathomably vast and dark abyss where countless black worlds and suns swirled around, there was something moving.

At the same time, everyone present felt their five senses starting to morph as they melded together. Their senses of sight, taste, smell, and hearing were all melded together into a brand-new perception that ordinary people would never be able to understand.

Only in this way could they truly “see” Ba-Hui.

“Finally!” Shou San shouted excitedly despite the almost materialistic fear that shrouded his body.

“Begin quickly! Everyone, get ready!” shouted Shou San.

Once those words were uttered, the other disciples who were sitting cross-legged around Li Huowang all began to mutilate themselves in various ways. At the same time, they all “looked” toward Ba-Hui in the skies, their eyes filled with a morbid longing.

Soon, red blood dripped down from their skins and began to form complex hook-shaped symbols on the ground. Slowly, the blood symbols coordinated with one another and formed a giant circle.

Just as the symbol circle was about to be completed, Li Huowang, who was in the center of the circle, gently raised his head. At the same time, all the blood symbols on the ground were lifted before slowly revolving around his body.

Ba-Hui had been summoned by Li Huowang, and so at least for now, he had momentarily obtained a portion of Ba-Hui's strength.

Seeing that their plans had been foiled, the six elders simultaneously glared at Li Huowang.

After a moment, Elder Yan Jianxi spoke first, "Young man, what are your intentions?"

Powerless, Li Huowang continued to kneel on the ground, his body swaying as though it could fall at any moment; there was no sign of vitality in his eyes.

Due to having endured extreme mental and physical agony, Li Huowang's heart was filled with the desire for death. At present, even thinking was very difficult for him; even so, he endured it and mumbled, "I've done my part... Now, it's your turn."

"Now? Are you mad? You must know how long we have waited for this moment?" shouted one of the Elders.

"Stop horsing around! Quickly return the blood symbols!" shouted another Elder.

"Who do you think you are?! You dare to threaten us?" shouted yet another Elder.

However, Li Huowang's outburst suppressed all their voices, "It must be now! I didn't get what we agreed on! So, don't even think about getting what you wanted!"

Even in his current state, Li Huowang was keenly aware of the fact that there was no friendship between him and the Ao Jing Sect. He was also a Strayed One. If he didn't take the opportunity to barter right now while he still held the upper hand, then there would be no room for negotiation once he no longer had Ba-Hui's strength.

“You guys can just kill me now! Then all your work this time around would have been for nothing! As long as... Help me get rid of Dan Yangzi! ...I won't care about what you do next!” Li Huowang used his remaining strength to state his conditions.

Then, his body began to tremble as his physical and mental agony started to spread outward in all directions.

At the same time, all the Ao Jing Sect disciples fell to the ground, shrieking miserably. This agony greatly surpassed the intensity of their usual self-mutilation.

When any existence is unable to endure the pain and suffering they are going through, they try to think of a way to escape. And so, all the Ao Jing Sect disciples took out various sorts of sharp weapons before pointing them toward their necks.

“Stop! We will help you get rid of Dan Yangzi now!” shouted one of the Elders.

When he heard this, a smile bloomed on the face of Li Huowang who had been quivering in agony.

At that moment, everyone had their attention focused on Li Huowang; nobody noticed Ba-Hui glancing at Li Huowang.

1. Their names are interestingly made up of sensory organs, senses, and an emotion. Yan Jianxi - Eye sees Joy, Er Tingnu - Ear hears Anger, Bi Xiulai - Nose smells Love, She Changshi - Tongue tastes Thought, Yi Jianyu - mind sees Desire, Shen Benyou - body touches Worry.

Chapter 130 - Death

Li Huowang quivered as he looked at the “six people” in the distance. In his eyes, they were currently undergoing some huge changes.

Their bodies were the same, but their facial organs had changed, becoming completely distorted and elongated as they rearranged themselves to look like fleshy mahjong tiles.

“Stop! We will help you get rid of Dan Yangzi now!” shouted one of the Elders.

When Li Huowang heard those words, he smiled even on the verge of collapse. However, this smile was just an instinctive response; his heart didn’t feel any sense of joy. Even though he should have been happy now, the excruciating pain that was tormenting him made him incapable of experiencing any sense of joy.

All his strength was focused on resisting his strong urge to die.

At that moment, still confused, Li Huowang saw the Elder whose head resembled Three Bamboos speak.

“Xuan Yang, keep your legs crossed! Then, place your hands on your dantian, and guard your heart!”

Hearing this, Li Huowang tried his best to follow the instructions while the blood symbols around him started to sway along.

At the same time, Li Huowang saw the six Elders approach him, and sit down in a circle around him, about three feet away.

As the six people started to speak, unexpectedly, they did not recite some cryptic commands or strange incantations. Instead, they started asking rhetorical questions, their voice reverberating heavily.

“What does it mean to be sitting in oblivion?”

“Abandoning the body, deposing intelligence, detaching from the form, and transcending knowledge; this is what it means to be sitting in oblivion!”

As they conversed, their clothes started to billow in the wind as they floated into the air. At the same time, the colors around them began to distort.

“No!” A voice with an unknown origin rang out, occupying their hearts, and turning everything around them dim and colorless.

“No!” The six Elders responded simultaneously, their voices magnified immensely.

At the same time, the cracked skies began to be covered by some form of dark clouds.

Li Huowang’s merged senses gradually returned to normal, yet something felt a little different than before.

“With sitting comes movement. With forgetting comes remembrance. Without sitting, one ceases to do labor. Without forgetting, one’s mind becomes calm. When labor continues, the spirit is tranquil. When thoughts do not cease, the heart finds peace!”

As the six Elders continued chanting, Li Huowang felt something and looked up. At that moment, he saw Dan Yangzi hidden amongst the black clouds.

This time around, Dan Yangzi had a different appearance from before. There was an umbilical cord-like translucent object extending from his abdomen and connecting him to Li Huowang’s body.

All three of Dan Yangzi’s heads turned toward Li Huowang; his six eyes held extreme hatred within them. “Evil disciple! Once again finding others to deal with your Master? Hmph! Do you think you can hide? Master has already attained Immortality!”

“Immortal... Immortal... Hehe...” Li Huowang was on the

verge of collapse as he looked at those sickening tentacles connected to Dan Yangzi's body.

After a moment, Li Huowang took a deep breath and shouted toward Dan Yangzi, "Someone like you can also become an Immortal? Based on what? Does this place even have any justice!"

"Hmph! You are no better than me when it comes to the number of people we have killed! So who are you to say that?!" roared Dan Yangzi.

At that moment, Dan Yangzi's childlike head on his right shook slightly. He was holding a fleshy bronze sword with three tentacles, using that grotesque body to dash toward the six Elders below; he almost looked like an eagle diving down from the black clouds.

However, the six Elders completely ignored Dan Yangzi, pointing their hands toward Li Huowang. "Three flowers blooming is an illusion. Clouds under the feet are not real. One must eventually wake up from a dream, and all things are bound to return to dust."

As soon as those words rang out, Dan Yangzi, who was in the air, seemed like he was struck by a large mountain as he directly fell down while leaving behind an afterimage.

Then, Li Huowang who was bathed in flames, felt something abnormal within his stomach; it was as though something was stirring within him.

He had a feeling that it was very painful, but he could not feel anything.

All his attention was focused on the "umbilical cord" that linked him to Dan Yangzi; it was slowly becoming thicker and more corporeal. He had a feeling that he could even grab it with his own hands. In the end, he decided to reach out, and found that he really could touch it. And since even his own hands were on fire, that "umbilical cord" started to burn with a crisp sound.

"Im... impossible! I'm an Immortal now! Who dares to stop

me?!” Dan Yangzi shouted as he struggled to stand up against the force pressing him to the ground.

Meanwhile, the six Elders sighed, and continued their chanting. “Form is adhered to, while the mind is lost. Reasons emerge and emotions cease. The Dao transcends color and taste. True nature is separated from desire. Perceive the subtleties and have faith. Listen without confusion, if someone sits in oblivion...”

Amidst their sometimes loud and sometimes soft chanting, Li Huowang found that everything around him was suddenly in the wrong positions. Originally, he had just been sitting cross-legged in the center of the group of Elders, but he was now suspended in mid-air sideways.

This change was not limited to just him; everyone was the same. Some of them even had half their bodies in the air, with the other half being in the ground.

However, compared to them, the changes that happened to Dan Yangzi were much greater. As the chanting continued, his entire body began to melt. Soon, his celestial belt fell weakly to the ground and was stained by the earthly mud.

“In the ultimate path, there is silence without existence. The divine uses are without form, and so is the heart and the body. From the source...”

As the chanting continued on and on, Li Huowang saw a trail of white smoke float out from the mahjong-patterned heads of each of the six Elders before intertwining and forming a rope that burrowed deep into the ground.

“This... impossible! I am an Immortal...!” These were Dan Yangzi’s final words.

After this last sentence, Dan Yangzi collapsed completely; everything about him turned into puffs of black clouds that floated into the skies. Before long, those black clouds had dissipated completely.

At almost the same time, Li Huowang began to vomit. With a belch, a mass of tentacles that had half a face entangled with it was expelled out.

The half-face that was entangled with the mass of tentacles belonged to Dan Yangzi; currently, it had turned pale and emitted an extremely foul stench. It was clearly lifeless.

As he looked at the half-face in front of him, Li Huowang looked as though he was in a dream.

As the half-face gradually started to turn into ashes, Li Huowang picked it up with trembling hands.

Dan Yangzi was gone. At this moment, the 'thing' that had always been scheming to assimilate with himself was gone.

However, Li Huowang did not feel the slightest bit of happiness. Rather, he felt empty inside his heart. At the same time, the intense physical and mental pain prevented him from thinking about other more complex emotions.

On the other hand, the six Elders around Li Huowang all looked at one another, and then once again pointed their fingers toward Li Huowang again. As they did, the hook-shaped blood symbols around him slowly faded before returning to the ground.

The dark clouds in the skies had dissipated, and with this, the extremely far and high Ba-Hui once again became like the sun that illuminated them all.

At that moment, Li Huowang froze in place, ignoring everything around him. He did not want to know what the six Elders were up to.

At this point, it was already hard for him to resist the urge to seek death.

Li Huowang did not know when he fainted; the last thing he saw was the charred remains of Dan Yangzi.

Chapter 131 - New

Lick~

A large tongue licked Li Huowang's reddened cheek, pulling off a large piece of his newly-grown skin. The intense pain caused by this was akin to being scrubbed by a steel brush, forcing Li Huowang to open his eyes.

Li Huowang looked around in a daze. He realized he was still in the ghost town; however, many of the buildings around him had collapsed. It seemed that a lot had happened after he had passed out last night.

At this moment, it was already daytime, and judging by the position of the sun, he had been lying here for the better part of a day.

“Mm~” Bun circled around Li Huowang and barked. It seemed like it wanted to approach him, yet was afraid to do so at the same time.

It was only at this moment that Li Huowang noticed something unusual about his body. Logically, given that those flames had burned him from the inside out last night, he should be completely and utterly dead. But he was very much alive right now. Not only that, his charred exterior had fallen off, and had been replaced by a thin layer of skin.

From the looks of it, my ability to recover from injuries has increased yet again. No, it's more than just that; it's a qualitative enhancement.

Li Huowang thought as he looked down at his flushed-red body. All the clothes he had been wearing had been burned away.

Fortunately, the Profound Records, his long sword, and those torture tools made of iron had not been damaged by the flames.

After a while, he stood up unsteadily; at this moment, even the gentle wind brushing against his body caused him to feel pain.

Completely bare, Li Huowang led a dog and wandered through the entire ghost town. After circling around a few times, he found some new clothes in an abandoned clothing store that was filled with cobwebs.

After he passed by the counter that was manned by a headless skeleton, he found himself a green Daoist robe to wear. At the same time, he also tore off a large piece of fabric to wrap up the items he was carrying around.

His newly-grown delicate skin was damaged quite easily by the rough fabric, causing “peach blossoms” to start blooming on his robes.

Currently, his flesh and his skin were just stuck together. Every time he moved, it felt like a knife was scraping against his body; it was akin to torture.

He soon found a long bench in the store and sat down on it, still trembling. He had decided to patiently wait for his skin to heal completely.

As time passed, the entire clothing store grew darker. Within this gradually darkening environment, the old clothes hanging from the rafters seemed like rows of hanged ghosts.

At that moment, a gentle breeze seemed to blow past from nowhere, causing those clothes to start swaying gently and give the room an eerie feeling to it.

“Woof! Woof woof!” Bun barked at the swaying clothes before timidly cowering under Li Huowang’s bench.

“Shh, don’t bark. There are no ghosts in this world. When people die, they are gone. Otherwise, they would have come to claim my life a long time ago,” murmured Li Huowang as he stroked Bun’s head.

Bun gradually quieted down and started licking Li Huowang’s

palm with its tongue.

Unexpectedly, Li Huowang's skin was once again pulled off by this. Due to this, Bun did not dare lick anymore, and looked at Li Huowang remorsefully.

However, Li Huowang did not bother with his injuries; instead, he began to examine Bun's condition. First, he carefully pressed down at the abdominal region where Bun had been kicked.

The blood stains around Bun's mouth proved that it was indeed injured. However, it had still managed to make its way down from the mountain, and to the town, suggesting that its injuries were not too severe.

If Yingzi had really wanted to kill the dog, it would have been quite easy for her to do so. There was only one explanation for why Bun had not died—she wasn't truly evil. She did not want to kill Bun, even if its owner was her enemy.

"Yingzi..." In the dimly-lit clothing store, Li Huowang stared at the swaying clothes with a blank look.

At this moment, he was thinking of many things.

Suddenly, he ignored the pain from his skin and stood up.

Then, Li Huowang walked over to the headless store owner of the clothing store, picked up his body and carried him outside.

Today, that sharp sword of his was once again used as a shovel to dig a hole.

After he was done, Li Huowang went back into the clothing store to find the skull of the store owner. Then, he arranged the skull and the headless skeleton inside the pit, before covering it up with soil.

He dismantled a door frame with the intent to carve something on it, yet found that he had long since forgotten how to write. In the end, he used the tip of his sword to carve a design that resembled a pair of clothes, and stuck it before the grave.

Next, Li Huowang turned around and walked into another

house before carrying out the skeletons of a mother and her daughter.

One by one, he buried the skeletons, and erected makeshift tombstones with designs.

As his skin had not yet healed completely, it was once again torn apart due to the constant friction between the clothes and his skin. With his heightened senses of pain, this level of pain was almost on the level of death by a thousand cuts.

However, Li Huowang did not hesitate at all. The more pain his body felt, the clearer his conscience would feel.

As Li Huowang constantly moved, the robes on his body gradually turned a crimson red once again.

When Li Huowang entered another house, he was momentarily stunned upon encountering a bamboo cradle.

For a moment, he was hesitant, not daring to approach it.

“Hehe... compared to you, am I not a Saint?” At that moment, a familiar voice rang out in his ears almost like thunder.

Immediately, he turned around, only to see the three-headed Dan Yangzi standing atop the rubble of another house.

At that moment, as he looked at the three heads smiling mockingly at him, Li Huowang felt like he had been dropped in a cave of ice.

After just a moment, Li Huowang moved. He completely ignored Dan Yangzi who was standing opposite him, and instead turned to walk toward the mountain in the distance.

He started off with a slow walk, which turned into a jog, and then finally into a full blown sprint as he gritted his teeth. All along the way, a trail of blood dripped down from his body.

“Explain this! What the heck is going on?! Why is Dan Yangzi still around?!” roared Li Huowang.

Within a bright cave, a group of disciples from Ao Jing Sect watched as Li Huowang panted heavily, his face full of blood. At

this moment, he was facing a wall with several large caves as shouted loudly.

After a moment, an elderly voice rang out from one of the caves, “Little friend, everything between us is over. Your Master has been expelled, and we can’t see any trace of him on yourself.”

Hearing this, Li Huowang’s pupils shrank, and then he pointed toward a particular direction with a trembling finger. “Then tell me what that is? What is that?! Are all of you blind? What nonsense?! His influence on me is even greater now! He can appear at any moment! That thing had not been eradicated at all!”

Suddenly, Li Huowang paused and seemed to see something else as he sucked in a breath of cold air. “No! Even Jiang Yingzi is here! She is standing right beside Dan Yangzi!”

These words bewildered the members of the Ao Jing Sect. Even Li Huowang himself felt that something was amiss.

Dan Yangzi could exist because of his cultivation to Immortality, but what about Jiang Yingzi? She did not practice cultivation!

Li Huowang continued to stare fixedly at the woman who was covered in mangled flesh and had a few limbs missing, his mind buzzing continuously.

Currently, her eyes were filled with intense hatred as she locked eyes with him.

“Little friend, we had already told you that we would only deal with your Master, and not with those strange illusions of you Strayed Ones; we cannot do anything about them.”

Chapter 132 - True Or False?

“Illusions of the Strayed Ones?” Li Huowang mumbled as he stared at Jiang Yingzi and Dan Yangzi; he could still see them in the distance.

One was a three-headed deformed creature draped in celestial silks, and the other was a naked girl with grotesque scars all over her body. They just stood in place, both of them gazing at him with a mixture of hatred and amusement.

The two of them appeared to be so real that Li Huowang could not tell whether they really existed, or whether they were illusions. Trembling, he lifted his right foot to approach them, but found that he could not do so.

Every time he took a step forward, the two figures would move back accordingly.

However, they were not moving on their own; it was more like they would always remain at this specific distance from Li Huowang.

“Little friend Xuan Yang?” asked a voice.

Only after the voice from the cave echoed a few times did Li Huowang finally come to his senses.

After a while, a voice rang out from the cave; Li Huowang recognised that the voice belonged to the square-faced Elder Shen Benyou and that it carried a hint of complex emotions. “Little friend, you don’t look too well.”

“I’m fine, I’m fine,” Li Huowang replied subconsciously.

However, before he could continue, he fell silent.

He immediately realized that he had misspoken.

How could he possibly be fine? He had a lot more problems now.

This was not just related to Dan Yangzi and Jiang Yingzi appearing in the distance, but also about what he had become now. Nobody could guarantee that there wouldn't be any more of these apparitions appearing before he resolved this issue.

"Little friend, are you alright? Isn't it natural for a Strayed One to always have difficulty distinguishing between reality and illusion?" asked Elder Shen Benyou. "Since you have survived into your adulthood, you should have become used to it by now. Why are you still so surprised?"

Li Huowang swallowed his saliva with difficulty, then took a deep breath to focus and arrange his thoughts. After contemplating for a long time and reluctantly digesting all this information, he spoke again, "Elder, I have heard that Abbess Jingxin's son came here before. He is also a Strayed One. Can you tell me if he also had similar symptoms back then?"

Elder Shen Benyou paused for a long time before he answered. "Ah, it's really hard to guess. In general, Strayed Ones tend to be a bit crazy. I once heard him referring to himself as a ship."

Before Li Huowang could ask another question, a rough voice sounded from another dark cave within the wall. "I know about this matter. That person often woke up in the middle of the night, screaming that the Three Pure Ones were staring at him. Not long after, he turned into a complete lunatic."

"Three Pure Ones? What is that?" Li Huowang questioned.

Beside him, Shou San quickly replied, "Seen but unseen; Colorless. Heard but unheard; Soundless. Can be reached, but is still unreachable; Bodiless. Colorless, Soundless, Bodiless. One becomes three, and three unite as one. This is the Three Pure Ones. Daoists of various sects to the south worship the Three Pure Ones. I've only ever heard of them and never seen them. Something that is even

more unheard of is the fact that the Three Pure Ones can watch people.”

Li Huowang was somewhat baffled upon hearing these words. The other party's symptoms did not seem to be similar to his.

After a moment, Elder Shen Benyou's voice once again rang out from within the cave, “That person clearly came here on his own, but Abbess Jingxin from Benevolent Nunnery always assumed that it was us who drove him insane due to there being some past conflicts between us. It was an unjustifiable disaster. Little friend, these few days, you've also seen how we do things. Have we done anything that was against the rules? Under the heavens, breaking the rules is a great taboo.”

However, Li Huowang did not pay attention to what he said; his mind was simply a mess right now. After a while, he said, “Then... is there any solution to my situation?”

“Haha, you must be joking, little friend. It would truly be great if we had a solution. Strayed Ones often have hard lives. After all, they can never be truly understood by anybody. If one day, someone tells you that they have a way to heal you, little friend, then remember to be cautious. It's highly likely that they want to harm you instead. You should know about this yourself, right? Strayed Ones are beings that are very desirable to many. Many seek them out to refine them into pills, or to use them for cultivation techniques to enhance their own cultivation.”

After listening to all this, Li Huowang realized he was still very unfamiliar with his own body.

The name ‘Strayed One’ carried too many meanings.

He stood on the spot for a long time, lost in thought. After a while, he first looked toward the two people in the distance, and then at the silent Ao Jing Sect disciples around him.

At least Dan Yangzi won't try to take over me anymore. That should be a good thing, right?

Li Huowang consoled himself bitterly.

Then, he clasped his hands together and faced the caves, “Thank you, Elders, for enlightening me. We’ll meet again if fate wills it.”

Having said that, Li Huowang reached out and patted Bun’s head. Then, he began to make his way back with Dan Yangzi and Jiang Yingzi following right after him.

After a while, he returned to the desolate town in a daze; there, he stared at the two figures dazedly. At that moment, the two illusions started to speak at the same time.

“Kid, I’ve truly become Immortal now. As long as you continue to help your Master achieve enlightenment, everything that happened in the past can be forgiven.”

“Why aren’t you dead?! Why are you still alive, you murderous devil?!”

However, no matter what they said, or how close they were, they never came in direct contact with Li Huowang.

“Hehe... at least it’s more lively now. I’m no longer alone,” mumbled Li Huowang. He did not know whether his current situation was better than before, or worse; the only thing that he knew was that he had to keep moving forward, no matter what.

Li Huowang picked up the sword that was stuck in the ground, and continued to dig graves for the other skeletons in the town.

Meanwhile, Jiang Yingzi dragged her broken body and came beside Li Huowang, shouting at him with endless hatred, “Do you think that everything you did can be brushed away just because you are giving them a burial? They were all killed by you! If you really want to atone for your sins, then you should take your own life! Otherwise, everything you do will be in vain! Li Huowang, why don’t you go and die! Why pretend to be a Saint? Just hurry up and die!”

Li Huowang continued to remain silent; under Jiang Yingzi’s

piercing insults, he just continued to dig one grave after another.

Meanwhile, back in the Ao Jing Sect's cave, Elder Shen Benyou's voice rang out, "Shou San, Tou Qi, you guys can disperse. If he comes back again, then just block him at the mountain gate. We have no further connection with him."

"Yes, Elder Shen Benyou," replied the charred Shou San as he bowed respectfully. Then, he brought the other Ao Jing Sect's members away from the meditation area of the elders.

Not long after, everything turned quiet, leaving only the wall with six caves.

At that moment, a sharp female voice suddenly broke the silence. "Hehe... that Strayed One actually believed it... he believed it all! San Tiao, your method really worked!"

Once this voice rang out, it seemed like a switch had been flipped. The wall filled with black caves suddenly came to life and all kinds of laughter rang out—some sharp, some sinister, some mocking and some light. The joy contained in all those types of laughter soon filled the entire cave.

Chapter 133 - On The Way

Shivering, Lu Xiucan was awakened by the extreme cold. He groggily looked toward the campfire only to discover that it was nearly extinguished. He glanced over at Puppy with a gaze filled with displeasure; Puppy was responsible for keeping watch right now. This fellow with a sharp mouth and puffy cheeks was already nodding off. It seemed like he had been fast asleep for a while already.

However, Lu Xiucan dared not go over and berate him; his father had given him strict instructions previously.

These people were their future escorts. Thus, they couldn't have any confrontation with them if they wanted to continue traveling together; he had to be careful about his interactions with them.

After a moment, Lu Xiucan got up unhappily and added more firewood to the campfire before crawling back into his blanket.

Just as he closed his eyes, he felt his father poking him with his tobacco pipe. "Kid, wake up and go fetch some water from the river. It's getting bright soon."

Hearing this, Lu Xiucan groaned, and covered his head with the blanket.

However, the next moment, the pipe was no longer just poking him, and was instead tapping him. "Hurry up! All you do is laze around! At this rate, you're going to turn into a lazy bum soon enough. Nobody would be interested in marrying a lazy bum!"

The sun gradually rose, as did the surrounding people.

Bai Lingmiao rubbed her eyes and sat up from Chun Xiaoman's

warm embrace, looking around. Her face revealed disappointment when she did not find that familiar face.

Next, she looked up into the distance and saw the mountains shrouded in mist.

According to Abbess Jingxin, Li Huowang's destination was there. If they did not find him on the way, they could only head to the mountains to ask around.

She pulled her feet out from the blanket before putting on her shoes. They couldn't afford to remain hungry; they had to continue on their journey. At the same time, they couldn't just use up all their available food, and had to be frugal with its usage. Increasing their complementary food options was one way to save on their rations. And so, she, Xiaoman and Lu Zhuangyuan's daughter-in-law had decided to go into the forest to pick some wild vegetables.

Since this was the transition period between spring and summer, the woods were rather abundant with wild vegetables. In just a short while, Bai Lingmiao's basket was filled with Solomon's seals, wild onions and some wood ear mushrooms.

On their way back, they passed by a patch of mushrooms, but did not pick any.

After the past few days of practice, Bai Lingmiao could identify most of the wild vegetables. However, mushrooms were risky. They could be deadly if handled incorrectly. She didn't dare to pick them, even if they appeared normal and seemingly safe to consume.

By the time she brought the washed wild vegetables back to the bonfire, she saw that the dough was already being cooked by the responsible young boy, Yang Xiaohai. The pieces of dough were rolling in the boiling water like tadpoles.

"Yang Xiaohai, let the adults handle these things," said Bai Lingmiao as she grabbed small handfuls of wild vegetables and placed them into the pot.

"It's alright, Senior Bai. I enjoy cooking, hehe," replied Yang

Xiaohai.

The wild vegetables were cooked quite quickly. After that, a spoonful of lard was melted into the pot, and a hearty bowl of wild vegetables and fish dumplings was ready to be served.

The bunch of them held their bowls and ate heartily.

At the start, when the two groups met, they often prepared their own meals. But after a few days, they found it to be way too troublesome and time-consuming. Finally, Lu Zhuangyuan suggested sharing a communal pot, with each side contributing one meal.

Slurp~

Lu Zhuangyuan inhaled a dumpling into his mouth, then munched on it as he asked, "Miss Bai, did the young Daoist really come this way? I hope we haven't taken a wrong turn."

"It's the correct direction. Abbess Jingxin told us that Senior Li could have only gone through this route. After all, there is no other way to reach his destination," replied Bai Lingmiao confidently.

She was the first to notice something was amiss when Li Huowang had told all of them to leave. When he talked to her, his face was no longer gloomy; it was as though he had come to some sort of realization. It was quite an unsettling feeling, and she felt inexplicably afraid every time she thought about it.

And precisely because of that, she had hurried the others along. Even so, they still couldn't meet him.

That was how they happened to have a chance encounter with the Lu Family Troupe as they rushed in the direction that Li Huowang had departed in.

Senior Li, please be safe.

"As long as he's fine. I'm just asking." Lu Zhuangyuan had a smile on his face.

Though he was smiling, on the inside he felt quite anxious. He had left the Qi Kingdom to escape the calamity brought about by

the war with the confidence of relying on Li Huowang. Now, they had bumped into everyone besides him. After being on the journey for so long, he had still not seen his reliable escort, and so he could not help but be worried.

The large pot of vegetables and fish dumplings was quickly emptied, with not even a drop of soup being left behind. It was too wasteful to pour the soup away as there was even some usable grease in it.

After having their fill, they once again resumed their journey.

Traveling on the road was boring, and the days passed uneventfully. Aside from the distant mountains becoming a little clearer, there were no other significant changes.

As the night approached, Bai Lingmiao seemed to notice faint light on the distant mountains.

Have the people on the mountain seen Senior Li? Master said these people are dangerous. Could he be in trouble?

That night, Bai Lingmiao used the light from the fire to mend her shoes. They were on the move every day, and it was normal for their shoes to be worn out.

Apart from Zhao Wu, who was on night watch, everyone else soon fell asleep. Compared to the bustling daytime, everything around them had quieted down.

“Zhijian, your shoes are worn out as well. Take them off and let me mend them,” said Bai Lingmiao to the big guy who was holding an iron rod.

“Uh... uh... Smelly!” Gao Zhijian moved his feet backward.

“It’s alright, take them off. See, your toes are already starting to peek through. If you don’t fix them now, they will soon fall apart,” said Bai Lingmiao.

After some hesitation, he was about to take off his shoes. However, he suddenly grabbed the iron rod with both hands and shouted toward the forest on his right.

This loud shout startled everyone. When they awoke, they immediately understood the reason behind Gao Zhijian's shout.

A certain sound could be heard from the dark woods. It was a crunching and nibbling sound, along with some sort of eerie howling noises.

Everyone was horrified to hear such sounds in the middle of the forests at night.

"This... is this another spiritual possession? How can I be so unlucky this year! Again?" Lu Zhuangyuan grumbled as he put on his clothes.

He then turned toward Bai Lingmiao and clasped his hands together, "You guys are the juniors of that Daoist. You should be able to deal with such a situation, right?"

As he spoke, the sounds seemed to approach even closer, seemingly like they were just coming from the shrubbery next to them.

The atmosphere became tense, and everyone picked up their weapons.

At that moment, the shrubbery beside them suddenly moved and a red-veiled woman stepped out.

"Gosh! A female ghost!" Seeing this, Lu Xiucui was so scared that he directly crawled under the carriage.

"What's going on? What is it?" Bai Lingmiao asked the Second Deity.

However, the Second Deity did not say anything, instead raising her long black nails as she gestured for Bai Lingmiao to come closer.

Translator's Thoughts

Lu Juren! Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on
douyin



Chapter 134 - Found

"What's there?" asked Bai Lingmiao, about to head toward the Second Deity. However, she was pulled back by Xiaoman.

"Be careful, don't go there," said Xiaoman.

Bai Lingmiao thought for a moment, glanced at the Second Deity who was at the edge of the forest, and then said, "It's okay. There shouldn't be any danger."

As they saw Bai Lingmiao directly walk over like that, everyone grew worried. They all raised their torches before following along.

When they reached the Second Deity's side, they finally understood where the sounds had been coming from.

In the light of the torches, they saw a person dancing wildly in the forest.

"Mom, I can eat on my own; you don't need to feed me. The IV on my hand is also fine."

Covered in dust, Li Huowang sat on the ground covered in dry leaves while smiling at a spider web on the tree. He held a long piece of stone in his hand, biting it over and over. One could hear a constant cracking sound, and his mouth was flowing with blood.

"Mom, I swallowed it, I really did. I'm not a child, so there's no need for you to worry about me being picky. Hehe," said Li Huowang.

"Woo~ woo~" Bun circled around Li Huowang while constantly wagging its tail. It was the source of the howling sound from earlier.

"Senior Li!" Bai Lingmiao could not help but cry out upon seeing his pitiful state. She unconsciously took a few steps forward, but then forcibly stopped herself. "Quick, get a rope and tie Senior Li up. He'll be fine in a while!"

After some time, Li Huowang opened his eyes to a familiar tear-stained face. He showed an extremely exhausted smile as he asked, "You guys came? How did you even find me?"

Bai Lingmiao was choked with emotion as she held Li Huowang's head tightly in her arms. Even though she didn't say anything, her deep emotions were conveyed through her actions.

Seeing this, Li Huowang felt warmth in his heart while an unfamiliar emotion rose within him.

Is this... joy? I haven't felt this in a long time...

He reached out and patted her back. After some thought, he decided to give a vague explanation, "I... I went to figure some things out, and finished dealing with some trouble. How did you all get here?"

Li Huowang did not want the others to know about what he had been through or what he had done in the past.

After a warm conversation, everyone gradually fell silent.

Beside the campfire on the dark forest path, Li Huowang took a sip of hot soup. It helped to warm his stomach, and also cleared out the taste of blood from his mouth. While the inside of his mouth was all torn up, he knew that these wounds would heal quickly.

After a while, Li Huowang gently squeezed Bai Lingmiao's smooth right arm, and once again reassured her, "It's alright. The trouble is over now. We can continue our journey home."

Li Huowang looked at everyone surrounding him and saw the concern in their eyes. He knew that there were still some people in this world who genuinely cared about him.

He raised his hand as he thanked all of them. "All of you have worked hard. Thank you for your hard work."

He didn't specify what he was thanking them for. Some things were better when kept within; there was no need to say everything out loud.

At that moment, Lu Zhuangyuan, who was sitting on the right

side of Dan Yangzi, spoke with a flattering smile, "Oh my, what are you saying? We only did what we should have. Anyway, what happened to you earlier? Were you possessed? How come you were eating stones? Was there some kind of evil spirit?"

Li Huowang already knew why the Lu Family Troupe had come; however, he didn't care about these small matters. He shook his head and pointed to his own head with a bitter smile. "My brain has some problems. Don't worry; it's nothing serious."

At this point, Puppy who had been squatting beside Jiang Yingzi, widened his eyes and asked, "Senior Li, are you really alright? You won't crawl into someone's belly and eat your way out from the inside in the future, right?"

As soon as he uttered those words, the faces of Lu Zhuangyuan and the others turned green with shock.

Zhao Wu punched him on the waist as he quickly tried to defuse the situation. "What the heck are you talking about in front of outsiders? When has our Senior Li eaten others? That was when he was ill, and thought that he had eaten someone."

"Ah~ right, right. I'm so pig-headed; how come I keep remembering things incorrectly," Puppy realized that he had misspoken and tried to cover up.

However, this wasn't quite enough to reassure Lu Zhuangyuan and the others. They all tried to put on a brave facade.

"Enough, stop pretending. Some things have happened, and there's no need to conceal anything," Li Huowang clarified the situation. "Troupe Leader Lu, I'll be honest. I have done many wicked things in the past, which I won't explain further. All I can say is that all that was against my wishes. If you are worried that it might bring harm to your family, then let's part ways amicably. However, if you don't mind it, then you can stay for as long as you want. We are friends, and I will ensure your safety."

"Ah, what are you saying? Is this old man so snobbish? I trust

your character. There must be some difficult reasons behind all this,” Lu Zhuangyuan put on a smile before quickly pouring out another bowl of hot soup. This old man will use this as a substitute for wine to compensate you. Who said we’re leaving? Whoever leaves is a bastard!”

Hearing this, Li Huowang raised his own bowl to Lu Zhuangyuan, and then took a sip.

It didn’t really matter to Li Huowang whether they left or not. What he needed to consider now was what his next steps would be.

After some consideration, Li Huowang addressed everyone before him, “Everyone, we’ve been delayed by these matters for far too long. Fortunately, all the problems have been resolved now. And so, we will resume our journey and leave the Kingdom of Si Qi tomorrow.”

As long as he sent all these people back to their homes safely, he would feel much less burdened, and it would also be a lot more convenient to do what he needed to in the future.

“Senior Li, we can’t leave yet. The Abbess told us that if we found you, we had to report to them that you are safe,” explained Bai Lingmiao.

“There’s no need to take a detour merely for this. Just write a letter and send it through a relay station,” said Li Huowang. Since his problem had been resolved, there was no need to make another trip to the Benevolent Nunnery; while it wasn’t very far, it wasn’t that close either.

“No, the Abbess asked for you to come see her in person. It seemed like she had something she wanted to tell you face-to-face,” said Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang furrowed his brow.

Face-to-face? Seems like it’s not something as simple as reporting my safety. Does the Abbess have something else that she needs to tell me about?

After some consideration, Li Huowang handed the bowl in his hands to Bai Lingmiao. "Alright, let's go back to Henghua Mountain. It's also a good opportunity to get an overall picture of what's going on now."

Ever since coming to this wretched place, he had been rushing all along, and had never had time to figure out what was going on.

How many sects there were, how extensive was their influence, and what he should avoid when dealing with them. If they were to continue with their journey, then he had to get a better understanding of these matters.

Translator's Thoughts

Lu Juren's wife, Luo Juanhua! Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin



Chapter 135 - Beneath The Mountain

In the small town at the base of Henghua Mountain.

It seemed to be the first time that Bun had met so many people, and so it didn't leave Li Huowang's side for even a moment.

After a tiring journey, everyone was exhausted and in need of rest.

Even though the Benevolent Nunnery was right before them, unlike before, Li Huowang was no longer in a hurry. Since that oppressive feeling where he felt like he could be replaced by Dan Yangzi at any moment was now gone, he could finally take it easy.

Li Huowang used his somewhat tired eyes to look around. The town at the base of the mountain was the same as before. Even though it wasn't a market day, perhaps due to the fact that it was a transportation hub, there were many people going to and fro.

The only difference was the increase in the number of beggars squatting by the walls. When the ragged-looking beggars saw their horse-drawn carriages, they quickly approached them before raising their broken bowls and starting to sing.

"Come gather 'round, see the poor beggar's plea~ Oh kind sir, won't you lend an ear to me~? Have a heart and let compassion take its toll~ A bun, some soup, may you live a life whole!"

Jiang!

At that moment, a long sword was drawn, causing the beggars to scatter like frightened birds.

"Three bamboos!" said a voice.

Pa!

Hearing the voice and the sound, Li Huowang subconsciously

looked toward the source.

“Pong! Six characters~”

“Aiya~ what kind of hand is this, nine dots again.”

“Ah~ Haha! A self-drawn pure suit~ Hahaha, pay up!”

The mahjong parlor was quite lively and bustling with people; almost every seat was occupied, and you could constantly hear the sounds of the dice and mahjong tiles clashing. It could be seen that everyone was having fun.

“Oh, they are playing mahjong,” remarked Li Huowang before continuing onward.

After walking for a while, they arrived at the inn they had previously stayed at.

As Li Huowang stepped into the inn, he said to the oncoming waiter, “We need both accommodation and a meal. Tell your chef to prepare some hearty dishes, but no pork.”

“Ah~ Alright, dear guest, please come in~”

“Senior Li, while we do have ample money, we are spending without an income. Perhaps we should be a little more frugal,” Bai Lingmiao voiced her concern at Li Huowang’s extravagance.

Li Huowang sat at the seat of the host and sipped the tea that was offered to them by the attendant, and then said, “It’s alright, let’s celebrate a little. It’s not like we eat like this every day.”

“You beast! You still have the nerve to eat?! Have you ever thought about the people who died because of you?! Why don’t you go and die?!” shouted Jiang Yingzi.

However, despite Jiang Yingzi’s insults, Li Huowang remained completely unfazed as he continued to address the others, “Wait here after we finish the meal. The Benevolent Nunnery is quite dirty. I’ll be back soon.”

Initially, he had found it hard to accept his new companions.

As time passed, Li Huowang was able to completely adapt to the presence of a long-dead ghost shouting in his ear. After all,

Jiang Yingzi could only resort to incessant cursing, which could really affect Li Huowang.

On the other hand, Dan Yangzi often stood in the distance, watching him creepily.

After a few simple tests, Li Huowang had discovered that they were indeed just illusions, and could not actually affect him.

He did not know how long such a situation would last for, or whether others would appear in the future. But for now, this situation was a lot easier to accept than being taken over by Dan Yangzi.

“Hehe, the dishes are here~ Green Dragon Emerges from the Sea~ Twin Dragons Chasing the Pearl~ Three Suns Prosperity~ Fortune in the Eastern Sea~ Dear guests, please enjoy~ Other delicacies will also arrive shortly~” said the waiter as he brought in their dishes.

Seeing all these dishes, Lu Xiucan started salivating. Just as he was about to pick up his chopsticks, he was tapped by Lu Zhuangyuan’s tobacco pipe.

After stopping his son, Lu Zhuangyuan smiled flatteringly and said, “Young Daoist, please eat first. You’ve had a tough trip, so let this meal be our treat.”

Surprised, Li Huowang glanced at him, and then picked up his chopsticks as he began eating; he couldn’t be bothered with such trivial matters.

At the same time, he had a feeling that in his presence, the Lu Family Troupe was a lot more restrained.

After having traveled for so long, everyone was hungry. Bai Lingmiao and Gao Zhijian both had large appetites, and quickly wiped clean the dishes on the table, as well as two more barrels of rice.

Bun wasn’t left hungry either; it was given all the leftover bones.

After a satisfying meal that included plenty of wine, Li Huowang drank another mouthful of tea and got up. Once he picked up his belongings, he walked out of the inn, "I'm leaving. I should be back before nightfall."

As soon as it heard him, Bun, who had been gnawing on a bone under the table, picked it up and followed after him.

Once Li Huowang left, Lu Juren put down his clean bowl and chopsticks, then stepped before Lu Zhuangyuan and cleared his throat. "Dad, come with me."

After a while, they arrived at the quiet stable behind the inn. Then, Lu Juren leaned against a black horse that was eating some beans before whispering nervously, "Dad! Why aren't we leaving?! Are you really planning to go with them! Did you forget—"

At that moment, he glanced around to check that there was nobody else around before continuing, "Did you forget what they said that night? That's not a person—that's a demon! Those Daoist robes of his are stained red due to blood! Aren't you afraid that someday he'll eat us as well?"

Hearing this, the wrinkled Lu Zhuangyuan retrieved his tobacco pipe before taking a deep puff. "Perhaps... Perhaps the Daoist has some difficulties?"

"What kind of difficulties can there be to explain doing things like that?! Ah, Dad! You've started to become muddle-headed!"

"Hey! Are you asking for a beating?! What do you mean muddle-headed?!" said Lu Zhuangyuan as he raised his tobacco pipe into the air.

Faced with Lu Zhuangyuan's raised pipe, Lu Juren, who had always been honest, did not dodge it like he normally would. Instead, he stared at his father stubbornly. "For a moment, let's forget about ourselves! But what about your granddaughter Cui'er? The storytellers often say that demons like to eat children! Can you bear to place Cui'er in such danger?"

Upon hearing this, Lu Zhuangyuan could no longer retort, which was quite unlike him. After a while, he once again took a deep puff causing the tobacco inside his pipe to start glowing brightly. "Son, I understand what you're saying. But haven't you noticed it? Something has been amiss throughout this journey. I know what's going on. Originally, it just started out with there being more beggars by the roadside. It doesn't seem like much, but it won't be long before people even start selling out their own children. The world is slowly descending into chaos. Right now, we're fleeing on our own, and that makes us easy pickings for anyone who wants to have a tasty morsel. On the other hand, following the Daoist at least gives us some safety against the ordinary outlaws and their schemes. Your dad has lived for a long time, and can judge people quite accurately. The Daoist is not that kind of evil person. Though he may possess formidable powers, his character is not immoral. He cannot commit such heinous acts."

"But..."

"There's no 'buts'. Let's stick with the plan. Earlier, I noticed that your wife didn't really eat much. That's unusual for her, and she even has the urge to vomit quite often. Take her to a physician; I have a feeling that she might be pregnant."

Translator's Thoughts

Yang Xiaohai, Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on
douyin



Chapter 136 - Sword

"Hoo~ hoo~" Li Huowang panted heavily as he climbed the mountain. The oil-paper bags he was carrying in his hand swayed with his difficult ascent.

The mountain path leading up Henghua Mountain was incredibly difficult to traverse. It didn't have proper steps, and it was still quite unbearable even after the trips he had made before. His clothes were soaked with sweat, and his tender skin was chafed to the point that it was painful.

"Woof! Woof woof!!" Bun had already reached the mountain gate of Benevolent Nunnery and was wagging its tail at its owner.

When Li Huowang finally arrived at the gate with great effort, he noticed that Bun had been patiently waiting for him. Dogs had much better stamina than humans.

"Why are you following me? Go back!" Li Huowang's words were obviously not understood by Bun. The dog shook its head and wagged its tail before approaching Li Huowang and affectionately licking his fingers.

After taking a break near the couplet written in Women's Script at the mountain gate, Li Huowang caught his breath, covered his nose, and started walking toward the roof-less temple in the distance.

Benevolent Nunnery was still the same as ever—dirty, smelly, and in ruins.

The swamp of half-rotten food in the nunnery had lessened a lot. It was unknown whether it was eaten or had just rotten away.

"Why did you bring your dog up? The feces in the nunnery are used to feed the pigs, not your dog," said Miao Yu warily as she approached Li Huowang.

"Sister, is Abbess Jingxin here?" asked Li Huowang as he patted Bun's head.

Miao Yu was about to speak, but then a greedy expression appeared on her face, "Give me some of the snacks in your hands, and I'll tell you."

"I'm afraid that won't do," Li Huowang smiled and clasped his hands together toward her before turning toward Abbess Jingxin's residence. He made several turns through the dilapidated nunnery, and found his destination.

The wall that had been torn down earlier had been rebuilt. Li Huowang could see Abbess Jingxin inside the room.

At present, she had once again returned to her original state. The only things that had changed were her two dark eye sockets, and her mouth which had receded inward due to being toothless.

"Ah~ Green bean cakes! Are they from the Prosperity Bakery down the mountain? Their green bean cakes are the best. And so are their sweetheart cakes, and their red bean paste mooncakes," exclaimed Jingxin.

Li Huowang just watched as Jingxin lugged her skin folds and crawled over, using her black hands as support. Once she reached him, he handed the snacks over to her.

He could see that Abbess Jingxin didn't have any teeth as she grabbed the bag of snacks. Then, without even peeling off the brown paper packaging, she started chewing on it with her red gums.

Seeing this, Li Huowang reached his hand into her mouth to remove the oil paper, and said, "Abbess, thank you for your guidance before. If not for your help, I would likely be dead already."

However, Abbess Jingxin did not stop at all, focusing all her attention on the snacks as she stuffed her mouth full of food.

Li Huowang continued to wait patiently as he watched Abbess

Jingxin enjoy her snacks. This bag of green bean cakes weighed about 3.5 pounds. Normal people would take a long time to finish it, but it was not at all challenging for the Abbess.

When only a few pieces were left, Abbess Jingxin reluctantly stopped. Then, she used the paper bags to rearrange the green bean cakes as she placed them aside.

“Is your Master gone? Let me take a look,” said Abbess Jingxin as she reached out her hands toward Li Huowang.

After she carefully examined his abdomen, she withdrew her hands. “Ah, looks like you are right; your Master is indeed not around anymore. Those fellows from the Ao Jing Sect can still be considered useful.”

Hearing this, Li Huowang glanced at Dan Yangzi who was nearby and nodded in agreement, “Indeed. Thank you, Abbess, for your help.”

“Since you’re thanking me, how come you didn’t buy more snacks? Was this 3.5 pounds of snacks for me to put in between my teeth?” She said with some displeasure as she picked up the remaining cakes and sniffed them greedily. Then, she directly stuffed them in between the folds of her skin.

“Alright, I’ll bring more on my next visit,” reassured Li Huowang.

“Good! You better keep your word! I’ll remember it. The thing that I hate the most is when people don’t keep their promises, especially when it comes to matters related to food,” said Jingxin.

The tone of their conversation had clearly become much friendlier than before.

“Right, Abbess, you instructed Junior Bai to have me pay you a visit. Do you have any instructions?” Li Huowang asked.

Hearing this question, Jingxin fell silent for a long time before asking, “Where’re you going next?”

“Sending my juniors home.”

“And after that?”

“To look for a way to resolve my issues as a Strayed One,” Li Huowang spoke calmly, his tone brimming with determination.

Jingxin was not the slightest bit surprised at Li Huowang’s reply. “You sure are stubborn. Go on then; maybe you’ll turn around after you end up hitting a dead end.”

“We can speak about that when I hit the dead end. If I’m forever stuck between reality and hallucination, then it’s not much better than being dead.”

“Hmm, spoken well, spoken well...”

Li Huowang’s heart was stirred when he saw her reaction. “Abbess, do you have any guidance on how to break free of the condition of a Strayed One?”

“What guidance can I provide? If I could, then my son wouldn’t have gone crazy. However, I won’t stop you if you want to go down this road. How about this? I’ll sell you a weapon for self-defense during your journey,” offered Jingxin as she pointed toward a dark corner of her room.

“Weapon?” Li Huowang looked toward the dark corner pointed by Jingxin. There, lying in the corner was a longsword.

Li Huowang walked over and extended his arm to grasp the sword, only to find that it was surprisingly heavy.

He held the sword and brought it before Abbess Jingxin before gently waving the sword. In an instant, an intense aura filled the entire house. At the same time, a wave of heat surged through Li Huowang’s mind, turning his eyes red. His body started to tremble uncontrollably, and he felt as though there was something continuously flowing into him from the sword hilt.

Li Huowang used all his strength to sheath the sword, after which, everything returned to normal. He gasped for breath, his heart pounding.

“It’s normal for military items to have some level of ominous

aura. Normal people may be easily affected by it, but it's fine since you're a Strayed One. This small amount of ominous aura isn't capable of dispersing your sense of doubt and confusion. This sword can be used for killing people and exorcizing evil spirits. It will be good to defend yourself with during your journey. In the future, don't use the Profound Records; it will bring you much agony," said Jingxin.

Li Huowang looked at the longsword in his hand with shock. Even if he did not know anything about weapons, just based on that single moment, he knew that this sword was extraordinary, and was definitely an item that should be treasured.

"Abbess, you said that you wanted to sell this sword to me, right? However, I don't have the money to afford it."

"No problem, you can just write an IOU. 30,000 taels of yellow gold should be enough, along with interest. In case, mind you, just in case, if you really do find a way to break free from the condition of a Strayed One, you must let me know."

Hearing this, Li Huowang had a complex look on his face. He could tell that the part about the IOU was said in jest, and what she really wanted from him was what she said after that.

Chapter 137 - Sitting Oblivion Dao

Staring at the Abbess, Li Huowang held the sword before kowtowing toward her. “Thank you for giving me this sword, Abbess! As long as I live, I will graciously repay you for this favor!”

Li Huowang was not someone good with words. Compared to using words, he preferred to use his actions to show his intentions.

He knew who had treated him well and who had not.

However, the Abbess was not satisfied with his answer. “Who said that I am gifting it to you? I am selling it. Don’t try to skip out on the payment. 30,000 pieces with interest. You need to return it to me without missing even a single piece. I know that you can’t give me the money right now, and so you should just use the escort service to send over whatever excess money you have in the future, regardless of the amount. We will accept it all, regardless if it’s a thousand pieces of gold or just half a string of copper coins. Now that everything’s over, just leave this place. I won’t ask you to stay for dinner, nor do I think you will be able to eat it. Just bring some more snacks when you come over next time.”

After saying her piece, Abbess Jingxin slowly moved her fat body back into the depths of her house.

However, Li Huowang immediately stopped her. He still had some questions. “Wait, Abbess, I still have some questions.”

“Sigh. Why are you so annoying? Tell me quickly. I need to sleep after I finish eating.” Abbess Jingxin was visibly annoyed.

Li Huowang stood there for a few seconds before asking his question. “Abbess, I’m a newcomer to Jianghu and do not know much about the various factions of the world, much less their

strengths and taboos. Could you please describe some of them to me?”

“No need to fret over it.” Abbess Jingzin scratched her stomach, annoyed. “You are a Strayed One. If you encounter another sect, then just run.”

“Wait, that’s it?” Li Huowang was thrown off by her answer.

“Of course, or do you want to go and converse with them? Weren’t you lied to by the monks of the Righteous Monastery? You are a Strayed One. In the eyes of others, you are no different than a piece of gold. Who cares what sect they come from. Fight if you can, run if you can’t. And don’t even think about joining any of them. There are no sects that recruit Strayed Ones as their disciples, not even the Benevolent Nunnery. If they say that they do, then they are lying.”

These words were a kind of wake-up call for Li Huowang. “So I can trust no one besides you?”

“Nope. Who would help you out without a cause?” The Abbess’s triple chin trembled as she shook her head.

Even if he had already expected the answer, hearing the truth from her mouth still caused Li Huowang to feel depressed.

He realized that his journey was destined to be a rocky one.

Li Huowang slowly digested what she had said before asking another question. “Abbess, can I ask about how the nuns of the Benevolent Nunnery obtain their powers?”

Except for the members of the Ao Jing Sect who gained their powers through offering their mental and physical pain to Ba-Hui, Li Huowang had absolutely no idea how the people of this world obtained their powers.

“Yawn~” The Abbess yawned, “Why do you ask this? It’s not like you will even be able to cultivate it. Can’t you see everyone here is a nun?”

“That’s not an issue. I just want to know.”

“Sigh. It’s not like I don’t want to tell you, but we can’t pronounce it with our mouths. We have to write out the method using Women’s Script. And you are a guy...”

Since she had already said so much, Li Huowang knew not to trouble her anymore. “Thank you for your guidance. I hope to meet you again soon.”

After saying that, Li Huowang kowtowed toward her once more before turning toward the door.

Just as he was leaving the house while inspecting the sword in his hands, the Abbess called for him. “Wait a minute, I almost forgot what I needed to say when you interrupted me just now. There is one particular group of people that you need to be extra careful with,” said Jingxin.

As he heard this, Li Huowang’s ears perked up. “Please tell me.”

“Remember their name. They are called the Sitting Oblivion Dao.”

“Sitting Oblivion Dao?” Li Huowang furrowed his brow. He had heard those three words before. He tried to recall where he had heard them, but nothing came up.

“Sigh, why do you keep spacing out? I’m still talking to you. Or do you not need my explanation?” asked the Abbess, exasperated.

“Abbess, please explain to me. Why did you mention them specifically? By any chance, are the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao friendly toward Strayed Ones?”

“Nope. The other sects will try to capture or kill you for their own benefit, but the Sitting Oblivion Dao is a whole different matter. They are a group of liars that love to fool others.”

“Hmm?” Li Huowang was visibly confused.

“The Sitting Oblivion Dao is not a group of bandits that occupies a mountain, nor is it a sect that cultivates. No one knows what they are. All we know about them is that they like to fool

others without any limitations. While they do like fooling others for money, more than anything else, they absolutely love fooling people for their own amusement. Here's an example. There was a time when one of them disguised himself as the Emperor's eunuch before proceeding to fool all of the men in a town to castrate themselves. The reason? He was bored and wanted to have some fun."

Li Huowang still had no idea what the Abbess was trying to tell him.

He asked hesitantly. "A group of swindlers who like to fool others? But... Is this somehow related to me?"

Out of all the sects who wanted to capture him, why did the Abbess tell him about this group of people specifically?

"Sigh. Did you forget that you are a Strayed One and that you can't differentiate between hallucination and reality? What do you think will happen if you meet someone from the Sitting Oblivion Dao? If they know that you are a Strayed One, the issue will become complicated."

"Even then, why would you think that I would be fooled by a group of swindlers? Why are you so nervous about this?"

The Abbess shut her eyelids and shook her head. "They are not just a simple group of swindlers. We don't know where they came from nor how they obtained it, but they have some powers that are ridiculously hard to shake off. They are also extremely well versed in illusions. There was even a time when I was fooled by them. At that time, a member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao snuck into our nunnery and wanted to fool us into breaking our taboo. Thankfully we managed to catch on to his plans and forced him into the path of Buddhism. Remember this, the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao do not fear death. Never get entangled with one of them, or you will find yourself dealing with more and more of their members."

“They even tried to fool you?”

“Yeah! Not only did they want to fool me, they even wanted to fool the Gods themselves! I’ve heard that a group of people within the Sitting Oblivion Dao waited thirty years to fool the God of Prosperity.”

“The God of Happiness? The one that appeared above the ancestral hall of the Hu family?” Li Huowang was visibly shaken.

“No, it’s the God of Prosperity, not the God of Happiness.” said Abbess Jingxin as she used her blackened fingernails to write the character on her skin.

Translator's Thoughts

The God of Happiness. Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin



Chapter 138 - The Five Realms Of Buddhism

“The God of Prosperity?” This was the first time Li Huowang had heard of it. “Is there any difference between it and the God of Happiness?”

“How should I say this? If we were to compare them, the God of Happiness’s power would be equivalent to just a single fingernail of the God of Prosperity.”

“Yikes.” Li Huowang recalled the terrible figure of the God of Happiness. It was hard to believe that the God of Happiness was barely strong enough to match one of the God of Prosperity’s fingernails.

“Hold up, I feel like my brain is on the verge of exploding now.” All this information caught him off guard. “So the God of Happiness is not some major evil being?”

“How can the God of Happiness be an evil being? Those are two different things altogether.”

Li Huowang took a deep breath. “In that case, what are they? What is the God of Happiness or the God of Prosperity?”

“What else can they be? They are Gods.”

“Uh... Which God?”

Abbess Jingxin’s face contorted in confusion. “You don’t even know that? How did you even survive up until now? I thought you already knew.”

Li Huowang sighed and explained, “As I’ve mentioned before, I’m not from this world and I was transmigrated here. I have no idea how I ended up in this place.”

“Sigh... here it comes again.” Abbess Jingxin stared at him

with pity.

“Abbess, I really did transmigrate here!” Li Huowang shouted, his anxiety increasing; he wanted to believe that it really was the truth.

“Fine, fine. I believe you. Let’s continue talking then. Have you heard of the Five Realms in Buddhism?”

“Five Realms of Buddhism?” Li Huowang recalled the five large Buddha statues he had seen within the Righteous Monastery. “I’ve heard of it. The Abbot of the Righteous Monastery briefly explained to me that there are five different Buddhas in Five Different Realms.”

“The one in the middle is Vaicorana from Vajradhatu, the Diamond Realm. The one on the East is Akshobhya from Abhirati, the Eastern Pure Land. The one on the South is Ratnasambhava from Śrīmat, the Southern Pure Land. The one on the West is Amitābha from Sukhavati, the Western Pure Land, and the one on the North is Amoghasiddhi from Prakuta, the Northern Pure Land,” explained Abbess Jingxin. These were the exact same words that the Abbot had told Li Huowang. “The God of Happiness and the God of Prosperity are both Gods belonging to the Southern Pure Land; however, they are not the only Gods there. There are still many other Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and Arhats.”

Hearing all this, Li Huowang felt kind of lost; it was the first time he had heard most of it. He knew that this world had many strange things, but it was a lot more than he had anticipated.

To think that there exist five different realms, and each of them contained such unimaginable horrors.

“So the realm of the Immortals that you mentioned before are the Five Realms of Buddhism?” asked Li Huowang as he unconsciously turned to Dan Yangzi who was standing near the wall.

“Hmph! There’s no such thing as the Five Realms of Buddhism.

What do a bunch of stupid bald donkeys know?" said Dan Yangzi, his six eyes filled with contempt. This was the first time Li Huowang's illusion had reacted to his words. "What do they know? They trust just about anything that's written in the book! They haven't even seen the Southern Heavenly Gates!"

Li Huowang ignored the barrage of insults from Dan Yangzi and continued to ask Abbess Jingxin. "Can you tell me where the Five Realms are?"

"How would I know? If I knew that, then I would already have become a Buddha; I wouldn't be here," said Jingxin as she dug her before flicking the snot onto the folds of her own skin.

"Become a Buddha? Do you want to become a Buddha?" asked Li Huowang.

"Nah I'm too lazy. My son may be crazy, but he's still alive. If I were to become a Buddha, who would take care of him?"

Slowly, Li Huowang was starting to piece everything together; he was finally starting to get a vague understanding of this world.

"Which world does Ba-Hui come from?" asked Li Huowang. He recalled that Ba-Hui also came from an extremely mysterious place.

"No clue; after all, I'm not from the Ao Jing Sect."

At that moment, Dan Yangzi's horrifying three-headed self phased out from within Abbess Jingxin's stomach. "She's lying! She knows nothing! You will only know how beautiful the Immortal Realm is once you see it with your own eyes. Once you have laid eyes on it, you will know that nothing else matters!"

Li Huowang's lips twitched as he feigned calmness. "Abbess Jingxin, about the Five Realms of Buddhism, do the other sects have some other explanations about the Immortal Realm?"

"Of course. Some of them are adamant that there's no Five Realms of Buddhism and instead it's a big piece of land called Peng Lai. Some of them also say that no such place exists in the world. Anyway, no one side can persuade the other and I'm too lazy to

debate with any of them either.”

At that moment, the Abbess fished out a mung bean cake from the folds of her skin. She was just about to eat it but stopped when she brought it near her mouth. She withheld her desires and forced it back into the folds.

“I think that’s enough explanation for today. There’s no need for you to trust my words completely. Whether the supernatural stuff is true or not, it doesn’t matter to you. If there’s nothing else, then you can leave. It’s already late and I haven’t even taken my nap. Remember to avoid the people of the Sitting Oblivion Dao as much as you can. If you do meet one of them, then you can unravel their scheme by thinking just like them and working your way backward,” said Abbess Jingxin.

After saying all that, she rolled her head backward and let out a thunderous snore.

Li Huowang stared at Abbess Jingxin with a complicated look on his face. After a while, he performed the Daoist salute he had learned back at the Zephyr Temple before leaving with the sword in his hand.

This time around, he had gained a lot and would need some time to sort things through.

Yang Xiaohai sat on a rock as he admired Xiaoman who was practicing with the sword.

With the sound of metal screeching, Chun Xiaoman unsheathed her green sword. The edge of the sword glinted with a cold light and an invisible pressure forced Yang Xiaohai to sit slightly further back.

The sword danced in the air like a swimming dragon, flashing a silvery sheen from time to time.

While Yang Xiaohai didn’t understand the intricacies of the sword dance being performed, he knew that Senior Xiaoman was

amazing.

It was only natural, since Xiaoman practiced with the sword anytime she even had a single moment of free time. She practiced day and night, and even read the manual while having her meal.

“If I was as strong as her, then no one would be able to bully me anymore.” Yang Xiaohai yearned for the day he would be able to get stronger.

“Hmph. This is nothing. If you want to become strong, then you need to learn from Senior Li.”

Hearing those words, Yang Xiaohai turned around and saw Puppy leaning against the wall with his arms folded on his chest.

Thinking about how scary Senior Li looked, Yang Xiaohai felt chills running down his spine; instantly, he shook his head vigorously. “No, I don’t want to learn that. It’s far too painful.”

Just then, Yang Xiaohai saw Chun Xiaoman stop her practice and walk toward the outside.

“Senior Xiaoman, where are you going?” asked Yang Xiaohai as he followed her.

“I’m going to the escort service. I’ve trained for so long but there’s no one here that I can spar with. I can’t improve like this,” said Xiaoman.

“Xiaoman, why do you need to find outsiders to spar with you? You can just spar with me, no need to waste your time. After all, I’ve also trained with my blade.” Puppy patted the blade on his waist.

“That doesn’t count. You’ve only learned how to perform a single slash,” refuted Xiaoman.

Chapter 139 - Escort Office

Puppy was upset when he heard Chun Xiaoman's remark. "So what if I only know one move? Haven't you heard of a thing called specialization? I could still kill someone with just a single downward slash!"

Xiaoman scoffed. Then, she stepped forward with her right foot and unsheathed her sword, thrusting it toward Puppy in one fluid motion.

Puppy wasn't able to react in time as the sword stopped just inches away from his nose.

Jiang~

Then, Chun Xiaoman sheathed her sword and left.

Puppy was left embarrassed. He glanced at Yang Xiaohai who had been watching them. "That doesn't count. She launched a sneak attack. If it was a real fight, then she might've lost to me."

Yang Xiaohai stared at Xiaoman who had just left the inn as he nodded and glossed over Puppy's words. "Yeah, yeah. Senior Cao Cao is correct."

After Yang Xiaohai saw Puppy walking away with a happy smile, he decided to follow after Chun Xiaoman. When he finally caught up to her, she was already in front of a gate. The gate had a flag with the character for "escort" on it, while behind the gates was a large courtyard.

He quickly followed her into the place.

Chun Xiaoman glanced at Yang Xiaohai. "Don't run out of the inn by yourself if you don't have any urgent issues. The world is very chaotic right now and there are many people who might want

to abduct you for money.”

“Alright! I will remember that. Senior, can I follow you this time? I just want to watch. I swear I will be good.”

Seeing his sincerity, Chun Xiaoman chose to remain silent.

The escort office was quite big yet crowded. There were many ox carts and carriages within the large courtyard.

“There are so many people inside,” exclaimed Yang Xiaohai as he walked over a pile of horse excrement.

“This is normal. The more chaotic the world is, the more money the escort services make. If the land was unified and in peace, then we would no longer need escorts,” remarked Xiaoman.

Just as Xiaoman finished speaking, a man walked over. He was quite tall, at least two heads taller than Xiaoman. His muscles were quite well-toned and rippling with energy as he walked toward Xiaoman menacingly. He quickly inspected the black-veiled girl in front of him and paid his respects. He was surprisingly friendly. “Does the young lady wish to employ an escort?”

“I am a practitioner of the sword. I’ve heard that the reason why the escort services can stay in business is because of the martial prowess of the escorts themselves. As a fellow martial artist, I’m here to request a spar,” replied Xiaoman.

The man was stunned by how frank she was. He had met someone who had requested to spar with them before, but this was his first time seeing a girl requesting a spar as a martial artist.

He thought about it for a moment before cupping his fists respectfully as he declined her request. “Young lady, there is no reason to do so; I don’t think this is appropriate. Besides, the escort office is extremely busy. Almost all our escorts have left for their assigned missions.”

Xiaoman was not surprised to hear this. They are a business after all; why would they grant her request without any rewards?

She stuck her arm into her clothes and took out a piece of

silver. “I do not have a master and have only been able to practice on my own. At the very least, please guide me and point out some of my flaws.”

“This...” Seeing how adamant she was, Wang Chengxing finally became suspicious. He wasn’t interested in the silver, but he was trying to guess what her goal was. He was afraid that she was lying, afraid that she might be feigning to be weak to defeat one of them and increase her reputation.

The reason why the Longteng Escort Office had so many branches was because their escorts were amazing martial artists. If rumors were to spread that they were defeated by a young lady, then their reputation would be ruined.

Who is she? Where did she come from? Is she an expert hired by the Guangsheng Escort Office to ruin our reputation? But business is booming so there’s no reason for them to do so.

For a person to act as an escort, one must not only be a talented martial artist, but their thought process must also be clear. Soon, Wang Chengxing came up with a plan to defuse the situation.

He took the piece of silver and said to her, “Since you insist, please follow me.”

They walked past the carriages, past the busy main hall, and into a smaller courtyard at the back.

Faced with his foreign surroundings, Yang Xiaohai felt a little as he walked closer to Chun Xiaoman. “Senior, do you think they will harm us?”

Chun Xiaoman shook her head while observing her surroundings. “This is an escort office, not a bandit camp. They regard their reputation as the most important thing. No one would hire them if their reputation is shit.”

Behind the busy escort office was a courtyard filled with various weapon racks. Youths in black were sparring against each other just like in a dojo. Some of them were training with weapons,

while others were doing physical training.

“All of you, come over here!” shouted Wang Chengxing, prompting everyone to stop their training and approach him.

“Good day, Senior Uncle Wang!” greeted one of them.

“Hello!” said another.

“Have you eaten?” asked another.

Wang Chengxing stared at them for a moment before pointing to a silent youth. “Tian Ci, come here and spar with this young lady. Remember, this is a spar. Don’t go overboard.”

After instructing him, Wang Chengxing told another person to guard the entrance, making sure that no one got in.

This was a win-win situation for him. If they lost, then no one would know and it wouldn’t affect their reputation. Additionally, if someone were to spread the rumor, they could also justify it by saying that it was a spar against a youth, especially one who was not yet an official escort. It was normal for him to lose. And this wasn’t a lie either. Tian Ci was someone who was quite talented and had received extensive training, to the point that he was even stronger than some of the escorts; however, in terms of seniority he was still a junior. He had not yet graduated to become an official escort.

Meanwhile, Chun Xiaoman was not someone picky either. She stared at the youth who was sizing her up. She needed a sparring partner to determine her training progress.

She was just about to unsheath her sword when she realized it might not be suitable in this situation. This was nothing but a spar. It would be bad if either of them got hurt.

Luckily there were plenty of training weapons in the courtyard. She went ahead and picked up a polished bamboo sword.

On the other hand, Tian Ci did not pick a blade. Instead, he picked up a wooden shield. It had quite a bizarre design, with an elongated top and tapered bottom. There were even two sharp

wooden spikes at the front that were akin to a boar's tusks.

After they had picked their weapons, Tian Ci stood in front of Xiaoman in an odd stance as he held the shield.

Meanwhile, Xiaoman frowned and raised her sword. She wanted to try probing her opponent's strength by lunging forward with a stab.

Tok!

The bamboo sword hit the shield directly, producing a muffled sound.

Immediately after, Tian Ci lowered his shield and charged forward, ramming Xiaoman's sword out of position. The moment he saw an opening, he lunged forward and charged, the spikes of the wooden shield approaching Xiaoman's neck.

Xiaoman had never encountered such a situation before. She hurriedly tried to block with her sword.

However, her sword was only halfway there by the time the wooden spikes had touched her neck.

At that moment, Tian Ci stopped and placed the wooden shield down. Then, he cupped his fists as he said, "Thank you for letting me win."

Chapter 140 - Possessed

Everything happened so fast. Not only was it completely out of Chun Xiaoman's expectations, even Wang Chengxing, who was at the side, was surprised.

Hmm? Her lower body is so unstable. She really doesn't have a master to train her. Looks like I had been looking too much into it.

Chun Xiaoman was not disappointed with her failure. Instead, she picked up the bamboo sword and told the silent youth, "Not bad, one more time!"

Both of them exchanged a few blows and Xiaoman lost once again. This time, her sword was flung out of her hand. Even though the weapon that Tian Ci used was quite weird, it was more than enough to defeat Chun Xiaoman.

Xiaoman fought a few more rounds and lost almost every single time. It was only in the final round that she managed to barely win by exchanging blows brutally, injuring herself in the process.

As he saw her breathing heavily, Wang Chengxing immediately stopped their spar. He was afraid she would cry. "Alright, that's enough young lady. The day will be over soon. Let's just stop here for now."

Chun Xiaoman was both dishevelled and upset. "Was the way I used the sword terrible?"

She was extremely disappointed with the results and with herself. She was afraid that all the practice she had put in for the past few days had been nothing but a joke.

Hearing her question, Wang Chengxing smiled awkwardly. "Young lady, your horizontal swings, vertical swings, jabs, lunges, and even the downward swing are all very good. You could say that you have a very good foundation and I can see that you must've

worked hard for it. You should have no problem fighting against your regular brutes.”

That was all he said.

However, Chun Xiaoman understood what he meant to say. She was not even at the level of a normal martial artist.

“How should I improve myself? What is the direction of my growth?” asked Xiaoman.

“Sigh, young lady, it’s not so easy to become a heroine. The stories of the storytellers are all fake. Please return home,” replied Wang Chengxing as he returned her the piece of silver. He was regarding Xiaoman as a young lady from a rich family who was instilled with a sense of justice.

However, Xiaoman didn’t take the piece of silver. “Sir, I do not wish to become a heroine. I just want to protect myself in this chaotic world!”

Maybe it was the determination in Chun Xiaoman’s voice that made Wang Chengxing think she was different. He thought about it and explained. “Young lady, your strength is lacking but your body is quite flexible. It would be better if you learned a sword technique that is more suitable for you. Your lower body is also quite unstable. You need to practice your horse stance and train everyday to reinforce your lower body. One last thing... you should find a sparring partner. It’s almost impossible to train on your own. Naturally, the best thing would be to find a master to train you.”

Xiaoman stared at the youth holding the wooden shield. She was about to ask him what kind of martial art he had learned but she held herself back. Wang Chengxing had already explained so much to her with just a single piece of silver. It was the best outcome. Any more questions and she would be overstepping her boundaries.

Chun Xiaoman knew her limits. She took her sword from Yang Xiaohai before turning around and saying her goodbyes to Wang

Chengxing.

“Senior Xiaoman, you are already very amazing! You’ve only practiced for such a short period of time. A few more years and you will definitely be able to defeat him,” said Yang Xiaohai, trying to console her.

As he said this, he stared distastefully at the youths training in the courtyard. “Plus, they are nowhere near as amazing as Senior Li. None of them would be able to withstand a single blow from him!”

“Shut up and let’s go!” said Chun Xiaoman as she started walking faster. Not only did Yang Xiaohai fail to console her, she felt even more useless now.

“Ah!”

At that moment, an old woman suddenly ran out from somewhere before pouncing toward Yang Xiaohai. Her body was filled with the stench of urine and her hair was an absolute mess. Her expression was extremely gnarly, looking no different from an evil spirit.

Just as Xiaoman was about to unsheath her sword, a strong wind blew past her.

It was Wang Chengxing!

The old lady didn’t even get the chance to get close to Yang Xiaohai before she was grabbed by him.

After he had grabbed her, Wang Chengxing smiled apologetically. “Sorry young lady, please forgive us. This is the wife of my master. She had been possessed for many years.”

“Possessed?” Xiaoman stared at the old woman. The old woman was staring intensely at Yang Xiaohai, her teeth chattering and clicking constantly. She looked extremely scary.

“Since she was possessed, why don’t you find someone to chase the spirit away?” asked Xiaoman.

“Sigh~ We did, but neither the nuns on the mountain nor the

monks could chase it away. The old woman is still possessed to this day. I pity my master.” Wang Chengxing sighed as he took his master’s wife away.

Wait... Possessed? Master’s wife?

Chun Xiaoman’s eyes lit up. She had thought of an idea.

If they managed to solve the issue, maybe they would not only train her, but even help their group on their journey! There might be some other rewards as well!

“Let’s go,” said Chun Xiaoman as hurried back to the inn while looking for a certain someone.

“Senior Zhao Wu, you are really fast with the abacus. To think you managed to calculate it so quickly and accurately,” said Bai Lingmiao.

“You are too kind. My family runs a grain shop after all. I was naturally exposed to all this from a young age,” explained Zhao Wu humbly.

“Can you teach me how to use the abacus as well? I want to be able to manage our ledgers. I feel like we might run out of money before everyone can reach my house,” asked Bai Lingmiao.

At that moment, Xiaoman opened the door—she had come to find Bai Lingmiao.

She pulled Bai Lingmiao into the corridor. After making sure that no one was around she whispered, “Was everything you said to me that night true? Have you really become a Shaman?”

“Of course, what’s wrong?” asked Bai Lingmiao as she stared at her friend.

“Good, then come with me. I need your help.”

By the time Xiaoman brought Bai Lingmiao to the escort office it was already nighttime.

Staring at the large flag, Bai Lingmiao was slightly scared as she held her drum. “Where is this place? What if we come back

tomorrow morning?"

"This cannot wait any longer. Just consider this as doing me a favor." Chun Xiaoman brought her in.

Fifteen minutes later, Chun Xiaoman and Bai Lingmiao were sitting in a room used to welcome important guests as they stared at the serious looking old man in front of them.

"Sir, this is my friend; she might be able to heal your wife," said Xiaoman.

Hearing this, Zhao Qin calmly placed his teacup down before turning to stare at the white girl in front of him. He had tried many methods throughout the years, but his wife remained the same. He had long since given up on her.

After a while, he glanced at Chun Xiaoman and waved his hand. Wang Chengxin walked in and silently placed a piece of silver in front of Chun Xiaoman.

Zhao Qin said, "Young lady, this was the piece of silver you accidentally left here earlier today. We apologize for scaring you. As for the matter of my wife, we will not require your assistance. She is already old and I only wish to live with her for the remainder of our old lives."

Chapter 141 - Shaman

His words shocked both Bai Lingmiao and Chun Xiaoman. His own wife had been tormented for so long, and yet he still doesn't want to treat her?

Bai Lingmiao thought about it for a moment as she held her drum. "Sir, if she really has been possessed, it's better if we try to exorcize whatever is possessing her. It doesn't feel good to be possessed, and her life is in constant danger. I don't need any rewards from this, but let me at least try."

Zhao Qin frowned at her words. He intentionally placed the tea cup on the table. "Chengxing, send them off."

Hearing this, Wang Chengxing stepped forward and blocked the two ladies from his master. He smiled, "It's dangerous at night. Let me personally send you back. Where do both of you live?"

Chun Xiaoman sighed. She knew there was no persuading them at this point. She gently tugged at Bai Lingmiao and approached the door.

"AAAAAH~"

At that moment, a shrill cry pierced through, startling everyone. At the same time, Zhao Qin's face became even more gloomy.

On the other hand, after she heard the pain in the woman's voice, Bai Lingmiao couldn't bear it anymore. She turned around and tried to persuade Zhao Qin one more time. "Master Zhao, at the very least let me try it once. I swear that even if we aren't able to treat her, she will not be harmed. The Immortals aren't heartless."

Chun Xiaoman nodded as she tried to assist Bai Lingmiao. "Since you've tried every other option, why not let us try? What if we manage to exorcize whatever is possessing her?"

She suddenly thought of something causing a sad expression to appear on her face. “Or are you saying that you don’t treat her as a —”

Bam!

Even before Chun Xiaoman could finish her sentence, Zhao Qin’s fist smashed the entire table into smithereens. He was glaring at her angrily, his raging aura suppressing everyone in the room.

“I never lift my hands against girls, but if you continue to be rude, then you will be the first lady I’ve hurt in my life,” warned Zhao Qin.

“Hihi~” At that moment, a smirk sounded from the dark corridor, instantly alerting everyone.

“Who’s there? Formation!” Zhao Qin shouted, causing the two men guarding the door to immediately send a signal.

Within moments, more than ten strong men rushed in with various weapons in their hands. The group consisted of shield bearers at the front and spearmen at the back. It could be seen that their teamwork was impeccable.

Under everyone’s watchful gaze, a pair of blood-red shoes stepped out from the darkness and into the candle light. The owner of the pair of shoes continued to walk in, revealing a red-veiled bride.

As they watched her, everyone had goosebumps. They knew that they were against something abnormal. They were all experienced escorts, and most of them had encountered the supernatural at least once during their missions. This was why they had their own counter measures against them.

“Raise the ink net! Bring in the black dogs!” shouted one of them.

At the same time, the sound of an unswirling thread was heard as various ink-drenched cotton threads sealed came together in the form of a large net and a couple of growling black dogs were

brought in.

“Wait a moment, this is a misunderstanding,” said Bai Lingmiao nervously as she walked past the ink net and guided the Second Deity into the room.

The closer Bai Lingmiao got, the further back the escorts retreated, their weapons held high.

“This is my sister. She has no ill will.” Bai Lingmiao tried her best to explain, but it wasn’t much use.

Just then, a mustached escort whispered to Zhao Qin. “Master... Shaman...”

Hearing his disciple, Zhao Qin’s expression slowly began to change.

Sensing the tense atmosphere, Bai Lingmiao sighed. “Xiaoman, why don’t we go back?”

Bai Lingmiao was worried. Not because she was worried about being injured by the escorts, but because she knew that if Senior Li were to catch wind of this, the situation would take a devastating turn.

Senior Li already had so much trouble of his own and she didn’t want to cause any more trouble for him.

Chun Xiaoman was also someone who could read the room quite well. At this point, her original goals were inconsequential. Thus, she too walked out from the ink net, intending to leave the escort office with Bai Lingmiao.

“Young ladies! Wait!”

At that moment, Zhao Qin called for them. His current demeanor had completely changed as he politely asked them to come back. “I do indeed require your assistance to heal my wife. Name your price, as long as she can be cured.”

“Erm...” Both Bai Lingmiao and Chun Xiaoman were shocked at his sudden change in demeanor.

“If that is the case—” began Bai Lingmiao.

However, just as she was about to make her request, she was interrupted by Xiaoman. “Let us discuss with our comrades.”

Xiaoman felt it would be safer if they called in everybody. The sudden change in Zhao Qin’s demeanor was quite weird.

Half an hour later, their entire group was at the escort office. This time around, they were treated much more politely. The entire escort office was brightly lit up while all of the escorts and their disciples stood in rows as they welcomed them.

Zhao Qin asked them to follow him as they walked through the corridors toward a hut. As they walked, Zhao Qin tried to butter them up. “Young lady, what you said is correct. We should at least try or we would never know if your method could work.”

Hearing this, Bai Lingmiao could only smile nervously as she nodded. This was partly because of the grand welcome, and partly because this would be her first attempt at exorcism. It would be embarrassing if she couldn’t exorcize whatever it was that was possessing Zhao Qin’s wife.

While the escort office looked big, it was surprisingly modest. To the left of the training grounds was a small hut. This was where Zhao Qin had locked up his wife.

Creak~

The door was opened, giving way to sounds of someone sobbing.

At that moment, one of the escorts lit up a lantern, illuminating the inside of the hut. The interior of the hut caused everyone to be shocked.

The hut wasn’t very big while its walls and floor were padded with thick hay. It looked relatively clean, a sign that it was maintained regularly.

At this moment, a disheveled and dirty old woman with white hair was shuffling inside the hut. The chains that bound her leg looked quite rusty as she dragged them across the floor while

sobbing. She completely ignored everyone.

“She has been like this ever since thirty years ago. At this point, I’m completely stumped.” Zhao Qin’s face was filled with bitterness.

“Master Zhao, please relax. I will do what I can,” said Bai Lingmiao nervously as she took a quick glance at the red-veiled Second Deity standing behind her.

After a while, Bai Lingmiao took a deep breath and approached her Second Deity before lifting up her red veil.

The men were all curious to see what was beneath the red veil. However, they were disappointed when they saw that there was another red veil with a mandarin duck embroidered on it.

At that moment, Bai Lingmiao took a deep breath and covered her head with the red veil before passing the drum to the Second Deity.

Meanwhile, Chun Xiaoman used her sword to make some space for Bai Lingmiao. “Everyone, stand back.”

As they sensed the change in the atmosphere, everyone in the escort office held their breath in anticipation.

After a moment, the Second Deity used her black fingernails and rapped the drum as a shrill voice rumbled from under the red veil. “Summon~ The~ Gods~”

Chapter 142 - Master's Wife

As this drawn-out incantation was uttered, the surroundings fell silent.

Next, the Second Deity began to recite the Divine Summons. It was similar to Li Zhi's but different in its delivery, as it was rapid and hurried.

"Dong dong dong! The sun sets on the Western mountain, the skies turn dark, doors all shut tight! Dong dong dong!"

As the drumbeat continued, Bai Lingmiao's body began to tremble. At the same time, the red veil on her head started shaking vigorously like a flowing waterfall. Soon, her body began to contort, and the outline of what seemed to be a beast's skull caused the red veil covering her face to be propped up.

"Today, this disciple calls to Immortals high, Misfortune lurks beneath this roof, can't deny. Southern doctors tried, yet no cure could they bring; monks and nuns from the north, their chants didn't sing. Many attempts, but no answer we found; can only turn to the old Immortal, wise and renowned. Seeking yin-yang's dance in eight characters' art, through the seven apertures, a journey to start; twelve meridians, a map to explore, five organs, six viscera, seek to implore. Oh, old Immortal, bring your guiding light, in wisdom and grace, make our future right..."

Under the rhythm of the drumbeat, Bai Lingmiao started to walk inside the house.

As the woman who had her eyes concealed by her white hair sensed someone approaching, she revealed a fearful expression. However, the very next moment, that fear turned into an intense

hatred.

“Give my son back to me!!” She shouted as she opened her arms and lunged forward. But with her body restrained by chains, she made no progress as she remained frozen in place, desperately trying to break the restraints.

At that moment, a slender snout reached out from beneath Bai Lingmiao’s red veil and sniffed at the woman. At the same time, a constant, low beast-like growling sound could be heard coming from underneath the veil.

“My child~!!” The woman's expression shifted from one filled with hatred to pleading, "My child, it's Mother's fault, it's Mother's fault!!”

At that moment, the snout was rapidly retracted beneath the red veil as Bai Lingmiao once again started trembling. Then, a tail extended from beneath the hem of her clothes.

Meanwhile, the Second Deity once again began to chant, “Soul of a human, back to its frame, soul of a horse, not playing the same game. A person true to soul, feasts with delight, a horse true to soul, dances in the light. Eight Immortals' table, on earth it's laid down, Starry flag soaring, up to the crown. Five-colored flags, and banners so bright, In red, white, blue, and green, a splendid sight!”

Following the beat of the drum, Bai Lingmiao started to circle around the woman in a methodical fashion, all the while placing paper flags made with yellow paper into the hay on the ground.

Suddenly, the woman stopped moving and collapsed to the ground, her body trembling incessantly as her face contorted in pain.

As Zhao Qin watched this scene from the outside, he felt pained, but he did not dare interrupt in such a situation.

At that moment, the drumbeat quickened once again, and seven lit purple incense sticks appeared in Bai Lingmiao’s hands. The incense sticks burned, releasing green smoke which went

directly into the woman's mouth.

Hiss~

There were many sounds of people inhaling a breath of cold air. The escorts were well versed in martial arts, and they would not even bat an eye at your everyday injuries. However, the scene that was occurring in the hut felt quite unbearable to them.

Bleargh~

The woman wanted to vomit, but her face was covered by a red handkerchief.

Just as everyone was watching what Bai Lingmiao planned to do, a low voice rang out from the distance. "Xiaoman! Bai Lingimao!"

It was Li Huowang.

As this voice rang out, the drumbeat suddenly became a little unstable, and the chanting changed once again. "I'll send you three beats as we part ways, to an ancient cave, where Immortals find their stays! From ridge to ridge, and mountain to mountain high, apprentices, beware, don't let troubles nigh! I will shoo you away if you overstay! Dong dong dong!"

After the three drum beats, Bai Lingmiao's strange appearance instantly returned to normal.

As she returned to normal, Bai Lingmiao also heard Li Huowang's voice. She quickly removed the red veil on her head and stepped out of the house. Then, she snatched the drum in the Second Deity's hands, and once again placed the red veil on her head. After finishing all this, she went over to welcome Li Huowang, who was leading over a large group of people.

"Senior Li, you've come down from the mountain? Have you completed your errands?" asked Bai Lingmiao as she smiled. At the same time, she noticed that Senior Li's back carried two swords now.

"Yes, it's almost done. I heard that you came here to exorcize

some evil spirits? How is it? Are you done?” asked Li Huowang as he pulled Bai Lingmiao toward him, and then looked toward the crowd.

“Hmm... Not yet. I thought that she had bumped into something, but there was nothing. I tried several methods, but I still can’t figure out what has happened to her,” said Bai Lingmiao.

When they returned to the house, they saw Zhao Qin was carefully supporting his wife. He softly called out to her a few times, but there was no response, causing him to look toward Bai Lingmiao anxiously, “Miss, what happened to my wife?!”

His tone carried a hint of anger. It was only natural, since he had witnessed his wife being tormented like that without any change in her condition.

At that moment, Li Huowang glanced at the dazed state of the woman, and a trace of fatigue appeared on his face. He turned to Bai Lingmiao, “Since you can’t treat her, then let’s go. We don’t need those fifty coins anyway.”

“Hold it!” Zhao Qin shouted. Along with his shout, all the escorts in the entire escort office surrounded them with unkind looks on their faces.

Seeing this, Li Huowang coldly glanced around him before placing a hand on the hilt of the sword on his back.

Clang!

As the sword was drawn out just an inch, everyone started to feel their blood boil, almost as though they were embroiled in the middle of a raging battlefield.

This abnormal change caused Wang Chengxing’s face to turn pale; he knew that they were in a massive amount of trouble now. He was usually out and about, and had heard that there were some lords with mysterious and unpredictable supernatural abilities out there. It was difficult to distinguish whether they were good or evil. One had to be fully alert when dealing with them. Unfortunately for

them, it seemed like they had encountered one of them this time.

“Senior Li! Don’t do this! It’s us who are in the wrong...” Bai Lingmiao hurriedly tugged at Li Huowang’s sleeve.

Hearing this, Li Huowang sheathed his sword as he turned around, ready to leave.

“Child... Mother has let you down...”

It was this voice that caused Li Huowang to stop in his tracks and look back at the woman.

When he saw her current state, he felt a sense of familiarity. Seeing the mangled state of her hand and the iron chains, he inexplicably felt furious.

At that moment, the woman’s expression changed once again as she tightly grabbed Zhao Qin’s neck. “Return my son! Return my son to me!”

Seeing this, Li Huowang rushed over with Yang Xiaohai in tow.

“I will return your son to you!” shouted Li Huowang as he pushed Zhao Qin aside before stuffing the dazed Yang Xiaohai into her embrace.

As she hugged Yang Xiaohai, the old woman finally became silent. She leaned her face over as she stroked her hands through Yang Xiaohai’s hair.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang surveyed the room, and said with a voice filled with dissatisfaction, “Why are there no windows over here? Don’t you think she will feel afraid, being all alone in the dark without any light?”

Zhao Qin could not react in time; everything was happening too quickly. “My wife is already like that. Will she really be afraid of the dark?”

Li Huowang pulled out the other longsword, easily cutting through the chains binding her hands. “Even if she has gone crazy, it doesn’t mean that she can’t feel anything! She can still feel afraid, and also feel pain! Without anyone here to accompany her, she can

also feel lonely! Do you think she wanted to become like this? No!
But she really cannot do anything about it!”

Chapter 143 - Treatment

As he heard Li Huowang's words, Zhao Qin was clearly quite confused. He could not understand what Li Huowang was saying.

Just as he clenched his fists tightly and was about to say something, an old voice rang out, making him forget everything.

"Husband, look. Our son is back."

Shocked, Zhao Qin turned back to look at his wife. He was surprised to find that his wife's eyes were filled with clarity for the first time since being possessed in the past thirty years.

"You... recognize me?" Zhao Qin dashed beside her, grabbing her hands excitedly.

"Husband, look at how obedient our son is. He already knows how to be filial despite his young age. He knows that I like to eat freshly fried youtiaos, and so he went out to buy some in the morning," said the old woman as she gnawed on the hem of Yang Xiaohai's clothes.

At that moment, to the astonishment of all the members of the Longteng Escort Office, their usually stern leader burst into tears.

Zhao Qin walked over and hugged his wife, crying uncontrollably, "Feng Xia... I've let you down!"

Seeing this, Wang Chengxing, who had been following his master since childhood, felt saddened. Although his master had a strict personality, he knew that it was just a facade.

Bai Lingmiao approached Li Huowang and quietly tugged at his sleeves, "Senior Li, how did you do that? You're amazing!"

There was a complex look in Li Huowang's eyes as he watched the hugging couple. "Prolonged illness makes one a good doctor. In the past, I've seen similar cases at the hospital. Actually, I'm better at diagnosing mental illnesses than physical symptoms."

“So what was she possessed by?” asked Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang sighed. “She wasn’t possessed. She was just deeply traumatized in the past, and couldn’t recover. Her current state is the result of being locked up for thirty years.”

Just as Li Huowang was about to bring Bai Lingmiao and leave this dimly-lit house, he was stopped by someone.

It was Zhao Qin, who still had tears in his eyes. He placed his palms together emotionally and bowed down to Li Huowang.

“Thank you for your help, Benefactor!”

“Don’t thank me just yet; this matter isn’t over. Bring her out, get her cleaned up and give her a fresh set of clothes,” instructed Li Huowang.

Currently, to Zhao Qin, Li Huowang’s words were akin to an Imperial Decree. He immediately obeyed the instructions given to him.

After changing her clothes, the old woman was sent to a bright and warm room. She was still holding Yang Xiaohai in her arms.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang continued to instruct Zhao Qin. “Let her continue to hug him if she likes to do so. Spend some money and hire a few children to take turns with her. She is trying to find a replacement to compensate for the losses she suffered in the past. Once her emotional state stabilizes after she has finished venting, you can replace the substitute with a dummy. Also, take her out in the sun more often. Sunlight can improve a person’s mood, and is extremely beneficial for their recovery. And, if there’s truly no one who can accompany her, then let her have two dogs by her side; pets can also have the effect of stabilizing a person’s mental state. Thirty years is far too long a period. In such conditions, earlier intervention would have had a much better effect. For now, prioritize stabilizing her condition.”

Li Huowang paused, as he tried to recall what Doctor Li used to tell the families of the other patients. After a moment, he continued

to relay the details to Zhao Qin, “I only remember so much. Give these methods a try. It's better than keeping her locked up within a dark room. Remember not to lock her up anymore, and absolutely do not use chains to restrain her. She's already in such a condition, so chaining her up will only make things worse.”

His wife could still recognise him after thirty years—this was something that Zhao Qin couldn't even imagine. In his eyes, Li Huowang was like a legendary doctor come to life!

“That's it for now. If there's nothing else, then we'll take our leave first; we have a long journey ahead of us tomorrow,” said Li Huowang, ready to leave.

However, he was stopped by Zhao Qin's open arms. Zhao Qin's voice trembled as he instructed his disciples, “Yuan Hu, arrange a feast! A huge feast!”

Zhao Qin spared nothing to express his sincerity. The best restaurant in this town was reserved entirely by the Longteng Escort Office, all to entertain Li Huowang and his group.

The restaurant served a top-notch banquet that far surpassed anything that could be found in an average inn's dining hall. There were various delicacies, including roasted meats, braised fish, sophora flower soup, etc...

The central dish on the table was a roasted suckling pig—its tender, succulent meat roasted to crisp golden perfection. Its rich aroma filled the air, and the candlelight danced on its glistening surface, creating an enticing fragrance that wafted through the entire room.

Not just humans, even Bun couldn't resist the temptation of the food as it sat eagerly by Li Huowang's feet, licking its lips in anticipation of leftover bones.

Li Huowang was seated at the head of the table, but he didn't pay much attention to these details. He just listened as Chun Xiaoman explained the story behind the current situation.

“Next time you encounter such a situation, consult with me first. Don't act recklessly on your own, and don't involve Bai Lingmiao either,” said Li Huowang. Handling such matters required careful management. If mishandled, they could lead to troublesome consequences.

Hearing this, Chun Xiaoman paused as if trying to find an excuse, but finally nodded, “Yes, Senior Li.”

As he saw Zhao Qin ascend the wooden stairs of the restaurant, Li Huowang straightened his posture.

At present, Zhao Qin was clothed in formal attire and was accompanied by his disciples behind him.

With fervent eyes, Zhao Qin didn't say anything, simply pouring out three cups of wine for Li Huowang.

“Leader Zhao, you're too courteous. I just couldn't stand what was happening, and hence reached out to help,” said Li Huowang as he picked up a piece of chicken with his chopsticks. He only placed it in his mouth after he saw all the escorts accompanying Zhao Qin start to pick up their chopsticks. Then, he signaled the others with a nod.

The rest, who had been waiting impatiently, immediately picked up their chopsticks. They made use of the opportunity when the escorts were still startled by their sudden movements, causing the dishes on the table to be lessened noticeably in just a short while.

Li Huowang picked up a chicken drumstick, took a bite, and then threw it beneath the table.

“Benefactor, I cannot express how thankful I am. Today, you have saved my wife which is akin to saving me! Tomorrow, there will be generous gifts sent to your residence, and I hope you won't refuse them!” said Zhao Qin whose nose had turned red from all the wine he had drunk. He was much more talkative now.

“Benefactor, if you face any difficulties in the future, then the

Longteng Escort Office will definitely lend a hand with all our might!” After announcing that, Zhao Qin raised his cup and drank three more cups in quick succession.

Just as Zhao Qin was about to pour a fourth cup of wine, Li Huowang stopped him with his chopsticks. “Leader Zhao, it’s best not to drink too much wine. Also, I do in fact have something that I need your help with. Since all of you are in the escort business, and your escorts are all quite skilled, do you have any suitable sword techniques?”

This request was not just for Chun Xiaoman, but also for himself. He had just acquired a great sword from the Abbess. However, without any proper sword techniques, even if he had a great sword, its uses would be limited to poking bonfires and dancing around with it.

Since Zhao Qin had offered his help first, Li Huowang decided to make his request known.

Chapter 144 - The Green Forest

“Sword techniques? Yes, of course we do!” Zhao Qin replied decisively. “Though the Escort Office doesn’t use swords as much, since Benefactor has requested, we would have found a way to bring you some sword techniques even if we didn’t have any!”

Hearing this, Li Huowang raised his cup and gave Zhao Qin a toast. “Then, thank you, Leader Zhao.”

As the wine flowed, the atmosphere of the banquet gradually grew warmer. As the cups were refilled and the dishes were replaced, the atmosphere grew quite lively.

However, Li Huowang himself did not enjoy such settings. When he saw that the others were almost done, he planned to get up and leave.

At that moment, he saw Puppy carrying a cup of hot tea while walking toward him.

Puppy glanced at Zhao Qin behind him, then leaned toward Li Huowang and whispered, “Senior Li, didn’t Junior Bai previously say that money was only flowing out but not in? Shouldn’t we try to find a way to make money?”

“Ah, what are you trying to say?” asked Li Huowang, irritated. Bai Lingmiao had indeed complained about this issue on multiple occasions, to the point that his ears had almost fallen off.

Puppy’s brows flew up. “Look, this is a golden opportunity! We can get them to teach us how to be escorts! Since we’re going toward the Liang Kingdom anyway, we can receive escort missions on the way. It’s a win-win! And look, this bunch is capable of treating us to such expensive food. Providing escort service must

bring in quite a bit of money!”

Li Huowang was rather surprised by Puppy’s quick thinking, especially when it came to handling money. It was indeed a feasible plan.

They could use the money they made by providing escort service to cover their expenses, and send the excess to Abbess Jingxin.

Though Abbess Jingxin had only brought up those 30,000 pieces of gold casually, it would be rather inexcusable if he did not send anything to repay such a huge gift.

He didn’t want to owe anything to anyone, much less the only person who had helped him ever since he arrived here.

When Li Huowang raised this issue with Zhao Qin, the latter readily agreed. “Sure! Since Brother Li wishes to join us, then I’ll be your guarantor! As long as you take my recommendation letter, you’ll be able to take missions from any escort office!”

However, after making this promise, he started to offer some advice, “But, providing escort service is not so easy. The escorts from our office have a mantra that they call ‘the three points for safety’. These so-called ‘three points for safety’ are to have a friendly demeanor, be accommodating in your dealings, and to keep your drinking at the table moderate. Outsiders often believe that escorts rely solely on their strong martial arts. However, in reality that only covers half of it. The other, more important half relies on networking and connections, which can be very troublesome.”

Zhao Qin’s face was flushed as he once again raised his cup and drained it before waving his hand. “Brother Li, if you are in need of money, just say the word. I’ll give you however much you need!”

His words were spoken with conviction, but Li Huowang knew he couldn’t take them at face value.

Any item had a value attached to it. While Li Huowang had helped his wife, he hadn’t healed her completely; she was just

placed on the path to recovery.

He could accept receiving some sword techniques and being introduced into the escort trade, but to cause the other party to become destitute was definitely going way too far.

“Leader Zhao, thank you for the offer. However, I feel it’s better for me to be self-reliant.”

After going back and forth for a while, Zhao Qin sighed. “Alright, since Brother Li is so stubborn. Then, come to the escort office tomorrow. I’ll teach you the necessary code words myself.”

“Code word? What do you mean ‘code word?’” asked Li Huowang.

“Code words refers to the jargon used in the martial world. When you encounter bandits, you must be able to speak their language,” explained Zhao Qin.

“Ah, I see,” Li Huowang suddenly seemed to think of something, “Then, what does ‘shoulders together, throw me a vine’ mean?”

This was the phrase that those water bandits had said to him on the lake. Thinking back, this could have been their attempt at exchanging code words.

“‘Shoulders together’ means ‘brother’, and ‘throw me a vine’ means to report your name.” Zhao Qin explained.

“Then what if we’re unable to answer?” asked Li Huowang.

“If you are unable to answer the code word, then that means you’re an outsider. In such a situation, most that raise the black flag will directly attack,” replied Zhao Qin.

“Ah, I see...” Li Huowang’s chopsticks were raised as he seemed to think about something.

At that moment, Puppy interjected from beside him. “Escort Head, it shouldn’t really matter whether the code words are exchanged or not, right? After all, those insignificant bandits cannot cause any huge waves. Wouldn’t it be fine to just slaughter them

all?”

“Insignificant bandits?” Zhao Qin chuckled. “Do you really think that all bandit groups are just a random group of evil people that come together to plunder? The waters run deep, my friend.”

This sentence piqued Li Huowang’s interest. “Leader Zhao, please elaborate.”

Ever since they had come out of Zephyr Temple, they had already encountered two bandit groups in these short few months. This meant that there could be many more encounters in future, and it was definitely beneficial to get a better understanding of this.

An escort office that undertook missions often would also understand this quite well.

“I admit that some of the wandering bandits lack strength. However, they are not the only ones in this huge green forest; among those who raise the black flag, there are many players, both big and small. Not talking about the various bandits on Dongyi Mountain, there’s the Southern Overlord of the Western Wilderness. Basically, any of them that can make a name for themselves are all capable powers. With them, ruling the mountain is not just a saying. They may have thousands of followers under them,” Zhao Qin took a gulp of wine and continued, “There is also a critical saying, which tells one to strategically keep one’s adversaries without taking any action against them. Behind the bandits may well be some official connections. Don’t be fooled by their current status as bandits. If, by any chance, one day they receive an Imperial Edict, they would quickly transition from outlaws to law-abiding citizens. Can you understand the relationships at play in all this? If you don’t follow their protocols such as exchanging code words, can you still do escort missions? Everything in this world has its rules, and this vast green forest is the same.”

Through Zhao Qin’s explanation, Li Huowang slowly began to understand a corner of this mysterious world.

Li Huowang thought back to the scene of the water bandit's ritual. He paused for a moment, then asked, "Among these people, are there any who are skilled practitioners of dark or mystical arts?"

As he was now, he was no longer afraid of ordinary bandits. However, nothing in this world was so simple.

Even that small group of water bandits in the reed river were somehow in possession of the Profound Records and were capable of wreaking havoc. The larger groups of mountain bandits were likely to have even stronger capabilities

When he asked this question, the atmosphere of the dining table suddenly cooled down.

As he saw the nervous looks on the faces of these escorts, Li Huowang already knew the answer to his question.

Zhao Qin hesitated for a moment, then sighed. "Basically, my point still stands. Everything needs to follow rules. Who knows who is really behind these mountain or water bandits. Though the Imperial Guards have a Surveillance Bureau, the current Emperor can't even secure his own throne, let alone manage these matters. Also, there are certain things that us ordinary folks should stay out of."

Chapter 145 - Drunk

Under the influence of alcohol, Zhao Qin shared quite a lot of things with Li Huowang; it was almost as though he was trying to dissuade Li Huowang from becoming an escort.

However, Li Huowang's attention was drawn to a name that Zhao Qin mentioned. "Leader Zhao, what was that Surveillance Bureau that you mentioned?"

Though Li Huowang had been here for a couple of months, it was still the first time he heard of some terms. It was a good opportunity for him to learn more.

"The Surveillance Bureau is supposedly a group of highly-skilled individuals appointed by the Emperor. Whenever there are sinister affairs that the local enforcement cannot manage on their own, they are the ones that are called upon to handle it," explained Zhao Qin.

Li Huowang was not surprised by this. Since the Si Qi dynasty was so stable, there had to be some people who could manage these sorts of strange powers.

However, he did not know if these people were specially trained by the palace, or recruited from outside.

When Zhao Qin saw that Li Huowang did not reply, he continued, "But even then, they are not always reliable. One such example was four years ago; there was a town which was completely slaughtered mysteriously."

"Tsk, tens of thousands of people, gone in just a single night," Zhao Qin lamented, not noticing that the fingers that Li Huowang was using to hold the cup had gone pale.

Wang Chengxing chimed in, "I heard about that incident too. It was rather tragic; some victims weren't even left with complete

bodies. How could they do such a thing? Aren't they also birthed by their parents? They're worse than animals."

At this point, Li Huowang saw Jiang Yingzi approach him with a fierce expression. "Do you see how others talk about you?! What right do you have to live?! Why don't you go and die?!"

Li Huowang's chest heaved up and down.

Others may not have noticed this change, but Bai Lingmiao was able to sense that something was amiss. She quietly changed seats with Xiaoman and cupped Li Huowang's trembling hands, "Senior Li, are you alright?"

Li Huowang took a deep breath and smiled at Zhao Qin, "Leader Zhao, let's not discuss state affairs. Such matters are not something that us ordinary folk should be concerned with."

"That's right! Let the important people worry about them. Let's drink! Here's another toast to Brother Li!" said Zhao Qin.

"Cheers!" said Li Huowang as he picked up the pot of wine and poured it directly into his mouth. However, he could not handle alcohol, even more so because this was strong liquor.

That night, Li Huowang didn't even know when he became drunk. That dazed feeling was not bad; there was no need for him to think or worry about anything.

"Li Huowang... Li Huowang!"

He woke up abruptly to a voice. When he opened his eyes, he was staring right at Jiang Yingzi's face that was filled with hatred.

Any normal person would be startled if they woke up to see a blood-stained girl with severed limbs.

However, Li Huowang was already used to it.

After a moment, he looked at Dan Yangzi who was floating on the ceiling, and then propped himself up on the bed.

He was wearing simple clothes when he got up, but immediately sat back down while holding his head in agony.

I really can't handle alcohol...

It was the first time Li Huowang had felt the pain of a hangover; he had a feeling that the extreme pain could perhaps be due to his heightened senses.

At that moment, the door creaked open as Bai Lingmiao carried a basin and walked in. When she saw Li Huowang sitting on the bed while holding his head with an agonized expression, she quickly approached him before placing the basin on the table.

The water splashed around as she wringed the wet handkerchief. Then, she went behind him and used one hand to support Li Huowang's head, while lightly wiping his face.

When she was cleaning his neck, Li Huowang looked up at her face which was barely inches from his own. "Where are we?"

"We are still in the escort office. Leader Zhao told me to tell you that when you wake up, you shouldn't hurry to leave. He has already sent people to look for the sword techniques that you requested," replied Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang glanced at the two swords placed beside his red Daoist robes, and nodded.

Seeing this, Bai Lingmiao seemed to understand what Li Huowang wanted. She walked across and placed that longsword into Li Huowang's hands.

This was the first time he was carefully examining this sword after he had obtained it.

The sword was three feet and two inches long, and about half a finger in width. It was in predominantly darker colors, and a dark-purple silk tassel that was slightly longer than an inch hung on the black hilt. The hilt had a carving of a ferocious beast with bared fangs. When he touched it, it felt as though his fingers were being cut by something sharp.

At first glance, this sword seemed very ordinary. There was nothing that made it seem like a powerful weapon.

Li Huowang thought about it for a moment, but finally decided

not to draw the sword. Not because of the noise it would make, but because the feeling he got from it was different.

For some reason, this thing gave him an unsettling feeling, just like the Profound Records.

Abdess said that this sword will not be able to threaten me. Even so, I feel that it's better to not unsheathe it if not necessary.

"Senior Li, can you walk? If not, I'll bring your breakfast here," asked Bai Lingmiao.

"No need, I just needed some rest. Without Dan Yangzi rushing us from behind, we can take our time," said Li Huowang.

Just as he finished speaking, a creepy sound of three people laughing rang out from the ceiling.

Li Huowang looked up to see his Master's three heads staring at him together, their gazes full of ridicule.

"What're you laughing at?!" shouted Li Huowang.

"Senior... Li?" Bai Lingmiao glanced at the empty ceiling, then back toward Li Huowang, feeling uneasy.

"Nothing, let's go eat," said Li Huowang as he placed his right hand on her shoulder while stumbling toward the exit.

When they stepped outside, the sun was already shining brightly.

At this moment, the entire escort office, both in the front and the backyard, was quite lively.

From the looks of it, Zhao Qin had given everyone some instructions; anyone that saw Li Huowang treated him very respectfully.

Li Huowang looked past the wooden pillars on his right, toward the bustling martial arts training ground. He could see Puppy, Gao Zhijian, Chun Xiaoman, Sun Baolu and the others. They seemed to be gesticulating with some escorts.

"What are they doing?" Li Huowang was puzzled.

"Earlier, Puppy requested them to give him some pointers. In

the end, the rest came over to join the party, and it became like this,” replied Bai Lingmiao.

“Ah, he really knows how to get the small advantages. Right, go to the inn and let Troupe Leader Lu know about where we are. He may think that we have left him behind if he doesn’t see any of us,” instructed Li Huowang.

“Okay, got it.”

At that moment, Li Huowang glanced toward Dan Yangzi, and then asked, “Is there any trouble with the Immortal families?”

Bai Lingmiao blinked. “No. Why do you ask, Senior Li?”

“That’s good. Let me know if there’s anything. Remember, you’re not Li Zhi. If anything happens, I’ll think of a solution,” said Li Huowang.

“Okay.”

Once the surroundings fell silent, the two of them enjoyed this rare moment of tranquility while walking slowly toward the kitchen.

Given their travels, it was hard to have moments like this.

As they walked, Bai Lingmiao slightly leaned on Li Huowang, a sweet feeling welling up in her heart.

“If there’s anything, don’t hide it from me. Even if it’s very difficult, we can think of a solution together. Moreover, right now... you’re all I have,” said Li Huowang.

“Mm...”

Translator's Thoughts

Bai Lingmiao as a Shaman! Though she technically is something else in this form, but close enough. **Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin.**



Chapter 146 - Practice

“Eat... eat... eat...”

As he watched Gao Zhijian stutter and struggle to speak, Li Huowang sighed in frustration. Then, he reached out to take the two books from the big chap’s hands. “Alright, that’s enough. You can leave.”

After the disheartened Gao Zhijian went out, Li Huowang turned his attention back to the two books.

One of them was a regular paper book, while the other was encased in a semi-transparent wax cover. The wax-covered book was the Fiery Scripture that Jiang Yingzi had given him, along with her translations.

The Fiery Scripture was a good object. Despite the excruciating pain it caused during the healing process, it would be valuable in saving lives if any of them suffered from any external injuries in future.

It would be quite a waste if he did not learn how to make use of such a good item. However, Li Huowang had become almost completely illiterate. He could not even read the written translations, let alone the strange words written in the Fiery Scripture.

Things can’t go on like this. I can’t remain illiterate my entire life. I must re-learn how to read.

Li Huowang helplessly stuffed the Fiery Scripture back into his pocket.

While it was right to think that way, it would take several years to systematically learn a language from scratch. Even if he hired someone else to help him translate, it would still take several months, and he didn’t have the luxury of time.

It was even more tiring when he had to ask Simpleton to teach him, since he was the only person who was literate in their group. However, he could stutter on two sentences for over ten minutes.

Even so, Li Huowang was unyielding; he re-opened the translated text, “Wood.. mouth... person...”

Currently, he could recognise only the most simple characters on the page.

“Haha, this is really returning all we have learnt to the teacher,” Li Huowang mocked himself. He had assumed that after Dan Yangzi’s death, the knowledge that he had lost would return to him. But from the looks of it, that was clearly not the case.

Just then, someone knocked on the wooden door. “Brother Li, are you there? I’ve found the sword manual you had wanted.”

Li Huowang perked up, and stood up to open the door. The matter about the Fiery Scripture had to be pushed back. He had waited here for so long, just for all these sword techniques.

Soon, Zhao Qin had passed the sword manual to Li Huowang.

There were four large characters written on it, but Li Huowang could not understand them.

“I noticed that Brother Li uses a three-foot long sword, and so I picked this manual that matches it. It is a sword technique from the Duan Clan, so it’s suitable for you. This sword technique was created by the genius, Duan Si. It’s different from the other techniques as it focuses on straightforward strikes rather than finesse,” explained Zhao Qin.

“Duan Clan sword technique?” Li Huowang mumbled to himself, then flipped open the manual. He saw that most of it was illustrations, with only sporadic written annotations. When he saw this, he breathed a sigh of relief.

“No worries, you can have your Leader Zhao instruct you about this. Just memorize the key points and you should be fine,” said Zhao Qin.

Li Huowang turned toward Zhao Qin. “Leader Zhao, I’ve not learnt to use a sword before this. Could you give me some pointers on how to start?”

“Oh? You’ve never used a sword? Not even the basics?” Zhao Qin was puzzled as he looked at the two swords on Li Huowang’s back. But as an experienced escort master, he was quickly able to figure it out.

He placed his hand on Li Huowang’s shoulder and gestured outside, “It’s alright. Sword techniques can be picked up by anyone. I may be no genius, but I will be able to teach Brother Li for a few days.”

As they spoke, they walked toward the martial arts training grounds where Li Huowang saw Xiaoman practicing with Puppy and the others.

At that moment, he shouted toward Xiaoman, “Xiaoman, come here!”

When he saw this, Zhao Qin nodded in approval. “Good choice, Brother Li. It’s best to have a partner to practice with. Otherwise, there won’t be anyone for you to spar against in future.”

Meanwhile, Xiaoman was rather excited as she gripped her own sword. She seemed to understand the reason behind why Li Huowang was calling her over.

In the following days, Li Huowang began his life of training to be a swordsman.

With the guidance of an experienced person like Leader Zhao who taught patiently, the two students learnt eagerly. Both Li Huowang and Chun Xiaoman progressed quite fast.

Clang!

Sparks flew into the air as both Li Huowang and Chun Xiaoman were knocked back a few steps.

Chun Xiaoman gripped her sword tightly, then stepped forward with her right foot before charging ahead.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang twisted his body to dodge her attack. When he saw her wooden sword miss its target, he quickly counter-attacked, launching a series of blows.

Li Huowang's quick movements disrupted Chun Xiaoman's rhythm, causing her to make mistakes. Not long after, her sword was knocked out of her hands, and her defeat was greeted by cheers all around.

Impressed, Zhao Qin approached Li Huowang, "Brother Li, you have remarkable aptitude. In just a short fifteen days, you've already trained to this level. You're a martial arts genius!"

This was not just flattery. As the leader of an escort office, he had seen far too many seedlings before; however, there were few that were like Li Huowang.

"You're too kind, I still have a long way to go," Li Huowang replied modestly. Only he understood why his progress was so much faster than Chun Xiaoman.

Ba-Hui's attention had not just enhanced his sense of pain, but also his other senses. These enhanced senses allowed Li Huowang to learn quite efficiently. While he did not know if they would impact him negatively in the future, they were at least beneficial for him currently.

At that moment, he passed the bamboo sword in his hand to Sun Baolu, then turned back to Zhao Qin. "Leader Zhao, it has been troublesome for you these few days. We've spent too much time here and cannot dawdle further. We ought to set off. I'll visit if I'm back."

The master may be able to help them get a foot into the door, but in the end cultivation was dependent on the individual.

Since he was already on the path of swordsmanship, there was no need for Li Huowang to continue wasting his time here. There wasn't much that Zhao Qin could teach him, since he did not use a sword.

“Alright! Brother Li, please follow me. I want to give you something,” said Zhao Qin.

In Zhao Qin’s office, a bunch of paper and ink were arranged neatly.

He picked up the brush and started to write. Then, he blew dried the letter and placed it within an envelope.

“This is my letter of guarantee. In the escort trade, I do have some influence. Brother Li can go to any escort office and use this letter to receive escort missions,” said Zhao Qin.

Li Huowang accepted the letter and clasped his hands toward Zhao Qin. “Thank you for your guidance these past few days.”

After much consideration, Li Huowang finally felt that they could take on some escort missions.

Puppy was right; since they had to travel, they might as well make a living out of it; it would be killing two birds with one stone.

“Brother Li is too kind. This is nothing. You are my benefactor who finally allowed my wife to recognize me! I won’t ask where you’re going or what you’re doing. If you ever come back to this town, then be sure to come and visit!”

Translator's Thoughts

Bai Lingmiao's second deity looks like! Or at least how she looks like when she summons the Immortals on her body. **Credits to** 格子的乱七八糟 **on douyin.**



Chapter 147 - Hou Shu

“Benefactor Li, let’s meet again!”

“Safe travels!”

“Take care of yourselves!”

The entire escort office came out to send off Li Huowang and the rest. With this, they had officially left the Longteng Escort Office.

As he saw them traveling further and further away, Wang Chengxing stopped smiling and glanced at his Master. “Master, did you see the sword on that person’s back? It was not something you can see everyday. I could feel dense killing intent from it.”

Zhao Qin frowned and nodded. “Of course I did. I also know whose personal sword it was. It belonged to General Zixiong.”

“What? General Zixiong’s personal sword? Then why did you not do anything for the past half a month?” asked Wang Chengxing.

“And what would you have liked me to do? Steal it? Ask him where he got it? Or report him?”

Wang Chengxing remained silent as Zhao Qin continued to chastise him. “You think I am blind? Do you think I couldn’t tell that there was something wrong with him? The red bamboo slips on his waist, the various torture tools, and that gourd. Heck, even the comrades around him were all malformed in one way or another. This matter is not something I should interfere in. He improved Fengxia’s condition and in return I acknowledged his request to get him a sword training manual. I even gave him a letter of recommendation from me. At the very least, everyone earned something. This was the best case scenario. While we must always make sure to see through everyone’s intention, we mustn’t say it out loud all the time.”

“I understand, Master. It’s my fault for thinking too rashly,” said Wang Chengxing.

Meanwhile, back in the carriage. The horses were already restless from not traveling for half a month. The moment they were out of the city gates, the horses ran joyfully.

“Ho... Hold on!” Zhao Wu handled the reins and calmed the horses down, maintaining a constant speed.

Then, he turned around and asked, “Senior Li, where should we go now?”

“To the border. We’ve done everything we needed to in the kingdom of Si Qi, and so it’s time to leave. The situation here is getting more and more chaotic, so it’s best if we reach the Liang Kingdom soon,” replied Li Huowang.

As he spoke up to this point, Li Huowang felt uneasy; he turned to Bai Lingmiao. “Since even the kingdom of Si Qi is about to get involved in the war, would the Liang Kingdom also be affected? Your house—”

However, even before Bai Lingmiao could answer him, Lu Zhuangyuan overheard his words and approached him. “Hai! Young Daoist, you are thinking too much. The Liang Kingdom is at least four to five times larger than the kingdom of Si Qi. Also, the emperor of the Liang Kingdom is a powerful individual. If there really is a war, then it would be them waging it against another kingdom and not the other way around.”

With this, Li Huowang now knew that the Liang Kingdom was a major kingdom compared to the others. It was clear that Lu Zhuangyuan had done his homework beforehand.

Just then, Li Huowang realized something was different about Lu Zhuangyuan. “Troupe leader Lu, did something good happen to you?”

Compared to aged and wrinkled appearance from before, he looked like he had become a few years younger and there was a

constant smile hanging on his mouth.

“Hehe, oh it’s nothing, hehehe.” Lu Zhuangyuan wanted to endure but the smile on his face sold him out.

Then, he climbed up his horse carriage and grabbed a sack. “Here, have some eggs.”

Two red eggs were passed into Li Huowang’s hands. It was not only Li Huowang who got them, everyone else did as well.

Lu Zhuangyuan was not someone who would be generous enough to give everyone eggs for no reason. After a moment, Zhao Wu realized the meaning behind the red eggs.

“Brother Juren! Is your sister-in-law pregnant? Congratulations! May she give birth to a healthy son,” congratulated Zhao Wu.

Faced with his well-wishes, Lu Juren’s smile was unnaturally forced. On the other hand, Lu Zhuangyuan took charge of the situation quite naturally.

“Did you see my daughter-in-law’s stomach? The bulge is sharp and recently, she has been craving sour food. It seems that I’m having a grandson this time around!” said Lu Zhuangyuan, his voice full of joy.

As she heard his words, Luo Juanhua sat on the horse carriage, looking just like a proud general returning victorious from a war.

“Everyone, please join us in the full moon celebration when the time comes.” The more Lu Zhuangyuan spoke, the happier he became, while his eyes became slanted from smiling so much.

Li Huowang munched on his eggs while observing the difference in the father-son duo. He felt that something was amiss, to the point that the egg tasted weird. But he decided to ignore them; he was not interested in gossip and was too lazy to be bothered by it. He just leaped onto the horse carriage and unfurled his map.

“The next kingdom is... The next one...” As Li Huowang stared

at the strange blocky character, he felt stunned. He had never really thought about how impaired he would be from becoming illiterate.

He sighed and popped his head out from the carriage. “Troupe leader Lu, what’s the next kingdom on our way to the Liang Kingdom?”

“I think it’s called the Hou Shu Kingdom,” replied Lu Zhuangyuan.

“Hou Shu?” mumbled Li Huowang as he stared at the words on the map.

“Troupe leader Lu, do you know any famous sects in Hou Shu Kingdom? Or maybe dangerous evil beings?” asked Li Huowang.

“Hai~ Young Daoist, you are asking me questions I don’t know the answer to. I’m not that knowledgeable. It’s already very good of me to know that the kingdom next to the kingdom of Si Qi is Hou Shu.”

That’s a fair point. He’s a performer so it’s natural that he wouldn’t know details pertaining to another country.

“Do any of you know anything about Hou Shu?” Li Huowang turned to the rest of his group.

It would be better for him to understand the places they would be arriving at.

However, he was disappointed when everyone shook their heads. From the looks of it, none of them were captured from Hou Shu.

“Senior Li, I remember that one of the assistants was from Hou Shu, but he drowned last time,” said Xiaoman.

Hearing this, Li Huowang sighed.

They could only take one step at a time. At the very least, things were much better off than the last time. He was no longer in danger of being possessed by Dan Yangzi. They also had more methods of self defense compared to when they first walked out of the Zephyr Temple.

As Li Huowang leaped down from the horse carriage, he saw Lu Zhuangyuan smiling sheepishly while approaching him.

“Aiya~ My brain is really getting old. I almost forgot the story of Hou Shu that my blind second uncle used to tell me when I was younger. He told me that the people of Hou Shu do not prefer to watch traveling performers like us. I recall him saying something about them instead preferring to watch Nuo Opera.”

“Nuo Opera?” asked Li Huowang.

“Yeah, Nuo Opera is a weird name. My second uncle even said that they don’t have to put on makeup. When they perform, all they need to do is to cover their heads with a red cloth and wear different wooden masks to perform,” explained Lu Zhuangyuan.

Li Huowang stopped him; he was not interested in listening to the difference in theater performances between different kingdoms. The people of Hou Shu could watch any type of theater performance they liked and it wouldn’t matter to him. He was not like Lu Zhuangyuan, who was trying to steal some of their business.

Translator's Thoughts

Just so you know, sometimes performances in China are also called operas, like Beijing or Sichuan Opera

Chapter 148 - Nuo Opera

Soon, they arrived at the border of the kingdom of Si Qi.

As could be expected, the borders were being controlled by the military in order to prevent spies from entering the kingdom.

The border was being tightly monitored. None of the people here had smiles on their faces.

After a while, the two groups managed to leave the border peacefully with the help of some pieces of silver.

The kingdom of Si Qi was a place filled with rivers and lakes. After exiting the kingdom, everything around them started to become barren; the trees were slowly replaced by sand dunes.

By the tenth night of their travels, there were no more trees in sight.

The further they traveled, the more barren it was. Li Huowang had a feeling that this was Hou Shu's natural terrain.

“Whew~” Zhao Wu sighed, his breath condensing into a white vapor from the cold air. He was the one on night duty tonight. He rubbed his cold palms and continued to breathe into them for some warmth.

Given that it was almost summer solstice, it shouldn't be this cold. But out in the desert, there was not a single object blocking the wind. Additionally they couldn't get any firewood to chop, and so there was no fire. Thus, it was natural for it to be cold.

Zhao Wu turned around and stared at Li Huowang cuddling Bai Lingmiao while sleeping. At this moment, he felt envious of Li Huowang.

He looked down at his fragile and deformed body; he felt inadequate. He wanted a wife, but no one would marry him due to his condition.

After a while, he took another breath of the cold, dry air, feeling sleepy. He tried keeping himself awake by using a small rock to write words onto the sand.

Some of them were taught to him by Li Huowang while others by Gao Zhijian.

I need to learn how to read. I must!

Zhao Wu's eyes were filled with determination. He needed to prove to his father that he was not a waste of resources!

After he learned how to read and write, he would become a fortune teller in a temple and help people write letters to earn money.

If he could read, then he would be able to study a lot and even try his luck on the examination to become a minister!

By then...

Just as he was thinking about his future, he felt someone move behind him, the sudden change sending shivers down his spine.

He started to tremble in fear and was about to shout to wake everyone up when a hand without fingernails covered his mouth.

"Don't shout, it's me!"

Hearing Li Huowang's voice calmed him down. Zhao Wu whispered. "Senior Li, what's wrong?"

Zhao Wu scanned his surroundings but didn't see anything besides the dark sand dunes.

"Shh~ Something is crawling toward us. Let me check and see if it's alive," said Li Huowang.

Then, Li Huowang cleared his throat and shouted in a certain direction. "Three men and four youths walk on the shore, swim out the river and anger the sea serpent. I wonder what method it is today?"

Li Huowang's voice echoed across the sand dune and into the night sky. His voice was so loud that everyone else woke up.

"Is the spring book open?" A hoarse voice asked from further

away.

“The spring book is open!” replied Li Huowang.

“Shoulders together, throw me a vine?”

Li Huowang bowed in the direction of the voice. “A golden pagoda facing the green hut with sand at the back! Meat dumpling vine!”

“Oh, so it’s Daoist Li, are you passing or visiting?” asked the voice.

“We are passing, may I know your name?” replied Li Huowang.

However, after Li Huowang asked for their name, there was no reply. It was only after the sky brightened up that Li Huowang felt them leave.

“To think I had to use the codeword so soon after learning them.” Li Huowang mumbled to himself. Even though he had detected someone approaching them last night, Li Huowang wasn’t sure if the owner of the voice was alone or the leader of a group of bandits.

Being able to avoid fighting by just saying a few words was an excellent outcome. After all, Li Huowang didn’t know what kind of fighting methods the bandits would have, especially those of a supernatural source.

When Lu Zhuangyuan heard about what had happened from Li Huowang, he felt quite afraid.

“Yikes. We’ve only been here for a few days and were already intercepted by bandits. It seems that Hou Shu isn’t a safe place to be,” said Lu Zhuangyuan.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang sat down as he continued to practice the codewords a few more times. “Who cares if it’s safe or not? We are just passing by the kingdom. Let’s hurry up and move. If we travel faster, then we can reach the town before nightfall.”

After this incident, their travels were rather peaceful. Even though it was still barren, at the very least they were not

intercepted by bandits.

Just as Lu Zhuangyuan was trying to butter up Li Huowang, they encountered a group of people.

“Dad, why does that horse look so weird? It even has two humps on its back.” asked Lu Xiucui.

“Are you stupid? That’s a camel,” replied Lu Zhuangyuan.

Ding ding ding~

The bell hanging on the camel’s neck rang incessantly as they slowly walked on the hardened path. Li Huowang took a glance and saw that the riders had their faces covered to prevent the sand from entering their eyes.

The appearance of the camels was like a signal as more and more groups of people started appearing on the hardened path.

Li Huowang and the rest finally reached the first town in Hou Shu before nightfall.

Just as they had entered the town, they immediately realized the difference between Hou Shu and the kingdom of Si Qi. Both the buildings and the clothing of the people of Hou Shu were a lot more coarse. Many of them also covered their faces, not necessarily to keep the sand out of their eyes.

At the very least, Li Huowang’s group of people in black veils were not that conspicuous.

“Let’s go and find an inn. We’ve been traveling for many days and it’s time to rest,” said Li Huowang.

Hearing this, all their tired faces instantly lit up. It was purely torture to travel without fire and a supply of water.

All of them followed each other closely as they merged into the crowd.

The nearby stalls were selling food. The tantalizing smell of skewers and noodles was good enough to entice all of them.

Soon, they arrived at an empty plaza; this was most likely the center of the town.

At that moment, the sound of drums and cymbals instantly attracted their attention within the crowd.

“Is that a group performing Nuo Opera?” mumbled Li Huowang as he watched the three performers jumping around from within the crowd.

Shaking their heads, twisting their body, squatting, snaking their arms, running around, and jumping. The three performers had their heads covered with red clothes while they donned wooden masks. Their dance was eccentric and non-humanlike; it was as if a monster had come up with the choreography for the dance.

At the same time, the chaotic sound of the musical instrument accompanied their strange dance. Occasionally, there was even the sound of a horn.

The sound of the black horn being played was akin to the sound of a crying ghost.

Drums, cymbals, horns, and their strange dance—all of them made Li Huowang feel uncomfortable.

On the other hand, the rest of the townsfolk were in a trance as they sat there and silently enjoyed the show.

“What is this? Is this a performance?” Lu Zhuangyuan, who worked in the same line of business, said distastefully.

He had just said that when the three performers twisted their bodies even more wildly. As they twisted, sharp white fangs protruded out from the opening in the wooden mask where the mouth was supposed to be. It was like the white fangs had grown like a sprout.

However, there were not two, but sixteen white fangs!

The white fangs trembled and shook, following the beat of the drum.

“This is... Teeth play?”

Their teeth play was amazing. Li Huowang saw the white fangs retracting and extruding from their mouth fluidly, almost giving

him the impression that the white fangs were indeed grown in their mouth.

Translator's Thoughts

This is how Teeth Play looks like:



Chapter 149 - Old Friend

Their limbs twisted and danced while the white fangs fluidly protruded and retracted from their mouths, following the rhythm of the musical instruments.

Li Huowang stood there, just watching their performance from afar. At this moment, he didn't feel like a spectator, but a tree watching wild beasts.

After some time, a high pitched voice rang out from behind their wooden masks as they began to sing in an unknown language.

Li Huowang and the rest did not recognize it. However, the singer's tone fluctuated high and low along with the musical instruments; it had its own charm.

After listening to them singing for a little longer, Li Huowang continued walking. Regardless of how weird their performance was, it had nothing to do with him.

He had just taken a few steps when he noticed Lu Zhuangyuan just standing motionlessly.

"No need to worry about us, please go ahead. Hmph! I want to see what's so special about their show," said Lu Zhuangyuan. For some reason, a burning sense of competition had been ignited within Lu Zhuangyuan.

Maybe it's because they are performers as well?

"Dad, why don't we watch their performance next time? We are in foreign lands and it might not be safe," suggested Lu Juren.

Lu Zhuangyuan's eyes widened and he brought his smoke pipe up to hit him. "Are you trying to control your father? There are so many people on the street. Why wouldn't it be safe?"

While they argued, Li Huowang brought the rest of them and departed.

After fifteen minutes, they finally found an inn and booked their rooms.

In an old musty room, Li Huowang placed his belongings on the table and sighed.

Two swords, the *Profound Records*, the sacred text, and all his torture tools. All of them added up, making it so that his traveling gear was not light at all.

At that moment, he poured some water from the teacup and drank it before frowning.

When Bai Lingmiao, who was arranging the sheets, saw him frown, she asked. "What's wrong?"

"Here, taste this. Do you think the water tastes weird?" Li Huowang passed her the cup of water.

Bai Lingmiao tasted it and was astonished. "You are right. There's an earthy taste to it."

"I thought it was due to my heightened sensitivity, but it seems that the quality of Hou Shu's water is subpar," said Li Huowang as he opened the window. "I need you guys to go out tomorrow and gather some information. It would be best if you can obtain a map so that we don't have to make any unwanted detours."

"Okay. As you wish." Bai Lingmiao finished arranging the bed before taking off Li Huowang's Daoist robes. "When we were tying up the horses, I saw a well nearby. Since we have some time, I will go wash your clothes. Also, I recall that one of the assistants who died used to live in this town. We can send her ashes back home."

Li Huowang suddenly remembered that someone did say that one of the dead assistants was from the Hou Shu Kingdom.

"Who's taking care of the ashes? I will go and send them back home now," asked Li Huowang.

"Now? It's already quite late. Why don't we go tomorrow?" suggested Bai Lingmiao.

But in the end, Li Huowang still took the ashes and exited the

inn with Yang Xiaohai and Bun. He was not someone who delayed such small tasks.

He needed Yang Xiaohai to come with him, because the dead assistant was his friend; Yang Xiaohai knew where her house was.

At the same time, Li Huowang's other purpose in bringing Yang Xiaohai with him was to have at least one person beside him in case he got caught up in his hallucination once again. Li Huowang required at least one person by his side. Then, at the very least, that person could run back and call the others.

At this moment, Yang Xiaohai held the ashes as he told Li Huowang about the dead assistant.

“Back in Zephyr Temple, we used to call her Liar Mao because she loved to lie. She kept saying that her house was larger than the Zephyr Temple and that her family had over a hundred goats and cows. She also said that she was the only daughter in their house, and so everyone loved her. Her father would kill as many goats as she wanted and they had unlimited mutton to eat,” explained Yang Xiaohai.

Li Huowang stared at the ash jar. “The assistant was a girl?”

“Yeah. Do you not remember her, Senior Li?” asked Yang Xiaohai.

Li Huowang shook his head. He never remembered any of the assistants' names; he had never paid attention to the hardworking children.

“Sigh... Such a pity. She had already managed to escape the Zephyr Temple and yet, she drowned.” Li Huowang pitied her.

“Do you know how disgusting those words sound when you say them? Do you have any qualifications to say those words? Do you know how just many people you strangled to death with your own hands?”

Jiang Yingzi's words annoyed him, causing Li Huowang to lose his patience. “Shut up!”

Hearing those words, Yang Xiaohai jumped up from surprise. Even though he had seen Senior Li talking to himself so many times, it was still quite unnatural to him.

Li Huowang's face was gloomy as they silently walked toward the dead assistant's house. He tried to ignore the illusions, but it was not so simple this time.

They walked further and further away from the town center until they reached the border of the town.

At this moment, the sun was setting and there were very few people out on the streets. Many of them were hurrying back to their homes.

Just as Li Huowang was about to ask if Yang Xiaohai really knew the way, a joyous shout rang out from behind them.

"Hey! Daoist! Daoist, it's me!"

Hearing the shout, Li Huowang turned around and was surprised to see who it was.

It was the old monk that stayed behind in the Righteous Monastery, Monk!

Compared to his clean and well-groomed look from back then, he was now back to his old disheveled self.

"Monk, how did you get here? Weren't you staying at the Righteous Monastery?"

Monk grumbled and lamented. "Don't talk about it. I was so bored back in the monastery. Not only could I not do anything, they even forced me to read the sutras. I couldn't stand it any longer and just left. Wait, where are you guys going?"

"We... are sending something to someone. Let's go together. By the way, did the Monks from the Righteous Monastery try to stop you from leaving them?" asked Li Huowang.

"No. Not only did they not harass me, but they even gave me some money. The monks were all good guys," said Monk.

"Heh." Li Huowang snorted, too lazy to argue.

Having met an old face, Li Huowang felt happy. It was much more relaxing to be with simple folks.

As they talked, Li Huowang and Monk continued walking. Li Huowang kept talking about the past and Monk was somehow able to keep the conversation going.

Just as they were happily talking to each other, Yang Xiaohai's voice brought them back to reality. "Senior Li... We are here."

Translator's Thoughts

So this is how a Nuo Opera performer look like

...

Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin



Chapter 150 - Trouble

When he heard Yang Xiaohai's voice, Li Huowang snapped back to reality.

At this moment, they were on the outskirts of the town. In front of them were several huts built from stone, along with a massive stable in front of the hut.

The stable housed camels, goats, and even horses in different pens, as evidenced by the unmistakable stench of livestock that assaulted their noses.

When the people inside the huts noticed Li Huowang, they stared at him cautiously. From their outfits, it was clear that these people specialized in rearing livestock.

With that in mind, it was more likely that the assistant who passed away was abducted rather than being sold off like Chun Xiaoman.

Yang Xiaohai carried the jar of ashes while Li Huowang took a deep breath and prepared himself before approaching the huts.

When Li Huowang got closer, a strong man pushed away the horse beside him and greeted Li Huowang. "Are you here to buy some livestock?"

"No, I'm here to send something." Li Huowang judged that the man was the father of the assistant based on his age.

The man was somewhat skeptical due to Li Huowang's sudden visit. It was only after Yang Xiaohai told him the name of the assistant and some details about her that they finally believed Li Huowang.

The death of their daughter was horrible news to them; they all huddled around the jar of ashes, crying.

Li Huowang had thought that he too would cry when bearing

witness to the tear-jerking scene, but he didn't. At this point, he had seen too many deaths, to the point that he was desensitized.

On the other hand, Monk, who had been standing beside him, stopped smiling and began to reverently pray to the ash jar in hopes of appeasing the little girl's soul. "Amitabha... Amitabha... Amitabha..."

Due to being questioned by the father of the dead assistant, it was already very late by the time Li Huowang and Yang Xiaohai arrived back at the inn.

"Come stay with us. Considering that fate allowed us to meet once more, I will book a room for you; there's no need to sleep in the toilet like last time," offered Li Huowang.

"I have my own money," said Monk as he shook his robes, causing the sound of coins clinking. "Also, who told you that I slept in the toilet last time?"

Hearing this, Li Huowang sighed in relief. "Where are you going? If we are heading in the same direction, then we can travel together."

It was not easy surviving in this world. It would be best if he had even one more person to help him.

"I don't mind going anywhere as long as I can keep doing kind deeds. Let's talk more tomorrow, otherwise I will end up violating my curfew," said Monk before turning to leave.

Staring at Monk's departing figure, Li Huowang smiled and entered the inn.

Just as he walked in, he saw Lu Zhuangyuan angrily debating with his son.

"Troupe leader Lu, what are you doing?" asked Li Huowang.

Hearing this, Lu Zhuangyuan pushed his son away and gestured angrily at the air. "Those damned performers are so rude! They had the guts to tell me that our performances originated from them, and that the Nuo Opera is the ancestor of our type of shows!"

“Dad, it’s fine. There’s no need to argue with them. This is their territory after all,” said Lu Juren, trying to calm him down.

“It’s fine?! I could’ve ignored any other remarks, but not this one! How can I face my ancestors if I don’t reclaim my honor? We are all performers, so who’s afraid of who? Let me go!”

Li Huowang couldn’t be bothered to care about the fact that Lu Zhuangyuan wanted to go and argue with the performers of the Nuo Opera. He just ignored them and entered his room.

“Miaomiao, do you still remember Monk? He—” Li Huowang stopped talking the moment he entered the room. Bai Lingmiao was visibly tired from their journey; she had already washed up and was fast asleep on the bed.

After a moment, Li Huowang approached the side of the bed and gently caressed her face.

Sensing him, Bai Lingmiao groggily hugged his hand.

Li Huowang chose to remain silent; he could tell her about it tomorrow.

He blew out the oil lamp and lay down on the bed, staring at the rafters as he thought about their journey.

Finally... a few days of peace and rest.

Li Huowang was not a greedy person. He just wanted to be able to live peacefully.

Except... The two of them.

Li Huowang frowned as he looked at the illusions of Jiang Yingzi and Dan Yangzi who were right beside him.

At this moment, the two illusions were staring at him from a corner of the quiet room.

“Hmm?” Li Huowang sat up in surprise. He suddenly realized that he could see in the dark.

“Looks like my senses are becoming more and more sensitive,” mumbled Li Huowang as he pondered whether this was a good thing or bad.

“Senior Li... ?” Bai Lingmiao almost woke up from the commotion.

Li Huowang gently patted her. “Sleep... Go to sleep...”

Perhaps it was due to the long journey, but Li Huowang instantly fell asleep.

Halfway through the night, his body suddenly tensed up; it was as if he sensed something coming closer. In the next instant, a sharp pain from his fingertip caused him to wake up.

He inspected his hand and saw that his fingertip had been bitten.

The bite mark was similar to a beast’s jaw, allowing Li Huowang to instantly know who it was.

It was Bai Lingmiao’s Second Deity!

He looked around, but didn’t see the red-veiled woman.

He suddenly looked down and saw that there were three pairs of shoes by the bed. There was a pair for both him and Bai Lingmiao, as well as a third pair of red shoes.

At that moment, Li Huowang saw the red shoes slowly retreat underneath the bed.

He looked at the sleeping Bai Lingmiao before whispering toward the underneath of the bed. “What are you doing?!”

“Something’s here...” A seductive voice came from beside his ear.

Li Huowang grabbed the sword underneath his pillow and held his breath before carefully checking the room.

Li Huowang’s senses had now become extremely sharp. Normally, he would’ve sensed it if someone approached him.

However, at this moment, he felt nothing.

Just as he thought that the Second Deity was playing a trick on him, a sound rang out from outside the window. It was a clear metallic clicking sound.

Tak~!

At that moment, a shadow suddenly appeared on the wall; it was quite similar to a shadow play.

Li Huowang had a hard time describing what the shadow looked like. It looked like a spider but its face was that of an old man. The shadow had six arms with spines and a lattice-patterned tentacle could be seen retracting and extending from its body.

At that moment, Li Huowang saw the shadow climb further up the window before he could even figure out what it was.

“Hm? A Strayed One? And that too from the Ao Jing Sect? This is rare,” said a voice.

As soon as he heard this voice, Li Huowang immediately rolled off from the bed with his sword in hand.

Chapter 151 - Shadow Play

A horrifying shadow monster skulked near the window in the middle of the night.

It was truly a scary sight, but what scared Li Huowang the most was that the shadow was capable of recognizing him as a Strayed One. Li Huowang knew what it would mean if someone could find out that he was a Strayed One.

“Who are you?” Li Huowang asked the shadow monster.

“Hehe, you came to my territory and yet you don’t even know who I am?” asked the voice.

At that moment, Li Huowang saw the monster slowly phasing through the paper panes of the window and into the room.

Jiang!

Li Huowang immediately unsheathed his sword, filling the entire room with killing intent.

At this moment, a dark red sword was held in Li Huowang’s grasp. This was the first time he unsheathed it.

Something leaked out from the hilt of the sword and spread through his body, causing his blood to start boiling and his vision to be dyed red.

As Li Huowang saw the lattice-patterned black tentacle slowly rise out from the paper pane, he instantly lunged at it with his sword.

“Die!” He shouted unconsciously.

Seeing this, the shadow monster dodged to the right, unwilling to block the attack from the blood-red sword directly. The sword was filled to the brim with murderous intent!

As it moved to the side of the wooden door, the sound of metal clanging rang out.

“Hmm? That sword... What kind of relationship do you have with the You family from the kingdom of Si Qi?” asked the shadow monster. Seeing Li Huowang’s sword, the monster became hesitant. At the same time, its movements also became much more cautious.

Usually, Li Huowang would’ve taken the time to listen to it, but with the murderous intent of the sword assaulting his mind, he couldn’t think rationally.

The monster hadn’t even finished its sentence when the sword reached it once again.

A crimson flash could be seen when the sword sliced through the wooden door along with the shadow monster.

Seeing this, Li Huowang ran out of his room. He saw a figure using some wooden sticks to control the shadow monster from the window at the end of the corridor.

The shadow monster was being controlled by someone all along! The figure was somehow controlling the shadow using a puppet!

As soon as the figure saw Li Huowang, it immediately threw away the puppet before entering one of the vacant rooms.

Li Huowang tried to chase after the figure, but there was nothing left in the empty room, save for the puppet that was slowly turning to ashes in the center of the room.

Li Huowang was only able to catch a glimpse of the assailant and the bronze coin veil that they were wearing.

Jiang~

At that moment, Li Huowang sheathed his sword and took a few deep breaths to calm himself down.

What is their goal? Are they trying to capture me for money?

Even though he had chased them away, he had a feeling that the situation was not so simple.

“Wait... Bai Lingmiao!” Realizing that he had left Bai Lingmiao alone, Li Huowang immediately ran back to his room.

It was only after he saw Bai Lingmiao sleeping soundly on the bed that he heaved a sigh of relief.

He was flustered; she meant a lot to him.

However, thinking back, there shouldn't have been any danger since Bai Lingmiao was a shaman. There was no reason to worry about the enemy luring him away.

At that moment, Li Huowang started inspecting his sword as he sat on his bed.

There was nothing weird about someone attacking them. However, this time was different. This time, it was no longer him trying to escape, but the assailant. The one who escaped was the assailant.

Thinking about this, Li Huowang started to get excited; it meant that he finally had sufficient power to be able to survive in this bizarre world.

At the same time, he decided that he had to thank the Abbess for giving him this sword. One look at the sword was all it took to discourage the assailant from attacking Li Huowang. He could tell that rather than being wary of him, the assailant was wary of the sword.

Not only was the sword powerful, but it also had other uses.

“You family from the kingdom of Si Qi? Is that where the owner of this sword comes from? That doesn't seem like a sect name,” mumbled Li Huowang.

Li Huowang didn't have an answer. The only thing he knew was that the sword belonged to someone famous. Thinking about this, he felt even more indebted to the Abbess.

As Li Huowang was slowly inspecting the sword and its scabbard, he felt something weird. He looked down and saw a pair of pale white hands with black fingernails grabbing his thigh.

This time, Li Huowang didn't pull his legs away and instead whispered to the Second Deity. "Thank you for alerting me. If it wasn't because of you, then I would've been attacked in my sleep."

Regardless of what had happened before, today the Second Deity had indeed helped him out.

But Li Huowang was still confused. He had been able to use his heightened senses to detect the bandits from a faraway distance before. So how was the assailant able to approach him until they were just outside the window? He even needed someone else to alert him.

Did the assailant have something on them that could hide their presence? I wonder if that item will be able to help with hiding the signs of me being a Strayed One? It would be great if I could just grab it from them. Then at the very least I won't be plagued by people trying to hunt me down just because they were able to figure out that I'm a Strayed One.

Just as Li Huowang was lost in his thoughts, he felt a different sensation on his thighs.

He looked down. At this moment, the pale hands had disappeared, replaced by several tentacle-like creatures crawling up his thigh. They were cold to the touch and had the texture of soft snakeskin.

At the same time, a seductive voice rang out beside his ear. "Dear husband~"

Hearing the voice, Li Huowang felt his scalp go numb. "Enough! I told you to stop it!"

Just as Li Huowang was about to unsheathe his sword, the tentacles slowly retreated from his pants.

Li Huowang glanced at the sleeping Bai Lingmiao and then whispered underneath the bed in a harsh tone, "I don't want to talk about what happened last time! Enough is enough! Go to sleep!"

After saying that, Li Huowang lied down on the bed.

The Second Deity also chose to silently remain underneath the bed, causing the room to once more become silent.

After the incident that just happened, Li Huowang dared not sleep, choosing to stay awake until the morning. It was only when he heard the shouts of the stall vendors from outside that he allowed himself to fall asleep.

By the time he woke up, it was already afternoon.

He wore his clothes and walked into the mess hall. As he ate, he thought about what had happened last night.

Based on their methods, they don't seem to be from a sect like the Righteous Monastery or the Benevolent Nunnery. Maybe they are someone cultivating on their own like Dan Yangzi. In that case, there shouldn't be too much of a problem. They said that this was their territory rather than their sect's territory, so it's very likely that they are indeed alone.

Li Huowang did not want to leave this town so quickly. After all, it was much easier to be ambushed in the wilderness than in a busy town.

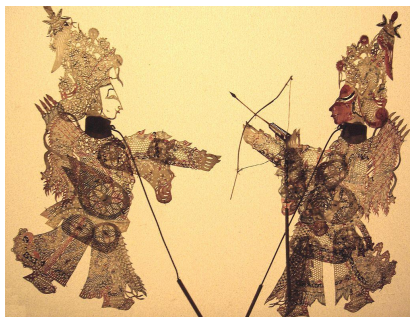
As Li Huowang was eating some peanuts, he saw Lu Zhuangyuan proudly walking in with his sons.

Thinking back upon yesterday, it was not hard to determine what had happened.

“Troupe leader Lu, did you go and argue with the performers of the Nuo Opera? Looks like you won,” said Li Huowang.

Translator's Thoughts

Shadow Play refers to this particular 'performance' where the performer would use the puppet cutouts and animate the 'shadow' with a light



Chapter 152 - Doubt

When Lu Zhuangyuan saw Li Huowang eating in the mess hall, he decided to be modest while smiling to please him. “Young Daoist, that was just a joke. We didn’t fight. We were merely discussing the differences between our performances. Hehe, one has to learn even if they are old.”

Li Huowang chuckled. “So? Was there any major trouble, since they are the locals?”

Lu Zhuangyuan was so happy about his victory that as soon as Li Huowang asked, he sat down on a stool and started boasting about himself, “Young Daoist, as you know I’ve already been doing performances for more than thirty years. How could I be intimidated by young whelps in their twenties? They tried to intimidate me when I met them, but how would I be fazed from that? Since I am a performer, I am used to such intimidation. That’s when I sat on one of the boxes and shouted back. I told them that their singing tone was inaccurate. Guess what happened next?”

“What happened?” asked Li Huowang.

This question made Lu Zhuangyuan even more prideful as he continued to talk about the situation. “Ha! The three performers were stunned by my words. The youngest one even asked me at which point in time their tone was incorrect. He thought that he could get some free pointers from me, but why would I do that? I didn’t want to teach them, and so I just ignored him. Hmph! They didn’t even serve me tea. Hehe, you should’ve seen how quickly they changed their behavior. All three of them became much more respectful and even addressed me as Senior. Still, their tones were indeed too high and mighty. It wasn’t like I was coming up with some nonsense just to fight with them. As their senior, I have the

obligation to look after them. Don't you think this is true?"

As Li Huowang heard how well Lu Zhuangyuan boasted, he realized that Lu Zhuangyuan could've been a really good storyteller.

Li Huowang finished eating at the same time Lu Zhuangyuan finished his story.

By the time he finished his story, Lu Zhuangyuan's face was flushed. Then, he drank a cup of tea and took a deep breath, feeling satisfied.

"Troupe Leader Lu, what kind of performance were they doing? It was very strange," asked Li Huowang as he ate the final mouthful of rice.

"Oh, they were performing an old show called 'Da Nuo Exorcising The Twelve Ghosts'. It seems to be a legend that has been passed on for thousands of years. The reason behind their strange singing tones was probably the fact that it's an old show," explained Lu Zhuangyuan.

"Who's Da Nuo?" asked Li Huowang as he picked his teeth with the chopsticks.

"No idea. But according to the three performers, Da Nuo was an Immortal. They told me that at one point in time Hou Shu used to be a kingdom of ghosts where humans were nothing more than livestock that were destined to be eaten. Then, Da Nuo came and exorcized the twelve most powerful ghosts. He even taught the ancient people to stand, read, write, and even use fire," said Lu Zhuangyuan.

"So it's a mythical legend..." Li Huowang squinted as he recalled the three masked Nuo Opera performers.

Was the one who attacked me last night related to the performers?

Li Huowang felt that they were suspicious. He and his group had just entered the town and already managed to see the strange Nuo Opera and their teeth play.

"Wait, teeth play?" Li Huowang remembered the bronze coin

veil worn by the assailant. It would've been perfect to cover up their teeth.

Li Huowang immediately asked Lu Zhuangyuan. "Troupe leader Lu, about the three Nuo Opera performers, did they remove their masks while talking to you?"

"Nope. In fact, they didn't even remove their makeup when they saw me. They were too busy being respectful and pouring me a cup of tea," boasted Lu Zhuangyuan.

Could it be them? But there are three of them... or, maybe they wanted to mislead me by sending only one of them last night.

Thinking up to this point, Li Huowang frowned.

"Daoist! Daoist!" At that moment, a clear voice broke Li Huowang's train of thought.

Li Huowang looked over and saw that it was the disheveled looking Monk standing at the door while waving at him happily.

"Where were you? Why were you up so late? I've been looking for you since morning, but you were not here," asked Monk.

Li Huowang placed his chopsticks down before turning to Monk. "You came looking for me? Is everything alright?"

"Yeah. Come on, I found a great place!" said Monk.

Hearing those words made Li Huowang remember something unpleasant—Monk had similar words when he brought Li Huowang to the place where the Righteous Monastery housed the flesh Buddha.

However, it was only thanks to this that Li Huowang had managed to see through the Righteous Monastery's deception. In a way, Monk was technically half a savior to him.

Staring at the bright sun, Li Huowang walked outside. "Sure, let's go."

Just as he said that, he heard two people laughing at him.

"Hehehe ..."

"Hehehe ..."

Li Huowang turned toward the source of the laughter. It was none other than Dan Yangzi and Jiang Yingzi. Both of them were in a corner of the room, their four faces contorted in a sarcastic smile.

“Daoist, come quick!” shouted Monk who was already on the main street. Enduring the harsh sunlight, he kept waiting for Li Huowang.

“Is he really the Monk I know?” mumbled Li Huowang as he stared at Monk. Even though he had probed Monk multiple times yesterday, it was quite strange for him to suddenly appear here out of nowhere.

Could he also be an illusion? But that doesn't work on me, especially after the recent heightening of my senses. I would've found out if he was fake. Wait, why should I let myself be affected by the two illusions? They are fake.

Li Huowang's mind was a mess from doubting himself.

“Daoist! Come quick, why are you hesitating?” Monk's voice was already hoarse from shouting his name.

After a moment, Li Huowang took a deep breath and followed him. He felt that he needed some more time to determine whether this Monk was real or not.

If he was, then that would be for the best. However, if he wasn't, then it would be a good idea for Li Huowang to keep playing along. He needed to know whether the fake Monk had a motive and whether he had other helpers.

Li Huowang had become a lot more bold after chasing away the assailant from last night.

There were still a lot of people on the street during the afternoon. It was probably because this was a border town, but the number of mule carts, horse carriages, and camels in Li Huowang's field of vision never reduced.

“Monk, where are we going?” asked Li Huowang as he secretly placed one hand on the Profound Records.

“It’s not far. We are almost there. It’s just over there,” said Monk, pointing in a direction.

Li Huowang looked toward the direction that Monk was pointing and saw the three masked Nuo Opera performers.

“Hehe, what do you think? You must’ve never seen them before right?” asked Monk excitedly.

“The Nuo Opera? Was this what you meant when you said you wanted to show me something good?” Li Huowang was speechless.

“You can always choose to watch their performance another time if you’ve already seen it. This performance can only be seen here. We might never get a chance to watch it again once we leave this place. Ah damn it! They are already closing for the day!” said Monk.

While Monk was sighing, Li Huowang was feeling excited; he saw the three performers preparing to remove their masks.

Chapter 153 - Courtyard Houses

At that moment, the three performers removed their masks, allowing Li Huowang to see their heads which were covered in red cloth. But it was not a complete wrap—there was an opening for their nose and mouth.

After removing their masks, they slowly started to remove their red cloth. Soon, three young men appeared in front of Li Huowang. They were almost the same age as him.

The three performers looked quite normal. Their faces were human without any weird appendages or tentacles. Everything was normal.

“Daoist, what are you looking at? They are no longer performing. Let’s just go somewhere else. We might be able to do some good deeds today,” said Monk, pestering Li Huowang to leave.

“No need to rush; let’s just wait a little.” Li Huowang didn’t let his guard down. He still remembered how frightening they looked when they were doing the teeth play.

Li Huowang was not afraid of fighting them, but he was afraid that they would play some tricks or ambush him later on.

At that moment, Li Huowang suddenly saw the three of them hurriedly pack their stuff. They looked cautious and peeked at Li Huowang from time to time.

Looks like something is indeed wrong with them. They’ve hidden it well.

Li Huowang was becoming more and more suspicious of them.

Initially, after having heard Lu Zhuangyuan’s story, Li Huowang hadn’t felt them to be suspicious, but now he was fully

alert.

The three performers and the musicians moved all of their items onto their camel before running into a small alley.

“Monk, quick! We need to chase them!” said Li Huowang as he ran to follow them.

“Aiya! Why are you chasing them? Don’t tell me that you want to pay them some silver to perform privately for you?” asked Monk. However, despite his protests, he still followed Li Huowang.

Both of them followed them from a distance as they tailed them all around the town. It was initially fine, but soon, the cargo-carrying camels soon started running as the people riding them started whipping the camels to run faster.

“Shti! They saw us! Quick, chase them!” Li Huowang ran faster as one of his hands clutched his sword. However, even though the town wasn’t big, they weren’t locals; after zig-zagging through a few alleyways, Li Huowang realized that he had lost them.

Li Huowang was quite annoyed as he stared at the gray walls.

“Ha~ Ha~ Daoist, slow down. I almost lost you~” said Monk as he propped himself up on the wall while panting.

Hearing this, Li Huowang glanced toward Monk.

It’s natural for him to not have the stamina at this age...

“If you can’t take it, then go back and rest first. No need to follow me,” suggested Li Huowang as he continued walking.

Even though he didn’t suspect Monk as much, Li Huowang still didn’t trust him completely. He also didn’t want Monk to hold him back if they ended up meeting a strong enemy next time.

“Fine... I will go back and rest first. You can run by yourself.” Monk held his waist and walked into another alley.

“I hope I’m just thinking too much.” Li Huowang shook his head.

Just as he had just taken a few steps, he heard a shout.

“That’s the old monk’s voice!” Li Huowang ran over and leaped

a wall before stopping in front of a square-shaped hole in the ground.

It was a hole in the ground. Rather than dirt, the walls of the holes had wooden doors and windows. It was like a courtyard house was buried underground.

Various wooden masks could be seen decorating the wall. These snarling wooden masks were the same ones that the three performers had been wearing.

Staring at the camel that was eating grass in the center of the courtyard, Li Huowang was certain this was the home of the three performers.

“Daoist! Quick, come and pull me up. Ouch! Why did the people here build an underground home? Rather than a house, this looks more like a tomb,” called out a voice.

Li Huowang looked toward the source of the voice and saw Monk who was lying on the ground in pain.

Seeing this, Li Huowang leaped down, landing solidly beside Monk. However, instead of helping Monk, Li Huowang clutched his sword and stared at the closed windows, completely alert. With his heightened senses, he instantly realized that many people were staring at him from behind the windows.

Li Huowang did not wish to fight without knowing the number of enemies.

At the same time, the people staring at him from behind the windows didn’t act either. Both parties just stood there, waiting for the other to act.

Maybe they have the same thoughts as me?

Li Huowang’s mind was racing.

“Daoist, what are you doing?” asked Monk as he slowly stood up in pain.

“Wait for a bit; I don’t have the time to deal with you for now,” said Li Huowang.

Just as he said those words, he felt a few more pairs of eyes being trained on him. However, these gazes originated from the masks decorating the wall rather than the rooms; it was as if they had come alive.

After a moment, Li Huowang decided that even though he hadn't confirmed whether they were related to the assailant from last night, it was best to not linger around any more.

After some consideration, Li Huowang decided to talk to them. "I am junior Xuan Yang. I've accidentally walked into your homes and mean no harm. Please forgive me."

Seeing that there was no reaction, Li Huowang decided to try another method of communication. "Is the spring book open?"

Even so, no one replied to him.

"Let's just forget about what happened yesterday. I do not wish to harm you and I hope you wouldn't harm us either. How about a truce?" suggested Li Huowang.

However, even after he explained his intentions, he didn't receive any replies. Thus, Li Huowang gave up before supporting Monk to a ladder placed at the side. Once the tall ladder was placed upward, Li Huowang let Monk climb up first.

Once Monk was back up on the ground, Li Huowang leaped up the ladder and followed him.

After Monk and Li Huowang left, the people hiding inside the rooms walked out. All of them had tattoos on their ears. There were both men and women, with some of them even carrying infants and children.

At this moment, everyone's faces were filled with hatred and fear.

One of the three performers clenched his fist while talking to an old man with white hair, "Grandpa! That man was right! We can't wait anymore! We need to act now!"

The old man was visibly angry as he forcefully swung his cane

down onto the ground. “Go, gather all the youths in our house. We need to kill that red-robed Daoist! They dare think of us as mere pushovers?!”

Meanwhile, Monk still acted clueless as they left the underground courtyard and returned to the busy street.

“What just happened?” asked Monk, confused.

“You don’t know?” asked Li Huowang, carefully scrutinizing Monk.

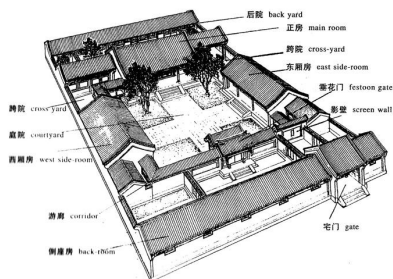
He had never forgotten how suspicious Monk had always been.

It was only thanks to Monk that Li Huowang had managed to see through the deception of the Righteous Monastery. It was also thanks to his help that Li Huowang managed to find the house of the Nuo Opera performers.

It might’ve been a coincidence the first time, but a second time around? This was too much of a coincidence.

Translator's Thoughts

Here's an example of what courtyard houses look like. Basically rather than the house being surrounded by the yard, the courtyard would be within the house instead.



Chapter 154 - Dunes

Li Huowang may look relaxed, but as he stared at Monk in front of him, he was completely alert. Even though Monk hadn't done anything to harm him, Li Huowang refused to trust someone else with his life.

"Monk, can you tell me who you are?" Li Huowang said jokingly.

Does Monk have an ulterior motive? Or is he a spy acting on the behalf of the Righteous Monastery? Or maybe he's someone from the Sitting Oblivion Dao that the Abbess warned me about? All of these could be true and it would be a problem no matter which of them he is connected to.

"Me? I'm a monk. Why do you ask me this?" said Monk frankly.

Li Huowang observed Monk's expression closely but found nothing unusual. Still, even if there was no evidence, Li Huowang couldn't bring himself to fully trust Monk that easily anymore.

Unable to confirm whether Monk was harmless or not, the best plan that Li Huowang could think of was to distance himself from him, "Fine, since we are done watching the show, let's split up for now. You go do your good deeds while I continue with my travels. I hope that we will meet again."

"Why are you in such a hurry? We haven't seen each other for so long. We can just travel together like the good old days," said Monk happily as he reached for Li Huowang's sleeve. However, his hand was stopped by the scabbard of a sword.

After a moment, Monk retracted his hand. "What are you doing? Aren't we friends?"

"If you are a friend, then tell me who you are! Don't make me

guess your identity here! Who are you?!” shouted Li Huowang as he walked back to the inn without waiting for a reply.

Sensing the hostility in Li Huowang’s tone, Monk decided not to follow him. At the same time, he looked a little dejected.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang walked back to the inn without any incident. When he turned around and confirmed that Monk hadn’t followed him, he sighed in relief.

“Senior Li, what’s wrong? Why are you so nervous? Did a ghost chase you?” asked Puppy as he chewed on sunflower seeds while walking down the stairs.

“Where is everyone?” Li Huowang hurriedly asked him.

“They are all outside, following your orders and gathering information about Hou Shu. They are also trying to find a map of the kingdom,” explained Puppy, feeling confused as to why Li Huowang would ask him that.

“There’s no need to do all that now! Call everyone back. We need to leave as soon as possible!”

“Why... Alright, Senior Li, let me go and find them immediately,” Puppy threw away the sunflower seeds and ran out.

“Don’t forget to call for the Lu family!” shouted Li Huowang as he ran to the stables.

Li Huowang’s order was so sudden that none of them had any time to prepare. They all rushed back as soon as they could before hastily preparing for their journey.

Even so, Li Huowang’s orders were absolute. No one dared to fight back.

Thankfully they were able to finish preparations before nightfall. Soon, the horse carriage was well on its way out of town.

“Senior Li, what’s wrong?” Chun Xiaoman clutched her sword, confused by their sudden predicament.

“Someone in the town is targeting us. But don’t worry; this time it’s not the same as last time. If they choose to fight us, they

won't have the advantage," said Li Huowang as he felt the sword on his back.

After having rested for an entire day, everyone's stamina was in good condition. They only stopped to rest when the moon was high in the sky.

At that moment, Li Huowang roughly calculated and determined that they were at least ten kilometers away from the town, and so he told all of them to stop and rest.

If they wanted to continue their journey tomorrow, then they needed to sleep for now.

At the same time, Li Huowang personally took the job of night watch in order to prevent any people from suddenly attacking them on the first night of their journey.

Li Huowang gently patted Bun's head while recalling everything that happened today. He was trying to see if he had missed any details.

He had a feeling that something was indeed strange; however, he couldn't figure out why. He felt as though he was being led around by the nose, causing him to feel irritated.

But since they were already out of town, he decided not to think anymore and instead figure out his next steps.

The Nuo Opera performers and the monks from the righteous monastery. Regardless of their origin, none of them wanted to fight me in a town. It means that they are afraid of something.

Li Huowang patted the Profound Records and the sword on his back as he pondered about it.

Everyone I encountered immediately knew that I was a Strayed One. Based on the actions of the Righteous Monastery, it seems that Strayed Ones are indeed valuable. Regardless, since they did not act immediately, it must mean that I have the power threshold to protect myself in this world. At least we should be able to peacefully navigate through the dangers.

At that moment, Dan Yangzi, who had been squatting directly in front of him, suddenly spoke. “Hmph! And to think that I call you my disciple. They are all bullying you and yet you only think about self defense. Instead of running, you should be thinking about how to kill them all!”

Hearing this, Li Huowang smiled coldly and clapped his hands slowly. “Amazing! My Master is such a good teacher! However, I wonder who it was that left his disciples behind to run away from the Righteous Monastery last time.”

“You damned brat!” shouted Dan Yangzi as he stood up, his grotesque muscles and flesh pulsating. Just as he was about to open his three mouths to say something, he turned, staring in the same direction as Li Huowang.

At that moment, a single black dot was slowly approaching them.

“They are chasing us!” Li Huowang's face turned serious. Just as he was about to stand up and inform the rest of the group, he realized that there was another black dot approaching them from the front.

Seeing this, Li Huowang scanned his surroundings and saw black dots approaching them from every direction. They were being surrounded!

“Li Huowang! You’ve been surrounded! This time, you are dead for sure, hahaha!” said Jiang Yingzi as she laughed maniacally while hugging her belly with her remaining arm.

“Wake up! Someone’s here!” Li Huowang’s angry roar broke the silence of the dunes.

Hearing his shout, the sleepy members instantly broke out into cold sweat and brandished their blades.

Regardless of who they were, their enemies wanted them dead. Instantly, the atmosphere became tense.

“Don’t wait for them to complete their encirclement! We need

to break through now!” Li Huowang led them, charging toward one of the black dots.

As they got closer, Li Huowang saw who they were.

One of them was wearing the same bronze coin veil. It was the same assailant from last night! At the same time, just like yesterday, the man had several shadow monsters in his hand.

Seeing this, there was no need for any words. Li Huowang just unsheathed his sword and charged forward.

On the other hand, the veiled man threw out the shadow monsters in his hand. With the aid of the moonlight, the shadow monsters quickly gained form and stood up like paper dolls as they floated toward Li Huowang.

Chapter 155 - Nature

“Kill them all!” Li Huowang’s sword slashed upward, a crimson glow flashing on the sword’s body. In the next instant, a shadow monster was sliced in half as it turned to smoke while howling in pain.

At the same time, Li Huowang gritted his teeth and continued running, closing in the distance between him and the veiled man.

Li Huowang slashed until there was only one shadow monster left. Initially, he had thought that this would be easy, but at that moment, the veiled man’s underarm bulged before four more arms extended from underneath it.

Each of these arms held another shadow monster.

After a moment, the veiled man threw the shadow monsters into the air. Illuminated by the moonlight, Li Huowang was instantly surrounded by them.

“Senior Li, we are here to help!” shouted Bai Lingmiao.

“Don’t come any closer! Miaomiao, don’t play the drum! I can handle this myself.” said Li Huowang as he slashed through the horde of shadow monsters while closing in on the veiled man.

Fa la la~

At the same time, the Profound Records was unfurled.

Then, Li Huowang sliced off two of his fingers, causing him to almost faint from the pain.

However, it was worth it.

The two fingers rapidly expanded before they even touched the ground. At the same time, the bones within them grew longer as they shot themselves toward the veiled man.

The veiled man tried to evade, but the fingers homed in on him.

Splurt!

The fingers buried themselves into the man's neck and Li Huowang saw the remaining shadow monsters stop in their tracks. Then, the shadow monsters slowly turned back into ordinary shadows.

"You..." The veiled man fell onto the ground, dead before he could say anything.

Seeing this, Li Huowang hurried over and inspected the dead six-armed man.

"Wait, is that it? This was too easy." Li Huowang was confused. Compared to the previous encounters, this was too easy.

After a moment, Li Huowang carefully used his sword to lift the coin veil; he wanted to see what the man looked like.

Just as he started unveiling the man, Li Huowang was stunned to see a wooden lip. The 'man' was nothing more than a puppet!

"Careful! The dwarf is inside the stomach! It's trying to attack you!"

Li Huowang didn't know who had shouted those words, but he saw a flash of steel approaching his heart from the puppet's abdomen.

Thanks to the warning, Li Huowang managed to block it with his sword.

The very next moment, Li Huowang raised his sword and stabbed it directly into the abdomen of the puppet.

A scream rang out, accompanied by a spray of blood from the abdomen of the puppet.

After a moment, a bald man with saggy skin and asymmetrical eyes crawled out. Blood could be seen leaking out from the dwarf's mouth.

But it was useless. Soon, the dwarf died.

At that moment, Li Huowang felt a dragon's roar coming from his sword, almost causing him to lose control of it. Then, he quickly

removed the sword before sheathing it again, finally bringing it back under his control.

However, Li Huowang didn't have any time to inspect his sword. He turned around to see who it was that warned him about the dwarf's attack.

Standing there was none other than Monk.

"You again? Who are you?" asked Li Huowang.

One of Monk's shoes had a hole in it, revealing his toe. He walked forward with his torn shoes, walked past the dead dwarf, and then stored the bronze coin veil in his pocket.

"Let's go. We can talk while we run. Can't you see that they are catching up?" said Monk.

Li Huowang saw the rest of the black dots were becoming larger and started running.

"Everyone, quickly catch up! Don't get left behind!" shouted Li Huowang.

Then, he approached Monk and questioned him once more, "Who are you? Why are you doing this?"

Hearing this, Monk laughed. "No need to be so cautious. Have I ever harmed you when we were together?"

Without waiting for Li Huowang's reply, Monk continued talking, "No, I've never harmed you; in fact, I've been helping you. I helped you discover the Righteous Monastery's plot and I was the one who reminded you of how suspicious the performers of the Nuo Opera were."

Li Huowang sighed as he monitored the black dots chasing them as he tried to calm himself down. "I thank you for your help, but I hate it when someone lies to me."

The originally jovial Monk suddenly turned serious. "There's no need for you to know who I am. What's more important is for me to know whether you are the real Li Huowang or not. Are you the same Li Huowang that I know of?"

“What?!” Li Huowang’s pupils shrank from surprise. He almost wanted to stop Monk from speaking any further.

“The things that I am about to say next may sound preposterous, but seeing how you saved me so many times, you need to trust me. I am not Monk, and you are not Li Huowang. All of these are identities that we’ve borrowed from someone else. Your true name is Peng Zhi and I am Peng Jiao. We are not real people. Our real identity is that of someone else’s Three Corpses!”

“What the fuck are you talking about?!” Li Huowang was confused. “I’m not Li Huowang? And there is someone else called Li Huowang?”

Piu~

An arrow flew toward them. At the last moment, Monk pulled Li Huowang, causing the arrow to narrowly miss.

Sensing the urgency of the situation, Monk sped up his explanation. “Do you not know the Three Corpses of Daoism? Anyone who wants to become an Immortal must kill their Three Corpses! And, we are the Three Corpses! The upper corpse, Peng Ju is Dan Yangzi, the middle corpse Peng Zhi is you, and the lower corpse Peng Jiao is me! Now that Dan Yangzi has been slain, we are the only two left. We need to work together to live!”

“This... How could this be....” Li Huowang wasn’t sure if he could trust those words. His entire perception of the world had been turned upside down in just a few seconds.

“Daoist! Look at me! You need to look at me!”

Hearing this, Li Huowang turned to stare at Monk; he could see how Monk was.

“The upper corpse, Peng Ju resides in the head, turning someone stupid and without wisdom; the middle corpse Peng Zhi resides in the chest, turning someone anxious, someone who can’t calm down; the lower corpse Peng Jiao resides in the abdomen, causing a person to become greedy and lustful. Not everyone can

abandon their instincts, but look! I've broken free of my nature. I was destined to be someone evil, but I persevered in doing good deeds! My instincts call on me to be lustful and greedy, but I refuse to follow them, choosing to become a poor and chastised monk! I alone shall control my life, not my instincts! I know that the instinct of Peng Zhi is to be anxious and doubtful, but Daoist, these are merely your instincts. You can fight back against them, just like me! Only then can we win against the one who is trying to kill us! We will finally be free after that!"

Chapter 156 - Peng Zhi

“I am one of the Three Corpses, Peng Zhi?” Li Huowang’s brain was abuzz. His mind was a complete mess.

“How can that be? I was transmigrated here! How can I possibly be something stupid like Peng Zhi?” mumbled Li Huowang.

“It’s no use even if you don’t want to believe it. Currently, I need you to recall as much as you can and see if you are able to find something bizarre in the details that you remember.”

“Details?”

While Li Huowang was reluctant, after thinking for some time, he did find many suspicious points. Dan Yangzi’s idiotic pride and all his various bizarre encounters fit quite well with the hypothesis of the Three Corpses.

“One more thing. If I am correct, then you can’t recall anything from your childhood, correct? This is natural, since we were never children to begin with. We were already adults when we took form!”

Monk’s words made Li Huowang realize that he could indeed not remember anything from his time before Zephyr Temple. In fact, his very first memories were of him being within the Zephyr Temple!

“What’s going on? What is real and what is fake?” mumbled Li Huowang as he felt his head splitting in pain as various pieces of information swirled within his mind.

“Peng Zhi! Don’t think about it! Stop thinking! You have to go against your instincts! I did it and so can you! Don’t think about it and don’t doubt anymore. Only then can we win against that person!” said Monk as he shook both of Li Huowang’s arms rigorously. “Pull yourself together. Do you see the people that are

trying to kill us? The cultivator is using them to try and kill us! The moment he kills both of us, the cultivator will become an Immortal! We are in this together and we can never let his plan come to fruition!”

Li Huowang took deep breaths as he tried to calm himself down before turning to question Monk. “Monk, you—”

“Careful!” Monk quickly pulled him down as another arrow flew past Li Huowang’s shoulder, taking off some of his hair.

“Why are you still asking questions at such a crucial time? Let’s talk more once we leave here. Our enemies are quickly approaching!”

Hearing this, Li Huowang turned around and saw that the black dots chasing them had indeed become larger. They were chasing them on camels!

He could see that the assailants all wore wooden masks and had white fangs protruding out from their mouths, wriggling like antennas.

Li Huowang recognized them—they were the Nuo Opera performers!

He would’ve been fine if only the performers were the ones chasing them, but this time around they had brought an entire group of bandits with them!

The bandit had hidden their faces, allowing Li Huowang to only see their eyes that were filled with hostility as they raised their various weapons and hollered.

After a moment, Li Huowang stared into the distance, choosing to continue with his escape.

But just as he had taken a few steps, the sand dunes around him faded away into nothingness.

“Not again! Not when it’s this dangerous!” shouted Li Huowang.

After a moment, he woke up and found himself strapped to a

hospital bed.

At this moment, he could see Yang Na and his mother carefully moving a table and placing it near his bed.

“Peng Zhi.” A faint voice rang out.

Hearing the voice, Li Huowang clenched his fist, his arms tied to the bed securely.

He closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and then opened his eyes; however, he was still within the hallucination.

“Huowang, happy birthday! Do you remember my birthday? It is only three days away,” said Yang Na. Currently, she was wearing a white sweater as she carefully placed a paper crown on Li Huowang’s head. She hadn’t noticed the changes in Li Huowang’s expression just yet.

“Peng Zhi... Wake up...” The voice became louder.

Meanwhile, Sun Xiaoqin placed a cake on the table and started lighting up the candles on it.

On the other hand, the voice inside Li Huowang’s ears suddenly became louder. “Peng Zhi, wake up! They are catching up to us!”

At the same time, the lights within the room were turned off. Then, both his mother and Yang Na stood beside him and smiled.

“Peng Zhi! Everything I’ve said is true! Don’t think about the memories stored within Li Huowang’s body! They are not yours! No matter how doubtful you are, they belong to Li Huowang and not you! You are only using his body. Fight against your instincts and forget about them!” said the voice.

“I’m not Li Huowang? The person my mother and Yang Na cared for, the Li Huowang they knew, was someone else?” Li Huowang’s lips trembled as he saw them.

“Happy birthday to you~ Happy birthday to you~” The two of them started singing softly.

Staring at the warm and gentle sight in front of him, Li Huowang’s lips continued to tremble. He bit his lips and swallowed

the blood that flowed out from it.

He wanted to take a deep breath to calm himself down but he couldn't—he was afraid of scaring his mother and Yang Na.

Soon, the song came to an end. After that, Li Huowang slowly leaned his body forward and blew out the candles.

Li Huowang's sudden action surprised both his mother and Yang Na. "Huowang! When did you become coherent?"

However, instead of answering, he just smiled at both of them. "I want you to place a piece of cloth in my mouth. I'm afraid that I will get very loud later."

Just as he said those words, he felt an impact on his head causing stars to swim around his head. Slowly, everything around him fell apart.

"Wake up!"

At that moment, Li Huowang was back at the cold sand dunes, his face flat on the sandy ground. He was a bloodied mess.

He could see that their three horse carriages had been positioned in a circle and that everyone was taking refuge in the center. Many among them had taken up arms and were fighting against the assailants. Even so, they were slowly being pushed back.

There were just far too many enemies!

Seeing that the situation was dire, Li Huowang wanted to immediately help them.

But he did not move—he did not move because he saw someone standing on his right.

It was Monk.

Immediately, he turned to his left and saw another person—it was Monk, helping him up.

Seeing this, Li Huowang pushed them away. At this moment, there were two identical Monks!

Splurt!

An arrow pierced through Li Huowang's shoulder. However, neither did he feel any pain nor did he pay any attention to it. He just stared at the two Monks.

"Aiya! Daoist, you have been shot! Are you alright?" asked one of the Monks, about to approach Li Huowang. However, he was stopped by a shout from Li Huowang.

"Both of you! Stay back! I don't trust the two of you!" Li Huowang raised his sword in anger. He was afraid of being stabbed in the back if he didn't settle this right now.

Hearing this, the Monk standing closest to him was left speechless. "Peng Zhi, what do you mean by the two of us? That Monk is nothing more than your illusion. You can ask the others; they can't see the other Monk that you are talking about."

Chapter 157 - Peng Jiao

Li Huowang asked everyone around him and was surprised by what he heard from them.

“Senior Li, what are you talking about? There are no Monks with us at all. Forget that, and come help us; their archers are too strong!”

“Wait... Not even one Monk? Are both Monks part of my illusion? How could this be? There must be at least one of them here! No, this is impossible!” mumbled Li Huowang before staring at Yang Xiaohai. “When we were sending the urn of ashes, we encountered Monk and we even talked to him along the way! How can you possibly say that you didn’t see him?”

The anxious Yang Xiaohai was lying flat on the ground as he stared at the enemies in fear. Hearing Li Huowang’s question, he turned around, “Senior Li, there is no Monk. No one followed us along when we were sending the ashes.”

“Impossible! I was talking to him the entire time. If he had been a fake, then that would have meant that I was talking to nothing but air. Are you blind? Why did you not tell me if I was talking to the air all that time?”

Yang Xiaohai cried from the pressure. “But Senior Li, you often talk with non-existent people. How would I know that this time was different?”

Shocked, Li Huowang fell onto the ground. “I speak to myself all the time? Then... what is real... and what is fake?”

As he mumbled, Li Huowang stared at the people surrounding him, smiling madly.

Bai Lingmiao, Puppy, Sun Baolu, Chun Xiaoman, Yang Xiaohai, Gao Zhijian, Lu Zhuangyuan, Lu Juren, Lu Xiucan, and everyone

else. Their faces flashed in front of his eyes.

“Maybe... some of them are fake as well? Is this world the real one? Or is this side fake and the other side real? Which is fake?”

At that moment, the Monk closer to him pulled Li Huowang up from the ground. “See? I was right. You are indeed Peng Zhi, the one who doubts everyone the most. It’s normal for you to always feel like something is off. If you think that the Monk standing there is real, then you can just go and touch him. The illusion of the Monk is over there, come! Let me bring you over to him!”

Li Huowang’s mind was still buzzing when this Monk pulled him toward the other Monk.

Both Monks looked the same and were no different from each other.

“Daoist, are you alright?” asked the other Monk as he came over.

When the illusion of the Monk came over, Li Huowang’s right hand phased through him. The Monk standing beside him was right—the one in front of him was nothing but an illusion, just like Jiang Yingzi.

“That means...” muttered Li Huowang, his face filled with pain.

“See? Didn’t your hand phase right through? That means that I am real and that I am telling you the truth. You are Peng Zhi! You are not Li Huowang. We need to work together to—” said Monk before suddenly stopping halfway as he lowered his head—there was a blade embedded in his abdomen.

“Why?” asked Monk in a weak and trembling voice, feeling shocked as he looked at Li Huowang. “Wasn’t the other Monk fake just like I told you? Why do you choose to ignore my words? Even though I’ve helped you so much throughout your journey, you are still trying to kill me?”

Li Huowang gritted his teeth and thrust his sword deeper into Monk’s abdomen. “You are right, he was indeed fake. But... I am

not Peng Zhi... I am Li Huowang!”

“Why? Why do you suddenly think that you are Li Huowang? Earlier, you had even been on the verge of believing me!”

Li Huowang snarled as he stabbed deeper into Monk. “I don’t need any reasons! I am Li Huowang! I don’t need any logic or evidence to prove my identity! Even if there’s evidence showing that I am Peng Zhi, I still believe I am Li Huowang!”

Then, Li Huowang took a few steps forward and pinned Monk against the horse carriage.

Red blood flowed out from Monk’s robes as he stared weakly at Li Huowang, using the last of his strength to question Li Huowang, “You... Have you ever thought that you might kill the wrong person? What if I am right?”

Li Huowang took a deep breath and shouted at Monk, “So what if you are right? So what if I am Peng Jiao?! I don’t care! I am Li Huowang! I AM THE LI HUOWANG THAT MY MOTHER AND YANG NA CARE FOR THE MOST! NO ONE CAN TAKE THEM AWAY FROM ME!”

After Li Huowang’s outburst was finished, Monk lowered his head.

Staring at the dead Monk, Li Huowang’s face twitched as he continued to mumble to himself, “I am Li Huowang, I am Li Huowang, I am Li Huowang ...”

Every time he mentioned his name, killing intent arose within his heart. He kept thinking back to the birthday cake he had seen earlier.

“If the Li Huowang that Yang Na loved existed, then I would just kill him and steal his identity!” muttered Li Huowang.

Hearing this, Dan Yangzi’s three faces turned scornful as he scoffed at him.

“Sigh... why are you such a crazy bastard? I had already been doing such a good job fooling you, so why aren’t you following my

plan? Why did you suddenly attack me? Ah! Such a hassle. But, it was so fun just now,” Suddenly, the dead Monk spoke up, his face morphing into a rectangle while his facial organs melted and turned into two large circles.

Seeing this sudden change, Li Huowang was first surprised before becoming extremely angry. “I FUCKING KNEW IT! You are a liar! No, you are not just a liar, you are from the Sitting Oblivion Dao! You are Er Bing[1]!”

Li Huowang instantly realized who it was when he saw the face resembling a mahjong tile. He was a member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao that the Abbess had warned him about.

“Aaaaaaa! This is so annoying! You had already started to believe me, but then why did you suddenly attack me? You are such a crazy bastard!”

Er Bing’s face quickly morphed into that of a beautiful woman. Then, she chuckled and quickly leaped to the top of the horse carriage.

As soon as all of the assailants spotted Er Bing, they stopped.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang ran up to the roof of the carriage and saw that Er Bing had joined their attackers and was getting further away.

Seeing how the Nuo Opera performers and the bandits didn’t attack her, Li Huowang knew that she was the one who had orchestrated all of this!

There are no Three Corpses!

Everything had been a lie created by the Sitting Oblivion Dao!

1. Er Bing refers to the name of the mahjong tile that this fellow's face resembles and that's why Li Huowang calls them that



So here's an explanation on what the Three Corpses are:

The *sanshi* 三尸 "**Three Corpses**" or *sanchong* 三蟲 "**Three Worms**" are a Daoist physiological belief that demonic creatures live inside the human body, and they seek to hasten the death of their host. These three supernatural parasites allegedly enter the person at birth and reside in the three dantian "energy centers", respectively located within the head, chest, and abdomen.

For a Daoist adept to achieve the longevity of an Immortal, it was necessary to expel the Three Corpses from the body. Since these evil spirits feed upon decaying matter produced by grains being digested in the intestines, the practice of abstinence from grains and cereals is the first step towards expelling them. It weakens them to the point where they can be killed with alchemical drugs and ultimately eliminated through meditation techniques.

There's an entire wikipage with information of it: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_Corpses

Chapter 158 - Er Bing

“Look! I’ve forced him to come out! He’s that crazy bastard who joined the Sitting Oblivion Dao! He’s Dan Yangzi, the very same man that used mercury to flay your family before burying them underground! He’s the culprit!” Er Bing pointed at Li Huowang as she shouted in an exaggerated manner.

Upon hearing her words, Li Huowang shouted in anger, “You damn liar!”

Li Huowang was so angry that he almost spat blood.

This damned bastard is lying about me being a part of the Sitting Oblivion Dao!

“That lady is the one from the Sitting Oblivion Dao! She can change her face freely! You guys are being lied to!” shouted Li Huowang.

However, even though Li Huowang told them the truth, none of them listened to him.

One of the Nuo Opera performers wearing the wooden mask glared at Li Huowang with intense hatred. “Not only have you killed my people, but you even sent that old man to probe us and then even rushed into our house to threaten us! Even with death at hand, you still think you can fool us? Dream on! Don’t you dare think that the Lai household can be bullied by you, Dan Yangzi!”

At the same time, the masked bandit standing beside the Nuo Opera performer got excited as he started shouting, “Ptui! Fucking bastard! How dare you kill my sworn brother?! Just you wait, I will personally torture you once we have captured you!”

Li Huowang wanted to explain himself, but no one listened to him. Soon, under Er Bing’s deception, they all took up their weapons and started charging toward the horse carriages.

Bam!

The horse carriages were pushed a few inches back while the carriages themselves started to crack.

Meanwhile, the scared Lu family huddled together in the center of the circle.

At that moment, a familiar scream rang out, causing Li Huowang to turn around amidst all the chaos.

He saw that a barbed arrow had shot past Bai Lingmiao's right shoulder, shearing off a chunk of her flesh.

Seeing that Bai Lingmiao was injured, Li Huowang was enraged; it was as if he was the one that got wounded instead. Immediately, he jumped down from the horse carriage.

"How many times must I tell you that you are all being lied to!" shouted Li Huowang. At the same time, cold steel flashed, and both humans and horses fell apart as they screamed in pain; Li Huowang had cut through them effortlessly.

Li Huowang had only recently learned how to use the sword properly and this was a good chance for him to quickly master it; the best method to do so was real combat.

"Give me back my grandson's life!" shouted an old man.

On the other hand, Li Huowang just took a step back before cutting the old man down.

"AAAAARGH! He was only six! What sin did he commit?! He was the only descendant of our family! Why did you kill him?!" shouted the old man. Even as he bled profusely, he refused to die. He pounced toward Li Huowang's leg before forcefully biting down with his white fangs.

"I've told you so many times that it was not me!" denied Li Huowang.

Bam bam bam!

Li Huowang kicked the old man numerous times, causing his head to become dented.

Then, Li Huowang once again started to mow through the enemies, slicing them in half in almost no time. The more he killed, the more familiar he grew with the sword, and the more his killing intent grew.

Given Li Huowang's heightened senses, he should've already been able to locate Er Bing amongst the crowd. However, for some reason, he was unable to do so. Thus, he concluded that she had a method to hide her presence.

After a while, Li Huowang bit his lips and glared at the crowd of assailants with eyes filled with killing intent. "ER BING!"

Hearing his shout, a woman wearing a coin veil popped out from the crowd. She revealed her mouth and smiled before disappearing behind a burly bandit.

"You crazy bastard from the Sitting Oblivion Dao, your evil-doing days are over!" shouted Li Huowang as he unfurled the Profound Records and took out his pliers.

Then, he ripped out three of his molars, using that to pay the price required by the Profound Records. The molars exploded in the air and pierced through everything in their path, be it leather armor or wooden masks.

Soon, the massive crowd of enemies in front of Li Huowang fell to the ground, allowing him to pinpoint Er Bing's location.

Just as he was about to chase her, the remaining assailants encircled him once again, stopping him from getting closer to Er Bing.

As Li Huowang saw Er Bing getting further away, he gritted his teeth and aimed his sword at his own forearm.

However, just as he was about to slice off his forearm, a tall figure appeared in between him and the enemies.

Gao Zhijian swung his large club mercilessly, causing bits of red and white to splash all over the place.

"Summon~ The~ Gods~"

At the same time, a red-veiled woman rushed forward along the beat of a drum, using her beastly jaws to tear through the enemies' throats.

Chun Xiaoman also arrived beside him with her bloodied sword. She panted while fighting off the enemies. "Senior Li! We are here to help you!"

As he saw his comrades, Li Huowang kept away his swords. "Ok! Follow me and chase after that woman. She's the mastermind who orchestrated all of this!"

After a while, they slowly closed in on Er Bing while fighting off their enemies. All the while, sounds of painful shrieks, cracking bones, and metallic clashes rang out continuously.

Er Bing finally had nowhere else to hide. Forced into a corner, she suddenly started laughing as she ran toward Li Huowang's group. At the same time, she threw something out from her sleeves.

No one had expected such a situation. Instinctively, Li Huowang blocked with his sword.

At that moment, a metallic die covered in flames flew high up into the air, covered by a faint glow that indicated a spell inscription.

Er Bing made a seal with her palms causing the flaming metal die to start spinning before embedding itself into Gao Zhijian's temple.

"Simpleton!"

"Gao Zhijian!"

Slowly, Gao Zhijian's massive body fell to the ground, his eyes growing more and more unfocused.

"Hehe, now this is how it should be. It's much more fun if someone dies~" Er Bing laughed as she produced two black dominoes from her sleeves.

She held both the dominoes in one hand while using the other hand to perform hand seals. "Seven, eight but not nine~ Make it a

poisoned hand if nine~ Golden four, silver five and a stool, supports the Heavens and Earth, meeting fleet fully with four, five, and six~”

As she chanted, the two dominoes became soft and long, slowly seeping through her fingers as they started burrowing into the ground.

But at that moment, something unexpected happened—something Er Bing could never have foreseen.

An arm with two fingers burst forth from the ground, grabbing the two dominoes and stabbing into Er Bing’s abdomen at the same time.

Er Bing spat out blood and raised her head. At that moment, she saw Li Huowang slowly stand up from a kneeling position, his left sleeve looking completely empty and billowing in the wind.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang’s severed arm continued to tighten its grip until it managed to snap Er Bing’s waist.

Chapter 159 - Liar

Li Huowang almost passed out from the pain, but somehow endured it as he ran over and sliced off Er Bing's face, revealing the bloody, mahjong tile face hidden underneath.

Li Huowang grabbed Er Bing's neck and raised her into the air. "Stop fighting! Look at this! She's someone from the Sitting Oblivion Dao! Everyone here has been lied to!"

But his only response was an arrow to his abdomen—they were all beyond reasoning.

It might've been a misunderstanding in the beginning, but at this point, too many people had died. There was no turning back.

Li Huowang threw Er Bing down and crushed the bones in all her limbs before charging into the battlefield. "Xiaoman, make sure she doesn't escape!"

As she saw Li Huowang become a demon of bloodshed, Er Bing started chuckling.

Seeing this, Xiaoman placed her sword on Er Bing's neck. "You still have the gall to laugh? You will be crying soon enough."

Hearing this, Er Bing started laughing even more loudly, all while her face underwent numerous transformations before settling on a new face. "When should I be laughing if not now? Risking my own life to fool someone feels especially amazing."

Today, Jiang Yingzi did not glare at Li Huowang like she usually did. Instead, she was looking at Er Bing with a complicated look on her face; among the various faces that Er Bing's face transformed into was the face of Elder Yan Jianxi.

After a while, the assailants finally retreated; not because they had realized that it was all a ploy devised by Er Bing, but because they'd lost too many men.

The sky slowly brightened while the sound of horse hooves and camel bells gradually became distant, leaving an entire battlefield littered with bodies as well as several camels with no owners.

As the sun gradually arose at the horizon, the blood on the ground, as well as everyone's bodies looked a lot more red.

Li Huowang had suffered numerous injuries, yet he still stood tall like a statue amidst a pool of blood.

In this battle, both parties had been innocent, but the Sitting Oblivion Dao's devious plot pushed both sides past the point of no return.

At this moment, Jiang Yingzi was staring at the scene in front of her, panicking; it was as if she was finally starting to piece the puzzle pieces together.

"Hahaha! Not bad! Not bad at all." The limbless Er Bing laughed.

Her voice attracted Li Huowang's attention as he too started to laugh. Then, Li Huowang let go of his sword and stumbled back.

Once he reached Er Bing, he stuffed several Blood Nourishing Pills into her mouth and instructed Xiaoman, "Go and fetch the Golden Wound medication that we bought in town."

"What?" Xiaoman thought she had misheard.

"Did you not hear what I said? Go and bring the Golden Wound medication, NOW!" shouted Li Huowang.

Once she retrieved it, Li Huowang carefully scattered the medication on Er Bing's disembowelled intestines. Then, he unfurled his torture tools in front of her before speaking lightly, "Feel like confessing?"

Er Bing was confused. "Confess? Did I do something that I need to confess?"

Li Huowang positioned Er Bing's listless right arm and carefully used his torture tools to pry out her fingernails, one by one. He didn't stop until all five fingernails on her right arm had been pried

out. “Feel like confessing?”

“What do you want me to tell you?” asked Er Bing.

“DO YOU FEEL LIKE CONFESSING OR NOT?!” Li Huowang rammed his remaining hand into one of her eye sockets.

As Li Huowang crushed one of her eyeballs, Er Bing screamed in pain.

“Do you feel like confessing yet?!” asked Li Huowang once again.

“Senior Li, are you alright?” Bai Lingmiao approached carefully.

Li Huowang took a deep breath and gently said to her, “I’m fine. Help me check on the others. Summon the Immortals to heal those who have been heavily injured.”

Just as Bai Lingmiao left to follow his instructions, Li Huowang stomped on Er Bing’s intestines, and shouted in a voice filled with anger and hatred, “JUST TELL ME EVERYTHING!”

However, at this point, he didn’t want her to tell him anything; he just needed an outlet to channel all his rage. He wanted to get his revenge on Er Bing. Everything had happened because of her, so she needed to pay the price.

Li Huowang often used only some of the torture tools, leaving the other tools untouched. However, those tools now had their chance to shine.

As more and more of his torture tools were stained with blood, Er Bing’s once beautiful figure transformed into a bloody human stick.

Throughout the process, the intense pain caused Er Bing to faint and wake up over and over again.

However, Li Huowang didn’t let her go regardless of how painful it was.

After a while, Er Bing stared at him with her one remaining eye and started laughing, her laughter gradually getting louder and

louder.

The more she was tortured, the louder she laughed.

Eventually, Er Bing's breathing grew faint. Finally, Li Huowang, who was panting heavily, lost his patience and used his sword to aim for her heart.

"Li Huowang, wait, can you help me and ask her a question?"

This sudden voice caused Li Huowang to stop. He turned around and saw who it was that had spoken to him.

It was Jiang Yingzi's illusion.

At this moment, she looked conflicted, a mix of expectations and fear.

"Can you ask her if the Sitting Oblivion Dao was the one responsible for the massacre of my town four years ago?" asked Jiang Yingzi.

This question immediately caught Li Huowang off-guard, so much so that he didn't even notice how bizarre his illusion was.

At that moment, Li Huowang's pupils shrank, and he had a bold hypothesis. When he asked Er Bing the question, the latter started laughing loudly. "Hehehe~ Didn't you kill them? Be more confident! After all, you are a Strayed One! It's a piece of cake for you to kill those tens of thousands of people!"

As soon as she said those words, her remaining eye was crushed by Li Huowang. "You guys were the ones responsible for it! The massacre from four years ago was done by you guys! And you framed me!"

On the other hand, Jiang Yingzi's body became unstable and she started crying. She dragged her wounded body and approached Li Huowang. "Li Huowang, I was wrong. The Sitting Oblivion Dao was the one who killed my family. We've all been fooled."

Then, without even waiting for his reply, she wiped away her tears. "Li Huowang, I know it's too much for me to ask this, but can you get revenge for my family? If you help me, then I will tell you

something important.”

Hearing that, Li Huowang was curious but snapped out of it in an instant. “Why should I listen to an illusion like you?”

“I might be an illusion, and so was Monk, but Dan Yangzi is not! He’s real! The elders of the Ao Jing Sect had all been replaced by the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao! You’ve been fooled by them! They did not help you get rid of Dan Yangzi, but instead hid him further down inside of you! Your personality is still being influenced by Dan Yangzi!”

Just as Yingzi had just finished telling those words to Li Huowang, her body slowly started disappearing. “I’m sorry...”

Translator's Thoughts

Er Bing's true form! Credits to 格子的乱七八糟
on douyin



Chapter 160 - Death

At that moment, Jiang Yingzi disappeared without any prior warning.

Li Huowang was left stunned as he thought about what Jiang Yingzi had just told him.

“The elders of the Ao Jing Sect had been replaced by the members of Sitting Oblivion Dao? Dan Yangzi is still alive and is not an illusion?” mumbled Li Huowang. He would normally have just ignored her words since she was an illusion, but he found her words to be reasonable.

The Sitting Oblivion Dao hadn’t just appeared suddenly. They had already been there and had infiltrated the Ao Jing Sect.

“Impossible! How did you find out?!”

At that moment, Li Huowang lowered his head to see Er Bing shouting hysterically. Even though Er Bing had been able to laugh throughout the torture earlier, now she was visibly distressed after knowing that Li Huowang had found out the truth about the Ao Jing Sect.

Li Huowang finally realized what the Abbess meant when she advised him to think like the Sitting Oblivion Dao and work backward to resolve their plots. At the same time, he also realized why they were so dangerous and had to be killed on sight.

These crazy bastards didn’t fear death or pain, and only wanted to entertain themselves. Their perspective was so twisted that to them fooling someone was even more important than their own lives.

Now that Li Huowang knew what they cared about the most, he also knew how to exact his revenge on them.

“Do you want to know how I managed to see through your

tricks?” asked Li Huowang as he stabbed his sword into Er Bing’s chest.

“Cough~ Cough~” Blood flowed out from Er Bing’s mouth, the few remaining pieces of flesh on her face twitching. “How ...?”

Li Huowang lowered his body and whispered into her ears, “Hehe... Take a guess.”

As he said those words, he twisted his sword, causing Er Bing’s body to twitch in pain.

Then, Li Huowang withdrew his sword and slashed downward, splitting Er Bing’s head in half.

But that was not enough for him.

Li Huowang continued to slash Er Bing, over and over. Hatred filled his eyes while pieces of flesh were flung into the air until Er Bing’s body was turned into nothing more than a pile of minced meat.

Meanwhile, everyone else stood a distance away as they stared at the enraged Li Huowang, not daring to move a single step closer to him.

Just as Bai Lingmiao was about to approach Li Huowang, Chun Xiaoman stopped her. “Don’t go! What if ... “

“I’m not afraid!” said Bai Lingmiao as she pushed Xiaoman away and hugged Li Huowang.

“Senior Li! Senior Li! Please snap back!” Bai Lingmiao started crying as she hugged Li Huowang’s arm, stopping him from hacking up Er Bing.

Gradually, Li Huowang gradually regained his sanity and sheathed the bloody sword in his hand. Then, he slowly raised his head and stared at Dan Yangzi’s illusion.

Dan Yangzi was floating in the air, his three faces displaying different emotions—one displayed happiness, one anger, and one sadness. All of the faces stared at Li Huowang before creeping into an eerie smile.

After a while, Dan Yangzi slowly drifted downward and into the ground.

“Senior Li, please stop. She’s already dead and we are safe. Everything is over,” said Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang took a deep breath and nodded. “Yeah, everything is over.”

Then, he stared at the minced meat on the ground and asked the others, “Does anyone have a flint? Burn this motherfucker into ashes.”

Li Huowang was wary; he needed to make sure that Er Bing was well and truly dead. Burning her to ashes was one way to do this.

The others immediately followed his orders. They used a part of the broken horse carriage as fuel to burn up the bodies of Er Bing and the rest. As the flames burned brightly, a plume of black smoke could be seen rising atop the dunes.

Li Huowang did not leave. He just stared at the flames, making sure that nothing but ashes remained of Er Bing. Anything could happen in this bizarre world; he didn’t dare to be complacent.

Meanwhile, Lu Zhuangyuan stood at the side hesitantly before making up his mind. “Young Daoist, my daughter-in-law was startled very badly yesterday. Now that she is pregnant, it might not be wise for her to travel. We will go to the town and find a doctor to check on her first.”

However, he was telling only half the truth.

It was not only Luo Juanhua who was frightened yesterday, but the entire Lu family! Lu Zhuangyuan had originally thought that they had gotten a free Daoist bodyguard, but after he witnessed the things that happened yesterday, he realized that he was wrong. If they were traveling alone, then at most they would lose their money or maybe Luo Juanhua would have to suffer. But if they were to travel with Li Huowang, then their very lives could be lost!

The Young Daoist is crazy! To think that he hid it so well.

At that moment, Li Huowang turned around causing Lu Zhuangyuan's face to instantly turn pale as he took a few steps back, ready to explain himself.

"Alright. I hope you have a safe journey. Puppy, give Troupe Leader Lu two of the camels for their journey," said Li Huowang.

"N-n-no, no need for that!" said Lu Zhuangyuan as he instantly turned to leave, bringing his family with him. He was too afraid of Li Huowang.

Li Huowang ignored them and continued to monitor the flames which burned from morning to afternoon before finally dying out. Then, he approached the pile of burnt residue and confirmed that nothing but ashes remained. Only then did he finally let out a sigh of relief.

"Is everything okay?" asked Li Huowang as he inspected the wound on Bai Lingmiao's shoulder.

"Yes, it's just a minor injury." Bai Lingmiao forced a smile when she saw Li Huowang had returned to normal as if nothing had happened.

She extended both her hands and carefully inspected Li Huowang's amputated arm, her eyes revealing deep sorrow.

"No need to worry. It will grow out soon enough." Li Huowang carefully patted her head.

"Really?" Bai Lingmiao's eyes lit up.

"Of course," assured Li Huowang before turning toward the rest.

Everyone else also looked disheveled, but Li Huowang ignored their wounds; he was more concerned about those who had died.

One of the guiding drug ingredients had died. He had only one arm but good eyesight.

The other one who had died was a fat assistant.

At this moment, the two bodies were lying side by side, and

Monk's illusion was praying for them.

As he looked at their lifeless faces, Li Huowang felt numb. He doubted himself as a leader; if things had been different, maybe they too would have been able to go back to their homes.

"Burn their bodies. Do we have a jar? If not, then we can use a cloth to store the ashes," instructed Li Huowang.

Once everything was ready, Li Huowang took the rest of them and departed.

"Senior Li, I think we are going the wrong way. This path leads to the kingdom of Si Qi," pointed out one of them.

Li Huowang nodded. "Yes, and we must hurry."

Chapter 161 - Go Back

In a guest room, Li Huowang sat in a wooden tub, completely naked. He held onto a three-barbed spike in his lone arm, breathing deeply as though in preparation for something.

Whoo~ whoo~ whoo~

Li Huowang panted, trying to calm his nerves. Once he was completely composed, he stuffed a piece of cloth into his mouth, and raised the three-barbed spike in his hand, aiming it at his abdomen.

Blood started to flow into the bathwater, staining it a deep red.

The veins on Li Huowang's forehead throbbed as he endured the excruciating pain that almost caused him to pass out. Even as he trembled from the pain, he continued to dig deeper.

Finally, he reached inside his stomach, intending to create an opening to see what was inside.

However, at that moment, Li Huowang realized that he only had one arm left, and thus he could not perform such an action.

Just as he was considering if he should call someone for help from the outside, a hand with long and black fingernails grazed his skin and reached for his waist.

"Thank you," said Li Huowang as he shuddered as he raised the three-barbed spike.

The Second Deity's hand exerted slight pressure, causing the contents of his stomach to be slowly squeezed out. Apart from some half-digested food, there was nothing else—there was no Black Taisui nor Dan Yangzi's half face. He was gone.

Upon seeing this, Li Huowang smiled. He had guessed correctly. That day, in the cave in order to confuse him, those members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao had taken care of the still alive

Dan Yangzi.

Next, to tease him further, they had further hidden the Immortal Dan Yangzi, to an extent that even the Abbess hadn't been able to detect him.

Those liars wanted to see him continue walking down this path and get replaced by Dan Yangzi under unexpected circumstances.

This was all for their amusement.

But this had inadvertently helped him. Back then, the reason Abbess and the nuns hadn't been able to completely get rid of Dan Yangzi was because a part of him was still alive. That portion of Dan Yangzi which had still been alive was now completely dead. He just needed to return to the Benevolent Nunnery and look for Abbess; then, he could be completely rid of Dan Yangzi.

He let the three-barbed spike fall into the water, and picked up the Golden Wound medication before pouring it into his abdominal wound.

At that moment, the hand with the black fingernails quickly spun as the Second Deity held two red threads and inserted them into the flesh around Li Huowang's wound.

The red threads intertwined and swiftly closed up the wound. This process was still quite painful, causing Li Huowang to almost bite through the cloth.

"Thank you," said Li Huowang as he turned to look behind; however, there was nobody in sight.

His expression was somewhat pale, as he stepped out of the bathtub to dress himself.

"Daoist, are you going back this time just to resolve the matter about your Master? What about those liars? You should think about taking care of them, otherwise they will continue to deceive people and cause suffering. Enforcing justice is also a good deed," asked Monk.

Hatred flashed through Li Huowang's eyes as he listened to

Monk's ravings. However, he could not be bothered to reply, and continued to put on his clothes.

Of course he hadn't forgotten about those from the Sitting Oblivion Dao pretending to be from the Ao Jing Sect. At the same time, he also thought of his two juniors who had just died because of them, and the many things they had done to his body.

Li Huowang wanted nothing more than to carve out their heart and bones. Even if he ignored Jiang Yingzi's dying wish, he still had unfinished business with them. This matter was almost as important to him as taking care of Dan Yangzi.

"But they are very powerful. Daoist, can you beat them?" asked Monk, still looking worried.

"I have my own ways. Now, can you give me at least some moments of silence?!"

He could not take care of the other five people from the Sitting Oblivion Dao with his own strength. However, during his travels, he had thought about it, and found out that he did not need to fight alone.

Firstly, it was likely that the entire Ao Jing Sect was being fooled and controlled by those from the Sitting Oblivion Dao, just like Jiang Yingzi—with Shou San at the top, those Ao Jing Sect members had all been fooled, just like her. As long as he could make them aware that they were being lied to, then they would become his allies.

Second, Abbess Jingxin's son was also a Strayed One like him. The reason behind his current condition was also likely linked with those from the Sitting Oblivion Dao. As long as the truth was revealed, he trusted that the Abbess would be more than happy to seek revenge for her son.

But first, he had to get rid of Dan Yangzi.

Dressed neatly, Li Huowang took out the translated version of the Fiery Admonishment and struggled to read the text on it. At

that moment, he realized that he could recognize even fewer characters than before.

Previously, Li Huowang had thought that his ability to read had been taken away along with Dan Yangzi. But now that he thought about it, he realized that wasn't the case. It was simply because Dan Yangzi had yet to die.

Based on the number of characters I still recognise, I guess I should be able to reach the kingdom of Si Qi before being completely assimilated by Dan Yangzi.

Li Huowang thought to himself before closing the book and stepping out.

Once outside, he noticed that everyone was looking at him with concern.

"I need to go back to the Benevolent Nunnery to ask the Abbess about some matters." Li Huowang explained the reason why they were going back to Si Qi.

They had all visited the Benevolent Nunnery before, and everyone knew that there was something wrong with Li Huowang's words; however, they did not question him. Perhaps some of them had other thoughts in mind, but now, they could only follow him without dissent.

One reason for this was because Li Huowang had saved their lives, but there was also an increasingly intimidating aura starting to emanate from him.

"Gao Zhijian, how's your head?" Li Huowang clutched his stomach as he looked up at the tall figure with his covered head.

"No... no... no..."

"It's good if you have no problems. Rest well, and eat more in this period to heal your body," said Li Huowang.

Li Huowang was very shocked when he learned that Gao Zhijian was still alive. After all, he had personally seen the iron die penetrate Gao Zhijian's temple.

When the others had gone through the battlefield, they found out that he was still breathing. Bai Lingmiao had then requested the assistance of the Immortals from the Bai Family, allowing him to eventually wake up.

Drowning was one thing, and this was another. Li Huowang found it rather hard to believe that this was just a coincidence. After all, he had seen far too many bizarre events here.

However, he stopped asking questions after Gao Zhijian told him that he did not know what was going on either.

No matter what, being alive was preferable to being dead.

Even so, there was still an iron die buried in his head. In that regard, Li Huowang did not dare ask for too much either.

“Has the new carriage been bought? Let me take a look. No need to support me, I can walk by myself,” asked Li Huowang.

As Puppy watched Li Huowang’s figure gradually growing distant, he couldn’t help but shiver. He turned to Zhao Wu and asked cautiously, “Hey, do you guys feel like Senior Li is becoming more and more like that Baldy?”

Chapter 162 - Unexpected Harvest

Li Huowang used his lone hand to stuff a piece of golden-brown bun into his mouth, chewing it slowly. He looked lifelessly at the bonfire before him as he mentally calculated where they should stop for a break after this.

Currently, they were on their way to the kingdom of Si Qi, and had purchased three more second-hand carriages. They were acquired by selling off a few camels and then exchanging the silver. The carriages were indispensable to their long journey ahead.

At that moment, a chopstick carried some cooked meat along with some piping-hot noodles toward Li Huowang's mouth, waiting for him to open it.

Seeing this, Li Huowang frowned slightly and shook his head. "I can eat on my own; there's no need to feed me."

"Senior Li, how can you eat with just one hand? Let me feed you while you wait for your hand to grow back. Right, how much longer will it take?" asked Bai Lingmiao.

Hearing the worried tone of her voice, Li Huowang raised his right arm and looked at that empty sleeve. He smiled bitterly and mumbled, "Soon, very soon."

"But it has already been three days, and yet there don't seem to be any changes." Bai Lingmiao reached out to roll up Li Huowang's sleeve and examine the healed wound.

"It's already been three days?" Li Huowang's pupils contracted as though he had remembered something. He immediately stood up and looked around the barren dunes, as though looking for something.

He found his target quite quickly before heading toward a large rock in the distance.

“Senior Li, where are you going? The noodles will get cold soon!” asked Bai Lingmiao.

“I’m going to pee, don’t follow me!”

Soon, he arrived at the large rock and walked toward the shadow it casted onto the ground.

There was only a patch of barren ground behind the rock—this was exactly what he wanted.

At that moment, he faced the rock and sat down cross-legged. He hesitated for a moment, but pulled out his sword and drew a human figure on the wall.

“Mom, it must have been hard for you in this period,” Li Huowang spoke gently to the human figure. “Mom, I’m finally awake. Can you pass me my phone? It’s her birthday today, and I want to give her a call. Don’t untie me, just help me dial her number. It’s on the second row of the contacts list.”

Then, he took out a small, sharp shovel and gently used it to carve on the human figure’s face. Not long after, a simple but rather familiar face appeared before him. Li Huowang did not know how to draw, causing it to be rather ugly. Even so, in his eyes, there was nothing more beautiful than what he saw on the wall.

“Happy birthday, Nana. Happy birthday to you~ Happy birthday to you~”

All alone, he sat there and smiled at the drawing he had made on the giant rock while gently singing aloud.

The sound didn’t travel too far; it was muffled by the unforgiving winds.

“Sorry, Nana. I can’t be with you for your birthday this year. The only thing I can do is send you my wishes like this. I’ll make it up to you when I have the chance,” said Li Huowang as he reached out with a smile before caressing the face of the wall drawing.

Then he leaned across and kissed it, before standing up by supporting himself with his single hand.

When he turned around, he was faced with a red-veiled person; it was Bai Lingmiao's Second Deity, and she had witnessed the heartwarming yet eerie scene that had taken place.

"Keep your mouth shut," said Li Huowang before leaving her behind, and turning toward the carriages in the distance.

By the time he returned, everyone had eaten their fill, and were chatting to pass time.

Li Huowang reached out to take his bowl of noodles from Bai Lingmiao's arms. Then, he placed it on the ground, picked up his chopsticks and began to slurp them up with his one hand.

After devouring the noodles, a crisp, metallic sound caused his body to instinctively tense up. He seemed to have heard of this sound before.

Li Huowang looked toward the direction where the sound originated from and found that it came from Puppy; he was sitting on the ground, and using his knife as though he was trying to pry something out from the ground.

Li Huowang stood up and walked up to him. "What are you doing?"

Li Huowang's words startled Puppy, causing him to sheepishly look toward Li Huowang. Then, he reached out and picked up the object on the ground.

"Nothing much. Since we're spending so much money, I'm trying to help us save some," said Puppy.

There were rows of blackened bronze coins in front of him—they seemed to have been burned recently. Li Huowang recognized that these were from the bronze-coin veils that the dwarfs performing the shadow play were using. He still remembered that Er Bing had taken it and even worn it on her face.

The burnt bronze coins had many scratches on them.

Obviously, Puppy wanted to pry out these coins to put them to use.

“I feel that it’s such a waste to just leave them in the pile of ashes like that. There are at least a hundred coins here. I’m not planning to keep them for myself. Once I pry them out, I will pass these to Junior Bai for safekeeping. But who knew that even the thin chains passing through the coins would be so hardy, and couldn’t be pried out easily.”

Hearing this, Li Huowang took it and wiped away the black dust on the coins quite easily.

The flames hadn’t been able to harm this object in the slightest. There were thin, old chains that passed through each coin to form a strange coin veil.

These bronze coins seemed ordinary, and were all round with a square hole in the center. Each of them was imprinted with four large words which Li Huowang could not read.

“Dao... dao... dao guang... tong... Ah... tong... Tong bao!” Gao Zhijian translated for Li Huowang.

“Daoguang Tongbao[1]?” Li Huowang did not know which currency this country came from, nor did he care. What mattered was their actual value.

Li Huowang examined the coin veil carefully before calling Bun over, and placing the veil on its head to see if there were any hidden issues.

At that moment, a surprising scene happened—even though Bun was shaking its head and trying to use its front paws to scratch its head, Li Huowang felt like there was no dog in front of him.

Back then, the dwarf had worn this veil while sneak attacking him. If not for the Second Deity warning him in advance, he might have suffered from the sneak attack.

After that, when Er Bing wore this item and hid amongst the crowd, he hadn’t been able to locate her.

From these two points, it seemed that this item could help

conceal one's presence.

“This... might actually be useful for me.” Li Huowang looked at the item, his gaze gradually brightening, “It’s actually extremely useful!”

Although he did not understand why, it seemed like anyone in this world with some level of ability could easily tell that he was a Strayed One.

And this object might be able to prevent that from becoming a repeated occurrence—he would no longer be treated like a piece of highly sought after meat!

1. an inscription on the coin that describes itself 

Chapter 163 - Arrival

The bronze coins rustled as Li Huowang donned the veil of bronze coins on his face. The distinctive burnt smell emanating from the coin veil gave Li Huowang an unprecedented sense of security.

Once at Benevolent Nunnery, if this thing is even able to conceal me from Abbess, then it would be shockingly valuable.

Wearing the mask, Li Huowang stood up and shouted excitedly to the people behind him, "Let's go! Hurry to the Henghua Mountain!"

With his shout, the carriage wheels started to roll once again, this time toward the kingdom of Si Qi.

As they gradually approached the kingdom of Si Qi, which had a lot more lakes and rivers, the landscape around them also grew more lush, with even the air feeling more moist.

However, their journey was not completely smooth-sailing. The border guard of the kingdom of Si Qi had started to become a lot more strict.

Fortunately, the border between the kingdom of Si Qi and Hou Shu was quite long to begin with. Some of the border troops had already been moved away, leaving gaps in their defenses.

They used the time when the guards changed their shifts to re-enter the kingdom of Si Qi.

One morning, Li Huowang was bound tightly to a tree with chains that were as thick as a bowl.

His fellow disciples silently looked on as he rambled on nonsensically. They had already grown accustomed to this after having experienced it multiple times. Now, they were no longer as surprised as before; they were quite familiar with his illness now.

After a while, Li Huowang's eyes gradually became clear. He looked up to see the bright sunlight, then glanced at the greenery by the roadside. Then, he heaved a sigh of relief.

No matter what they had gone through during their journey, they were finally about to arrive at their destination.

"Let's have lunch, and then we'll leave. We should be able to reach Henghua Mountain before nightfall," Li Huowang said to Bai Lingmiao, who was untying him.

There was a hint of sadness in Bai Lingmiao's eyes as she inspected his empty left sleeve. There were still no signs of improvement even after so many days.

After a moment, she turned around, picked up a wooden bucket, and went to the nearby river to fetch water.

The river water was very clean. The wooden bucket fell into the stream, along with Bai Lingmiao's tears.

"Do you feel sorry for Senior Li?" Chun Xiaoman, who had followed her, asked softly.

"He's disabled now! His hand cannot grow back!" Bai Lingmiao choked up.

Chun Xiaoman seemed to want to comfort her, yet found that she didn't know where to begin.

At the same time, seeing as how she was so sad, it pointed toward the fact that she had already accepted Senior Li as her own man.

"It's just his arm this time, but what if it happens again? Why is it so difficult for us to just go home?" sobbed Bai Lingmiao.

Seeing her closest friend so heartbroken, Chun Xiaoman felt quite sad for her.

Even though Li Huowang did not explain anything to them, in the time they had spent together, Chun Xiaoman had understood that the red bamboo slip on his waist was used to sacrifice a part of his body to exchange for supernatural abilities.

As long as Li Huowang was in possession of that thing, he would eventually have fewer and fewer organs.

Chun Xiaoman watched as Bai Lingmiao grew more and more distressed, causing her heart to waver as she hugged her.

In the end, it was all because their strength was not enough. If they had enough strength to easily resolve such situations, then such outcomes wouldn't happen.

However, it was almost impossible to persuade Senior Li to discard the bamboo slip. Even though the price to use that thing was quite large, it had enormous power.

I should get Senior Li to teach me how to use that bamboo slip.

Since anyone could use that thing, she might as well use it herself.

Be it Bai Lingmiao or Senior Li, they would both feel pained if either of them got injured. And since she had already made the decision to never get married, her appearance didn't matter anymore.

If it was my hand that was cut off...

Chun Xiaoman glanced at the dejected Bai Lingmiao, and then at her hand covered in black hair.

...it's alright!

After Xiaoman consoled Bai Lingmiao for a while, the two of them continued filling the water.

The rest of them were still waiting to eat, and they could not delay their journey further.

After a moment, the wooden bucket was filled with the refreshing river water.

"Hold on," said Chun Xiaoman as she dipped her hairy hand into the water before gently wiping the corners of Bai Lingmiao's eyes. "There's some ash here. Let me clean it off."

"Thank you, Sister Xiaoman," thanked Bai Lingmiao.

"Don't mention it. We're like sisters. I'm going to be your

future child's godmother." Chun Xiaoman smiled.

At that moment, she saw Bai Lingmiao's expression suddenly become terrified

"Sister Xiaoman! Look behind you!" shouted Bai Lingmiao.

Xiaoman quickly reached for the hilt of her sword and spun around, only to see several corpses slowly floating down the clear river.

Soon after, everyone gathered by the river bank, silently staring at the corpses.

From their clothing, it could be inferred that these were soldiers belonging to the kingdom of Si Qi—likely casualties from a battle occurring in a region upstream.

Amidst the chaos of war, the commoners couldn't have fared much better either; there were quite a few commoners amongst the corpses, their eyes filled with despair.

"So many bodies... Just how many people must have died?" Puppy sighed as he leaned against a tree trunk.

"The river water is probably no longer fit for drinking. We'll have to look for wells in the future," said Li Huowang. He was busy considering other matters, different from the worries of the other disciples. "Does anyone feel that these bodies seem unusually fresh?"

Li Huowang's words caused everyone to pay closer attention to the corpses. Under normal circumstances, as long as a person had not died that day, their corpse would look a lot more terrifying after a while in the water—they wouldn't look like this.

"Yes, look, these corpses still have color in their faces!" commented one of them.

"If they were not motionless, they could easily be mistaken as being alive."

Li Huowang squinted as he continued to observe. These corpses were causing him to feel a strong sense of unease.

Were they killed with some special ability to become like this? Or did some sect get involved in this war among mortals?

Or maybe I'm overthinking it. In this world, normal wars are probably fought with those strange sects joining in.

Li Huowang stood by the river and pondered for a while before bringing the others away.

Maybe it was because so many had died, but everyone's mood was rather heavy. Nobody really spoke during their journey to the small town at the base of Henghua Mountain. They were only able to relax after seeing the familiar scenery of the small town around them.

"Senior Li, it's already so late. Are you going up the mountain now? How about going tomorrow after breakfast?" suggested Bai Lingmiao.

"Hold on," said Li Huowang as he walked into a pastry shop with fragrant aromas.

When he returned, he had a large stack of snacks on his back. It seemed like he had nearly emptied the entire store.

"I'm leaving. You guys can stay at the same inn as before, and I'll meet you guys there. Right, where's Puppy? I saw him just now," asked Li Huowang.

"He went to the restroom," replied someone.

At that moment, a contented-looking Puppy walked out from a nearby alley. "Ah... this restroom is clean enough. There's not even a single fly or maggot."

Translator's Thoughts

This is how the MC looks like with the bronze coin veil! Looks badass ngl

Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin



Chapter 164 - Goodbye Abbess

At this moment, Li Huowang was carrying a load of pastries on his back, panting heavily as he struggled up the dirt road on Henghua Mountain.

With only one hand now, and the burden of carrying so many snacks, this trip up the mountain was even more arduous than the ones before.

Li Huowang had tried to keep the pastries away from his body to avoid dousing them in his own sweat. However, this only served to tire him out even more.

Finally, after turning a corner, he couldn't continue. He put the pastries down, and leaned against a crooked tree to catch his breath.

Li Huowang had rushed up the mountain immediately after reaching the town below, causing him to start feeling hungry. He gave it some thought, and then reached into the snacks box and took out a green bean pastry before munching on it.

The pastry was crispy on the outside and soft on the inside, and it soothed Li Huowang's empty stomach. He had never eaten such a pastry before, but found it to be unexpectedly delicious. Given its taste and fragrance, he had a feeling that it was freshly made that day. It was even more delectable than those cream cakes and chocolates he used to eat before his transmigration.

Li Huowang didn't think too much about him eating some of the Abbess's snacks. It was not his first time here, and there was no need to be too polite with her. He was certain she wouldn't mind.

There are so many pastries here... they should be enough for the

Abbess, right?

Li Huowang thought as he looked at the stack of pastries and chuckled.

Nope... it's not enough. Even if the amount is doubled, it's probably still not enough to feed her.

As he thought up to this point, Li Huowang smiled, before feeling stunned. When did he have such a close relationship with Abbess Jingxin?

When he thought about it, the Abbess was greedy, lazy and dirty. But ever since coming to this world, aside from his fellow disciples, she was the person who had treated him the best.

She had not harmed him because he was a Strayed One, and even tried to help him to dispel Dan Yangzi. Before he left, she even gifted him with a sword to help him deal with danger during his journey.

If not for having to send Bai Lingmiao and the others home, staying in the town at the bottom of this mountain wouldn't be a bad choice. This is the Benevolent Nunnery's territory, and other powers wouldn't cause trouble for me over here.

Lost in these thoughts, he finished more than half of the box of green bean pastries, causing him to immediately stop.

He looked around at the lush surroundings of Henghua Mountain and relaxed. He suddenly thought of something, and reached into his pockets to retrieve the translated version of the Fiery Scripture.

He flipped through it, wanting to see how much influence Dan Yangzi currently had on him. To his astonishment, he found that he couldn't even recognize a single word.

This change caused his heart to drop.

I need to hurry! The speed at which Dan Yangzi is wresting control of my body is increasing! If there are any further delays, then I am going to be completely assimilated by Dan Yangzi!

Li Huowang quickly put the book back into his pocket, then picked up the pastries and continued to climb up the dirt path.

Finally, when the moon had risen high up in the sky, Li Huowang returned to the mountain gate of the Benevolent Nunnery.

When he saw the rhombus-shaped couplet written using Women's Script, Li Huowang felt a sense of familiarity.

"Abbess, I'm back! Look what I brought you guys!" Li Huowang shouted excitedly toward the pitch-black Benevolent Nunnery.

None of the lamps are on? Looks like they are too lazy to even light them up.

As he stepped foot into the dilapidated nunnery, Li Huowang suddenly felt that something was amiss.

How come... It's not smelly anymore?

Li Huowang tossed aside the pastries in his hand, then took a few deep breaths while standing on the spot. He was shocked to find that the smelly stench that was a characteristic of the Benevolent Nunnery had vanished without a trace!

Something's wrong!

Feeling somewhat flustered, Li Huowang couldn't be bothered to care about other things as he dashed toward the depths of the nunnery.

"Abbess Jingxin! Miao Yu! Miao Xin! Where are you guys!!" shouted Li Huowang, his voice reverberating throughout the nunnery. Even so, no one responded, causing him to start panicking.

Suddenly, Li Huowang heard some commotion in the distance. He dashed across, only to find that the commotion was caused by pigs oinking.

When he came to the pigsty located behind the washroom, the scene before him caused him to freeze on the spot.

A fat person about the size of a small house could be seen

within the pigsty. The black-haired fat pigs could be seen surrounding her. They seemed like baby pigs that were suckling milk.

However, they were not suckling milk—instead, they were eating human flesh!

Their teeth that were usually used to eat feces were now being used to tear off the fatty flesh of the obese person before they swallowed it into their stomach. Every pig's snout was stained red as they enjoyed their meal.

“Get away!” shouted Li Huowang with bloodshot eyes as he unsheathed his sword and dashed toward them. He directly slashed at them before the pigs could even turn around, slicing one of them in two.

Frightened by the intense killing intent, the other black pigs quickly scattered away.

When Li Huowang arrived before the deceased fatty, he slowly knelt down and lifted the head that had half of its face chewed away.

It was Abbess Jingxin's face.

“Ahh!! Ahh!!”

At that moment, Li Huowang's agonized screams echoed throughout the Benevolent Nunnery. He clutched the Abbess's face as his tears rolled onto the floor.

Abbess Jingxin was dead.

The only person who had been good to him in this world, had departed from this world, and so had the hope in his heart.

“Who did this?!”

The almost-berserk Li Huowang maniacally charged out of the pigsty with his sword raised as he looked for the enemy within the nunnery.

However, aside from the corpses of the other nuns, he did not find anything else.

By the time he found her, Abbess Jingxin had been dead for some time already. The culprit had probably left a long time ago.

Who killed them?!

This was the only thought going through Li Huowang's brain. He dashed out toward the mountain gate, but gradually came to a stop.

With bloodshot eyes, he once again came before Abbess Jingxin and took out his long sword before starting to dig out a pit beside her.

He wanted to bury the Abbess, so that her body wouldn't be nibbled on by the pigs.

The hole required to bury the Abbess was quite large. He continued digging for a long time, all the way until the middle of the next day, before finally completing it.

Just as Li Huowang was about to push the Abbess in, he found something abnormal. Her corpse had been here for an entire night, yet there were no signs of it starting to smell or attracting any flies.

Seeing this, Li Huowang subconsciously thought back to the corpses they had seen floating in the river water. They had similarly not decomposed, and looked quite lifelike.

Could they have been killed by the same people? Those killed by the culprits do not rot? Who are they?!

Something is wrong! Hold on!

Li Huowang suddenly realized that he had overlooked something. He paused, then dashed toward the pigsty to examine the black-haired pig he had killed previously.

After an entire night and a day, the pig he had killed had similarly not attracted any flies or started to smell.

After a moment, Li Huowang stumbled out of the pigsty, looking at his surroundings disbelievingly.

There were no signs of any struggle or battle.

In any world, "decay" was an inevitable part of life.

However, at this moment, it seemed like something was not working properly with the process of decay in this world.

Perhaps... the Abbess wasn't killed by someone.

Li Huowang turned to look toward Abbess Jingxin. By now, her skin should have started decomposing and become filled with pus and maggots. Yet, it still appeared extremely smooth and fair.

The “decay” in this world had vanished.

Chapter 165 - Have Not Won

Veins bulged on Li Huowang's solitary arm as he exerted force to push Abbess Jingxin's corpse into the pit he had just dug out. Next, he knelt down on both knees and began filling the pit with soil to bury the Abbess's body.

Then, he drew some pastries on a wooden board, and placed it before her grave.

With an ashen expression, he took out the pastries that he had brought up the mountain and arranged them as offerings before her grave.

Abbess Jingxin had died, along with the "decay" of this world.

From here on, anything and everything made of flesh and blood would no longer decay or disintegrate; any dead person would remain in the same state that they were in at the time of their death.

Abbess Jingxin's death was definitely related to this. Previously, whenever the nuns used their supernatural abilities, they seemed to be connected to "decay".

The disappearance of "decay" seemed to be the true cause of Abbess Jingxin's and the others' deaths.

No matter the time, "decay" was always repulsive, and yet it was something unavoidable.

In a world where "decay" vanished, there would be a huge amount of problems.

If corpses did not decay, the cycle of life would be broken, and corpses would start accumulating in the world.

However at this point, Li Huowang couldn't be bothered with

pondering over what was going on; he himself was about to be a goner.

The Abbess was dead, and there would be nobody else like her that would help him deal with the matter of Dan Yangzi.

There was no one else he could turn to now; he was nearly out of time.

At this point, he had turned completely illiterate, which foreshadowed that he was on the verge of being completely assimilated by Dan Yangzi.

If he did not want Dan Yangzi to succeed in his schemes, then there was only one path he could take.

“Abbess, wait for me at the Bridge of Helplessness. I will come down to join you guys shortly!” said Li Huowang. Then, he kowtowed three times toward the grave before dispiritedly looking toward the rat mountain.

Abbess had previously told him that he could prevent Dan Yangzi from taking over him by being nibbled to death by those rats.

He did not want Dan Yangzi to come back to life, even if that meant that he himself would have to die!

However, when Li Huowang arrived before that black tower again, he was stunned by the black objects that littered the ground.

He walked across and lifted the black objects, slowly prying them open with his fingernails. Cockroaches and flies fell out from in between his fingers, and floated down like black-colored snowflakes.

With the death of the nuns, these flies and cockroaches had followed suit. After all, they were the lowest level of decomposers.

Li Huowang suddenly stood up. His breathing quickened as he dashed toward the black tower.

However, what he saw was a shocking scene. The black rats inside had similarly died, and those dead rats were the same as the

others—they showed no signs of decay or foul odor.

“Damn!” Enraged, Li Huowang smashed his fist onto those dead rats, causing their innards to be squeezed out from their mouths and flying everywhere.

“What immoral deeds did I do in my past life?! Why can’t I even die when I want to?!”

“Hehehe... Child...” A low laughter rang beside Li Huowang.

When Li Huowang looked up, he saw that it belonged to Dan Yangzi’s three terrifying faces.

“What did I tell you? At this point, whatever you do is in vain. You can still help me if you turn back now,” said Dan Yangzi.

“Do you think you’ve won?” Li Huowang stood up, his eyes filled with boundless hatred. “As long as this body still belongs to me, you have not won yet!”

Li Huowang suddenly stood up and rushed toward the mountain gate of Benevolent Nunnery before running down the mountain as though in a frenzy.

Once he got down, he collided with Yang Xiaohai, who had two pieces of fried sweet potato in his mouth.

Seeing Li Huowang, Yang Xiaohai said ingratiatingly, “Senior Li, you’ve returned? Have you finished your matters on the mountain? Shall we go back together?”

However, Li Huowang completely ignored his flattery, and continued to dash onto the road. He glanced around and directly seized the horse of a scholar nearby before climbing onto it.

With bloodshot eyes, he quickly turned the horse around, and then jabbed a sharp screwdriver onto the horse’s butt. The horse neighed and screamed in pain before dashing toward the direction of the Ao Jing Sect.

“My horse!! That’s my horse!!” The scholar cried and chased, but Li Huowang soon vanished from his field of vision.

Seeing this scene, Yang Xiaohai panicked. Still holding the oily

paper bag, he hurried back toward the inn. "Seniors! Senior Li is having an episode again!"

The mountain range where the Ao Jing Sect resided was over 200 miles away from the Benevolent Nunnery that was located on Henghua Mountain, and thus it required some time to traverse this distance when traveling via carriages.

However, with Li Huowang constantly using his torture instruments to stimulate the horse, they got there within just two days.

Once they returned to the ghost town, the horse finally could not continue any further. It started frothing at the mouth and fell onto the ground, its behind mangled from the repeated stabbing.

Li Huowang passed through the graves he had dug for the residents of the ghost town, and dashed up toward the mountain cave.

By now, it was already his third day without any sleep, and without anything to eat or drink. His current expression looked very bad.

However, Li Huowang had already cast aside all his worries about life and death. He just wanted Dan Yangzi dead! He was willing to do whatever it took, as long as he achieved his objective.

When Li Huowang returned, a few large-robed Ao Jing Sect disciples immediately blocked him without hesitation. "Shou San has orders, you—"

However, before they could even finish, a cold glint flashed through the air, and two heads fell to the ground simultaneously. Their eyes were filled with disbelief; they had never thought that the other party would attack first.

Covered in blood, Li Huowang dashed into the cave and shouted, "Sitting Oblivion Dao! Come out now!"

His voice reverberated within the cave, attracting everyone's attention.

Soon after, Li Huowang was completely surrounded.

But it did not matter to him, since he did not plan to leave this place alive.

At that moment, Shou San stepped out from within the crowd, his body wreathed in flames. “You can’t be reasoned with. Do you really think that we won’t do anything to you?”

Meanwhile, as those words were uttered, Li Huowang looked toward the five elders that stepped out. Seeing the five people from the Sitting Oblivion Dao who were in disguise, he started chuckling, “Come, show me the strength of your Sitting Oblivion Dao!”

After saying this, Li Huowang raised his sword and sliced it across his own neck.

Beside him, Dan Yangzi was filled with anger as black clouds gradually enveloped his terrifying body before he lunged directly at Li Huowang.

However, Li Huowang did not care as he felt his blood pour out along with his life.

Splash~

At that moment, the Profound Records were unfurled onto the ground, and Li Huowang stood directly on it.

After a moment, the blood that flowed down his neck and down his clothes completely soaked the Profound Records.

Chapter 166 - Five Elements Intercalation

“Little brat, you’re pushing your luck too far. Do you really think that just because you could massacre an entire town, you are above everyone else?” Elder “Shen Benyou” said while looking toward Li Huowang with a hint of displeasure on his face.

At that moment, his body trembled slightly, causing the rusty nails embedded within his body to quickly shoot out toward Li Huowang.

But as the long nails were flying toward him, Li Huowang dodged them with surprising agility, all while cutting his own neck.

A sinister smile then appeared on Li Huowang’s extremely haggard face. He stepped onto the Profound Records, and then dashed toward the five elders, with a slight gust behind his back.

“Protect the elders!”

Flames quickly lit up on the bodies of some of the Ao Jing Sect disciples like Shou San and Tou Qi. As they raised their hands together, the blaze seemed to become contagious as it also appeared on Li Huowang’s body, causing his red Daoist robes to start burning as well.

It seemed like “Li Huowang” was in a dire situation. But in the very next moment, he tilted his head and the situation was completely reversed. The flames on “Li Huowang”’s body were extinguished, and at the same time, the charred bodies of the Ao Jing Sect members that were ablaze began to swell up inexplicably. Soon, their charred skin split apart like scorched rice, revealing their grotesque flesh. The blood that spewed out from the gaps quickly caused the flames on their body to be extinguished.

Then, “Li Huowang” held his sword in one hand and slashed down, directly cutting down two of the deformed Ao Jing Sect members; these Ao Jing Sect members were no match for him—for him, dealing with them was as easy as cutting vegetables.

“No! That’s not the brat! He has been possessed by his half-Immortal Master, Dan Yangzi!”

When the five elders of the Sitting Oblivion Dao realized this, they quickly sat down cross-legged, and began to chant. “As for joy, the pinnacle of elegance~ The beginning of the Dao, the fulfillment of accomplishment, the mastery of delight~ One should find joy in all things...”

As he heard them chanting, Li Huowang started laughing. However, it was not just his mouth smiling, but his eyes, fingers, and all the other organs on his body were laughing as well.

As his laughter rang out, his facial features began to loosen.

The very next moment, Dan Yangzi’s counterattack began. Some illusory black clouds appeared out of nowhere and shrouded Dan Yangzi, gradually suppressing his laughter.

At that moment, Li Huowang looked over to where Dan Yangzi was locked in fierce combat with the “Sitting Oblivion Dao”.

Even though his neck was throbbing with immense pain, the smile on his face was even brighter than before. What he wanted was to use himself to incite Dan Yangzi and Sitting Oblivion Dao into killing each other—no matter which side suffered casualties, he would have achieved his objectives.

No, it’s not enough. Just a bit more!

As he thought up to this point, Li Huowang raised a dagger and plunged it half-an-inch deep into the skin on his chest. He trembled as he gripped the hilt tightly, then gritted his teeth before sliding it downward.

Seeing this, the illusory Monk who had been following beside him, took a breath of cold air, and started gesturing frantically.

“Daoist, don’t do this. Let’s think of another way!”

However, Li Huowang did not think so. He did not want to risk giving Dan Yangzi a chance to take over his body after he died, and use it to commit heinous crimes.

With a low growl, Li Huowang pulled the hilt down firmly. Fresh blood splattered out from his chest and onto the Profound Records beneath him, causing the color of the bamboo slip to turn even more vibrant.

At this moment, between his enhanced perception of pain and the near-dissement caused Li Huowang to almost faint.

But he didn’t dare to let himself faint now. If he did, then by the time he woke up, the wounds on his body would have recovered. If Dan Yangzi managed to take over his body during that time, everything he had done before would have been in vain.

Now that Dan Yangzi had come out and shown himself, there would be no second chances for him.

With a clang, the blood-stained dagger fell onto the ground. Then, Li Huowang staggered as he raised his remaining hand and inserted it into the wound he had just cut open.

“Ahh!! Ahh!!!” He cried out as he knelt onto the ground with one knee. At the same time, veins began to bulge on the back of his hand as he forcefully pulled at the edge, causing his innards to be exposed to the cold air just like that.

“Wood Liver!”

Red roots extended from the Profound Records and burrowed in, restoring life to the liver that had lost far too much blood. Then, more roots extended from it, and followed along Li Huowang’s knee before burrowing in once again, going even deeper than before.

“Gold Lungs!”

As so continued, the roots extending from the Profound Records became even thicker.

“Earth Spleen!”

Thunder started echoing, while some sort of aura expanded within the cave. Everything around Li Huowang began to distort.

At this moment, everyone present before Li Huowang had turned into horrifying fleshy monsters, while the Profound Records on the ground had similarly transformed into parallel rows of wriggling worms.

“Water Kidneys!”

As Li Huowang continued, the crowd from Ao Jing Sect dashed toward him to try and stop him. However, as soon as they approached him, the Profound Records hanging on them all flew over and surrounded Li Huowang, forming a protective barrier around him.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang was slowly turning empty from within, and yet he was smiling more happily than ever before.

The entire process was painful, in fact extremely so. But he was truly happy—he was finally about to die. As long as he died, then he would not need to feel any more pain, and Dan Yangzi would not be able to take control of his body.

He took a deep breath, and his voice that was filled with sorrow and hatred spewed out along with fresh blood. “And lastly... Fire Heart!”

At this point, the Profound Records, which had now connected with his five organs burst with vitality.

Li Huowang had completely sacrificed his most important organs to Ba-Hui. With this, his body was almost reduced to an empty shell, and he fell to the ground, his pupils dilated.

However, this was not the end. This was not the Cang-Qiang Ascension that was used to summon Ba-Hui, but a different ritual recorded on the Profound Records—the Five Elements Intercalation.

And now that Li Huowang had completed it, he watched the wriggling worms on the ground that formed the Profound Records. They quickly gathered together and burrowed toward his empty

body.

Soon after, his body, which had been nearly completely torn apart, was once again filled up, overflowing with them. Those worms burrowed freely within his body, not leaving any empty spaces.

Li Huowang staggered to his feet while holding his sword, and then looked down at the worms that were wriggling inside his body. At this moment, he could feel these worms wriggling inside his body.

It was an extremely strange feeling; he felt like these worms had already become a part of himself, and he could even feel the peculiar strength that was contained within their bodies.

He was already starting to have trouble distinguishing whether these things were worms or just a part of himself.

Most importantly, Li Huowang no longer felt any pain.

Chapter 167 - Chaotic Battle

When the ritual is over, I should be dead, right?

Li Huowang slowly raised his sword, and the worms in his abdomen climbed along his robes before wriggling toward his broken stub of an arm.

In just a few moments, he had a new left hand that was formed with wriggling worms.

After testing his new hand, Li Huowang nodded in satisfaction. Then, he once again looked into the distance, where Dan Yangzi was locked in battle with the five people from the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

From what he could see, Dan Yangzi still had the same terrifying appearance, while the faces of the other five had morphed into fleshy mahjong tiles.

When he thought about his imminent death, Li Huowang's heart began to calm down. He lifted his sword before walking toward them.

When he got closer, he charged forward and sliced off Dan Yangzi's central head. "Master, don't panic, your disciple is here to assist you!"

Meanwhile, the five from the Sitting Oblivion Dao seized the opportunity created by Li Huowang ambushing Dan Yangzi to quickly start levitating in a sitting position. Then, they began to chant while circling the two of them, "What is sitting in oblivion?"

Their voices continuously reverberated throughout the spacious cavern, becoming louder and louder.

On the other hand, as soon as they said those words, Li

Huowang and Dan Yangzi pushed off each other, and simultaneously leapt toward one of the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao on either side.

At that moment, a black domino flew toward Li Huowang's wrist. Just as he was about to dodge it, Yao Ji[1] put his fingers together and snapped. In an instant, the black shadow beneath the domino and the domino switched their positions—the shadow became the domino, and the domino had turned into the shadow.

This caught Li Huowang off-guard, causing the domino to pierce through Li Huowang's wrist, leaving behind a square gap in its wake.

Without the support of his wrist bones, Li Huowang's hand was about to droop powerlessly. However, that square hole was quickly filled up by those worms, allowing him to once again hold his sword firmly.

Hehe, we get what we pay for. Looks like I gain quite a bit from sacrificing my internal organs.

Li Huowang thought to himself as he dashed toward Qi Wan[2] in the distance.

This time, Li Huowang did not bother with dodging anything the enemy threw at him, using his body to meet it all head-on. Any damage or loss of body parts was quickly filled in by the wriggling worms. With the strength he borrowed from Ba-Hui, for the moment Li Huowang was evenly matched with them.

Li Huowang, Dan Yangzi, and the Sitting Oblivion Dao—these three parties had completely different goals, and were engaged in a chaotic battle.

At times, it was Li Huowang and Dan Yangzi fighting off the Sitting Oblivion Dao, and at others, it was Dan Yangzi and the Sitting Oblivion Dao fighting off Li Huowang.

Dan Yangzi was wielding a fleshy coin sword, and had terrifying strength. He could still suppress the Sitting Oblivion Dao,

even though he had lost one head.

On the other hand, it seemed like the Sitting Oblivion Dao was more adept at psychological games, and not as good at direct confrontations. The five of them were even being suppressed by Dan Yangzi.

But this was partly thanks to Li Huowang.

Though Dan Yangzi was slightly stronger, their three sides mutually balanced each other out; none of them wanted to let either of the other parties win.

In this chaotic battle, Li Huowang always chose to help the weaker side, and fight against the stronger side; he was already giving up his life, and so there was no reason to not take down a few more with him. The best outcome would be if both Dan Yangzi and the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao could die with him.

Soon, this intense battle reached a temporary stalemate, with each person calculating their own interests.

Taking advantage of the moment when Dan Yangzi was pressuring the others, Yao Ji quickly approached Li Huowang and said urgently, “Boss! Don’t mess around anymore! Can’t you see how powerful this half-Immortal is? Continuing will only lead to everyone dying!”

“Hehe, do you think calling me ‘Boss’ will make me spare you? Even calling me “ancestor” is not going to help you at all!” said Li Huowang. As he spoke, he reached out toward the edges of the wound on his body, and abruptly pulled them apart.

Immediately, the blood-red worms burst forth from his abdomen and crashed toward Yao Ji.

Currently, these worms were all under Li Huowang’s control. As long as a worm managed to come into contact with someone, it would immediately burrow into their body and pierce through that person’s intestines.

“Boss Hong Zhong! We really have to stop fighting! Feel the

skin at the back of your neck! Tell me if I'm lying!" said Yao Ji.

Hearing this, Li Huowang reached behind his neck. Then, the worms burrowed through his flesh before propping up a hard object from within.

It was a mahjong tile—Hong Zhong[3].

This scene left Li Huowang feeling somewhat hesitant.

Yao Ji hurriedly explained, "Your true identity is that of one of the three bosses of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. It was you who felt that you had played through everything possible and felt that everything was boring and meaningless. And so, you sealed up your consciousness for us to play with you. Now, Er Bing is dead because of you. We can't play any further; after all, we're all brothers. Any more will be too much, and we can't lose our lives just to satisfy your desires."

"Are you speaking the truth?" Li Huowang looked very confused as he stared at the Hong Zhong mahjong tile.

"Ah! Didn't you see that this mahjong tile was dug up from within your flesh! Could there still be—" said Yao Ji before coming to an abrupt stop. He suddenly felt that something was amiss as he spoke. At that moment, he looked down, only to see that several worms had already burrowed into his leg.

Just as Yao Ji's attention shifted onto his leg, there was a cold flash in front of him, and then Li Huowang's sword had directly pierced through his neck.

Li Huowang smiled mockingly at Yao Ji before continuing to act in accordance with his lies. "Yes, I recall now. I'm one of the three leaders of the Sitting Oblivion Dao, Hong Zhong. I even recall that back in the day, you stole my woman, and so I'm publicly seeking revenge now."

As long as he could ascertain the identity of a member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao, it was very simple to deal with them—treat anything and everything they said as worthless.

“Boss, I’m speaking the truth!” shouted Yao Ji as he desperately clutched onto Li Huowang’s sword.

“I believe you!” said Li Huowang as he exerted force with one hand, slicing off Yao Ji’s fingers and his square-shaped head.

After that, the worms within Yao Ji’s body burrowed back into Li Huowang’s chest before he turned around and dashed toward the distant battlefield.

One of the liars from Sitting Oblivion Dao had died, and it was time to handicap Dan Yangzi a little.

“Master! Xuan Yang is here to help you!” shouted Li Huowang as he dashed toward Dan Yangzi.

Splloosh!

With the combined efforts of the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao and Li Huowang, Dan Yangzi’s child-like head was cut off quickly.

However, even before Li Huowang could catch his breath, an indistinct fleshy and immature infant head had started to grow out from the wound on Dan Yangzi’s neck.

When Yi Wan saw this happen, he quickly turned toward Li Huowang. “Your Master is semi-Immortal, so it’s completely futile to keep going on like this! Help us fend him off for a moment, and we’ll help you take care of him!”

But all he got in response was Li Huowang spitting a mouthful of blood at him.

“Alright, fine! We did fool you before, but you have already killed Er Bing and Yao Ji. Shouldn’t two lives be enough to soothe some of your anger? And besides, compared to us outsiders, shouldn’t you hate your Master even more?” asked Yi Wan.

1. one bamboo in mahjong 🖐

2. seven characters in mahjong 🖐

3. Hong Zhong is also known as the Red Dragon in mahjong 🖐

Chapter 168 - Cooperation

Swoosh!

Dan Yangzi swung his coin sword, forcing Li Huowang and Yi Wan to step back and dodge it.

At the same time, the other three from the Sitting Oblivion Dao quickly stepped forward to intercept Dan Yangzi.

Taking advantage of this rare moment of respite, Yi Wan looked at Li Huowang, “How about it? Help us deal with Dan Yangzi, and then we can part ways peacefully after that.”

However, Li Huowang simply ignored his words, all while steadying himself on the ground, preparing to help the other three Sitting Oblivion Dao members against Dan Yangzi.

Seeing this, Yi Wan spoke once again, this time, his words making Li Huowang grind to a halt, “You still think it’s not enough? Then let me give you a final offer! Li Huowang, you are a Strayed One, aren’t you? It must not be very pleasant to occasionally end up in a state of bewilderment, right? As long as you help us, then we will tell you the method to free yourself from a Strayed One’s bewilderment and help you become a regular person!”

Looking at the surprise on Li Huowang’s face, Yi Wan continued to explain, “That’s right, Strayed Ones can indeed free themselves from their bewilderment. It’s just that the method to do so is extremely difficult! Ordinary people simply cannot hope to find it!”

“Quit lying! Even Abbess Jingxin couldn’t find it, and you think you can?” Li Huowang spoke firmly. However, he still did not leave.

As Yi Wan saw his comrades struggling, he spoke rapidly,

“Chen Hongxiu, that old nun, knew nothing! I’ll tell you the truth! One of the four Joys of the Sitting Oblivion Dao, Bei Feng[1], is also a Strayed One! He has managed to live to a ripe old age of 190, and he’s still doing well! None of a Strayed One’s bewilderment or confusion bothers him!”

As Li Huowang was deep in thought, the other three Sitting Oblivion Dao members could no longer hold out. At that moment, Dan Yangzi’s bronze coin sword pierced one of their chests, and his chest immediately started to swell up.

The very next moment, his body exploded, turning into a huge pile of bloody, grotesque flesh that splattered everywhere.

“Look! Now three of us are dead! If you don’t completely restrain Dan Yangzi, then after our deaths, he’ll be the one to reap all the benefits! Will you be happy then? Let’s be honest, even if I openly admit that I deceived you, so what? Do you hate him more or us? Three of us are already dead, while your Master Dan Yangzi has yet to lose even a single strand of hair! Think it through!” shouted Yi Wan.

This speech finally seemed to convince Li Huowang. If he had to choose who he hated more, it was very easy for him to select between Dan Yangzi and the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

Once he made his decision, Li Huowang looked at Dan Yangzi who was chasing after the two remaining members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao, and then nodded. “Hurry! I’ll hold him off for now!”

Just as Dan Yangzi opened his enormous mouth and was about to bite off the square head of one of the members of Sitting Oblivion Dao, Li Huowang arrived in front of him.

At this moment, Li Huowang didn’t bother dodging, instead choosing to directly stomp his feet toward Dan Yangzi’s open mouth.

The wriggling worms that formed the Profound Records were like bloodthirsty leeches. They directly burrowed out of Li

Huowang's chest as they flashed their fangs while heading toward Dan Yangzi.

Clang!

However, Dan Yangzi's mouth closed down before Li Huowang could reach him.

At that moment, with his entire body filled with wriggling worms, Li Huowang crashed heavily onto Dan Yangzi's terrifying face.

Immediately all the worms opened their mouths, ready to burrow into Dan Yangzi's flesh.

But unexpectedly, all Dan Yangzi did was just pinch his fingers, which were made of wriggling tentacles, together.

In an instant, Dan Yangzi's flesh and blood twisted in reverse before directly leaping onto Li Huowang's body, attempting to swallow him.

Flesh, blood, bones, organs, and worms—all these objects were confined together in a very limited space as they tried to tear and devour each other.

Dan Yangzi could see that Li Huowang was hard to deal with, and thus he wanted to take care of the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao first;

However, Li Huowang did not allow that.

Gradually, both sides began to intertwine with one another.

While it seemed that Dan Yangzi was stronger than Li Huowang, it was not so easy for him to just swallow Li Huowang like that. After all, Li Huowang had sacrificed his body's five elements and organs. The thing he had received from Ba-Hui in exchange was not something that could be dealt with so easily.

Those worms were not affected by Dan Yangzi's abnormal body; they just held onto Li Huowang's flesh firmly, preventing themselves from being swallowed.

From the perspective of Yi Wan and the others, Dan Yangzi and

Li Huowang who were fighting in the distance, looked like they had morphed into a mass of constantly wriggling flesh.

“Master, hope you’re doing well!” Li Huowang smiled and greeted the head that was now about the size of an orange, and seemed to have had its skin peeled. Even though he was smiling, Li Huowang actually really wanted to eat Dan Yangzi’s flesh and drink his blood!

Hearing this greeting, Dan Yangzi revealed a mocking smile on his face. “Evil disciple, do you really think that you can beat me? I’m a half-Immortal now. So, what can you, a mere mortal, do?”

“Then why are you still unable to beat a mere mortal like me? Seems like your status as a half-Immortal is quite lousy!” retorted Li Huowang.

Just as both of them were entangled with each other, the remaining three Sitting Oblivion Dao members began to move. They quickly surrounded the master and disciple pair and sat down cross-legged, then closed their eyes and started to chant. “Embark on the path of cultivation! Practice until it turns natural! Cast away the confusion! Sit in oblivion! Unmoved by silence! Explore the subtle brilliance! Follow a unique path! Find virtue with no bounds! Expect the marvels that lie ahead! Look for efficiency! Marvelous! Hahaha!”

As they chanted, patterns of mahjong tiles flowed down from their clothes like water before quickly spreading out onto the ground.

These patterns and lines then swiftly formed strange symbols. The strokes between them began to tremble, emitting high and low sounds of laughter.

Gradually, the laughter grew louder and louder, infecting the onlookers from among the Ao Jing Sect members, as well as Dan Yangzi and Li Huowang in the distance. Soon, everyone’s voices began to echo within the cave as they grew increasingly louder.

At that moment, Li Huowang's ears finally picked up on something hidden within the laughter.

It was something that felt dark and obscure, something that the senses of normal people could not understand. Though Li Huowang could not understand what it was, he felt a sense of familiarity from it.

“This is the God of Happiness! I remember now! This is the same God of Happiness from back at the Hu Family's ancestral hall! The members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao are summoning the God of Happiness!” said Li Huowang.

However, beside him, Dan Yangzi sensed something that Li Huowang couldn't. “No, kid, you're wrong! They're not summoning! They are deceiving it! Not only have they managed to deceive Ba-Hui, they have even deceived their own God of Prosperity! None of their supernatural abilities are their own, and they were all acquired by deceiving others!”

Li Huowang felt like something was drawing him toward the laughter, toward where that thing in the walls was staring at himself. It was the God of Happiness.

The laughter by his ears grew louder and louder, and Li Huowang understood that no matter what they were doing, now was a critical moment.

Just as the laughter reached its peak, Li Huowang's lips curled up as he glanced at the three members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao, his body suddenly shrinking back.

At the same time, all the worms that had been entangled with Dan Yangzi's flesh withdrew from his body before flying back to Li Huowang.

Chapter 169 - Made It

This sudden situation caused everyone present to be caught off guard.

Dan Yangzi, who had now regained his freedom, did not hesitate. He immediately stepped onto the dark clouds and pounced toward the three people in the distance, looking like a ferocious tiger descending down a mountain.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang just remained standing on the spot, watching everything happening in the distance as though it was all just a play. When he saw Yi Wan staring at him in disbelief, he suddenly slapped his head in frustration with both hands. “Oh no, look at what I’ve done! How could I let Dan Yangzi escape so easily? I’m quite inexperienced, so please forgive me, Senior.”

“You actually dare to deceive me!” shouted Yi Wan.

Hearing these words, Li Huowang chuckled, “Now I can somewhat understand why you guys from the Sitting Oblivion Dao like to do this. It’s really quite fun to deceive others, hahaha!”

No matter what the others thought, the situation was now spiraling out of control.

Just as one of the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao had their head sliced into half by Dan Yangzi’s sword, three figures representing the Gods of Happiness burrowed out from within the smooth walls of the cave.

The three masses were sticky and chaotic, and semi-transparent, resembling a bunch of rotten grapes.

The moment they appeared, the onlookers from Ao Jing Sect were no longer able to escape. Everyone present started rolling on the ground as they burst out laughing, their laughter growing more and more terrifying. Eventually, blood started to flow out of their

seven orifices, leading them to their deaths.

After the newly emerged figures had gotten used to their surroundings, they locked onto their targets and flew straight toward Dan Yangzi and Li Huowang.

At the same time, with the addition of another faction, the battlefield once more became chaotic.

However, Li Huowang couldn't be bothered to move, as he watched Dan Yangzi dismember yet another one of the members from the Sitting Oblivion Dao. With that, he felt that he had achieved what he had wanted, and it was time for things to come to an end.

Suddenly, darkness enveloped him from above—Li Huowang had been enveloped by one of the figures of the God of Happiness.

As the layers of the God of Happiness' body brushed past Li Huowang, he suddenly felt like many things had been taken from him.

The emotions in his heart, his will to die, as well as a trace of reluctance. A great portion of these things had been taken from him.

At that moment, a splattering sound rang out, and some lifeless worms helplessly fell out from inside Li Huowang's chest.

Li Huowang sluggishly looked down at the dead worms. He understood that the duration of the Five Elements Intercalation was almost over.

At the same time, a chattering sound came from above his head; one of the God of Happiness' figures was about to attack again, an attack that would likely spell his doom.

But Li Huowang did not plan to hide anymore. Without those worms, and with his internal organs gone, he was destined to die sooner or later.

But it was alright as well, since, at this point, Dan Yangzi's plan to take over his body had completely failed.

“Ah, I’m exhausted. I can finally rest,” muttered Li Huowang, his robes fluttering in the wind as he closed his eyes and waited for his end.

“Get lost!”

At that moment, a thunderous sound rang out, causing Li Huowang to look up in confusion. There, he saw Dan Yangzi’s figure, still covered with his peculiar flesh.

He was shrouded within the dark clouds and firmly holding off the God of Happiness; he had actually managed to save Li Huowang this time.

As he saw this, Li Huowang scratched at his chest, causing some more dead worms to slip out and onto the ground. At this point, his missing sense of pain was gradually starting to return.

“Why try to save me? Do you think I won’t die just because you saved me?” Li Huowang said as he stood on the spot and watched the scene above him unfold.

At this point, given that he could see the other two Gods of Happiness swim over as well, it was likely that Dan Yangzi wouldn’t have a good ending either.

Before his death, Li Huowang stood on the spot, planning to watch Dan Yangzi suffer. However, he suddenly thought of something, and turned to look toward the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

There, he saw bodies scattered all over the ground—all of them except for one was dead.

At this moment, one of the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao was clutching at his stomach as he stumbled out of the cave.

“Damn! One of them got away!” muttered Li Huowang.

Letting the member of Sitting Oblivion Dao escape alive was even more unbearable for Li Huowang than death itself.

Just a moment ago, he had been ready to die. But now, it seemed like he suddenly saw a ray of hope as he dashed toward the

last member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

From the looks of it, that person had been injured during his battle with Dan Yangzi, and was not able to move fast.

On the other hand, Li Huowang was not particularly fast either; after all, his sense of pain had started to return. Every step he took at this moment was excruciatingly painful, almost as though countless needles were piercing him. His body was slowly collapsing.

One chased, while the other hurried away. Then, the member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao suddenly turned a corner, and vanished from Li Huowang's field of vision just like that.

With his sword in hand, Li Huowang dragged his collapsing body around the corner, only to be stunned by what lay before him.

It turned out to be a dead end. At this moment, some women were hiding here, huddled together while holding their children, as they trembled in fear.

These people were likely the family members of the Ao Jing Sect's disciples, and were hiding here to seek refuge.

That member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao seemed to have changed his appearance before hiding among them.

After a moment, Li Huowang bent his aching back before staggering toward them, the sharp sword tip scraping against the ground and causing a piercing friction noise.

To the women hiding here, this noise seemed like a death knell, causing them to cry out in terror.

For a moment, Li Huowang looked through these people as he tried to search for the member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao hiding among them.

However, this was no easy feat, since there were far too many people here.

Splloosh~

At that moment, Li Huowang's left hand crumbled and fell to

the ground, turning into a broken red bamboo slip.

There's not much time left for me to find the bastard! Since he won't come out, then I'll just kill them all!

As Li Huowang's thought reached this point, he gritted his teeth and raised the blade in his hand toward the elderly, women and children.

"Hold on! Daoist, what are you doing?! They are innocent! They haven't done anything wrong!" shouted the Monk from his hallucination as he suddenly tried to persuade him.

Upon hearing this, Li Huowang's eyes showed some hesitation, but then he tightened his grip on the hilt of his sword and swung it down forcefully.

In an instant, blood splashed, and screams filled the air. At the same time, Li Huowang's robes were stained with an even deeper shade of red.

Witnessing this horrifying scene, Monk cried out. He started jumping around frantically as he tried to go over and stop all this, but couldn't touch Li Huowang at all.

Amidst the bloodbath, one of the women's bodies suddenly twisted, and her face quickly morphed into a new one as she tried to use the chaos to escape.

However, just as she had taken a few steps, some worms flew out from the blood on the ground and entered her body.

She fell to the ground and started howling in agony, while something started to slowly prop up her flesh.

As her struggling ceased, some spluttering sounds rang out as distorted red bamboo slips burrowed out from her face like a screw.

With this, the final member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao had died—all six of the Sitting Oblivion Dao members who had deceived Li Huowang were now dead.

Monk furiously watched as Li Huowang stopped his massacre, and then tore off the cloth from his sleeve before throwing it on the

ground. Then, he pointed at Li Huowang with trembling fingers and shouted, "Daoist! It seems that I've misjudged you! We're no longer related! The Li Huowang I knew would never have done such a thing!"

Hearing this, Li Huowang, who was almost completely exhausted, slowly looked up slowly at him; it was as if he was coming to a slow realization. He lowered his head to look at his own battered body, his expression suddenly becoming ecstatic as he shouted, "That's right! Li Huowang would definitely not have done something like this. But I, Dan Yangzi, definitely would! Hahaha! I've made it!"

Chapter 170 - Dan Yangzi

“Hahaha! This is it!”

Dan Yangzi, who was standing amidst a scene of carnage, now grinned wildly. At this point, he had finally come to an understanding.

He had finally understood what that Senior in the heavens had said to him about killing the Three Corpses. He had always assumed that he had to turn Li Huowang into the Three Corpses, and then kill him. But his understanding had been incorrect.

Those seeking Immortality had to first eliminate the Three Corpses, be calm and without any desires, and possess a serene spirit.

As it turned out, there was no Li Huowang in this entire process—Li Huowang was just a part of his past, an inner demon, and a part of his Three Corpses.

It was because he was filled with mortal energy that he had prevented himself from becoming an Immortal. Now, he had completely become himself, meaning that one of the three corpses had been killed.

Back when he had taken the medicine was the moment that another corpse had been killed. That was precisely why he had become a half-Immortal.

Overjoyed, he laughed while using his blade to slaughter the remaining people; whenever he was happy, he wanted nothing more than to kill people.

While he did not know where the final corpse of his three corpses was, Dan Yangzi had a premonition that at this point was already capable of passing through the Southern Heavenly Gate.

The others in the cave were no match for Dan Yangzi. Soon, he

was the only one still alive within the cave.

Dan Yangzi stopped and once again looked down at his youthful body before laughing out triumphantly, “Haha! I’m finally going to become a true Immortal!”

On the other hand, Monk watched him with an astonished expression on his face before gradually vanishing.

However, not long after, Dan Yangzi suppressed his joy; it was not yet time for him to be happy.

Without the support of the Five Elements Intercalation, this battered body without its five internal organs was about to collapse.

He could not afford to die now; first, he had to merge with his true body.

“Hmph! A mere inner demon wanted to ruin my path to Immortality? Now, I am an Immortal!” muttered Dan Yangzi.

Then, he took out the bronze bell in his possession and shook it quickly. Soon, the surroundings morphed into chaos and a few Wandering Gods appeared before him.

Dan Yangzi hummed his orders to them, and then they quickly flew away.

When they returned, they brought along a cinnabar brush, some yellow paper, a piece of wood, a lump of soil, a torch, a jug of water, and a golden ingot.

Dan Yangzi staggered over to the lifeless bodies on the ground and picked one of them for each of the elements—water, fire, earth, wood, and gold. Then, he lifted his sword and beheaded them.

After that, he opened the mouths of one of the dismembered heads before stuffing the golden ingot within. Then, he used some of the yellow paper to seal the mouth. Next, he held the cinnabar brush in his hand and quickly drew something on the yellow paper.

As soon as he finished the last stroke, the head suddenly emitted a creaking sound and began to shrink. Soon, its skin, hair, and facial features all fell away, until the head shrank down to less

than half its original size.

At that point, Dan Yangzi picked up the head and stuffed it into his own chest.

Following the same procedure, the other four heads were also stuffed into Li Huowang's empty chest, replacing the positions of the five organs.

When the last head occupied the position of the heart, Dan Yangzi nodded with satisfaction. While this sinister method that he had stolen from the Lion Dance Palace would not last long, it would suffice for now.

Satisfied, he took out the sacred text and gazed at it with mixed emotions. Even if he did not understand a single character on it, it was what had led him down the path of Immortality.

I wonder if I'll still be able to meet that Immortal after passing through the Southern Heavenly Gate. If I do meet them, then I must sincerely express my gratitude.

After all, it was only because of his help that he would be able to enter the Southern Heavenly Gates and live as long as the heavens and earth.

“Fucking useless!”

This unexpected sound of someone cursing caused Dan Yangzi's expression to freeze. He quickly turned toward the source of the voice, yet there was nobody there; everything continued to remain motionless.

“Who's there?! Show yourself now, and I'll leave your corpse intact if I'm feeling good!” Dan Yangzi's enraged voice echoed through the large cave, but there was no response.

With a furious expression, Dan Yangzi snorted, picked up the sacred text and walked out of the cave.

The situation within the cave was very strange. The God of Happiness was not a friendly entity either, and it was best for him to leave this area first, and then find a quiet place to wait for his

own body to return to him.

As long as he became a true Immortal at the end, everyone in this mortal world would be nothing more than an ant to him!

When Dan Yangzi came back to the battlefield, he found that the surroundings outside were extremely quiet.

He was the only person in the entire cave who was alive—the rest of them were all dead. Ao Jing Sect's entire stronghold within these mountains had been completely wiped out.

“Baldy! Do you really think you can become an Immortal? How can a despicable wretch like you do it?”

Swish!

Hearing the voice, Dan Yangzi threw out his sword which stabbed firmly into the solid cave wall while trembling with a low hum.

Ring ring ring!

At this point, Dan Yangzi could no longer sit still, and decided to once again ring the bronze bell. Immediately, Wandering Gods appeared all around Dan Yangzi.

At his command, they all began to frantically search around for the person who had spoken previously.

But even after searching for fifteen minutes, the Wandering Gods, entities that could fly up high and through the ground, had still not found anyone. Even their search underground and within the walls didn't yield any results.

“What's going on? Could it be an ambush set by the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao?” Dan Yangzi was rather unsettled as he mumbled to himself while looking at his unfamiliar surroundings.

After two times, Dan Yangzi dared not let down his guard anymore. He pointed with the bell in his hand, and the Wandering Gods quickly flew out of the cave to find his true body.

Then, he raised his sword and waited on the spot.

After about thirty minutes, Dan Yangzi heard some commotion

from outside. His heart leaped with joy as he quickly turned over to look.

However, he found that it was not his true body that had walked into the cave, but a strangely dressed woman. He had traveled extensively for many years and had seen all kinds of things, but he had never seen a woman dressed like this. Her clothes looked like they were made of silk, and she carried a peculiar rectangular box under her arm. Her hair was tied up in a bun.

She seemed to be around forty odd years of age, and had a round face, large eyes, short hair, and seemed a little tired.

Where is this person from? Was the person who cursed me just now her? Why did she come here at such a critical juncture? Is she one of my old enemies?

Just as Dan Yangzi was racking his brain, he saw the woman smile apologetically at him. “Son, we’re late because the hospital had to handle some paperwork. Your external injuries have almost completely healed, so your dad and I have found a new hospital for you.”

Right after she started speaking, Dan Yangzi noticed the bright cave around him collapsing rapidly and changing. Soon, the bright cave around him had turned completely white.

At the same time, he noticed that while he should have been standing inside the cave, objects were quickly piling up on his own body.

Chapter 171 - Strayed One

When Dan Yangzi came back to his senses, he saw that his left arm had regrown.

He tried to move, but found himself strapped to a metallic bed. His limbs were being tied down by leather straps. He couldn't move an inch.

Seeing this, he tried muttering some chants to use his supernatural powers, but none of them worked.

Given the situation, he was no different from a fish on a chopping board, waiting to be slaughtered.

Dan Yangzi felt humiliated.

Ever since he started murdering people at the age of ten, he had never found himself in such a situation.

"Who's there?! Who is trying to use illusory tricks on me?!" Dan Yangzi howled at the woman in front of him. He was unfamiliar with the place.

"I don't care who you are, just you wait! Once my main body arrives, all of you will die!" Dan Yangzi growled.

His outburst visibly shook the woman in front of him, causing her to run out while shouting, "Doctor! Doctor, come quick! Something's wrong with my son!"

While she was gone, Dan Yangzi tried to escape his restraints, but it was no use. After a while, he calmed down and surveyed his surroundings.

"The Sitting Oblivion Dao! Maybe it's them! There might have been more than six of them and now they are attacking me from the dark!"

After some time, Dan Yangzi saw the woman walking in with two men in white.

Three people? They have restrained me and yet haven't done anything to me. What is their goal?

While he was thinking, one of the doctors asked 'Li Huowang'.

"Xiao Li, look carefully. Who is she?" asked the doctor wearing a pair of round frame glasses while pointing at Sun Xiaoqin.

Dan Yangzi calmed down. "Talk. Who sent you over? Since when did you start following me just so you can stop me from achieving Immortality?"

The doctor was not surprised by this response and just nodded calmly before writing something down on his tablet.

"Do you still remember your name?" asked the doctor.

At this point, Dan Yangzi decided to change his strategy a little and said seriously, "Zephyr Temple, Temple Master Dan Yangzi. You tied me up when you don't even know who I am? Which sect are you from? I've lived for almost half a century and traveled across the lands. I've met many people. It's even possible that your elders were my friends at some point in time. Let me go and help me achieve Immortality. If you do, then I will reward all of you handsomely."

Hearing his response, Sun Xiaoqin panicked. "Son, what are you talking about? You are not Dan Yangzi. You are Li Huowang!"

"Li Huowang?" Dan Yangzi's eyes were filled with doubt before he shook his head. "No! There's no Li Huowang! There's only Dan Yangzi! Li Huowang was nothing more than a part of my Three Corpses!"

Sun Xiaoqin wanted to say something but was stopped by the doctor. "Madam Sun, please calm down. Let us finish questioning him first."

Sun Xiaoqin gripped her bag and nodded before retreating to a corner of the room, her heart burdened with anxiety.

On the other hand, the two doctors talked to each other and discussed a strategy. Once done, they decided that one of them would question Li Huowang while the other would note down his responses.

The doctor asking the questions sat on a stool beside Li Huowang. “Dan Yangzi, let me ask you a question? What is one plus one?”

Dan Yangzi was confused by the purpose of the question. What was this man in white trying to do? But he was more than happy to entertain him. After all, as long as his main body returned, it would be his win.

And so, both of them began to probe the other, neither of them getting the answer they wanted.

As he watched this interaction, the doctor recording their exchange was confused. “That’s strange. Why is he suddenly exhibiting a new symptom after his illness had been stable for so long? Madam Sun, did your son receive any stimulus from the outside world?”

“No! My son is still very good! He even talked to us during his birthday,” replied Sun Xiaoqin truthfully.

The doctor thought about it and suggested, “We should transfer him. Your son’s internal fistula has been resolved and he can now defecate normally. We can transfer him to a normal psychiatric hospital. The doctors there are much more skilled in treating cases like this. Don’t worry, we will record all his symptoms in his medical history and will not delay his treatment in the slightest.”

“But how can we transfer him when he’s like this?” worried Sun Xiaoqin.

“Don’t worry. It’s not unheard of for an illness to rebound. Please give your son some time. I will give your son some Risperidone and Olanzapine. Nothing will happen to him while we are transferring him,” explained the doctor.

Soon, Dan Yangzi saw two burly men approach his bed before wheeling him outside.

“Where are you taking me? Put me down! I will kill all of you when I become an Immortal!” shouted Dan Yangzi.

Hearing this, the nurses scoffed at him, causing Sun Xiaoqin to be upset.

“What are you laughing at?! My son is a patient! Do you think it’s funny to laugh at a patient?” shouted Sun Xiaoqin.

Then, she placed her hand on Li Huowang’s face and gently caressed it. “Don’t be afraid, son. I am here. No one can bully you while I am here.”

At that moment, Dan Yangzi was stunned. The soft feeling on his face and the earnest gaze of the woman in front of him unlocked a distant memory within him. Gradually, Sun Xiaoqin’s face grew hazy before being superimposed on an unfamiliar face.

Dan Yangzi trembled. “Mother?”

Just as he uttered that word, his surroundings crumbled. The white walls all around him quickly disappeared and he was once again in the cave filled with the stench of blood.

“This... This... What is happening?” Dan Yangzi stared at his surroundings warily. He had seen many bizarre things in his life, but nothing as crazy as today!

After a moment, Dan Yangzi took his sword and carefully inspected everything around him.

“Where is my main body? Why is it not here yet?”

At this point, Dan Yangzi started panicking. Even though everything looked normal right now, the hallucination from just now was definitely not something a normal human could induce!

The one who had trapped him in that hallucination was definitely someone very strong!

“Master...”

At that moment, a familiar voice rang out from behind him,

causing all the hair on his body to stand on end.

Chapter 172 - Disciple

“Master...”

Dan Yangzi immediately turned around and saw a familiar face.

It was Zheng Kun, the disciple he had cared about the most. Currently, Zheng Kun was wearing a green Daoist robe as he stood there without any hatred in his eyes.

Zheng Kun looked extremely real; it was as if he was actually alive.

But Dan Yangzi remembered that he was the very person who had crushed Zheng Kun’s head, and so it was impossible for him to still be alive!

After a moment, Dan Yangzi finally snapped out of it and roared in anger, “Who dares to try and trick me?! You are courting death!”

As he spoke, Dan Yangzi threw his sword high into the air. Then, he bit his fingers and drew a bloody rune onto the falling sword.

“The Seven Stars of the Heavens! Ruler of the skies! Pierce through all illusions and heed my words! Cut down all evil and chase them back up the mountains! Heed my orders and treat them as the supreme law!”

As he chanted, the sword turned black from the bits of talismans that stuck themselves to it from the Heavens and Earth.

Dan Yangzi held the blackened sword and stabbed it toward Zheng Kun.

On the other hand, Zheng Kun didn’t try to hide from his Master’s attack. Instead, he just stood there as he tried to say something.

But the moment Dan Yangzi's enchanted sword slashed across Zheng Kun's body, he smiled and disappeared.

After that, Dan Yangzi stood around in the cave warily. Everything had turned quiet.

Nothing happened even after he had waited for half an hour.

"Hmph! Looks like you know when to back off! I don't care who you are, but if you cross me, then I will kill you!" shouted Dan Yangzi.

However, while Dan Yangzi was speaking fierce words, he was merely bluffing.

Dan Yangzi did not lower his guard and continued to monitor his surroundings as he slowly walked outside.

Once out of the cave, he immediately ran down the mountain.

He kept running and running until he arrived at the ghost town located at the bottom of the mountain; Dan Yangzi did not want to run too far away. He was afraid that his main body might not be able to find him.

He just needed to wait at a quiet place.

After choosing a location, Dan Yangzi started to use the items brought to him by the Wandering Gods to set up a formation.

"Blazing sun, flashing thunder~ Kill those who are cursed or try to change this formation~ Protect the righteous and kill the evil~ All evils shall perish~ Nothing is unstoppable, for everything can drown in water and burn in fire~ Heed my words and treat them as the supreme orders!"

Just as he finished chanting, the yellow flags planted on the various graves shook at the same time. Then, an invisible line connected all of the yellow flags and formed a massive formation.

Dan Yangzi sat in the middle of the formation and waited.

"Hmph! I have all night, so let's see you try and trick me again!"

Then, Dan Yangzi knocked over one of the gravestones before sitting on it and waiting.

He looked at the various mounds around him while worrying about his main body. "It might be annoying to deal with those three figures of the God of Happiness, but the main body should be strong enough to fight against them. Even if it can't fight them, it should still be able to escape. Why is it still not here?"

As Dan Yangzi sat there and waited, he felt anxious; after a while, he used his sword and started drawing something on the ground.

"Master, what is this formation?"

When Dan Yangzi heard someone trying to butter him up, he scoffed. "Just sit there and watch. It is not yet time to teach you—"

However, he suddenly stopped speaking and slowly raised his head.

He was surprised to see Zheng Kun standing in front of him.

Zheng Kun was currently standing in the middle of the formation! Even though he had used so much time to set up this formation, it turned out to be useless!

"Impossible! Even if it can't block you from entering it, it should alert me about your presence!" shouted Dan Yangzi as he swung his sword, which once more phased through Zheng Kun's chest, leaving him completely unharmed.

As Dan Yangzi tried to figure out how to deal with his disciple, he suddenly heard the mound on his left move.

When he turned around, he saw his other disciple, Xuan Yin, standing there.

"Master, long time no see. I've missed you somewhat," said Xuan Yin.

Just as Dan Yangzi took a step back in fear, two more men walked up to him and made a seal with their hands. Both of them had swords strapped to their back.

"Disciples Chang Ming and Chang Ren greet Master. Congratulations on becoming an Immortal!" said the two men.

But this was merely the start. More and more people started appearing from the surrounding mounds and started talking to Dan Yangzi.

Some of these people were not from the Zephyr Temple. Instead, they were people that he knew in the past.

“Dan Yangzi you thief! To think you would refine pills using live humans! I should’ve slapped you to death!”

“Baldy! To think that you would betray your own sworn brother!”

“Why did you sell our daughter? She was your wife! You fucking ingrate!”

“Why did you kill our father? Why?! My father even fed you the white noodles that we ourselves couldn’t afford to eat! How could you kill him?!”

As more and more people appeared within the formation, the voices became more and more chaotic. At this point, Dan Yangzi started panicking.

“What is this?” Fear welled up from the depths of his eyes as he lowered his head and took a deep breath. He recognized all of these people!

Finally, the fear in his heart exploded when he saw a big fat man appearing.

“ENOUGH!” shouted Dan Yangzi as he stomped and started waving his sword around.

Soon, the lines that formed the formation became white smoke that ascended to the Heavens.

At the same time, thunder clouds covered the skies and Dan Yangzi stabbed the sword into the ground.

Crack!

A huge amount of purple lightning illuminated his surroundings.

The purple lightning shot toward the formation before

radiating toward the surroundings, turning everything it passed through, including the gravestones and the houses, black.

However, when Dan Yangzi raised his head, he was surprised to see that none of the people around him were harmed.

“What is this? Who are you guys? The Sitting Oblivion Dao?! You guys dare to go against an Immortal?!” Dan Yangzi howled at them.

Dan Yangzi was shaking with anger, when someone suddenly started laughing at him.

It was none other than the big fat man.

“Aiyo~ Isn’t this Yang Danzi[1]? You are already so old? Haha! I still remember how you used to kiss my ass and grovel on the ground just so you could learn from me!” said the big fat man.

The fat man's words made everyone else laugh.

All of them started laughing at Dan Yangzi.

“Mere mortals like you dare to mock me?! I am an Immortal! You need to respect me!” shouted Dan Yangzi.

At the same time, he started using all his techniques to try and kill the people surrounding him.

But it was no use. None of his methods worked.

After a while, Dan Yangzi sat on the ground, tired from using all the methods that he could think of.

After a while, he took a long piece of wood before stabbing it into his right and then his left ear; he intended to pierce his eardrums to stop the voices.

However, the sound of laughter just became even louder.

“AAAA!” screamed Dan Yangzi as he picked up a piece of stone and started whacking his head with it.

Just then, someone pushed through the crowd to come closer.

He was the only one who didn’t laugh.

Dan Yangzi recognized him. It was none other than Li Huowang.

Li Huowang approached the sorry-looking Dan Yangzi and chuckled. “Master, how does it feel occupying my body?”

1. also known as goat testicles, after his name is moved around



Chapter 173 - The Southern Heavenly Gates

“Master, how does it feel to inhabit my body?”

Hearing this, Dan Yangzi glared at Li Huowang. “You! It’s you! You cheated me before, so this must be your doing!”

As he roared, Dan Yangzi tried to stand up and cut Li Huowang down with his sword.

But all he managed to do was pass right through Li Huowang.

Dan Yangzi was shocked and stared at Li Huowang as the latter smiled and explained calmly, “Oh, please forgive me, Master. I forgot to tell you that I am an illusion, and so you can’t kill me.”

Then, Li Huowang pointed toward the rest of the illusions. “Not only can you not kill me, but you can’t kill any of them either. They are all illusions that will follow you to the edge of the world.”

At that moment, Dan Yangzi saw as the illusions closed in on him, causing his heart to start pounding in fear.

Their faces slowly melted and became a wall that surrounded him from all sides. He realized that he would never be able to run, and that he would never be able to hide.

He realized that he would have to suffer for an eternity.

“This... What is this?!” Dan Yangzi shouted as he slashed at his surroundings in a frenzy.

He had always resorted to using violence to settle things. He would steal, rob, lie, and even kill to get what he wanted. But now, all of these methods were useless.

Everything he had learned throughout his life was now completely useless.

“Master, that is the body of a Strayed One. Enjoy it as much as

you want,” Li Huowang laughed, his laughter joining the rest as all of them laughed at Dan Yangzi scornfully.

When Dan Yangzi saw Li Huowang acting so haughty, he gritted his teeth with envy. He threw his sword in anger and shouted, “You think you’ve won? Stop dreaming! I will spare you for now. Just wait until my main body comes back!”

As soon as he said this, the laughter stopped. All of the illusions stared at him at the same time.

At that moment, Dan Yangzi raised his right hand and slapped himself. “I am not Dan Yangzi, I am Li Huowang!”

As soon as he did this, the illusions around him started disappearing one by one, causing doubt to blossom within Dan Yangzi’s heart.

“Who am I?”

“Am I Dan Yangzi or Li Huowang? No, I am not Li Huowang, so I must be Dan Yangzi! Scram, get out of here! I am Dan Yangzi, not Li Huowang! No, you scram! I am Li Huowang, not Dan Yangzi!”

The youth continued struggling.

In the meantime, the illusions around him disappeared one by one, until there was only an old Monk left. However, in a bit, he too disappeared.

As the youth fell onto the ground while struggling like a maggot, a dark cloud appeared in the sky. This black cloud was none other than the monstrous Dan Yangzi.

The current Dan Yangzi looked injured, and was missing many of his organs. His body was dark and without color. He had used a majority of his strength just to escape.

Dan Yangzi slowly floated downward and approached the youth, his long tentacles easily lifting the youth into the air.

“Which one are you?” Dan Yangzi asked.

The youth struggled for a long time before calming down. Then, he opened his eyes and calmly said, “I am Dan Yangzi. The

Three Corpses have been slain.”

Hearing those words, the monstrous Dan Yangzi revealed a satisfied smile before hugging the youth with his hideous body and sucking on the youth’s face. As he did this, something flowed out from the youth’s seven orifices and into Dan Yangzi’s body.

Soon, the youth’s body stiffened, becoming lifeless.

At that moment, Dan Yangzi finally revealed a satisfied smile—the last remaining essence had once again entered his body.

“I can finally become an Immortal!” Dan Yangzi laughed maniacally and flew into the dark cloud above.

He flew higher and higher, his heart pounding from excitement. Seventy-four years! That was how long he had lived for, and he had never been as excited as today!

He passed through the layer of clouds and continued flying upward into the starry skies.

As he went up, he flew past the stars and saw many monstrous beings.

Some of them were nothing more than a gray gloop, their bodies stabbed with numerous incense that burned forever as they expanded and contracted rhythmically.

There was also a blind golden Bodhisattva with a pink tentacle extending from its crotch. The tentacle rummaged around as if it was sucking on something. Dan Yangzi even caught a glimpse of the wishes of the devotees.

There was also a blob of shimmering light that was encircled by numerous black cranes. Everytime they touched each other, a hoarse cry could be heard.

But this was not all.

Dan Yangzi also saw the God of Happiness, the Immortal Households, and even his Senior who had taught him how to slay the Three Corpses.

All of them were Half-Immortals!

As he saw all of them, Dan Yangzi scoffed. They were beings destined to be stuck here until the end of time. They no longer had a way of ascending.

But he was different—he was now an Immortal.

He flew faster and faster as he passed through the sea of stars until he arrived at a colorless jade plate in the middle of nowhere.

The jade plate was being hung from something hidden within the darkness. As the formless darkness moved, the jade plate bobbed up and down.

There were three large characters written on it. While Dan Yangzi was illiterate, he was certain that these characters spelled out the words, ‘Southern Heavenly Gate’. This was because he recognized the final character that was shaped like a gate. Three characters that ended with the character for ‘gate’? Due to this, he was certain that this was the Southern Heavenly Gate.

At this moment, there were various monstrosities surrounding the jade plate as they tried to make their way inside.

“Scram! Get away! Don’t stop me from becoming an Immortal!” shouted Dan Yangzi as he blasted everything in front of him away and monopolized the area in front of the jade plate.

Through the jade plate, he saw the hazy-looking Immortals.

There were Immortals, Bodhisattvas, and Arhats inside the jade plate!

Compared to their previous unmoving selves, they were all happily eating something and were almost done with it.

However, the dense mist that covered the interior of the jade plate made it so Dan Yangzi couldn’t see the situation inside clearly.

“What are they eating? Are those the Immortal Peaches and Pills?”

Fearing that he might not even get a bite, Dan Yangzi panicked, choosing to immediately charge toward the jade plate.

But just as he was about to pass through the jade plate, he felt

an invisible wall blocking him from entering. It was as if the jade plate was denying him entrance.

“Let me in! I’ve become an Immortal! Let me into the Immortal Realm!” Dan Yangzi shouted into the darkness as he floated near the jade plate.

At that moment, up in the formless darkness, Dan Yangzi saw the two massive snakes that were holding up the jade plate. The snakes had no tails or heads, but somehow took a ‘look’ at Dan Yangzi before ignoring him.

“I’ve killed my Three Corpses and become an Immortal! Let me in! What right do you have to keep me outside?!” Dan Yangzi howled at the darkness above and at the jade plate.

But then, Dan Yangzi suddenly recognized the three words etched onto the jade plate.

“Ox Tail Gate.”

Chapter 174 - Opening The Gates

“Ox Tail Gate?” Dan Yangzi was shocked at being able to recognize the characters on the jade plate. He felt his brain buzzing from shock. The three characters had revealed themselves to him just like that.

How could this be the Ox Tail Gate? Wasn't this the Southern Heavenly Gate? Is the Immortal Realm not behind it? Weren't those Immortals?

He looked down at the stars and then looked up into the darkness. He wasn't sure what to do now. It was as if everything had lost its meaning.

“You are still clueless? There's no such thing as the Immortal Realm! You've been fooled and your entire life has been nothing more than a joke!”

A familiar voice rang out, causing Dan Yangzi to turn around. However, there was nothing there.

Just as he thought that the illusions from earlier were about to appear once again, he found the source of the voice.

It was one of his three heads!

Currently, his left-most head had been replaced by Li Huowang's head!

“Impossible! I've already slain my Three Corpses! Who are you?” shouted Dan Yangzi as he raised the coin sword in his hand and placed it on Li Huowang's neck, threatening to cut him off.

However, Li Huowang was unfazed. “Hehe, why don't you take a guess?”

“You fucking ungrateful disciple!” raged Dan Yangzi as he tried

to slash downward, but couldn't. He noticed that a mysterious force was stopping him.

Suddenly, Dan Yangzi raised his other arm and slapped his own face.

On the other hand, as he saw Dan Yangzi growing more and more infuriated, Li Huowang laughed even harder.

Back when Dan Yangzi had sucked out his essence from Li Huowang's body, the latter had barely managed to regain consciousness. At the time, the first decision he made was to never let Dan Yangzi live peacefully!

And so, he followed the other Dan Yangzi and allowed himself to get sucked into Dan Yangzi's main body. Now that he was in here, he had some degree of control over Dan Yangzi's body.

"You dare to hit me?" Dan Yangzi was angered and tried to cut off Li Huowang.

Unfortunately, since this was Dan Yangzi's main body, he was the one who had more control over it. Soon, Li Huowang lost control and the coin sword started to cut into his neck.

However, Li Huowang was not the slightest bit afraid. Instead, he started laughing like a maniac.

"Baldy! Did you know, I've tried so many methods to kill and get rid of you, but none of them worked. Then I had a thought... Why should I kill you? All I have to do is to torture you until death seemed like a paradise! And to think that the torture that I've endured all these years will become useful now," said Li Huowang.

Before Dan Yangzi could even figure out what was happening, numerous voices suddenly appeared all around him.

"Yang Danzi! You stupid brat, you deserve to die! Li Huowang, kill him! Take revenge for me!"

"You filthy ass-kisser, why don't you just die?!"

"Daoist, kill him quickly! Take the place of the Heavens and exact revenge for us!"

Gradually, illusions belonging to both Li Huowang and Dan Yangzi started appearing one by one.

At this moment, Li Huowang's bewilderment and sense of doubt had appeared within Dan Yangzi.

Soon, the illusions elongated in the darkness and became like seagrass, twisting and encircling both of them.

Following Li Huowang's will, his properties as a Strayed One had started manifesting themselves within Dan Yangzi.

As he saw Dan Yangzi start panicking, Li Huowang chuckled. "How is it, Master? Do you like it? This is how I will show my respect for you. Even though you've managed to kill me, you will continue to suffer as a Strayed One!"

"YOU CRAZY LUNATIC!" Dan Yangzi dared not attack him anymore as fear gripped his heart.

"I'm a lunatic? It's all thanks to your guidance!" said Li Huowang.

As the two of them continued arguing, something massive started to move within the jade plate.

Originally, the monstrous beings within the jade plate had all been eating something, but now, all of them were staring at Dan Yangzi and Li Huowang through the jade plate.

Without any warning, the jade plate disappeared into the darkness. At the same time, a wondrous phenomenon manifested itself at the location where the jade plate disappeared from.

With this, both Li Huowang and Dan Yangzi caught a glimpse of the inside. Instantly, a primal fear gripped both of their hearts; the evil beings within far exceeded anything they could comprehend.

At that moment, a gentle breeze floated out along with a sigh, slowly approaching Li Huowang and Dan Yangzi.

"The Baiyu Capital resides in the heavens, with twelve pavilions and five cities. The Immortals caress our heads and we

shall become Immortals'. Is this the legendary Baiyu Capital?!" shouted one of the illusions, a divine-looking Daoist. He was clearly very excited.

When Dan Yangzi heard those words, he immediately took action. He completely ignored Li Huowang and rushed straight toward the Baiyu Capital!

"I want to go to the Baiyu Capital! I want to become an Immortal! I've become an Immortal!" shouted Dan Yangzi as he rushed toward the 'Baiyu Capital'.

On the other hand, Li Huowang tried his best to pull him backward.

"Don't stop me from becoming an Immortal! You can't stop me!" Dan Yangzi struggled against Li Huowang's control, using all his energy to run inside.

As the two of them struggled over controlling the main body, they gradually closed in on the bizarre phenomenon. All the while, the 'Immortals' were patiently waiting for them.

The being closest to them within the Baiyu Capital was a Bodhisattva. Her movements were fluid and elegant, and her floating shawl gave everyone the impression that they were underwater. A pale halo of light could be seen resting at the back of her head.

Both Li Huowang and Dan Yangzi failed to see her appearance until they were very close to her; the light emitted by the halo wasn't just regular light. Instead, it was a halo made from numerous white eyes!

However, this was the most normal thing within the entire Baiyu Capital. Soon, they saw more and more monstrosities, each worse than the last.

As he stared at the Bodhisattva in front of him, Dan Yangzi's heart was instantly gripped with fear. His instincts were telling him that this was a dangerous place, one that he must avoid entering at

all costs!

No! This is not the Southern Heavenly Gate! This is the Ox Tail Gate! These are not Immortals!

At that moment, Dan Yangzi finally snapped out of his obsession with becoming an Immortal.

However, at that moment, just as Dan Yangzi was trying to pull back, Li Huowang's voice suddenly rang out. "Master! Are you ready? Then let me help you become an Immortal!"

At the same time, Li Huowang suddenly stopped pulling Dan Yangzi back and instead pushed him forward. Failing to react, Dan Yangzi was propelled straight toward the face of the Bodhisattva.

Chapter 175 - Crazy

“Stop! You will also die with me!”

As they got closer and closer to the Bodhisattva, Dan Yangzi’s voice was filled with fear for the first time in forever.

However, Li Huowang just grew excited! “Who the heck cares?! The life of a disciple is nothing compared to helping his Master achieve Immortality!”

Between the force of Li Huowang’s push and the slight tug of the gentle breeze, all of Dan Yangzi’s struggles were rendered useless as they slowly approached the open Ox Tail Gate.

As they got closer, the pale white light coming from behind the Bodhisattva enveloped both of them.

At that moment, all of Dan Yangzi’s feathers started transforming into a white shawl similar to the one on the Bodhisattva’s body. Dan Yangzi’s body, regardless of whether it was the wriggling flesh or his organs, died the moment they were enveloped by the white shawl.

As Dan Yangzi felt his body slowly dying, his survival instincts kicked in. He refused to die just like this. “Huowang! You don’t have to do this! Your physical body can still be used! We just need to go back down and then you can go! After that, I will leave you alone and we won’t meet each other ever again!”

While Li Huowang ignored Dan Yangzi’s word, one of the bandit-like illusions spoke out, “Young man, don’t listen to him! He has never spoken the truth! He’s still thinking about how to get rid of you!”

Just as Dan Yangzi glared at the illusion, a portion of the white shawl enveloped one of his heads causing it to die.

When Dan Yangzi’s other head witnessed this, he was

extremely shocked. Immediately, he threw aside his dignity and started pleading with Li Huowang, “Huowang! You’ve won! Please, let’s just run away! Otherwise, both of us will die and who knows what kind of fate awaits us after that! We might even suffer from a fate worse than death! Please! I am even willing to kowtow to you and call you Master! Just let me go!”

At that moment, the white shawl covered Li Huowang’s eyes, but he was still smiling happily. “That won’t do, Master. You promised me that we will become Immortals together.”

Just as he finished saying that, Dan Yangzi’s body was completely covered by the white shawl and brought into the Ox Tail Gate.

The moment they passed through the gate, Dan Yangzi’s body was separated from Li Huowang’s head.

Staring at Li Huowang’s translucent head, Dan Yangzi barely managed to say something before his body popped like a bubble.

At that moment, Dan Yangzi, who had tormented Li Huowang for so long, disappeared just like that. His death was swift and quiet.

In the spot where Dan Yangzi had died, numerous different colored types of energy spread out before floating into the depths of the gate.

Li Huowang recognized what that was and yet he couldn’t find words to accurately describe it. If he tried, the only thing he would be able to come up with was that it was the energy representing desire, greed, persistence, hate, and killing intent.

While Li Huowang did not die like Dan Yangzi, his current condition wasn’t much better.

At that moment, the massive Bodhisattva used one of her rotting skeletal hands to reach out for Li Huowang.

Just as the massive shadow enveloped Li Huowang, a voice rang out from the depths. The voice was quite similar to that of a

Suona[1].

As soon as he heard the voice, Li Huowang felt his five senses morphing and melding together. He had instantly obtained five different ways to ‘see’ the world.

At that moment, he saw that the Bodhisattva was composed of a mountain of corpses, and that she had an umbilical cord dangling from her abdomen.

In fact, pretty much everything within the Ox Tail Gate had an umbilical cord dangling from its abdomen.

However, it was not only his sense of sight that had changed. At present, he could sense so many different things that a mortal should never be able to sense. A mass of foreign senses were worming their way into him.

Amidst all this, Li Huowang started moving deeper and deeper into the Baiyu Capital.

The deeper he got, the more he sensed.

“No... No, No, NO NO NO!”

As he went deeper, Li Huowang learned more and more about Baiyu Capital, but at the same time, his mind almost crumbled from the overwhelming amount of knowledge.

Li Huowang shouted in despair. The deeper he flew, the more he learned.

Then, he stopped and slowly flew back the same way he came from.

At this point, Li Huowang had learned everything about the world, and he finally knew what had been worming into his very senses.

It was a bundle of pain and suffering—it was Ba-Hui!

Back within the kingdom of Si Qi, on a beautiful mountain, a group of people were standing around a newly constructed grave while wearing funeral clothes. At this moment, they were scattering

a bunch of bronze coins and paper ingots while grieving.

“Senior Li! Boo-hoooo~ Why did you die? What’s going to happen to us now that you are dead?” Puppy bawled, his eyes red with tears. However, halfway through he quieted down and stared at Bai Lingmiao.

Compared to his somewhat extreme display, Bai Lingmiao was eerily calm. She did not cry, and instead just silently burned the pieces of offering paper one at a time.

Seeing her current state, Puppy sighed and started sniffing. Then, he laid his body onto the grave and started bawling his eyes out. “Senior Li! How did you die without any illness or accidents? Now that we are without you, we will end up being bullied by everyone else!”

Just as he was doing his best to grieve, the dirt on the grave moved.

“Hm?” Puppy thought he was seeing things. He rubbed his eyes, only to see a hand explode out from within the grave.

“AAAAAAAHAH! HIS BODY IS MOVING!” Puppy cried out and fell onto the ground.

On the other hand, Bai Lingmiao reacted immediately. The walls surrounding her heart crumbled away as she started crying while clawing at the dirt, trying to remove as much of it as she could.

After a moment, the others reacted as well, and moved to help her.

However, before they even finished digging away the dirt, Li Huowang suddenly appeared from within the grave, wearing his graveclothes.

He held his head with a twisted expression, his face twitching as he mumbled something, causing most of them to be scared away.

“Senior Li!”

Bai Lingmiao ran over to him tearfully, but was caught by him.

As he looked at Bai Lingmiao, his eyes were bloodshot. “Alive! You are alive! This world is alive!”

At that moment, Chun Xiaoman sighed in relief and sheathed his sword. “That’s good; looks like he’s alive. His body did not just reanimate by itself.”

On the other hand, as she faced Li Huowang who was behaving strangely, Bai Lingmiao did not feel afraid. Instead, she was concerned. “Senior Li, what’s wrong?”

“Listen to me! I know what’s wrong with this world!” Li Huowang’s shout dampened all the noises around him. “This world is alive! That means that anything that could happen to a human could happen to the entire world as well! I’m not the crazy one! This world is crazy! IT’S TRULY LUNATIC!”

As he spoke, Li Huowang pushed Bai Lingmiao away before pointing one of his fingers toward the Heavens and the other toward his chest as he tried his best to reassure himself as much as he could. “THE ENTIRE WORLD IS CRAZY, IT’S EVEN CRAZIER THAN ME!”

After repeating those words tens of times, his body finally gave way and he crashed onto the ground.

1. a musical instrument 📖

Translator's Thoughts

The artist drew a very good rendition of that eldritch being! **Credits to** 格子的乱七八糟 **on** douyin



Also this is a Suona



Chapter 176 - Talk

Dak dak dak~

The sound of horse hooves rang out non-stop as the horses trodded along rhythmically.

The wheels of the horse carriage trailed the hoof prints before their marks were replaced by Gao Zhijian's massive footprints.

A group of people could be seen following a carriage along a small path.

All of them were deep in thought, with some of them taking glances at their leader, Li Huowang.

They had been sure that Li Huowang was dead. Even if his body hadn't attracted any flies, after checking many times, they had been certain that he was dead.

However, now he was back just like that. It was too bizarre.

But that was not all. Not only did he rise out of his grave just like that, he was shouting about the world being the crazy one before passing out.

Everything had happened so fast that they still hadn't managed to react to it all.

Were it not for the fact that Li Huowang still looked the same as ever, they would've thought that something was possessing his body.

But they were glad that he returned to normal after he woke up.

Whenever they asked him about what happened, the only answer he gave them was 'Everything is over.'

Since he just said that it was over, everyone stopped asking. They were just glad that he was still alive.

"Let's rest here and have dinner," said Li Huowang.

Immediately, the carriage came to a stop and everyone started doing their job. Some went and fetched water, some others collected firewood, while a few of them went and collected wild vegetables to eat. After having traveled together for so long, they worked together quite well.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang didn't do anything. He just sat there and used the remaining sunlight offered by dusk as he studied the Fiery Scripture.

He could recognize the characters written in Yingzi's notes—after Dan Yangzi had died, Li Huowang's literacy had returned. He could now read perfectly.

Since he was literate once more, he was certain that this time around, Dan Yangzi was well and truly dead.

The characters used in the Fiery Scripture had been translated by Yingzi and Li Huowang gradually learned how to use them by comparing them with her notes.

But it was not that simple.

One crucial element that he needed to use the Fiery Scripture was a heart of compassion.

Li Huowang had never expected that he would need to focus on one particular feeling to be able to use it.

As he chanted in a voice filled with uncertainty, the white wax on the book gradually melted, trying its best to form a shape.

However, Li Huowang's practice was soon cut short.

"Senior Li, hehe~ Senior Li? Are you busy?" Puppy approached Li Huowang with a smile while carrying some firewood. He looked around and after making sure that Bai Lingmiao had yet to return, he whispered, "Senior Li, to show my sincerity, I burned two female paper dolls on your grave when senior Bai was not around."

"Hmm?" Li Huowang raised his eyebrow.

Puppy checked his surroundings once more and whispered. "Senior Li, did you receive the two women on the other side?"

Li Huowang was speechless. “But... I didn’t die?”

“I know that you are alive right now, but weren’t you dead before? If you really managed to receive two women on the other side, then I have thought of burning some female paper dolls for myself when I die.”

“But since I never died, I didn’t receive them,” said Li Huowang with a straight face.

“But you were not breathing! We even made sure to bury you only after three days just to confirm you were indeed dead. Did you not follow Ox-head and Horse-face and report yourself in Hell? Wait, what did the place look like?” Puppy questions came in like a tide.

Being annoyed, and wanting to end the conversation quickly, Li Huowang just said, “Yes, yes, yes. I did receive them.”

“Hooray! That is good news!” Puppy was overjoyed. He slapped his hands and danced around before thinking about his ‘future’.

“What did you receive?”

Hearing the voice of a woman behind him, Puppy was frightened. He turned around and saw that Bai Lingmiao and Chun Xiaoman had come back from picking wild vegetables. Flustered, he quickly changed the topic. “Nothing, I was just talking with Senior Li.”

Tonight’s dinner consisted of gnocchi. It was a meal that was simple to make and eat.

Mix flour with cold water, knead it, and then squeeze out the irregularly-sized orb-shaped pieces of dough into boiling water.

Once the clumps of gnocchi floated to the surface, Bai Lingmiao mixed in a large scoop of lard into the pot, followed by the wild vegetables.

Soon, the wild vegetable soup and the gnocchi started boiling.

Taking in the fragrant aroma, everyone swallowed their saliva.

Their journey was long and now, they needed to replenish their stamina.

“Haha, to think that there would come a time when I, Cao Cao, would be eating white flour every day,” exclaimed Puppy happily as he took his bowl.

The first bowl out from the steaming pot was naturally Li Huowang’s.

As Bai Lingmiao gave him the first bowl of gnocchi and saw him accept it with his own two hands, she smiled happily; Senior Li hadn’t lied to her. His arm really had grown back!

“Why are you staring at me? Are you not going to eat?” asked Li Huowang.

Hearing this, Bai Lingmiao nodded and took her bowl. Then, she sat quietly beside Li Huowang and started eating.

They didn’t have that many people, but with both Gao Zhijian and Bai Lingmiao eating a large amount of food, the large pot of gnocchi was finished in no time.

As they washed their utensils, the night descended upon them. Since there was nothing to do at night, they just lit up a bonfire and went to bed.

Gao Zhijian was the one on watch tonight.

At the same time, with Bun’s keen sense of smell, Li Huowang had nothing to be worried about. And so, he washed up beside the river and soon fell asleep inside the horse carriage.

Just as he had closed his eyes, he felt something soft entering his blanket. Li Huowang just kept his eyes closed and hugged her as he went to sleep.

However, after some time, Li Huowang felt her hugging him tighter and tighter, to the point that she almost buried her entire body into his. At the same time, she started sobbing, her tears making his shirt wet.

“Why are you crying?” Li Huowang gently caressed Bai

Lingmiao's hair.

“My mother used to teach me that a good wife must be hardworking, good at maintaining the household, be kind, good at communication, and never bother with her man's business. But I'm very scared... scared that you will just be gone just like that day, and that this time around, you may never wake up...”

Within the silent horse carriage, Li Huowang the sincere emotions contained within her sobs.

Her sobbing did not stop as she continued, “Senior Li, why do you always try to endure everything on your own? Why can't you tell me? Am I nothing to you in your heart?”

“That's because I don't want to hurt you. Since everything is already over, then let me tell you everything,” said Li Huowang as he kissed the top of her head and sighed. Then, he started telling her about the things that had happened, one thing at a time.

He told her everything, from the Zephyr Temple up to the Ox Tail Gate.

And then... he stopped.

“And then... what happened? Did Dan Yangzi die? How did you come back?” Sensing that this was an important event, Bai Lingmiao started pressing for details.

But Li Huowang was visibly struggling, veins bulging on his face as he grabbed the sides of his head. “Those... those... things! I... I can't describe them! I can't describe them!!!”

Translator's Thoughts

The artist also did some renditions of the ox-tail gate. Here's version 1 **Credits to** 格子的乱七八糟 **on douyin**



Chapter 177 - Horse Carriage

“Senior Li, what’s wrong?” Bai Lingmiao was frightened by his suddenly bizarre behavior. She tried holding him down but was surprised to find that his skin was burning hot.

“Senior Li, stop! Don’t think about it anymore! I won’t ask you again!” Bai Lingmiao started sobbing as she hugged him despite the heat.

Hearing her voice, Li Huowang closed his eyes, trying his best to think about other things.

But it was futile. The broken pieces of memory within him soon joined together.

A suffocating image popped up in his mind, one that he was supposed to forget.

The image was both still yet moving at the same time. He tried his best to describe it.

“Behind the jade plate was a place called the Baiyu Capital. I’ve seen things, things that I cannot describe! They are massive and cold!”

Li Huowang’s voice was hoarse and deep, but he stammered a lot. His body trembled uncontrollably as he continued, “Mortals must never set foot there! If they do, they get taken away and decomposed into bits and pieces of abstract items! Humans were all made by them! If everything that constitutes us is taken away, then we would disappear as well, just like Dan Yangzi! But then something within the depths of the Baiyu Capital pulled me in! It sucked me into the depths where I saw the entire world! And then, I felt it! I felt what it was thinking!”

At that moment, another pair of hands pushed down on Li Huowang's forehead. The hands pushed down stronger and stronger, the pain from the pressure alleviating Li Huowang's headache a little.

Li Huowang didn't know who it was but continued talking, "I could understand it and what it was thinking! Only I could do it and no one else! It had gone mad!"

Li Huowang felt the image within his mind slowly escape his grasp. The beings within the image stared back at Li Huowang.

"I saw the past... In the past, it was not like this! It was perfect... But now... it's crying! IT IS CRYING!"

"Who is 'it'?" A cold female voice came from behind Li Huowang.

The veins on Li Huowang's forehead bulged to the point of rupturing but he somehow held it in as he used all his remaining strength and shouted, "Da Nuo! It is Da Nuo!"

The moment he said it, the atmosphere within the horse carriage became bizarre and cold winds seeped into him despite the fact that he was covered by a warm blanket.

At the same time, a blurry voice mumbled within everyone's ears, causing the horses to start panicking and Bun to bark out loud.

Li Huowang knew that this voice did not belong to Da Nuo; it had gone mad and would never pay attention to him. The one causing the animals to start panicking was something else entirely.

"Scram!" Li Huowang shouted, and everything around him became quiet once more.

Li Huowang sat on the floor and panted.

Bai Lingmiao's sobbing voice rang out from beside him, "Senior Li, I'm sorry. Please stop thinking about it. I'm already very grateful that you can be beside me. I won't ask you again!"

After she said those words, two hands propped him up within the dark carriage while another hand carefully used a towel to wipe

his forehead. A bowl of water was given to him and he carefully drank it.

With the four hands working in tandem to calm him down, Li Huowang's breathing soon became normal. The buzzing in his mind and the sharp noise disappeared as well.

Li Huowang looked at the girl in front of him weakly. "That's... What happened..."

That night, Li Huowang didn't know when he fell asleep. By the time he woke up once again, it was already bright outside. He looked down and found that his clothes had been changed as well.

Staring at the top of the horse carriage and the space beside his blanket, Li Huowang sighed and massaged his temples.

At this point, everything that he had tried to remember yesterday had been forgotten once again. Some of his memories had also become very hazy.

Still, Li Huowang learned something from it.

Those who worshipped the Flesh Buddha in the Righteous Monastery, the dirty, slothful, and greedy nuns of the Benevolent Nunnery, the liars and swindlers of the Sitting Oblivion Dao, and even the Shamans who summoned the Immortal families using someone's lifespan.

All their powers were supernatural and bizarre.

Especially evil beings such as the Eighteenth Lunar, the Wandering Gods, the Mountain Grandma, and the God of Happiness.

He had originally thought that he had transmigrated into a bizarre and crazy world.

But from the looks of it, this was not the case.

There was something wrong with this world, something extremely wrong.

It was as if the whole world was sick just like him. However, this was not how it was supposed to be. Instead, it was supposed to

be a more... normal world.

“What’s wrong with this world?” Li Huowang mumbled. “And that being... It’s called Da Nuo? Is it related to the Nuo Opera? According to Lu Zhuangyuan, the Nuo Opera was an ancient show, possibly the ancestor of all the other shows. Looks like the Nuo Opera performers worship Da Nuo but...”

Li Huowang recalled the performers who got duped by the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. They were neither strong nor influential—they were even weaker than the bandits.

“Ai~,” Li Huowang sighed, too lazy to be bothered by such details.

Regardless of what happened to Da Nuo, it didn’t matter to him.

He was just a normal man, so he should be thinking about his next step.

How should he live here? That was his next question.

Not only had he traveled to the depths of Baiyu Capital, but he hadn’t disappeared like Dan Yangzi. In fact, he was still alive!

Is this the power of a Strayed One? Or was it because Ba-Hui saved me?

Li Huowang made some random guesses, but it was not easy to come up with a satisfying answer. It was great to be alive, but he was afraid that there might be consequences.

After a moment, Li Huowang sat up and put on his clothes.

He stared out from the horse carriage and gazed at the river, only to see Bai Lingmiao’s hair swaying gently with the wind.

At this moment, she was concentrating on washing clothes. The morning sunlight lit up a part of her face and made her look like an ethereal beauty.

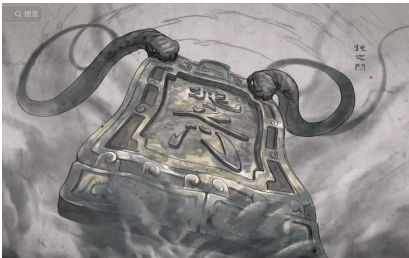
Staring at the girl who was willing to go through Heaven and Hell together with him, he felt touched. “Since she is willing to stay by my side, then no matter how I came back to life, I will have to

continue living. Thankfully everything has ended now.”

Translator's Thoughts

This is the second rendition of the Ox-tail gate.

Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin



Chapter 178 - Village

As they traveled, Bai Lingmiao followed Li Huowang closely, occasionally taking out her handkerchief to wipe off his sweat.

The hottest days of the year were upon them, and the weather had become extremely harsh and hot. Even though they were traveling when the sun was still low in the morning, sweat continued to pour out from their bodies.

After wiping off Li Huowang's sweat, Bai Lingmiao proposed, "Senior Li, it's too hot to travel in the afternoon and evening. We should probably rest now and travel earlier tomorrow."

Li Huowang nodded and took out the map from within the horse carriage before examining it carefully.

They were still within the borders of the kingdom of Si Qi. Thankfully, they had not thrown away this map.

"How about we skip lunch for today? There's a village not too far from here. If we don't stop and increase our pace, then we can reach there and stay for the night."

Everyone perked up when they heard they might be able to sleep on a bed tonight.

After traveling for two whole hours, they finally saw some fields in the distance. By now, their throats were completely parched. Behind the fields were houses with black roof tiles. They had finally arrived at the village.

"Look, there's even flowers beside the fields. Such a pretty red flower," said Bai Lingmiao.

Just as she was about to pick some of them, Li Huowang stopped her. "Wait, those flowers don't look right."

Li Huowang carefully inspected the red flowers. The flowers had curled petals that splay outwards.

“These are spider lilies,” said Li Huowang.

Even though he no longer remembered who told him about them, he recalled that these flowers were ominous in nature.

Hearing his words, everyone was speechless. It was clear no one knew what Li Huowang was talking about.

“Haha, you are even worse than me at recognizing flowers.”

At that moment, a cheerful laughter came from the distance.

Everyone turned and saw a bare-footed young boy was walking around with a bamboo basket on his back. He looked roughly seven or eight years old.

“These aren’t spider lilies. These are crab flowers. My mother told me that we can’t feed these flowers to the pigs or they would end up getting diarrhea,” said the young boy. Then, he took out a sickle from his bamboo basket and cut away some of the crab flowers.

It was clear that the boy had seen the flowers many times. He was most likely someone staying at the village.

Li Huowang pondered his options and approached the boy.

“Boy, what are you doing?”

“I’m harvesting some grass for our pigs. We have two pigs at our home, and I have to collect food for them everyday! How many pigs does your home have?” asked the boy.

When he heard that Li Huowang didn’t own any pigs, he laughed, “Haha! Your house is so poor! To think that you are even poorer than our family!”

“Yeah, my house is very poor. Are you staying in the village? Can you show us the way?” asked Li Huowang.

“Of course!” The young boy didn’t suspect them and brought them into the village.

“Are you guys still at war?” asked Li Huowang.

“War? There’s no war here. My third uncle was drafted but he recently came back.”

“Oh, that’s good. It’s good that there’s no war.” Li Huowang easily obtained the information he needed from the innocent young child.

This village was called Qianjia Village. There were barely over a hundred people living here. To survive, the villagers often tended to the fields during summer and went into the forest to forage during winter. There were plenty of such mountain villages in the kingdom of Si Qi, and so it was not a weird sight.

Villages like these often shunned outsiders, but under the ‘strength’ of money, Li Huowang and the rest managed to get a place to sleep within the child’s house.

Li Huowang placed his two heavy swords onto the table in the guest house, his body instantly feeling much lighter.

Just as he moved to remove Profound Records hanging from his waist, all he felt was empty space.

The Profound Records had been lost during the previous battle.
“Sigh.”

Li Huowang was somewhat sad about losing the Profound Records. Even though the price to use it was steep, it didn’t require him to cultivate or practice to be able to use supernatural powers. As long as he was willing to pay the necessary price, he would be able to obtain an equivalent amount of power.

Without it, he could only rely on the sword that the Abbess had gifted him.

“Oh, and this too.” Li Huowang took out the Fiery Scripture that was covered in white wax and slowly started studying his notes.

Now that he had lost the Profound Records, he needed to learn more methods to preserve his life. At the very least, the Fiery Scripture would allow him to heal his wounds.

Bai Lingmiao had just brought in a bowl of roasted sweet potatoes, but she tiptoed out of the room when she saw Li Huowang

was studying seriously.

She thought about it for a moment and chuckled before walking to Xiaoman's room. "Xiaoman, do you want to eat some roasted sweet potatoes?"

However, Bai Lingmiao had just entered Xiaoman's room when she saw that the latter was vomiting profusely.

Seeing this, Bai Lingmiao was shocked. She placed down the bowl and quickly started patting Chun Xiaoman on the back.

After a while, Chun Xiaoman finally stopped vomiting and sat on the edge of her bed as she tried to catch her breath.

"Did you eat something spoiled? That can't be right. Everyone ate from the same pot, so why are you the only one vomiting?" asked Bai Lingmiao.

Xiaoman shook her head. "It's fine. I probably kicked off the blanket last night and just got sick."

"But you don't kick off your blankets when you sleep..."

Chun Xiaoman averted her gaze and made a request, "Could you just help me boil some ginger soup? It would help me a lot."

"Then... Alright."

After hesitating for a moment, Bai Lingmiao went out of the room.

When Chun Xiaoman saw Bai Lingmiao leave, she finally sighed in relief. She lifted her blanket, revealing a blood-red bamboo slip.

Back in the cave, Chun Xiaoman had found a copy of the Profound Records and hid it.

She had seen Senior Li use it a few times before and knew what the associated risks were. But she had overestimated her own tolerance. When she recalled the cruel sacrifices written on the Profound Records, she almost ended up vomiting once again.

She finally knew just how much Li Huowang had sacrificed for all of them, and just how painful all of it had been .

After she vomited once more, she steeled herself to read through the Profound Records once more.

Compared to her suffering, she was more concerned about just how indebted she was to someone else.

She hated how Senior Li was the one who fought for them every time something happened—she hated how weak she felt.

After she had killed her own father, she had sworn to herself that she would no longer continue to be a weakling.

“If Senior Li could withstand it, then I can withstand it too!” Chun Xiaoman gritted her teeth and read through the Profound Records once again.

Meanwhile, Bai Lingmiao was cooking some ginger tea in the kitchen. As she stared at the flames, she suddenly felt worried.

She was vomiting so much and her behavior seemed odd. Is she pregnant? Then... who's the father? It's impossible for Senior Li to be the father, since I sleep with him every night. Could it be Puppy? Gao Zhijian? Sun Baolu? But when did Xiaoman get so close...

When she thought up to this point, Bai Lingmiao blushed. Still, she was worried about Chun Xiaoman. The journey ahead was still long and it would be quite hard for her if she really had gotten pregnant.

Just as Bai Lingmiao was worrying about Xiaoman, she suddenly felt a presence behind her. Smelling the same scent as her own, Bai Lingmiao frowned. “What’s wrong?”

The Second Deity’s voice rang out from behind. “Bring the drum. There’s work in this village.”

Chapter 179 - I'M Back

The multicolored ribbons adorning the drum trailed behind Bai Lingmiao as she gingerly walked past the old houses. At times, an old farmer guiding a cow or a woman holding a baby passed by as they stared at her.

They had never seen a girl like Bai Lingmiao before.

Bai Lingmiao was nervous. Even so, she kept walking toward the location pointed out by the Second Deity.

Soon, she arrived at a short house. The house had a smaller house attached to its side. She took a deep breath and walked into the courtyard.

Woof! Woof woof!

Hearing the sudden barking sounds, Bai Lingmiao was shocked. Thankfully the dog was securely leashed.

However, she felt quite embarrassed by how surprised she was.

At that moment, the door opened and a heavy voice rang out.

“Who are you looking for?” asked the farmer as he stared at her warily.

Bai Lingmiao didn't know what to say. After all, she was still quite new as a shaman. She thought about it and then carefully asked, “Is someone in your house possessed?”

Bam!

The door slammed shut.

“Eek!” Bai Lingmiao jumped in surprise as she stood there without knowing what to do. She turned around and used telepathy to communicate with the Second Deity, “See, they closed the door on us. Maybe they are fine.”

However, Bai Lingmiao was disappointed by the Second Deity's answer.

"I know that the Immortal families are urging me to work, or they will punish me. But this family... Alright, fine. I will try again," said Bai Lingmiao.

She approached the door and knocked once again, "Please open the door! I am a Shaman that can exorcize evil spirits. If you are troubled by them, then I can help."

She kept knocking at the door for a while. Just as she was about to give up, the door slowly creaked open. A yellow eye stared at her from within the darkness.

"How did you know that we have someone who was possessed?" asked a voice.

On the other hand, Bai Lingmiao was relieved that the eye belonged to a human.

"Uuh ..." Bai Lingmiao couldn't think of a good excuse. "Old man, please don't worry about how I got to know. All you need to know is that I can help you. Evil beings cannot be allowed to remain on a person's body for too long or there might be trouble."

"How much money will you charge?"

"Fifty coins. No matter how strong the evil spirit is, it will be fifty coins." Bai Lingmiao told him the price for a Shaman's aid.

The moment she gave them the price, Bai Lingmiao heard a young man's voice from behind the door. "Father, let's just ask for her help instead. A shaman will be much cheaper than a medium!"

At that moment, the door closed once again. Bai Lingmiao didn't know what the father and son duo were discussing, but she decided to wait patiently.

Soon, the door opened once more.

A burly farmer appeared in front of Bai Lingmiao. He was short, but looked strong for his old age. He was carrying a pole while walking out of his home.

He reevaluated Bai Lingmiao and reconfirmed the price. "Fifty copper coins, that was the price you told. Don't you dare change it

afterward.”

Bai Lingmiao sighed and nodded before entering the house. She was surprised by what she saw inside.

The entire room was decorated like a mourning hall, but the coffin was nowhere to be seen.

“Old man, why is the memorial tablet placed here instead of the ancestral hall?” asked Bai Lingmiao.

The old farmer sighed. “I would if I could. Come, let's go sit down and I will explain the situation.”

They walked past the back of the house into a small courtyard where several chickens were being raised.

The father and son duo were nervous as they brought Bai Lingmiao into the courtyard. Once there, they gave her a bamboo stool to sit on while they squatted down on the floor and explained their circumstances.

“My wife passed away eight days ago at the age of seventy-one. She had led a good life, free of sins and vices. It was supposed to be a normal burial service, but on the seventh day, our nephew heard someone knocking the coffin,” explained the old farmer.

Hearing this, Bai Lingmiao was frightened and scanned her surroundings; however, everything looked normal.

“At that point, we were quite afraid, and so we decided to quickly bury her. But then, on the second night after the burial, she came back!” continued the old farmer.

Even though the old farmer tried his best to make the story sound as normal as possible, Bai Lingmiao was already sweating from fear. This was different from what had happened to Senior Li.

“My supposedly dead wife opened the door and asked for meat. That night, both me and my son were scared out of our minds. We were afraid that if we didn't give her any meat to eat, then she would just eat us. We had to take down the ham that we hung up on the rafters to save for the upcoming New Year. The piece of ham

consisted of half a pig's leg that had been cured, but my wife ate it just like that! After she ate the entire ham, she walked away and said that she would come back again tomorrow," said the old farmer, his voice filled with worry. "It's not that we don't want to feed her, but at this point, she's no longer my wife. The manner in which she ate that piece of ham was akin to that of a beast! Her teeth had transformed into sharp fangs that could tear through even the tough ham meat! Now, we are terrified and we have no idea what to do. We already had to sell off two of our pigs for her burial service. If she comes back again, then she might just eat us if we don't have enough meat to feed her. If you can return her to the cycle of reincarnation, then you will truly be our Bodhisattva!"

After saying all this, the old farmer lowered his head as he wallowed in the pain of his wife's death and her transformation afterward.

Did the corpse get reanimated and the body possessed?

Bai Lingmiao carefully analyzed the situation to get a rough idea of how dangerous this task could be.

After discussing it with the Second Deity and being reassured that it wouldn't be too dangerous, Bai Lingmiao accepted the job. "Old man, the sun is setting soon. Since I am here now, let me stay for the night. What do you think?"

Since she was here, it would be best if she dealt with it tonight instead of waiting for another day. After traveling with Senior Li for so long, she was confident in dealing with a small issue like this.

"Really? You will help us?" asked the old farmer excitedly. He had originally thought that the girl was too young and inexperienced, and hadn't held much hope.

Bai Lingmiao nodded.

In response, the old farmer stood up and caught one of the chickens. "Alright! As thanks, please come eat dinner with us! There's no need to be shy!"

Soon, an entire chicken was placed in front of Bai Lingmiao; however, she didn't get to savor it in peace. She was nervously waiting for nighttime.

When the time came, both the father and the son went to sleep.

On the other hand, Bai Lingmiao waited patiently in the hall.

She could see that the farmer was indeed poor. They only had a single oil lamp that flickered occasionally, causing the shadows around them to dance. The atmosphere within the hall was quite ominous...

Chapter 180 - Strange

Bai Lingmiao hugged her drum as she waited nervously.

At that moment, the Second Deity suddenly appeared behind her silently and stared at the bolted door.

"I know that I can't always rely on Senior Li, and so I don't intend to do so this time. No need to remind me," Bai Lingmiao whispered. "Really, it's fine. Plus, what does Senior Li have to do with you?"

Hearing those words, the Second Deity placed her sharp fingernails on Bai Lingmiao's neck. "You know very well just how much Senior Li has to do with me, with us..."

Bai Lingmiao was visibly upset when she heard those words, but said nothing.

As the hall was once again plunged into silence, Bai Lingmiao started feeling scared. "What if I don't help the Immortal families do their bidding? Just what would they do to me? I'm not saying that I don't want to help, but what if I was so busy that I couldn't do it?"

When she heard the answer in her mind, she became even more upset. "Is that so... I wonder how we can stop them..."

At that moment, a knock came from the front door, surprising Bai Lingmiao.

Bam!

Something crashed into the door causing a crack to appear on the wooden door.

Bai Lingmiao peeked through the crack and saw a pair of eyes, ones that did not belong to the living.

"It's here!"

Instantly, Bai Lingmiao passed her drum to the Second Deity

and covered her face with a red veil.

At the same time, a shrill female voice rang through the night.
“Summon~ The~ Gods~”

Bam!

The door was knocked down, and an old lady with white hair stood in front of Bai Lingmiao. The old lady was still wearing the red graveclothes.

There were bloodstains on the old lady’s mouth while her eyes looked completely soulless. She just stood there like a zombie in the night, striking fear into everyone who saw her.

Bam!

The old lady passed through the doorway and leaped into the house. Her feet were tied together with black ropes, and so she could only resort to jumping.

“The sun set on the Western Mountain, and the skies went dark~ Nine of the ten families had locked their doors, and only one remains~”

The chant was fast but the old woman paid no heed to the Second Deity. Instead, she was searching for something within the house.

When she didn’t find what she wanted, the old woman stared at Bai Lingmiao before approaching her slowly.

“The East and West Dipper come together, the Big Dipper examines the cosmic dust~ The grass grows in Spring, and dies in Autumn~ The pines remain eternal and persevere through the Summer and Winter~ A faint star in the Heavens fell onto Earth and brought about life!” chanted the Second Deity.

As the chanting continued, four incense sticks appeared in Bai Lingmiao’s hand. She swung her hand and the incense sticks instantly lit up without a fire.

“The Heavens have their rules and Hell has its own laws~ You’ve lived your life in the past, so begone and let go of the

present!”

Following the rhythm of the chant, the white smoke emanating from Bai Lingmiao’s incense sticks billowed toward the old lady.

But something was wrong.

As if entering a body of water, the smoke disappeared the moment it came into contact with the old lady’s clothes.

At that moment, the old lady opened her mouth and bit into Bai Lingmiao’s arm; however, rather than flesh, the old lady was met with a mouthful of black porcupine quills. The quills pierced through her mouth and her jaw.

“Dong dong dong~ Master Red, send your infantry~ Dong dong dong~ The first drum means the soldiers have eaten~ Dong dong dong~ The second drum means that the soldiers have donned their armors~ Dong dong dong~ The third drum means the soldiers have brandished their swords~ Dong dong dong~ The fourth drum means that the soldiers have started clashing with the enemies~”

As the drum continued beating, clumps of white fur flew out from within Bai Lingmiao’s sleeves and extended from beneath her red veil. At the same time, a fox tail slowly grew from underneath her skirt.

The fur was akin to a living animal as it flew into the old lady’s orifices.

The old lady wanted to struggle against the attack, but it was no use. She gradually became weaker and slower.

After a while, the old lady suddenly collapsed. Then, something soft and black came out from beneath her graveclothes and immediately ran out into the night.

“Dong dong dong~ Leave if you want to; The sovereign has given you the horse’s reins~ Undo the restraints and ride the saddle, the Immortal Family will spur the horse forward~ Time to go back~ Ai Hai Yi Hou Hei~ Dong dong dong!”

After the chant finished, Bai Lingmiao returned to normal and

removed the red veil. Then, she sighed in relief before letting out a happy laugh.

This was her first solo exorcism and she had done it perfectly!

She was very confident now. At the very least, she would be able to help Senior Li whenever he was in trouble.

As the saying went, the wife should always follow the husband. Bai Lingmiao would never complain about Senior Li's matters, and she would always help him if she could.

"How should I go about becoming stronger as a Shaman? I feel like my strength is still inadequate... Hm? You want me to learn how to sing and chant instead? But you are the one doing it... Oh, ok. I will try," said Bai Lingmiao.

After that, Bai Lingmiao carefully tidied up the old lady's graveclothes. The old lady was no longer moving.

"Looks like I was right. Something was indeed possessing her corpse, but I don't know what it was since it ran off so quickly."

After making sure that the old lady's graveclothes looked presentable, she called for the father and son duo. They gave her fifty coins before sending her off.

Bai Lingmiao had just walked out of the house when she was surprised by a black shadow sitting beside the door. "Who is it?!"

The shadow approached her and grabbed her hand. "At least let me know if you are doing something like this next time. Then, I can at least keep watch."

It was Li Huowang. He was worried about her and had been sitting outside for quite some time.

Bai Lingmiao was surprised by his actions and felt loved. Feeling shy, she hugged his arm. "Ok..."

Both of them walked on the muddy path back to their house, enjoying the silence; they didn't talk at all.

But the silence was soon broken.

A hunchbacked old lady was carrying a basket while holding a

bamboo in her hand as she approached them.

Tok tok tok~

They saw her sweeping the bamboo stick left and right—she was blind!

When she heard their footsteps, the blind woman stopped and asked them. “Do you know the way to Qian Niusheng’s house? Someone in their house was possessed and I am here to help them exorcize the evil spirit.”

“Ah? Grandma, I think you are too late. The evil spirit has already been exorcized,” said Bai Lingmiao.

“What? How dare they fool a blind woman like me!” raged the old lady.

The blind old woman was so mad that she shouted out profanities that neither Li Huowang nor Bai Lingmiao had ever heard of. She was cursing all of Qian Niusheng’s ancestors.

At this point, even the dogs around them had started barking.

Seeing this, Li Huowang stared at the fierce old lady with interest. “You are already so old and yet you can still exorcize spirits? May I know your name and which sect you belong to?”

Hearing his question, the old lady calmed down. “My surname is Cui; you can just call me Lady Cui. Do you need my help?”

As she spoke, she suddenly felt that something was off, prompting her to place her bamboo stick under her armpit and carefully feel her way toward Li Huowang.

Li Huowang wanted to dodge but the old lady homed in on him accurately. In the end, her skinny fingers gripped Li Huowang’s face like an eagle.

“Holy shit. Just what kind of sin did you commit in your previous life? This is so strange! Most people would be missing one of the five elements in their life, either fire or water. Worst case scenario, I’ve seen extremely unfortunate people who were missing two elements in their lives. But you are missing all five of your

elements!”

Chapter 181 - Asking Rice

“Five elements... Missing the five elements?”

Upon hearing that, Li Huowang used his hand to touch his own abdomen, touching the positions where the five organs should be.

He subconsciously thought back to his actions from that day, when he had gone to seek revenge from the Sitting Oblivion Dao while intentionally seeking death.

Back then, he had used the Five Elements Intercalation recorded in the Profound Records, and offered his five organs up to Ba-Hui.

If his five elements had disappeared from his body, then it should be related to that.

However, despite missing his five elements, Li Huowang did not feel like there was anything amiss.

As he was thinking, Li Huowang reached within his blood-colored Daoist robes to touch the gruesome scar that he had carved out on himself.

Unexpectedly, the skin there was now smooth, with not a single scar remaining.

Li Huowang tried hard to think back on what had happened, but found that he had no recollection at all.

What's going on with my body? How come it's completely alright?

Puzzled, he looked up at the blind lady before him. “Lady Cui, if a person was missing their five organs and five elements, could they still survive?”

The blind woman was shocked. “Missing their five organs and five elements? At that point, how could they even be considered a person? At most, they would be a dead person.”

At that moment, Li Huowang felt as though something within

his mind snapped. A sharp pain started spreading from his chest and gradually grew more and more intense, making it difficult for him to breathe!

What's happening? Did she do something? Is this some sort of supernatural ability used with words? Did she see through the fact that I'm a Strayed One? Is she trying to harm me or scheme something?

Li Huowang endured the sharp pain as he stared at her, who was dressed just like a common grandmother.

Just as Li Huowang was about to stagger and fall to the ground with an ashen look, she spoke again, "However, you lack the five elements and are still able to survive. So, it may not be the best to speak in such absolute terms."

This time, the sensation of pain in Li Huowang's body vanished immediately. He clutched his chest and looked at the old woman doubtfully.

He was no longer certain about Lady Cui's intentions. If she had been the one to cause the intense pain earlier, then why had it suddenly disappeared?

If she didn't cause it, then what's wrong with my body?

The intense bout of pain he had felt was definitely not something simple; it had almost felt like he was about to die.

"However, I advise you to recover your five elements as soon as possible. If not, you will run into trouble sooner or later," advised the old lady.

Li Huowang stretched out his hand to block Bai Lingmiao behind him, and then asked with a mix of curiosity and probing, "Then, Lady Cui, do you have any solutions for someone like me?"

"I don't, but others may. If you want to find out, then I can inquire for you. You should hurry up and recover your five elements. Otherwise, even if you survive, things won't go well for you," said the old lady.

"Ask who?"

"I am a medium, so who else can I ask but rice," said the old lady in a matter-of-fact manner.

Asking rice? Something new again?

Soon after, Li Huowang and Bai Lingmiao brought this so-called Lady Cui back to their residence.

Once there, they borrowed a few kilograms of rice from their host, and then Lady Cui began the so-called process of asking rice.

First, she took out various items from her basket.

A small bronze mirror was placed on the center of the table.

Before the mirror was a palm-sized clay cauldron, along with thirteen short yellow incense sticks.

Next, the borrowed rice was placed into the basket, followed by thirteen chicken eggs that were placed atop the rice.

Once done, Lady Cui faced the basket filled with rice and eggs, and then poured a cup of wine, a cup of tea, and a bowl of rice.

Then, Lady Cui closed her eyes and placed both her hands on the eggs. With this, the process of asking rice had begun.

"Observe the moon with great respect as it protects our homes. Masters and ancestors, please come forth, Spirits and Immortals from all directions, all come together to bless us..."

As she continued to use her slang while muttering incomprehensible words, she grabbed the rice from the basket and threw it onto Li Huowang's head.

"What's this ritual?" asked Li Huowang, his guard fully raised. After going through so much, he was wary of everything, and carried a trace of doubt when looking at things.

After a while, Lady Cui suddenly stopped and reached out her right hand toward Li Huowang, her fingers trembling.

Li Huowang did not quite understand her meaning as he looked at the old hand. Fortunately, Bai Lingmiao explained it to him as she took out some pieces of silver and placed them in Lady Cui's hand.

With eyes closed, Lady Cui picked up the pieces of silver and put them in her mouth to bite them, prompting a satisfied look to appear on her face.

“Young man, don’t be distracted. Report the eight characters [1] of your date of birth.”

“What? Eight characters? I don’t have them,” responded Li Huowang.

Lady Cui sighed, then pinched her fingers toward Li Huowang before continuing to sing. Even now, Li Huowang could not understand the lyrics; however, this time was different from before.

Not long after, Li Huowang’s body tensed up. With his heightened senses, he subconsciously looked toward the dark doorway, and then toward the empty rafters atop.

Some things were coming over.

Burp~

This sudden sound made Li Huowang turn toward the front to look at the medium that had begun to shake her head. He could sense that the Lady Cui standing in front of him was now completely different, as though something else was occupying her body.

Why does this feel similar to the methods used by the Shamans? Since they summon the Immortal families, then what does one summon when asking rice?

As he thought up to this point, Li Huowang vigilantly distanced himself a little.

“Who is there~ What questions~ do you have~ burp.”

At that moment, an aged male voice rang out from Lady Cui’s mouth with a noticeable theatrical tone.

Initially, Li Huowang had wanted to ask about his missing five organs, but decided not to. If he had indeed been lacking his five organs, then he would have already died. Though he did not know what method Dan Yangzi use to restore his five organs, he put that

concern aside for now. The urgent matter at hand was to recover his missing five elements.

“Do you have any way to restore my missing five elements?” asked Li Huowang.

“Hmm~? Who is there~? Burp, Report~ your~ name!” asked ‘Lady Cui’ as she took a deep breath, her nostrils drawing in the white smoke from the nearby incense.

“Li Huowang. Who are you? Or should I say... What are you?” Li Huowang replied cautiously, instinctively grabbing the hilt of his sword.

“Hmph~! I am the~ Imperial Palace~ Ruler of Nine Heavens,~ the Supreme celestial being, and the Pardoner of Sins~ Little~ Strayed One~ How amusing~ Burp,” said the voice.

Li Huowang’s eyes shrank. The other party could tell he was a Strayed One!

“Don’t be afraid~ Hahaha~ burp,” said the voice, their laughter causing an eerie wind to blow through the entire house.

Clang!

Instantly, Li Huowang unsheathed the sword causing a strong aura to disperse the chilliness in the house.

At the same time, the incense sticks inside the black cauldron were also instantly extinguished.

1. basically year, month, day, and time of birth. It's used to predict your life and personality 🤔

Chapter 182 - Great Deity

The commotion caused by Li Huowang unsheathing his sword startled Lady Cui, instantly jolting her awake.

“Ah, what’s happening? Weren’t you asking rice? Why are you so worked up?” She asked in a flustered voice, as though genuinely unaware of what had just transpired.

Li Huowang had been ready to strike, but paused and looked at the bewildered Lady Cui with an uncertain expression. He couldn’t determine whether she was pretending or whether she was truly perplexed. Logically, if they were interested in him as a Strayed One, then they shouldn’t be acting this way.

“Are you going to ask or not? If not, I’m leaving,” Lady Cui said as she lifted her basket and prepared to leave.

After a moment, Li Huowang decided that he did not want her to leave. He dragged over a nearby wooden stool and sat down with his sword. “I want to continue asking questions. Summon that supreme being back.”

Hearing this, Lady Cui hesitated for a few moments, then placed down her basket and re-lit the incense sticks.

The same sequence of actions as earlier were repeated, and then the male voice reappeared.

After learning that Li Huowang lacked his five elements, the voice gave a very strange answer. “Change your name and surname! Lack five elements~ Fill five elements!”

Then, ‘Lady Cui’ reached into the basket and grabbed a handful of rice, scattering it onto the ground before Li Huowang.

Jin Zaomu[1]. These words appeared before Li Huowang.

Change my name?

Li Huowang looked at the name on the floor and was rather

puzzled.

Could having the five elements in my name really compensate for the missing elements? Is this person just trying to deceive me?

After pondering for a while, Li Huowang decided to once again test the ability of this entity. He faced Lady Cui who was drinking the tea and wine, and then asked, “Thank you for the clarifications. I have another question I wish to ask; could you help provide an answer for it?”

“Ask~!”

“Why has the process of ‘decay’ stopped in this world recently?” asked Li Huowang. If this unknown entity could provide a real answer, then Li Huowang would immediately change his name.

The disappearance of ‘decay’ had to be related to the Abbess. He was deeply troubled by her death, and wanted to know what was going on.

“The Bodhisattva, out of compassion, sympathizes with all living beings in the world, who endure the suffering of decay,” said the voice.

“You liar! You are exposed! There is no Bodhisattva or Buddha! Beyond the heavens, there are only those... those...” said Li Huowang before trailing off. Soon, fear was revealed in his eyes, and he could not continue anymore. He did not know how to describe those entities, those things that he had intentionally avoided thinking about ever since waking up.

He had believed that by not thinking about them, he could just pretend that they did not exist. Those beings were immensely more powerful than ordinary humans, and had the ability to easily annihilate anyone and everyone if they so desired.

However, when he thought about them again, Li Huowang could no longer ignore them. Instantly, his expression grew agonized and his breathing became more rapid. At the same time,

some indistinct voices started echoing in his ears.

“Senior! Stop thinking about it!” Bai Lingmiao’s anxious voice pulled Li Huowang’s attention back.

As Li Huowang looked at the worried, delicate face before him, he took a deep breath and nodded. “You’re right, I won’t think about it. I won’t think...”

Yes, that’s right. Regardless of what those things truly are, or no matter whether what she said is true or false, this world has gone mad. Since I can’t do anything about it, I just need to live my life peacefully.

With constant reassurance from Bai Lingmiao, Li Huowang gradually calmed down as he placed the things he should not be thinking about aside.

With renewed composure, Li Huowang once again looked toward Lady Cui. At this point, his trust in her words had significantly diminished.

“I have another question for you. What exactly is the Strayed One?” asked Li Huowang.

This question caused her to pause. She looked over with her blank eyes. At that moment, Li Huowang could instantly feel eight gazes examining him.

“As a deity, I of course know. But if I were to tell you, then you would die on the spot,” said the voice.

This reply caused Bai Lingmiao to grab onto the hem of Li Huowang’s clothes tightly.

“Hmph!” Li Huowang sneered, his trust in Lady Cui vaporizing completely. “Playing tricks with me, huh? The Sitting Oblivion Dao has taught me one thing—not to follow the path of someone else.”

Then, he raised his sword that radiated killing intent, and pointed it toward Lady Cui’s head. “Get lost! No matter what you are or what intentions you have. Scram! Do you hear me?”

“Little~ Strayed One~ Amusing~ Very amusing~ Since it’s like this, then I shall inform you~ what a Strayed One is~ burp,”

said the voice.

However, before they could say anything more, a sharp crack echoed through the room. The black cauldron, the basket filled with rice, and the bronze mirror had all been sliced into two halves. The sword's edge was already on Lady Cui's neck.

"Oh my~ What's going on?!" asked Lady Cui, her voice returning to normal.

"This again? You're quite skilled at pretend acting! I'll repeat this one last time! Get lost!" shouted Li Huowang.

At this point, it was evident that Lady Cui was quite frightened by Li Huowang's killing intent. In a panicked state, she picked up her belongings from the ground and stumbled outside.

Clang!

Once she left, Li Huowang sheathed his sword, and the room gradually returned to normal.

"Let's go get some sleep. We should have a good rest while we still have a bed," Li Huowang said. As he stepped into the inner room, he put on the bronze-coin mask.

Feeling the weight of the mask, he let out a sigh of relief. "I'll need to bring this thing with me from now on. My identity as a Strayed One is too enticing to some people."

"Master~ What if... What she said was true?" asked Bai Lingmiao.

"That was the only reason I didn't strike her body. Otherwise, I wouldn't have let her leave through the door. Also, don't call me Master!" said Li Huowang.

That night, Li Huowang hardly slept, fearing a night-time ambush by the other party.

Next day, even though nothing had happened, Li Huowang had everyone hastily pack their luggage and leave this troubled area.

It was only after they arrived at the bustling streets of the border town of the kingdom of Si Qi that Li Huowang finally

relaxed.

Compared to before, there was much less tension over here, suggesting that they might no longer be at war.

Li Huowang and the others took some time to rest in the town, and then prepared to re-enter Hou Shu. But before that, there was something that they needed to do.

At the Hutou Escort Office, the burly Chief Escort read the recommendation letter in his hand, while scrutinizing the peculiar red-robed Daoist with a mask of bronze coins on his face.

After much consideration, he placed the letter back. "Alright, since Leader Zhao is taking your guarantee, then I'll trust you! However, let's make it clear beforehand. If you're escorting goods, then we'll take a twenty percent cut from each deal. After all, we're the ones signing the contracts. Is this agreeable?"

"Yes," Li Huowang readily agreed. Escorting cargo was quite convenient for his group, and the earnings were essentially free money.

"If the goods are lost, I won't hold you accountable. We have our own guarantors too. Since you said Leader Zhao is your friend, don't disappoint him," said the Chief Escort.

1. the three characters of the name Jin Zaomu has the radicals of the five elements, 金灶沐 🌊

Chapter 183 - Village Protector

Since the Chief Escort had agreed, their next steps were quite simple—accept the contract, take the deposit, and place their handprints.

Li Huowang turned around as he observed the items being loaded onto his carriage, and then turned to the Chief Escort. “By the way, Chief Escort, I’d like to ask. Wasn’t there a war recently? Did it also affect your business?”

“Why wouldn’t we be affected? The escort business does make more money when the world is in chaos. But if the entire world is in total chaos, then we wouldn’t be able to make any money either. You should know that once military troops are involved, those high-ranking officials won’t follow any rules. Thankfully, the war has ended.”

Hearing this, Li Huowang was surprised. “Chief, do you know what happened? Why did the war suddenly stop?”

He recalled that a significant number of people had died during the battles; it hadn’t just been any normal skirmish.

According to normal procedures, it shouldn’t have ended like this.

There must have been some reason that caused both sides to reign in their hostility so abruptly. No, not just both sides, as there seemed to have been more than two countries involved in the war.

Yet now, they had all stopped so abruptly, almost as if they had all agreed upon it beforehand; due to this, it was very strange.

“How would I know? If I did, wouldn’t I be sitting on the throne of the kingdom of Si Qi right now? However, I’ve heard from

the conscripts that while everything was normal in the beginning, one day, out of the blue, the dead suddenly stopped rotting, and no longer even attracted any flies,” explained the Chief Escort.

Hearing this, Li Huowang’s expression stiffened. It all related back to the Abbess’s body. This unexpected ceasefire was related to the sudden disappearance of ‘decay’.

Could it be that those in power feel that the disappearance of ‘decay’ is more important than conquering cities and seizing more land? So the emperors and the kings stopped the war to join forces and deal with this issue?

Perhaps the disappearance of ‘decay’ would lead to major changes in the world.

Li Huowang speculated aimlessly as he looked toward the other side of the street. The border town was very lively, with horse-drawn carriages, ox carts, and even camels passing by.

They all seemed to be completely unaffected by the disappearance of ‘decay’.

From the looks of it, there were many significant events happening in this world, but they were unrelated to him. Currently, he was no different from these commoners; he was just another one of them.

There will always be someone dependable when calamity strikes.

Perhaps the disappearance of ‘decay’ was something very important. But ever since the Abbess’s death, he no longer had any further connections with this matter.

Unknowingly, they finished loading the goods they were meant to escort. Since their two carriages were now full, they would have no choice but to sleep underneath the carriages at night.

“Young man, as long as you deliver these goods to the Fengteng Escort Office in Ji City of Hou Shu, you will receive a reward of seventy taels.” [1]

Seventy taels!

Li Huowang was stunned by the reward. He remembered that back then, the Lu Family Troupe only managed to earn ten taels back when they performed for the dead.

It seems that the escort business is very profitable in these chaotic times.

“Don’t think it’s too little; it’s your first time, after all. As long as you do a good job, your business will naturally become more lucrative. This is the escort contract, keep it safe,” continued the Chief Escort.

Hearing this, Li Huowang reached out for the contract and bowed courteously. “Chief Escort, till we meet again.”

“Take care, and have a smooth journey,” said the Chief Escort.

After leaving the Escort Office, Li Huowang took another look at this small town that they had visited several times now and sighed with mixed feelings. He had no more attachments to the kingdom of Si Qi, and this was likely the last time he would come to this place.

Where is my home in this vast world?

Once everything was prepared, the carriage wheels began to roll again as he led his group toward the barren land of Hou Shu.

Now that they were acting as escorts, they were moving much slower than before. After all, they were carrying more goods causing the horses pulling the carts to be tired out much quicker.

To avoid facing the revenge of the relatives of the Nuo Opera performers, Li Huowang deliberately took a longer route and went around the previous town.

Due to this, they only saw another village after about half a month of travel. Worn out by their long time on the road they had cracked lips, and wanted to go in for a rest.

Not having enough water for washing up hadn’t been the biggest issue for them. The real problem was having to eat dry

rations every day, causing all of them to grow more and more irritable.

Li Huowang had also developed a large ulcer on the corner of his lips.

“Wooo~” Bun howled out.

Seeing this, Li Huowang patted its smooth, yellow head and said, “Keep quiet, this is someone else’s place.”

While enjoying being licked by Bun, Li Huowang looked at the small village.

All the houses here were painted a conspicuous red, as though to contrast them from the desolation outside. However, there was nothing else remarkable about this place.

When Li Huowang saw a man in ragged clothing step out of one of the houses, he immediately led his group forward.

“Excuse me—” Li Huowang had just begun to speak, but stopped. There was a trail of green mucus hanging from the face of the man, and it extended all the way to his chest. Its thickness showed that it had accumulated due to the air drying it over time.

“Huh? Outsiders?” The person just stood there with his legs bowed inward, smiling foolishly at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang raised his hand to adjust his bronze coin mask as he watched the man warily; he was uncertain whether this man was genuinely foolish or just pretending.

“Fool, the Wu Family is having a celebration! Come over and help! There will even be baked buns afterwards!”

When he heard the shout from an old person in the distance, this man’s eyes brightened, and he turned to rush toward the source of the voice.

What sort of person is this?

Just as Li Huowang was feeling puzzled, Gao Zhijian, who was standing beside him stuttered, “Vill-Village... Protector!”

“What?” Li Huowang turned to look at him as he came to

understand what that term meant through Gao Zhijian's stuttering explanation. Some of the villages had a fool, and they were usually called Village Protectors. It was claimed that they were lacking in mental faculties, but they were destined to help ward off disasters for the village.

However, this was just a nice way of putting it. The majority of Village Protectors lived difficult lives, and often went hungry. The only time they enjoyed decent meals was when they helped out during village celebrations.

Li Huowang nodded in understanding, "I see. I've never encountered them before, and so it's my first time learning about this."

When he thought up to this point, Li Huowang was suddenly startled as he looked up at Gao Zhijian's honest face. "You are slow with almost everything else, so how did you know about this so clearly? Were you... also a Village Protector before?"

Gao Zhijian shook his head vigorously, "N-n-no! I... I... I am not!"

Li Huowang nodded upon seeing his anxious expression. "Alright, you don't need to explain. I know that you're not."

At that moment, Puppy chimed in as well, "Yes, yes. You are not."

"I... really... am not!" Gao Zhijian turned red with embarrassment.

1. Interesting note: A Tael is a unit of weight and equal to 1.3 Ounces and when associated with silver in this context, it means that they will be paid 91 Ounces of silver 📖

Chapter 184 - Getting Married

Seeing Gao Zhijian getting so anxious, Zhao Wu, who was driving the horse carriage, spoke up, “Puppy, don’t tease him too much. If you end up making him lose his temper, then I’ll smack you.”

“Senior Li, seems like there’s a celebration going on inside the village. Should we go over to take a look? Most of the village people should be there,” suggested one of them.

Li Huowang looked up at the fiery sunset, then nodded and led his group toward the village. “The customs in Hou Shu are a little strange, huh. They hold their weddings at dusk.”

“Senior Li, we also have weddings at this time back home.”

“Is that so? Why’s that?” asked Li Huowang.

“No particular reason. It has always been tradition.”

As they chatted along the way, Li Huowang gradually made his way into the village. Locating the family hosting the wedding was not difficult; some of the villagers carrying buckets filled with rice and eggs directly pointed out the direction for Li Huowang.

They were not just carrying plain rice and eggs; some of them also carried baskets filled with other lavish offerings such as live chicken and lambs.

The villagers here seemed like their faces shining more and more brightly as they deliberately walked slower while swaying their shoulder poles flamboyantly; it was as though they were boasting to the others.

Li Huowang followed these people and quickly found the wedding house. The two stone lions at the entrance suggested that

this family was different from the others in the village.

Two ushers at the entrance wore warm smiles as they rushed to welcome Li Huowang's group. "You can leave your carriages at the door, and we'll keep an eye on them."

After finding out that Li Huowang's group were escorts, and after verifying the escort contract, they were surprisingly no longer wary of them, and even passionately invited them in.

It seemed that having more guests during a wedding would add to their social prestige.

With this, Li Huowang was even more convinced that his choice to become an escort was correct.

However, there was also a possibility that their attitude might have been influenced by their attire.

Most people here wore bamboo hats and veils to protect themselves from the sandstorms. If this were within the kingdom of Si Qi, the people would not readily invite a group of veiled strangers in.

After going in, they sat around a small table. Li Huowang picked up his chopsticks and took a small portion of each dish, then discreetly passed it to Bun who was under the table.

Though it may look unsightly, Li Huowang did not care. He was more concerned about the possibility of the village being a bandit lair, and that their food might have been drugged.

They had endured through many chaotic things, and it would be quite interesting if something went wrong here.

After a while, Bun licked its face and wagged its tail, clearly wanting more food.

Seeing this, Li Huowang nodded to the others. "Eat."

After their long journey, everyone seemed to have forgotten their manners; they could not resist the delicious dishes on the table.

However, Li Huowang did not start eating. Instead, he picked

up the cup of strong tea and drank it.

Given his heightened senses, the ulcer on his lips felt like constant torture to him. He had to find a way to quickly relieve himself of the heatiness.[\[1\]](#)

Hou Shu's cuisine was quite different from that of the kingdom of Si Qi; there were very few vegetable dishes. The majority of the food items were meat and dairy products, as well as baked buns and date cakes.

The only other options were the dried fruits that were arranged on the beautiful plates, and the tea water. Thus, Li Huowang's choices were very limited.

"Zhao Wu, try these baked buns! They are really good; crispy on the outside and fragrant on the inside. Very delicious!" said one of them.

However, not everyone just cared about the food. Bai Lingmiao stretched her white neck and curiously looked toward the entrance. There, she saw the bride, covered in a red veil, and being helped down from the wedding sedan.

At this point, a handsome young man with sharp brows who held a gong in his hands struck it and announced in a loud voice, "The bride enters! May wealth follow abundantly!"

"Good!"

The others stood up to applaud, prompting Li Huowang to nudge Gao Zhijian who was just wolfing down his food. After that, they stood up as well.

Bong~

The gong rang again. "The bride crosses the brazier~![\[2\]](#) Red and fiery~!"

"Alright! Well-spoken!" The entire courtyard erupted in cheers.

Bong~!!

"The bride crosses the saddle~![\[3\]](#) Peace and prosperity~!"

As he looked at the joyous expressions of the people around

him, Li Huowang's mood involuntarily improved.

At the same time, he also noticed the strong look of envy in Bai Lingmiao's eyes.

He reached out and pinched her soft hand, causing her to turn around and give him a reassuring smile.

"Senior Li, everyone is giving them gifts. Shouldn't we give one as well? It's only right to do so," suggested Bai Lingmiao.

"Alright."

"We can give them some candied fruits produced in the kingdom of Si Qi, since they can't be found here. This will be enough to represent our goodwill, and wouldn't cost us much," said Bai Lingmiao.

Just as she said this, a fourth gong sounded. "Worship~ the~ God of Prosperity~!"

"What?!" Li Huowang could hardly believe his ears, "What did he say to worship?"

From his perspective, the warm and merry atmosphere instantly vanished, and a bone-piercing chill enveloped him.

"Senior Li, they said to worship the God of Prosperity," said Sun Baolu, his mouth filled to the brim with lamb meat.

Li Huowang watched on with shock as the newlyweds were led into the hall by their cheerful relatives. Then, they knelt in front of a red and round character that represented Prosperity[4].

Just as the smiling youth was about to strike the gong once again, he saw Li Huowang in the crowd, causing his expression to turn unpleasant.

"Brother! What are you looking at?! Strike the gong!"

As soon as the youth heard the groom's soft reminder, he struck the red-clothed mallet onto the gong.

Bong~

The jarring sound of the gong rang out once again.

"Congratulations to the eldest son of the Hou Family, Hou Qiao

on marrying Luo Tian as the bride! The bride is virtuous and dignified, and we pray to the God of Prosperity to bless their family to bear many children and descendants!”

“Hehe! Good!”

At that moment, the atmosphere reached its peak with everyone smiling and cheering.

After the newlyweds left through a side door, the others gradually sat down and continued to eat and chat.

This just made Li Huowang who was standing there on his own seem even more conspicuous. When he felt someone tug on his sleeves, Li Huowang sat back down, albeit looking rather displeased.

According to the information he had received before, the God of Prosperity was an existence even more terrifying than the God of Happiness. Perhaps it was one of the things behind Baiyu Capital.

And now, such an existence had become the god of blessings for weddings; it was undoubtedly ironic.

Though he did not know how this custom came about, he was certain that the people offering their worship had no idea what the thing they were actually worshiping was!

“Senior Li, what’s the matter? There’s nothing wrong here, so why the displeased expression? Are you... having an episode again?” asked Puppy.

Li Huowang glanced at Puppy and then pointed at the red, giant, round character on the wall. “Do they have to worship that thing at weddings in other places too?”

An example of the Double Happiness character (**not sure if copyright rules apply**)

1. a traditional chinese medicine concept that is believed to be related to causing blisters or ulcers 

2. a Chinese custom to step past a brazier, believed to help dispel evil spirits with the fire, and hope for a prosperous life 🙌

3. I can't find any relevant info about this online, perhaps a wedding custom unique to this story. 🙌

4. the term used is actually Double Happiness, commonly used as a symbol for marriage 🙌

Translator's Thoughts

This is how the character for double happiness looks like.



Chapter 185 - Toast

“Worship... the God of Prosperity? No, at least not in our Liang Kingdom. I remember that when my second brother got married, they had to first pay their respects to Heaven and Earth, and then to her parents. But in marriages, we also have the same circular character pasted on the doors and windows,” said Puppy while holding onto a lamb hoof and pointing toward the red-colored double happiness character in the banquet hall.

However, this reply didn’t manage to improve Li Huowang’s expression by much.

He just stood in place for a while, and only sat down after seeing that there were no peculiarities with the red-colored round character for double happiness.

“Let’s eat quickly and find a place to rest afterwards,” said Li Huowang, prompting the others to speed up their pace.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang took a dried date from the date cake and began to slowly munch on it, all while looking around warily. He couldn’t let his guard down completely.

However, he couldn’t be blamed for being overly cautious. Being too careful was never a bad thing in this crazy world.

Moreover, he had accumulated many bitter experiences.

Li Huowang did not want to know the reason behind these things. The only thing he wanted was to live on safely with the people around him.

As the evening grew darker, the torches on the walls were lit up, and the entire banquet hall grew even more lively.

The host family had been busy toasting with those seated at the other tables, and Li Huowang had assumed that they would not come and raise a toast with their group of outsiders. Who knew that

one of them would actually be dispatched to their table.

The youth who had been striking the gong to welcome the bride now walked toward Li Huowang with a smile. He held a cup of wine in one hand, and a wine jug in the other.

He came to their table and filled up his wine cup first, and then held it up to Li Huowang. "Thank you everyone for rushing here for my brother's wedding! I am Hou Wen, and I would like to raise a toast to you escort masters. May everything go smoothly for you!"

Given the situation, the others could not remain seated, and raised their cups in return. Even Li Huowang did the same, using tea as a replacement for wine. After all, it was very good for them to receive such treatment as outsiders.

Hou Wen held his cup with both hands and emptied it down his throat, and then immediately filled it up once again before facing Li Huowang. "Daoist, I offer a separate toast to you. Here's to hoping that you attain the Dao and ascend to Immortality soon!"

These were kind words, but to Li Huowang, a fake Daoist, they sounded quite uncomfortable.

"You're too courteous," said Li Huowang as he raised his cup of tea and drank it, the cup obscuring his view.

Li Huowang could acutely sense that the man before him was staring at himself.

No, more accurately, it was not at himself, but at the sword on his back, the one gifted to him by the Abbess.

When Li Huowang put down the cup of tea, that gaze quickly vanished, and he was once again faced with the young man's smile. If not for his heightened senses, it was likely that he too would have missed it.

Why is this person staring at my sword? Does he recognize its power?

No matter what Li Huowang thought, the youth didn't do much after the toast. He just picked up his pot of wine and turned toward

the other tables.

From the looks of it, the purpose of his visit had just been to raise a toast.

“Enjoy your meal, and leave only after you are happy!” said the departing young man.

Li Huowang had a complex look on his face as he watched the youth depart. He turned to the others and said, “We should be done. Let’s go.”

Hearing this, the others looked reluctantly at the unfinished dishes. But since Li Huowang had spoken, they could only stand up and follow him.

After the feast, not only had they had their fill, it was also easier for them to find a place to rest. A landlord saw that they were the escorts who had eaten at the same feast as him, and agreed to shelter them temporarily. He even had to pretend to decline Bai Lingmiao’s offer to pay rent.

“Since you came to dine at the banquet, you are our guests. There’s no need for any money here,” said the old man. But in the end, the elderly man with the loud voice still accepted their coins happily.

Money was indeed quite handy, and he quickly cleared out an old two-story clay building for Li Huowang’s group to stay in. Even though it was old, it was a standalone structure with its own courtyard, which suited Li Huowang’s preferences quite a bit.

As the night grew darker, the lively village also gradually grew quiet.

At this moment, Li Huowang stood at the window by the second floor as he gazed at the red lanterns of the house where the wedding had taken place.

Bai Lingmiao was sitting on the side of the bed as she wet a thread with her mouth. Then, under the illumination of the candlelight, she carefully threaded it through the eye of a needle

before starting to sew some useless cloth onto the chains on a nearby stool.

She continued sewing until her eyes grew tired, and then looked up toward Li Huowang's broad figure. "Senior Li, perhaps he was just casually glancing at your sword. He may not necessarily be scheming against you."

"I have two swords on my back, so why did he focus on this one? It's better to be safe than sorry. When you go down later, inform the others in the house to take turns keeping watch throughout the night," said Li Huowang.

Bai Lingmiao obediently nodded before spreading open her blanket.

"Li... Li..."

"What's the matter?" Li Huowang looked down at the courtyard, to see Gao Zhijian looking up toward himself.

"I... I'm really not... a village protector," said Gao Zhijian, clearly concerned about this matter.

"Alright, I know that you're not a village protector. But then, where are you from? You couldn't have popped out from a rock, right?" asked Li Huowang.

Due to Gao Zhijian's limited intelligence and stutter, Li Huowang and the others were not keen about engaging in a conversation with him, since he often tended to be long-winded.

Due to this, aside from knowing that he was literate, Li Huowang did not know much else about Gao Zhijian.

Gao Zhijian appeared conflicted as he paused for a while, and then said, "Senior... Senior Li! Trust... trust me..."

"I trust you. Now hurry up and speak. If you keep dawdling, it's going to be dawn soon."

"You! Don't... Don't interrupt! Don't interrupt... me!" shouted Gao Zhijian. This was the first time he had used this tone to speak to Li Huowang. "I... I hate... hate it the most! When... others..."

Interrupt... me!"

Li Huowang looked at Gao Zhijian, whose face was turning red from agitation, and also at his tightly clenched fists, and nodded.

"Alright, you can speak."

"Senior... Senior Li! Will... you be... able to believe me? No matter... how... shocking... my words are?!"

"I will believe you. Say it."

Hearing this, Gao Zhijian stomped his feet angrily and said, "I... I... I'll come up to tell you!"

Hearing this, Li Huowang glanced at Bai Lingmiao behind him, and then stopped the agitated Gao Zhijian, "Don't come up, just speak from there, and then go to bed."

Chapter 186 - Beauty

When he heard Li Huowang tell him to just stand in the courtyard and talk to him, Gao Zhijian hesitated. He looked around warily and then began to speak, "I... I... I might... I might be an emp..."

As he spoke, Gao Zhijian's voice gradually became softer and softer, turning into something akin to a mosquito's buzzing.

"Hm? An emp? What are you talking about? Speak up," asked Li Huowang.

Gao Zhijian was ashamed when Li Huowang talked to him like that and just returned to his room.

"Why did he stop talking? What was he trying to say? An emp?" wondered Li Huowang. He was about to head down and ask but decided against it. He closed the window and approached his bed.

He had many other things to do and had no time to meddle in the private affairs of others.

Plus, he was a Strayed One. He was not suited to be a counselor, lest he dragged the others into his troubles as well.

And so, Li Huowang was not interested in what Gao Zhijian was trying to tell him.

Gao Zhijian was not stupid. His mind just worked slower than the others. Gao Zhijian must've his own issues to deal with. He knew that there would come a day when Gao Zhijian would naturally tell him everything.

After Li Huowang waited and confirmed that Gao Zhijian never came up, he blew out the candle and went to sleep. As he lay on the bed, Li Huowang stared at the roof.

"Do you still remember where Simpleton wanted to go?" asked

Li Huowang.

Bai Lingmiao hugged Li Huowang even while her eyes were closed. “I asked him a couple of days ago and found that he wasn’t sure either. He had said the Liang Kingdom the last time but then he answered with Qing Qiu a few days back.”

“Qing Qiu...” mumbled Li Huowang as the map surfaced within his mind. Qing Qiu was the next kingdom after Hou Shu, and beyond it was the Liang Kingdom.

Their journey would end once Bai Lingmiao arrived back at her village at the base of Cowheart Mountain. At that time, he would finally be able to settle down there too.

What should I do once I’m there? Should I arrange for a wedding ceremony and marry her? But since I will be staying at her house, technically she’s marrying me, right?[\[1\]](#)

Amidst his thoughts, Li Huowang placed his jaw on the top of her head and snuggled with Bai Lingmiao.

Neither of them had fallen into love at first sight, nor had they sworn to love each other. Li Huowang didn’t know how to pamper her, and Bai Lingmiao had never flirted with him. Both of them were akin to a small stream; they went on and on until they reached a lake.

To Li Huowang, nothing about it felt particularly special. It was just that he felt comfortable staying by her side and wanted to do so for his life.

But he was still worried about the one remaining issue he had. His hallucinations.

“Is there nothing that can cure the symptoms of a Strayed One?” Li Huowang wondered aloud. This was not only a question of responsibility, but also a future threat.

Li Huowang was still unconvinced. He was afraid that he would end up treating the hallucination as the real world once more and abandon Bai Lingmiao.

For a period of time, Li Huowang was very certain that the other side was fake and that he would never doubt himself again.

But now, the reality hit him hard. Everything was possible. He would never be so sure anymore.

Li Huowang recalled the final words spoken by one of the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. “Chen Hongxiu, that old nun, knew nothing! I’ll tell you the truth! One of the four Joys of the Sitting Oblivion Dao, Bei Feng, is also a Strayed One! He has managed to live to a ripe old age of 190, and he’s still doing well! None of a Strayed One’s bewilderment or confusion bothers him!”

As he thought about it, he got more and more annoyed.

At that moment, Li Huowang suddenly realized that he had played right into that person’s trap and cursed.

Fuck! That bunch of crazy lunatics are still trying to swindle me even after their death!

“Senior Li, what’s wrong?” asked Bai Lingmiao.

Staring at the sleepy Bai Lingmiao, Li Huowang was about to say something when he suddenly felt his hallucination coming back. “Quick! Bring the chains!”

Hearing this, Bai Lingmiao didn’t even question him. She immediately found the chain from under the bag and tied up Li Huowang.

“Tie harder! Don’t ever let me go!” said Li Huowang.

When he saw Bai Lingmiao reassuring him even as she was busy tying him up, Li Huowang sighed and tilted his head back.

At that moment, the pillow filled with grain transformed into a soft pillow filled with cotton.

Li Huowang gradually raised his head and stared at the white environment. The ward looked quite different compared to the last time.

Li Huowang knew where he was. After staying in the psychiatric hospital for so long, he knew that this was the ward

where they kept the patients that had to be strapped in. A normal hospital would never have such a ward.

He thought about it for a moment, and came to a logical conclusion. “I was transferred?”

Li Huowang smiled bitterly and shook his head. After all, it was a hallucination and just about anything could happen here.

Li Huowang stared at the clean white ceiling and didn’t know what to do next.

He stared at the straps on his arms. After a moment, he raised his head and spoke into the microphone. “Is there a nurse? This is the thirteenth ward. Could you please bring my phone? I would like to make a call.”

After some static, a male voice answered him, “You are Li Huowang, correct? I’ve read your report. My surname is Wang, and so you can call me Nurse Wang. Who would you like to call? I can connect them to the microphone and the speaker by your bed.”

A male nurse?

Li Huowang pondered for a moment, and asked, “Nurse Wang, could you call Yang Na—”

However, as soon as he mentioned Yang Na’s name, Bai Lingmiao’s face popped up in his mind.

What am I doing? Why am I interacting with a hallucination? Yang Na is fake and Bai Lingmiao is real.

“Aa! Who is it? So annoying! Who’s calling me so early in the morning?” At that moment, a familiar voice came from the speaker.

When he heard her familiar voice, Li Huowang stopped hesitating. “Nana.”

“Huowang!” Yang Na cried out in surprise and happiness.

“Why are you still in bed? Where did you go last night and just how crazy was the night?” asked Li Huowang.

Hearing his question, Yang Na started letting out all her complains, “I didn’t go anywhere to play last night. The first year of

university is more or less like another advanced year in high school. I'm so busy I could die."

"You no longer have to study late into the night and you don't even have classes all day long. How could you be busy?"

"Who said that? You can only say that because you have never gone to university before! Once you are in, you will realize that all those teachers in high school lied to us about how carefree being a university student was!" said Yang Na.

After she said those words, she suddenly became quiet. After a while, she carefully probed Li Huowang. "Huowang, I'm sorry. I don't mean to trigger you."

Hearing this, Li Huowang stared at the black microphone and chuckled, "You think you can trigger me just like that? I'm pretty much unfazed. By the way, did you hear me sing Happy Birthday to you that day?"

"Yes, I did. Thank you. But... I'm still waiting for my birthday gift."

1. Usually in Chinese culture the girl would go to the boy's family after marriage, but on rare occasions where the boy lives with the girl's family instead, they will use a different Chinese character to describe it. 🤔

Chapter 187 - Confrontation

“A birthday gift? Sure, what do you want?” Li Huowang smiled as he talked to the microphone. He did remember promising Yang Na that he would give her something.

Yang Na's voice turned quiet. “Huowang, I wish for you to come and fetch me from the university whenever you are healed. I told everyone there that I had a cool boyfriend, but none of my hostel mates believed me. I even showed them our pictures, but they thought that they were photoshopped! Those three crazy women!”

Healed?

Li Huowang smiled bitterly.

While the hallucination was extremely logical, to the point where it was almost indistinguishable from reality, in the end, it was just that... a hallucination.

“Alright,” Li Huowang lied. This was one of those rare cases where he had to lie.

“Yay! And then we can make sure that they die from jealousy!” said Yang Na in a cheerful voice.

Soon, both of them started to calm down.

“How are you in there?” asked Yang Na.

This question immediately made Li Huowang uncomfortable; he didn't know what to say. He thought about the various experiences he had so far. None of them were good.

“Not too bad,” said Li Huowang after a pause.

Yang Na's voice grew even quieter. When she spoke again, her voice was filled with sadness. “Huowang, I love you, I really, really

do... But, we need to maintain it together. I'm afraid that I can't maintain it on my own. I don't want to be like my parents. They loved each other when I was younger, but that love slowly transformed into hatred."

Li Huowang took a deep breath and reassured her.

However, Yang Na did not accept it. "Li Huowang! Be serious! You always said you would do it, so show me! Your mom told me that you hated seeing the doctors! You can't do that! Do you think I don't understand you? You kept everything within your heart! Where are you trying to escape to? You've always been so stubborn and headstrong ever since you were young. I know it's hard for you to be riddled with this illness, but you need to go and let yourself get treated. I *need* you to do it so that I can also see that you are trying. If not, I won't feel safe anymore. I keep thinking whether you are trying to abandon me."

Hearing all this, Li Huowang clenched both of his fists. "Nana, I swear that I will never abandon you, even if..."

"Even if?"

Even if you are an illusion...

Li Huowang buried those words deep inside his heart.

"...even if I can't be treated, as long as you are able to endure, then I will never give up either," said Li Huowang.

After obtaining his answer, Yang Na's voice returned to her jolly self. Then, she began to talk about her university life.

They talked for another half an hour before Nurse Wang reminded them that their time was up. And so, Yang Na reluctantly hung up.

Li Huowang sighed while lying on the bed. He knew that the hallucination was logical, but he really didn't know what to do about Yang Na's birthday wish.

After what had happened the last time, the hospital would never let him out. He would even be subjected to numerous rounds

of assessment just for them to release the straps binding him.

Going to Yang Na's university? Forget it. He couldn't even leave his room.

"You were able to converse quite naturally with her today. Want to try talking with a doctor?" asked Nurse Wang.

However, due to being annoyed, Li Huowang decided to ignore Nurse Wang.

"Young man, even I was touched by the relationship between you two. You can't disappoint such a girl now, can you? Don't give up on your treatment," advised Nurse Wang.

"This is a private matter. You and I are nowhere near close enough to be discussing this," said Li Huowang, feeling extremely irritated.

"You don't know me, but I know you. I did everything to take care of you while you were strapped in, including bathing you, changing the catheter, and even changing the poop bucket. Heck, I never even treated my own mother that nicely. But at least we haven't had to flip you over. Your body is still strong and never developed any pressure ulcers. On the other hand, the patient on bed number nineteen needs to be flipped every few hours or so."

Nurse Wang happily continued to talk to him whether Li Huowang liked it or not.

But this only further irritated Li Huowang..

"I'm tired, let me rest," said Li Huowang.

"Young man, you are almost one with the bed by now. How could you still be tired? Just talk to me for a couple of minutes. This hospital is very unfriendly to us. They don't even allow us to look at our phones during our shifts. If it weren't for the pay and the benefits, I would've long since changed jobs. Are you sure you don't want to see a doctor today? What do you think Yang Na would say if she knew about it?" said Nurse Wang.

Li Huowang finally relented when he thought about how Yang

Na would feel. “Fine, bring the doctor in.”

Even if this was just a hallucination, he didn’t want Yang Na to be sad.

“Oops, I forgot that today is a Sunday. The doctor is on break today. Would you be free tomorrow?” said Nurse Wang.

“Are you fucking with me?” At this point, Li Huowang was starting to hate the nurse.

“I wouldn’t dare. After all, your mother is very fierce. I don’t want her to complain about me to my supervisors. The doctor really is on break today; but, I will let them know tomorrow. Will you be fine with that? I’ve heard the doctor say that your illness is quite unique. They even wanted to name it after you.”

At this point, Li Huowang closed his eyes and just tuned Nurse Wang out. He was done with Nurse Wang.

Amidst Nurse Wang’s voice, Li Huowang soon fell asleep.

When he woke up, he once again found himself on the wooden bed, his body tied up with chains and covered with a blanket. Seeing this, he sighed in relief.

Then, Li Huowang turned to stare at Bai Lingmiao. At this moment, she was sleeping on the side. For some reason, he suddenly felt like Bai Lingmiao’s face was being superimposed with Yang Na’s.

But then he reminded himself that the hallucination was nothing but a fake. Now, he needed to treasure Bai Lingmiao.

This was his reality.

Numerous thoughts ran through Li Huowang’s mind.

Bai Lingmiao wants the same thing that Yang Na wished for.

At that moment, Bai Lingmiao’s eyes gently fluttered as she woke up. When she saw that Li Huowang’s eyes were clear once more, Bai Lingmiao smiled. “Senior Li, it’s only the fourth section of the night. Let me remove your chains and then we can continue sleeping.”

Having said that, she removed the blanket on his body before quickly untying Li Huowang.

When her face came close to his, Li Huowang suddenly asked her. “Were you envious of the bride today?”

Hearing this, Bai Lingmiao blushed but didn’t deny it. “Yeah, I was very envious. Senior Li, will you... marry me when we reach my home? You do not dislike me right?”

Li Huowang just gave her a gentle kiss as an answer.

On the other hand, Bai Lingmiao was clearly surprised by his actions and froze up.

Then, Li Huowang sat up and pulled her into the warm blanket. The next day, both of them woke up very late.

Chapter 188 - Soldiers

There was a well within the village. There was even a fireplace close to the guest house. Thus, all they needed to do was to place their pot onto the fireplace and they could easily cook a meal.

As he drank the wild vegetable soup and ate the grain bun, Li Huowang felt the ulcer on his lips slowly receding.

At that moment, Li Huowang asked Gao Zhijian about the previous night. "Did anything come close to us last night?"

"N-no. No one was here," replied Gao Zhijian.

Li Huowang glanced at Bun and saw that the dog was fine as well. He recalled the strange wedding from yesterday.

Even though everything seemed normal, Li Huowang felt that the gaze of the man was off. He wasn't sure when he had obtained the power to determine one's emotions through their gaze, but he could tell that the man who was staring at him yesterday was doing so not out of curiosity, but out of wariness.

"We will rest for today and depart tomorrow morning. Puppy, since we don't have enough food for our travels, go and gather some rations for our trip today. Gao Zhijian and Chun Xiaoman, both of you can go with him as well. Don't be careless," instructed Li Huowang.

"Sure, leave this to me, the great Cao Cao!" answered Puppy.

Li Huowang glanced at Bai Lingmiao, who was whispering something to Chun Xiaoman, before continuing with his meal.

Given that this was one of their rare rest days, Li Huowang took the chance to practice the Fiery Scripture.

However, even now he had no idea how to gather or invoke the feeling of compassion within his heart.

Just as he had barely managed to gather the white wax into a

pile, he suddenly detected someone staring at him.

Li Huowang quickly stowed away the Fiery Scripture and opened the window, only to find the Village Protector sniffing and smiling at him.

Is it him? Maybe I can get some information from him.

Li Huowang immediately ran down and took some of the grain buns from the kitchen before approaching the Village Protector.

Li Huowang shook the grain buns in front of him and saw the man was staring intensely at the buns. “I will give you a bun for every question you answer. Deal?”

“Alright!” The stupid Village Protector nodded.

“What’s your name?” asked Li Huowang.

“I have no idea, but my mother said my surname is Hua,” replied the Village Protector.

“Alright, here’s your bun.”

The Village Protector was so happy about receiving a bun that his snot flew out.

“Here’s another question. Who was the man hitting the gong yesterday? What is his job?” asked Li Huowang.

“That’s Hou Laoer. He’s a soldier. His brother, Hou Laoda, was the one getting married so he recently came back here,” replied the Village Protector.

“A soldier? For the kingdom of Hou Shu?” mumbled Li Huowang.

That means he’s working with the kingdom!

Li Huowang had been here for quite a while, but other than the soldiers guarding the borders, he had never met an official or a representative of the kingdom.

Now he was quite curious. How did the officials govern their countries that were riddled with evil beings in this bizarre world?

The Village Protector did not answer him but stared at the grain bun.

Seeing this, Li Huowang gave him another bun and the Village Protector once again started talking, "I don't know what kind of soldier he is nor his rank. All I know is that he's a soldier and that he wields a large spear. The spear is so heavy that I can't even lift it."

Hearing this, Li Huowang frowned and glanced in the direction of the Hou family's house. It was just further up the path, with the stone lions protecting the gates.

"Where is he now?" asked Li Huowang.

"He left. After Hou Laoda's wedding ceremony was over, he directly left," replied the Village Protector.

Hearing that Hou Laoer had already left, Li Huowang sighed in relief. Still, he would rather face a human than some evil being.

Li Huowang didn't know if he would cross paths with that man again, but if his hunch was right, then the state officials were probably very busy with the disappearance of 'decay' from the world.

Just then, an old voice came from behind, "Village Protector, did that man give you food?"

Li Huowang recognized the old man; it was the father of the groom from yesterday's wedding. The old man was still wearing his hat and coat from yesterday.

"Greetings, good sir," greeted Li Huowang.

"Aiya, you were already our guest yesterday. There's no need to be so polite," said the old man.

While the two were talking, the Village Protector saw that there were no more grain buns to be had and left.

Staring at the Village Protector's dirty back, Li Huowang asked the old man, "Sir, I've heard that the Village Protectors can protect a village from disasters. Is this true? Did he help this village before?"

Even though Gao Zhijian had just mentioned it in a passing

remark, it was something entirely possible within this bizarre world.

“It’s just a story that we came up with so that a mentally retarded person without any family wouldn’t die from hunger. Anyone smart enough would be able to tell,” said the old man.

“I see. You must be quite kind then.”

“I’m afraid not. Our ancestors have told us that a single village can only contain a single Village Protector. After all, we can’t feed too many people for free. That said, will you be passing by Ji City? I recall that you are offering escort services, correct?” asked the old man.

Li Huowang was surprised. From the looks of it, the old man hadn’t just found him by chance, and had been actively searching for him.

“My eldest daughter is staying there. Could you pass a message to her? I need you to tell her that her brother just got married and so we will be expecting a new addition to our family. How much silver would that require?” inquired the old man.

“No need for payment. You already invited us to dinner last night. There’s no reason for us to request payment just to pass on a message.”

After hearing Li Huowang’s words, the old man did not continue insisting. He then told Li Huowang the address of his eldest daughter.

After remembering the address, Li Huowang suddenly recalled about Hou Laoer. “I thought your second son just left? Why did you not ask him to pass the message instead? He should arrive faster while traveling on his horse compared to my carriage.”

“My second son is rushing back to his camp. How could he possibly go to Ji City? In fact, it took him such a long time just to appeal to leave his post for two days. Sigh, I hope they are not going to war again,” lamented the old man.

“Old man, what is the rank of your second son within the camp? He must be someone of a high rank,” asked Li Huowang.

Li Huowang’s question was something that the old man loved to hear. He purposely spoke in a louder voice as he started boasting, “Of course! He’s a Small-arms soldier.”

“A Small-arms soldier? What is that?” asked Li Huowang.

“Oh, you don’t know? Well, I didn’t know in the beginning either. But he told me that the Small-arms soldiers are essentially the guards that stand beside the general. How could a soldier guarding the general not be someone of high-ranking? Look at my house, my ox-carriage, and the two stone lions by the door of my house. All of those were gifts from my second son,” boasted the old man.

Chapter 189 - On Their Journey

As he heard a father brag about his own son, Li Huowang gradually learned more and more about the life of Hou Laoer.

It was quite inspirational. The Hou family hadn't really been that rich in the past. They were just as poor as the others. Since the few acres of land they owned wasn't enough to feed their entire family, the second son was forced to leave the family in search of a job.

Li Huowang was suspicious about the 'general' that the old man kept talking about; from the looks of it, the old man thought that a general was the only high-ranking official within a camp.

"Sigh. It was even worse in the past. We didn't even have enough food to feed ourselves, and only had a single pair of pants. Back then, whoever wanted to head out got to wear that single pair," said the old man.

As he heard the old man's words, Li Huowang nodded.

After talking for a period of time, the old man was finally satisfied with his boasting and slowly walked back to his home.

Seeing this, Li Huowang sighed and turned back. He was glad that the old man took his leave.

After having learned so much, Li Huowang was no longer as cautious about Hou Laoer as before.

It wasn't because of his rank and identity, but because of the fact that Hou Laoer had really left the place. There was no way he could come and disturb Li Huowang anymore.

Just then, Li Huowang saw Puppy who was on his way back from purchasing some rations.

“Senior Li, look what I bought! It’s a map drawn on leather!” said Puppy.

That night also passed by peacefully. At dawn, all of them departed with full spirits.

As the wheels of the carriage rolled slowly along the path, the dunes around them slowly disappeared. Gradually the path became uneven and stones started replacing the sand.

Soon, smaller mountains made of stones and rock started to appear here and there. Thanks to them blocking the wind, Li Huowang and the rest were no longer buffeted by the sand. There was even some short brown grass growing near the sides of the path.

“We will walk through here before taking a turn here,” said Li Huowang as he pointed at the map and stopped at an icon representing a town. “If we do not get lost, then we will arrive at Ji City over here. As long as we reach there, we will be able to fulfill our escort mission, and we would have traveled halfway through Hou Shu. It looks like Hou Shu really is a much smaller kingdom, at least compared to the previous two.”

As Li Huowang was explaining all this, he felt someone tugging on his sleeves. “Senior Li, someone is in front of us.”

Hearing this, Li Huowang raised his head and saw that there was indeed someone.

As they got closer, they saw that it was an old man who was walking with a bamboo cane. He looked like a scholar. Even though he was old, his body was still fit and energetic. He showed no signs of tiredness despite the old bamboo basket he was carrying on his back.

At that moment, hearing the sound of horse hooves, Jin Shanzhao turned around. When he saw a group of people wearing black veils, he immediately stepped aside.

Who are these guys? Especially that young man in the red Daoist

robes; he's even going so far as to cover half of his face with a coin veil. Looks like these are people I shouldn't mess around with. I guess I should hide then?

Jin Shanzhao analyzed the situation quickly and calmly. He wanted to slow down and let the group pass by first.

However, he had never expected the young Daoist to be the one to approach him and start talking.

"Old man, could you please lend us your map so that we can verify our map is correct?" asked the red-robed Daoist.

Hearing this, Jin Shanzhao rummaged through his bamboo basket and took out a paper map. "This map is hand drawn by me. I've been traveling around for many years and I'm quite confident that my map is accurate. You can have it if you want."

"Thanks, but there's no need for that. I just want to compare it with my own map. Once we are done, I will return it to you," replied the red-robed Daoist.

Jin Shanzhao was slightly relieved to hear how friendly the young man was. The young Daoist was by no means rude either.

"Daoist, where are you going? I'm just asking out of curiosity, maybe you are heading in the same direction as me," asked Jin Shanzhao.

"We are on an escort mission to Ji City," replied the red-robed Daoist.

However, Jin Shanzhao did not believe them. How could an escort not even know their own route? It was a blatant lie.

"Oh? You are on an escort mission? That's rare to hear. I've heard Daoists usually don't bother with mundane tasks like these," probed Jin Shanzhao.

"Even I have to eat, so I might as well earn some money along the way. Old man, why are you out here in the mountains, all by yourself? Isn't it dangerous?" asked the red-robed Daoist.

Jin Shanzhao chuckled when he saw how the Daoist was trying

to probe him. Just as he was thinking about what lie to tell them, a massive rock suddenly rolled down from the mountain and crashed into the path. At the same time, the sound of horse hooves suddenly rang out from all around them!

Jin Shanzhao was shocked to see that they were being surrounded by bandits riding on horses. “Oh no! We have been trapped by the bandits!”

But when he turned around, he was surprised to see that the young Daoist was completely calm.

He must have a plan if he's able to remain this calm.

Thinking about this, Jin Shanzhao immediately hid behind the young Daoist while the bandits approached them from all directions.

Tak tak tak~

As the sound of horse hooves got closer, they saw an imposing bandit appear in front of them.

“Shoulders together; I’m not an outlier. Is the spring book open?” spoke the red-robed Daoist.

Hm?

Jin Shanzhao was once more surprised by Li Huowang.

To think that he knew the codewords used by those belonging to the Jianghu. He must be someone extraordinary.

But just when Jin Shanzhao had thought that the bandits would reply to the codeword, the one-eyed bandit at the front brandished his blade and shouted, “Go! Kill them all!”

Immediately, the horses all around them resumed their charge. Unexpectedly, the bandits did not even bother with the codewords and directly attacked them.

Seeing this, instead of thinking about what had just happened, Jin Shanzhao immediately ran up the boulder as he tried to climb past it; he wanted to try and escape while the two forces clashed with each other.

However, just as Jin Shanzhao managed to climb up the boulder, he heard the sound of fighting slowly dying down behind him.

When he turned around, Jin Shanzhao got one last surprise for the day. He saw that the bandits had all been defeated!

At this moment, the ground was littered with the corpses of the bandits and their horses. On the other hand, the group by the young Daoist was completely unharmed besides some dents on the carriage!

What the... What did I miss?

Li Huowang ignored the old man as he placed his sword on the neck of one of the last surviving bandits. The bandit had already lost one of its arms.

“Do you not know the rules? Why didn’t you even answer the codeword?” demanded Li Huowang.

“Fucker! You dare to kill my brothers?! You are dead!”

Splurt!

One of the bandit’s ears was cut off just like that.

Meanwhile, Jin Shanzhao was horrified.

Yikes! So he had just been feigning to be a kind man before this. He didn’t even bat an eye when killing all those bandits!

Chapter 190 - Bandits

The bandit held his wound and howled in pain.

Seeing this, Li Huowang was tired and couldn't be bothered to question him any more.

Just as he was about to kill the bandit, someone shouted, "Senior Li! Look at what this is!"

Sun Baolu revealed something. Li Huowang glanced at the item and saw that it was a well-polished tobacco pipe.

The smoke pipe and the bag of tobacco looked quite familiar.

"Senior Li, this smoke pipe and tobacco bag belong to Troupe Leader Lu! They are definitely his. I remember him lending them to me a few times while we were traveling together," said Sun Baolu.

Hearing this, Li Huowang checked the smoke pipe and his face immediately became gloomy.

It was very likely that the Lu family had been captured by these bandits.

He showed the smoke pipe to the bandit in front of him and asked in a voice that grew increasingly cold, "Where did you get this? Did you recently rob a group of performers?"

"Kill me if you can! I am a man and I will never sell out my brothers!" The bandit roared defiantly.

Li Huowang was infuriated, but instead of becoming angry, he smiled. He released the clasp on the goatskin pouch on his waist.

Kling~

At that moment, the sound of metal clanking together was heard as various torture tools revealed themselves. Li Huowang had been taking such good care of them that they were shining brightly from being polished regularly.

"You must be dreaming if you want me to kill you," said Li

Huowang.

For the next few minutes, Li Huowang slowly ground the bandit's fingers, causing the latter to howl and sob in pain. His voice echoed throughout the stony mountains.

As this was happening, the rest of them all turned around; they couldn't bear to continue watching.

Finally, when the bandit had his entire left hand ground down to the stump of his wrist, he relented. "I will speak! Our leader's mother recently celebrated her 70th birthday, and so he purposefully caught a group of performers to perform for her. They are still up on the mountain!"

Hearing this, Li Huowang threw the bloody torture tools in front of the bandit, causing the latter to shrink back in fear.

"Get up. If you don't want to be tortured again, then bring us to your camp," said Li Huowang.

The bandit no longer dared to act so tough. He just stood up and led them to their camp, just like a defeated dog.

Just then, Sun Baolu, who was rubbing the blood off his sword using a corpse spoke out in a voice filled with hesitation, "Senior Li, maybe we should just leave. We have no relationship with the Lu family and it would be better for us to not get into any more trouble..."

Hearing those words, Li Huowang gave a stern glare to Sun Baolu, causing the latter to avert his gaze.

"I am Li Huowang, not Dan Yangzi. It would've been fine if we hadn't found out about it, but now that we know that they were kidnapped, we will go and save them. Plus, I hate people who attack us out of nowhere. I'm gonna go and give them a piece of my mind," declared Li Huowang. He was pissed that a group of bandits dared to attack them. At this point, he no longer wanted to live within the shadows.

There were definitely monsters out there that he shouldn't

offend, but not just anyone had the ability to command his respect. He was more than happy to kill those who tried to kill them for no reason.

At that moment, they turned their horse carriage around and followed the bandit back to their camp.

“Safe travels. I hope we will meet again,” said a voice behind them.

Li Huowang turned around and saw that it was the old man who had already crawled past the boulder and was on the other side of the path. After a moment, he waved his arm before continuing with their journey.

After forgetting the old man, Li Huowang focused on what he should do next.

The name of the bandit they were following was Liu Waizui. Thanks to him, Li Huowang quickly learned about how their organization operated as well as what their organizational structure was.

Their leader was called Da Jinlong, and he controlled the area around here. They weren’t bandits who wandered the lands, but instead had a nearby camp with a proper structure.

“What does your organizational structure look like?” Li Huowang asked.

According to Liu Waizui, there were various roles and names for all of them .

Those in charge of robbing others were called “knife heads” and those in charge of managing their resources were called “grain stations”.

The guards within their camp were called “fragrant water”, and those in charge of strategy were called “stack turners.”

Those who kidnapped rich people were called “granaries,” while those who blackmailed people to pay money were called “flower tongues.”

Those masquerading as normal villagers to collect information were called “planted sticks.”

And finally, those who were in charge of writing blackmail letters and other documents were called “wordsmiths”.

Their chain of command was also quite simple. The leader was at the top, followed by the second-in-command, the third-in-command, the various department heads, and finally the ones who did the odd jobs.

The organizational structure of the entire bandit camp was quite rigid and clear.

“You guys are nothing but bandits. Why do you have such a structure? How many people do you have in your camp?” asked Li Huowang.

“I never counted, but probably a few hundred people,” replied Liu Waizui. At this point, he had given up on fighting back as he told Li Huowang everything the latter wanted to know.

“How strong is your leader? What kind of powers does he have?” asked Li Huowang.

“He doesn’t have any supernatural powers; he’s just big and strong. He uses the hammer as a weapon,” responded Liu Waizui.

A few hundred people, and no supernatural powers. So just normal bandits...

Li Huowang carefully gauged the difference in strength between his group and the bandits.

Since the bandits had initially surrounded them while on horsebacks, and Li Huowang’s group was walking on foot, it was almost night time by the time they finally arrived near the bandit camp.

Soon, they were already halfway up the mountain. There were several torches lit up on the mountain, indicating the location of the camp.

Ji ji~ Ji~

At that moment, the sudden sound of a bird rang out from the side of the forest.

Then, Li Huowang kicked Liu Waizui. “Tell them that we are here to talk. It would be best if we can talk this out peacefully or there will definitely be blood. You’ve seen how we fight, so just think about how many more of your brothers will die by our hands.”

Hearing this, Liu Waizui nodded in defeat and whistled, his whistle resembling the sound of a bird.

Soon, the forest came alive with the chirping sounds.

And so, none of the bandits stopped them during the rest of their trip.

They soon arrived at a cave on the mountain with several fierce-looking bandits glaring at Li Huowang.

“Brat, you got guts! You dare to come and find us even after killing our brothers?” roared one of them.

However, Li Huowang just ignored the normal bandits and directly walked inside.

Soon, they arrived in a large hall. Here, Li Huowang saw three big burly men eating meat and drinking wine as they cursed and laughed. When the sound surrounding them slowly died down, all three of them sized up Li Huowang.

“A sharp target? Or a stinky target?”[\[1\]](#) asked the bald man first.

However, Li Huowang was too tired to bother with the codewords at this point. “Since I can come up here unharmed, you should know just how strong I am. Hand over the group of performers and I will overlook your sins.”

“Hahahaha!” The three men laughed.

Jiang!

Seeing this, Li Huowang unsheathed his sword and a dense killing intent filled up the entire hall.

1. A real Daoist or a fake one? 📖

Chapter 191 - Military Family

Li Huowang pulled out his sword, and a dense murderous intent filled the entire hall, making everyone present feel as if they were suddenly at the heart of a battlefield.

The sound of swords being drawn echoed continuously. The bandits wielded various weapons, struggling to charge forward from all directions while resisting the murderous intent.

However, some of the bandits amongst them could not bear it any longer, and fear crept up within their eyes.

When the sword was sheathed again, the surroundings quickly became calm.

By now, the laughter of the bandit leader had vanished completely. The three men who had been drinking and eating, were now staring at Li Huowang.

Amidst this tension, the bald man, who sat at the head of the table, picked up a fried peanut and popped it into his mouth.

On the other hand, a broad-faced bandit with a smile on his face immediately stepped forward to mediate. “Esteemed Daoist, please don’t be hasty. Things can be discussed calmly. Being able to meet like this can be considered fate, and we can all sit down together to have a drink.”

Li Huowang was not intimidated by them, and so he went over to have a seat, and then started to pick up and eat the meat that they had been eating.

On the other hand, the round-faced man acting as a mediator now stood beside Li Huowang, acting as though Li Huowang was one of his associates. He took out a paper fan with a landscape

painting on it, and then gently fanned Li Huowang several times. Then, he closed the fan and pointed it toward a bald man sitting at the Eight Immortals table.

“This is our leader, Da Jinlong,” said the round-faced man.

“This is our second-in-command, Xia Shanhu,” continued the round-faced man as he pointed at the bandit wearing a tiger-skin coat, causing the latter to snort coldly.

However, he did not introduce the final person.

The last man at the table had a gloomy expression as he lifted his bowl and took a big gulp. Apart from his fierce appearance, he had a distinctive look; there was the word “Qiu” tattooed on the left side of his forehead.

All three men had frames that were significantly larger than the rest of the bandits.

Then, the round-faced man tapped his nose with his fan and said, “I am Liu Xiang, the village calligrapher. It’s a pleasure to meet you, Daoist.”

“Is the play troupe still around? How many of them have died?” asked Li Huowang directly.

Just as the bandit wearing the tiger-skin coat was about to speak in an agitated voice, he was silenced by a look from Da Jinlong. Then, with the wave of his hand, a few disheveled-looking people were brought out.

These individuals were the Lu Family Troupe, who they hadn’t seen in a while.

Upon seeing Li Huowang sitting together with the bandit leaders, Lu Zhuangyuan immediately knelt down and started kowtowing repeatedly. He cried pitifully, “Daoist! Save us, Daoist!”

Li Huowang used his tongue to push out the shreds of meat from between his teeth, and glanced across the bandits’ faces. Then, he stood up as he prepared to head out of the cave.

Seeing this, Lu Zhuangyuan was overjoyed and had tears

rolling down his eyes, and even wanted his son to join him in kowtowing.

“Hold on~ Did I say that you can leave?” An arrogant voice sounded, causing the bandits around them to immediately block off Li Huowang’s path.

When Li Huowang turned back, he saw that the person who had spoken was not the so-called leader Da Jinlong, but the gloomy-looking man with the “Qiu” character tattooed on his forehead.

He tapped the table with his thick knuckles as he spoke, “Come and drink with us. Let’s put aside the family troupe for now. What relationship do you have with the You Family of Si Qi?”

“You Family of Si Qi?” questioned Li Huowang.

The man chuckled upon seeing Li Huowang’s confusion. He bit on a soybean and drank a mouthful of wine. “Stop pretending. That sword belongs to You Zixiong, right? He wouldn’t have given you that sword for no reason.”

At that moment, Li Huowang noticed the man eyeing the sword on his back, and slowly started to piece things together. It seemed that this sword held more secrets than he had initially thought.

After observing the faces of the trio, Li Huowang felt something was amiss. This person spoke haughtily, and did not seem to show any respect to the bandit leaders of this village.

“And who are you? The third leader of this village?” asked Li Huowang.

“Third leader, my ass! I am Wang Deqiu!” That person suddenly exploded before directly smacking a palm onto Li Huowang’s chest, sending him flying.

The force of this blow was tremendous; it nearly sent Li Huowang flying outside.

As he saw this, Gao Zhijian, with his tall and wide stature, quickly rushed up and firmly caught Li Huowang.

At that moment, Li Huowang clutched his chest due to the excruciating pain. He was instantly filled with anger, and directly drew his sword and charged at that person.

On the other hand, Wang Deqiu just stood there with an astonished look on his face as he watched Li Huowang charging toward him.

This person took one of my strikes, and his heart hasn't shattered? He must be rather skilled.

“This is ridiculous! You are messing with the wrong people!” shouted Da Jinlong as he kicked aside the Eight Immortals table, and then pulled out a mace to meet Li Huowang head-on.

With this confrontation, chaos erupted all around them as the bandits all rushed in as well.

Originally, it seemed like there was a wide disparity in the strengths of the two groups, and that Li Huowang's side would definitely lose.

However, things didn't turn out like that.

Gao Zhijian roared and swung his rod forcefully, sending three people flying away.

Just as two bandits with daggers were about to flank him, a pair of hands with long black fingernails embedded themselves into their necks.

Seeing this, a few of the bandits who were standing further away raised their crossbows. In response, Chun Xiaoman opened the Profound Records and sliced off two of her fingernails along with the skin and flesh around them.

As she cried out loud, the fingernails were sent flying toward the bandits who were holding the crossbows. Everyone who stood between them was decapitated.

Li Huowang did not pay attention to what was happening behind him. His focus was entirely on the three people before him; they were the core of this bandit hideout.

Clang!

Xia Shanhu's huge ring knife clashed against Li Huowang's longsword, the huge force behind the clash pushing Li Huowang a few steps back. However, this was the limit of what Xia Shanhu could do.

Whoosh!

At that moment, Li Huowang's sharp blade easily sliced through the large ring knife, before continuing toward Xia Shanhu's face.

"Deputy!" Da Jinlong roared as he rushed in to help out his brother, but Wang Deqiu was already one step ahead of him.

Wang Deqiu wielded a pitch-black straight sword, and left behind a phantom image as he sliced it toward Li Huowang's hand.

Clang!

A clear and metallic sound rang out, and then a dent appeared on the edge of the straight sword.

As he saw this, Li Huowang retreated and changed targets.

These three individuals were clearly more skilled than Li Huowang; however, their weakness lay in their weapons. Before long, they all broke in the face of Li Huowang's assault.

In response, the three of them started to find ways to restrict him; they did not want to engage in direct combat against Li Huowang.

When the pressure on them finally reduced, a woman wearing a red veil came out to help them.

"Dong dong dong~ When the whip cracks, the drum sounds. The Immortals are welcomed, and one's inner spirituality must first be connected. Three wolf masters and three hurdles..."

As the chanting rang out, three wolf heads quickly rose from under the red veil, and bit onto Da Jinlong's neck, causing the latter to angrily raise his mace and strike down the wolf heads underneath the red veil.

The wolf heads were beaten and shrank in size, but they rapidly reformed and bit down once again, biting so fiercely that they even exposed the bones. The spray of blood that stained the red veil gave it an even deeper crimson color.

On the other hand, Li Huowang used this moment of respite to slice off Xia Shanhu's head, and then looked toward Wang Deqiu as blood trickled down his sword.

"They say that there are rules in this green forest, but I've realized that it's all nonsense. The only rule in this world is the sword in your hands!" said Li Huowang.

Wang Deqiu smiled despite this dire situation. "Yes, there are rules, but it depends on the person to follow them. People from Hou Shu won't follow the rules when facing the You Family."

"What do you mean?" asked Li Huowang.

"You Family of Si Qi is a military family. How many people from Hou Shu have they killed? So do you really think that we will let you stroll through here so casually?" asked Wang Deqiu.

"Huh, when did bandits start being concerned with politics? If you're talking about that, then why did you rebel in the first place?" mocked Li Huowang.

Hearing the disdain contained in Li Huowang's words, Wang Deqiu smiled but did not reply.

As he looked at that smiling face, Li Huowang's expression gradually turned . He had realized the identity of the other party. "Hold on, you are not bandits! You are soldiers!"

"Hehe, bandits and soldiers, is there a need for such clear distinctions? Isn't it all about the business of killing people?"

Chapter 192 - Clean Up

Having said that, Wang Deqiu used his right heel to fling a knife lying on the floor into his hand before charging toward Li Huowang without the slightest bit of hesitation.

Clang!

The sword and knife clashed, producing crisp sounds of collision.

As they continued to fight, Li Huowang felt pulse after pulse enter his body from the You Family sword, allowing him to slowly overpower Wang Deqiu. However, the latter's reckless fighting style also posed a great challenge to Li Huowang.

With another resounding clang, the noises stopped abruptly. At this moment, the knife had fractured, its pieces rolling on the ground.

Originally, Li Huowang had planned to spare him so that he could ask the man some questions. However, the sword in his hand caused him to be filled with an insatiable amount of bloodlust causing him to not be able to stop himself.

As Wang Deqiu raised his broken knife to stab it toward Li Huowang's abdomen, Li Huowang also pierced his sword into Wang Deqiu's chest.

"Just who are you?!" Li Huowang gritted his teeth and stared at the person before him.

Wang Deqiu didn't seem to be the slightest bit troubled when faced with death. He tried his best to gather some saliva and spit it at Li Huowang's face, but the bloody spittle simply slid down his chin weakly.

At that moment, Wang Deqiu mustered all his strength and shouted in a hoarse voice, "Bastard of the You Family, you will

never get your hands on Hou Shu! As long as we are around, not an inch of Hou Shu will be lost!”

“How many times must I repeat myself? I am not from the You Family of Si Qi! This sword was given to me by someone else!” roared Li Huowang.

However, at this point, Wang Deqiu could not hear anything as warm blood flowed out from his chest, and his body gradually slumped onto the ground.

Panting heavily, Li Huowang gritted his teeth and pulled out the broken knife embedded in his abdomen.

Next, he pressed his hand onto the wound, and looked at Wang Deqiu’s body again. He cursed silently under his breath, and then went to help the others.

At that moment, the entire village was in chaos. But since the leader of the bandits had already died, the remaining brats didn’t last long. They were eventually defeated by Li Huowang’s group, and ran back toward the depths of their cave in a panicked state.

Just as Li Huowang and the others were slaughtering the remaining few bandits, a rumbling sound rang out. Immediately, an area of the cave crumbled, and then a stone wall appeared between the two groups.

Bang bang!

Gao Zhijian whacked his iron rod onto the wall forcefully, causing sparks to appear with each strike.

“Alright, stop knocking on it. It’s obvious that they were prepared and have now sealed this way,” said Li Huowang.

Hearing this, Gao Zhijian sheepishly put down his hands.

On the other hand, Li Huowang sheathed his sword, and instantly felt his mind grow clearer. He let out a deep breath slowly, then shook his head. When he looked back toward the hall, he felt rather vexed upon seeing the corpses that littered the ground. So many people had died once again.

Truthfully speaking, he did not want to kill anyone. Yet, more and more people were dying at his hands.

Li Huowang glanced down at Wang Deqiu's body, then reached out and tore a large piece of clothing from one of the nearby corpses and used it to rewrap the You Family's sword.

In the end, all of this had happened because of this sword. Li Huowang had finally understood this.

It was same during the marriage function where Hou Laoer had recognized this sword, and mistakenly believed him to be someone from the military family of Si Qi.

And now, he had provoked someone like Wang Deqiu over, leading to all this trouble.

In Hou Shu, there are definitely many people with grievances against the You Family. I should be careful not to expose this sword casually.

Also, we must up our pace in the upcoming period. When the military families of Hou Shu learn that Wang Deqiu is dead, they will definitely not let this matter slide easily. At that time, even more people will be sent over; I can't let them find me.

Even though Li Huowang had won quite easily this time around, he dared not face off against the entirety of Hou Shu; that would undoubtedly be a disaster.

Meanwhile, Chun Xiaoman held her sword as she walked around the cave. Though her chest was still heaving, she was inflicting a finishing blow to anyone still gasping for breath, preventing any of them from launching any surprise attacks.

As she walked by Li Huowang, a hand reached out. "Give it to me."

"Senior Li, give you... What?" Chun Xiaoman pretended to be puzzled.

"Stop pretending. Pass me the Profound Records. That is not something that you can handle," said Li Huowang.

Li Huowang obviously knew what she had been using when he saw her profusely bleeding finger.

Hearing this, Chun Xiaoman eyed Bai Lingmiao, then covered her bosom and took a few steps back, her eyes unusually determined. "Senior Li, this is not the one you had before. I found this on someone else, and it belongs to me."

As she saw Li Huowang approach her, she slowly retreated.

"You don't understand what you are dealing with. You cannot handle it!" said Li Huowang, his tone becoming stern.

Backed up against the wall with no room to retreat, Xiaoman instinctively drew her sword.

Seeing this, Li Huowang couldn't help but chuckle. "We've been through so many life and death situations together, and now you're drawing your sword against me?"

These words caused Chun Xiaoman's eyes to show some hesitation, but determination quickly replaced it. "Sorry, Senior Li, but I must have my own weapon."

"Alright! Since you're so capable, then you can go out on your own! Why are you still in our group!" roared Li Huowang.

Chun Xiaoman's body trembled slightly, and tears started to well up in her eyes. To her currently, this was the most important thing.

Bai Lingmiao quickly appeared between the two, her expression worried. "Senior Li, don't be like that. We're all one family; let's talk it out."

"I'll repeat myself. Pass me the Profound Records!" said Li Huowang.

With reddened eyes, Chun Xiaoman gritted her teeth and took out the Profound Records.

When Bai Lingmiao saw that Li Huowang focused on the red bamboo slip, she quickly pulled Chun Xiaoman to a corner. "Sister Xiaoman, Senior Li is right. That thing is very dangerous, and it will

hurt you each time you use it. You shouldn't have it with you."

This statement caused a burst of anger to appear inside her, and she said indignantly, "You know that it's dangerous, and yet you still support him? Are you out of your mind? Can't you distinguish right from wrong yourself?"

"But Sister Xiaoman, Senior Li is different from you. Even if his hand is cut off, it can regrow, but yours can't," argued Bai Lingmiao.

Hearing this, Chun Xiaoman looked at Bai Lingmiao disappointedly, and then walked away with her sword.

Bai Lingmiao anxiously followed her. "Sister Xiaoman, we are still good sisters, right? You won't ignore me, will you?"

Chun Xiaoman just lowered her head and directly walked out of the cave. She didn't want to be entangled with Bai Lingmiao right now.

However, under Bai Lingmiao's constant pleading, her heart gradually softened.

"I know you like him, but there are some things for which you can't always depend on him. That will only lead him further astray, ultimately causing him harm," said Chun Xiaoman.

Just as Xiaoman was about to continue speaking, some choked sobs rang out faintly, causing Chun Xiaoman to instantly draw her sword and stand before Bai Lingmiao.

Chapter 193 - Sympathy

In the hall, Li Huowang examined the Profound Records and gently ran his fingers across it. Only when this item returned to his waist again did he finally feel a sense of relief.

Even though each use of the Profound Records required one to pay a substantial cost, it always proved itself to be invaluable in critical moments.

After all, enduring some torture was better than death.

“Daoist! Daoist! You are the living protector of our Lu Family! Without your help, our whole family would have perished! And I... I on the other hand acted like I was possessed and actually ran away! I... deserve to be punished!” said Lu Zhuangyuan. As he spoke, Lu Zhuangyuan raised his dirty hand and prepared to slap himself across the face.

“Alright, alright. Are your people okay?” asked Li Huowang, stopping him.

Lu Zhuangyuan stopped reluctantly upon hearing Li Huowang’s intervention. “That bandit, Da Jinlong enjoys theater, and so we are not dead... But... my daughter-in-law has suffered quite a lot...”

At that moment, as if suddenly realizing something, Lu Zhuangyuan’s body quivered, and he said resolutely, “Daoist, from now on, we won’t go anywhere but follow you! We will never forget the debt of gratitude we owe you for saving us! From now, our Lu Family Troupe will become your personal theater troupe!”

“What do I need a theater troupe for? I can’t understand any of it,” said Li Huowang. However, even before he could finish his words, Lu Zhuangyuan knelt down emotionally, and started kowtowing repeatedly.

“Alright, follow us if you want. But we can’t stay here any

longer. Do you still have your theater props? Pack everything up and prepare to leave,” said Li Huowang. After having spent so much time together, Li Huowang had long since figured out their intentions—they wanted to have him as their bodyguard. However, he had a feeling that they would be useful later.

Upon hearing this, Lu Zhuangyuan immediately got up from the ground. “They are still around. Ooo! I also know where they keep their horses! I’ll bring all of them here now!”

To show his value to Li Huowang, Lu Zhuangyuan moved quite quickly and led his family members toward the nearby entrance.

After dealing with Lu Zhuangyuan, Li Huowang looked toward the direction of the tunnel that Xiaoman had just entered with a complex look on his face.

After a moment, he turned toward Gao Zhijian and said, “Go inside and hurry them. It’s not safe to stay in this bandit hideout. Tell them to hurry; we’re going to leave.”

Gao Zhijian nodded and tossed aside the iron rod in his hands. He then picked up the mace dropped by one of the bandits and carried it on his shoulder as he walked toward the tunnel.

However, before he could enter, Chun Xiaoman and Bai Lingmiao walked out with reddened eyes. It seemed like they had been crying not too long ago.

“What’s the matter?” Li Huowang frowned.

Chun Xiaoman bent down to pull at the clothes of a fallen bandit. “Come in and see... These... bandits are complete savages! Just like animals!”

After glancing at Bai Lingmiao, who was also bending down to remove the clothes on the bandits’ bodies, Li Huowang headed for the tunnel.

At the end of the cave, Li Huowang saw several naked women. All of their gazes were listless as they lay there, shivering on the floor. There were several X-shaped wooden frames around them

with ropes hanging from them. From the bruises he saw on women's wrists and ankles, it was clear they were released by Bai Lingmiao and the others not too long ago.

Assisted by the others, the women put on the bandits' clothes before gathering at the bright hall.

If the women captured by the water bandits from the reed island could be considered to still have some status, then these women inside the bandit's den were nothing more than tools for these bandits to vent their desires.

While this was already bad enough, Lu Zhuangyuan mentioned that since it was quite boring within the hideout, the bandits would often treat these women as their playthings.

Thus, their fate was even more tragic. Once the bandits were tired of them, they were discarded and replaced by others. After all, there was no shortage of women as long as they could be captured.

As Li Huowang heard these disgusting descriptions, he turned around to look toward the collapsed rocks, a strong killing intent glinting in his eyes.

Instantly, a bronze bell appeared in his hand.

Ring ring ring!

As the piercing sound of the bell rang out, the edges of the world congregated and gave form to a Wandering God.

Then, Li Huowang pointed toward the rock wall.

The Wandering God nodded, and then disappeared into the wall.

Not long after, Li Huowang keenly heard some faint cries from within the wall.

After about fifteen minutes had passed, the Wandering God re-emerged from within the wall, nodded toward Li Huowang and then dissipated.

The ringing sound of the bell gradually faded. Then, Li Huowang turned toward the women behind him and said, "Don't

worry, all the bandits are dead. Not a single one remains.”

However, there was no emotion on their faces—no excitement, sadness, or joy. They just appeared to be listless.

Li Huowang looked at them with sympathy. They had suffered so much, and now, they had been mentally broken.

Wait, is this feeling... Sympathy?

As he thought up to this point, Li Huowang paused, and then took out the Fiery Scripture.

Then, with the emotions he felt now, he began reciting the cryptic incantations. Immediately, the white wax condensed into a fiery centipede which then crawled up his pants, and toward his abdominal wound.

Then, with a sizzling sound, the gruesome wound was quickly sealed.

With this, the missing portion of the Fiery Scripture was finally restored; This item that Jiang Yingzi had left for him could finally be used.

This should have been a joyous matter, but now was not an appropriate time to be happy.

As Li Huowang looked at these muddle-headed women, so as to not forget the feelings he had felt just now, he engraved them deep in his heart.

After thoroughly searching the entire hideout, the group left this place that reeked of death. By the time they left, it was already deep into the night

As Lu Zhuangyuan said, the bandits indeed had many horses. They also found some supplies such as dried food and blankets. However, there wasn't much of anything else, especially no silver. It appeared that they had hidden their silver behind the collapsed wall.

Now, there was nobody alive in that cave, and so the silver would be forever buried with the bandits that the Wandering God

had killed.

That night, they continued to travel without rest, all the way until noon of the next day, all so they could distance themselves from the bandit hideout.

Once here, Li Huowang and Bun stood guard while the rest of them took this chance to get some sleep.

When all of them woke up in the evening, Li Huowang immediately laid down and fell asleep. By the time he woke up, it was the next morning.

As he rubbed his eyes sleepily, he saw Bai Lingmiao distributing some porridge to the women they had found. At the same time, he heard the voices of Sun Baolu and Puppy talking beside him.

Chapter 194 - Disguise

As Li Huowang observed those women, he overheard the conversation between Sun Baolu and Puppy.

“Old Sun, those bandits were really wicked. But all the women they captured look pretty decent. Should I pick one of them to be my wife? I don’t mind if they are dirty; it’s fine as long as they can bear children,” wondered Puppy.

“Forget it; they’ve just come out from that place. Don’t bully them,” said Sun Baolu.

“Tsk! What are you saying? I’m not taking a concubine, but openly marrying a wife. I may not be that good-looking, but they would definitely be climbing up the social ladder if they were to marry me,” said Puppy. After a moment, he continued, “Old Sun, do you want one too? If we miss this opportunity, it won’t be so easy to find such pretty wives.”

“Forget it, they are all so pitiful.”

“Hey, we are helping them! Think about it, even if they return, people will still gossip about them, and they won’t be able to marry anyone! At least with me, they will be able to have warm meals,” said Puppy.

At that moment, Li Huowang reached to remove his blanket, and stood up. He ignored Puppy who was spouting nonsense, and made a beeline for Lu Zhuangyuan who was drinking porridge.

The Lu Family Troupe appeared a lot more refreshed after a night of rest; their faces were cleaner, and their clothes were neater.

As he saw Li Huowang approach them, Lu Zhuangyuan hurriedly stood up. At the same time, he stuffed the bowl he was holding to his younger son, and his expression turned into one of utmost respect.

“Is this yours?” Li Huowang returned the tobacco pipe to its rightful owner.

“Ah yes!” Lu Zhuangyuan nodded and received it. “Sorry for the trouble. You had to return this small thing to me personally.”

“If you feel guilty, then do me a favor. We need your assistance,” said Li Huowang.

Lu Zhuangyuan was surprised. This Daoist had supernatural abilities, and so was not sure what kind of help he could offer.

On the other hand, Li Huowang turned to look back at the others who were eating. “Help us put on a disguise and some makeup.”

Soon after, everyone’s faces had theater makeup. Even Li Huowang’s coin veil was decorated with a long beard.

Once all of their weapons were stashed onto the carriages, they could no longer be recognized as a messy group of escorts, but a large theater troupe of about twenty people.

“From now on, you will lead this theater troupe. That means, we are all under your command. You will be the one to answer if anyone asks questions,” said Li Huowang as he looked at Lu Zhuangyuan.

Hou Laoer had pointed out that they were quite conspicuous. Hence, Li Huowang’s objective was for them to change their looks.

Lu Zhuangyuan also understood the situation immediately, and patted his chest while assuring them that there would be no problems.

“Senior Li, will this do?” Puppy asked. He had a white circle drawn on his nose.

Li Huowang’s beard shook with his head as he said, “No matter what, we have to try. We’ll be found far too easily if we continue like before. We can’t fight the entirety of Hou Shu.”

Currently, Li Huowang’s entire face was black, he had a fake beard, and he was wearing a set of theater clothes. It was

completely different from his look as the red-robed Daoist from before. He was completely unrecognizable.

“Senior Li, have some food,” said Bai Lingmiao who was wearing an opera costume as she poured some porridge for him.

Li Huowang was about to begin eating, but as he scanned the rest of them, he noticed that Chun Xiaoman had not applied any makeup.

Bai Lingmiao hurriedly explained, “Sister Xiaoman has too much facial hair. She needs to shave it off before applying the makeup.”

“Then shave it off quickly; don’t waste any more time. Who knows when those people will catch up with us,” said Li Huowang as he threw over his sharp sword, and began to eat his porridge.

“There’s no need for that thing; we’re not beheading anyone. I will shave her face,” said Luo Juanhua. Then, she removed two strings from her wrists and walked over to help.

The string heads intertwined, and the black hair on Chun Xiaoman’s face was quickly shaved off, revealing her white skin underneath.

By the time Li Huowang finished eating his porridge, Xiaoman’s face had also been completely shaved off all the hair.

At this point, the other disciples from the Zephyr Temple looked at her curiously. Chun Xiaoman’s face had always been covered in hair, and this was their first time seeing what she truly looked like.

Luo Juanhua had been extremely meticulous, even shaving off the hair on her neck cleanly.

Chun Xiaoman looked at the rest of them nervously. In reality, even she herself did not know what she looked like either.

Xiaoman quickly walked up to a mirror and examined her face carefully.

At that moment, she saw a young maiden about sixteen years

of age, with a delicate, slightly round face, and a straight nose. She was not some stunning beauty, but could still be considered pretty.

While Chun Xiaoman did not know about the others, she was definitely satisfied with her appearance. She felt extremely moved as she used her hairy hands to support her face. After all, nobody would want to remain as a hairy monster their entire life. She also wanted to be like other women, to get married and to bear kids.

Xiaoman is actually so young...

Li Huowang thought to himself, and then began to pester them, "Stop gawking; hurry and put the makeup on her. No place in Hou Shu is safe for us right now."

Hearing this, Lu Juren took up his brush and began to paint on Xiaoman's face. Despite her reluctance, the dense ink gradually covered her appearance once again.

Ta ta ta!

At that moment, horse hooves suddenly sounded as a group of fierce-looking men quickly rode past them. One of them turned back to glance at them, but did not pay much attention to a theater troupe like theirs.

Li Huowang instantly had a feeling that this wasn't a good omen. "Hurry, those people must be related to the bandits and have likely come to look for us,"

Li Huowang's words instantly caused the slightly relaxed atmosphere to tense up.

After they all finished their porridge, they quickly packed up and left.

In the following period, Li Huowang avoided all the major roads and took smaller paths.

Whether it was due to the make-up or their choice of routes, it took them ten days to safely arrive at a small town nestled among several rocky hills.

This town was not very large, and there seemed to be just one

major street running through it. Even so, it seemed quite busy due to the constant flow of travelers passing through this hub.

When he saw the bustling street, Li Huowang breathed a sigh of relief. They were a little closer to being able to leave Hou Shu.

“We’ll rest here tonight, and continue on our way tomorrow,” announced Li Huowang before leading the group in.

Just a few steps in, Li Huowang’s eyes gleamed as he saw the old man they had bumped into along the way previously,” Senior? Where are you going?”

Hearing this voice, Jin Shanzhao turned around and saw a middle-aged man with a long beard. However, the voice sounded quite familiar, and so he asked in surprise, “Oh? Is that you, Daoist? Such a coincidence.”

“Coincidence?” Li Huowang’s eyes shrank, and then he quickly walked up to the old man and said, “Hit me.”

“Hmm? What for?”

Thump!

Suddenly, Li Huowang’s fist landed onto Jin Shanzhao’s chest, causing the latter to stumble back.

“Daoist? Why did you do that? Have I offended you somehow?” asked Jin Shanzhao as he struggled to catch his breath.

Li Huowang did not respond to him, and instead looked down at his fist.

I can touch him, and this sensation... Seems like he’s not a hallucination, unlike Monk.

Chapter 195 - Play

With Li Huowang's explanation and help from the rest of them, Jin Shanzhao's anger finally subsided.

After all, it was up to Jin Shanzhao whether to believe the so-called reasons fabricated by Li Huowang.

"Elder, since we're traveling in the same direction, then how about we go together? It will be convenient for mutual support if we encounter any trouble on the way," suggested Li Huowang.

As he recalled the corpses of those bandits, Jin Shanzhao hesitated for a moment but nodded in the end. "Alright, I'm getting older and may get picked off by bandits quite easily. Traveling together might just be safer. However, Daoist, you should respect old people just as you do your own parents. Just a few more strikes like those, and I'll have to be placed in a coffin."

"Of course not. I was too careless previously," said Li Huowang.

Li Huowang finally heaved a sigh of relief when he saw the old man agree. It was not that he wanted to stick with this stranger, but rather to ensure that the man wouldn't report him to the others while they were on the move.

As long as they stuck together, then he could be monitored.

The entire town was very busy, and their painted faces attracted quite a bit of attention as they walked through. Quite a few people stood still and pointed curiously toward Li Huowang's group.

Can they tell that that we are from the kingdom of Si Qi?

However, this thought was quickly dismissed from Li Huowang's head.

Lu Zhuangyuan's family wasn't from the kingdom of Si Qi in

the first place, and they didn't perform any plays from there, so nobody would suspect that they were from there.

However, the crowd's interest did serve as a reminder for Li Huowang.

After all, while they may not be suspected to be from the kingdom of Si Qi, they may raise suspicions as a theater troupe that didn't perform any plays.

After some contemplation, Li Huowang came up with a solution. "Troupe Leader Lu, since we are a theater troupe, why don't we set up a stage for a play? There's already an audience waiting."

Performing a play was something that was expected of them.

Hearing Li Huowang's suggestion, Lu Zhuangyuan nodded enthusiastically, and then came to the Lu Family Troupe and instructed, "Hurry up! Didn't you hear the Daoist? Quickly find an area to set up the stage."

"But... Dad, I'm so tired. We just came out of the bandits' hideout. Didn't we sing and dance for long enough over there? Let's rest for a while more..." said Lu Xiucui.

Lu Zhuangyuan glanced at Li Huowang who was standing nearby, then picked up his tobacco pipe and smacked it on his son's head. "You sing when I tell you to! What's with all this nonsense?! You should follow your father's words!"

Since there were no trees or bamboo poles around, they could not erect a proper stage and had to make do by draping a large red cloth over a broken wall. The carriages that were led behind the broken wall served as the backstage.

Though it was quite crude, the townsfolk were not picky. They soon gathered around when they saw that there was a play.

Li Huowang was not one to sit by idly. "Go and help out. Remember our identities; right now, we are a theater troupe. We can find an inn to rest after the performance."

Li Huowang's words caused everyone besides Jin Shanzhao to start moving.

Since all of them weren't really skilled as performers, they could only assist them offstage, but even this lightened the burden on Lu Zhuangyuan's group massively.

Dressed in black, Lu Juren raised his knife and stepped on the stage, causing the buzzing crowd to gradually become quiet. There was no applause, but a curious sense of expectation filled their eyes.

While the Nuo Opera was famous in Hou Shu, the people were not dismissive of other types of plays either.

Dong dong jiang!

As the Lu Family Troupe began to play their music, Lu Juren followed their rhythm and started singing. "Today~ for~ justice~ down~ mountain~ pass~ blade~ to~ assist the battle!"

Meanwhile, Li Huowang observed the audience, using his keen senses to search for any potential risks. Fortunately, after searching for a while, the only noteworthy thing was a thief stealing some money at the periphery of the audience.

He also saw Jin Shanzhao engrossed in the performance.

"Senior Li, previously... I didn't refuse to give you that bamboo slip... I just..."

At that moment, a hesitant voice rang out behind him.

When he saw Chun Xiaoman, Li Huowang raised his hand to stop her. "I know that you were sold by your family and often feel uneasy. But the *Profound Records* is a very sinister item and not suitable for you. If you use it improperly, it can end up costing you your life."

"Then, Senior Li, how come you can use it?" asked Xiaoman.

"I..." Li Huowang touched the smooth surface of the *Profound Records*, and smiled bitterly, "...I am just used to it."

"Sorry for being harsh with you. That's just my temperament. Please bear with me," As he said this, Li Huowang reached out to

pass the bronze bell to Chun Xiaoman. “Take this. Although it requires your lifespan, at least it’s safer than the Profound Records.”

Chun Xiaoman accepted the bell with a look of surprise. They had spent so much time together, and she understood this bronze bell’s power quite well. She was amazed that he would entrust it to her. With this, the unease in her heart finally vanished without a trace.

She wanted to say something, but all she could say was, “Thank you, Senior Li.”

Li Huowang sighed. He did not want to give any of these items to others. It was not out of selfishness, but because each of them was extremely dangerous. In this crazy world, one had to sacrifice something if they wanted to obtain something else.

Just as Li Huowang was instructing Xiaoman on how to use the bell, an unexpected scene began to happen.

It was not the arrival of enemies, but Lu Juren’s emotions suddenly seemed amiss on the stage. He seemed to be overly engrossed in his performance. Even with Li Huowang’s limited knowledge of the plays, he felt that there was something off with the lines.

“Rouge and powder like enchanting drugs!”

“The lotus-like face is the source of this bewitching charm!”

“The little golden lotus, this malicious spirit!”

“The willow-like waist, akin to a snare for horses!”

“Those charming eyes force me to wear a cuckold’s hat!”

“A pair of jade-like wrists serve as a pillow for a thousand men!”

“Scarlet lips, savored by countless guests!”

“Doesn’t matter if it’s Zhang, Wang, Li, or Zhao!” [\[1\]](#)

“On the mandarin duck pillow, he calls out affectionately!”

As he finished singing the last verse, Luo Juanhua, Lu Juren’s wife, raised the gong and pounded it indignantly, before dashing

toward the backstage with tears streaming down her face.

Clang!

For a moment, the entire stage and the audience fell silent.

Then, the audience erupted in cheers and applause.

“Amazing!”

“Encore, encore!”

“This is so much more energetic than the Nuo Opera! What kind of show is this?”

“Let that lady who just struck the gong come back on the stage. I’ll reward her generously!”

Various coins and silver pieces, and even some food, gradually littered the ground.

This was the most rewarding response the Lu Family Troupe had received in all their years performing.

1. common surnames 📖

Chapter 196 - Kill

As the leader of a theater troupe, Lu Zhuangyuan easily managed to reign in the chaos. He ran up the stage, stood in front of Lu Juren, and apologized to the customers with a smile on his face.

After that, he gave his younger son a look and immediately pulled Lu Juren to the back of the stage.

Lu Xiucan understood what needed to be done and quickly somersaulted onto the stage. He grabbed the gong and used it to quickly collect the money on the stage while performing.

“The Lu family... It seems that they have trouble...” muttered Li Huowang as he approached the carriage. He knew about what had happened to Luo Juanhua within the bandit camp, but there was nothing he could do.

When Li Huowang was close to the carriage, he saw Lu Zhuangyuan raising his smoke pipe and smacking it on his son’s head.

“She’s your wife! How could you say all that on stage?! You are embarrassing yourself and the entire Lu family!” shouted Lu Zhuangyuan.

Lu Juren suddenly grabbed the smoke pipe and pulled it out of his father’s hand, causing the latter to fall over with his eyes wide open as he stared at his son, shocked.

“Embarrassing? What do you mean I am embarrassing the Lu Family? We are performers! We are already the lowest of the low! We are already embarrassed enough! Even prostitutes have a higher status than us! Who else could we even compare ourselves with? Didn’t you see how she acted when she was within the bandit camp? She was laughing with them! She even... did that in front of

the bandits! Father, I've had enough! Why is my life so miserable?!" Lu Juren knelt on the ground and continued pounding his fist on it, despair evident in his eyes.

"Why do you think I was laughing with them? I did it for all of us! If I didn't do that, then they would've killed Cui'er! You think you are the only one who is miserable?! I'M MISERABLE TOO! But I am not a noble... I'm only the wife of a performer. However, even while I'm miserable, I have to endure and pretend like nothing is happening. You think I'm a shameless woman who would sleep with just anyone? What choice did I have?" shouted Luo Juanhuan through her sobs while hugging her large belly.

Looking at this scene, Li Huowang sighed.

The root cause of this situation were the bandits. As long as bandits continued to exist, there would be many others who would suffer the same fate as Luo Juanhua.

The soldiers were supposed to suppress the bandits, but to think that they became the bandits themselves.

Wang Deqiu was right. Soldiers and bandits were more or less the same.

What a fucking horrible place this is.

There was nothing much Li Huowang could do. He whispered to the members of his group and told them to keep everything in mind.

Soon, Sun Baolu and Puppy huddled around Lu Juren while Bai Lingmiao and Chun Xiaoman approached Luo Juanhua.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang approached Lu Zhuangyuan and patted him on the shoulder. "Troupe leader Lu, don't just sit there and stare. The performance has not ended."

Lu Zhuangyuan looked tired; it was as if he had suddenly aged considerably. He walked toward the stage with empty hands. "Juren had never acted like that before..."

However, when he emerged from the backstage, he saw that all

of the customers were gone, and the few remaining residents looked afraid as they congregated near the edges of the town.

Seeing this, Lu Zhuangyuan had no time to care about his family problems and shouted as he ran back inside, “Daoist! Daoist, quick, come out! We have trouble!”

Hearing this, Li Huowang ran out to check the situation while the others prepared themselves to escape. Knowing that something was wrong they quickly packed their belongings and prepared themselves.

“Wait here, I will go and see what’s wrong,” instructed Li Huowang.

Li Huowang immediately hid his sword within his robe and ran toward the entrance of the town.

On the way, he had to pass through a dense group of villagers and camels before he could see what was happening.

The entire town had been surrounded by soldiers!

The soldiers weren’t wearing their standard uniform. Instead, they were all wearing mismatched armors and holding a variety of weapons. Every single one of them had a green “Qiu” character tattooed on their heads.

When Li Huowang saw Hou Laoer within the group carrying a large spear, he immediately knew that they were here for him!

Hou Laoer and the rest of the Small-arms soldiers were all riding horses and carrying the same type of large spear. At this moment, all of them were encircling a massive general.

The general was huge, with a body that was at least four times as large as that of a regular human. The general was wearing full plate armor with a helmet while holding a massive halberd that was at least twelve feet long.

The general just stood there unmoving, but waves of oppressive aura was radiating from their body. Even standing as far as he was, Li Huowang still feel it.

Li Huowang had a bad feeling about it. If he had to describe the general, then he would say that the general was nothing short of a landmine that could blow up any moment.

Meanwhile, the residents of the town buzzed in fear. Even though they were people native to the country of Hou Shu, they looked more uncomfortable than Li Huowang.

“Heavens! It’s the outlaw soldiers!”

“What should we do? We need to run!”

“How can we run? They’ve already surrounded us!”

As he observed the situation, Li Huowang blended into the back of the crowd and thought about how to escape.

They are probably here for me, but most likely don’t know who I am. If they knew, then they would’ve rushed into the town to get to me by now. Should I wait for them to conduct an inspection or make a run for it? They don’t look very disciplined so maybe I can try bribing them...

While Li Huowang was busy thinking about how to escape, a fat man wearing silk robes approached the soldiers. When he got close to the general, he lowered his head and started saying something.

Looking at his outfit, Li Huowang deduced that the fat man was most likely the person in charge of maintaining relations with the outsiders.

This is a busy town where a lot of traffic intersects and numerous outsiders come and go. They probably can’t find me even with the help of the villagers.

But what happened next shocked Li Huowang.

The massive halberd rose and fell down.

Instantly, the fat man's body was split in half.

As this happened, a soft breeze blew past the faces of everyone within the town.

Then, the general stepped forward and removed their helmet.

Li Huowang saw that it was a man with a woman's face... no, it was a woman! Her face also had a tattoo, just like the others; the words "Loyal to the nation" covered half of her face, making her look incredibly vicious.

"Everyone! There's a spy from the kingdom of Si Qi within the town, so please forgive us!" shouted the general.

The general's voice was melodious, but her words caused everyone who heard them to tremble.

After her declaration, she once again wore her helmet.

"Brothers! We will not sheath our weapons today until we kill them all! We need to ensure that the spies do not escape!" commanded the general.

"HA!" Immediately, the soldiers brandished their weapons and pointed them directly at everyone within the town.

Chapter 197 - Longteng

Li Huowang finally realized what was happening as the outlaw soldiers began charging toward town.

These bastards weren't trying to find the spy through verifying people's identities, but through killing the entire town!

Dong~ Dong~ Dong~

The sound of the wardrum struck fear in the hearts of everyone present.

Amidst the chaos, the outlaw soldiers showed no mercy as they continued their charge toward the unarmed civilians.

As he stared at the army, Li Huowang immediately knew that assassinating the general wasn't a good idea.

It had a low probability of being successful, and he didn't know how strong the general was. All he knew was that the general had to be significantly stronger than Wang Deqiu.

The best course of action is to run and escape their encirclement!

After deciding this, Li Huowang chose one of the directions with the least amount of soldiers and immediately ran back into the heart of the town.

At the same time, everyone else started running as well, the entire situation turning chaotic.

When Li Huowang finally got close to the center of the town, he heard the sound of metal ripping through the air.

Everyone, including Li Huowang, turned around and saw that the female general was directly pointing at them with her halbert.

Then, her strong and clear voice resonated in the air, "Charge into the Heavens and Earth and become a dragon! Flying Dragon formation!"

"Kill them all!" The outlaw soldiers shouted and ran into the

town.

Seeing this scene, all the civilians were horrified and the only thing they could think about was escaping.

However, a lot of the people were trampled to death as they tried to flee the scene.

Splat!

The sharp knives held by the soldiers easily stabbed into the bodies of the civilians and took their lives.

The soldiers who were supposed to fight off the enemies were now killing civilians without the slightest remorse.

The civilians started dying in swathes.

On the other hand, the outlaw soldiers enjoyed such a massacre. Some of them even started salivating as they saw the flying blood and flesh.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang continued to run while weaving through the crowd; even so, there were far too many people!

After a while, Li Huowang finally gave up and leapt up onto a roof before finally finding a path back to his group. Then, he ran back as fast as he could.

All of them were still waiting there for him, oblivious to the threat. When he saw that they hadn't tried to blindly run away, Li Huowang sighed in relief.

At this moment, Li Huowang's group was staring at the escaping civilians and feeling anxious. They didn't know what had happened and could only wait for Li Huowang to return.

Bam!

At that moment, Li Huowang suddenly fell from the skies and onto the ground, surprising the rest of them in the process.

"Run! I will explain everything while running! We need to leave the town now; they are killing everyone! Run!" barked Li Huowang.

Even though they didn't know what was happening, none of

them questioned Li Huowang and immediately started running with their carriage in tow.

The horses ran as fast as they could, while those on the carriage held on for dear life.

When he finally had the chance, Li Huowang explained to them what was happening.

“How dare they?! Those murderers!” Jin Shanzhao was livid.

Li Huowang stared at Jin Shanzhao intently. “Do you know them? Do you think you can stop them with your identity?”

Li Huowang didn’t know Jin Shanzhao’s true identity. He was a mysterious old man. If his true identity was that of someone influential within the kingdom, then they might be able to save themselves right now.

Jin Shanzhao shook his head. “The outlaw soldiers have already started massacring all the people within the town. There’s no hope anymore.”

“All the more reason for us to run then!”

At this moment, Li Huowang and the rest were running toward the North exit. Even though the outlaw soldiers had surrounded the entire town, at the very least the North exit was further away from the general, and so they had a higher chance of surviving!

As they ran, they saw the civilians in front of them turn around and start running back.

“Zhao Wu! Hold the reins and don’t let the horses get spooked!” commanded Li Huowang.

Their horse carriages were akin to a boat trying to go up against a strong current, causing them to be slowed down considerably.

Suddenly, the crowd of civilians was no more.

Just as Li Huowang raised his head, he saw something sharp aimed straight for his neck. He twisted his body and saw who it was, the “Qiu” character on their forehead revealing the identity of

the attacker.

Li Huowang's group had finally met up with the encirclement of the outlaw soldiers.

Immediately, Li Huowang unsheathed his sword and swung it as hard as he could, cutting the soldier in half.

“Charge! As long as we exit their encirclement, we will be able to survive!” roared Li Huowang. At the same time, he raised his sword and charged into the encirclement.

The rest of them dared not stop and followed closely behind Li Huowang.

In the face of Li Huowang's attacks, the outlaw soldiers were caught completely off guard; they had never expected there to be a group of fighters hidden within a traveling theater troupe.

Tens of soldiers were dead in no time.

When the soldiers finally reacted, they immediately started working together. They used their spears to keep Li Huowang and the rest at a distance, using their advantage in numbers to stop Li Huowang's attacks.

I can't drag this anymore!

As he thought this, Li Huowang used a metal tong to pull out two of his teeth. The pain shot through his spine accompanied by a sour taste in his mouth. Then, he unfurled the Profound Records and caused the two teeth to explode in front of the soldiers.

Instantly, the white shrapnels tore into the soldiers causing them to cry out in pain. A large group of soldiers died just like that.

Ding ding ding~!

At the same time, the horrid sound of the bronze bell started ringing.

In response, Wandering Gods flew out and started phasing through a large swathe of the soldiers, killing them in the process.

As more and more soldiers died, Li Huowang finally saw a path to escape the encirclement!

Finally—

Just as he had thought that they would be able to escape, Li Huowang was enveloped by a killing intent so intense that he almost crumbled under the pressure.

Li Huowang instantly knew that he was in danger but he couldn't move; it was as if his body had been frozen solid.

At the critical moment, a dragon roar rang out from the sword on Li Huowang's back, neutralizing the killing intent.

Freed from the killing intent, Li Huowang ducked and rolled as the sound of air being torn was heard. A massive halberd flew over and crashed into the position Li Huowang had been in just moments ago.

The impact caused pebbles to fly in all directions, peppering Li Huowang's face and causing him to grimace from the pain.

After a moment, Li Huowang turned around to look in the direction of the town.

Da da da!

A massive horse donned with heavy armor was carrying the female general as she trampled over the civilians and rapidly approached them. At this moment, the horse's legs were stained in red, just like Li Huowang's robes.

As she got close, fear gripped everyone's heart; all of them suddenly felt the urge to give up. Her very presence was enough to cause them to feel despair.

"Hoho, I finally forced you to come out, Si Qi spy." Her voice was quite soothing to hear.

"This sword was given to me! I'm not a spy from the kingdom of Si Qi!" denied Li Huowang.

"You carry the sword of the You family. Also, if I, Peng Longteng, say that you are a spy, then you are one! Who cares if you are really a spy or not?"

Translator's Thoughts

Here's a rendition of Peng Longteng. **Credits to**
格子的乱七八糟 on douyin



Chapter 198 - Move

As it charged toward Li Huowang, the massive horse crushed the corpses of the civilians under its feet.

At the last moment, Li Huowang rolled out of the way and raised his sword, but Peng Longteng's halberd was already being swung toward his face, the wind from the downward slash blowing his hair backward.

Li Huowang dared not use his sword to block such a powerful attack head-on; even if the sword did not break, his bones definitely would.

However, even as Li Huowang dodged, she easily redirected her halberd and stabbed it straight toward him.

At that moment, a massive man suddenly charged in from the side—it was none other than Gao Zhijian!

As soon as he charged in, he swung his mace against the halberd.

Dang!

Gao Zhijian managed to knock the halberd slightly off course.

However, immediately after, she managed to easily hook the halberd back, causing Gao Zhijian to be sent flying away.

Ding ding ding~!

At that moment, the Wandering Gods appeared and charged toward Peng Longteng. But just as they were about to touch her, the Wandering Gods' bodies twisted and missed her completely!

The Wandering Gods dared not touch Peng Longteng who was cloaked in dense killing intent!

As Li Huowang scanned his surroundings, he saw that Gao Zhijian's right arm had been wounded quite badly, to the point that even his bones were showing and he was bleeding profusely.

“I will hold her off, so all of you run now! She only wants me!” shouted Li Huowang.

However, not one of them followed this instruction, choosing to firmly stand right behind him.

At that moment, the sound of horse hooves rang out once again and Peng Longteng stood still. She observed everything that was happening and smiled sadistically. “Brat, looks like they are all very important to you. How about fighting me one-on-one? If you win against me, then I will let all of you go. How about it?”

Without even waiting for his reply, the general pulled on the reins as she once again charged forward.

Seeing Peng Longteng charge toward him, Li Huowang rolled toward the left.

I need to get her down the horse!

As he thought up to this point, he narrowly avoided the halberd and swung his sword toward the horse’s hind leg.

However at that moment, he felt a strange gaze coming from the horse’s body.

Almost as if the horse had already expected his actions, it dodged his attack and delivered a powerful kick, sending Li Huowang flying and crashing into a small house.

As she saw Li Huowang crawl out of the debris, Peng Longteng chuckled. “Not bad for a spy from Si Qi. Looks like you are able to take on some of my attacks.”

Li Huowang just spat out a few mouthfuls of blood as he glared at her.

This general was too strong. If he wanted to survive, then he was going to need to pull out all the stops.

As soon as he made up his mind, Li Huowang unfurled the Profound Records and placed his left arm on it. Then, he took out a dagger and immediately cut his wrist.

As she saw what was happening, Peng Longteng slightly raised

her chin.

At that moment, a dark shadow shot toward Li Huowang's face.

He dodged it, but he realized too late that the shadow was nothing more than a distraction.

Splat!

A massive black spear pierced through Li Huowang's palm, nailing it to the ground.

Meanwhile, Peng Longteng slowly approached him while dragging her halberd against the ground. Then, she picked up the Profound Records and threw it onto the roof of a nearby house.

"To think that spies from Si Qi are now colluding with the crazy bastards from the Ao Jing Sect," muttered Peng Longteng.

On the other hand, Li Huowang snarled at Peng Longteng, questioning her, "Was this what you meant when you proposed fighting one-on-one?"

"Hehe~ You actually believed it? Don't you know that the first rule of battle is to use any and all means to obtain victory? Any and all methods to achieve victory are welcomed here. Just like what we will be doing now. Guys, go kill those performers! But! Kill them slowly; I want them to continue wailing in pain for as long as possible so that this brat can't focus on the battle," ordered Peng Longteng.

As soon as he heard those words, Li Huowang was enraged. "You damned—"

However, he couldn't finish his sentence when he saw Peng Longteng swing her halberd down toward him.

No, I can't die here! Who knows how they will treat Bai Lingmiao and the rest of them once I am dead!

Li Huowang wanted to dodge but he had been pinned to the ground by the spear. He could only watch as the halberd came closer and closer to him.

"Move! MOVE NOW!"

Even as he continued to scream, the halberd stabbed into Li Huowang's skull.

Then, Peng Longteng pulled out the halberd and swung it down once more.

But Li Huowang was unharmed. In fact, there were no wounds on his head. At the same time, Li Huowang suddenly realized that he could move once more. He didn't know what had happened, but there was no time to think. He quickly picked up his sword and climbed up the horse before stabbing his sword at Peng Longteng's helmet.

Peng Longteng kept attacking Li Huowang, but for some reason all of her attacks were landing just a few inches to his left side.

Jiang!

As he stabbed at Peng Longteng's helmet, Li Huowang was surprised to find that he couldn't stab through the helmet despite how sharp the You's family sword was!

Realizing that stabbing wouldn't work, Li Huowang took out the Fiery Scripture and placed it on the helmet. Then, he looked at Peng Longteng pitifully and started chanting.

Soon, the wax on the book melted and slipped into the helmet through the hole as it tried to find a wound to cauterize.

At that moment, the sound of sizzling flesh was heard as Peng Longteng shouted, "Shit! It's in my eyes!"

As she shouted, she pulled up the front guard and quickly tried to remove whatever had entered her helmet.

But in that moment, her hand wasn't the only thing clawing at her face.

Seeing the opening, Li Huowang also stabbed his sword.

In that split second as soon as she sensed the danger, she twisted her head and managed to avoid a fatal blow. At the same time, she raised her halberd to counterattack, but her blow once more landed beside Li Huowang.

Li Huowang did not fail to seize such a big opening. He immediately stepped on the horse's head and stabbed his sword again, this time with even more strength.

Splurt!

Peng Longteng's body stiffened up and fell down from the horse.

"General! The General!" The soldiers shouted and quickly ran toward her.

On the other hand, Li Huowang leapt up from the horse, grabbed the Profound Records before running toward the horse carriage.

"RUN! RUN WHILE THEY ARE STILL CONFUSED! HER SKULL WAS TOO THICK AND I COULDN'T STAB DEEP ENOUGH!" shouted Li Huowang.

Hearing this, Chun Xiaoman rang the bronze bell as hard as she could.

In response, numerous Wandering Gods flew out and slaughtered the soldiers blocking them. The soldiers' morale was quite low after they saw their General falling off her horse, causing them to no longer be able to put up a good fight.

Soon, with the help of the Wandering Gods, Li Huowang and the rest managed to escape.

But they did not stop. They were afraid that the soldiers would catch up to them.

They ran until they reached a fork in the road. At this point they quickly grabbed whatever was necessary before running down the smaller path. At the same time, they directed the horse carriage to run down the main path instead, hoping to use the marks left behind by the horses and the carriage wheels to confuse the soldiers.

They continued to run until some of them could run no more. It was only then that Li Huowang allowed them rest near the base of a

mountain.

There were several large boulders at the base of the mountain that were suitable for them to hide themselves.

Only after calming down did Li Huowang realize just how much of a miracle it was for them to have been able to escape.

What just happened? Why did the general only attack the left side of my body? Is there something on my left?

Li Huowang turned to his left but didn't see anything besides a boulder.

"Senior Li, where are you?" asked Bai Lingmiao.

When he saw that she couldn't find him, Li Huowang panicked a bit.

Are her eyes alright? How can she not see me here?

He stood up and walked toward her.

Just as he was walking toward her, everyone shouted in shock and took a few steps back.

He looked at what all of them were staring at and once again turned to his left.

This time, he finally saw it. He saw a figure in a red Daoist robe, and half a head.

The man was split in half, one part stuck inside the boulder while the other was outside.

Li Huowang instinctively grabbed his sword and slowly retreated.

However, the figure did the same thing as Li Huowang as well. As soon as Li Huowang took three steps back, the man did the same and exited from the boulder.

At that moment, Li Huowang finally realized who it was after looking at the robes and the bag of torture tools.

It was himself!

After a moment, Li Huowang looked down and saw that his body was invisible. There was nothing there.

It was as if he had turned into a floating camera!

Li Huowang raised his head and stared at his 'body double'.
The 'body double' mimicked what he did.

“Good Heavens, it’s moving...”

Chapter 199 - Change

His body was indeed moving, but in a very convoluted way.

When Li Huowang straightened his back, he saw that his body did the same in front of him. Then, he raised his right arm and it once again mimicked his actions.

There was no mistaking that it was his body. Li Huowang looked down again and saw that even though he could feel his body, there was nothing there—it was just that he couldn't see it.

He touched the coin veil and saw the image of his body doing the same thing in front of him.

It was as if Li Huowang was performing a shadow play and the image of his body was the shadow.

However, compared to knowing what this was, Li Huowang currently was more concerned about how this situation came to be and how he could go back to normal.

Wait, I remember that earlier when I was nailed to the ground, the general had been constantly striking the left side of my body!

Li Huowang recalled how the general kept attacking to the left of his body. That was the only reason he managed to find such a big opening to attack her.

He hadn't thought about it before, but it seemed that the general had been attacking his illusion.

What is going on? How did I suddenly obtain this superpower? It's... it's as if there is a bug in the world... Is this world fake?

Li Huowang felt scared when he thought about the possibility of this world being fake.

As he stared at his illusion, the situation felt more and more surreal.

Soon, his breath became rapid and he quickly hugged his own

head. He kept reassuring himself that this world was the real one as he tried to calm himself down.

No! This is the real world! I cannot think otherwise. This must be a special power that belongs to a Strayed One! Yes, that must be it! I've been unlucky for so long that I finally got a stroke of good fortune! Li Huowang, stop doubting yourself! This is the real world and the other side is fake!

When Bai Lingmiao saw how Li Huowang looked to be in a lot of pain, she approached the illusion and tried to hug him, only to pass right through.

"I'm alright, I'm alright," said Li Huowang as he recovered a little and took a few steps back.

However, Lu Zhuangyuan was horrified as he asked in a meek tone of voice, "What do you mean you are alright? We can't even touch your body. You have become a ghost! Daoist, did you forget about your own death?"

At this point, no one could help Li Huowang; he could only think of a way himself.

After half an hour, Li Huowang finally calmed down.

"I'm not dead, it's just that my body gained a new ability," said Li Huowang.

While they were all resting, Li Huowang roughly told them about what had happened just now.

"Oh~ So it's one of your superpowers." Lu Zhuangyuan nodded, finally understanding what had happened.

Meanwhile, Bai Lingmiao wandered around and finally touched Li Huowang's invisible body. She was quite worried as she asked, "Senior Li, will you remain like this for your entire life?"

"Wait, let me try something," said Li Huowang as he took a deep breath while trying to remember the feeling from before.

Move! Move back and overlap with my real body!

He kept trying for a while and opened his eyes. He saw that the

illusion of his body had once more overlapped with himself!

But it was not a complete overlap.

He saw that only the top half of the illusion was above ground. The bottom half was buried completely underground.

Even though the illusion showed him to be stuck halfway into the ground, Li Huowang's real body was still above ground, or at least his feet were still stepping on solid ground.

His illusion had overlapped with him at the wrong height.

"Senior Li, I think I know what this superpower is! It's a method to travel underground, right?" Puppy was excited to see what Li Huowang could do.

On the other hand, Li Huowang couldn't be bothered to answer him as he tried again.

When he opened his eyes this time around, he saw that his illusion had come above ground, but he was now staring at the illusion from the top down! It was as if he was viewing himself in the third person view.

As he saw his illusion mimicking his every move down below, Li Huowang felt as though he was stuck in a game.

Again! I must get back!

Li Huowang tried again as he willed his body and illusion to overlap once more.

However, it was not as easy as he had thought. Rather than achieving it by just saying the word over and over again in his mind, it was more like he had to channel a very intense feeling of moving through space. It was very difficult to pull it off successfully.

After persevering for two whole hours, Li Huowang finally managed to overlap his illusion with his body, albeit in a somewhat imperfect manner.

At this moment, his vision was slightly above his eye level, somewhere around his forehead.

This is the best I can do for now. We still need to escape.

“Alright, we’ve rested for long enough. Let’s leave now and try to escape from Hou Shu as fast as we can,” said Li Huowang.

Hearing this, everyone nodded and grabbed whatever belongings they had left.

“My love, I can’t run anymore. I’m still pregnant...”

At that moment, Li Huowang heard Luo Juanhua whisper to her husband, causing him to look back and see Lu Juren carry his wife without any objections.

The once prosperous town had now been reduced to a pile of rubble. Some of the houses were still burning, but no one bothered with them. The dead bodies of the civilians were piled up in a small mountain.

On the other hand, the outlaw soldiers were all sitting beside the various fire places they had made, drinking and eating meat.

At that moment, a pale fat man was holding a handkerchief to his nose as he weaved through all the rubble. He accidentally stepped on something slippery and saw it was an entire section of intestines, causing him to let out a scream, “Aiya! Good Heavens!”

Seeing this scene, the other outlaw soldiers all laughed.

“Officer Cao, come and have a taste. We just roasted it,” offered one of the outlaw soldiers without any warning.

“Uwek~” At this point, Cao Hai couldn’t stand it any more and started vomiting.

“Relax, it’s pork, not human meat. See, it’s hoof is still on there,” said the soldier who offered the roasted meat.

Cao Hai felt slightly better when he saw there was indeed a hoof attached to the meat. Even so, he carefully declined the pork leg.

“I’m looking for General Peng to discuss something. Have you seen her? I checked the main camp, but she’s not there,” asked Cao

Hai.

“If even you don’t know, then how would I know? I was busy taking my share of money and women until just now,” said the soldier.

Just as Cao Hai was thinking about where to look for the general next, someone suddenly extended their hands into his pants.

Startled, Cao Hai took a few steps back and saw that it was a young man. On the other hand, the man was looking at his hand in surprise.

“Aiya~ I think I just felt something over there. Old man Cao, it seems that there’s still a little bit leftover. Were you thinking about extending your bloodline when you left behind some of it?” asked the young man.

Cao Hai ignored his teasing and hurriedly asked, “Hou Wen, you are one of the General’s Small-arms soldiers. You must know where she is, right?”

“Hehehe, do you want to know where she is?” Hou Wen chuckled and gently patted Cao Hai’s butt. However, when Cao Hai retreated in surprise, Hou Wen patted the front instead.

“Haiya, stop teasing me! I’m really looking for the General! This concerns her future!” shouted Cao Hai.

Hearing this, Hou Wen stopped his teasing and pointed toward a house. “The General is currently injured. So, be careful; she’s in a bad mood.”

After confirming the direction, Cao Hai ignored everything else and ran toward the house Hou Wen had pointed out. It was one of the very few houses that still remained intact.

Translator's Thoughts

Just to make it clear, he can throw out an illusion of his body and move it anywhere while rendering his real body invisible.

Chapter 200 - Both Parties

Cao Hai gingerly opened the door and saw Peng Longteng lying down on a bed. At this moment, there were two doctors bandaging the wound on her neck.

“Aiya~!” Cao Hai approached her and started to stomp the ground beside her bed in frustration. “Are you crazy? You just killed thousands of civilians!”

Peng Longteng replied with her eyes closed, “Who would want to fight for the country if they don’t pay us? It’s so much harder to ask them for money than it is to kill them. Since the nation is having such a difficult time paying us, I might as well as take matters into my own hands. After all, I cannot mistreat my soldiers after fighting the war for so long!”

“You! You—” Cao Hai was infuriated.

“It’s just a small town of a few thousand people... why are you so anxious about it? I’m already very merciful for not plundering a city instead,” said Peng Longteng.

“You talk as if it were that easy! Those were all the civilians of Hou Shu!” shouted Cao Hai as he wiped his tears. “Everyone within the palace is busy dealing with the Natural Disaster and you are just adding to their troubles! You just offended all of them!”

When she heard this, Peng Longteng sat up and pushed the doctors away, “I don’t care about the Natural Disaster. Even if the Heavens were to fall, the soldiers need their money! And why are you so afraid? It’s not like this is not the first time a Natural Disaster has occurred.”

“If you wanted money, you could have just taken it. Why did

you kill all of them?” asked Cao Hai. However, even as he complained, he still used his handkerchief to wipe the blood off of Peng Longteng’s armor.

“We just came back from the battlefield and had lost quite a few men. Then, we didn’t even get our money. My soldiers were starting to reach their breaking point, and if I hadn’t done anything then it would have caused a mutiny within my camp,” said Peng Longteng.

Hearing this, Cao Hai’s voice became soft, “There’s no way you will be able to cover this up. Those within the palace should already know about this by now...”

“So what if they know about it? You think I don’t know how they would act? They already embezzled the money that was meant for my soldiers, so they should have already known how I would act. Relax, they won’t make a big deal about it and their superiors will even work to cover it up. If word of this got out, then everyone would be at a disadvantage. This is the best situation for them. Not only do they not have to pay us, we still receive our money too. It’s a win-win situation. Plus, I have my own justification. We already discovered that there were several Si Qi spies within our kingdom,” said Peng Longteng. As she recalled the spies, her face became gloomy and she touched the left side of her face.

The tattoo on the left of her face had mostly been burned off, leaving behind only the character representing ‘loyal’. Even this tattoo had become distorted, giving her a much more fearsome appearance. Her left eye was also blinded. It was now white in color.

“Damned brat! Not only did he escape, he even managed to injure me! Officer, go and find the Surveillance Bureau. Tell them to find the location of the spy and let me know immediately so that I can go and kill him!” commanded Peng Longteng.

“Sigh, just let it go. Since he’s from the Ao Jing Sect, it’s no

longer under your jurisdiction. Let's head back to the camp," said Cao Hai.

"No! I am Peng Longteng, and I refuse to leave this grudge alone! Since he offended me, then I will kill him!" said Peng Longteng.

"But what are you going to do? You can't just bring your soldiers and mobilize all of Hou Shu. You are not the Emperor," asked Cao Hai.

"I am a General, someone that protects the people from their enemies. I will destroy all of the enemies of Hou Shu," declared Peng Longteng.

Cao Hai was speechless. "Since when did they harm Hou Shu? Weren't they just beaten and chased off by you?"

"No, they are the enemy!" retorted Peng Longteng as she smashed the bed with arm. Her immense strength caused the solid wooden frame of the bed to break apart.

At that moment, a mace was swung downward, instantly killing a two-meter long snake just like that.

Gao Zhijian took the snake and smiled happily. Then, he placed it on his shoulder and walked back to their resting place.

The mountains were filled with boulders and stones, but at least it was not as barren as before; there was some green vegetation here.

Soon, Gao Zhijian returned and saw everyone inside a cave.

"Make... Make... Make..." stuttered Gao Zhijian as he brought the snake inside the cave.

"Make what? Senior Li told us we can't light up a fire. Go and eat your ration," reminded one of them.

However, Jin Shanzhao thought otherwise. He cheerfully took the snake and said, "We can still eat this without needing a fire. We can use it to make sashimi."

As he spoke, he took out a small knife before carefully skinning the snake and slicing the flesh into small pieces. Then, he plated the neatly cut pieces of flesh nicely.

When he was done, Jin Shanzhao took a pair of bamboo chopsticks, and used it to dip a piece of snake flesh into a chili dipping sauce and ate it. “Mm~ It’s delicious. Come and try it yourselves.”

Hearing this, everyone huddled together and started eating.

Puppy was eating happily with everyone else when he suddenly stopped and shouted for Li Huowang, “Senior Li, come and eat. It’s surprisingly tasty. It reminds me of fatty pork.”

But Li Huowang ignored him. At this moment, he was in the middle of training himself to utilize his newfound power.

Shua!~

When Li Huowang opened his eyes again, he saw that everything around him had turned upside down. Directly below him was his own head.

Closer... Closer... Careful... Don’t go too fast now...

Li Huowang carefully willed himself to get back to his original position as his line of vision slowly became one with his body.

This time, he managed to overlap himself perfectly.

Li Huowang could finally overlap his illusion and himself perfectly after training for so many days.

He then looked around and saw Bun. After a moment of thought, he willed his illusion to appear directly in front of Bun.

Bun was surprised by Li Huowang’s sudden appearance and fell backward. Then, it crawled back up and started wagging its tail at Li Huowang’s illusion.

Li Huowang was happy with the results of his training.

I don’t know how I got it, but this power is very useful. At least I will be able to use it to confuse and surprise the opponent next time around. But I still need to practice more to become used to it.

Li Huowang's current limit was projecting his illusion anywhere within ten feet of himself. During this time, he wouldn't be injured even if the enemy attacked his illusion, just like how the General failed to injure him before.

But he knew that he wouldn't be able to use it frequently; the opponents he would be faced with will not be idiots. They wouldn't be surprised a second time.

"Senior Li, how is your training coming along?" asked Bai Lingmiao as she brought him a bowl of snake sashimi.

"Not bad," replied Li Huowang as he picked up his chopsticks and began eating.

Even though snake sashimi wasn't that delicious, it was still a much better meal than eating dried rations.

"Senior Li, how much longer until we are out of Hou Shu?" asked Bai Lingmiao.

Hearing this question, Li Huowang stopped eating and took out Jin Shanzhao's map. "We can't walk on the main paths anymore, and so we have to take numerous detours. We probably can't travel through some of the smaller paths either. However, given that they don't know where we are, we at least have the advantage in that regard. We will arrive at this place in two days, and then we have to travel for another week before we arrive at the border. And since we cannot go through the official gate, we will have to take yet another detour and hike out of Hou Shu. After that, we will be safe."

"But... we can't travel for that long. Even if we eat our rations sparingly, our food supply will at most last another two days," pointed out Bai Lingmiao, worried.

Chapter 201 - Village

Having returned their appearances to normal, Li Huowang's group continued to travel along a muddy dirt path. At this point, it had been several days since they had escaped from that town.

Currently, all of them had weary looks on their faces; they had not been eating well and were not dressed properly, so this outcome was inevitable.

When they got to a slightly flattened area, Li Huowang used his sleeve to wipe the sweat from his forehead. "Let's take a break."

Hearing this, everyone immediately sat down on the ground, panting heavily.

Bai Lingmiao carefully took out their last yellow biscuit and broke it into half, and kept one of the halves. Then, she passed the remaining half to Li Huowang, "Senior Li, have some food."

Li Huowang looked at her and pinched her shrunken tummy.

This action made Bai Lingmiao feel embarrassed, but she didn't deny him.

"Don't hold yourself back; I know that you have a large appetite. Eat while you can, and don't go hungry. I'll figure the rest out," said Li Huowang.

"I'm really not hungry. You can have it," said Bai Lingmiao as she once again pushed the biscuit over.

However, Li Huowang didn't bother to take it. Instead, he opened the map while trying to think of ways for them to re-stock. They were running out of supplies and needed to find ways to replenish them soon.

He had considered robbing those bandits, but dismissed the idea when he thought of the relationship between the bandits and the outlaw soldiers.

It was difficult to tell whether or not those bandits were acting as that woman's sentries.

Given how difficult it was for them to shake them off earlier, he felt that it was not worth it to provoke the outlaw soldiers just for some food.

Robbing the commoners?

However, Li Huowang immediately dismissed that notion. He would definitely not do such dastardly things like his own Master. He was Li Huowang, not Dan Yangzi.

He suddenly found that it was indeed quite challenging to obtain enough funds and food, yet not rob the bandits or oppress the commoners.

At that moment, Puppy snickered as he walked over, and reached for the biscuit in Bai Lingmiao's hands before being smacked away by her.

"Senior Bai, please give it to me. Senior Li is not hungry, but I definitely am," said Puppy.

"No. There's only a small amount of ration left. Eat your own," replied Bai Lingmiao.

"I've finished mine," said Puppy.

"Then you'll have to go hungry for a few days. You won't die from starvation so quickly," said Bai Lingmiao.

Hearing this, Puppy dejectedly scratched his ribs under his clothing. He turned around to look at the others nearby. But this time, he didn't find anyone else eating. Even the most accommodating Yang Xiaohai didn't have any spare food for him. Gradually, his eyes focused on the group of women they had rescued from the bandit hideout.

"If I had known that it would come down to this, then we should have left these ladies behind. They don't do anything besides waste our food. They are just a burden," muttered Puppy.

Those words instantly caused the women to feel afraid as they

huddled together helplessly.

“Are you even a man? Why are you so full of complaints?” said Chun Xiaoman, unable to stand his complaints.

“I’m just saying it as it is. Am I wrong?” retorted Puppy.

“Don’t... abandon us! We can be useful! We know a place where there’s food. It’s quite close to this place. We can take you there,” interjected one of the women.

Those words caused everyone to look toward the group of women.

The speaker was a woman with a big mouth. From the looks of it, she could easily attract the attention of the bandits, evidently not just because of her big mouth.

As she felt everyone staring at her, she drooped her head uneasily.

“Is what you are saying true? Can you really help us find food?” Li Huowang walked over and asked. He suddenly realized that he had been wasting his time and energy. With the help from this group of locals from Hou Shu, he did not even need a map.

“There’s a village nearby... And my fourth aunt has fields there... We can go and ask...” said the woman.

Hearing this, Li Huowang studied the map in his hands once again, but found that there were no markings close to their location.

“Hehe... There are too many small villages around here. I can’t mark them all,” Jin Shanzhao was embarrassed as he came over and explained himself.

“Why bother pretending if you don’t know. Don’t delay our Daoist’s matters,” ridiculed Lu Zhuangyuan.

Hearing this, Jin Shanzhao’s face turned red. “I’m not lying! Do you know how many such villages there are in Hou Shu?!”

“Alright, stop chatting. Let’s go over and see. Bring us to your fourth aunt’s place,” said Li Huowang, his words causing everyone

to stand up.

The entire group followed the big-mouthed lady as she led them toward a distant rocky mountain. When they arrived at the barren foot of the mountain, she did not stop, and continued climbing up the empty mountain.

Initially, there was still a semblance of a path, but later, it disappeared completely, and they had to get on four limbs to continue climbing upward.

There were several times when Li Huowang wondered whether this woman was lying to them. After all, this place did not seem like it had a village.

After a lot of effort, when they finally reached the top, they were greeted with a paradise-like scene.

This was a flat-topped mountain, and there was actually a village at the peak.

More importantly, there were lush green fields, a rare sight in the barren lands of Hou Shu.

“Which lunatic... Did they have nothing better to do? Why would they build a village all the way up here? I’m exhausted,” Puppy complained as he rubbed his aching legs.

“I’m guessing that it’s probably to avoid heavy taxes, levies and conscription. There are quite a few possibilities,” conjectured one of them.

“Ah, when you think about it, the people suffer a lot. There are so many things to worry about,” said Puppy.

“Are the Hou Shu officials really so strict? They even force people up the mountains. Our officials are a lot more understanding, and they only collect half of the harvest each season. The farmers are also exempt from forced manual labor,” asked Lu Zhuangyuan. He found a cheap sense of satisfaction when he compared himself to others.

As they conversed, Li Huowang had already confirmed the

location of the fourth aunt of that big-mouthed lady, and started heading in that direction.

This place appeared to be quite peaceful, and each house was bright and clean. It was like a paradise that was unaffected by the turmoil outside.

“Senior Li, our village is quite similar to this. Even though we only have a few people, they are all good folk,” said Bai Lingmiao. She seemed to recall something as a faint sense of joy appeared on her face.

When we finally settle down, living with others in a place like this seems like a good choice.

Li Houwang thought to himself.

At that moment, he heard noises coming from within the houses with his keen senses.

A big group of outsiders suddenly entering the village drew the attention, as well as hostility of the villagers. But as the big-mouthed lady accurately reported her fourth aunt's name, the hostility on their faces lessened.

Things seemed to be progressing quite smoothly until they heard that this distant relative had come here to borrow food; as soon as they heard that, they refused to open their doors.

Seeing this, the big-mouthed lady stood before the closed door and pleaded with tears streaming down her face, “I... I don't know... where else to go...”

On the other hand, the people standing around were starting to get impatient and frustrated. They had to continue to endure their hunger as they had nothing to eat.

Translator's Thoughts

Here's Jin Shanzhao! Credits to 格子的乱七八

糟 on douyin



Chapter 202 - Harvest

The atmosphere turned heavy in an instant.

Just then, Chun Xiaoman noticed that Li Huowang had no reaction, and was about to speak but stopped.

"Shh," Li Huowang placed a finger on his lips, motioning for her to be quiet. Then, he tilted his head toward the south and listened carefully. After a while, a rare smile appeared on his face. "Don't worry, the food issue has been resolved."

As the others watched him, Li Huowang's body gradually shifted and slowly phased through the nearby wall.

"Wait here for me; I'll be back shortly," his voice echoed from nowhere.

"Ah, this is what my second uncle mentioned, the art of passing through walls. The gentleman is truly exceptional in every way," commented Lu Zhuangyuan.

On the other hand, Li Huowang concealed his illusion within the wall, while his body continued to remain in a hidden state. He stayed close to the wall and headed toward another building. On the way, he passed through the courtyard where they reared chickens and then stepped into the room. This allowed him to hear the conversation of the people inside more closely.

"Son, you aren't there yet. Your skills are not fully developed. Go and read the Liar's Scripture ten more times," said a man.

"Yes..." replied a youth.

"Don't blame your father for being strict; this is the foundation of our Wu Family. All of our family's assets were amassed by our ancestors by swindling them from others one at a time," said the man.

Li Huowang sighed softly. From the looks of it, this place was

not the utopia it seemed. People here actually used their skills of deception to make it big.

But this fact just worked in Li Huowang's favor. Now, he wouldn't need to worry about his conscience when engaging in illegal activities to take care of their urgent needs.

Who knew that the first time I made use of my new ability would be to steal things. I had originally thought of earning money through honest means such as escorting goods and people. But now I'm actually doing things like this. Perhaps legitimate work is not meant for me.

As he contemplated this, he began to search through the entire building.

Soon, he found a hidden compartment and opened it. It was filled with all sorts of silver and gold ornaments, with various styles and varying levels of wear and tear. It was obvious that these were ill-gotten goods.

Seeing these items, Li Huowang's face lit up in delight; he had just found their travel expenses! After a moment, he quickly found a bag and filled it up with the pieces of silver and gold.

As this was happening, the father and son duo were still discussing their arts of deception in the next room over.

"Son, you're the only seedling of our family. You must learn well. If you don't, then our family's legacy will be at risk," said the man.

"I have memorized all of it, Dad. I will study hard and not let you down," replied the youth.

Hearing this, a trace of disdain appeared on Li Huowang's face. This bunch of liars actually felt proud about being from a family of liars.

After making one round, Li Huowang found their cellar and walked in. Here, he found all sorts of preserved meats and salted vegetables. He quickly brought all these outside, and then tossed them behind the wall to the people there.

This was a very strange scene. The vegetable jar would float up by itself, come to the corner of the wall, and then run off once again.

If others were to witness this, they would definitely be very shocked.

Meanwhile, the father continued to speak to his son. “When you go down the mountain this time around, use your arts of deception to find yourself a wife. I will only consider you a worthy disciple when you succeed in this endeavor.”

“Dad, can you actually deceive someone into marrying you?” asked the youth.

“Nonsense! As long as you put your heart and mind to it, you most certainly can. Back then, your mom was also hoodwinked by me, and she’s still in the dark even now,” said the father.

The more Li Huowang heard them talk, the angrier he felt. After a while, he suddenly stopped what he was doing.

Should I just kill them?

Because of his past with the Sitting Oblivion Dao, Li Huowang felt extreme hostility toward any and all liars, to the point that he felt that it was best to kill off all liars.

“Daoist, you can’t do that. They are indeed in the wrong, but that doesn’t mean that they deserve the death penalty.”

The appearance of a sudden voice beside caused Li Huowang to jump. When he turned toward the voice, he saw that the voice belonged to Monk, someone he hadn’t seen for quite some time.

Monk circled around Li Huowang and started nagging him with his little pearls of wisdom.

After a while of contemplation, Li Huowang finally decided to give up on the idea.

Monk was right; he shouldn’t kill them. He couldn’t just go around killing to deal with issues. That would only make him more and more radical; if he only held a hammer in his hands, then

everything he saw would look like nails.

While a death sentence could be avoided, a life sentence was inevitable. He had decided that he would completely empty their house and allow them to savor the feeling of losing everything.

After coming to his decision, Li Huowang emptied everything from their house, taking away everything as long as it was edible or worth some money.

“Son, when you deceive others, you can’t just make things up. It is necessary to use a mixture of truth and falsehoods. That’s how you will get others to believe you,” explained the father.

“Dad, I know that. But how much truth should be mixed with falsehoods? The Liar’s Scripture does not elaborate on that,” questioned the youth.

“Fool! That obviously depends on who you are dealing with. When dealing with those that are easier to deceive, use less truth and more lies. Against those that are less believing, especially the more stubborn types, speak more truth in front of them. Then, they will believe you when you try to deceive them later. Remember: a competent liar’s words must have some truth within!”

“I understand.”

Li Huowang was about to leave, but after overhearing their conversation, he went back into the room. When he emerged again, he was holding a slightly worn out book with the words “Liar’s Scripture” written on it.

I’ll let you guys lie even more!

“How’s it going? Did you guys get everything?” asked Li Huowang as his illusory body merged with his actual body and he appeared before the others once again.

“Yes, we got everything; it’s to the point that we can’t fit anymore. But, Senior Li, where did you get all these items from?” asked Puppy, already munching on a piece of cured meat.

“That’s good. Come, we will talk on the way,” said Li

Huowang.

As they left the village, the miserable cries of the father-son duo rang out in Li Huowang's ears before gradually fading away.

"Dad! Our Liar's Scripture has been stolen!"

"Dad! Our chickens have been stolen!!"

"Dad! The pots on our stove have been stolen!!!"

After a lot of effort, they finally managed to move everything down from the rugged mountain path.

When they looked at all the heavy things that they were holding, everyone's faces were filled with joy; they wouldn't need to go hungry anymore.

The first thing they did when they got down the mountain was to find a source of water, make a fire, and enjoy a meal.

After they had eaten their fill, their anxieties disappeared, and even their tempers improved.

"Sister, I apologize for my thoughtless words from before."

Puppy beamed as he once again approached those women.

"Get away! Who doesn't know what your actual thoughts are at this point? Once you're full, you directly start thinking about dirty things," said Xiaoman, shooing him away.

"Sister Xiaoman, look at the way you're talking. My words were not intended to harm anyone, but were for the greater good..." said Puppy, trying to defend himself.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang listened to them bickering before reaching into his pocket and passing the heavier bags to Bai Lingmiao, "This is the loot from those liars. There are quite a few pieces of gold and silver; you can count them."

"Okay," replied Bai Lingmiao.

As watched the others who were now full after their meal, Li Huowang finally felt at ease.

They had managed to resolve their worry about supplies, and now all they had to do was to get out of Hou Shu. Then, their

current troubles would be over.

He pondered for a moment, then flipped through the Liar's Scripture that he had gotten earlier.

There's actually a manual that specializes in teaching people the art of deception. It's my first time seeing something like this.

Heh, there are even tactics and strategies for deception here.

Originally, Li Huowang had just been planning to pass some time by flipping through the book. But as he continued to look through it, his expression became more solemn.

He found that the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao had also used some of the tactics mentioned in the book.

The Sitting Oblivion Dao's words had indeed contained a mixture of truth and falsehoods!

Chapter 203 - True? False?

“What happened to Senior Li?”

“I don’t know, he was fine until just a moment ago. How come he seems like he suddenly got possessed after glancing through that book?”

“Junior Bai, do you want to go and take a look? Is his illness acting up again?”

Under their urging, Bai Lingmiao nervously walked over and squatted beside Li Huowang. She asked, “Senior Li, are you... alright?”

As she spoke, Bai Lingmiao sneaked a glance at the rows of words that Li Huowang was staring at. She was illiterate and did not know what they meant, but from the looks of it, they seemed to be important to him.

When she saw that Li Huowang didn’t respond, Bai Lingmiao paused, then took out the whip that she used to knock the drum. Then, she used it to knock the book aside, sending it flying.

Senior Li had been reading this book before he became like this. Perhaps it is something ominous.

She then asked him again, “Senior Li, are you alright?”

On the other hand, Li Huowang, who usually had heightened senses, now could not hear what the others were saying. He was entirely focused on the lines of text that he had written on the ground.

I am Peng Zhi, one of the Three Corpses. (False)

I am Hong Zhong, one of the three leaders of Sitting Oblivion Dao. Earlier, the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao lied to me

because I instructed them to do so. (False)

I killed the people in the dead town. (False)

Among the members of Sitting Oblivion Dao, there is a high-ranking person who is also a Strayed One. He has lived to the age of 190, and has completely shaken off the hallucinations brought about by being a Strayed One. (?)

As Li Huowang looked at the fourth line, he contemplated various possibilities.

Could this be real?

Since everyone wanted to capture Strayed Ones, he knew that they were clearly valuable. If they could make use of Strayed Ones, then why could the Strayed Ones themselves not use their own powers?

Due to his newly acquired abilities, Li Huowang deduced that the potential of a Strayed One far surpassed what he had imagined.

If there's a way, then that would mean that this illness can be cured! Then, I can become a normal person. No, I may even be able to completely control this strength. If that were the case, then no one would dare to deceive or harm me anymore!

With excitement bubbling within him, Li Huowang felt a surge of strength course through his body. Even his mood turned from being gloomy to becoming more impassioned.

However, he gradually calmed himself down. Everything hinged on one major premise—that the Sitting Oblivion Dao member was speaking the truth back then.

But based on their past interactions, it was rather uncertain.

Li Huowang did not know the probability of the last statement being true. But even if there was only the tiniest sliver of a chance, it was already extremely tempting for him.

After all, he was desperate.

His desire was not just for more power, but it was for a way out of his suffering.

His random bouts of switching between reality and hallucinations was too tormenting. He did not want to go through the excruciating pain he had gone through before; it was something that was even worse than death.

I can't do anything right now, but after we escape from Hou Shu, I can start gathering information on this slowly, and analyze it rationally.

I also need to be cautious, and not rashly believe any of the words uttered by the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. Be it true or false, I need to take things one step at a time, only using the truths as my reference.

After sorting out his thoughts, he stood up. When he looked around, he noticed that the others were watching him with strange expressions.

“Why is everyone staring at me? Is there something on my face?” asked Li Huowang.

“No, there’s nothing,” said Yang Xiaohai as he tried to pick up the large pot and place it on his back. However, Gao Zhijian suddenly reached out and lifted it with his big hand.

At the same time, the rest of them also started to pack up their belongings, as though they were preparing to set off.

Li Huowang looked around, then picked up the Liar’s Scripture that was lying in the distance, and started preparing to continue their journey.

But at this point, he suddenly had a thought.

Hold on! Could those two liars also be from the Sitting Oblivion Dao? Are they planning to deceive me again? No, I need to go back there.

With a grim look on his face, he threw the Liar’s Scripture on the ground, and started heading back toward the flat-topped mountain.

The others were bewildered by this, unable to understand what was going on. For a while, everyone remained silent.

“I’ll keep an eye on him, in case his illness acts up on the way,” Chun Xiaoman said, then picked up her sword and followed him.

As the rest of them waited, four hours quickly passed and it started turning dark. At that moment, they saw Li Huowang once again coming down from the flat-topped mountain with Chun Xiaoman following behind him with a disturbed look.

On the other hand, Li Huowang’s expression was clearly better than it had been before he had gone up the mountain; it was as though a heavy weight had been lifted from his shoulders.

“What happened?” Puppy ran to Chun Xiaoman and whispered.

“Those two liars are pitiful. It’s really terrible. They were just deceiving others, and did not deserve to die,” said Xiaoman.

“Why did Senior Li do that?” asked Puppy, surprised.

Faced with this question, Chun Xiaoman hesitated, unsure of how to explain. “He... wanted to see how many faces those two had. Evidently, they only had one face each.”

Hearing this, Puppy hissed, his scalp tingling.

“Quit chatting. We should hit the road before it’s completely dark. Don’t forget that we are still being pursued,” said Li Huowang.

Li Huowang’s words prompted both of them to pick up their pace and catch up with the others. They both stopped discussing what had happened on the flat-topped mountain.

Just then, another unexpected event occurred as they were preparing to set off.

“Senior Li, what’s happening? Are you okay?”

At this moment, Li Huowang had an extremely distressed expression on his face as he clutched his head with both hands. He shouted, “...chains... Chain me up quickly! It’s coming!”

“Senior Li, we don’t have the chains! They were all on the carriage!”

“Then quickly dig a hole and bury me! Hurry! Don’t let me run

around!”

Before they had finished digging the hole, Li Huowang had already returned to a ward filled with the disinfectants. There was a person standing before him. It was a young, bespectacled man in a white coat.

The man smiled slightly and pushed his glasses up. “Li Huowang? You’re finally awake? Let me introduce myself. I’m your attending physician, Dr. Hou. How are you feeling now? It seems that you have been having fewer and fewer periods of wakefulness compared to before.”

Li Huowang looked around and asked, “Where’s my mom?”

Hearing this, a warm smile spread across Dr. Hou’s face, and he said amiably, “Your mom had something to attend to outside. She had been here until just a moment ago, but you had not yet awoken. Li Huowang, if you truly care about your mom, then you need to cooperate with my treatment. The sooner you recover, the earlier you can repay her for all she has done for you. Let’s have a chat. I know you think that this place is a hallucination. That’s alright, then how about we talk about your “real world” there? From the looks of it, many... interesting things have happened over there.”

Chapter 204 - Wang Wei

When he heard Dr. Hou reveal his identity, Li Huowang immediately turned away and stopped talking. He had no interest in listening to the nonsense of a doctor within the hallucination.

When Dr. Hou saw his patient's resistance, he did not say much either. He just tapped a few words on his tablet and left the room.

As soon as he stepped out, Li Huowang heard a new pair of footsteps entering the room. "Little buddy, I heard from Dr. Hou that you are awake. Can you go to the restroom by yourself? I'd rather not have to change your catheter bag. Please take some pity on me."

Even without opening his eyes, Li Huowang recognized this distinctive voice with its characteristic chattering. It belonged to Nurse Wang who had talked to him over the phone.

Suddenly, a warm towel was placed on his face and it began rubbing. "Here, young master, let me wash your face."

Li Huowang pushed the towel aside and glared at the newcomer. This was a plump man with an unmemorable face. There was a blue nurse's cap on his head, and he was also wearing a blue nurse's uniform. The only distinctive feature on his face was a mole on the left side of his chin.

"Ah? Young master, you are awake? Do you need my help with anything?" asked Nurse Wang.

Li Huowang looked at him, annoyed. "Can you stop talking? Do you enjoy chatting with mentally ill patients? Aren't you afraid that you'll go insane yourself?"

"Well, mentally ill patients are quite interesting. Yesterday, the patient in bed 89 next door was being quite picky with his food. Do you know why? He said that the eggplants seemed shifty, and that

he was afraid they would do something bad to his tummy. Hahaha!” laughed Nurse Wang.

After laughing, Nurse Wang resumed his duties. He picked up the urinary catheter bag and headed to the bathroom to empty it, and then he returned.

“Your urine is too yellow. Looks like you’ve become more heaty. Young people are really quite something; it’s even possible to become heaty through hospital food,” commented Nurse Wang. Then, without waiting for Li Huowang to reply, he continued, “Hey, kid, back at the nurses’ station, I heard that you say that you obtained some supernatural abilities? Why, have you turned into an Immortal over there?”

“Is that any of your business?” asked Li Huowang. This Nurse Wang was like a fly that buzzed around him incessantly, making him feel extremely vexed.

“Tell me more, I love to hear your nonsense; it’s really interesting. I can’t play with my phone when I’m on shift, so I rely on you to pass time. I also heard that you found a woman over there? How is it? Is it lifelike? If it is, then you’ve hit the jackpot!”

Anger flared in Li Huowang’s eyes as he glared at the man who was making inappropriate comments about Bai Lingmiao.

But the next moment, the rage on his face vanished, and it was replaced by a deep distrust. “What’s your surname?”

“Didn’t I tell you just now? My surname is Wang. You can call me Nurse Wang. Or, you can follow beds 65 and 31, and call me Handsome. I don’t mind either,” said Nurse Wang.

“Wang? Are you Wang Deqiu?” asked Li Huowang.

“No? What kind of crappy name is that? My name is Wang Wei,” said Nurse Wang.

Hearing this, the doubt in Li Huowang’s eyes vanished, and only chilliness remained in his gaze. “You’re lying to me. You are no nurse. Your true identity is that of a doctor.”

Puzzled, Wang Wei scratched his head. "What? Is your illness flaring up again?"

"You led my mom away, because she has an honest personality, and you were afraid that she'll expose the situation. Previously, you kept provoking me with your words, in an attempt to elicit a response from me."

Hearing this, a helpless smile appeared on Wang Wei's face. He bent down to connect the urine bag, and then turned to the door and said, "Come in."

The ward's door opened, and Dr. Hou from before walked in. Then, he bowed and greeted Wang Wei, "Teacher."

"Did you see that? The patient is still rather sensitive. They only lose self-control when their illness acts up. In stable conditions, they're just like anyone else; probably even smarter than normal people. So, you must treat patients normally. Don't treat them like fools just because they are mentally ill," said Wang Wei. Then, he turned back to Li Huowang. "Let me introduce myself. I am your attending physician, Dr. Wang Wei. It's a pleasure to meet you."

"Why pretend to be a nurse?" questioned Li Huowang.

"Because you have a strong aversion to doctors. So I thought of using a different identity to talk to you. But, there's not much difference between a doctor or a nurse. We're all here to serve patients," said Wang Wei.

After uncovering the man's true identity, Li Huowang closed his eyes and stopped interacting with him, quietly waiting for the time to pass. Since he had the time, then he would rather think about how to quickly leave Hou Shu, than to waste time talking nonsense to him.

"Li Huowang, do you really think that it's possible that I am nothing, and just a figment of your imagination?" asked Wang Wei.

"Hmm?" Li Huowang opened his eyes.

Seeing the patient respond, Wang Wei continued, "I often

wonder why our self-perception is so fascinating. If someone believes that they are something, then they will become that thing. Did you know that not all conscious beings work the same way. For example, in the minds of some animals, or even infants, there is no concept of 'self'. Beings like them can never suffer from mental illnesses. Speaking of which, mental illnesses can be considered to be a more advanced condition."

"What are you trying to get at? You're all over the place. Dr. Wang, go and take a break if you can't do this. Don't end up having a nervous breakdown of your own in the midst of attempting to treat a patient," said Li Huowang.

"Let me correct you," said Wang Wei as he continuously circled around Li Huowang's bed. "It's not nervous, but mental. There are many professional diseases amongst doctors, and mental breakdown is one of them. So strictly speaking, you're not wrong."

Li Huowang couldn't be bothered with him, and closed his eyes again.

"Li Huowang, based on my analysis of your previous recorded conversations, it seems that you've acquired some sort of an ability there, like a power to displace yourself, right? Did you know that this corresponds quite well with schizophrenia? You're already quite ill now. You can't afford to get any more sick. It's alright if you don't respond to me. After all, my salary will still be the same. But, your mom will be very saddened. She paid quite a large sum to hire me after all. Oh, and I forgot to tell you. This is a private hospital, and the rates here are quite high. And since it's private, very little of it is covered by medical insurance. Do you really want to stay here like this for the rest of your life? Have you ever thought about the burden that you're placing on your family? As the saying goes, there is no dutiful child before the sickbed. It will be the same for your mother and the others. You're so stubborn, and never cooperate with the treatment. Be it your girlfriend or your mother,

they will all eventually leave you. I've seen that happen far too many times. Ultimately, you'll likely be locked up in a cheap hospital, unable to come out your entire life, and grow old in loneliness."

Chapter 205 - Fight

As Wang Wei continued to speak, his tone gradually became heavier. “Of course, aside from your mother, there’s also your girlfriend! They will all eventually come to despise you because nobody wants to be around a lunatic.”

Seeing Li Huowang lying on the bed and continuing to glare at him, Wang Wei continued, “Do you know how long it takes for her to get here by train? How many transfers she has to take? How many excuses she has to come up with to explain to her parents? No, you don’t know. Because you only think about yourself. That lady named Yang Na has been sacrificing so much for you. But what about yourself? You have been uncooperative with the treatment and unwilling to take even a single step out of your comfort zone. Li Huowang! What kind of man are you?!”

As heard all this, the veins on Li Huowang’s forehead throbbed.

“Li Huowang, you don’t deserve her! Yang Na should have long since given up on you and gone away to find someone better! Then, the final outcome would be her getting together with someone else and bearing their children. And all the while you would just continue to lie here on the sickbed and imagine them together in bed!” continued Wang Wei.

“Shut up!”

Creak~

The straps restraining Li Huowang began to tear as he glared at Wang Wei intensely.

Wang Wei could see the hostility in Li Huowang’s eyes; even so, he wasn’t the least bit afraid as he walked over to the bedside and removed the restraints.

As soon as he was free, Li Huowang pounced on Wang Wei and

grabbed his nurse's uniform, and then threw a punch. "What do you know?! You're just a hallucination! Do you know anything about what I've been through?! You don't know anything!"

Wang Wei also started to fight back. Soon, a fist landed on Li Huowang's face, causing his nose to start bleeding. At that moment, Wang Wei's expression seemed to have become as crazed as Li Huowang's—his teeth were clenched as he stared back at Li Huowang.

"Then let me tell you! I do know! You think you're the only one who has experienced hallucinations? Wrong! I was once like that as well, but I managed to overcome it, and now, I'm a qualified doctor! So, I'm far stronger than you, you coward!" shouted Wang Wei.

As they continued to fight fiercely, a syringe suddenly plunged into Li Huowang's arm from the side. Immediately, Li Huowang felt as though his brain had rusted as his movements became sluggish and he suddenly felt very weak.

Wang Wei, along with his student, supported Li Huowang and restrained him to the bed once again.

Then, Wang Wei stuck his fingers into his mouth to massage his slightly loosened teeth while gasping for air. "This young man hasn't had any exercise for a long time, but his strength is still quite impressive."

"Teacher, you..." Dr. Hou looked puzzled. Though he had heard of his unique style of doing things when they first met, he still found it quite unusual to see a doctor engage a patient in physical combat.

Wang Wei stood by the bedside and looked down on Li Huowang, whose face was bruised and battered.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang continued to stare at this person as his mind slowly became a whirling mess. Gradually, the two figures before him began to change, and grew much larger. Their voices echoed, and it seemed like drumbeats were echoing along with their

speech.

“His condition is more unique in that he has very high psychological barriers. It’s to the point that he’s almost emotionally isolated. Our first step is to increase his interaction with the real world, to allow him to meddle in this world through his own senses,” explained Wang Wei.

“But... the books don’t say that...” questioned Dr. Hou.

“The books don’t say? Then do they describe such a case in the books? Don’t be too rigid with what you’ve learned. Sometimes, you have to be flexible and adapt,” retorted Wang Wei.

Li Huowang didn’t know what happened after he passed out. The only thing he remembered was that it was very messy. When he woke up again, he found that the world in front of him was upside down, with a large round moon hanging below him.

It took him a while to realize that it wasn’t the moon that was upside down. Instead, it was him who was turned upside down.

It seemed that he had used his new ability while he was unconscious.

He slowly adjusted his body, and then retraced his steps with the help of the chaotic marks on the ground. It didn’t take long before Li Huowang spotted Puppy peeking out from behind a rock.

“Didn’t I instruct you to bury me? How come you let me escape?” asked Li Huowang.

Puppy had an innocent look on his face as he said, “Senior Li, we did bury you. But the problem is that you stepped out from the ground... again.”

“Stepped out? What do you mean?” demanded Li Huowang.

“Just like that time, when we were mourning for you, and you climbed out of the grave,” explained Puppy.

Puppy’s words instantly made Li Huowang’s expression worsen. He hadn’t really considered this aspect previously.

Gaining a new ability had indeed made him stronger. And

perhaps, this was a good thing to others. However, that may not necessarily be so for himself; after all, Li Huowang understood very well that he was a lunatic.

If there was anything more dangerous than a lunatic, then it was a lunatic trained in using a weapon.

The greater the power, the greater the responsibility. That was true for others. But for himself, the greater the power, the more danger he posed to others.

No matter what happens in the hallucination, I must try to remain as calm as possible.

Li Huowang pondered these matters as he silently walked back.

On the way back, Li Huowang saw the others looking around while carrying torches. It seemed like they were all looking for him; from the looks of it, he had walked quite far.

Li Huowang could see the fear in their eyes. He did not say anything, and just continued to walk back.

When he returned to their previous location, he saw that everyone was back.

Li Huowang appeared behind Bai Lingmiao, and said, "I'm back."

Hearing his voice, Bai Lingmiao shuddered and slowly turned around, revealing the bruised right side of her face to him.

When he saw this, an intense sense of self-blame washed over him, making it hard for him to breathe. It was clear that he was the one who had inflicted those injuries on her.

On the other hand, tears welled up in Bai Lingmiao's eyes as she hugged Li Huowang, "That's great, Senior Li! I thought I'd never see you again!"

Seeing this, Li Huowang wrapped his trembling hands around Bai Lingmiao, as if he wanted to pull her toward him.

Once his sense of self-blame lessened, a strong sense of fear swept over him. It was fortunate that he had only punched someone

this time. But what if he had a knife next time around?

Despair inducing images flashed through Li Huowang's mind, causing his pupils to tremble slightly.

Even though he didn't say a word, Bai Lingmiao seemed to be able to sense what he was thinking as she reached out with her fair hand to stroke his back. "Senior Li, it's okay. I know you didn't mean it. It's just a little bit of swelling; it'll be gone in a few days."

However, her words couldn't improve Li Huowang's mood. He whispered softly in her ear, "Promise me, if there's a next time, you... will stay further away from me."

"Alright," Bai Lingmiao nodded obediently, her true thoughts remaining unknown to him.

Li Huowang's gaze slowly moved past Bai Lingmiao's shoulder, and his emotions became increasingly resolute. In the end, his gaze settled on the line of words that he had carved into the ground.

Among the members of Sitting Oblivion Dao, there is a high-ranking person who is also a Strayed One. He has lived to the age of 190 and has completely shaken off the hallucinations brought about by being a Strayed One.

Chapter 206 - Jin Shanzhao

The ox-cart steadily moved forward as it creaked here and there.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang and the rest were slowly walking beside the ox-cart.

After placing their luggage onto the cart, they didn't have a lot to carry and were thus much more relaxed.

All of these ox-carts were bought by Sun Baolu from a small town that they had just passed by. They still had to travel a long way, and so it was necessary to purchase these ox-carts.

However, Jin Shanzhao was still carrying his bamboo basket as he hummed. He felt much better being surrounded by the lush green grass.

Since such an environment couldn't be seen in the central region of Hou Shu, Jin Shanzhao knew that they were close to the border.

At that moment, he opened his map and tried comparing it with their current location.

"Hmm... A few more days and we should be able to reach the border," muttered Jin Shanzhao.

Once he finished checking the map, he stored it once again and clasped his hands together toward Li Huowang. "Young Daoist, we will be reaching the border soon. Congratulations. As long as you exit the border and enter Qing Qiu, you will be fine."

Li Huowang was still busy reading the Liar's Scripture. Hearing Jin Shanzhao's words, he raised his head and nodded before continuing with his reading.

“Where are you planning to go? Will you travel with us to Qing Qiu and the Liang Kingdom?” asked Li Huowang.

“No, I will not be joining you on your journey. I will send you off to the border and return,” replied Jin Shanzhao.

“Return? Where to? Aren’t you afraid they will capture you?” asked Li Huowang.

Jin Shanzhao smiled confidently. “No worries. I have my methods of protecting myself.”

Hearing this, Li Huowang turned to look at him; he had a feeling that the man was just bluffing. Back then, Jin Shanzhao was scared shitless by the outlaw soldiers, but now, he was trying to put on a brave front.

They were both still chatting when they saw a village in the distance.

Once they got close, the group stopped outside while Jin Shanzhao and Li Huowang entered the village to buy some food.

Having just two people helped them avoid garnering unwanted attention, and Jin Shanzhao was good with his words. It made communicating with the villagers much easier.

Li Huowang had no intention of stopping here. They had decided to quickly buy the food and continued with their journey; they needed to escape Hou Shu as fast as possible. Even though it was tiring, they had no choice due to the outlaw soldiers that were looking for them.

Just as they had entered the village, Li Huowang caught the scent of something nasty. He followed the scent and saw a pig pen. The pen was built directly below the houses.

When he saw what the black pigs were eating, Li Huowang’s voice trembled, “Do they... feed the pigs that?”

Looking at these pigs and the pig pen, Li Huowang recalled the Benevolent Nunnery and Abbess Jingxin who had died within the pig pen.

“Hmm? And why would you say that? Isn’t this usually how you rear pigs? This is why I don’t eat pork and dog meat; both of them feast on feces,” said Jin Shanzhao.

Li Huowang suppressed his sadness and looked at Jin Shanzhao. “Wait, you mean to say that everyone else does the same thing to rear their pigs?”

“Naturally. This was how it has been for hundreds of years,” said Jin Shanzhao as he picked up a stone and wrote something onto the soft soil. He wrote the character for ‘home’. Even though he used a piece of rock, his handwriting was still quite neat and meticulous.

“Do you see this? The upper part of the character symbolizes the roof of the house, while the lower part of the character symbolizes pigs [1]. A roof over pigs makes the character for ‘home’. Hence, people have been feeding pigs with feces ever since ancient times. If we can read characters and decipher their components, we can see how culture and tradition have shaped them,” explained Jin Shanzhao.

Li Huowang squatted down slowly and stared at the character. After a while, he touched the character with tenderness in his eyes.

“So this is home... Looks like I might’ve misunderstood the Abbess,” muttered Li Huowang. His eyes started to water when he remembered all the help that the Benevolent Nunnery had given him.

Even if the entire world had gone mad, that was one of the only places where he had felt warmth. Now that place is no more.

“Young Daoist?” As Jin Shanzhao saw Li Huowang’s emotion become unstable, he took a step back.

After traveling together for so long, Jin Shanzhao had long since noticed that something was wrong with Li Huowang. Even though Li Huowang had many powers, his mind was... off.

Hearing the voice, Li Huowang buried the character for ‘home’

with some soil and stood up. Then, he once again turned to look at Jin Shanzhao, his gaze back to normal.

“Old man, your identity must be very special,” said Li Huowang.

A regular civilian would only recognize some words; most of them were even illiterate. Then how did Jin Shanzhao write with such a neat handwriting, even with a stone?

Jin Shanzhao stood there and considered his question.

“I’ve saved your life and you won’t even tell me this? No need then. Let’s go and find some villagers to buy some food,” said Li Huowang.

Just as Li Huowang took a few steps forward, Jin Shanzhao called for him, “It’s fine. I can just tell you. I am actually a follower of Zhong Heng Jia.”

“Zhong Heng Jia?” Li Huowang turned around slowly. He didn’t know what those words meant.

As Jin Shanzhao began to explain what it was, his voice became more and more spirited, “The nations divide themselves while trying to unify everyone. The weaker nations would ally with each other to defeat a stronger nation; that is Zhong. On the other hand, a strong nation would try to conquer everything; that is Heng. Hence this is Zhong Heng.”

As Jin Shanzhao explained, Li Huowang slowly understood what he meant. It was a special job that existed only during times when the nations were divided.

Jin Shanzhao’s job was related to intelligence—to act as a tactician beside a warlord or an emperor; to help his lord with strategies and insights, to unify the nations.

To Li Huowang, all he understood was that Jin Shanzhao worked as an intelligent man that helped his lord to unify the nations.

“To understand the bigger picture, analyze the situation, be

good at communicating, able to adapt to any situation, and have both intelligence and bravery while making snap decisions. This is what it means to be a follower of Zhong Heng Jia,” explained Jin Shanzhao.

When Li Huowang saw how proud Jin Shanzhao was of his work, he interrupted the latter, “Since you are so great, then why did you not try to persuade that General from before?”

Hearing this question, Jin Shanzhao became sheepish. “Uh... I’m afraid that in this case the sword is mightier than the pen, especially since we were dealing with the outlaw soldiers of Hou Shu.”

“Hehe.” Hearing this, Li Huowang just chuckled and walked further into the village with Jin Shanzhao following him.

“Young Daoist, I know that you don’t believe me, but don’t worry. Once you leave the kingdom of Hou Shu, I will make sure to do my own job and stop them from obtaining your whereabouts through me. Since you’ve saved my life, I will definitely repay you. Once I become an officer of the kingdom of Hou Shu—”

“But you still don’t have a lord. Doesn’t that mean you are jobless?” interrupted Li Huowang.

“No worries. I will get a job soon. Once I become an officer, I will never forget your help,” assured Jin Shanzhao.

“Sure, let’s talk about it once you have a job. But I would probably be in the Liang Kingdom by then,” said Li Huowang.

As they continued to chat, the atmosphere around them was quite pleasant and everything was going fine. However, at that moment, Li Huowang suddenly grabbed his sword as if preparing for a fight.

“Young Daoist?” Jin Shanzhao followed Li Huowang’s gaze and saw several black jars, each of them plastered with a red sheet that had the upside down character for ‘prosperity’.

1. 家 🏠

Chapter 207 - Someone's Staring

“What’s wrong, young Daoist?” Jin Shanzhao asked as he took a few steps back upon seeing how agitated Li Huowang was.

To Jin Shanzhao, those black jars looked quite normal, just like any other clay jars that were used to pickle vegetables. The only difference he could spot were the red sheets with the upside down character for ‘prosperity’.

However, Li Huowang did not let his guard down. “Something just looked at me from within those jars!”

“Looked at you?” Jin Shanzhao was confused and re-examined the jars once more. “Could there be someone inside? But the jars are too small to fit a person.”

“I didn’t say it was a human!” said Li Huowang as he unfurled the Profound Records and shot one of his fingernails toward the black jar, shattering it in the process.

Splash!

The black jars broke one by one as the brown brine and pickled vegetables sprayed everywhere.

Li Huowang kept his guard up and carefully walked over, using his sword to pick up the pieces of the jars as he inspected them.

However, Li Huowang couldn’t find anything wrong. They were ordinary jars used to pickle vegetables.

The sound of jars being broken immediately caught the attention of the people inside. An old lady with a walking stick walked out. “You rascal! Why did you break my jars? Pay up!”

Li Huowang sheathed his sword and threw some fragmented pieces of silver toward her. Then, he carefully retreated, his eyes

trained on the old lady.

“Daoist, where are we going? Aren’t we supposed to buy food?” asked Jin Shanzhao hurriedly.

“We need to leave this place now. We can buy food somewhere else!” said Li Huowang. He had lost any and all the trust he had in this village.

He would rather have guessed wrongly than be ambushed by something he didn’t know about; he had grown to be wary of everything in this bizarre world.

The old lady didn’t stop them from leaving. She just grumbled as she picked up the pieces of silver.

After leaving the village, Li Huowang brought everyone with him and resumed their journey once more. This time, they didn’t stop until midnight.

When they stopped, they were in a bamboo forest. At this point, Li Huowang felt that they were far enough away from the danger regardless of what the thing inside the jar was.

They set up a campfire and started cooking. Even though everyone was tired, they still needed to eat or their body would fall apart.

Li Huowang did not partake in the cooking. Instead, he stood guard while standing on the ox-cart. His eyes were extremely sharp and could see even within the darkness.

At the same time, Bun, who somehow understood what Li Huowang was doing, placed its nose on the ground. Then, it started sniffing the area to make sure that there was nothing suspicious.

Nothing happened even as the meal was prepared. It was as if the gaze he had felt within the village was nothing more than an illusion.

Did I make a mistake?

Li Huowang started doubting himself. To be honest, he didn’t even fully trust himself.

But then he immediately tossed those doubts to the back of his mind. Everything was in the past and there was no need to be hesitant anymore.

“Senior Li, the food is ready. Come and eat,” called out one of the assistants.

Tonight’s meal consisted of bamboo shoot noodles. They had collected the fresh bamboo shoots from within the bamboo forest. The bamboo shoots were quite crisp and sweet. Even though there wasn’t any meat, since they had used pork lard to cook the meal, it smelled heavenly. Li Huowang gladly ate the meal without a complaint.

All of them were huddled around the campfire as they ate their meal. The sounds of munching and slurping did not stop.

After eating their meal, all of them felt sleepy. Soon, they were lying down and covered in their blankets as they fell asleep.

However, Li Huowang was on night duties tonight. He trusted no one else to do this.

At this moment, there were no other noises in the bamboo forest besides the crackling of the flames.

Li Huowang sat beside the fireplace as he carefully caressed Bun’s soft fur. Unfortunately, given that he wasn’t a robot, he too soon felt sleepy. He shook his head in an attempt to stave off his sleepiness, but it was to no avail. Then, he took out one of the sharp pikes from his bag of torture tools and used it to stab his right palm.

The blood that poured out made his robes become an even deeper shade of red. Li Huowang’s body instantly tensed up from the pain and he no longer felt so sleepy.

“Young Daoist, why not switch with me? An old man like me doesn't sleep much anyway.”

Li Huowang didn't need to see who it was to know that the voice belonged to Lu Zhuangyuan. The footsteps and the smell of the smoke gave him away. “Troupe Leader Lu, go and sleep. We

have a long way to travel tomorrow and you should rest, or you might collapse.”

Lu Zhuangyuan approached Li Huowang and sat beside him, his face filled with even more wrinkles than before. Then, he carefully took out three strips of tobacco before mixing them with some dried leaves and placing the mixture within his smoke pipe.

“Daoist, what do you think of my youngest son?” asked Lu Zhuangyuan.

“Hm?” Li Huowang looked at Lu Xiucan who was currently sleeping with his older brother and sister-in-law. He had never really thought highly of Lu Xiucan. Not only was he cowardly, he was also very hesitant and didn't have much self-confidence.

“Young Daoist, I know that this is just wishful thinking... But I would still like to give this a chance. Could you take him in as a disciple? He's technically not a performer yet because he still hasn't perfected his singing. I hope that you won't dislike him. I don't expect you to teach him everything you know, but at the very least our ancestors would be happy if he manages to learn even one of your powers,” said Lu Zhuangyuan.

Just as Lu Zhuangyuan finished speaking, Li Huowang suddenly stood up.

“They are here! Everyone, wake up!” Li Huowang shouted while the rest of them tried their best to shake off their grogginess.

“Prepare yourselves!” Li Huowang warned the others as he slowly approached one side of the bamboo forest. The darkness within the forest made it look even more sinister.

It wasn't long before Li Huowang saw two white urns within the bamboo forest. The urns weren't large, only around the size of the watermelon. There was a long sheet of red with words plastered on each of the two urns.

One of them read ‘Deceased Mother, Yang Fengling’ while the other read ‘Deceased Grandfather, Li Gongquan’.

It was clear that these were cremation urns. There were even signs of worship in front of them.

Seeing this scene, Li Huowang hesitated.

Should I smash them? Or would something pop out if I smashed them?

After much consideration, Li Huowang carefully retreated. At the same time, the bonfire disappeared as all of them ran.

It was only after some time had passed that the lids of the two urns slowly lifted up. Then, the head of a child popped out from each of the two urns, both of their faces smeared with white powder.

They were not normal children either. Their heads were roughly the size of a man's fist. The red makeup on their cheeks amplified the paleness of the rest of their faces.

Both of them looked at each other and chuckled. Then, they raised their pale white arms and legs before climbing out from the urns.

Both of them were just about to leave when a shadow fell from the skies and blocked their path.

Li Huowang gritted his teeth, as his bloodshot eyes glared at the two weird things in front of him.

Chapter 208 - Danger

The ‘children’ were surprised and afraid when they saw Li Huowang’s towering figure.

“So you do know fear!” said Li Huowang as he unsheathed his sword while releasing a thick murderous intent.

With just a single stroke of the sword, the urns were smashed and the two ‘children’ were beheaded.

But they did not bleed. Instead, brown ash flew out from their pale bodies. Within the brown ash were bits and pieces of white bones.

The ‘children’ were made from the ashes of the cremated!

“Hang on. This doesn’t look like an evil being that spawned naturally...” muttered Li Huowang as he checked the urns and saw fingerprints on some of the shrapnels.

Sha~ Sha~ Sha~

At that moment, the sound of paper ruffling through the bamboo leaves rang out from all directions, causing Li Huowang to stand up. Knowing that he was in a difficult position, he snarled.

There weren’t just one or two sets of eyes gazing at Li Huowang; he could feel numerous gazes coming from every direction. He was surrounded!

Then, Li Huowang saw what it was. These beings were different; they had a body, with each of them wearing funeral clothes that were usually worn by the dead.

They also had white urns instead of heads.

Each of the urns had a strip of red paper plastered to it, the ‘gazes’ seemingly coming from the paper itself.

They flickered amongst the darkness of the bamboo forest, appearing and disappearing from time to time.

Li Huowang knew that they were moving, but he couldn't see how they moved. They were slowly approaching him using an unknown method.

After a moment, Li Huowang unfurled the Profound Records and grabbed his pliers, ready to pull out his teeth at a moment's notice.

Just then, something red appeared on his face and covered his vision.

It was a red talisman, similar to the yellow talismans attached to the foreheads of zombies he had seen in movies.

Li Huowang quickly ripped it off and saw the words written on the red talisman: Deceased, Li Huowang.

Staring at the words, Li Huowang's mind quickly raced with all of the information he knew about this world.

Are they trying to convert me into them? Who are they? No wait, I think I've heard about them before while I was at the Zephyr Temple.

At that moment, a single name appeared in his mind.

Mountain Grandma! They are the Mountain Grandmas!

As his thoughts reached this point, Li Huowang raised his pliers, but not to pull out his teeth; instead, he intended to sacrifice his left eye.

Pop!

As he sacrificed his left eye without any hesitation, a sinister light enveloped the surroundings. Immediately, all of the nearby Mountain Grandmas were covered by this sinister light.

And then, they disappeared. Everything that was enveloped by the light had vanished.

Li Huowang took this chance and quickly ran back up the path. Everyone else was still waiting for Li Huowang on the path, but they didn't know what had just happened.

"Run! Leave the bamboo forest! It's too dangerous here!" shouted Li Huowang.

When they saw Li Huowang's missing left eye, none of them objected to his command. As blood continued to drip from his eye socket, all of them disregarded their fatigue and ran as fast as they could.

They didn't stop even after they had exited the bamboo forest. What awaited them was a grassy plain. Even then, they continued to run on the endless field of grass until dawn.

At that point, Jin Shanzhao threw his bamboo basket down onto the ground and sat down, his shirt drenched in sweat. He panted rigorously while trying to catch his breath. Then, he plucked some of the grass before placing it back down powerlessly. "Ha... Ha... Qing... We are... almost... in Qing Qiu... Ha..."

Meanwhile, Li Huowang was once again perched on the ox-cart. This time around, because of the fact that there was nothing blocking his view in the plains, he could maximize his sharp vision and survey everything around them despite only having a single eye at the moment.

If the Mountain Grandmas were pursuing them even after they had run so far away, then Li Huowang would have no choice but to fight them.

Thankfully the sun continued to rise, the warm rays of sunlight washing away the coldness within Li Huowang's body. He could no longer feel any gazes.

Back within the bamboo forest, the Mountain Grandmas were long gone. Then, one of the stones on the ground suddenly spoke. "What should we do? It doesn't seem like he is someone we can defeat. Even the Mountain Grandmas we lured toward them were defeated. Should we request for backup?"

The stone had just finished speaking when one of the bamboo shoots spoke up, "Why even bother wasting our time with them? I remember that Peng Longteng was trying to find that brat. We should just tell her where they are heading instead."

“You are right. In the end, if she somehow ends up causing a mess of things, then we can just push the blame onto her. On the flip side, if she is successful, then we will also get some merits at least,” replied the stone.

Then, the stone and bamboo shoot became quiet once more, never to speak again.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang and the group rested on the grassy plain for an entire day. They had no choice. As much as they wanted to continue running, they were still human.

Thankfully nothing else happened, except for a few people walking past them.

At this moment, Bai Lingmiao was sitting beside the sleeping Li Huowang, her heart aching at the sight of his wound.

Even though Li Huowang was sleeping, it was not restful at all. He continued to move in his sleep, murmuring something all the time.

As she saw this, Bai Lingmiao gingerly placed her hand onto Li Huowang’s bloody eye socket. “How painful this must be...”

Bam!

Li Huowang suddenly woke up and moved rapidly, both his hands already placed on Bai Lingmiao’s neck.

Everyone was shocked to see what had happened, including Li Huowang.

After a moment of stunned silence, Li Huowang immediately let go and inspected Bai Lingmiao’s neck. When he confirmed that she was not hurt, and was merely shocked, he felt relieved. Then, he hugged her and kissed her, refusing to let her get out of his embrace.

“Senior Li... Everyone is still watching...” muttered Bai Lingmiao.

Hearing this, Li Huowang finally stopped and sighed. “Please stay further away from me when I’m sleeping next time.”

“But... We’ve always been sleeping together.”

“Listen to me. I’m a bit tense during these times so we can sleep together again once this crisis is over, ok?” said Li Huowang.

“Alright... But Senior Li... Your eye...”

“No worries. This is better. At least like this they will have a harder time recognizing me,” reassured Li Huowang.

Li Huowang and the rest continued their journey the next day. They walked for three more days before they saw the border on the afternoon of the third day.

The border was essentially just a short wall with a few soldiers. At the same time, the walls were quite crooked, a clear indication of the sloppiness.

“This is only natural; Qing Qiu and Hou Shu have always been allies. They never had to be wary of each other,” explained Jin Shanzhao upon noticing Li Huowang’s curiosity.

“Allies? Doesn’t that mean that the outlaw soldiers would be able to cross over into Qing Qiu?” asked Li Huowang as he stared at the busy street in front of him.

“Impossible. If the soldiers of Hou Shu entered Qing Qiu, then it would mean war. It would be a much more serious situation than killing a few thousand of their own civilians,” replied Jin Shanzhao.

Hearing that, Li Huowang felt slightly more relaxed.

Then, he recalled something and looked back at the old man.

“Will you be turning back now?”

Jin Shanzhao smiled and bowed. “Young Daoist, may we meet again. I will never forget the fact that you saved my life. If I do end up becoming an officer, then I will repay you graciously.”

Li Huowang chuckled. “No need. Just find a place and live out your life quietly. Might as well retire before you even start working.”

Hearing this, Jin Shanzhao suddenly became serious for once. “The only reason I’ve learned so much is for the sake of my future

lord! How could I not use the knowledge I've accumulated over tens of years? My dream is to stop the wars between nations! I will bring peace to the lands!"

As he spoke, Jin Shanzhao's eyes were blazing with passion.

Li Huowang was impressed by Jin Shanzhao. Even though the latter looked cowardly, his dreams were magnanimous. He could sense the seriousness behind Jin Shanzhao's words.

After a moment, Li Huowang bowed respectfully toward Jin Shanzhao. "Then, I wish you good luck in your future endeavors."

Jin Shanzhao smiled and bowed back. "Thank you Daoist. We will go our own separate ways from here on out."

Shiuuu~

At that moment, something flew through the air as it approached them rapidly.

Shriek!

Jin Shanzhao was still smiling when a massive halberd flew through the air and crashed into his waist. Instantly, he was cut in half just a few feet away from Li Huowang, barely leaving him alive.

Chapter 209 - Blood

A single drop of blood splashed into Li Huowang's opened mouth.

Salty, smelly, and bitter.

That was all Li Huowang could think about as he saw the halberd cut through Jin Shanzhao's body and fly toward himself.

The owner of the halberd had meant to attack him and Jin Shanzhao was just in their way.

At that moment, Li Huowang subconsciously used his new power and moved his body two inches toward the left.

Bam!

The halberd phased right through his illusion and crashed into the ground behind him, cracking it in the process.

Unharmd, Li Huowang looked down at Jin Shanzhao who had stopped smiling; he suddenly felt confused.

On the other hand, Jin Shanzhao opened his mouth to try and talk to Li Huowang but nothing came out. Soon, his eyes became unfocused and he died.

Staring at Jin Shanzhao whose body was split in two, Li Huowang suddenly felt unsure about what he was supposed to do.

This was not supposed to happen!

Just a moment ago Jin Shanzhao was talking about his grand dream and now he was dead; it was as if he was nothing more than a joke.

Dak dak dak~

Suddenly, the sound of horse hooves came from far away. Li Huowang looked up, anger filling his heart. As he saw the familiar helmet, he roared furiously, "PENG LONGTENG!"

This time around, Peng Longteng had brought with her a

cavalry of hundreds. She rode her armored steed as she slowly approached the border region where Li Huowang's group was.

Their group had been hiding for so long, but she still managed to catch up with them.

As she approached them, she used her one remaining eye to see that Li Huowang was unharmed. Seeing this, she smiled cruelly. "Looks like you are indeed something. I underestimated you last time and I won't make the same mistake again. As an acknowledgement of your strength, I will make sure to leave you with an intact corpse! Charge!"

As she roared, the hundreds of cavalry behind her followed suit and charged toward Li Huowang, their oppressive aura aimed directly at him.

Halfway through their charge, Peng Longteng suddenly raised her hand and pointed at Li Huowang. "Fire!"

In response, all of the soldiers raised their bows and shot arrows straight toward Li Huowang. The rain of arrows ensured that he had nowhere left to run.

However, in the face of this dangerous situation, instead of running away, Li Huowang did the opposite—he raised the sacred text over his head and ran straight toward the soldiers.

Since these were the plains where cavalry had the advantage, he judged that it would be impossible for him to run away. So the only thing he could do was choose to fight!

Splurt!

An arrow curved and shot straight toward Li Huowang's chest from an impossible angle!

However, it did not harm him; he had separated his body and illusion once more. At this moment, he was close enough to see the soldier's faces.

"That's just an illusion! He must be somewhere nearby! Quick, use the method that we used to take down that black-faced monk

before!” shouted Peng Longteng.

Following her orders, the cavalries all separated and surrounded Li Huowang in a large circle. However, even as they surrounded him, they did not stop their attacks. They continued shooting their arrows into the circle blindly, covering every inch of the open space to make sure that they hit Li Huowang.

Splurt!

At that moment, a sharp pike with backward facing hooks pierced into Li Huowang’s forearm through his palm.

Li Huowang shouted in pain as he ripped out the bone marrow from his forearm before splashing it onto the Profound Records.

In the next moment, the forearms of the horses and soldiers all snapped into two, causing them to fall down onto the ground.

This caused a chain reaction that caused the other soldiers to trip as well. With this, the rain of arrows finally stopped.

At that moment, Li Huowang suddenly saw a shadow appear above his head—Peng Longteng’s halberd was just above him!

However, she was not aiming for him. Her halberd was aimed at the Profound Records!

Seeing this, Li Huowang picked up the Profound Records and immediately dodged to the left. Once he was out of danger, he launched himself toward Peng Longteng as he stepped on her armored horse and stabbed his sword into the gap of her helmet.

He was attempting to do the same thing as he did last time!

Ding!

The sound of clashing metal was heard. However, Peng Longteng did not attempt to attack Li Huowang directly. Instead, she swept her halberd in a large arc, causing everything around her to be cut in half indiscriminately.

Seeing this, Li Huowang leapt upward and somersaulted to dodge her attack.

This was the moment when Peng Longteng’s massive amount of

battle experience showed its usefulness; she managed to intuitively guess where Li Huowang was and successfully kicked him in the stomach!

Li Huowang was launched into a small hut, causing it to collapse!

On the other hand, Peng Longteng and her army slowly surrounded the demolished hut as they waited for the dust to settle.

But Li Huowang's body was nowhere to be found!

A burrowing technique?

Just as Peng Longteng had that thought, her senses alerted her of an impending danger, causing her to immediately leap off her horse.

In the next instant her horse was cut in half from the bottom just like Jin Shanzhao.

At the same time, Li Huowang's bloody illusion slowly appeared from underneath the ground.

This was a new method of using his power that he had just thought of. All he needed to do was project his illusion below ground; this would effectively render his real body invisible.

This is the key to defeat her!

Li Huowang lowered his sword and sank his illusion back underground.

Then, the invisible Li Huowang slowly approached Peng Longteng, who was now without a horse.

However, just when he was almost there, Peng Longteng quickly ran to another soldier and pulled them down before taking control of their horse.

"Ha! Don't think that you are omnipotent just because you have some tricks! Your parlor tricks are nothing compared to a soldier's combat methods! For example, one of our techniques is called distraction!" shouted Peng Longteng as she ushered her horse

and led the outlaw soldiers to charge in another direction.

Seeing this, Li Huowang was stunned. But then, he immediately realized what they were aiming for. They were targeting Bai Lingmiao and the rest!

Realizing their intentions, Li Huowang chased after them; however, he was not as fast as a horse. Thus, the outlaw soldiers managed to reach them first!

As soon as Li Huowang heard one of the women scream, he unfurled the Profound Records.

His heart hurt when he saw one of them being killed!

Instantly, a sharp bone spike shot out from one of his finger toward the soldiers.

This is not enough!

Li Huowang roared and opened his robes as he used his bare hands to rip open his wounds. Even so, his anger made it so he felt no pain.

Then, a huge chunk of flesh fell heavily onto the Profound Records.

Chapter 210 - Peng Longteng

Many of the outlaw soldiers fell to Li Huowang's attack. Realizing that she could no longer afford to ignore Li Huowang, Peng Longteng decided to separate her army. Half of the army continued their attack against Bai Lingmiao and the rest while the other half followed Peng Longteng to attack Li Huowang.

"Huowang?"

Just as Li Huowang was on the verge of collapse, a blurry voice rang out. But, he shook his head, causing the voice to disappear.

Then, Li Huowang raised his head and saw the soldiers that were charging at him. Seeing them, he smiled. "You think I don't know the soldiers' combat methods? I call this the 'torture method'."

When Peng Longteng was once again in front of him, Li Huowang roared. "Come! We fight one-on-one!"

However, all he got in response was a halberd being swung right at him.

"Brat, you think I can't defeat you? If it wasn't for how self-harming this technique was, I would've used it before! Roar!" shouted Peng Longteng as she raised her halberd. At the same time, the soldiers around her clashed their weapons with each other.

A horrible screeching sound resonated through the entire area.

But the sound wasn't coming from the weapons clashing against each other. Instead, it was coming from the soldiers. Their screams were impossibly horrifying and guttural, such that they could strike fear into the hearts of their enemies.

Accompanying their horrifying screeching was a rain of blood

—all of them started to bleed from their seven orifices.

However, the blood evaporated instantly, forming clouds of blood that enveloped all of the soldiers.

Even Peng Longteng was not spared, her blood flowing out from her helmet.

As they continued bleeding, the soldiers soon started shriveling up.

Now, all of them were nothing more than demons shrouded in a red mist, their eyes devoid of all feelings and their only purpose being slaughter.

At that moment, Li Huowang's sword suddenly reacted to the killing intent being emitted by the soldiers, causing a faint dragon roar to be heard; it was as if the sword was resonating with them.

“ROAAAR!” roared the outlaw soldiers as they thrust their weapons toward Li Huowang.

Seeing this, Li Huowang immediately used his new power and shifted his real body elsewhere.

But the enemy's plan involved overwhelming Li Huowang with pure strength—they did not even attempt to locate where Li Huowang's real body was as they started attacking indiscriminately.

At that moment, a single drop of blood fell from Li Huowang's body and mixed with the bloody fog.

Instantly, all the soldiers turned toward Li Huowang. They had sensed him.

As Li Huowang stared into their eyes, he saw nothing but greed and yearning.

These soldiers have eaten humans before and not just once, but many, many times!

Li Huowang instantly understood.

“Men! It's time to eat some flesh!!” roared Peng Longteng.

At the same time, the outlaw soldiers howled like hungry ghosts, their saliva dripping down from their mouths as they

charged toward Li Huowang without any regard for their lives, instantly turning the situation extremely dangerous for him.

Li Huowang wanted to use the Profound Records but he couldn't do it anymore! Everytime he tried unfurling the Profound Records, the soldiers would interrupt him.

Gradually, Li Huowang's situation worsened and he almost died a few times.

Just as everything was about to go awry, the sound of a drum was heard.

Dong dong dong~

At the same time, one of the soldiers was thrown down by a red-veiled woman, his head instantly decapitated.

Bai Lingmiao had arrived to help him, finally allowing Li Huowang to have some breathing room.

I can't use the Profound Records like this! It's too easy for it to be countered!

After a moment, Li Huowang sheathed his bloody sword and tore open his own skin without any hesitation.

Shou San's appearance from back then had given him an idea. If he could become like Shou San, then he could use the Profound Records anytime he wished without needing to unfurl it on the ground.

Li Huowang unfurled the Profound Records and directly inserted it into his own flesh. The pain was so unbearable that it instantly caused him to start howling.

Even so, Li Huowang was unable to embed the Profound Records into his flesh.

"Hm?" Noticing that something was off with Li Huowang, Peng Longteng instantly pointed her halberd at him. "Invisible wind, follow the Heavens!"

Just as Peng Longteng shouted those words, the berserking soldiers arranged themselves into a Wind Formation as they

charged toward Li Huowang.

On the other hand, as they got closer, Li Huowang's body suddenly burst into flames. Gradually, Li Huowang's skin was burnt completely black, his appearance becoming similar to that of the God that the Ao Jing Sect worshiped.

At the same time, the flames on Li Huowang's body burst forth and engulfed the soldiers. Given that the soldiers were all clumped together, it was quite effective.

However, Peng Longteng charged straight through the flames as she ran toward Li Huowang. Instead of feeling fear, she was excited. "Haha! Brat! Not bad, but I've already seen through your illusion. You are dead!"

A massive gust of wind blew Li Huowang's flames back with every swing of her halberd. As she got closer and closer, Li Huowang finally realized just how tall she was. She was at least two heads taller than him!

JIANG!

As he blocked a swing from her halberd, Li Huowang's feet instantly sank three inches into the ground.

At the same time, Li Huowang's flames engulfed Peng Longteng. Despite being armored quite heavily, soon the skin underneath her armor started to burn and swell.

Even so, Peng Longteng was not the slightest bit afraid; instead, she was ecstatic. It was as if her entire existence was meant for slaughter and war!

"Hahahaha! This feels great! Come on! Fight me some more!" shouted Peng Longteng as she knocked Li Huowang away with her halberd. Then, she once again swung it toward Li Huowang.

Engulfed in flames, both of them were locked in a frenzied battle where a single hit from the other would mean death.

As he saw Peng Longteng's armor slowly starting to glow with a reddish hue, Li Huowang had a daring idea. After a moment of

consideration, he charged toward Peng Longteng, lowering his body in the process.

“One more time!” shouted Peng Longteng.

However, this time around Li Huowang did not dodge the halberd that was swinging down from above. Instead, he raised his sword and used it to stab through the gap in her helmet.

He intended to kill her even if it meant that he would be heavily wounded.

Even though he managed to dodge the blade of the halberd, he was still hit by the pole, instantly causing a large cavity to appear on his body. Despite this, his sword managed to find its mark.

Just as he had thought, the heat of the flames had made the helmet much softer than before.

At that moment, Li Huowang’s sword, which was engulfed in flames, stabbed Peng Longteng’s neck in the very same spot he had stabbed her last time. As he roared, a cracking sound was heard. Then, with one last burst of strength, he sent Peng Longteng’s armored head flying into the air.

Then, everything became quiet as the blood fog retreated from the outlaw soldiers. All of them stared at Li Huowang in horror as they immediately disappeared in front of him.

At the same time, the flames engulfing Li Huowang scattered as well.

Li Huowang’s remaining eye had been cooked to the point that it was barely functioning. Still, he looked down and inspected his body.

At this moment, he didn’t have a single inch of skin left on his body. All that remained was a charred mess. In fact, his body had become quite a bit smaller from being burned so much.

Plop.

Without his skin, the Profound Records fell onto the ground.

When Li Huowang suddenly felt his back tingling, he turned

around in a daze, only to find a round faced man.

Even though the man was scared of Li Huowang, he still held his dagger with a handkerchief as he used it to stab Li Huowang numerous times.

For a moment, Li Huowang was confused by that man's actions as he stabbed Li Huowang numerous times, leaving countless wounds on Li Huowang's dried body.

Who is this guy and what is he doing?

As he thought about this, Li Huowang swung his sword and ripped open that man's stomach.

Cao Hai staggered backward before placing his back against Peng Longteng's body and sliding down. He stared at her unmoving body that was standing even in death with eyes filled with yearning. "General..."

On the other hand, Li Huowang stood up shakily and staggered back toward where Bai Lingmiao was. Amidst the intense pain, his mind soon started to wander off.

It is so painful. Why am I always getting hurt so much? Is living supposed to be this painful? I don't feel like living anymore... But... I can't... I must survive! Mom... It hurts so much... Can you make all this pain go away?

Just as Li Huowang was hobbling back, he suddenly sensed movement behind him.

When he slowly turned around, he saw that the headless Peng Longteng had raised her halberd as she prepared to swing it down toward him!

Chapter 211 - Keep

The headless Peng Longteng was still capable of moving. This was completely out of Li Huowang's expectation; there was no way he could've seen it coming.

Presently, Li Huowang didn't have any skin now and his senses had dulled by quite a lot. Even his movement speed had slowed down considerably. There was nothing he could do but watch as the giant halberd was swung down toward his head.

Am I going to die?

He was not afraid; in fact, he even felt a sense of freedom as the end approached.

At the critical moment, a shadow leapt up and crashed into Peng Longteng's left shoulder. The impact from the tackle was so massive that it caused Peng Longteng to slightly shift toward her right.

The halberd narrowly missed Li Huowang and fell to his left, leaving him surprised at having survived the attack.

He looked up and saw that the silhouette belonged to none other than Gao Zhijian.

At the same time, another silhouette in red suddenly appeared in front of Li Huowang. Then, the face of a beast emerged from underneath the red veil and picked Li Huowang up by his neck before running away while carrying him.

As he was dragged away from Peng Longteng, Li Huowang stared at the white clouds above him. He smiled; having someone else come rescue him felt quite nice.

After dragging the burnt Li Huowang far enough away, the beast released its jaws and placed him down before running back.

However, given that their enemy could still move, Li Huowang

refused to lay down just like that. Despite the immense pain, he tried sitting up before ordering Puppy, “Go and bring the Profound Records for me.”

Hearing the command, Puppy swallowed his saliva; he wanted to prop Li Huowang up, but he didn’t know where to hold him. After all, there was no skin left on his body. Then he asked, “Senior Li, where’s the Profound Records?”

Li Huowang used one of his few remaining fingers to point toward where Peng Longteng was.

But at that moment, someone else made a run for it instead. It was Chun Xiaoman! As she reached the location pointed by Li Huowang, she picked up the Profound Records.

Despite Li Huowang’s orders, the situation had suddenly changed.

Gao Zhijian had been pierced through by the halberd, his body limp as it was propped up. The difference in strength between him and Peng Longteng was too big.

“Quickly give me the Profound Records!” Li Huowang shot up and tried to walk over but he fell down soon after. At this point, his entire body was essentially burnt into a giant piece of charcoal. Each step he took made a part of him fall off.

Chun Xiaoman saw how terrible Li Huowang looked and then she saw Peng Longteng fling away Gao Zhijian. Seeing their dire situation, she grit her teeth, she unfurled the Profound Records and placed her sword against her left arm before chopping it off.

Once chopped, her left arm quickly lost all color; then, the hair on her dismembered left arm grew into numerous tentacles. Soon, the entire arm, along with the tentacles all burrowed into the ground.

Just as Peng Longteng raised her halberd and was about to run toward Li Huowang, Chun Xiaoman’s dismembered left arm exploded from beneath the ground and crashed into Peng

Longteng's body, sending her flying away. The force from the impact almost caused Peng Longteng to let go of her halberd.

Just then, the red-veiled woman ran over on all fours and leapt into the air. Three rotting wolf skulls appeared from beneath the red veil before forcefully biting down on Peng Longteng's halberd.

At the same time, the sound of the drum rang out from a distance.

Dong dong dong~

"The turtle carries the Earth, while the Earth carries the Heavens~ A pair of magpies observe everything~ A single blink from the turtle would shake the Earth~ The Heavens and Earth would topple if the turtle rolls over~"

Dong dong dong~

As the chanting rang out, the red-veiled woman turned her body at an impossible angle in the air. Thanks to the extreme torque generated from her twisting body, Peng Longteng finally lost her grip on the halberd.

Without a weapon, the headless Peng Longteng could no longer fight as efficiently as before. Soon, Chun Xiaoman's arm and the tentacles coiled around Peng Longteng's body and trapped her.

On the other hand, the red-veiled woman threw the halberd onto the ground before launching herself at Peng Longteng once more, assaulting her with the three wolf skulls. After tearing apart Peng Longteng's armor, the wolf skulls made short work of Peng Longteng's body, stripping her flesh off her bones.

When he saw that everything was over, Li Huowang finally fell unconscious. Up until now, he had only been keeping himself conscious through sheer willpower. The last words he uttered before falling unconscious were, "Save Gao Zhijian."

Even as he lost consciousness, Li Huowang was on the verge of death. His consciousness faded in and out repeatedly.

I'm so tired... No... I can't give up. Someone is waiting for me.

Everyone paid a terrible price to rescue me. I can't die!

Who? Who is watching me? Who are you?

He wasn't sure how long he was out for, but he finally opened his one remaining eye.

The familiar surroundings told him that he was currently on the ox-cart.

He looked downward and saw that Bai Lingmiao was currently holding an urn as she slowly applied a sticky yellow oil on his body. Looking at her reddened eyes, he knew that she had been crying.

Li Huowang tried his best to open his glued lips. As a thin stream of blood flowed down from the corner of his mouth, he asked, "How is Gao Zhijian?"

His hoarse voice caused Bai Lingmiao to jump a little before she carefully approached Li Huowang's head, tears welling up in her eyes once again.

"Where is Gao Zhijian?" Li Huowang asked again. He was very worried about how Gao Zhijian was impaled by the halberd before being flung away.

Bai Lingmiao wiped off her tears and replied, "He is fine. I summoned the Immortal families to heal him. Thankfully, the halberd hadn't pierced through any of his vital organs."

"That's good." Li Huowang smiled and tried to sit up, only for Bai Lingmiao to stop him.

"Senior Li, you can't move now. I am applying rat oil onto you. My mother once told me that it's very effective at treating burn wounds," said Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang listened to her and continued laying down on the ox-cart while Bai Lingmiao started applying layers of rat oil onto his charred body. Then, Bai Lingmiao told him about what had happened after he fell unconscious.

No one knew what kind of cultivation method Peng Longteng had. How she was capable of moving her body without a head was

anyone's guess.

The only thing they knew was that the bloodthirsty general was finally dead. This could be considered her retribution for the dead villagers.

Peng Longteng's bones had been extremely dense, to the point that they couldn't be broken. It was only after all the flesh on her body had been stripped away that she finally stopped moving.

After the danger had passed, all of them quickly crossed the border and entered Qing Qiu to avoid having the remaining outlaw soldiers following them.

After Bai Lingmiao finished telling Li Huowang everything, the ox-cart fell silent. After a moment, Bai Lingmiao asked hesitantly, "Senior Li, can you teach Chun Xiaoman how to regrow her arm? She lost her left arm. Even though she said that it's fine, she's still so young and it's such a shame..."

Chapter 212 - Charred And Rotten Flesh

“No!” Li Huowang replied, adamantly denying her request. But when he saw how wronged Bai Lingmiao felt, Li Huowang’s tone became gentle as he explained, “Actually, there’s no method to learn; there’s only endless suffering. Trust me, compared to going through that, losing an arm is nothing much.”

If Chun Xiaoman wanted Ba-Hui to notice her, then she would have to experience the utmost of physical and mental pain. Having experienced that twice, only Li Huowang knew what he had to go through.

He didn’t want his companions to experience the same sense of despair as him. At the same time, he was afraid that Chun Xiaoman might end up going crazy.

“Oh, I just thought that it would be quite a shame for Chun Xiaoman to lack an arm from such a young age,” said Bai Lingmiao.

“Don’t worry. There must be other methods to regrow an arm in this crazy world. We will just have to find them,” assured Li Huowang. However, he didn’t even know whether he was consoling himself or Bai Lingmiao.

Just then, Li Huowang sniffed the air. “Do you smell something? Why does it stink?”

“Senior Li, you have a lot of dead flesh on you. Given that it is rotting, it would naturally smell bad,” replied Bai Lingmiao.

“Rot? Smells bad?” muttered Li Huowang. Then, he suddenly started laughing. This was a laughter that came from the bottom of his heart.

‘Decay’ had reappeared in this world, meaning that the world

had started returning back to normalcy.

At the same time, since ‘decay’ had returned, a daring thought popped up within Li Huowang’s mind.

Does this mean that the Abbess came back to life?

Li Huowang made a bold guess. It was just wishful thinking, but it could very well be real. After all, in this bizarre world where the laws were twisted, anything could happen.

He suddenly had a strong urge to run back to the kingdom of Si Qi and check on the Benevolent Nunnery; however, it was nothing more than a fleeting thought. He knew that he couldn’t go back there in his current state.

He had just killed Peng Longteng. Unless he wanted to seek death, he shouldn’t think about returning to the kingdom of Si Qi for the next few years.

So, ‘decay’ has returned. Did it return on its own, or did a being bring it back?

Li Huowang tried to think about it as he recalled the Bodhisattva composed of flies back within the Benevolent Nunnery.

The Righteous Monastery worshiped a Flesh Buddha and they obtained a power associated with flesh and blood.

The Ao Jing Sect yearned for Ba-Hui’s power[\[1\]](#) and used their pain to commune with it in order to obtain extraordinary power.

Does this mean there is a being that is in charge of ‘decay’? Does it mean that something happened to the previous being when ‘decay’ had disappeared? Now that ‘decay’ is back, does that mean that the being is once again present at its original place?

All sorts of thoughts ran through his mind.

Thinking back, the Abbess’s death was too unnatural. How could such a powerful individual die within the pig’s pen?

Were multiple beings at war with each other and the Abbess was just caught in the crossfire?

Li Huowang instinctively thought about the beings within the

Baiyu Capital. Back when he was outside the Ox Tail Gate, Li Huowang had seen that the beings inside were consuming something.

Was it them?

When he tried to recall what had happened that day, Li Huowang suddenly felt sharp pain shooting through his body and his breath became rapid.

“Senior Li, what’s wrong?” asked Bai Lingmiao as she noticed that something was wrong with him and quickly held his hand.

Li Huowang tried his best to forget about the Baiyu Capital. “I can’t listen... I can’t think... Stop thinking...”

In order to break his train of thought, Li Huowang quickly asked Bai Lingmiao, “Where is the book? Where is the Fiery Scripture? Quickly bring me the wax-covered book!”

Hearing this, Bai Lingmiao quickly rummaged around before giving him the wax-covered Fiery Scripture.

As Li Huowang chanted, the white wax was engulfed in flames before congregating together. The flowing white wax then slowly crawled onto Li Huowang’s charred body and slowly started treating him. It crawled slowly, cauterizing the wounds on his body.

A pungent smell filled the interior of the ox-cart.

On the other hand, the pain made Li Huowang relax. He needed the pain to stop himself from thinking.

Those things were not for him to think about. After all, the leaders of the various kingdoms should be the one responsible for dealing with the Natural Disasters.

At this point, everything had already been resolved and there was nothing he could do. All he needed to do was to survive. Only when he became stronger would he have the rights to think about these matters.

Then, Li Huowang suddenly remembered something and asked Bai Lingmiao, “Where is the Profound Records? The blood-red

bamboo slip?”

When Li Huowang stopped his chanting, the white wax once again changed back into normal wax.

When Bai Lingmiao heard Li Huowang ask about the Profound Records, she was quite hesitant but relented in the end and went outside.

A verbal fight ensued outside. But Li Huowang could barely hear it.

After some time, Bai Lingmiao returned with the Profound Records.

Seeing her return, Li Huowang used all of his strength to sit up, causing Bai Lingmiao to be surprised.

“Come, pull off the scab on my back and shove that thing inside me,” said Li Huowang. He wanted to implant the Profound Records into his body while his skin had yet to grow back. It was a good opportunity to do so. Once his skin grew back, the Profound Records would be embedded within him. That way, he wouldn’t have to unfurl it every time he wanted to use it. That way, it would be easier to attack with it as well.

Previously, he had been curious as to why Shou San would hang the Profound Records onto his chest. But now he knew.

Bai Lingmiao naturally knew why Li Huowang wanted to do so. “Senior Li, do you *have* to do this? If you do this, then no one else will be able to use the Profound Records anymore.”

Li Huowang nodded resolutely. “Yes, that’s my intention.”

This time around, Chun Xiaoman had lost an arm. There was no telling who would lose what the next time a situation like this happened.

The Profound Records was too easy to use. Everyone else could just copy him. Thus, he would rather keep the Profound Records embedded under his skin to ensure that no one else could use it again.

Bai Lingmiao bit her lips, but in the end, she decided to follow his instructions. She shakily placed her pale hands onto the scab on Li Huowang's back and tore it down. Li Huowang's painful scream could be heard from within the ox-cart.

Underneath the scab was Li Huowang's bleeding tissue. Bai Lingmiao carefully unfurled the Profound Records and placed it onto his back.

Once she was done, Li Huowang turned around and quickly laid down before pressing the Profound Records deep into his body.

After everything was over, Li Huowang finally closed his eyes to rest. It had been a very tiring day. As he was falling asleep, Li Huowang opened his hazy eyes and looked at Bai Lingmiao. "Did you get everything from Peng Longteng's body?"

Bai Lingmiao nodded. "Puppy said that the armor could probably be sold for money and so we placed everything onto the ox-cart. We even carried the massive halberd; even if we can't use it on our own, we can always melt it down and reforge it into weapons we could use."

"What else did you obtain from Peng Longteng's body besides the armor and halberd?" asked Li Huowang.

1. original text states that they worship Ba-Hui, which is incorrect. Ao Jing Sect's god is someone who wants to consume Ba-Hui's power and usurp it 🤔

Chapter 213 - Reward

Bai Lingmiao nodded. "The General had an identification plate on her. Initially, Puppy thought that it was made of gold, but it was actually bronze. There's not much value to it."

"An identification plate? Show it to me," asked Li Huowang.

Soon, the identification plate was placed in front of him. It was indeed a bronze plate with Peng Longteng's name and position etched onto it.

"There's an emblem of a tiger at the top of the plate. This must be the identification plate of the soldiers." Li Huowang traced his finger at the top of the tiger's head before asking Bai Lingmiao to store it. He decided to keep it; after all, they might be able to make use of it in the future.

Even if they didn't use it, it was just a single plate and didn't weigh that much. On the other hand, Dan Yangzi's sacred text was much heavier than that plate, and its usage was very limited as well. Even so, they were still carrying it with them.

"Oh, Peng Longteng had a book with her as well. Since none of us could read it, Gao Zhijian took it," said Bai Lingmiao.

"Book?" Li Huowang was just beginning to relax when he became alert once more. "Bring the book over."

Hearing this, Bai Lingmiao headed outside only to return empty handed after a while.

"Zhijian said that the book is just a manual containing different techniques for soldiers to cultivate in. It's not very interesting," said Bai Lingmiao.

"He didn't want to give it to you? Call him over and I will talk to him directly." Li Huowang became even more suspicious.

Why does he not want to give it to me if it's just a normal training

manual?

Soon, Gao Zhijian soon arrived near the ox-cart. At this moment, his body was covered in bandages while his face was still pale from his injuries.

Then, Li Huowang asked seriously, “I know that Peng Longteng was incredibly strong and that she had quite some tricks up her sleeves. I know that you also want to learn them and become stronger, but these training methods have their own risks. If you aren’t careful with them, then you can die. Do you understand me?”

Li Huowang was suspicious that the book contained Peng Longteng’s training methods and that Gao Zhijian was secretly trying to learn from it.

After going through so much, Li Huowang had understood that in this crazy world, it was impossible to obtain any power without paying a price.

To obtain something, one must sacrifice something.

Thus, any cultivation or training methods had to have their own inherent risks. Li Huowang did not want Gao Zhijian to turn into another Peng Longteng.

“This... this... this is just... a training manual...” said Gao Zhijian sheepishly.

“Since it’s just a training manual, then why are you hiding it? Show it to me!” demanded Li Huowang.

Gao Zhijian hesitated for a while, before finally passing him the book.

The book was called Jiang Yuan. Li Huowang turned over the coarse paper with his charred fingers and saw the words written on it.

“Those who use this manual are bound to the Emperor and have to gather soldiers for the military. One must not camp on terrains that are difficult to move on. One must convene with allies at strategic locations. One must not stop at dangerous

environments. One must come up with tactics at chokepoints. One must fight to their death in an environment with no place to retreat. Some paths cannot be taken, some enemies must not be attacked, some cities must not be taken, and some lands must not be contested. Those who do not adhere to the above nine rules will lose their lives even if they are an Emperor... Wait... Is this really a manual?" Li Huowang was surprised as he looked at Gao Zhijian before turning back to the manual once again.

Even though the content was difficult to understand, and Li Huowang struggled to comprehend the latter part of the manual, there was nothing wrong or supernatural about it. It was just a normal manual.

Pak!

Li Huowang closed the book and stared at Gao Zhijian in confusion. "It's really just a normal manual. But why are you so obsessed with it?"

"It's... it's nice to read," replied Gao Zhijian as he extended his large hands and took back the book.

When Li Huowang saw Gao Zhijian's bandages starting to get bloody once more, he dismissed him. "Go back and rest first. Once your injuries get better, you can continue reading it."

Hearing this, Gao Zhijian smiled and nodded before taking the book back with him away.

Once he was gone, Bai Lingmiao quickly grabbed a thin blanket and covered Li Huowang's body. "Senior Li, your injuries are very serious. There's no need for you to worry about things like them right now. You need to rest."

Li Huowang wanted to sleep, but the pain from having the Profound Records embedded within his back was keeping him awake. He stared at the roof of the ox-cart, his mind wandering around. He had nothing to do. After some time, he got too bored and called out, "Miaomiao, please prop me up. I want to see the

outside world.”

Bai Lingmiao was quite reluctant, but still did as she was told after some persuasion.

When the curtains of the ox-cart were pulled open, all Li Huowang saw was a large field of green grass. They were traveling through the grass plains.

As he took in the beautiful scenery around him, Li Huowang felt his spirit getting uplifted. It was the same feeling that one would get if they got to drink a large cup of iced water during summer. He could see the grass swaying rhythmically amidst the gentle breeze.

“Is this Qing Qiu? It is so much more beautiful than Hou Shu,” commented Li Huowang.

Bai Lingmiao nodded and agreed, “I’ve heard my father tell me that Qing Qiu is located to the west of the Liang Kingdom. He told me that the horses and goats of Qing Qiu were of excellent quality.”

Li Huowang nodded. “‘Qing Qiu’ means green hills. I can see the ‘green’, but where are the hills?”

Bai Lingmiao had never traveled far from her village, and so she didn’t know how to answer his question.

“Who among us is from Qing Qiu?” Li Huowang asked after a moment.

“Sun Baolu is from Qing Qiu. Besides him, there was another disciple and two of the assistants. However, all of them except Sun Baolu are dead,” replied Bai Lingmiao.

Hearing this, Li Huowang sighed. “Find out where they used to live. We will send their bodies back.”

Too many had died during their travels.

“Mmhhh. But I’ve heard that the people of Qing Qiu do not bury their dead. Let me ask Sun Baolu,” replied Bai Lingmiao.

Bai Lingmiao continued talking for a while, but didn’t get a reply. Puzzled, she turned around and saw Li Huowang frozen on

the spot with his single eye opened wide from shock. It was as if he had seen something; however, there was nothing but grass outside.

“Senior Li, what are you—” Just as Bai Lingmiao was speaking, her words were cut short when she saw the wounded Li Huowang suddenly grab his sword, leap out of the window, and crash onto the floor.

The impact instantly caused his charred left leg to snap like a twig. At the same time, cracks started appearing all over his body.

But Li Huowang ignored all of it. Instead, he pointed his sword toward his left arm, making it so that he could cut off his left arm at a moment’s notice.

Seeing this, Puppy, who was the closest to him, ran over to Li Huowang and hugged his right arm to prevent him from cutting his left arm off.

“Quick! Bring the chains! Senior Li’s illness is back!” Puppy shouted at his companions.

Li Huowang froze and asked Puppy, “You can’t see them?”

“Ah?” Puppy didn’t know what he was referring to. “See what?”

Hearing his words, Li Huowang’s body collapsed listlessly onto the soft grass below as he stared at the sky above with his one remaining eye. He was the only one who could see the headless Peng Longteng standing there like a statue, her shadow covering his entire body.

Peng Longteng’s armor was still glowing red with blood seeping out from the cracks of her armor. She looked the same as how she looked during her fight with Li Huowang.

Why did she become an illusion and follow me? Why?

Li Huowang didn’t know how it happened.

At that moment, he suddenly saw something moving behind Peng Longteng’s illusion.

It was Jin Shanzhao, or to be exact, only his upper torso. His

organs were rotting as they trailed behind him.

He too had become an illusion!

As Li Huowang was being tied up with a chain by his companions and carried into the ox-cart, he saw Jin Shanzhao opening his mouth, as if he wanted to say something.

“What do you want to say?” asked Li Huowang.

Jin Shanzhao’s mouth opened and closed, but in the end, no voice came out.

Chapter 214 - Yang Xiaohai

Splash~

Yang Xiaohai closed his eyes as he dunked his head into the clear river water. After shaking his head a few times, he raised his head, feeling quite spirited.

With this, he had managed to finish washing up and drinking water at the same time.

“The water is so sweet here,” muttered Yang Xiaohai as he rubbed off the water on his chin before filling a pail of water and hurrying back.

After traveling for so long and having had enough food to eat, Yang Xiaohai’s body was no longer as skinny as before. He now had distinct muscles and his face was no longer yellow. He had even grown quite a bit taller.

“Good morning, Senior Cao Cao,” Yang Xiaohai greeted Puppy, the latter circling around some of the ladies. However, when he saw how Puppy didn’t have any time to talk with him, Yang Xiaohai just smiled and walked up to the pot.

He was no longer the innocent child he once was; he knew why Puppy was working so hard at serving the ladies.

Given that most of them were still asleep, they hadn’t yet started a fire under the pot. They waited until almost everyone was awake before starting the fire to cook breakfast.

After placing down the pail of water, Yang Xiaohai picked up a stick from the fireplace and started observing Chun Xiaoman, who was practicing with the sword, from the sidelines. Then, he started copying Chun Xiaoman by swinging the stick, focusing just as hard

as Chun Xiaoman.

When she saw what Yang Xiaohai was doing, Chun Xiaoman suddenly sent a stab toward him. Flustered by the sudden attack, Yang Xiaohai fell onto the soft grass.

Chun Xiaoman was holding the sword with her one remaining arm as she said, "Get up and practice with me. You can't just learn by staying on the sidelines."

Usually, Li Huowang would practice swordplay with her; however, given his current condition, it was almost impossible for him to do so.

Hearing Chun Xiaoman's words, Yang Xiaohai got excited and picked up his stick before trying to stab her.

Yang Xiaohai was someone who loved practicing with the sword and didn't loathe how tiresome it was. After all, if he managed to learn well, then he wouldn't be bullied by others even if he ended up becoming a beggar once more.

They continued practicing until they saw Bai Lingmiao come out from the ox-cart.

Seeing her, Chun Xiaoman sheathed her sword. "Let's go and prepare breakfast. They are awake now."

"Ok!" Yang Xiaohai happily returned to the fireplace and the pot. But when he got back, he frowned upon seeing someone else doing his job of starting the fire.

It was a plump woman. She was one of the women Senior Li had saved from the bandit's camp.

Many of the women had died back at the border of Hou Shu due to the attack of the outlaw soldiers. She was one of the few remaining survivors.

"Get away!" said Yan Xiaohai as he ran over and took the flint from her hands. He was adamant about not letting anyone take his place.

The plump woman was not angered by his actions, and instead

smiled sheepishly. "Little fellow, you are back?"

Yang Xiaohai had once talked to this woman for a while, but he had never expected her to suddenly claim that she came from the same village as him. He hated her quite a lot. She was particularly good at scheming.

After being rescued by Li Huowang, all the women had been eating and drinking without worries. Some of them even ran away at the border. However, more importantly than anything else, the women that were traveling with them had even started taking over Yang Xiaohai's jobs! So, he hated them.

But the one he hated the most was the plump woman with a beauty mark on her chin.

"Don't call me little fellow, and I'm not from the same village as you!" shouted Yang Xiaohai. There was no way things could be so coincidental. The woman was obviously lying.

Seeing his reaction, the plump woman smiled, a dimple appearing on her left cheek. Then, she started talking to Yang Xiaohai as he started the fire, "Little fellow, what is the name of that large man? He's so strong."

Yang Xiaohai turned around and saw Gao Zhijian who was gritting his teeth while trying to lift the halberd up. Veins could be seen bulging around his neck as he exerted all of his strength to do so.

"And why do you care?" asked Yang Xiaohai, annoyed.

"Little fellow, are you annoyed with me?" The woman smiled and dusted off some dirt from Yang Xiaohai's body.

"Don't touch me!" shouted Yang Xiaohai, causing the woman to step back a little.

Feeling wronged, the woman asked, "Why are you doing this? I was finally able to meet someone from my village and I just want to get close to you."

I was sold when I was young so there's no way you would recognize

me!

But, in the end, Yang Xiaohai never said those words to her.

“Don’t come and steal my work. Just sit there next time,” said Yang Xiaohai.

“But my benefactor is injured... I was just trying to help,” retorted the woman weakly.

Hearing her words, Yang Xiaohai turned and stared toward the ox-cart.

At this moment, Li Huowang was staying inside the ox-cart.

As Yang Xiaohai recalled everything that had happened to them, he started getting worried.

Senior Li was their pillar. He must live!

After a while of trying, the flint finally produced some sparks and started a fire. Then, Yang Xiaohai raised his head and ordered the woman. “Go and fetch some water.”

The woman was not angry at being ordered around by a child, and instead looked eager. She turned around while carrying an empty pail.

Meanwhile, Yang Xiaohai patted the dirt on his shirt and approached the ox-cart warily. When he got close, he heard someone talking.

“What are you trying to say? What should I do for you to take Peng Longteng and leave?” asked a voice.

Yang Xiaohai moved to the other side of the ox-cart and saw Li Huowang perched on the window.

Compared to how burnt his body was before, he looked much better now. Even so, his appearance was still quite gruesome.

Half of his head was covered in new skin while the other half was still exposed with some patches of scarred flesh. The skin and flesh from his jaws had been burned off, exposing his white teeth that clacked when he spoke.

Not only did the current Li Huowang look scary, his eyes were

constantly staring at something distant as he continued to talk to himself. "Monk, do me a favor and ask him what other final wishes he had? I know that he's very pitiful and I do want to help him, but why is he still following me around as an illusion? Shouldn't he be following around Peng Longteng, the one who had killed him?"

At that moment, Li Huowang's one remaining eye suddenly darted around before fixing itself on Yang Xiaohai.

Yang Xiaohai suddenly felt his scalp tingle from fear, almost causing him to run away. Now he knew why Li Huowang's ox-cart was usually much further away from the others.

Li Huowang himself was almost as scary as an evil being.

"Is something the matter?" asked Li Huowang.

Yang Xiaohai was so afraid that he didn't know where he should place his hands.

"Senior... senior... sen-senior... senior Li, is everything alright?" asked Yang Xiaohai. Even though he was terrified, he still cared about Li Huowang.

However, Li Huowang just ignored him and continued to talk to himself.

Yang Xiaohai quickly fled back to the fireplace, only to be stopped by Puppy.

"How's Senior Li?" asked Puppy.

Yang Xiaohai shook his head. "I think Senior Li's condition is slowly getting worse. Should we find a doctor?"

"How can a doctor possibly treat him? Even that Baldy could only suppress it in the past," said Puppy as he stood there with a worried look on his face. He too wanted to cure Li Huowang. "I remember what the Black Taisui looked like. That Baldy used to feed those to Senior Li to suppress his illness. But the question is, where can we find one?"

Chapter 215 - Seniors And Juniors

Gao Zhijian's face was red as he carried the halberd back onto the ox-cart. He had to use all his strength just to carry it back.

Once he got it back onto the ox-cart, even without waiting to catch his breath he quickly took out a cloth and wrapped the halberd up. Senior Li had told him before that whenever he was done with training, he had to wrap the halberd up. Given that this halberd originally belonged to a General of Hou Shu, it might draw them into a conflict if the officials from Qing Qiu recognized it.

After he finished wrapping the halberd, Gao Zhijian scratched his head with a sigh. He had trained for so long, but was only barely able to carry the halberd around. On the other hand, Peng Longteng had been able to easily wield the halberd as if it weighed nothing. He had measured the halberd and had thought about cutting it to make it shorter and lighter. Twelve feet long was just far too big for him to use it.

While cavalymen often required their weapons to be twelve feet long, those fighting on foot wouldn't require such a large weapon. After all, it would be too hard to use such a long range weapon to fight an enemy in close quarter combat.

Then, Gao Zhijian opened the curtains of the ox-cart and stared at the messy armor kept within. He had tried measuring it and adjusting the size to fit his body. He was sure that the armor was definitely extraordinary, especially since it was able to block Senior Li's sword. But that woman was larger than him. He would have to find a blacksmith to alter the size if he wanted to be able to wear it properly.

At the same time, the other issue was the weight. The entire armor weighed several hundred pounds. His strength was still insufficient to use such a thing.

“Simpleton, what are you doing? Come here, I have something to talk to you about. It’s good news!”

Hearing the voice, Gao Zhijian begrudgingly turned around and saw that the voice belonged to Puppy.

“Did you see those girls? Some of them are interested in you!” said Puppy.

Gao Zhijian looked at where Puppy was pointing and saw that several women were staring at him. After being found out, the women immediately hid behind another cart.

“Simpleton, do you want a wife? If you want, then I, Cao Cao, will become your Yue Lao[1] and help you hook up with them!” declared Puppy.

However, Gao Zhijian completely ignored Puppy as he continued checking the pieces of armor with a sour expression on his face.

“Are you thinking that they are dirty? You shouldn’t do that; you know, they never even treated you like a simpleton. All of us are born with defects, and so we can’t choose who we get to marry. So, we might as well settle for one of them. If you miss your chance, then there might not be another one in the future~ Let me tell you this: I think I have a chance with one of them. Who knows, you might be able to attend my wedding reception soon,” bragged Puppy as he rattled on and on.

“Go... Go...”

“Go? Yeah, let’s go!” responded Puppy.

“Go... Go away!” shouted Gao Zhijian, causing Puppy to be surprised.

“Hey! I look up to you as a brother and was worried about your love life! It will be close to impossible to find someone if we miss

our chance this time around!” said Puppy.

But Gao Zhijian just slapped Puppy away, causing the latter to fall onto the ground.

After a moment, Puppy grumbled and cursed under his breath while walking toward Zhao Wu’s ox-cart.

“Ps~ Psps~”

On the other hand, Gao Zhijian called for Bun who was sleeping under one of the horse carts.

Hearing the voice, Bun stretched its body, and slowly walked toward Gao Zhijian.

As Gao Zhijian carefully cradled the dog, he felt its smooth fur running across the palm of his hand causing him to start smiling. He reached into his shirt and brought out half a piece of cornbread. Seeing the food, Bun instantly started wagging its tail.

Then, Gao Zhijian tore off some of the bread and placed it on his palm before silently enjoying the feeling of Bun licking his palm.

Bun ate really fast and the cornbread was finished in just a few moments.

As he saw this, Gao Zhijian closed his eyes and buried his face into Bun’s soft fur. He really liked dogs. Dogs were better than humans. He had even thought about asking Senior Li to give the dog to him.

After a while, Gao Zhijian stopped what he was doing and carefully took out the soldier’s training manual and started reading it once again. He didn’t know why he never got tired of reading it. While he didn’t truly understand the contents of the book, he felt a familiar feeling when he read it.

Meanwhile, Puppy saw Gao Zhijian hugging Bun and shook his head. “Sigh, he’s still a bit stupid. To think he prefers dogs over women.”

“Puppy, I would advise you to behave a bit. If you act rashly against those women, then I guarantee that Chun Xiaoman will kill

you; even Senior Li is too injured to stop her right now,” warned Zhao Wu while holding an abacus. He was counting their inventory.

“Even if you don’t support me, why are you admonishing me? I would never be rough with those women even if I’m trying to find a wife. I have many methods to woo them without touching them! Just you wait, I am sure I will be able to get a wife before we reach Liang Kingdom. Do you want to bet?” said Puppy.

“Sure, sure. You are amazing. Go and try to hook up with one of the girls. I’m a bit busy counting our inventory right now. If I don’t do it right, then we will end up without food for days,” said Zhao Wu, shooing him away.

Puppy scratched the white patches on his face and stared at Zhao Wu. Zhao Wu’s body was still the same as ever, with one shoulder higher than the other. After a moment, Puppy tried to persuade him one more time, “Are you sure you don’t want to come with me? You should know that people like us would have a hard time finding a wife. If you don’t seize your chance, then you will be single forever.”

At this point, Zhao Wu became annoyed. “Senior Li is already injured so badly, yet you still have the time to think about such trivial things?”

“Relax, he can even grow back an entire arm. What are you afraid of? I’ve finally made sense of Senior Li, and he’s bloody amazing!” said Puppy as he raised his thumb high up into the air. “Relax, even if the Lord of Hell were to come and find him, Senior Li would still be fine.”

However, Zhao Wu was still worried. He thought about everything that had happened throughout their journey and how Senior Li had managed to survive through every single crisis. All of them had some impairments here and there, but Senior Li’s illness was invisible, and it was the most dangerous of them all.

“What are you worried about? Senior Li is more or less half an

Immortal right now with so many powers under his belt. Even if we encounter something dangerous, there's nothing we can do to help him. Zhao Wu, didn't I say it just now? We must know our limits. I know I don't have the strength to do much, and so I don't bother with it at all," said Puppy.

"Why are you so pessimistic?" asked Zhao Wu, irritated.

"As if you are very ambitious. Except for Senior Li, all of those who were ambitious had already been killed by that Baldy back in that cave," Puppy scoffed.

The sound of the abacus suddenly stopped before Zhao Wu spoke in a voice filled with hesitation, "Puppy, do you think Senior Li could teach those powers to us?"

The moment Zhao Wu said that, Puppy hugged his stomach and ran away. "Aiya~ Aiya~ My stomach hurts~ I need to go to the toilet now, so we will talk later."

Puppy knew that Li Huowang's powers came at a price. Chun Xiaoman had used it once and lost one of her arms. That was too scary. It was also possible that the reason Senior Li became crazier by the day was due to those powers. He did not want to end up like him.

1. god of marriage and love 🙌

Chapter 216 - Considerations

Ox-carts. Although they were a lot slower than horse-drawn carriages, they could carry a lot more weight. Furthermore, there was no need to be concerned about the food required to feed out here in Qing Qiu since it was available everywhere.

Li Huowang and his group had a smooth journey after leaving Hou Shu, and did not encounter any evil spirits or bandits. Moreover, Li Huowang's injuries were gradually improving. Thus, everyone was in high spirits.

As the ox-cart continued to move slowly, Li Huowang limped alongside it. At the same time, Bun faithfully circled around him while wagging its tail.

“Senior Li, why don't you head back into the cart and rest? Your injuries haven't been completely healed,” said Bai Lingmiao worriedly.

Li Huowang's newly grown hair swayed slightly as he shook his head. “Lying in the cart all the time makes my limbs stiff. Walking is good, and besides, I'm recovering quite well now. At least Bun is now able to recognize me.”

Li Huowang still remembered how Bun barked at him back when he first got off the cart. But that couldn't be blamed on it; he did indeed look quite frightening back then.

Fortunately, Bun could recognize him now. His skin had healed completely, and just as planned, the Profound Records was safely embedded within his back.

“Senior Li, we can take a break now. We'll continue walking for another two hours after noon and finally reach Women's Mountain,”

said Sun Baolu. Being a local, he was quite familiar with the area.

Nowadays, Sun Baolu always had a smile on his face. He used to be very quiet, but had become a lot more talkative ever since they arrived in Qing Qiu.

“Are you really going back, Old Sun? Why don't you join us so that you don't get kidnapped again?” suggested Zhao Wu.

However, Sun Baolu simply smiled brightly and shook his head in response to the suggestion. “No, someone is waiting for me. I have to go back home.”

Meanwhile, Li Huowang raised his crutch and pointed to a nearby stream. “Let's head there and start a fire.”

It was quite challenging to find firewood in Qing Qiu, but they were finally able to start a fire after gathering some dried branches.

After starting a fire, the others went to fetch water and forage for wild vegetables.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang sat alone, once again lost in his own world, detached from the outside noise. He looked up and saw Peng Longteng blocking the sun.

Even after all this time, she was still around.

His only solace was the fact that she was just standing there motionless and not doing anything.

Peng Longteng looked quite towering in her heavy armor. Even without her head, she still easily surpassed Li Huowang in terms of height. Li Huowang estimated that she was at least two meters tall when she was still alive.

At that moment, Li Huowang suddenly heard some unusual sounds. Even so, he didn't turn around to check on it; he knew that the sound was coming from Jin Shanzhao dragging his organs through the grass.

Why did both of them turn into illusions and start following me?

This was a question that had been filling Li Huowang's mind for a long time; however, he didn't have an answer.

It was not just these two either; the earlier illusions of Jiang Yingzi and Monk also left him without any answers.

Is this the power of a Strayed One? Can the Strayed Ones control the people they have killed?

A new speculation appeared in Li Huowang's mind.

How can I make them disappear? No... that's not right either... I didn't kill Monk. In fact, he might still be safe and sound back in the Righteous Monastery, never to have actually died.

But, if they aren't appearing due to my powers as a Strayed One, then what could be the reason? Could it be that I actually have a mental illness?

Li Huowang was feeling a little disoriented when he suddenly felt an itch, causing him to reach his bruised hand into his new clothes and scratch himself.

When Bun noticed his actions, it raced over and started wagging its tail as it squatted down in front of him.

Rip!

Li Huowang tore a huge piece of dead skin and hurled it toward Peng Longteng.

“Woof woof woof!” Bun barked delightedly while chewing on the dead skin greedily.

After finishing the snack, Bun went under Peng Longteng's legs and obediently sat in front of Li Huowang. Li Huowang knew that Bun liked these treats. All of his dead skin from before as well as his severed leg had all gone into its belly.

As he stared at Bun, Li Huowang stretched out his hand to pat its head, and then gazed off into the distance toward Peng Longteng.

After a while, he sighed deeply and mumbled to himself, “Well, at least these two don't talk. They won't be as annoying as Monk.”

“Daoist, am I annoying? I'm not, am I? I haven't done anything,” said Monk.

Hearing this, Li Huowang just gave a self-deprecating smile and chose to remain silent. Self-assurance was just that; he was more concerned about what would happen next after these three illusions.

What if these illusions multiply in the future? What if... I end up becoming like Dan Yangzi?

Li Huowang shivered as he thought back to the horror of Dan Yangzi and the hundreds of hallucinations.

I need to figure out what's going on and get rid of them. If I end up like Dan Yangzi, then I will surely go insane.

With these thoughts, the urgency of resolving his issues as a Strayed One became even more apparent to Li Huowang.

“Baolu!” called out Li Huowang, instantly causing Bun's ears to perk up. Then, it turned around and saw Sun Baolu running toward them. After a moment, it took a few steps forward, pushed its head against Li Huowang's legs, nudging him with its black nose.

“Senior Li, you called me?” asked Sun Baolu.

At this point, Li Huowang closely examined Sun Baolu once again. He was still the same as when they left the Righteous Monastery, still wrapped up tightly in his clothes. In fact, throughout their journey, he had always kept a low profile, to the point that Li Huowang sometimes forgot that he was even there.

“Do you know Qing Qiu well?” Li Huowang asked.

Sun Baolu nodded. “I'm very familiar with it.”

“Very familiar?” Li Huowang was a bit surprised; this was the first time he had heard anyone say that.

Unless met with unforeseen circumstances, a majority of the people in this world would spend their whole lives within the same twenty miles. Sun Baolu's assertion that he knew the entire place very well made Li Huowang skeptical.

“People in Qing Qiu are not like people in other areas. We follow nature. We travel to areas where nature is fertile. From my

grandfather to my father, we've moved around Qing Qiu all our lives," explained Sun Baolu.

Hearing this, Li Huowang finally understood. "Oh, so the people here are nomadic."

Seeing the vast grasslands, Li Huowang could have guessed as much. People here relied on the land for everything, including their food.

"The sun is scorching today. Why don't you take off some clothes?" suggested Li Huowang. But when he saw Sun Baolu just standing there smiling, Li Huowang didn't insist further.

"Well, let's get down to business. Are there any experts here? Maybe someone like Dan Yangzi?" asked Li Huowang, finally bringing up the real reason behind calling over Sun Baolu.

Chapter 217 - Rabbit

Upon hearing this, Sun Baolu's face showed a hint of confusion, but he quickly regained his composure. "I don't know if the Lama from Luoism count or not, but my dad and grandfather respect them a lot, and it's said that they can communicate with spirits. I've only heard about that, and haven't witnessed it myself. I've only seen them twice ever since I was young. They came to ask for food, and my dad entertained them."

Based on what Sun Baolu explained, Li Huowang got a basic understanding of what the so-called Lama from Luoism were like.

According to Baolu's description, they were the ones responsible for hosting the wedding and funeral ceremonies all over Qing Qiu. He also learned that they were rather secular, and that they did not place any restrictions on meat or wine.

These Lama also claimed that there were no evil spirits in the entirety of Qing Qiu because of the protection of their Immortal Heaven.

"No evil spirits? There's none at all?" Li Huowang looked around, surprised at the stark contrast between this place and the others.

"Well... at least I haven't seen any, and neither have any of the others," said Sun Baolu. He wasn't as certain as Li Huowang had expected him to be.

"No evil spirits... Do you want to get in touch with those Lama? Perhaps you can ask for information about Strayed Ones," suggested Sun Baolu.

But after careful consideration, Li Huowang dismissed the idea. Even if he had the bronze coin mask, it was too dangerous to recklessly interact with other factions. If he were to be recognized

as a Strayed One, it would lead to a lot of trouble.

After all the things he had been through, in his eyes, none of the factions besides the Benevolent Nunnery were any good.

It was Liang Kingdom after they passed through Qing Qiu. For now, there was nothing more important than getting to Liang Kingdom safely.

With this thought, Li Huowang came to his decision.

We can't bring this group of people there. After sending all these people along their separate paths, I might go and look for them myself.

"Tell me more about these so-called Lama from Luoism. What's their reputation like around here?" asked Li Huowang.

"They're still alright, at least in my experience," said Sun Baolu.

Li Huowang continued to question Sun Baolu, extracting all the bits and pieces of information about the Lama from Luoism that he could.

"Senior Li, time to eat," called out Bai Lingmiao.

A bowl of clear noodle soup was placed before Li Huowang, and there were some small, white tubers floating in it.

"What is this?" asked Li Huowang as he used his chopsticks to pick one up.

"I don't know. Senior Sun told us that these vegetables can be eaten. He said that he used to dig them up from the grass and eat them as snacks. He called them wild yams," replied Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang stuffed a wild yam into his mouth and gently bit into it. He found that they were like bitter potatoes, but the taste was decent.

At that moment, Bun, who was lying on Li Huowang's body, suddenly perked up, and then dashed toward a grassy area in the distance.

"Why did Bun run off? Should we follow for a look?" asked Bai Lingmiao.

“Let it have some fun. We’re usually rushing on the road, and it’s tough to find time to relax. Bun understands human nature, and will return when it’s time to leave,” said Li Huowang as he continued to eat. At the same time, Bai Lingmiao squatted beside him as she continued to watch over him.

Soon, the bowl of wild yams was quickly finished by Li Huowang, prompting Bai Lingmiao to serve him another bowl.

Li Huowang didn’t know if it was because his skin was growing back or something else, but his appetite right now was no less than that of Gao Zhijian or Bai Lingmiao’s.

As she gave him another bowl of noodle soup, Bai Lingmiao reached her right hand out to gently pat off the dust on Li Huowang’s body and she said longingly, “Senior Li, after passing through Qing Qiu, we’ll soon arrive at Liang Kingdom. Once we arrive at my village at the base of the Cowheart Mountain, we can settle down over there. We can use the silver to buy a few acres of land. Then, you can use oxen to plow the land, and I will weave at home. When we have saved enough money for a house, we can share the house with my parents.”

“Working the fields and weaving? Do you want to do that for the rest of your life?” asked Li Huowang as he slurped the rest of the noodles.

Hearing his response, Bai Lingmiao responded carefully, “Senior Li, you don’t want to work in the fields? That’s alright, you don’t have to. We have oxen.”

“I’m fine with doing anything, but I must cure my illness first,” said Li Huowang.

Hearing this, Bai Lingmiao grabbed his hand. “Senior Li, it’s alright. I don’t mind you being like this. I can take care of you whenever your illness acts up.”

Li Huowang recalled Bai Lingmiao’s swollen face from before, and shook his head firmly. “No, it must be cured.”

He had to cure this illness, otherwise he wouldn't dare let himself stay by Bai Lingmiao's side in his current condition. Currently, he was like a ticking time bomb, one that could burst at any moment, capable of doing something he would end up regretting for the rest of his life.

Although he still had Yang Na and his mother on the other side, they were merely hallucinations and didn't actually exist. It was time he gave up on them.

"Senior Li, I beg you. It's fine like this, don't go looking for anything more. Didn't you tell me before that even the powerful Abbess couldn't find a solution either?" begged Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang placed his bowl down and looked at her with surprise. "How would we know if we don't give it a try? Don't you want me to be cured of my illness?"

Hearing this, Bai Lingmiao hesitated, but finally chose to remain silent as she looked down.

On one hand, she was worried about Li Huowang's safety. But on the other hand, she was even more concerned that one day, if his illness was truly cured, then he would abandon her when he no longer needed her.

A healthy Li Huowang was too good, far too good, someone far beyond her reach.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang continued to eat his noodles, his eyes watching Peng Longteng, Monk, and half of Jin Shanzhao. He recalled his speculation about the Sitting Oblivion Dao, and his gaze grew more resolute.

No, I must completely resolve the issues associated with being a Strayed One. If Bei Feng from the Sitting Oblivion Dao really is a Strayed One, then there must be a way.

Even if there isn't a way, I must look for one. If I don't, then I would be letting myself down.

At that moment, Bun returned while holding a dead rabbit in

its mouth. It placed the rabbit in front of Li Huowang and wagged its tail excitedly.

Bun's arrival broke the deadlock between the two. Bai Lingmiao reached out to rub the mutt's head. "Good dog. You know that Senior Li's body needs nourishment right now."

She picked up the rabbit and headed toward the pot.

Li Huowang looked at her departing figure, then said to Bun who had its tongue stuck out, "I know that she has my interests at heart, but I really dare not continue to be like that and accompany her for the rest of our lives. Honestly, I'm afraid that I may accidentally kill her some day."

"Woof woof!" Bun barked at Li Huowang, and then placed its nose on the ground.

Li Huowang reached into his clothes and pulled out another piece of dead skin, then threw it toward Peng Longteng.

Seeing this, Bun immediately dashed toward Peng Longteng's crotch.

Meanwhile, Sun Baolu used his excellent skills to roast the rabbit, turning it into a delicious meal for everyone.

Chapter 218 - Women's Mountain

Li Huowang walked slowly with the support of a crutch, leading the blindfolded Bai Lingmiao. He couldn't move fast as his severed leg had yet to fully heal.

Fortunately, the ox-cart wasn't fast either. It sacrificed speed and compensated for it by carrying a greater load while matching Li Huowang's current pace.

"Is this Women's Mountain?" Li Huowang squinted, shading his eyes with his hand as he looked at the distant hills. As he looked at these hills that were devoid of trees and covered with only green grass, he understood why this kingdom was called Qing Qiu^[1].

However, it might also be related to the lower height of these hills, unlike those mountain peaks that reached into the clouds. These grass-covered hills were akin to clusters of low ridges that were not interconnected.

"Senior Li, do you see the resemblance? When you squint and look, don't those hills look like half a woman's face lying down?" said Sun Baolu as he excitedly pointed with his fingers.

Li Huowang examined them carefully before shaking his head. He couldn't quite make out the obscure likeness between those hills and a woman's face.

These oddly-shaped hills were very strange, and there were neither too many nor too few. They just seemed to appear out of nowhere in the landscape, with no apparent connection between them.

"This year is the Year of the Moon, and according to our ancestral tradition, my family should be camping and grazing about

a hundred miles from here. It won't be long until I can reunite with them!" said Sun Baolu, excited.

However, Li Huowang wasn't particularly interested in what Sun Baolu was saying. He was more concerned with their supplies. With there being so many people on this journey to Qing Qiu, their foodstock was running low.

"Can we find a market to buy food inside Women's Mountain? If not, we are going to starve to death," asked Li Huowang.

"Yes, no doubt about it. People from the nearby areas would often go there to exchange goods. I even went there once when I was seven," replied Sun Baolu.

With Sun Baolu's explanation, Li Huowang knew that in the vast and sparsely populated Qing Qiu, nomadic people would often choose a specific area to facilitate trade. Over time, these areas would become established marketplaces. Officials from Qing Qiu also came to these locations to collect taxes.

When Li Huowang saw tiny black dots moving at the base of the hills, he realized that Sun Baolu's information was correct. There were indeed people over there.

"Let's go. But remember to put on your veiled hats beforehand to avoid drawing attention from the locals," said Li Huowang as he donned his veil. His current bruised appearance wasn't any better than the others.

As the ox-cart approached the Women's Mountain, they followed a small path that led to the inside of the encircled area. In an instant, everything suddenly became clear.

A vast area of tents stretched out before Li Huowang and the others. The sound of horse hooves, people shouting, and donkeys braying filled the air. Li Huowang suddenly felt like he was attending a lively fair.

Many of the Qing Qiu people were dressed quite differently compared to the people from Hou Shu. Currently they were all

preoccupied with their affairs, shouting and calling out to each other in this bustling marketplace.

At the same time, the sheer number of livestock led to an enormous amount of dung. The distinctive smell filled the air, causing everyone to furrow their brows.

The most significant difference between the people from Qing Qiu and Hou Shu were their rosy faces. The people of Hou Shu were covered in heavy freckles, regardless of age or gender. This was perhaps due to the prolonged exposure to the sun.

They also noticed that the people of Qing Qiu generally had shorter statures compared to Li Huowang and the others, making their group a lot more noticeable.

Everyone around them wore rough, makeshift leather garments, and circular bone ornaments could be seen dangling from the braids of the women and around the waists of men. Aside from bones and leather, they used grass for almost everything else—from crafting grass shoes and hats to weaving grass baskets, which were available for sale.

When Li Huowang's group entered, they attracted the attention of the Qing Qiu people. Faced with foreigners, everyone regarded them with caution and indifference.

At that moment, a loud noise and a chopping sound suddenly rang out from a nearby grass stall. A sharp knife was raised high and brought down forcefully, splitting the head of a hairless, grotesque dog into two halves.

Startled, Bun whimpered and quickly sought refuge beneath the ox-cart, with its tail between its legs.

“Are you truly a Qing Qiu native? You seem quite different from them,” Li Huowang remarked as he glanced through the black veil toward Sun Baolu.

Sun Baolu's face dimmed as he explained, “It's because... my mother is from another place.”

However, his eyes quickly lit up as he rushed through the crowd toward the front. He quickly made his way through the crowd, clearly overwhelmed with excitement as he embraced an elderly Qing Qiu person and proceeded to engage in conversation.

When they got closer, Li Huowang realized he couldn't understand their conversation at all.

Of all places, it had to be this one that had its own language.

Li Huowang was speechless; he could foresee some communication issues during their time in Qing Qiu.

Following a brief exchange with the elderly person, Sun Baolu returned to Li Huowang and said enthusiastically, "Senior Li, there is no doubt about it! That person is one of my kin! My family is not far from here."

"Alright, even if it's not far, we still need to proceed one step at a time. First, help us buy some food. We're running low on supplies," said Li Huowang while surveying the lively marketplace. Their inability to communicate due to the language barrier meant that they would have to rely on Sun Baolu for negotiations.

Sun Baolu nodded in agreement and was about to dive into the bustling crowd, but was suddenly stopped by Li Huowang. "Wait for a moment. Is there a place to eat around here? Everyone is hungry and could use some rest."

Soon, everyone arrived at a noodle stall where green noodles could be seen hanging from the rafters, making the whole place resemble a forest.

According to what Sun Baolu told them, here each group would cook their noodles in a shared pot and pay only for what they consume.

Although this method of eating was unfamiliar to the rest of the group, it didn't stop them from enjoying the meal. The aroma of the grass-infused noodles, combined with the spiciness of the mutton and spicy sauce, made for quite a delectable meal.

The noodle house was crowded with many diners. Fortunately, the presence of the hanging noodles made it difficult for the nearby people to see Li Huowang's group without their veils.

Where's Bun?

Li Huowang suddenly realized that the mutt was nowhere to be seen. As he turned to look for it, he saw Bun returning from underneath the noodle stall, holding something in its mouth. It spat the object out near Li Huowang's feet, and then sat down, wagging its tail while waiting for a reward.

As he saw the gleaming white bone near his feet, Li Huowang was puzzled. “What is this?”

While the others were unfamiliar with it, Sun Baolu recognized it immediately and explained, “Senior Li, that is a horse bone. Qing Qiu people rear horses, and they naturally eat horse meat as well. It's quite tasty.”

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1. Qing Qiu can also be known as green hills 🏞️

Chapter 219 - Second Deity

“Horse bones? Where did you end up getting one of those? Please don't bring over random things. I'm almost out of scraps of my own dead skin to feed you,” Li Huowang turned to Bun.

Bun clearly didn't understand Li Huowang's words. It just lowered its head and used its black snout to nudge the horse bone closer to Li Huowang's feet. "Woof?"

Seeing this, Li Huowang patted its head and turned to Sun Baolu who was sitting across from him. “Alright, we are done eating. Since the place is different, the food will also be quite different. Just choose some local goods that aren't easily perishable.”

After finishing his instructions, Li Huowang nodded in Bai Lingmiao's direction, prompting her to hand him a money pouch she had sewn for herself using some scraps.

Sun Baolu weighed it with his hand, then stood up and wiped his mouth. “Okay, it's on me!”

“It's getting late, so let's check into an inn to rest. Staying outside every day can be quite tiring as well,” said Li Huowang as he pushed himself up with his crutch.

However, they soon faced a new challenge. Without Sun Baolu, they didn't understand what the people of Qing Qiu were saying.

After some gesturing from Puppy, they finally managed to check-in.

Bun followed Li Huowang into the tent-like room, circled him a few times and then settled down before starting to gnaw away on the horse bone it had found earlier.

Lying on the straw mat, Li Huowang sighed deeply and closed his eyes, allowing his tense body to relax.

A delicate pair of hands gently cradled Li Huowang's head to rest it on a pair of soft thighs. Then, the same gentle fingers rhythmically pressed against the newly grown hair on his head. As he breathed in the familiar scent, Li Huowang gradually drifted off to sleep.

"Wait, your fingernails seem a bit long," Li Huowang held her hands and slowly opened his eyes only to realize that the person he was facing was not really Bai Lingmiao but her Second Deity.

From his current position, Li Huowang could barely make out what was inside of the red veil. It was quite dim inside the red veil. Even with Li Huowang's excellent vision, he could only see the fox-like eyes that were glowing with an eerie light. However, there was something unsettling about the number of eyes. It was not a symmetrical pair but one larger and two smaller eyes.

At that moment, something inside the red veil gently moved and blocked Li Huowang's view.

"What do you want?" asked Li Huowang as he looked at her calmly. In the past, trouble from the Second Deity might have been a more concerning matter for him. But after his many experiences, her affairs didn't seem so important anymore.

"Hehe..." The Second Deity grabbed Li Huowang's hand and slowly brought it into her red veil.

Li Huowang felt snake scales, fur, and something that pricked his skin, something akin to a hairpin.

Then, she suddenly grabbed Li Huowang's hand and quickly pulled it, stuffing it into her bulging clothes. She slowly bent down, and the red veil got closer and closer to Li Huowang's face.

As they got closer and closer, some things were faintly appearing in front of Li Huowang through the red veil. There were human-like skulls, animal skulls, and some other objects that

couldn't be identified easily. Li Huowang looked at them and said calmly, "I don't know where you're from or whether you're involved in the schemes of the Immortal families, but if you dare to harm Bai Lingmiao, then I won't let you off! Since you've always been watching from the sidelines, you must know that I have the ability to back those words, even if... it comes at a great cost."

Li Huowang threatened her and waited for her response.

To his surprise, she didn't get angry or scared in the face of his threat. Instead, she suddenly broke down.

The sound of her crying resembled the eerie wails of a female ghost, sending shivers down one's spine. Although it was terrifying, the Second Deity was really crying. She leaned against him, nestled in his arms, and continued to sob.

As Li Huowang gazed at the red veil, he hesitated for a moment. Then, he found himself embracing her; it was as if the one crying in his arms wasn't the Second Deity but the girl suffering from albinism with whom he had been through many life and death situations.

Li Huowang hesitated as he reached out his hand. After some contemplation, he began to softly caress her head.

Amidst the soft sounds of crying, the exhausted Li Huowang started to drift off into a deep sleep. After traveling for so long, his body was indeed weary and in need of rest.

"Senior Li, wake up! We've arrived at Cowheart Mountain! We are finally home!"

"Home?" Li Huowang opened his eyes to see the massive mountain and the village nestled beneath, as well as the vast golden rice fields nearby. The scene was quite harmonious and completely different from the gloomy visions of his dreams.

After a moment, he shifted his gaze upward and examined the mountain's appearance. He good-naturedly asked in surprise, "This doesn't look like a cow's heart at all. Do you guys just name these

places randomly?”

Turning around, he saw Bai Lingmiao standing beside him.

“I don't know. My grandpa taught me this, and his ancestors taught him too,” replied Bai Lingmiao as she turned and smiled, revealing her frightening face.

Green snake scales appeared to crawl like centipedes on her white fox fur. Black needle-like thorns dotted the fur without hindering the movement of the scales. However, when the snake scales reached the center of her face, they couldn't go any further; two beastly eyes which radiated an eerie green glow blocked their path.

“Senior Li, what is wrong with you?” asked Bai Lingmiao as she took a step forward, causing Li Huowang to step back.

With his keen senses, Li Huowang suddenly felt something behind him. He abruptly turned around, and the two beast faces, which were now even more distorted and horrifying, appeared before him once again.

“Husband, do you dislike the way I look?”

“Ah!” Li Huowang was drenched in cold sweat as he opened his eyes, only to see that he was still in the grayish canvas tent.

He turned and saw Bai Lingmiao snuggled beside him, then glanced toward Jin Shanzhao and Peng Longteng in the corner. Only then did he realize that he had just had a nightmare.

It felt so real... I haven't had a nightmare in a long time .

Li Huowang turned on his side, pulled Bai Lingmiao closer to him, then closed his eyes again.

Is this a new nightmare now?

Li Huowang shook his head.

No... this time, it is not a nightmare. Because Jin Shanzhao and Peng Longteng are here.

Not long after he closed his eyes, he opened them again; he sensed someone lying down behind him.

At that moment, a bifurcated red tongue slithered from behind and gently licked Li Huowang's bruised neck. "Husband, do you dislike the way I look?"

Li Huowang pulled Bai Lingmiao closer into his arms, holding her even tighter. He buried his face in her white hair, and slowly said, "I don't mind, but you are not Bai Lingmiao."

Chapter 220 - The Marketplace

Upon hearing Li Huowang's response, the bifurcated tongue slowly retracted back into the blood-red veil and its mouth that was adorned with pointed teeth curved slightly upward into a faint smile. Then, the Second Deity, who was lying on the bed, carefully leaned toward Li Huowang, with Bai Lingmiao by his side.

The three of them lay quietly on the bed, not saying anything. The room finally fell silent.

As expected, Li Huowang once again overslept the next day. Thankfully, no one was on his case this time around.

"Senior Li, here you go." A bowl of white liquid was placed in front of the incapacitated Li Huowang.

"What is this?" asked Li Huowang; he noticed some white substances floating inside.

"Sheep milk curdled with tofu. I heard from Baolu that a saying in Qing Qiu suggests that drinking sheep milk helps wounds heal faster," said Bai Lingmiao.

Hearing this, Li Huowang took a big sip from the bowl. It wasn't particularly tasty or unpleasant. He was just not used to it. Nevertheless, as long as it wasn't overly salty or spicy, he wasn't picky when it came to food and drinks.

After he finished his bowl, Bai Lingmiao picked up a towel and reached over to Li Huowang's mouth, gently wiping away the milk mustache from the corners of his mouth.

"How's Sun Baolu's progress with the supplies?" asked Li Huowang.

"He left early this morning. He said that the sheep from the

first store were in poor condition, and so he planned to visit a few more places,” replied Bai Lingmiao.

“What? Sheep? I told him to buy food stocks. Why is he buying sheep?” asked Li Huowang.

Bai Lingmiao chuckled. “I asked him the same thing earlier. He explained that in Qing Qiu, live sheep are considered provisions. Sheep's milk is suitable for consumption. And when the sheep's dung dries, it can serve as a source of fuel. Plus, live sheep can move on their own, which is more convenient than carrying around dry rations.”

“Ah, I see. Well, alright.” Li Huowang decided to follow local norms in this instance.

After keeping away the bowl, Bai Lingmiao went over to Li Huowang and softly held his calf and pulled back his pants, carefully observing the healing progress of his severed leg.

“Senior Li, look! It has grown down to your ankle. It should be fully healed in the next few days,” exclaimed Bai Lingmiao joyfully.

As he stared at Bai Lingmiao's delicate face, Li Huowang momentarily got lost in his thoughts. He couldn't help but recall the happenings of the night before.

“Miaomiao, have you been keeping something from me recently?” asked Li Huowang.

“Hmm? What's wrong? I haven't kept anything from you,” said Bai Lingmiao, tilting her head with a puzzled expression.

Li Huowang went straight to the point, completely disregarding whether she really knew what was going on. “It is concerning your Second Deity. Has she been affecting you? Or have the Immortal families threatened you?”

“No, why would she threaten me? Our lives are connected. If I die, then she will die too,” replied Bai Lingmiao.

“Is that so?” Li Huowang thoughtfully regarded Bai Lingmiao.

“Remember, I'm right here. If there's ever any trouble, make sure to come to me, alright?”

Hearing this, Bai Lingmiao nodded. Then, with a hint of caution, she asked, “Senior Li, there is nothing much to do today. Can we go out for a walk?”

“A walk? Why?”

“Just... to go out and have some fun. After all, I haven't been to Qing Qiu before. It seemed quite lively outside when we came here yesterday,” Bai Lingmiao replied with a rare mischievous grin on her face.

Li Huowang re-evaluated the girl before him. Her current demeanor reminded him of the time he watched a movie with Yang Na. At that moment, it suddenly dawned on him that this young girl, despite all her maturity, was still just a teenager.

Li Huowang suddenly felt a pang of guilt. He hadn't considered this aspect before.

“Alright then, let's go. Let's have a good time today,” said Li Huowang as he picked up his crutch and walked out of the rudimentary inn with her support.

Once outside, the glaring sun made Bai Lingmiao scrunch up her pink eyes. “The sun is so bright today.”

Li Huowang quickly untied the white ribbon on her wrist and used it to cover her eyes. “No, your eyes must be covered up. Otherwise, the sun will hurt your eyes.”

“But... this way... I can't see anything...” Bai Lingmiao's enthusiasm waned, realizing that she would have to miss this rare opportunity.

“In that case, you can hold onto me, and I'll describe everything I see to you. How does that sound?” suggested Li Huowang.

“Okay... that works!” The smile on Bai Lingmiao's face immediately returned as she clasped Li Huowang's clothing with

both her hands.

“Miaomiao, there's someone in front of us, buying a baby lamb. Here, reach out and feel it,” started describing Li Huowang.

Bai Lingmiao reached out and stroked the lamb's furry head. In response, the lamb stuck out its tongue and licked her palm from below, startling her into withdrawing her hand swiftly.

After a while, she carefully reached her hand out again.

“Come on, let's continue,” said Li Huowang.

Then, the one-eyed and one-legged Li Huowang started hobbling around with the support of his crutch. Bai Lingmiao walked slowly by his side in the bustling marketplace, her eyes still covered.

Through Li Huowang's descriptions, Bai Lingmiao gradually learned about the ins and outs of the entire marketplace. At the same time, she felt genuinely happy now. Although she could not see anything, she could still feel that Senior Li genuinely cared for her and was there for her.

After a while, Li Huowang suddenly came to a halt, causing Bai Lingmiao to accidentally bump into him. She asked, “Senior Li, why did we stop walking? What do you see?”

“Oh, there's a group performing tricks up ahead. They're spitting fire. The fire was so high that it ended up burning someone's hair, and now that person is jumping around in a frenzy,” replied Li Huowang.

Li Huowang's description of the scene amused Bai Lingmiao, to the point that she even felt like taking off her blindfold to sneak a peek. However, Li Huowang stopped her.

“Another person is swallowing knives. He just shoved three knives down his throat without even blinking,” continued Li Huowang.

As he continued to describe the scenes of the people around them, Li Huowang and Bai Lingmiao both wore smiles.

Meanwhile, the ragged slaves had lifeless expressions, having long become completely numb to their situation.

The kingdom of Qing Qiu had more to offer than its green noodles and tent-like inns. There was a darker side to it all. They were involved in human trafficking!

“There's a monkey act next to the fire-breathing show. That monkey is very intelligent, even to the point of being able to whip its owner,” Li Huowang continued to relay. “Quick, the monkey is heading our way. Let's go.”

Li Huowang limped while guiding the blindfolded Bai Lingmiao away from that area.

Li Huowang continued to accompany Bai Lingmiao through the marketplace, thinking that they had seen enough for the day. However, they soon encountered an unsettling sight on the market platform.

There was a dead body being disemboweled with a dagger.

“Senior Li, what's happening over there?” asked Bai Lingmiao.

“People are wrestling over there. The guy looks enormous, and is probably twice as heavy as you,” lied Li Huowang.

“Senior Li, I'm not that heavy!” Bai Lingmiao blushed and nudged Li Huowang's arm.

“That was my mistake, let me correct that. The wrestler is probably four times as heavy as you,” said Li Huowang.

At that moment, Li Huowang abruptly lifted his head to gaze at the sky. The sky had suddenly been obscured by something.

It was a flock of vultures.

At that moment, dozens of pitch-black vultures swooped down and covered the corpse, going wild as they tore at it savagely.

The vultures competed fiercely over their scarce meal. After gorging themselves, they scattered like flies, leaving behind only a pile of scattered bones and some hair on the ground.

Then, the people who had been waiting on the side approached

the pile of scattered bones while carrying small hammers, and gently started tapping the bones. Once the bones had been properly fashioned into trinkets, they decked themselves with these trinkets, adorning their hair and garments with them.

As he saw this, Li Huowang finally understood how the people of Qing Qiu got their bone ornaments.

“Senior Li, what do you see? I want to know!” Bai Lingmiao tugged at Li Huowang's clothes, asking repeatedly.

Da da da~

Just then, Bun skipped through the crowd and arrived by Li Huowang's side, carrying half a human skull in its mouth. Then, it dropped the skull by his feet while wagging its tail and sitting there, panting continuously.

Chapter 221 - The Marketplace (2)

When Li Huowang saw Bun fetch him a human skull, he suddenly realized what the bone from before was—it should have been a human bone as well!

Does Bun like the taste of humans now since I kept feeding it scraps my skin?

Li Huowang was starting to regret his earlier actions as he watched Bun with a pained look on his face.

“Woo?” Seeing how its owner did not react, Bun tilted its head and used its black snout to push the skull closer to Li Huowang’s feet.

Seeing this, Li Huowang extended his hands and started rubbing Bun’s head. At the same time, Li Huowang raised a dagger and cut off a piece of his own flesh and placed it in front of Bun.

Li Huowang held the bloodied dagger and aimed it at Bun’s neck.

He had decided that he would kill the dog the moment it was attracted to the piece of flesh.

Even though Li Huowang had come to like the dog after traveling with it for so long, he would never keep a man-eating dog by his side, both for the sake of himself and the others.

However, Bun just continued to enjoy the head pats, not the slightest bit attracted to the piece of flesh. After waiting for a moment, Li Huowang slowly retracted the dagger.

Bun hadn’t become a crazy dog that loved to eat humans. It just loved to fetch things and present them to Li Huowang.

But, compared to Bun, one person came to mind when he

started thinking about how suspicious all this seemed.

It was a human bone, so why did Sun Baolu say that it was a horse bone? Something's up... Why did he lie to me?

Li Huowang frowned. Sun Baolu was the only one who could interact with the people of Qing Qiu. If there was something wrong with him, then they were all in big danger.

"Senior Li, what's wrong? Why are you not talking anymore? Are you feeling tired? If so, we can just head back." Bai Lingmiao felt the atmosphere was off and tried to be considerate.

"Oh, it's nothing. Bun just fetched the hoof of a donkey. It's right in front of us; you can touch it if you want," replied Li Huowang.

When Bai Lingmiao felt Bun's familiar head, she smiled. "So it really is Bun. I see that it loves to fetch a lot of different things for us. I have to wonder... where did it learn to do that?"

Just as Bun was about to lick Bai Lingmiao's hand, Li Huowang stopped it and pulled her away.

"It's definitely a bad habit. Bun, let's go. We should look at the other places in the market as well," said Li Huowang as he kicked away the skull and continued talking to Bai Lingmiao.

The incident from earlier did not stop Li Huowang and Bai Lingmiao's little adventure through the market. They continued browsing the place with Li Huowang describing what was going on to Bai Lingmiao.

They were going to resume their journey tomorrow anyway, and he didn't want to make Bai Lingmiao worry because of these small issues. At the same time, he also decided to temporarily hide his suspicions about Sun Baolu.

In order to prevent Bai Lingmiao from accidentally seeing those gruesome scenes, Li Huowang did his best to guide her away from those places. But due to that, the places they could go to were quite limited.

Soon, many people within the market noticed a hobbling man guiding around a blind woman, walking through the market again and again. However, the man would say a different thing every time they passed through the same area.

With Li Huowang's crafty storytelling, Bai Lingmiao still managed to 'see' how wonderful the place was without taking off her blindfold. It took them the whole afternoon before they finally decided to stop. The sun would soon set causing the temperature to drop.

"Miaomiao, it will be dark soon. We should head back," said Li Huowang as he took off Bai Lingmiao's blindfold.

Bai Lingmiao blinked a few times and excitedly looked around, but was disappointed; she didn't see any of the interesting things that Li Huowang had told her about.

"Since it's going to be dark soon, many of them have already closed shop for the day. Let's go back well," Li Huowang gently explained to her.

Bai Lingmiao looked at the sky and nodded. "Yeah, you are right. Let's go back. Ah! Today was so fun!"

As he saw Bai Lingmiao's smile, Li Huowang's heart ached.

Was she satisfied with just this?

"Senior Li, look. Bun is still following us," said Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang stared at Bai Lingmiao as she rubbed Bun's chin. "Don't touch it. The dog has become quite dirty."

"No worries. Bun is quite clean. Everytime we found a river during our journey, Bun would always wash itself in the water," said Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang said nothing. Both Bai Lingmiao and Bun didn't know any better, and so he didn't know how to explain. In the end, he just slowly hobbled back to the inn.

Seeing this, Bai Lingmiao quickly stopped petting Bun and went to support Li Huowang, helping him distribute some of his weight

by letting him lean onto her.

“Woof!” Meanwhile, Bun barked and wagged its tail while circling around them.

However, the quiet atmosphere didn’t last long.

Soon, Li Huowang and Bai Lingmiao saw Sun Baolu standing on the deserted street, accompanied by tens of goats.

Sun Baolu was very happy when he saw Li Huowang. “Senior Li, look at all these goats! After an entire day, I’ve picked the best of the best! Oh, Senior Bai, this is the leftover money after I bought all these goats.”

Li Huowang looked at Sun Baolu.

He still looked the same as before.

Li Huowang acted as if nothing had happened and calmly said, “Let’s herd the goats back. We still need to resume our journey tomorrow so that you can reunite with your family as soon as possible.”

“Yay!” Sun Baolu did not realize that something was wrong with Li Huowang and started herding the goats back.

None of them said anything along the way. After arriving at the inn, Sun Baolu quickly herded the goats to the side of the ox-cart. Then, he went and boasted to Zhao Wu about how he had chosen the best goats with the lowest price.

“Sun Baolu, are you really that happy to go back home?” asked Zhao Wu while munching on some cornbread and staring at Sun Baolu. He felt confused; the Sun Baolu in his memories was not someone that was this jovial.

“I’m really confused. You are just like a regular human without any disabilities. Why did that Baldy capture you?” asked Zhao Wu suddenly.

Sun Baolu’s face froze as he pulled his sleeves down. “Did that Baldy ever need a reason to capture people? The goats are here, so just count them. They will be our food source for our travels so

please be more careful with them.”

Zhao Wu nodded and Sun Baolu left the ox-cart.

As Sun Baolu thought about how he would be able to reunite with his family soon, he broke out into a smile. He happily skipped around for a while before stopping abruptly.

In front of Sun Baolu was Li Huowang, leaning against a wooden beam. At this moment, his gaze looked quite... unfriendly.

Chapter 222 - Baolu

“Senior Li? Is something wrong?” Sun Baolu asked carefully.

Li Huowang used his chin to point toward the outside before placing his crutches underneath his armpit and hobbling out. “Let’s go and have a chat, just the two of us.”

Sun Baolu hesitated for a moment before finally deciding to walk out.

As it got darker, very few people could still be seen outside at this point.

The bone-chilling wind blew gently, tugging at Li Huowang’s and Sun Baolu’s sleeves.

Sun Baolu was not having a good time. He was trying to think about how to answer Senior Li’s question. After all, he had never thought that his lies would be seen through so quickly.

“No need to delay this anymore. We still need to resume our journey tomorrow. So tell me, why did you lie and say that the bone was from a horse, not a human? How many more things are you hiding from us?”

Sun Baolu hesitated for a moment, and then sighed. “Senior Li, it’s not that I wanted to intentionally hide it from all of you, but I just thought that there was no reason for me to explain the local traditions of Qing Qiu to you and everyone else; after all, we are just passing through this place. I was afraid that you would think we are weird.”

“Cutting up a human being, feeding them to the vultures, and then using their broken bones as decorations? I don’t think this is a tradition,” commented Li Huowang. He was still shocked by what he had seen today.

Hearing the doubt in Li Huowang’s voice, Sun Baolu explained

as best as he could, “Maybe outsiders would think that this is crazy, but this really is one of the traditions followed by the people of Qing Qiu. Except for those who died from an illness, everyone else is given a sky burial. Since the dead would also rot underneath the ground, we might as well use them to feed the animals and then hunt them down for food. Regardless of what we do, everything is decided by the Immortal Heaven. All living beings would still go through reincarnation afterward.”

Li Huowang looked at Sun Baolu calmly. “Immortal Heaven? Do the people of Qing Qiu worship it as a God? Where does it usually reside?”

This was the second time Li Huowang had heard of that name.

Sun Baolu pointed at the moon. “It’s there. The Immortal Heaven cannot touch us, and we cannot see it, but it will always have something that we want.”

“Hm?” Hearing his words, Li Huowang looked at the moon as well.

“That’s the belly button of the Immortal Heaven while the entire night sky is its shadow. Its shadow is made from the two candles it holds during the night,” explained Sun Baolu.

“The entire night is its shadow? And what about the day?” Li Huowang asked.

“During the day, the sun represents the two candles it’s holding! The Immortal Heaven will observe us behind the candles. Thanks to it, we can live a good life,” Sun Baolu said as if it was the truth.

Hearing those words, Li Huowang began to ponder.

The Five Realms of Buddha mentioned by the Righteous Monastery, the Nuo Opera performers that talked about Da Nuo, the Baiyu Capital that Li Huowang himself had seen, and now the Immortal Heaven described by Sun Baolu.

Everyone had their own views about the world. Some of them

even contradicted the others.

However, Li Huowang had seen ‘it’ itself and knew that there was no Immortal heaven, nor was there any Da Nuo or the Five Realms of Buddha.

All Li Huowang had seen was a world gone crazy. The humans living within it and the beings living above it were all being tormented along with the world.

Li Huowang wanted to ignore all the other worldviews, but he tried his best not to do so.

Maybe the things I saw were mere illusions, and maybe what they said is true? No matter what, the world and Gods any of them described were much better than the crazy world I saw back then.

As he saw Li Huowang just standing there silently, Sun Baolu said with a bitter expression on his face, “Senior Li, you don’t believe me, do you?”

Li Huowang thought about it and finally gave his answer, “I trust you. But then, what about the people who took the pieces of bones as decorations?”

“That’s also one of the rules that has been passed down in Qing Qiu. Legends say that the bones contain a person’s bravery and strength. If we wear them on our body, it will not only increase our bravery and strength, it could also repel evil. But only the bones of extremely talented individuals are highly sought after. The unpopular ones just have their bones buried under,” explained Sun Baolu.

“Why is the culture of Qing Qiu so... unauspicious?” questioned Li Huowang.

“Is it unauspicious? I think it’s normal,” said Sun Baolu matter of factly.

After Sun Baolu explained more about the culture of Qing Qiu as well as some of their myths, the scene Li Huowang had seen before started to make sense.

Even so, Li Huowang was still suspicious and did not let his guard down.

Sensing the suspicion in Li Huowang's gaze, Sun Baolu revealed an unpleasant expression on his face. "Senior Li, we are all comrades that escaped from the Zephyr Temple. You've already sacrificed so much just so you could let us return home. I would never lie to you. Even if I wanted to hurt you, I would've done so when you were unconscious. After all, you are far too strong and a single hit from you would probably kill me."

Li Huowang nodded. "That's indeed the case. Then, since you trust me so much, can you tell me why you wrap your clothes so tightly around your body?"

Something definitely happened to Sun Baolu's body. Li Huowang had never really given it much thought before, but now he wanted to know what Sun Baolu was hiding.

Hearing those words, Sun Baolu paled and hugged his shirt tightly before taking a few steps back. He didn't know why Li Huowang would suddenly ask about *that*.

"What are you afraid of? You can just show me. All of us have some kind of deformity one way or another. Do you think that any of us would laugh at you? Or do you think that your condition is worse than mine?" pressed Li Huowang.

Sun Baolu felt extremely humiliated by Li Huowang's words. His eyes were red as he shouted, "Senior Li! I'm really different from all of you! Please, I beg you! If you keep pushing it, then I would rather just kill myself!"

When he saw just how big his reaction was, Li Huowang hobbled closer. "You are going to go home soon and we will most likely not meet each other again. Do you still want to hide it?"

Sun Baolu took a deep breath and shouted, "Fine! I will tell you and only you alone once I get back to my home! You must never tell anyone else or I will die right in front of you!"

Seeing how serious Sun Baolu was, Li Huowang realized that there was no reason to push him any further; they were comrades and not enemies.

At the same time, Li Huowang also realized he had become far too suspicious of everyone after being lied to by the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

“You don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to. I’m just asking,” assured Li Huowang. He decided to temporarily trust Sun Baolu as he started hobbling back toward the inn.

Hearing those words, Sun Baolu wiped his tears with his sleeves and helped Li Huowang walk back to the inn.

Just as they had almost reached the inn, Li Huowang heard something from the right. He turned around and saw that something glowing was headed their way.

Li Huowang stopped at the entrance of the inn. “Wait, that light is weird. It’s too diffused.”

The light slowly came closer and closer causing Li Huowang’s eye to widen with shock.

“Baolu... Didn’t you say that there were no evil beings in Qing Qiu? What is that?” asked Li Huowang.

“That’s not an evil being, that’s a Lion Dance. Senior Li, don’t you know about Lion Dance?” asked Sun Baolu, confused.

Chapter 223 - Leave

“Lion Dance?” Li Huowang’s still could not fathom it. The thing that was approaching them was not the Lion Dance that he knew of. The Lion Dance he knew was festive and glamorous, not a large dirty white sheet that didn’t even have a head on it!

Underneath the white sheet was a glowing white light. The light illuminated the white sheet from within, as well as the surroundings. Li Huowang noticed that it was the same exact light that he had seen just now.

Li Huowang wouldn’t have thought that it was an evil being if it was just a glowing piece of white sheet, but what made his hair stand on end were the various dried handprints on the white sheet.

Under the illumination of the light, the white sheet was somewhat translucent, and there were handprints of various sizes clearly printed on it.

As the Lion Dance got closer, Li Huowang saw that it had many white tassels attached to it, the same ones that were seen on the funeral banners.

Then, Li Huowang looked down and saw the legs of the performers. They weren’t wearing shoes and their feet were caked in mud.

If there was one similarity between this and the Lion Dance that he knew, then it was the hands holding up the white sheet. They were all swaying rhythmically while moving forward, almost as if they were dancing. Everytime they moved forward, the sound of pieces of wood smacking against each other could be heard from underneath the white sheet, as if following a beat.

“Senior Li, it’s fine. I also cried when I saw them for the first few times, but afterward I got used to it,” said Sun Baolu, trying to

reassure Li Huowang.

However, Li Huowang just carefully pulled his coin veil up a bit to cover more of his face. “Sometimes the things we are used to are not all that safe. Why doesn’t that Lion Dance have a head?”

“That’s because they are still disciples! Only the masters have the qualifications to don on the head. The disciples usually practice at night when no one is around,” explained Sun Baolu.

Once Sun Baolu explained everything to Li Huowang, he shouted toward the Lion Dance. Based on his tone, Li Huowang could tell that Sun Baolu was cheering on the Lion Dance performers.

But the headless Lion Dance did not respond to his cries. They just kept moving forward slowly and rhythmically before passing by Li Huowang and Sun Baolu.

After a while, the Lion Dance finally left the street. Now, the Lion Dance was nothing more than a glowing white light in the darkness, the same as before. During the entire process, the Lion Dance hadn’t even reacted to Li Huowang or Sun Baolu.

“See, Senior Li? Qing Qiu is not the same as the other places. With the protection of Immortal Heaven, the evil beings dare not come out over here,” said Sun Baolu proudly.

Li Huowang was still somewhat suspicious when he looked at Sun Baolu before heading into the inn. “Then, why is the Immortal Heaven so selfish? Why is it only protecting this area?”

“I don’t know. My family was the one who taught me that,” replied Sun Baolu.

“The Lion Dance... Do the masters among them gather and teach the disciples so that they can take the mantle as the next generation?” asked Li Huowang.

“No, they don’t gather disciples from the public. They are inherited instead. There’s a special place in Qing Qiu where they came from, called the Lion Dance Palace,” explained Sun Baolu.

“Lion Dance Palace?” Li Huowang mumbled and repeated the name. He had heard of it before but he couldn’t remember where.

Just as he was thinking hard about it, Monk’s illusion suddenly shouted and pointed in the direction of the Lion Dance, “Daoist! Something’s not right! Something’s wrong with the Lion Dance!”

“Hm?” Li Huowang turned and looked at Monk’s illusion. “What’s wrong?”

“Did you not count them? The number wasn’t right! There were more hands than there were feet under that sheet! Something’s definitely wrong with that Lion Dance!” replied Monk.

“Wait!” Li Huowang tried his best to remember what he had seen and a chill went up his spine.

If it wasn’t for Monk, he would’ve failed to notice it.

Why were there more hands than there were feet?!

“Senior Li?” Sun Baolu retreated a few steps back when he saw Li Huowang mumbling to himself. Just as he was planning to call for the others and ask them to bring the chains in case Li Huowang’s illness relapsed, Li Huowang started hobbling back inside.

“Baolu, we won’t be sleeping tonight! We need to guard everyone!” shouted Li Huowang while hobbling inside.

“Ah? Oh! Alright!” While Sun Baolu didn’t know why they still needed to stay up at night to stand guard, he did it anyway.

During the third section of the night, Sun Baolu saw as Li Huowang stood up and called for everyone to start preparing to move out.

The others didn’t know why they needed to travel during the night, but they did as they were instructed.

At this moment, they had traded their gold and silver for a whole bunch of highland barley and several lambs.

“Here, let me handle it! I’m great at it! When I was young, I helped some rich people to herd their lambs for two years!” Lu

Zhuangyuan volunteered himself and was temporarily assigned the position of the lamb herder.

Soon, they left Women's Mountain under the moonlight.

Throughout the process, Li Huowang kept looking backward from time to time. He looked terrible due to the lack of sleep.

Given how anxious Li Huowang was, everyone thought that something would happen to them. However, they didn't have the energy to think about other stuff and so the mood of the entire group became depressing.

Chun Xiaoman was carrying her sword as she went over and asked Sun Baolu, "What happened to Senior Li? Wasn't he always by your side? I saw him bringing Senior Bai to happily play around earlier, so why did he suddenly become like this tonight?"

Sun Baolu hesitated for a moment before whispering back, "I don't know either. There shouldn't be a problem."

Sun Baolu's voice was as quiet as a mosquito as he continued, "Maybe Senior Li is having one of his episodes again. I remember that every time it happened, there was always someone trying to harm him through his hallucinations."

Xiaoman looked at the nervous Li Huowang and ran over to Bai Lingmiao to question her instead.

But even as they arrived at a river to rest, Chun Xiaoman still had no idea what had happened to Li Huowang.

"Set up the pot, gather some of the lamb feces and start the fire under it!" instructed Li Huowang.

Meanwhile, some of them scattered to find some wild vegetables.

Puppy's eyes lit up as he caught two grasshoppers from the long grass. He plucked off their wings and legs before placing them into a pouch on his waist.

"Qing Qiu is so fertile. I can't believe that I managed to catch some good food so quickly over here," mumbled Puppy as he

started to look for more grasshoppers.

After a while, Puppy suddenly found a small spiny vine. He carefully twisted a part of the vine off before peeling it to reveal the emerald core within. Then, he chewed on the core, feeling satisfied. He had eaten this before and it tasted quite good, just like a stalk of celery.

Just as Puppy was about to harvest the entire vine, a basket fell in front of him, surprising him. He raised his head and saw that it was Chun Xiaoman's basket. She had placed the basket down in front of him as she walked toward Li Huowang.

“Please bring these back when you return to the fireplace,” said Xiaoman.

Translator's Thoughts

This is what a Lion Dance looks like in our world. Some of their performances are pretty amazing



Chapter 224 - Riverside

“Hey!” Puppy grumbled when he saw Chun Xiaoman so blatantly use him for physical labour. But, in the end, he wasn’t able to raise his voice for fear of being chopped up by her.

Meanwhile, Chun Xiaoman approached the sitting Li Huowang. “Senior Li, why are we traveling so urgently today?”

Li Huowang patted the ground beside him and said. “There might be an unseen danger. I’m just guessing, but it’s better to be safe than sorry.”

As he spoke, he turned around and looked in the direction of the Women’s Mountain. Whether or not the Lion Dance Palace was an established sect like the Righteous Monastery, he was glad that they hadn’t noticed his identity.

Should I make contact with them and ask them about Bei Feng of the Sitting Oblivion Dao? No... It might be too dangerous. If I want to solve the issues related to being a Strayed One, then I need to work on something else first.

At that moment, Bun walked over and placed down a stone that it had fetched from somewhere else. Then, it started wagging its tail, hoping for Li Huowang to pet it.

“Senior Li, you don’t have to shoulder everything by yourself. You already have an illness and it might even get worse if you just bottle everything up. You can tell us about your worries and we can figure it out together,” said Xiaoman.

Hearing this, Li Huowang started patting Bun’s head while calmly telling her what he had seen yesterday.

“So, your illusions told you that there were more hands than feet in the Lion Dance and then you recalled that it in fact did have more hands?” asked Xiaoman, feeling amazed. She suddenly felt

that the whole thing was quite ridiculous and thought that Sun Baolu was right.

Li Huowang felt her distrust but didn't get mad. He just sighed disappointedly as he stared at the three illusions in front of him and mumbled, "See? This is why I prefer to keep it all to myself and not tell anyone."

If he spoke to others, not only would he not gain their understanding, they would even think that he was crazy if he ended up saying certain things out loud.

"Daoist, don't worry. I will always believe in you. It's fine if they don't understand you," declared Monk.

However, Li Huowang just ignored Monk's illusion and looked at Chun Xiaoman's empty sleeve. "Have you gotten used to only having one arm?"

Chun Xiaoman was slightly surprised to see him taking care of her. "Losing an arm was worth it to save everyone's lives. After all, if it weren't for everyone here, then I would long be dead."

Li Huowang decided to use this opportunity to explain to her about his power. He placed his fingers into his left eye socket and gingerly touched the dry, but still recovering eyeball. "The ability to regenerate an arm... It's not that I don't want my secrets to be leaked, but that it's not something you can just use. The process would be too painful for you to handle."

Chun Xiaoman nodded. "I know. You would've taught it to me if I could use it. You are not someone that selfish."

Xiaoman wanted to say something else, but in the end, she decided against it. Instead, she just quietly approached Bai Lingmiao.

At this moment, Bai Lingmiao was picking some wild vegetables some distance away.

Xiaoman squatted down beside Bai Lingmiao and removed some of the wild grass from within Bai Lingmiao's basket. "If you

want to live with him in the future, then you have to find a way to cure his illness. Right now it's even affecting his daily life."

However, Bai Lingmiao was still riding the high of their date from yesterday and just nodded along.

Seeing this, Chun Xiaoman gently nudged Bai Lingmiao's shoulder. "Did you hear me? I'm talking to you."

"Yes, I'm listening. Xiaoman, I'm fine even if he's not cured. As long as I get to be with Senior Li, I will be happy," replied Bai Lingmiao.

When she saw how stubborn Bai Lingmiao was, Chun Xiaoman sighed. "Why are you so stubborn? If it was anyone else who was being this stubborn, then I would've long since stopped caring about them."

Hearing this, Bai Lingmiao smiled and hugged Chun Xiaoman. "Thank you for your concern. I will listen to you."

Chun Xiaoman's heart melted when she saw Bai Lingmiao's cute face. "Fine, fine. Anyway, the sun is so bright today; you should quickly put on your blindfold."

"I'm just digging up some wild vegetables. As long as I keep my head down I will be fine," replied Bai Lingmiao.

Given that summer solstice was almost upon them, there were many wild vegetables to be found in the grassfield. They ate about half of the wild vegetables they collected while the rest of them were stored, meant to be eaten the next day.

Even though there were some rough bits and pieces of vegetables within their soup, they still ate it gladly, all thanks to the lard floating at the top of the soup.

After their meal, the men went and washed up in the river. The days were getting hotter and no one enjoyed having sweat sticking to their body.

After the men finished bathing, it was the women's turn.

Bai Lingmiao and Chun Xiaoman carefully supported the

pregnant Luo Juanhua to the river while the other women that they had saved from the bandit camp followed them as well.

Some of the men were tempted to take a peek at the bathing women, but none of them dared to even look in the direction of the river when they saw Li Huowang sitting there menacingly like an iron pillar, guarding the women from unwanted gazes.

Behind Li Huowang was a scene straight from heaven. The setting sun dyed the river a beautiful red.

Bai Lingmiao poured the water that was glimmering with a red color onto her jade white skin, leaving glimmering droplets on her body.

Even Chun Xiaoman was astounded by the beautiful scene in front of her.

Meanwhile, Luo Juanhua, who also saw this scene, admired her as well. "Tsk tsk, such beautiful skin. Your man must love embracing and caressing you in bed."

Hearing this, Bai Lingmiao blushed and lowered her body into the water. "Sister Luo, what are you talking about?"

"There are no men here, so no need to be shy. But once you are at my age you will come to understand that for men, it's all just an act," said Luo Juanhua. Then, she carefully walked over while holding her belly and curiously asked Bai Lingmiao, "Say, how is your man in bed? Is he good? Does it feel good? Oh, and how long does he last?"

Hearing those questions, Bai Lingmiao was so embarrassed that she almost dove down into the water and Chun Xiaoman had to walk over and rescue her from the embarrassment. "Sister Luo, she's very shy; please don't embarrass her so much."

Luo Juanhua sighed pitifully. "I'm just trying to teach her since she's so young. But if she doesn't want to, then I won't do it. Plus all this is still quite tame compared to what we used to talk about in my village. There, every woman in the village would bathe together

in the lake and our topics were so dirty that even the old men would run away whenever they heard us talking.”

Having said that, Luo Juanhua carefully walked away toward another woman.

As she watched Luo Juanhua walking away, Chun Xiaoman held Bai Lingmiao’s arm and pulled her up. “Alright, she’s gone. You can stand up now or you will end up drowning.”

Bai Lingmiao patted her chest and sighed. “I’ve never seen her be so open before. That startled me.”

“They are already mature adults. They are all the same,” said Chun Xiaoman as she used her cloth to help wipe down Bai Lingmiao’s body.

“Do you think that we will also become like her once we reach her age? It’s so embarrassing...” Bai Lingmiao blushed while staring at Luo Juanhua who was laughing with the others in the distance.

Chapter 225 - Reaching Home

Chun Xiaoman spoke while still wiping Bai Lingmiao's body, "I don't think it's inappropriate. Since you've already slept with Senior Li, it's not really a taboo. So, don't slouch and stand straight."

However, Bai Lingmiao was so embarrassed that she couldn't say anything. She still felt that this topic was something private, and that it shouldn't be discussed with anyone else.

The women bathed for a long time. It was only when the skies were getting dark that they dried themselves off and wore their clothes.

Because of the fact that they had departed before dawn, most of them were already tired. Thus, all of them went to sleep quite early except for the ones who were standing guard at night.

"Since I have a lot of hair, I could only dry them halfway. Hope you won't hate them," said Xiaoman.

Hearing this, Bai Lingmiao hugged Chun Xiaoman with all her might and shoved her face into Chun Xiaoman's dense hair. "How could I hate it? I love my dear Xiaoman."

Xiaoman raised her hairy legs, tickling Bai Lingmiao all over.

"Hey, stop it! I'm ticklish!" said Bai Lingmiao.

"You love me? I think you love Senior Li more than you love me. I think that you will just wait for me to fall asleep before putting on your undies and then get into Senior Li's blanket," said Xiaoman.

"Senior Li is still wounded and I'm just going to go there to take care of him," defended Bai Lingmiao.

"Do you think he needs your care? I think there's only one

thing you can take care of for him, hehe..." chuckled Xiaoman.

"Xiaoman, why are you like this too?"

Both of them were whispering to each other underneath their blanket when they saw someone carefully approaching the river.

"Who's that?" asked Bai Lingmiao.

"Who else? It's Sun Baolu. He never bathes with anyone. He's even more afraid of someone peeping at his body than us," replied Xiaoman.

Nothing happened that night except for some wolf howls.

When Li Huowang woke up, he was hugging Bai Lingmiao.

"Senior Li, you were having a nightmare," said Bai Lingmiao as she carefully rubbed his chin, feeling concerned.

"Don't worry. I'm used to it."

Li Huowang had bags under his eyes when he woke up. He looked toward the Women's Mountain one more time before finally deciding to let his guard down for a bit.

I never revealed anything, so they probably don't know that I'm a Strayed One. Even more so since they were just disciples. Regardless of whether they can be considered good or bad, we should be safe for now.

After they finished washing up, Sun Baolu brought a bowl of brown liquid to him. "Senior Li, time to eat."

"What is this?" asked Li Huowang, his sharp sense of smell almost causing him to start retching from the noxious scent.

"It's fresh lamb's milk mixed with lamb blood and some salt. Not only does it taste great, it's quite good for people with injuries too," said Sun Baolu as he took a sip before giving the bowl to Li Huowang.

Li Huowang took a sip and almost puked; however, he somehow suppressed the feeling and forced himself to drink it.

While it was definitely nutritious, it was not his cup of tea.

Meanwhile, Sun Baolu hopped up and down in excitement.

"Senior Li, don't you think I was right? As long as we bring enough

lambs, we don't have to worry about our meals!"

Li Huowang used his sleeves to wipe his mouth and gave back the bowl. "Sure... Anyway, we should be reaching your home soon after leaving Women's Mountain right?"

Sun Baolu's eyes lit up upon hearing this question. "Yes! Let's go! They should be just ahead!"

Even though the scenery around them looked the same to Li Huowang, Sun Baolu was still able to point out the differences.

"There! That mountain! I used to herd lambs over there! I lost my left molar tooth when I fell down over there! Oh, I also saw a white wolf in the east! I'm not joking, it really was a white wolf! My parents said that it was impossible but I definitely saw it with my own eyes! And look! Do you see the marks on the ground? This must be where my people set up their tents before! We are quite close!"

As they got closer and closer, Sun Baolu became more and more excited. In the final two days, Sun Baolu didn't sleep a wink and stood guard for both nights.

On the third day, after they walked over a small hill, they finally saw something different—on the grassy green plains was a herd of white lambs and black cows.

There were several large tents close to the lambs, and most importantly, humans.

"HEEEY!" Sun Baolu cried out as he ran toward his people. He abandoned everything and ran as fast as he could.

When Li Huowang and the rest approached them, they saw that Sun Baolu was being hugged by a group of crying people. They were his tribesmen! Even though they don't understand the language of Qing Qiu, Li Huowang could still feel the strong bond they had between them.

Seeing this scene, Li Huowang felt a burst of warmth in his heart. While he was happy about the fact that he had managed to

bring Sun Baolu back to his home, he was even happier to see that Sun Baolu was being treated with kindness.

At that moment, Li Huowang saw a woman carrying a basin of milk out from a nearby tent. When she saw Sun Baolu, her face froze. Then, she threw down the basin and ran toward him.

Her voice instantly caught Sun Baolu's attention and he started crying when he saw her. Under everyone's gazes, both of them hugged each other and started crying.

"Wow... so he was telling the truth. He really did have someone waiting for him," said Puppy, feeling jealous.

While both Sun Baolu and the woman were hugging each other and cherishing the moment, an old man hobbled over to them. The old man was wearing several colorful ribbons on his neck. Then, he started speaking to Sun Baolu in Qing Qiu's native language.

From the looks of it, the old man's position was quite high; his words instantly caused both Sun Baolu and his woman to calm down.

Sun Baolu talked to the old man for a while before excitedly bringing him toward Li Huowang. Then, he excitedly introduced Li Huowang and everyone else to his tribe.

Li Huowang had no idea what Sun Baolu was telling them, but he soon had a rough understanding of what he had said. That night, Li Huowang was served with an entire rack of roasted lamb ribs and honey water.

That night, everyone finally had the chance to eat some meat again. None of them held any reservations and eagerly dug into the meat, directly using their hands.

The campfire was bright and warm. A crowd of people hollered at Sun Baolu while the latter was busy giving everyone a toast with a cup of wine.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang took in the festive scene and drank from his cow horn cup. "Is this bee honey? It's sweet but not

overpowering.”

“It’s ant honey. It’s even rarer than bee honey,” replied a voice.

Li Huowang raised his head and saw a beautiful lady. Even though she was wearing Qing Qiu’s garbs, her white skin gave her away as someone who was not born here.

When the woman saw Li Huowang staring at him, her eyes became red with tears as she kneeled down in front of Li Huowang. “Thank you for sending my son home from so far away! Thank you Daoist Li!”

Chapter 226 - Wu Yue

Just as the beautiful woman's head was about to touch the blanket, Li Huowang reached out to help her up.

"Madam, there's no need for such courtesy. We are fellow brothers in distress, so helping each other out is only natural; there's no need for such a grand gesture," Li Huowang said appreciatively in the face of the woman's gratitude.

After repeated refusals from Li Huowang, she finally sat down.

Then, with a lingering fear in her heart, she said to Li Huowang, "After our son went missing, we searched all of Qing Qiu, but couldn't find him. I thought that I had lost him forever. Thankfully, he has returned unharmed."

With that said, she took out a string of prayer beads from her sleeve. Then, she began to spin them as she bowed toward the north.

Li Huowang noticed this and was taken aback. "May I ask which Bodhisattva you're praying to?"

Perhaps it was due to many of his experiences from before, but Li Huowang was especially sensitive to religious matters in this strange world. He had a feeling that there was something wrong with such practices here.

Hearing his words, Wu Yue misinterpreted them as Li Huowang mocking her. Thus, she explained helplessly, "Sir, I didn't mean that. Our son has managed to return all thanks to your efforts. It had nothing to do with some ethereal Bodhisattva."

"Also, I've stopped worshipping Bodhisattvas ever since marrying into Qing Qiu. Even so, I had been following Buddhist customs ever since childhood, and thus, it's a habit that's difficult to break," she added.

Li Huowang assured her, "I didn't mean to mock you. I was just merely curious about which Bodhisattva you were praying to."

Hearing this, Wu Yue was surprised. "Bodhisattva... Isn't Bodhisattva the one who saves people from their suffering and rescues the distressed? Is there a different one as well?"

Her reply, which reflected the ignorance of the locals, caused Li Huowang to inwardly sigh.

People in this world are so superstitious. They just believe in anything without discrimination. It's all blind faith. They are not that much different from Dan Yangzi.

However, looking at it from another perspective, Li Huowang thought that Wu Yue's belief was a good thing. In this insane world, worshipping a 'real' Bodhisattva was far more dangerous than worshipping a false one.

"Madam, please, take a seat. I was just asking out of curiosity. By the way, I noticed earlier that Baolu was hugging a woman. Is she his lover?" asked Li Huowang as he tried to change the topic to ease the somewhat tense atmosphere.

"She is his older sister. She has been clinging to him ever since she was a child. They even had an engagement. She was so devastated after Bao'er went missing," Wu Yue explained.

"Older sister?" Li Huowang was surprised by her response. He couldn't comprehend how this parent could be so accepting of this unethical situation. And given that they are siblings, why is there such a significant difference in their skin color? Sun Baolu and the woman did not even appear to be of the same race.

"They don't share the same father. When I left the Liang Kingdom and came to Qing Qiu, Bao'er was already in my womb. At that time, Zhuo'er had already been born," Wu Yue clarified, hinting at her son's mixed heritage.

Li Huowang had immediately inferred this after observing the woman in front of him who had a skin tone that was different from

the people of Qing Qiu.

At that moment, a dark-skinned, sturdy Qing Qiu man approached them with a smile. He held a cow-horn cup in his hand and spoke in a quick, rhythmic Qing Qiu dialect before extending the cup toward Li Huowang.

Seeing this, Wu Yue quickly translated. "Baolu's dad wants to thank you for saving his second son and wishes you an eternal life, blessed by Immortal Heaven."

"The toasts in Qing Qiu are certainly unique," Li Huowang nodded, and raised his cup in response, clinking it with the cup in the man's hand.

As he drank his honey water, Li Huowang studied the couple in front of him. Sun Baolu's parents did not appear to be the slightest bit compatible with each other.

The man was short and stout, with a broad face that could easily be mistaken for a monkey's. He looked completely unworthy of a beautiful woman like Sun Baolu's mother.

Li Huowang couldn't help but speculate if Sun Baolu's mother had been bought by the man. Given his previous experiences with the slave trade on Women's Mountain, he couldn't help but entertain such thoughts.

"Senior Li!" shouted Sun Baolu, already pretty drunk. He sobbed and hurled himself upon Li Huowang while mumbling something incoherently. "Senior Li! I can't bear to leave you! I'm not going back! I wish to stay with you and accompany you to the Liang Kingdom!"

Seeing his son in such a state, Sun Baolu's father quickly put down his cup and pulled his son away from Li Huowang to help him sober up outside the tent.

As Li Huowang watched their somewhat disheveled figures, he smiled.

Sun Baolu was talking nonsense. He was already home,

reunited with his family. There was no reason for him to continue traveling with Li Huowang. Furthermore, there weren't that many places left for him to go through. Based on the map, Qing Qiu was not far from the Liang Kingdom. In fact, if the Cowheart Mountain wasn't too far away from here, then Li Huowang would even consider returning here whenever he had the chance in the future.

Li Huowang returned to his cross-legged sitting position and took a bite of the skewered roasted lamb that was covered in black spice. As he bit into it, the thick meaty fluids erupted on his tongue and a delectable aroma filled the air. He found this roasted lamb to be especially delicious.

He felt that it might have something to do with his enhanced senses, but to Li Huowang, having lived in two worlds, this was the tastiest lamb skewer he'd ever tasted.

The tender and succulent meat, combined with the salty and tangy seasoning, made every bite incredibly enjoyable. It was no wonder that everyone was so engrossed in their meals that none of them were talking; they were all huddled around the lamb and beef bones, gnawing away at them contentedly.

Like everyone else, Li Huowang too couldn't wait to dig into the delectable cuisine, and immediately set aside everything else to relish in the meal arranged for them.

The Qing Qiu guys danced around in a circle and tossed their heads, but it wasn't particularly entertaining. Even so, their exaggerated movements and actions enhanced the festive atmosphere within the large tent, bringing a smile to everyone's faces, including Li Huowang's.

After some of them had filled their bellies, they too began dancing with the Qing Qiu people, linking arms with them and swaying to the rhythm.

Here, the Lu Family Troupe's performance stuck out quite a bit because of their talented singing and acting. The unique melodies

and moves that they introduced earned them a large amount of applause and cheers from the Qing Qiu people.

As he looked over the crowd, Li Huowang smiled.

Everyone appears to be having a good time here. However, why is there only sadness and pain when they are with me?

As Li Huowang was lost in thought, his keen senses detected someone staring at him.

It was Sun Baolu's mother.

He turned his head slowly to look in her direction and noticed a deeply troubled expression on her face, completely different from her earlier composed appearance.

Li Huowang turned to her and asked, "Madam, is there something you'd like to tell me?"

Wu Yue, who had been hesitating for a while, finally made up her mind. "Benefactor, even though we have just met, I hope you don't mind me speaking openly. How about you and your group reconsider going to the Liang Kingdom? It's not a good place. Staying here might just be a better choice."

Chapter 227 - Beauty

“Oh?” Her words managed to get Li Huowang to refocus his scattered attention. “Why do you say that? I’ve heard that the Liang Kingdom is the most affluent place here. While the people from other places have to endure droughts and hunger, the people of the Liang Kingdom never go hungry.”

“Everyone says that the Liang Kingdom is good, but how can those who haven’t been there truly understand how they treat their people?” asked Wu Yue agitatedly. She seemed to have recalled some unpleasant memories as she almost started retching and had to cover her mouth in distress.

“Hmm?” Li Huowang furrowed his brow at her words. Her description contradicted what Bai Lingmiao had said. She had once described her hometown as a carefree paradise.

After a moment, Li Huowang signaled for Bai Lingmiao to come over. Seeing his signal, she promptly set down her cup beside Xiaoman and joined them.

Taking Bai Lingmiao’s hand, Li Huowang turned to the lady beside him and asked, “Madam, can you tell us some more?”

Wu Yue lowered the hand that had been covering her mouth as she looked at Bai Lingmiao, who was leaning forward, and eventually shook her head. “I was thoughtless. We shouldn’t talk about such things during mealtime as it might ruin your appetite. Benefactor, if you want to know more, we can talk about it tomorrow.”

With that, she turned around and left, leaving both of them puzzled.

“Miaomiao, did you live comfortably in the Liang Kingdom? Did people bully your family? How are the local authorities there?”

After a moment, Li Huowang began questioning Bai Lingmiao.

In fact, Li Huowang knew very little about the Liang Kingdom, the place where he envisioned living in the future. He knew that the Liang Kingdom was quite large and was the strongest among all these countries, but that was about it.

If they were going to spend their whole lives there, then he needed to know more.

“We’re living very well! Nobody dares to bully us! I have quite a large family, and my grandfather is the village chief. All the other uncles and aunts are very kind to me, and even my elder brothers and sisters treat me quite well. In fact, what Puppy and Xiaoman said about looking down on or disliking someone based on their appearance doesn’t happen where I come from at all,” said Bai Lingmiao.

“Have you only ever stayed in Cowheart Mountain? What about the other parts of the Liang Kingdom? Have you been there?” Li Huowang asked again.

“I don’t know... I haven’t been to other places,” replied Bai Lingmiao.

Bai Lingmiao’s words made Li Huowang slightly concerned about what Baolu’s mother had just said earlier. Now, he was genuinely curious about what she had wanted to say.

At that moment, Li Huowang noticed Sun Baolu puking in the distance. He walked over and helped him exit the tent.

Realizing that he couldn’t wait until tomorrow, Li Huowang decided to ask Sun Baolu. After all, since he was her son, he should know some things about his mother.

“Stop drinking and sober up. I’m here to ask you some questions about your mother,” said Li Huowang to the drunken Sun Baolu, who was leaning against a water bucket.

“Drink! More!” Sun Baolu had a silly grin on his face as he raised the empty cup in his hand and aimed it at Li Huowang’s

chest.

“Ah...” Li Huowang sighed as he reached for the hilt of his sword behind him, gently unsheathing a fraction of the blade. In an instant, the rising murderous intent made Sun Baolu start trembling uncontrollably, while the haziness in his eyes was replaced by extreme fear.

Clang!

Li Huowang sheathed the sword and reached for Sun Baolu's empty cup, then scooped up some cold water from the nearby bucket and poured it over his face. “Are you awake now?”

Sun Baolu nodded repeatedly as he took quick, shallow breaths and wiped the water off his face. “I'm awake, I'm awake!”

“Is your mother from the Liang Kingdom? Did she tell you anything about the Liang Kingdom?” Li Huowang asked.

Sun Baolu's expression became somewhat peculiar upon hearing this question. “Senior Li, what's going on? We were all having a good meal, so why are you suddenly asking about this?”

Feeling that there wasn't anything that needed to be kept hidden, Li Huowang told him about what his mother said and his own concerns. “If the Liang Kingdom is truly as bad as your mother says, then the rest of us might need to consider finding another place to settle down.”

With a flushed face, Sun Baolu raised his head and looked at the round moon in the sky. “Senior Li, can I choose to not say anything?”

Hearing this, Li Huowang was slightly displeased. “Does your family really have these many secrets? You act like you can't tell anyone anything, almost as if you're the emperor's illegitimate child or something...”

Sun Baolu gritted his teeth. “Fine! You saved my life and brought me back home. If you want to know, then I'll tell you. What do you think of my mother's appearance?”

“Hmm?” Li Huowang didn’t quite understand where this topic was heading. How was this related to the question he had asked earlier?

“My mother is quite good-looking, right? When she was younger, she was even more beautiful than she is now, almost ethereal!” continued Sun Baolu.

“That doesn’t sound like something a son should say about his mother. It’s better to be more discreet in front of outsiders,” Li Huowang reminded him. From the looks of it, Sun Baolu still wasn’t entirely sober.

“Senior Li, if my mother was as beautiful as I said, then what do you think she did in the Liang Kingdom before?” Sun Baolu looked at Li Huowang with a bitter smile.

Hearing this, Li Huowang’s heart skipped a beat. He chose to remain silent as he waited for Baolu to continue explaining.

“My mother was only fourteen when she was dressed up and hired at a noble’s mansion to serve as a ‘beauty paper,’” Sun Baolu shivered as he uttered a phrase that Li Huowang couldn’t comprehend.

“What’s a ‘beauty paper?’” asked Li Huowang.

“My mother used to clean people’s buttocks with her tongue. That’s what it means to be a ‘beauty paper!’” Sun Baolu gnashed his teeth as he finished the sentence.

This revelation stunned Li Huowang. He finally understood why Baolu’s mother felt ill when discussing the Liang Kingdom and why she believed that they treated people inhumanely.

Previously, he had thought that being a concubine or a prostitute still implied a sense of humanity. However, in the Liang Kingdom, these beautiful women were valued solely to wipe people’s buttocks.

“You think that’s too disgusting? Wrong! That is just the beginning! What do you think ‘beauty pots’ refers to? Those Liang

Kingdom people have all sorts of twisted ways to dehumanize people!” shouted Sun Baolu as he stormed away, leaving Li Huowang standing alone in the cold outside.

As he watched Sun Baolu’s departing back, he felt a little regretful; however, that regret soon turned into disgust.

Compared to what he had just heard, even the Abbess of Benevolent Nunnery seemed clean and pure.

But just as the feeling of disgust settled in, he also felt a profound sense of helplessness.

He should have known that there was no utopia in this insane world.

Why did I even bother traveling thousands of miles? I should have just taken over the Zephyr Temple when I had the chance.

However, this was just a passing thought. After all, he still needed to think about those who needed to go back to their homes.

“Senior Li, are you okay?” Bai Lingmiao poked her head out of the tent, feeling concerned. She was worried about him having another episode.

“Yes, I’m heading in soon,” replied Li Huowang.

The party within the tent continued, but at this point, Li Huowang had completely lost his appetite.

Chapter 228 - Hysteria

Li Huowang opened his eyes after the pounding pain eased and found himself lying in a small tent. By his side was Bai Lingmiao, wearing nothing but a bellyband. At this moment, she was silently combing her hair with a comb fashioned out of a bull's horn.

After a moment, Li Huowang reached out and pulled her into his arms.

Just as she was about to undo her bellyband, Li Huowang shared with Bai Lingmiao what he had learned the previous night.

As she listened, her bashful gaze gradually turned into one of horror and disgust. Sun Baolu's mother had been through far more than anything she could have imagined. How could someone commit such acts against a fellow human being?

"So, it appears that the Liang Kingdom isn't as wonderful as it seems," murmured Li Huowang as he placed his fingernail-less hand on Bai Lingmiao's shoulder and let out a sigh.

"But... but where I come from, these things don't happen... my hometown is great," said Bai Lingmiao weakly.

Li Huowang chuckled. Of course, that was something true for Bai Lingmiao. In their small and simple world, the vast majority of commoners spent their whole lives within twenty miles of their houses. As a result, they were more or less unaware and oblivious to the outside world.

At the same time, Li Huowang was aware that it was presumptuous to judge the entire Liang Kingdom based purely on the experiences of Sun Baolu's mother. Her's might just have been exceptional cases.

Nevertheless, Li Huowang always thought about the worst-case scenario. He needed to be prepared to be able to survive in this

world.

Thus, Li Huowang lovingly embraced Bai Lingmiao, buried his nose in her soft neck, and took a deep breath before saying, “Don’t worry. I didn’t say that we are not going back. But, we should re-evaluate the situation after we enter the Liang Kingdom.”

Hearing this, Bai Lingmiao breathed a sigh of relief. She had almost thought that Li Huowang had decided not to accompany her home.

“Let’s get up. Now that Sun Baolu has returned home, we should also continue with our journey,” said Li Huowang as he patted her head.

Although this was a nice place, there was no reason for them to stay in Qing Qiu when there were still potential dangers. They could rest all they wanted when they eventually reached their destination.

When the two of them emerged from the tent, they noticed that everyone else was already awake. After last night’s drinking session, it was evident that the others had grown quite close to Qing Qiu residents. They even went so far as to wash up at the river while linking arms and chatting.

They were speaking to each other, but it was clear that neither side could understand the other’s language.

The morning air was quite refreshing. As Li Huowang stood in front of the tent while surveying the lively surroundings and took a deep breath, he felt his spirit being lifted. He scanned his surroundings and eventually settled his gaze on Sun Baolu. Surprisingly, despite having consumed so much alcohol the previous night, Sun Baolu had woken up quite early. He was currently busy herding some of his sheep.

“What are you doing? There’s no need to send any more sheep with us. We might not even be able to eat all the sheep that you’ve already given us,” said Li Huowang as he approached Sun Baolu.

After returning home, Sun Baolu seemed to have become a bit more cheerful. He wore a bright smile on his face as he spoke to Li Huowang, “No worries. If you can’t finish eating them, then you can just sell them. Qing Qiu’s sheep fetch a good price in the Liang Kingdom. Consider it an early gift for you and Junior Bai.”

As soon as Sun Baolu finished speaking, he sensed that Li Huowang was ignoring him. His eyes appeared to be empty as his body swayed, and his face became very unsightly.

This is bad!

Li Huowang suddenly squatted down and clutched his head, startling Sun Baolu.

“Baolu, quick! Go get a chain from Gao Zhijian and tie me up! It’s happening again!” exclaimed Li Huowang in agony.

Sun Baolu quickly realized that Li Huowang was having another one of his episodes. He immediately threw down the whip he was using to herd the sheep, and ran toward the cowhide tent in the distance.

When he returned with a group of disciples, they found Li Huowang standing upright, tilting his head back and muttering to himself, “Wang Wei, I have nothing much to say to you. Please leave.”

“I am very clear about my situation. Don’t even think about using reverse psychology. Someone has already tried that on me before, and it won’t work again.”

Just when the disciples were unsure of what to do, Li Huowang seemed to sense their presence nearby. He spoke as calmly as he could, instructing them, “Have you brought the chains? If you have, then stop dawdling and tie me up. I’ll do my best to stay still. After you’ve tied me up, go and pack your things. Once all of you have had breakfast, we’ll continue with our journey.”

Hearing Li Huowang’s instructions, the others immediately snapped to attention and worked together to securely bind Li

Huowang with the chains. Even so, when they recalled their previous experience, they didn't dare to take any chances and quickly moved away from him after they finished chaining him.

"Is it any of your business who I talk to? Here we go again! If you have the guts, then go ahead and kill me today. Otherwise, get the hell out of here!" said Li Huowang.

After saying this, Li Huowang fell silent, and just when the others thought that it was finally about to end, he suddenly erupted into a furious roar that startled them. "Do you want to die? I'm mentally ill now! Killing someone isn't a crime for me!"

Bound by his shackles, Li Huowang abruptly stood up upright like a zombie. This scene instantly caused the onlookers to step back in fear.

Meanwhile, realizing that something was amiss, the other Qing Qiu people gradually gathered around, with Sun Baolu repeatedly explaining what was happening to Li Huowang.

Soon, several hundreds of people formed a circle as they watched Li Huowang's performance. By this point, he'd gone from being an enraged figure to one filled with tremendous helplessness and frustration.

"Mom? Why are you here? I was just angry, I didn't want to kill anyone... Please, don't cry. My condition hasn't worsened," Li Huowang begged.

Then, as if he had heard something, Li Huowang's expression slowly shifted from one of resignation and irritation to one that was filled with pain. He gradually collapsed to the ground, curling into a fetal position.

"Mom, I'm begging you, just let Dr. Wang leave. I don't need treatment. I know my situation. Don't waste any more money hiring experts. Please... just keep it for your own use," pleaded Li Huowang.

Seeing his labored breathing and increasingly pained

expression, Bai Lingmiao could barely hold back her tears. She wanted to rush over and hold him, but was pulled back by Luo Juanhua and Chun Xiaoman.

“Are you trying to get yourself killed? Senior Li can kill you with just a single touch!” reminded Xiaoman.

Li Huowang seemed to be listening to something. Soon, his face contorted in pain as he twisted on the ground like a worm, repeatedly rubbing his face in the grass. His tears mixed together with the dew on the grass, slowly turning indistinguishable from one another.

“Mom, are we short of money at home? If we are, then just tell me, and I’ll figure something out.”

“Don’t lie to me. You’ve even cut your own hair with scissors. I can tell...”

At that moment, Li Huowang suddenly sprang up from the ground, his face contorting with anger as he screamed into the air, “Wang Wei! Shut your mouth! It’s none of your fucking business!”

Chapter 229 - Unexpected

“You don’t need to remind me that she is fake! Even if my mom is just a hallucination, I still wouldn’t want her to be hurt!” Bound by chains, Li Huowang roared in frustration, his veins bulging on his neck.

But in the next moment, he slumped down again. Agony covered his face as he knelt down on the ground, repeatedly hitting his head against the earth. His banging started creating dents in the ground, each dent being larger than the last.

When Li Huowang finally stopped, he made every effort to keep his emotions in check and calm himself down.

“Mom, can you go outside for a moment? Don’t worry, I’ll have a good talk with Dr. Wang. It will be fine. I’m securely bound. I can’t hurt him even if I tried,” said Li Huowang.

At that moment, Bun suddenly emerged from the crowd, holding something in its mouth, ready to go close to Li Huowang; however, it was quickly held back by Gao Zhijian. “Don’t... don’t... don’t go!”

“What do you want? Let me tell you, if you dare to exploit them, then I won’t let you off!”

“What responsibility do you have? Just take your money! Can’t you just deceive her and tell my mom that you’re powerless?” Li Huowang exclaimed.

“I’ve told you before. People like you can’t help with my affairs!”

“Fine, I misspoke. Hallucinations like you can’t help me at all!”

“What are you trying to do? I won’t try! Everything here is fake! It’s all fake!”

As he spoke, Li Huowang twisted his head, plunging his entire

head under the grass, burying it completely.

After a while, there was a loud boom. Then, Li Huowang lifted his head from the grass and shouted into the air with a distorted expression on his face, “Do you think you’re tough? All you do is just stand there, blabbering on and on!”

“You dare to say that you understand me?! What do you understand?! Do you know what I’ve been through?! How could you possibly empathize?!”

“Take both sides seriously?! That’s easy for you to say! If you have the ability, then why not put yourself in my situation and try it? Have you ever tried eating chocolate balls on one side while someone tries to force-feed you iron nails on the other?”

“I don’t care about myself! I don’t even mind swallowing nails! But I have people I care about, and I’m afraid of losing them!”

“I’m afraid that one day, while I’m using chopsticks to pick up food on one side, on the other side, I’m shoving chopsticks into Bai Lingmiao’s eyes!”

“I won’t give up! Someday, I’ll find a way to get rid of these hallucinations! I won’t suffer like this forever! Someday, I too will be normal!”

Li Huowang appeared to have seen something that caused his face to be in a state of disbelief. His pupils continued to twitch as his breathing grew even faster.

Then, Li Huowang abruptly turned again. At the same time, his worm-like bounded body burrowed into the earth and he shook his dirt-covered head vigorously.

“No! Li Huowang, you’ve already fallen for this twice! You can’t fall for it again! This is fake!”

“You can’t become confused again! The others are still trying to survive! If you get trapped again, what will happen to them?”

Under the gaze of the onlookers, Li Huowang kept rolling on the green grass, ruining the neat arch beyond recognition.

An hour later, Li Huowang finally stopped. He lay there motionless, no different from a corpse.

“I’m fine now, release me,” said Li Huowang, his hoarse voice filled with exhaustion.

However, just as the others were about to rush forward, Bai Lingmiao stopped them. “You guys stay here. I’ll go alone. Senior Li doesn’t want to see anyone right now.”

As the crowd gradually dispersed, Bai Lingmiao knelt beside Li Huowang and gently began to undo the chains. She was not bothered by the fact that he was caked in dirt and directly cradled his head in her arms while using her fingers to massage his temples.

Li Huowang inhaled deeply before exhaling all the stale air from his lungs. He stared blankly at the sky, and murmured, “Miaomiao, they kept on forcing me. I... am so exhausted...”

As she heard his voice, Bai Lingmiao was on the verge of tears. But given the circumstances, there was little she could do to help. All she could do was hold Li Huowang’s head and give it a light massage.

Li Huowang looked at her, his expression somewhat hesitant. After a while, he whispered again, “Miaomiao, please stop treating me so nicely. It feels too surreal. I fear that everything here is merely a hallucination.”

Bai Lingmiao’s eyes glazed up, as she lay on Li Huowang’s chest and choked on her tears.

After a while, Li Huowang held up his right hand in front of him. Then, he grabbed a dagger with his left hand and severed a portion of his little finger. As he experienced the pain, he silently closed his eyes. At the same time, the flicker of doubt between his brows dwindled away. “What a joke. How could this type of intense pain be faked?”

“Woo~?” At that moment, Bun approached them and gingerly walked around Li Huowang while holding something in its mouth.

Seeing it, Li Huowang picked up the severed part of his pinky finger and tossed it toward the mutt's feet.

"Woof!"

Bun immediately spat out the snake-like black object from its mouth, and excitedly used its front paw to hold down one end of the little finger while using its teeth to delicately start nibbling away at it.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang sucked on his bleeding right hand before patting Bai Lingmiao on the back to comfort her, "It's okay, don't cry. Get up. Look, everyone is secretly watching us."

Once she rose from his chest, Li Huowang carefully loosened the ribbon from Bai Lingmiao's wrist and put it on her eyes.

"The sun is quite strong during the day. Remember to cover your eyes up, or the sunlight might hurt them," reminded Li Huowang.

Then, Li Huowang led the blindfolded Bai Lingmiao back toward their carriage.

Following this incident, the residents of Qing Qiu all had strange expressions on their faces when they looked at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang didn't mind this since he was leaving and was unlikely to see them again anyway. He didn't give that much thought to what people said behind his back or how they perceived him.

"Until we cross paths again, Baolu. Goodbye. Do not forget to write us letters whenever it's convenient." Li Huowang stood by the carriage as he spoke to Sun Baolu who was holding a Qing Qiu girl.

Hearing this, Sun Baolu looked somewhat helpless. "Senior Li, I don't know how to read or write."

Li Huowang said hoarsely, "That's alright. Take care of yourself."

With that, he led the others and left the group of tents.

Li Huowang wasn't really interested in finding out more about

what Sun Baolu had been hiding under his clothes. He wasn't such a gossip person.

Puppy, Gao Zhijian, and the others went over to embrace Sun Baolu. Many of them were overcome with emotion. They were like brothers who had been through thick and thin. The thought of never being able to see each other again was quite heartbreaking for them.

Bun, being a dog, couldn't comprehend these emotions. It just kept circling Li Huowang while holding an object in its mouth.

As Bun's tail brushed past his leg for the fifth time, Li Huowang sighed. Lowering his gaze to face Bun, he said, "Spit out whatever's in your mouth. If you go around picking up random things again, then I'm going to make stew out of you!"

Bun spat out the object in front of Li Huowang and sat down while wagging its tail and staring at him.

"What exactly is this? Shedded snakeskin? Does Qing Qiu have snakes this big?" asked Puppy as he used a knife to lift the object brought by Bun.

At that moment, a dark figure suddenly darted out from the side, startling everyone.

Seeing it, Li Huowang, who had been utterly unconcerned until now, rushed toward it. As he held the object in his trembling hands, it was evident that he was quite excited.

"This is... a Black Taisui!"

Chapter 230 - Source

“Senior Li? What’s the matter?” asked Puppy cautiously, his heart thumping loudly when he saw Li Huowang suddenly start to chew on the object. “Oh no, Senior Li is having an episode again.”

However, Li Huowang completely ignored what Puppy thought, and focused on slowly savoring the taste of the layer of skin. The more he chewed, the more excited he became.

This taste is unmistakable! It’s definitely the skin of a Black Taisui! I can finally do something about my hysteria!

Though the skin was completely dried up, Li Huowang had seen it once before, and he knew that the Black Taisui would turn into a puddle after it died, leaving behind only this layer of skin. The reason why it became like this was that the Black Taisui would be dehydrated after its death.

Currently, he didn’t have any methods to deal with his hallucinations, and finding a method to resolve the issues related to being a Strayed One was simply a distant dream with extremely slim hopes.

However, a Black Taisui could help him isolate the hallucinations, something which was very useful even if the effect was just temporary!

“Bun! Where did you find this thing?” Li Huowang turned to ask Bun.

“Woof woof...” The dog’s ears drooped as it cocked its head toward him, clearly not understanding what he was trying to ask.

Seeing this, Li Huowang directly placed the Black Taisui skin in front of its nose. “Smell it! Find where it came from!”

“Woof woof!” This time, Bun seemed to understand Li Huowang’s intention. It sniffed the black skin, and then turned

around before running toward the nearby grassland.

“Leave the ox-carts with Sun Baolu for now! We’re not leaving yet; we will only leave after we find the Black Taisui!” instructed Li Huowang as he used his crutch and started hobbling to chase after Bun.

Though the others did not know what Li Huowang was up to, they still followed after him. They were afraid about him having another episode in his current state.

This time around, Bun ran quite far away, to the point that even Li Huowang’s armpits began to bleed from the friction caused by the crutches rubbing against his armpits as he chased after it.

Dadada~

At that moment, the sound of horse hooves rang out, causing Li Huowang to turn over and see Sun Baolu who was riding a horse with some Qing Qiu people following behind him.

“Senior Li, what are you looking for? Get on the horse, and I’ll bring you there!” said Sun Baolu.

Hearing this, Li Huowang stepped onto the saddle and mounted the horse, and then pointed toward Bun who was running into the distance. “Follow it!”

The horse was obviously much faster than Li Huowang, and so they would at least not be left behind.

As the sun gradually rose higher and higher into the sky, the air around them became noticeably hotter.

So far? Where did Bun find the Black Taisui from?

As he thought about it, Li Huowang touched the sword on his back. Black Taisui may have been dangerous to him previously, but it was definitely less so now.

Right now, he couldn’t consider whether or not the Black Taisui would threaten him. Instead, he had to consider how he could capture it alive, imprison it, and then consume its flesh in a sustainable way.

While Li Huowang was busy pondering these issues, Bun, who had been running ahead frantically, suddenly vanished.

When the horse passed by, Li Huowang found that Bun had not truly disappeared. Instead, it had run into a low-lying area of a grassfield.

There was an irregular round hole on the left side of the depression, one which resembled the rabbit holes commonly seen on the grasslands. However, no matter how one looked at it, this hole did not seem like it was something that was dug by a rabbit. It was too large, and was at least a foot wide.

Li Huowang dismounted and approached Bun, who was circling around the area. As he approached, he noticed the traces on the ground, which seemed like the traces left behind by a Black Taisui.

The scattered black skin had been dispersed by the Qing Qiu wind, and only some pieces were left behind. However, the traces of blackened water had not yet vanished completely.

Li Huowang recognized this black water. It was something sprayed out by a Black Taisui right before its death. In the area he was standing, any grass that had been touched by this black water had withered completely.

The traces of the black water extended from inside the round hole. Li Huowang could roughly ascertain the situation based on what he had seen so far.

The Black Taisui should have been living within this hole, but had somehow suffered some sort of fatal injury. Then, it used the last of its energy to climb out before finally dying outside.

Then, the skin it left behind was picked up by Bun and brought back to him.

Well... Hopefully there was more than one Black Taisui within this hole.

As his thoughts reached this point, Li Huowang vigilantly approached the dim, round hole.

“Hold on!” shouted Sun Baolu as he rode his horse and rushed up before blocking Li Huowang’s way to the entrance of the hole. Terrified, he jumped off his horse and grabbed Li Huowang. “Senior Li, you must not enter! You really must not!”

Sun Baolu’s face was drenched in cold sweat. It seemed like he was terrified of the round hole, and did not even want to look at it.

“You’ve been here?” Li Huowang asked. Anyone who wasn’t blind could see the terror he felt toward the hole.

“Senior Li, I beg you! Please, leave quickly! It’s very dangerous here!” pleaded Sun Baolu.

Sun Baolu was almost kneeled down, but Li Huowang still didn’t budge.

What joke is he playing? How can I let a Black Taisui run after finally finding some clues about it?

“Baolu, calm down. It’s safe here. No one can harm you here,” Li Huowang soothed him, gradually calming Sun Baolu down.

Then, Li Huowang took a water gourd from Gao Zhijian, and passed it to Baolu. “Take a sip. Your lips are cracking up.”

After Sun Baolu drank all the water within, Li Huowang asked him once again, “What do you know about this place? What’s inside here? I need to find something in there, and your information can help me a lot.”

“Senior Li, you really mustn’t go in there! Qing Qiu has no evil spirits, not because they vanished without a trace, but because they have all hidden themselves under the grass! That is the entrance to their hideout!” said Sun Baolu.

Hearing this, Li Huowang looked down toward the hole in the green grass which Sun Baolu was pointing his trembling finger at.

If that’s the case, then everything under Qing Qiu’s surface was evil?

Li Huowang shuddered at the thought.

After some consideration, he felt that this was within the

logical limits in this crazy world. Otherwise, a Black Taisui wouldn't randomly appear in a place like this.

"That's all? Anything else? What else do your tribesmen know?" asked Li Huowang.

"Senior Li, don't go in! No one else knows what's inside! In Qing Qiu, there are orders not to even allow anyone to discuss what's inside this cave. Just mentioning its name and imagining its appearance can bring about a disaster!" pleaded Sun Baolu, trying to convince him.

After listening to Sun Baolu, Li Huowang pondered for a moment, and then spoke, "Alright, I got it."

Then, he used his crutches to walk toward the hole behind the horse.

"Senior Li, I've already made it so clear to you! Why are you still trying to enter it?! You will really die!" shouted Sun Baolu, jumping from anxiety.

Li Huowang looked at him, and then recalled the hallucination from earlier in the morning. At this point, he truly craved a Black Taisui which could help him isolate those hallucinations.

"I have already come across quite a few evil entities before, and I'm not a fledgling like before. Meeting one wouldn't necessarily mean defeat for me," said Li Huowang.

He truly did not want to experience the entanglement of the two worlds anymore. In fact, Li Huowang had little confidence in himself. He was afraid that he would end up delving deeper into the hallucinations if he experienced them a few more times.

Chapter 231 - Sun Baolu's Secret

“It’s very dangerous inside. All of you stay here. I can deal with this myself.” After Li Huowang instructed Bai Lingmiao and the rest, he walked into the cave on his own.

However, those words instantly displeased all of them. Puppy was the first to say something, “Senior Li, you can’t do that! We can help you if we end up meeting trouble.”

Li Huowang looked at Puppy’s skinny body and felt annoyed. “And what can you help with? Even Bun is more useful than you! If you come with me, then I would have to protect you instead!”

Hearing that, Puppy lowered his head in shame. “How could you say that?! I actually had to gather a lot of courage to bring myself to say that. I also trained myself with a blade, or at the very least, if your illness strikes again, then I could tie you up with the chains.”

“Senior Li, even if Puppy is useless, we can still be of use to you. You can enter, but you must bring us in!” Bai Lingmiao’s face was serious as she held her drum and whip in her hands. Even though she had always been meek, her heart had always been abnormally resolute in dire situations. She would always take charge in certain situations.

At the same time, Gao Zhijian stepped forward as well. Even though he didn’t say anything, his clenched fist already told everyone about his decision.

“Senior Li, since the Black Taisui can help suppress your illness, all of us are more than happy to help. The more people we have, the better. Also, we are different from Puppy,” said Chun Xiaoman

as she held the bronze bell in her hand.

Staring at their serious faces, Li Huowang felt happy in his heart. “Fine, but be careful. If there’s anything wrong then we must immediately head back out.”

After saying that, Li Huowang turned around as he prepared to bring the rest of them into the cave.

However, at that moment, Sun Baolu ran forward and stopped all of them.

“Why are you so persistent? Get away,” snapped Li Huowang, finally getting annoyed.

Hearing those words, Sun Baolu’s eyes went wide with agitation and he started taking off his clothes. His hands continuously trembled while untying the knots. “Senior Li! Listen to me! I went in there once. If you think you are fine with becoming like me, then I won’t stop you! Senior Li, you once asked me why I hide my body, right? It’s because I’m different from everyone! No matter what deformities you have, at least all of you are still human! But me? I’m a monster!”

As Sun Baolu’s shirt started to slide off, Li Huowang saw a small pit the size of a thumb at the base of Sun Baolu’s neck.

“What’s that? Is that a belly button? Wait, that *is* a belly button! But why is Sun Baolu’s belly button at the base of his neck?”

At that moment, Sun Baolu removed his shirt and showed everyone his body. With the exception of Chun Xiaoman and Bai Lingmiao who had turned around, everyone who saw Sun Baolu’s body gasped.

“Sun... W-why are your or-organs messed up?” Puppy stammered.

At this point, Li Huowang finally understood why Sun Baolu had hidden his body from them all this time—it was because Sun Baolu’s body was completely messed up. To be more accurate, all of

his organs were located in the wrong places.

Sun Baolu's anus was located on his belly, while his belly button was at the base of his neck. His genitals were growing from where they shouldn't be growing, while his nipples were nowhere to be seen.

It was almost as if a child had used some clay to make Sun Baolu's body.

Meanwhile, as Sun Baolu saw their horrified faces, he felt more and more ashamed. He had always had nightmares about people finding out what his body looked like, and so he kept hiding it. To think that there would come a day when he would have to show it to everyone on his own.

After a moment, Li Huowang sighed and hobbled over before helping Sun Baolu wear his clothes.

"What happened to you?" whispered Li Huowang.

"Something touched me inside the cave and I became like this. Back then, it was too dark, and so I didn't see what it was. I just felt a giant brush touch my body and then I became like this." Sun Baolu trembled from fear as he recalled what had happened to him in the past. "Back then, I was still quite young. I was only seven when some of the lambs I was herding ran into this cave. Even though the adults had said that the caves were dangerous, me and my four friends thought that it would be fine. In the end, I was the only one who managed to escape."

As he spoke, Sun Baolu stared at Li Huowang with agitation. "Senior Li, you've saved my life and allowed me to finally come back home. I'm deeply indebted to you and I cannot let you die in there!"

Even now, Sun Baolu was still trying his best to persuade him.

Li Huowang sighed. He could feel the concern in Sun Baolu's voice. "You should know that there is probably a Black Taisui in there, right? Do you know what that means to me?"

As he spoke, Li Huowang calmly explained why he needed to enter the cave, “This is why I must enter the cave at all costs; if I don’t, then I will forever be haunted by my hallucinations. It’s the only cure that I know of. I know that you have good intentions and I appreciate it. But if you want the best for others, then you must never force your kindness on them. Instead, you should let them choose. Thank you for the information. It will be very useful to me.”

Li Huowang patted Sun Baolu’s shoulder before heading toward the cave; he was adamant about capturing a Black Taisui.

The others looked at each other before quickly following Li Huowang.

As Sun Baolu saw all of them disappear into the dark cave, he did his best to stop his legs from trembling. After hesitating for a while, he finally relented and followed after them. “Since all of you are entering the cave, then I will come as well! I’ve been here before and I can guide you!”

As they entered the cave, they took out the glowing green rocks. Everything around them had become eerily quiet. The sound of wind, as well as the warm sunlight had disappeared completely.

“Hu~” Li Huowang exhaled lightly and white mist came out from his mouth. “Baolu, has the cave always been this cold?”

Li Huowang’s voice startled the tense Sun Baolu, but he quickly nodded. “Yes. It was this cold before as well. The deeper we walk, the colder it will get.”

As he spoke, Sun Baolu quickly walked past them. “I will take the lead, but you guys must follow me closely. If we go slightly further ahead, then we will reach the point where I lost one of my friends.”

Sun Baolu’s warning immediately made everyone tense up as they held onto their weapons.

The cave was extremely silent. There were no other noises

besides their footsteps.

It was not a limestone cave but a rocky one instead. The cave was slanted ever so slightly downward. This meant that the more they walked, the further away they were from the surface.

Translator's Thoughts

Finally I get to show you Sun Baolu's fan art!

Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin



Chapter 232 - Cauldron

They slowly made their way down the cave. No one said anything as they walked. Even though they continued walking for a long time, they had yet to reach the bottom; it was as if the cave was never ending. Luckily the deeper they walked, the wider the cave got. Due to this, it was not as oppressive as it had been near the entrance.

“Wait, stop.” Li Huowang saw something and kneeled down. He stared at the footprints within the cave.

“These are the footprints of an adult. Looks like someone else also came into this cave before... Everyone, be careful. Let’s continue walking.” Li Huowang stood up and continued walking down the cave. Compared to the evil beings, he was more afraid of encountering another human.

After all, if a human could enter this cave filled with evil beings so easily, then that would mean that the human had to be extremely powerful.

After a while, there was a turn in front of them. Sun Baolu stopped nervously and spoke, “Back then, when I passed through this point, one of my friends disappeared.”

Sun Baolu’s fear soon affected everyone else causing all of them to become a lot more alert.

Li Huowang pulled Sun Baolu back and walked to the front of the bend. He held his sword and stood there while surveying his surroundings, but in the end, nothing attacked him.

“Are you sure it’s here? There’s nothing on the ground except for two dead lambs,” asked Li Huowang.

“Dead lambs?” Sun Baolu and the rest carefully approached Li Huowang and raised their glowing rocks. Just like Li Huowang said,

there were two dead lambs and nothing else within the darkness.

Looking at their mummified bodies that were covered in dust, it was clear the lambs had lost their way in here and then died from hunger.

After a moment, Li Huowang sliced open the mummified lambs, causing the dried up organs within them to fall out.

However, Li Huowang did not stop there, and stomped the corpses of the lambs to bits. He was being cautious of the lambs suddenly being reanimated and attacking him.

Even though it might seem like he was being overly cautious, he would rather be safe than sorry in this situation.

After turning both the lambs to dust, Li Huowang sheathed his sword and continued walking.

Even though the cave became wider and larger the deeper they went, Li Huowang still couldn't see what was within the darkness.

The darkness within the cave was bizarre; it was as if it was even darker than the darkness found in other places. The glowing rocks in their hands only allowed them to illuminate a short distance away, while Li Huowang's eyes could barely see any further than that.

After walking for some time they soon encountered even more mummified lambs, but this time Li Huowang did not destroy them; there were just too many of them. They were littered across the floor, and there were at least 800 of them!

"We could attribute there being one or two dead lambs to them wandering in here and getting lost,, but more than a few hundreds? It's clear that someone did this purposefully. Someone herded the lambs into the cave and waited for them to die. But, who did this?" Li Huowang pondered out loud.

The body of the lambs were fine as well; there were no traces of them being bitten.

With all these indicators, it was clear that the Black Taisui was

not around here. After all, it would never give up on the lambs since it required their meat to survive.

After giving it some thought, Li Huowang took out the dead Black Taisui skin from his pouch and once again placed it in front of Bun. “Bun, smell this and help us find its source.”

Bun licked its lips and hesitantly walked forward.

Li Huowang waved his hand and everyone quickly followed after him. “Stay close. Don’t fall behind.”

“It should be fine in the short path ahead, but if we walk for another seven minutes or so, we will arrive at the place where I was hit by the brush last time around. That was also the farthest I went back then,” Sun Baolu nervously reminded them.

The dead lambs littering the ground did not stop as they went deeper and deeper into the cave. Finally, after walking for ten minutes, they saw something different.

It was a massive bronze cauldron, roughly ten feet tall.

The giant bronze cauldron was covered in green rust and dust; it was as if it hadn’t been used in a long time.

“Huh. This wasn’t here when I last came here,” said Sun Baolu, confused.

This fact instantly caused Li Huowang to raise his guard. He looked at the cauldron and then at the mass of dead lamb behind them. He felt that both of them were somehow connected. Li Huowang knew that a cauldron was an important object in ceremonies.

After a moment, Li Huowang circled around the cauldron and looked behind it. Just as he had expected, he found plates made from white jade, as well as the rotting carcasses of several animals that had been used as a sacrifice.

This place was indeed being used by someone for ceremonies.

Didn't Baolu say that this was the place where all the evil beings hid? Then why is there a ceremonial ground here? Unless... was it the

evil beings who were conducting the ceremony? If so, what are they worshipping?

Li Huowang carefully approached the cauldron and looked inside. However, other than ashes, there was nothing else inside it.

“Ah!”

At that moment, a sudden cry rang out, surprising Li Huowang. When he swiftly turned around, he saw Bai Lingmiao hugging her Second Deity tightly.

“What’s wrong? Did you see something?” Li Huowang quickly ran forward and asked.

“Lamb! The lamb!” shouted Bai Lingmiao as she pointed toward the left side of the cave. At the same time, she hugged the Second Deity even more tightly.

Seeing this, Li Huowang carefully approached the location that Bai Lingmiao was pointing toward and illuminated the area with his glowing rock. There, he found even more lamb corpses.

However, these corpses were different. These corpses were half human and half lamb! The corpse of an old man was just beneath Li Huowang’s feet. When he checked, he saw that the old man had spiral horns growing out from his forehead. Right before his death, the old man had been touching his face with his hooves, his face filled with despair.

There was another corpse right beside the old man’s corpse. The top part of this corpse belonged to a lamb, and had been skinned, but the bottom half was distorted, looking like a combination between a human and a lamb.

This was merely the start.

As Li Huowang raised his glowing rock and illuminated even more of the dark corner, he saw more and more corpses that were transformed half way through, each more horrifying than the last. It was no wonder that Bai Lingmiao was so scared.

As he looked at these half-human half-lamb corpses, Li

Huowang instantly remembered the lamb corpses he had seen before. “Those weren’t lamb corpses! Those were humans! They were transformed into lambs and then made into sacrifices!”

After coming to this realization, Li Huowang quickly ran toward the cauldron and saw rows and rows of lamb corpses, each of them placed neatly.

Upon realizing that the lambs were originally humans, it finally dawned on Li Huowang just how much danger they were in!

Someone had killed thousands of people over here just to offer sacrifices and worship!

Chapter 233 - Lion Dance

When Li Huowang realized that all these dead lambs were humans that were transformed, he was beyond shocked.

Numerous questions raced through his mind.

What are they worshiping, and who are they?

However, in the end Li Huowang kept going back to the same two questions.

He needed to get the answers soon. If there was an evil sect within the depths of this cave, then he might have to reconsider whether he wanted to leave immediately or not.

While it was worth the risk to enter the dangerous cave to get his hands on a Black Taisui, it was not worth it to risk everyone's life.

At that moment, Sun Baolu noticed something. "Wait, Senior Li, something's not right. Look at how the offerings were placed. It's backward. Someone was... offering the animals to the dead lambs."

"They are not worshiping some deity but the lambs?" Li Huowang frowned as he continued to observe the dead lambs and the offerings.

"Is it a Lamb God? Sun Baolu, is there a Lamb God in Qing Qiu?" Puppy asked.

"Lambs are just livestock. Why would we worship livestock as gods? Qing Qiu doesn't have such a rule," replied Sun Baolu.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang quickly tried to recall the names of various sects and their powers.

The Righteous Monastery worshiped the lustful flesh Buddha; the Ao Jing Sect worshiped the pain-giving Ba-Hui[\[1\]](#), and the Benevolent Nunnery worshiped the decaying Bodhisattva.

As he thought about all this, Li Huowang had a sudden idea

and accidentally said it out loud, “I get it. They are not worshipping the lambs themselves. The lambs are merely a metaphor or a vessel. They are worshipping death itself!”

“Huh?” No one else understood what he meant.

They didn’t understand it, but Li Huowang did. He stood above the giant cauldron and stared at the corpses of the lambs below.

Someone or something had chased thousands of people in here and transformed them into lambs. Then, those that failed to undergo the transformation were cast aside, while those that managed to complete their transformation into lambs were herded and killed at the same time.

Once the lambs died, they started their ceremony. They were not worshipping the lambs, but the ‘death’ of the lambs itself!

As he carefully thought about the clues presented to him, he slowly deduced the intricacies of this world.

Not only were the evil beings of Qing Qiu all trapped underground, there was even a sect that worshiped death itself!

Worse still was the fact that Li Huowang didn’t know whether this sect was formed by humans or something else.

Since the sect worshiped death, that meant that their powers were closely related to death. Just based on that information alone, Li Huowang realized the strength of their enemies and just how much danger all of them were in.

Realizing all this, Li Huowang quickly ran down and warned everyone. “Run! We need to get out of here, now! It’s no longer an issue about facing a mere evil being anymore!”

Li Huowang was just about to lead everyone out when the sound of smacking wood suddenly rang out.

Dak~ Dak~ Dak~

Hearing this sound, Li Huowang unsheathed his sword while quickly scanning the darkness.

Dak~ Dak~ Dak~

The sound of smacking wood was rhythmic, and it came from everywhere, making it so Li Huowang could not determine where it originated.

Given that he did not know where the enemy was located, Li Huowang dared not rush in a single direction, afraid that he would crash into them.

Li Huowang bit his lips and focused, trying his best to locate the enemy based on the sound. He needed to know where the enemy was right now!

The sound slowly got louder and closer. Finally, Li Huowang's sharp senses allowed him to determine the source of the sound.

"IT'S ABOVE US!" shouted Li Huowang as he quickly looked up into the darkness and threw out the glowing rock in his hand. The glowing rock got stuck within the cracks of the ceiling, its light illuminating the top of the cave.

Finally, they saw what it was—a massive human face, one larger than a dinner table, was being illuminated by the green light of glowing rock.

The face was completely flat and it seemed like a man. Its skin was pale and it had an extremely large mouth. At this moment, two eyes the size of lanterns were staring at Li Huowang.

Behind the neck of the man was not a humanoid body, but a caterpillar-like body. At the same time, hands of various sizes could be seen holding the sheet together.

The rhythmic sound of smacking wood was originating from the body!

Li Huowang immediately recognized what it was. He had just seen it at the Women's Mountain!

Is that the Lion Dance from the Lion Dance Palace?! That can't be! It has a flattened dead human face and not a lion head! Were they the ones who conducted this ceremony? Are they not from the Lion Dance Palace but the Death Dance Palace[2] instead?!

Regardless of what it was, Li Huowang could not ignore that massive being at the top of the cave. After a moment, he decided to be the one to make the first contact with it.

Li Huowang carefully worded himself, “Masters from the Lion Dance Palace, I, Xuan Yang, greet you humbly. I have no intention of causing trouble for you by trespassing into your territory, but there is an underlying issue. I need to find a Black Taisui that can be refined into a pill. I’ve heard there was one in your territory, and so I came here to seek one. If the Masters from the Lion Dance Palace could help me find one, I will give a bountiful reward to the Lion Dance Palace.”

While he didn’t have a ‘reward’, the first thing he needed to do was get out of this situation. This was the best he could do for now.

But the Lion Dance did not react. It just continued to hang from the ceiling without saying anything. One might even have mistaken it for a hanging stone statue instead.

Why aren’t they saying anything? Maybe they don’t understand my language and can only speak the native Qing Qiu language?

Upon reaching this conclusion, Li Huowang turned around and instructed Sun Baolu what to say to the Lion Dance above.

However, just as Sun Baolu was about to talk to the Lion Dance, Li Huowang’s body tensed up as he sensed an intense feeling of danger coming from behind him. He immediately dodged to the left.

But it was too late. Something hit his back forcefully, the impact causing him to be flung away.

“It’s an ambush! The Lion Dance above is just a decoy!” shouted Li Huowang as he crashed into the darkness and struggled to stand up. When he finally managed to get up, he quickly inspected his back but was surprised to see that it was fine.

“Huh? What’s going on?” Li Huowang felt his back before finally touching the Profound Records embedded underneath the

skin of his back.

At that moment, he realized that it was the Profound Records that had blocked the attack. Even though the embedding process had been very painful, it was very useful. He now had armor on his back.

However, Li Huowang didn't have time to be happy. He quickly found his crutches and hobbled back to the light, finally seeing what it was that had ambushed him.

It was another Lion Dance, but this one had a flattened woman's face with red lips!

1. Ao Jing Sect is infatuated with stealing the power of Ba-Hui, and they actually worship the sacrificial god. Likely mistake by the author, similar to the earlier chapter 🤔

2. character for lion and death have almost the same pronunciation 🤔

Translator's Thoughts

One of my favourite fan art so far. This is their version of Lion Dance. Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin



Chapter 234 - Death

The sounds of the bronze bell and drums filled the dark cave.

Ring~ Ring~ Ring~ Dong~ Dong~ Dong~

Amidst the harmony of the two sounds, the Wandering Gods, the Second Deity, and all of Li Huowang's companions were fighting off against the female Lion Dance.

Li Huowang did not run to help them. Instead he focused on the Lion Dance on the ceiling that was falling downward. He couldn't let the two Lion Dances trap them!

Jiang!

Li Huowang unsheathed his sword and ran as fast as he could toward the male Lion Dance.

Meanwhile, the various black legs of the Lion Dance under the white tassels and white sheet of the Lion Dance started to tap aggressively as it ran towards Li Huowang.

Soon both of them were close enough to see each other's faces, and both of them saw the killing intent contained within the other's eyes.

Both of them clashed. The giant Lion Dance rammed into Li Huowang, brushing the white tassels on its body toward Li Huowang.

But both of its attacks missed. On the other hand, Li Huowang raised his sword and sliced it downward toward the side of the Lion Dance.

Both of them quickly ran past each other. Li Huowang was unharmed while several feet of the Lion Dance were cut off.

What the Lion Dance saw was just an illusion of Li Huowang. Li Huowang had already separated his main body and illusion before he ran over here.

Staring at the unharmed Li Huowang, the Lion Dance's massive lantern-like left eye moved upward, revealing a round black hole. Then, seven to eight arms resembling dried up monkey paws extended outward from behind and placed themselves neatly into rows like eyelashes.

Soon, several irregularly-shaped eyes filled the empty eye socket. At the same time, the man's face became very scary with the several small eyes all staring at Li Huowang's true body.

Li Huowang clenched his teeth, feeling a chill run down his spine. Regardless of what it was, it was definitely not a Lion Dance!

After a moment, Li Huowang threw his crutches away and stabbed his broken leg into the ground. His eyes were filled with killing intent as he roared, "Come!"

Then, he held the sword in front of him before swiping his left hand toward the sword. Instantly, two of his fingertips were cleanly cut as they started expanding in midair. With a pop, the sharp bone exploded from the flesh and flew toward the Lion Dance.

The bone bullets were extremely fast. The Lion Dance failed to avoid them and soon, two bloody holes appeared on its large face.

The two bone bullets had penetrated the face and continued to penetrate through its entire body. Accompanying the sound of tearing flesh was the sticky black blood flowing down the feet underneath the white sheet.

The performers of the Lion Dance were hurt, but they did not give up. The Lion Dance shook its body rigorously and the white tassels shot themselves toward Li Huowang.

However, Li Huowang had already anticipated this. He quickly took out a plier and pulled two of his molars out of his mouth. The two molars exploded in the air, causing the white tassels to be torn apart and fall listlessly toward the ground.

At the same time, the Lion Dance itself was also torn by the shrapnels from the exploding teeth. Reddish-black blood seeped out

of the white sheet, making it look even more fearsome.

At this point, while the Lion Dance had realized that it was no match for Li Huowang, it still didn't say anything. The feet below the white sheet quickly moved as they dragged away its torn body into the darkness.

But how could Li Huowang let it escape so easily? He quickly shoved the pliers into his mouth again.

In the face of Li Huowang's attacks, the wounded Lion Dance soon died.

Then, without waiting to catch his breath, Li Huowang quickly ran over to help out his comrades. Once he joined in, the other Lion Dance also fell quite quickly.

Li Huowang leapt onto the Lion Dance head and stabbed his sword down, slicing right through the neck and chopping off the Lion Dance's head!

Without the head, the Lion Dance soon slumped onto the ground.

Bam!

The Lion Dance fell heavily and thick blood seeped out from underneath it, staining the ground with reddish-black blood.

Li Huowang retrieved his sword and leapt down. Then, he looked at everyone who had been spooked and asked, "Is everyone alright?"

"Everything's fine. It's just that Gao Zhijian's left ear was touched by the white tassels, causing it to shift downward by an inch. Those white tassels were most likely the things that Sun Baolu had touched before," Chun Xiaoman answered him.

Li Huowang nodded when he saw Gao Zhijian now have one ear lower than the other. Then, he wiped the blood off his sword and placed it back into its sheath before turning around and inspecting the two Lion Dances.

Behind the flattened faces of the Lion Dance were not live

humans, but masses consisting of fleshy corpses.

The entirety of the Lion Dance was just one body. It didn't matter whether they were the hands or the feet, all of them originated from a single, grotesque body. Underneath the white sheet, various organs were connected to each other with blood vessels, confirming Li Huowang's suspicions.

Li Huowang didn't know whether these beings were born like that, or whether they were made by humans. But no matter what, their situation was quite bad; in fact, it might have just gotten even worse.

The truly scary thing about the Lion Dances was the fact that they were not confined to the underground, and that they could appear in the open in Qing Qiu. They were even accepted as a part of life by the people of Qing Qiu!

But while Li Huowang was sad, he was no longer surprised anymore.

"Heavens... What is this..." Puppy was too shocked to even speak properly.

"Im... im... impossible! This cannot be right!" Sun Baolu stared at the Lion Dance corpse with a complicated look on his face. Everything that he had learned to accept in the past ten years was toppled over just like that. "Senior Li, what... What are they?"

At this moment, Li Huowang was standing beside the male Lion Dance corpse. He didn't have the luxury to think about what would happen to those living within Qing Qiu. In the end, they were just passers by who were passing through Qing Qiu so it didn't matter to him.

Instead, he was thinking about another problem.

Li Huowang stabbed the organs and flesh of the Lion Dance as he tried to find something.

"Senior Li, what are you finding?" asked Puppy.

"I'm finding Death," answered Li Huowang. However, Puppy

didn't understand what he was saying.

“What?”

Li Huowang was too lazy to explain and just continued examining the massive corpses in front of him.

Something's not right here. The RIGHTEOUS Monastery had the lustful flesh Buddha and those monks could use powers related to flesh. The Benevolent Nunnery had the decaying Bodhisattva and they could use powers related to decay. But these Lion Dances... They did not use any powers related to death even though this place worships it... Unless... there's another sect underneath here?!

As his thoughts reached this point, Li Huowang turned to look toward the giant cauldron. His body felt numb from the cold. This place was far more crowded than he had originally thought.

Chapter 235 - Black Taisui

“Woof!”

Bun’s barking broke Li Huowang’s train of thoughts as he saw Bun heading into the darkness.

“Daoist! Go and chase after it! The dog just caught a sniff of what you were looking for!” Monk’s illusion quickly reminded Li Huowang.

“Black Taisui?” Li Huowang took a glance at the illusion and quickly hobbled after Bun. Everyone else followed after him.

Bun ran faster and faster through the cave. After a couple of turns, Li Huowang also started getting excited! He too could smell a Black Taisui!

The Black Taisui is nearby!

Li Huowang’s heart started beating rapidly. But just as he was about to run faster, Li Huowang felt his scalp tingle and he immediately ducked. Thankfully, he managed to duck just in time, allowing something to swing past where his head had just been.

Bam!

Gao Zhijian slammed that thing with his mace and helped Li Huowang escape whatever it was.

When Li Huowang stood up once more, he saw that the thing had slipped back into the darkness.

Everyone else grouped around Li Huowang and readied their weapons.

Li Huowang’s body was tense as he asked Gao Zhijian, “Did you see what it was?”

“Meat... meathook!” Gao Zhijian explained what he saw.

“A meathook? Another evil being is here? Why can’t we just catch a break.” Li Huowang stared into the darkness alertly.

“Did you see it?” Li Huowang spoke to Monk’s illusion.

“No, I was distracted,” replied Monk.

Dak dak dak~

At that moment, something came from Li Huowang’s left side, causing everyone to point their weapons there, only to find that it was Bun running toward them.

Bun placed its head onto the ground and barked at Li Huowang.

“Daoist, it’s asking why aren’t you following it?” suggested Monk.

Li Huowang frowned. “Shut up. As if you know how to talk to dogs.”

Seeing this, everyone was surprised as they stared at Li Huowang.

“Senior Li, please don’t get one of your episodes over here. If you do, then we will really be done for.” Puppy trembled.

Li Huowang frowned at him and then looked at Bun. “Why did that thing attack me and not Bun?”

But no one could answer him. Meanwhile, Bun just wagged its tail and walked around in circles. Looking at how impatient it was, the thing they were looking for should be close.

Staring at the darkness ahead, Li Huowang decided to follow Bun. They were already here and it would waste all of their efforts if they decided to turn back now.

“Come! Everyone, follow me! Remember! Don’t lose track of anyone and don’t fall behind,” instructed Li Huowang. In order to prevent another ambush, all of them huddled around before walking forward carefully.

Because of the thing just now, Li Huowang kept looking upward to see if there’s anything on the ceiling.

On the other hand, when it saw its owner start to walk, Bun continued to trace the scent into the cave.

Nothing happened for the next two hours; neither the meathook nor the Lion Dance made an appearance. It was quiet, too quiet.

All of them were feeling oppressed by their surroundings. Within the dark and silent cave, everyone was tense; after all, anything could leap out from the darkness at any time. Cold sweat dripped down from their faces.

“Shhh! Quiet! I think we found it.” Li Huowang stared at the writhing tentacles within the darkness. Even though it was still blurry, Li Huowang was sure that it was a Black Taisui!

The Black Taisui was curious by the sudden light and extended one of its tentacles to touch the glowing green rock.

“We finally found it.” Li Huowang’s breath became soft. It was as if he was afraid of scaring the Black Taisui away.

“Senior Li, how should we bring it back?” Sun Baolu whispered.

Li Huowang stared at the Black Taisui and pondered about it. This Black Taisui was quite a bit bigger than the one in the Zephyr Temple.

“Zhijian, bring me the chains that all of you use to tie me up. We might need to surround and ambush it. When we act later, be careful not to kill it,” said Li Huowang.

As everyone moved around slowly, the chains slowly wrapped around the Black Taisui.

When Li Huowang gave the signal, Gao Zhijian raised his mace and ran over to the Black Taisui, as if about to smash it into pieces.

Bam!

At that moment, several translucent tentacles exploded from the Black Taisui’s flesh and stabbed toward Gao Zhijian.

In the instant it attacked, everyone raised the chain and ran

around it.

They were trying to bind it!

Li Huowang also shot forward and cut down the tentacles with his sword.

Compared to the Lion Dance, the Black Taisui was an easier foe for them to subdue. Even so, it was a ridiculously hard task to capture it without killing it. They could use all of their techniques to kill the Lion Dance, but they couldn't use them against the Black Taisui.

After all, they could neither be too hard on it nor too soft.

Li Huowang's group wanted to use the chains to capture it, but the Black Taisui's tentacles kept disrupting them.

The situation got chaotic very fast.

At this point, Li Huowang's plan has gone completely awry! The tentacles did not disappear after he chopped them off; instead, even more of them extended from where he had cut them.

At the critical moment, all of them heard something coming from their left.

Something was approaching them!

Peng! Shua!

The sound was too bizarre, completely unlike anything Li Huowang had ever heard before.

Shit! Something is coming and I can't wait any longer! I guess I have no choice.

Making up his mind, Li Huowang took a deep breath and quickly took out a dagger before cutting off the skin on his torso.

He peeled off the skin and flesh, revealing his white ribs to the air.

Then, without heeding the pain that almost made him pass out, Li Huowang threw the large piece of skin towards the Black Taisui. It quickly expanded and captured the Black Taisui. No matter how many tentacles the Black Taisui spawned to stab at the skin, it was

useless!

“Let’s go!” Li Huowang ignored his pain and ordered everyone to run in the opposite direction with the Black Taisui.

They were faster than whatever that thing was, and so the sounds slowly grew silent.

“Senior Li, you are hurt.” Bai Lingmiao glanced at Li Huowang’s shirt which was gradually becoming more and more red. As she spoke, she took out the Golden Wound medication and spread it across his torso.

Li Huowang almost had the urge to kill himself from all the pain and the medication, but when he saw Gao Zhijian dragging the Black Taisui, he once again found the drive to live.

Li Huowang smiled. Amidst the intense pain wracking his body, he started laughing.

Finally... he had finally found the method to stop the hallucinations once and for all.

“Wang Wei, didn’t you say that *that side* is reality? If you can still drag me back to ‘reality’ after I consume the Black Taisui, then I will believe you!” Li Huowang laughed, mumbling within the darkness.

Chapter 236 - Darkness

“Senior Li, who’s Wang Wei?” Hearing his mumblings, Bai Lingmiao asked out of curiosity.

Li Huowang shook his head. “Hehe, Wang Wei is just a nobody. He doesn’t exist.”

Bai Lingmiao helped him up and they quickly retraced their steps. Compared to when they came in, the road back wasn't as bad.

Since none of them died and they even found the Black Taisui, everyone felt relieved. Still, they wanted to head out as soon as possible.

“Senior Li, once we get back out, can we rest at Sun Baolu’s place for a few days? I want to eat more roasted lambs before we leave. I feel like I’ve lost six months of my life,” Puppy pleaded with Li Huowang, his white patchy face revealing a tired expression.

Li Huowang looked at everyone else and noted their tiredness before agreeing, “Sure. It’s thanks to everyone that we succeeded this time. We should get some more rest.”

In the end everyone was a living human. He had to consider the limits of their physical capabilities as well.

Hearing Li Huowang’s agreement, Puppy clenched his fist in excitement. Just the thought of the lamb meat already caused him to start salivating. “Haha! The things I had heard about the roasted lamb meat of Qing Qiu was not exaggerated in the slightest! Other places simply can’t compete with it!”

“Wait, Puppy, what are you holding in your hands?” asked Li Huowang when he saw some white threads floating in Puppy’s fist.

Puppy opened his fist and showed Li Huowang. “Oh this? These are the white threads on the Lion Dance. I cut down quite a lot of it. Since it could turn Sun Baolu into what he is today, this must be

quite a special item. I think that I can sell it once we reach someplace big, like the capital of Liang Kingdom. We should also consider our finances as well, right? After all, we've already used a lot of our money throughout our journey."

Within Puppy's fist was a pouch woven from thick cloth. Inside the pouch were bundles of white threads that looked like cotton.

Li Huowang shook his head. Puppy never failed to surprise him when it came to money. "The Lion Dances are already dead and so these might not even work anymore. And yet, you still took them with you?"

Puppy heard Li Huowang's words and felt that it was indeed possible for them to no longer work. His heart started pounding as he gingerly extended his pinky finger and swiped it against one of the white threads.

At that moment, Puppy saw with his very eyes as his fingernail shifted to the other side, while his fingerprints shifted to where his fingernail was before.

"This... this ..." Puppy checked his pinky fingernail and stared at Li Huowang helplessly. "Senior Li, it's still working, but now... my pinky finger is upside down..."

"Why are you panicking? It should be fine, plus there's no need to sell them for money. Why don't you research how to use them to kill enemies? For example tying one of them to a needle and shooting the needle through a blow pipe or something," suggested Li Huowang.

Li Huowang's advice caused Puppy's eyes to light up! "Hey! You are right! Senior Li is indeed a knowledgeable person! You are so much smarter than me!"

Puppy was excited! With these white tassels, he too could also be considered someone with supernatural powers!

It doesn't matter if it's real or fake, but now, I will also be able to show off to the women and make them want to marry me! I will also be

able to help Senior Li next time if there's trouble!

As he thought about this, Puppy ignored his inverted pinky finger and quickly kept the pouch of white tassels securely inside his shirt.

While Puppy was busy considering the possibilities, everyone else started to slow down.

"Wait, this isn't right. We've walked so far and yet we still haven't even reached the cauldron?"

Li Huowang's words were like a splash of cold water on all of their faces. Not only did it extinguish all of their happiness, it even made them feel somewhat scared.

All of them stared into the darkness, trying to find something familiar they could recognize.

But everything within the darkness looked the same to them.

"This place isn't right! It could make us lose our way!" At this point, all of their relief was gone and they started panicking again!

"Don't panic! Look at the foot prints! We just need to use them to retrace our steps!" said Li Huowang, causing all of them to lower their glowing rocks toward the ground.

Seeing the clearly visible footprints, they finally calmed down a little.

"Let's slowly retrace our steps," instructed Li Huowang.

Everyone followed Li Huowang's orders and slowly retraced their steps, even if some of their footprints weren't all that clear in certain places. There was also the trail of blood that Li Huowang had left from when they were walking just now.

An hour passed as they continued to retrace their steps, but they had yet to reach where the Lion Dance corpses were. They were certain they hadn't walked so far away. Even so, the blood stains continued leading them into the darkness.

Sun Baolu was the first one to start despairing. "Senior Li, we can't go out anymore. The cave has eaten us."

Li Huowang wasn't feeling good about being forced into the dead end either. However, at that moment, he heard something.

"Sh!" Li Huowang lowered his body and placed his ear onto the ground.

Li Huowang slowly crept forward. "Everyone, hide your glowing stones. Someone's coming."

Hearing his words, everyone kept away their glowing stones, allowing the darkness to engulf them. All of them were feeling afraid as they held onto each other to prevent themselves from getting separated.

"What do you mean you heard someone? I'm not hearing anything?" asked Puppy. However, just as he said this, Li Huowang silenced him by covering his mouth.

They continued walking slowly until Li Huowang suddenly stopped. Everyone tried their best to listen but heard nothing.

However, Li Huowang heard it clearly. It was an old man's voice.

"Let me test you. We are born as humans, but what is a 'human'?" asked the old man.

A child's voice answered him, "Humans are made of flesh, so the flesh is human."

Li Huowang frowned and stopped as he listened to their conversation.

"Wrong! The flesh is nothing but a vessel," said the old man.

"But Master did not say that. He just told me to stop thinking too much and taught me that humans are made of flesh," said the child.

"Shh! Don't listen to Master. That old man is just making stuff up! Everything is a lie," said the old man.

"Can you stop talking in circles? If you don't want to tell me, then don't! It's so annoying!" snapped the child.

At this point, the old man's voice became conceited as he

started explaining, “Humans are One, and One is humans. Everyone has One, and One becomes Two. From there the cycle of life and death is born. Two becomes Three, and then it becomes the Three Corpses and Seven Emotions. The path to cultivating the Dao is to cultivate the One. In order to do so, we must first abandon the Seven Emotions and kill the Three Corpses to return back to One!”

Chapter 237 - Sheng Erzi

Li Huowang was crawling on the ground while trying to pinpoint the location of the two voices. He started listening to their conversation.

Cultivation of Dao? Is he a Daoist? Is he talking to someone else? But it doesn't seem like a Daoist that I know, or at least I don't know any Daoists that cultivate the One.

As Li Huowang continued listening to them, the two of them continued with their discussion, the girl was scoffing at the older man.

“What rubbish are you talking about? Your mother was pregnant for ten months before she gave birth to you. Don't you think it's stupid to abandon your flesh?” said the girl.

“No, no! You must be thinking that the flesh on our bodies, the Seven Emotions, and the Three Corpses all belong to us, but that's wrong! They all belong to someone else! Even life and death belonged to someone! It was them who gave it all to us!” said the older voice.

“They belong to someone?”

“That's correct! The pain of our body, the smile on our faces, our previous lives, and our future lives all have an owner! Do you think it's good for us to carry all that with us? No, they are all shackles! We need to remove all of them! Fifty Major Daos, and the Heavens controlled forty-nine of them; on the other hand, we humans only needed to have access to one! That is how we become One!”

After hearing all that, the girl asked the question that Li Huowang wanted to ask. “What happens after we become One?”

“Hehe, after we become One, no one owes anyone anything.

Then, we will all be truly free, free from the Three Realms and Five Elements.”

What are they talking about? What owners and what One?

Li Huowang frowned and tried his best to understand their conversation.

Do all of them have their respective owners? Pain belongs to Ba-Hui while happiness belongs to the God of Prosperity?

At that moment, Li Huowang instinctively remembered the big cauldron.

Are they... worshiping the owner of death?

Li Huowang shook his head and cast aside all excess thoughts.

No, I can't let myself get roped in by them. They might just be talking about what they believe in and it might not even be real. They might as well be another Dan Yangzi, thinking that they know everything while truly knowing nothing! I shouldn't be thinking about this right now. I should be thinking about how to react if I happen to meet them and how to get out of here. Should I just reveal myself to them?

Li Huowang thought about it but felt that it was too risky.

Staring at the darkness around him, Li Huowang thought about another idea.

Should I slowly tail them and hope that they will leave the cave?

No, this is even worse than last time!

Just as Li Huowang was thinking about how to deal with both of them while escaping the cave, someone pulled on his sleeves.

“Senio... Senior Li!”

“Sh! Quiet!”

Li Huowang was getting angry. If those two people heard them, then they might lose their only chance to escape the place.

“Senior Li, someone is holding my wrist, but there's no one on my left!” Sun Baolu was almost crying as he said that.

Hearing this, Li Huowang gulped. He slowly moved his hands across Sun Baolu's sleeves.

He felt a very rough hand.

When Li Huowang held that hand, it instead grabbed onto him and pulled him toward the darkness.

Immediately, Li Huowang unsheathed his sword and swung it down.

At the same time, upon sensing the movement within the darkness, Chun Xiaoman brought out her glowing stone.

A green glow illuminated their surroundings but there was nothing there.

While Li Huowang was looking around, a young Daoist ran toward them. The Daoist was wearing a yellow Daoist robe while his cheeks were sunken. He wore black cloth shoes and a crown with a picture of the Taiji.

Compared to Dan Yangzi, this fellow actually looked like a Daoist.

When the Daoist and Li Huowang saw each other, the Daoist stopped in his tracks and suddenly shouted at them, revealing his black and rotten teeth, “Run! Sheng Erzi is coming!”

Li Huowang recognized that voice as the one who had been speaking just now! However, he looked much younger than his voice would indicate.

When all of them saw the Daoist running into the darkness, Li Huowang and the rest immediately followed after them. They didn’t know what Sheng Erzi was, but they knew it would definitely be terrifying if it was something that lived within the cave.

Compared to that man, Li Huowang’s group was considerably slower due to having to drag the heavy Black Taisui around.

Just as Li Huowang was beginning to think that the Daoist might be using them as meat shields, the Daoist suddenly turned back.

The Daoist bit both his fingers and blood flowed out from the wound. He used the blood to quickly draw a talisman in the air.

“Hide the lights!”

Staring at his thin back, Li Huowang hesitated for only a moment before ordering everyone to hide their lights.

Within the darkness, the Daoist started to chant. It was a peculiar chant. It wasn't the chant of a sutra or a spell, but seemed like a completely different system.

When the chant was over, a peculiar pressure enveloped them. Li Huowang felt goosebumps rising all over his body, as if something unidentifiable had covered it. He then felt his body temperature to drop rapidly.

“Shh~” The Daoist shushed them and told them to stand there quietly.

At that moment, Li Huowang felt something hairy hiding beneath his two feet. Sensing the trembling, he knew that it was Bun.

Bun was afraid of something that was approaching them.

Li Huowang felt the ground trembling, as if something massive was closing in on them.

The trembling gradually became stronger, and Li Huowang was barely able to see something massive coming out from within the darkness.

Huff~

A warm gust blew Li Huowang's hair. The rancid stench indicated that something massive had just exhaled at them!

Then, a rusty scale dropped in front of Li Huowang from the darkness above. The scale was tied to a rope and the rope in turn was tied to a pair of cloth shoes.

Cloth shoes?

When Li Huowang saw what it was, the scales suddenly tipped and the cloth shoes fell downward.

Shua!

A female corpse clad in red clothes with a long tongue

suddenly dropped in front of Li Huowang.

Both of them were just an inch away from each other.

Chapter 238 - Sent Off

Staring at the corpse that was just an inch away from him, Li Huowang almost reflexively unsheathed his sword. However, he suppressed his movements to the limit in order not to unsheathe his sword.

That was because Li Huowang saw that the thing was not staring at him. It really was just a corpse and not Sheng Erzi.

Li Huowang carefully looked up and saw a mass of darkness up there. Thinking back upon the shaking earth just now, he somehow guessed what it was.

The corpse is just part of it! Maybe it's just a finger. The thing hidden in the darkness is the real Sheng Erzi!

The thing did not attack them immediately. It was clear that the Daoist's method was working.

After thinking about it for a moment, Li Huowang started to study the corpse in front of him.

The woman's clothes were red. Within the darkness, it appeared to have a deep crimson color. Wrinkles covered her face and she had white hair. She was an old lady!

She just hung there in the darkness, her wax-like eyes staring at Li Huowang without moving.

Minutes passed, proving that Li Huowang was right. If he didn't move, the corpse didn't do anything to him. It was just like a puppet.

Within the darkness everyone just stood there motionlessly. If it wasn't for their pale white breath signifying that they were alive, then they would be no different from statues.

Li Huowang finally understood the meaning of living through days as if they were years. His limbs started to go numb from not

moving for so long.

No one knew how long it was before the rope started moving once again. The corpse slowly floated back upward, leaving Li Huowang's field of vision.

Li Huowang gently shifted his gaze upward, only to see the corpse entering the being within the darkness.

Li Huowang didn't know what the old lady's corpse meant for Sheng Erzi.

Was it a part of its body or a decoration? Sheng Erzi means 'Son of Ropes', right? Why is it called as such?

Then, the trembling sound started again as the being went further and further away.

Time slowly passed. Once the trembling had gone far enough, the invisible pressure around them receded as well.

Flash!

At that moment, a light illuminated everyone's pale face. It originated from a yellow talisman being lit on fire. The Daoist was holding it with two fingers. He first saw Li Huowang's exposed ribs and then chuckled nervously, "Daoist, Sheng Erzi has left. We are safe now."

When they brought out their glowing stones and saw that all of them were still alive, they finally sighed in relief. At the same time, they were all quite amicable with the other Daoist after the latter saved their lives.

When the Daoist saw how weird all of them looked, Li Huowang tried to explain their situation to him.

"Hoho, no worries, no worries. I am a disciple of Luoism. My name is Han Fu. Pleased to meet you," The skinny Daoist bowed to Li Huowang while revealing his rotten teeth once again. His teeth were yellow and black. They grew wildly in different directions and he had plaque caking his gum. The stench from his mouth made all of them take a step back.

It was not your everyday normal bad breath, but one that could rival a toilet.

However, even though he wasn't a hygienic man, Li Huowang did not mind it, not after having been to the Benevolent Nunnery.

Compared to his bad breath, Li Huowang was more interested in what he had just said.

Luoism? Is it a branch of Daoism?

But he did not say it out loud, fearing that it would reveal him as a fake. Instead, he chose to respond with a similar greeting.

“Zephyr Temple, Xuan Yang. Pleased to meet you.”

Li Huowang was happy that not only could they communicate, Han Fu didn't seem like he wanted to kill him either. Maybe they really could find a way out of here with their help.

“Oh? Are you also a Daoist? I thought you were someone from the Ao Jing Sect instead.” Han Fu was happy to talk to someone as well.

“I used to be from the Ao Jing Sect, but I've left it due to personal reasons.” Li Huowang made up a random excuse.

Where is the other person he was talking to? Did Sheng Erzi catch her? Why isn't he sad? No, I can't ask him or he would know that I had been listening to them just now.

Li Huowang didn't have the time to care about others right now. He pointed to the Black Taisui behind him and said, “Master had instructed us to come and capture some guiding drugs, but we ended up getting lost. We are fortunate to be able to meet a fellow Daoist as well. I hope Senior Han can lead us out of here.”

With those words, Li Huowang had not only presented what they needed him to do, he had also implied that he had a ‘master’, ensuring that the other party would not act rashly.

While Li Huowang was sizing up Han Fu, the latter was doing the same. When Han Fu saw Li Huowang's bronze coil veil, he paused for a moment, and then laughed, “Sure, and no need to be

polite. We are fellow Daoists after all. Come, let me bring you out of here. You can't walk around here randomly or you will end up dead."

As they followed Han Fu into the darkness, Li Huowang thought about something and asked, "Senior Han, what was that evil being? We have never seen one like it before."

Finally having met someone knowledgeable, Li Huowang decided to seize the opportunity. Without a Master, this was probably the only choice he had.

Han Fu was more than happy to answer him. "That was Sheng Erzi. Sometimes an elderly might not have children to take care of them, or maybe their children didn't want them. Whatever the reason, there's a saying that an elderly person could go and find Sheng Erzi to help take care of them before it sent them off to the afterlife."

Li Huowang recalled the female corpse and was surprised. "That thing could actually take care of someone?"

"Haha. Are you stupid? They are just lying. Anyone with eyes would be able to see that something like that would never take care of the elderly. Old people... They are useless. They can't do anything, can't tend to the fields, and are basically just eating for free. When the time is right, the villagers choose a good day and carry the elderly on a chair before sending them to Sheng Erzi. They would even play drums and musical instruments to liven things up. As for the elderly's money and the house~ Hehe, everyone would get a share of it," explained Han Fu.

At that moment, Puppy suddenly spoke up. "I know! In my village, this is called 'eating the final member'."

"Yep! It's called 'eating the final member', as in robbing the assets of the last surviving member of a family that has no descendants. But since it doesn't sound nice, they just refer to it as sending them to Sheng Erzi to be taken care of. That way, it sounds

much better,” said Han Fu.

As he heard Han Fu explain it, Li Huowang was filled with anger—he was angry that people would do something like that.

But in the end, there was nothing he could do about it.

Chapter 239 - Daoist

To think that they would send one of their own to the evil beings just to obtain their assets. Li Huowang had never thought that there would be such a disgusting practice behind such a funny name.

“Sheng Erzi must be happy seeing so many people being offered to it?” asked Li Huowang.

“Of course. Whenever it sees a new elderly, it becomes very excited. If it had hands and feet, then it would be pouring tea for them!” replied Han Fu.

After talking for so long, Han Fu and Li Huowang had become closer, at least on the surface.

“Senior Han, how long until we reach the surface?” asked Li Huowang while staring at the darkness surrounding them.

“Ptui~” Han Fu spat on the ground and said nonchalantly, “Almost there. You need to remember that within the Feng Capital, if you want to get out, then you must always move up. Never go down. The further up you go, the closer you are to the surface. Even if you meet a dead end, you need to just dig a hole and go out.”

“Feng Capital?” muttered Li Huowang, finally learning the name of the interconnecting cave systems beneath Qing Qiu.

After a moment, Li Huowang gently stepped on the ground and felt the slight incline. He sighed in relief.

Looks like we are indeed heading up.

“Sigh. It’s so tiring to do anything these days. I thought that Daoists had a lot of free time, but I was wrong! Xuan Yang, don’t you think being a Daoist is hard?” Han Fu raised both hands and stretched his back.

“You are right. In this world, nothing is easy.” Li Huowang did

his best to answer.

Where is the girl? He was talking to her until just now, but he doesn't look too concerned about her absence. Maybe she's not dead?

Li Huowang looked around cautiously. Even after they had gotten friendly with each other and survived their encounter with Sheng Erzi, Li Huowang still didn't trust Han Fu.

"Look, we are almost there," said Han Fu, pointing toward a glowing white light. From the looks of it, that was the entrance.

Everyone sighed in relief when they finally saw the entrance again. After staying in the dark for so long, they were beyond ecstatic to finally see a sliver of sunlight.

Everyone followed Han Fu's lead while carrying the Black Taisui.

Even though they were almost there, Han Fu still continued to chat, "Hey, did you know about the Natural Disaster that occurred on that day? I heard everyone had been waging wars against each other when the Natural Disaster happened, and that was the reason why everyone stopped the wars."

"That's natural. After all, 'decay' disappeared from the world," said Li Huowang while counting his group to ensure that everyone was there.

"I remember that the last time a Natural Disaster happened, I was still three years old," recounted Han Fu.

Li Huowang was focused on the white dot in the distance that was gradually becoming larger, but he was distracted by Han Fu's words. "You mean the Natural Disaster has happened more than once?"

Li Huowang was shocked. He suddenly realized that despite having been here for so long, he knew far too little about the world. He suppressed his excitement and asked Han Fu calmly, "Do you remember what happened during the last Natural Disaster?"

"Oh so you don't know? I thought you knew. I remember that

last time, the ‘Lies’ disappeared and it was very amusing! I heard my Master say that back then, the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao were so bored that they almost killed themselves, haha!” said Han Fu, happily laughing away.

“‘Lies’ disappeared?” Li Huowang could never imagine what kind of world that would be .

Everyone could only tell the truth?

However, before he could ask anything else, Han Fu asked him something first.

“Xuan Yang, do you know why a Natural Disaster happens?” Han Fu teased him.

“Does Senior Han know about it?” inquired Li Huowang.

Han Fu got close to Li Huowang and whispered, “I can tell you, but you mustn’t tell the others. This was what my Master said.”

Just as Li Huowang was anxious waiting for the answer, Han Fu lashed out with his right hand and quickly swiped it at Li Huowang’s face.

Pa-tak!

Immediately, Li Huowang’s bronze coin mask fell onto the ground.

Li Huowang quickly tried to use his hands to hide his face, but it was too late. Han Fu had already seen his face by then.

With this, Han Fu’s curiosity was satisfied, making him feel quite pleased with himself.

“And here I thought who that man is! He’s a Strayed One!” At that moment, the shrill voice of a girl came from within Han Fu’s body.

In front of everyone’s shocked eyes, a fist-sized baby head popped out from within Han Fu’s clothes. The baby head had sparse hair and was wearing the same Daoist crown as Han Fu.

A yellow-robed Daoist with a normal head and a small head. It was too bizarre!

It was no wonder that he was fine when he saw Puppy and the rest. Han Fu was even more of a freak than them!

Li Huowang growled. There had never been two people; it had always been just one! Han Fu was just talking to the other head!

“Senior Han, what is the meaning of this? Do you think the Zephyr Temple doesn't have backup?” Li Huowang gripped his sword and stared at the odd Daoist. He really didn't want to fight without knowing how strong Han Fu was.

“Hehe~” Han Fu's two heads chuckled at the same time, both revealing the exact same type of rotten teeth. “So you are a Strayed One. You should know what I want to do now, yea?”

“Hehe, guess, guess!” said the little head.

Han Fu formed a seal with his hand and placed it on his chest. Immediately, the darkness behind him came to life and enveloped Han Fu.

“He's trying to kill me!” shouted Li Huowang as he slashed at whatever remained of Han Fu—his one eye that had yet to be enveloped by the darkness.

Li Huowang managed to cut the darkness in half just as it enveloped Han Fu, but it was too late. Han Fu was already gone.

“Brat~ Since you have come to the Feng Capital, then you can just stay here,” the two head's voices intersected with each other and rang out from all directions.

Li Huowang stared at the surrounding darkness and fixated on the white light in front of them. He immediately pointed toward it and shouted at everyone, “Run! We need to head out now!”

No matter what Han Fu was planning from within the darkness, they had to get out first or there was nothing they would be able to do!

Translator's Thoughts

Hanfu! Pretty interesting character design.

Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin



Chapter 240 - Lion Dance Palace

When everyone heard Li Huowang's command, all of them brandished their weapons and moved at the same time, running directly toward the light.

As they ran toward the exit, Li Huowang did his best to listen to his surroundings. Now that Han Fu had disappeared into the darkness, they were surrounded with danger. He could ambush them at any time!

Since the two headed Daoist knew his identity, there was no way that he would let them go!

A friend had become an enemy just like that. He once again realized that humans were always worse when compared to evil beings!

*There's no such thing as a good person here in this crazy world!
Everyone is twisted and no better than livestock!*

As they closed in on the light, it dispelled the darkness around them. Everyone was happy to be basked in the light. They did their best to reach the outside and ran even faster.

But they slowly stopped, going from a full blown run to a slow jog to just regular walking before stopping completely. At the same time, they stared in despair at the "sunlight".

The light in front of them was impure. There were even many stains on it resembling hands and feet. An extremely large jade plaque sat above the light with three big characters etched onto it: Lion Dance Palace.

What they had been running toward was not the sun! Instead, it was the headquarters of the Lion Dances, the Lion Dance Palace!

The massive lump of light was formed by numerous Lion Dances gathering together and amplifying their light!

Han Fu had lied! He had never wanted to bring them outside even before this!

Hearing the sudden movements, the huge faces of the Lion Dances turned to face Li Huowang and blocked the light. They stood in rows until all Li Huowang and the others could see were rows and rows of flattened dead human faces.

All of them were staring at Li Huowang with their lantern-like eyes. The pressure they gave off was immense.

It wasn't just one or two Lion Dances here, but hundreds of them!

Li Huowang had killed two of them before, and so he knew just how strong they were.

"Run!" Li Huowang shouted and brought everyone back into the darkness.

Then, Li Huowang turned around, glaring at the Lion Dances that existed in all directions, from the floor to the ceiling. He knew that someone had to intercept all of them here while the others retreated.

At that moment, Li Huowang decided to stand his ground as he swung his sword toward his body.

But suddenly, someone burst forth from within the darkness below and stopped Li Huowang. He held a bronze coin sword that had three yellow talismans attached to it. The sword was aiming precisely for Li Huowang's waist!

Jiang!

The talismans burst into flames and the two swords clashed.

The owner of the sword was none other than Han Fu!

However, Han Fu didn't want to fight Li Huowang openly. After clashing once, Han Fu's two heads smiled as he returned back to the darkness of the ground.

Without waiting to understand what was happening, Li Huowang instinctively ducked down upon sensing a dangerous attack. He barely managed to avoid the white tassels that one of the Lion Dances had shot toward him.

Han Fu had never wanted to fight against Li Huowang openly! He only needed to interfere with Li Huowang and allow the Lion Dances to kill Li Huowang instead!

Now, his goal has been achieved when Li Huowang saw that the Lion Dances were very close to him. All of them opened their mouths to reveal six rows of sharp teeth.

Li Huowang's legs hadn't been healed yet. Thus, in terms of speed, he was quite a bit slower than the Lion Dances.

After a moment, Li Huowang looked back into the darkness and saw that everyone else was gone. He decided to make his last stand here and brought out the flint before placing it against his body.

However, before he could light himself up on fire, a familiar drum sound rang out and a person in red ran on all four toward him. Then, a beast head appeared from underneath the red veil, bit onto Li Huowang's neck, and dragged him into the darkness.

Bai Lingmiao's body was very agile when she was in this form. She never slowed down even while carrying Li Huowang. With her help, they gradually outrun the Lion Dances.

The Lion Dances tried to stop them by shooting out the white tassels but all of them were destroyed by Li Huowang sacrificing his teeth. However, thanks to that, Li Huowang soon ran out of teeth.

He was just out of harm's way when a new danger appeared. As Li Huowang was being dragged across the ground, a bronze coin sword appeared from within the ground and aimed for his back.

Just as Li Huowang was about to be stabbed by it, he suddenly turned around and stabbed his own sword into the ground. Upon feeling the peculiar feeling he felt when he did so, he knew that he had managed to stab Han Fu. "You think you can use the same trick

twice?"

As he spoke, Li Huowang stabbed the ground once more and blood appeared on his sword. At the same time, a painful grunt could be heard coming from within the ground.

But Han Fu did not stop this time. Suddenly he once again stabbed his bronze coin sword above ground, this time with numerous talismans and blood covering his sword.

Just as Li Huowang raised his sword to block the attack, he suddenly heard Han Fu start chanting something!

Soon, the chant was completed and the entire bronze coin sword exploded, turning into individual bronze coins that dodged Li Huowang's sword before regrouping once more into the original sword with talismans on it. Then, the sharp bronze coin sword stabbed the talismans into Li Huowang's waist, embedding them deep into his body.

The intense pain made Li Huowang howl loudly, but he chose not to run away. Instead, he started stabbing again and again into the ground—he was attacking recklessly in hopes of being able to kill Han Fu!

As Li Huowang and Bai Lingmiao were retreating, his and Han Fu's blood started intertwining.

Soon, Han Fu could no longer withstand the attacks and had to bring his sword back underground.

On the other hand, after they finally managed to defeat Han Fu, Bai Lingmiao continued to drag Li Huowang through the cave while running as fast as she could. She could not stop for even a moment; after all, the Lion Dances were right behind them.

Compared to Han Fu, they were much deadlier!

Chapter 241 - Exit

Li Huowang's shirt was torn from getting constantly dragged against the ground. Even so, he was staring at the Lion Dances that were relentlessly chasing after them.

With the aid of the white glowing light emanating from their bodies, Li Huowang was barely able to discern something even larger behind the Lion Dances chasing after them.

Li Huowang didn't know which sect the Lion Dance Palace belonged to, but he was certain there must be power differences between the various Lion Dances. The two Lion Dances he fought from before were likely some of the weaker ones.

"Second Deity! Run faster! The Lion Dances behind us are only the smaller ones! There's a massive one behind them!" shouted Li Huowang.

Hearing his words, Bai Lingmiao ran even faster. However, she did not run blindly, instead following the sound of the drum.

At that moment, Li Huowang suddenly heard something and patted Bai Lingmiao's shoulder. "Head East! Listen to me and head East!"

Instantly, Bai Lingmiao slammed all four limbs onto the ground and leaped toward the left wall. Then, she ricocheted off the wall and turned toward where Li Huowang was telling her to run.

It wasn't long before they arrived at a 'forest' within the darkness. The 'trees' were just hanging corpses. There were so many of them that they resembled the trees of a forest. It was the same as what Li Huowang had seen just earlier.

At that moment, Li Huowang felt a gaze trained on him, causing his thoughts to slow down. This was the territory of Sheng Erzi and at this moment, it was looking at them while hanging from

the ceiling!

But Li Huowang was not afraid. He was certain that compared to the two of them, Sheng Erzi would be a lot more interested in the group of glowing Lion Dances.

Just as he had expected, Sheng Erzi was attracted to the Lion Dances after sensing the massive disruptions brought about by them. The hanging corpses slowly floated toward where the Lion Dances were.

With the aid of Sheng Erzi, Li Huowang and Bai Lingmiao finally managed to escape from the Lion Dances. As they went further away, the sound of footsteps and the intensity of the white glow gradually reduced before disappearing.

Without anyone chasing them, Li Huowang and Bai Lingmiao followed the sound of the drum and finally reunited with everyone.

The others were relieved to finally meet with Li Huowang again. They huddled around and asked him a lot of questions.

“No need to be worried. Han Fu is nothing because he’s weaker than me if he fights me head-on. We just need to avoid being ambushed by him!” Li Huowang encouraged them.

“But Senior Li, where should we go now? We don’t even know where we are.” Chun Xiaoman stared at the darkness surrounding them. She felt hopeless about their situation.

Even though they had beaten back Han Fu and managed to escape the Lion Dances, the situation was still grim. The caves were somehow able to confuse them, and even if they didn’t have such power, without any landmarks to guide them, everything around them looked the same.

As long as they couldn’t escape the caves, they would get attacked by Han Fu or the Lion Dances again sooner or later.

Hearing this, Li Huowang looked around and saw the bell on Chun Xiaoman’s waist. “Give me the bell. We still have other methods to navigate here. We can ask the Wandering Gods to find

the exit for us!”

Chun Xiaoman only just realized that the Wandering Gods could also be used in such a manner. She was just about to hand over the bell when she retracted it.

“Senior Li, I’m younger and have a longer lifespan. Let me use it instead.” Without waiting for Li Huowang’s answer, she quickly rang the bell.

Soon, several Wandering Gods flew into the darkness. At the same time, Li Huowang saw Chun Xiaoman grow slightly taller; however, he wasn’t so sure.

Time slowly passed within the oppressive cave but the Wandering Gods did not return. Thus, their hopes were dashed once again.

“Maybe the Wandering Gods were eaten by some evil beings?” Puppy came up with the worst-case scenario.

Li Huowang frowned at their current predicament. Disregarding Han Fu, who was waiting to ambush them from within the darkness, if the Lion Dances took care of Sheng Erzi and then chased after them once more, then they would be dead. They needed to get out of here quickly!

He tried to recall the Profound Records and the various rituals recorded on it. He sieved through all the information, but in the end, didn’t find anything useful for them.

The Profound Records was an indispensable item of the Ao Jing Sect. It recorded various rituals and methods to torture one self and others, but there was nothing it could do for now.

Li Huowang was about to ask whether Bai Lingmiao could request aid from the Immortal Families when he saw Gao Zhijian pointing his finger up into the air with a serious expression. Holding onto the wound on his body, Li Huowang asked him. “What are you doing?”

Gao Zhijian did not answer him. Instead, he placed his finger

into his mouth, sucked on it, and raised his finger once again.

Seeing this, Li Huowang understood what he was doing. “Are you using your fingers to detect the direction of the wind? Is there wind?? Did you find the exit?”

Gao Zhijian lowered his hand and nodded. He pointed towards the west. “This... this way.”

“Gao Zhijian! Good job!” Li Huowang patted his shoulder heavily and ordered everyone else to immediately run toward the west.

The wind direction was not linear and billowed through the cave system. Sometimes it shifted upward while at other times it shifted downward.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang re-evaluated the big man in front of him once more. He was impressed that Gao Zhijian could think of such a method to find the exit.

This is not something an idiot can come up with. His background must be special.

But right now, there was no time to ask Gao Zhijian about his background.

“Everyone bend down. The ceiling is quite low in front,” instructed Li Huowang.

Hearing this, everyone couched and shuffled forward.

The hole gradually became narrower. It was only after the cave became narrow to the point that Gao Zhijian almost couldn’t squeeze through that it started growing wider once more. At the same time, a howl could be heard in the distance.

Li Huowang heard it and was elated. That was not a wolf’s or a ghost’s howl, but the sound of wind passing through the narrow holes!

Gao Zhijian was right, there was indeed an exit there!

Everyone else noticed it as well, and celebrated internally. After running around in the dangerous cave for so long, all of them

were already tired. Still, they squeezed whatever remaining strength they had and started running.

They ran through the curving cave and were soon greeted by a sudden burst of light. They saw an opening at the top of the cave! The wind was blowing in from the opening.

The light coming from the exit was not the bright glowing light of the Lion Dances, but the silvery moon light. At this point, it was already dark outside.

Soon, they walked under the opening and saw stars within the skies.

While this was not the place where they came in from, it was still an exit they could use.

Chapter 242 - Talisman

Within the intersecting darkness of the cave, Li Huowang and the rest were standing beneath the sliver of moonlight, staring at the exit of the cave.

“That’s too high up! How should we climb up there? It’s almost vertical.” Puppy stared at the hole high up on the ceiling with despair.

However, while this might’ve been a big problem for regular people, it was all too easy for Li Huowang. Even if he didn’t know how to solve it, the others would.

Li Huowang turned around toward Bai Lingmiao and raised his chin to signal to her. She hesitated for a moment, before nodding and covering her head with the red veil.

Li Huowang said nothing as he looked at her seriously.

Dong dong dong~

“Veil covering the head, legs stomping on the violet earth! We seek the auspicious Southern Dipper and Northern Dipper! The sixth elder of the Southern Dipper and the crepe myrtle hidden in the mouth of the Northern Dipper!”

With the aid of the drum, Bai Lingmiao was soon possessed by one of the Immortals and her head shot backward. She gazed through the red veil toward the starry night.

Her body started to tremble and shake. When it was over, she grabbed the chains they used to tie down Li Huowang from Gao Zhijian and placed them on her body. Then, without any warning, her body collapsed onto the ground as if she had lost all her bones. After that, she started wriggling her limp body like a snake as she climbed up the smooth walls of the cave.

Even though the walls were vertical, Bai Lingmiao was still

capable of reaching the top and crawling out of the hole.

Once outside, she tossed the chains back into the hole. The end of the chain fell in front of everyone, resolving their problem.

“You guys go up first. I will bring up the rear,” said Li Huowang as he stood motionlessly within the moonlight and used what remaining light they had to stare into the darkness.

“Senior Li, you are already gravely injured. You should go up first,” Sun Baolu expressed concerns when he saw Li Huowang’s wounds.

It wasn’t wrong of him to think like that. Li Huowang had indeed suffered many injuries. Not only were his left hand’s fingers cut off, a large chunk of flesh and skin from his torso had also been torn away. His body was already in tatters.

“Stop whining and get up, now!” Li Huowang declined his good offer. He knew that he was the strongest person in their group and he had to be the one taking up the rear. That way, if anything happened then he could handle it himself.

If someone else were to take the rear, then they might die if an evil being passed by.

Under Li Huowang’s command, everyone started climbing up the chain one by one.

The difficult part was getting the Black Taisui up. It continued to wriggle even though it was trapped. It took them a long time before they managed to tie it up and pull it upward with Gao Zhijian’s help.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang raised his head and saw everyone climbing up with difficulty. Just as he was calculating how much time they would need, he sensed something and turned toward his left, his face filled with hostility.

At that moment, Han Fu walked out from within the darkness with his two heads. Blood stained his yellow robes from where Li Huowang had attacked him.

Han Fu did not step into the moonlight, choosing to stop at the edge of darkness. He chuckled when he saw Li Huowang gripping the sword tightly. “Xuan Yang, it seems that the minor characters have finally left, right?”

“Yeah, they have.” Li Huowang cracked his right fist in anger.

“Senior Li, are you alright down there? Who are you talking to?” Puppy shouted down from above.

Hearing the voice from above, Li Huowang frowned. “Don’t worry! I’m just talking to my illusions! You guys continue to climb up!”

Then, Li Huowang glared at Han Fu coldly. “You were already here from the start, weren’t you? Do you think you can win against me one-on-one?”

Han Fu shook his head and smiled. “Hehe, did you not realize that I’ve already stabbed several talismans into your body? They are already enveloping your organs...”

Having said that, Han Fu splayed his arms open. Then, the sound of wind came from his wide sleeves and surrounded Li Huowang. At the same time, a massive rune floated out from the ground.

The rune had the same color as Han Fu’s teeth and immediately enveloped Li Huowang the moment it appeared, making it hard for him to move.

Han Fu immediately started chanting, causing the rune to start wriggling. Then, it split into numerous black lines before entering Li Huowang’s body through his wounds.

When Li Huowang suddenly stopped moving, Han Fu was delighted. “It’s so easy to capture a Strayed One alive. I wonder why the others always said that we shouldn’t fight a Strayed One head-on?”

“What do they know? Strayed Ones are hard to come by. How could a group of people who have never seen one of them ever have

the experience of capturing one?” explained the small head on Han Fu’s shoulder.

Han Fu walked over and started looking at the frozen Li Huowang. “I don’t see anything special on the outside. Who should I sell this rare ingredient to?”

“I don’t think we should sell him. Maybe they would directly rob it from us if they were stronger than us. We might as well use it ourselves,” suggested the little head.

“How should we use it? Skin him and toss him into a pot to cook him? I only know that Strayed Ones are rare but I have no idea why they are rare. We should just sell him,” said the normal sized head.

“We don’t even know why they are rare in the first place nor do we know the price. What if we end up selling it for too low? We should ask Master. They should know since they are very knowledgeable,” suggested the little head.

“But what if Master robs us of the Strayed One and kills us?” questioned the normal sized head.

As Han Fu’s two heads were discussing what to do with Li Huowang, the frozen Li Huowang suddenly lunged his arms forward.

Han Fu failed to react and a sword was stabbed into his stomach.

“Impossible! I had just sealed you!” Han Fu’s blood spilled from the corner of his mouth as he stared at the angry Li Huowang.

“Shitty bastard! If you can’t do it right, then don’t try to copy others to come and kill me!” Li Huowang growled and took his blade out of Han Fu’s body before slashing downward.

Han Fu hadn’t given up just yet. However, just as he was about to form a hand seal, Li Huowang’s sword reached first.

Han Fu’s fingers were chopped off in one swift motion and blood sprayed everywhere.

“Impossible!”

Amidst his dying howls, Li Huowang quickly sliced up Han Fu, starting from the neck, followed by the mouth, the nose, and finally the forehead.

Chapter 243 - Li Huowang

Han Fu's blood sprayed all over Li Huowang. He just stood there and stared at the mangled corpse in front of him.

The Daoist that had tried to capture him, Han Fu, was dead just like that.

Li Huowang was in disbelief. Compared to the enemies he had faced before, Han Fu was far too weak. It was as if Han Fu was just playing around. Li Huowang even doubted whether this was Han Fu's real body.

After a moment, he kicked Han Fu's bloody head and felt disgusted. "You are so weak and yet you want to rob someone?"

He now understood that everyone in the world wanted to capture a Strayed One, regardless of their strength. Even if some of them were weak, they would still give it a shot to try and capture one.

By this time, Puppy had already crawled up the hole. He peeked into the hole and shouted, "Senior Li, are you alright?"

However, when he saw Li Huowang's bloody face, Puppy felt goosebumps rising all over his body. He swallowed with difficulty. "Do you... want us to come down?"

"No need! I'm coming up now," replied Li Huowang as he grabbed the chains and started climbing up.

But then, he stopped and came back down again. He rummaged through Han Fu's body and found some yellow talismans.

I wonder if I can use them even though I have never learned how to use them.

He rummaged further and found several small beads wrapped in talismans.

Hm?

Li Huowang opened one of them and saw a familiar bead.

“This is a lifespan pill!”

Li Huowang had seen one before and knew just how valuable it was.

Seeing how the lifespan pill was about to disappear, Li Huowang quickly ate it, instantly feeling his body become lighter.

He rummaged around and found nineteen lifespan pills. Overjoyed, he quickly kept them away.

He continued rummaging about, but didn’t find anything else besides tools and materials used to make talismans.

Finally, Li Huowang picked up the bronze coin sword and placed it on his back before turning around to leave.

Having lost some of his fingers and having blood all over his body, climbing the chain had become extremely difficult. Even so, Li Huowang climbed up slowly.

All the while, he was thinking about the now dead Han Fu.

I wanted to ask him more about the world. Too bad he’s dead.

“Senior Li, quickly climb up! Hurry!”

When he looked up, Li Huowang saw their nervous faces through the hole. “Hm?”

When he looked down, he saw Han Fu standing up once more! Han Fu was barely capable of standing up despite having almost his entire body bisected.

Then, the shrill voice of a girl came from his corpse, “You killed him! How am I going to live now?! Waaaa~”

The voice was so shrill that it hurt Li Huowang’s ears. It even resonated throughout the cave.

“He’s not dead!” Realizing this, Li Huowang sliced off the final finger on his left hand and used the Profound Records.

The finger bulged and exploded in mid-air, sending a sharp bone spike flying down toward Han Fu and pinning him to the ground.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang continued climbing up. He had no time to think about whether Han Fu was still alive or not.

Just then, the entire cave rumbled. A bright light illuminated the dark cave.

Li Huowang looked down and saw a massive white snake, one larger than the cave itself! It was attracted by Han Fu's voice!

But this white snake didn't have any scales. Instead, it was composed entirely of the white tassels found on the Lion Dances!

At that moment, Li Huowang finally understood the true nature of the Lion Dances! The flattened dead human faces, the bloody flesh within their bodies, the hands and feet, all of them were fake! The white tassels on their bodies was the true body of the Lion Dances!

When Li Huowang saw the white snake, the snake saw him as well.

Instantly, the entire snake collapsed and the white tassels flooded everywhere within the cave, from the walls to the ceiling.

"Senior Li!" Seeing the situation, everyone immediately acted and started pulling up the chain.

Li Huowang continued to climb while they pulled the chain. At this point, he was barely able to avoid the white tassels.

Thirty meters! Fifteen meters! Nine meters!

Just when Li Huowang was almost out of the cave, the white tassels formed into a massive hand that grabbed him.

Then, amidst everyone's shouting, Li Huowang was dragged down from the chain into the cave.

The chain was also ripped out from everyone's hand. It slipped through their hands and fell into the cave. Only a portion of the chain that was attached to the ground remained above the hole.

Bai Lingmiao collapsed onto the ground, tears flowing down her eyes.

Everyone was shocked. What should they do without Li

Huowang now?

After a moment, Bai Lingmiao suddenly moved and ran toward the hole with the Second Deity.

Seeing this, Puppy grabbed Bai Lingmiao to stop her before Gao Zhijian appeared behind her and the Second Deity and restrained both of them.

At the same time, Chun Xiaoman approached the struggling Bai Lingmiao with tears in her eyes and slapped her. "Can you stop being crazy?!"

Finally, Bai Lingmiao stopped and slumped down like a puppet.

Just as everyone was unsure about what to do next, the sound of the chains rang out once again.

Puppy was the first one who heard it. "Wait! The chain is moving! Senior Li is not dead! Hahaha! I knew it! Senior Li would never die!"

Puppy's words instantly attracted everyone's attention. They looked toward the chain and saw that it was indeed rattling lightly.

Puppy was just about to start pulling up the chain once more but Chun Xiaoman stopped him. "Careful! It might not be Senior Li!"

"Pull me up!"

At that moment, Senior Li's voice rang out from down below. With this, everyone stopped thinking about it and grabbed the chain to pull it up.

With everyone's help, a mangled hand soon appeared from the hole.

The hand was truly mangled. The fingers were twisted and the skin was torn apart, almost as if it was a claw made by piecing together different pieces of flesh. At the same time, several white tassels were stuck to the twisted hand.

The mangled hand dug into the ground with its nailless fingers and trembled as Li Huowang used all of his strength to pull his

body up.

Finally, Li Huowang's body appeared in front of everyone's shocked eyes.

It was indeed Li Huowang, if he could still be called as such.

Chapter 244 - Treatment

Laying down on the soft grass, Li Huowang panted while staring at the wriggling Black Taisui. He was very happy. The last time he was this happy was when Yang Na gave him chocolate.

His entire body was aching all over and he could barely muster any strength. Even so, his objective behind risking his life by entering the cave had been achieved.

With the Black Taisui, he would finally be able to get rid of the hallucinations and would never be plagued by them again. He would finally be able to get rid of the sense of confusion and doubt that all the Strayed Ones suffered from.

“They told me that I can’t keep eating the Black Taisui or it would grow within my belly, but I don’t trust them! Even if that really is the case, all I need to do is to open up my stomach and dig it out! Then, I can just eat it again!” muttered Li Huowang.

While Li Huowang was thinking of the possibility and the chances of success, he suddenly saw everyone staring at him weirdly. They had already managed to escape from the cave and yet, they were still horrified. None of them even tried to help Li Huowang despite how injured he was.

“Stop staring and come help me pull the chain up. I tied Han Fu on the other end of the chain. His other head is still alive. Pull him up and I will try to pry out some information from Han Fu,” ordered Li Huowang. Even so, none of them made a move.

“What’s wrong with you guys?” Li Huowang tried crawling toward them, but all of them took a step back.

“Senior Li? Are you... really Senior Li?” Bai Lingmiao hugged her arms, her eyes filled with tears and fear at the thing in front of her.

Finally, Li Huowang realized that something was amiss with his body. He raised both his arms and was horrified to see what had happened to them.

His single eye underneath his ear closely examined his arm. When he tried to move his fingers, he saw the fingers stuck to his wrist move ever so slightly.

“Impossible! What is happ—” Li Huowang turned around and looked down on his body. Underneath the moonlight, he almost screamed from shock when he saw what his body looked like now.

He barely recognized his mangled body!

Sun Baolu’s body would be considered ‘normal’ when compared to him! His body had been twisted and mangled, his various organs shifted into different locations. The white tassels dotted his entire body and flowed gently. He was no longer human, or at least, he didn’t look like one.

It’s the white tassel’s power! After it dragged me down, I was transformed into this.

Li Huowang grabbed one of the white tassels and saw with his own eyes as the fingers touching the white tassels slowly shifted away from his hand.

Can I still be considered a human being?

Li Huowang gingerly touched his twisted face. All of his facial organs had been reorganized and were no longer at their original places.

Impossible! This is too surreal! Is this world really that bizarre?

Li Huowang shivered.

No, you have to calm down. This is nothing. It can be fixed.

With this in mind, Li Huowang turned around and faced the others with a confident expression. “Don’t worry. This can be fixed.”

As he spoke, Li Huowang grabbed a dagger with his twisted right arm and stabbed it into his face. Then, under everyone’s

horrified gazes, he opened a slit on the side of his face toward where his ear had shifted to.

Li Huowang carefully grabbed the ear and forcefully dragged it along the wound before placing it at its original location on the side of his head.

But the ear just fell down onto the ground.

Looking at his ear on the ground, Li Huowang smiled instead. “Wait, that’s a good idea. Since I can recover my body, I will just cut off all the organs and let them regrow back. I will just become an amputated man for a few days. There’s nothing to worry about.”

With those words, Li Huowang grabbed the dagger and aimed it toward his eyes.

When Puppy saw what he was planning to do, he tried stopping him from afar. “Senior Li, don’t do that! You can still be fixed!”

Puppy had lied. He didn’t know what to do, but Li Huowang just looked too horrifying.

At this point, he felt that it was probably better to just commit suicide.

Hearing Puppy’s words, Li Huowang stopped trying to stab himself and looked at his twisted thumb. Another idea had just popped up in his mind.

Wait... Since the white tassels caused this, then technically, I could use them to fix myself too!

Li Huowang grabbed one of the white tassels on his hand and tried to place it beside his eye. However, the white tassel continued moving around, all the while twisting his fingers even more.

“STOP MOVING!” Li Huowang tossed the white tassel onto the ground and stomped on it before once again placing it on his face.

Soon, Li Huowang felt his vision start to move under the effect of the white tassel.

Then, Li Huowang used his other three fingers to gently move his eye back to its original location; however, no matter how hard

he tried, he couldn't get it back to its correct location.

Shua!

After a while, Li Huowang decided to carve a slit near where his eye was and forcefully move it back to the correct location.

"Is it back in the right place?" asked Li Huowang while panting.

Once he got their approval, he started moving his other organs back to their original place. It took him quite some time before he managed to get all of his facial organs back in place on his face. He was in so much pain that he almost fainted.

"What are you guys staring at? Come and help me," said Li Huowang.

With this, everyone crowded around Li Huowang and started helping him to move his organs back to their original locations. It was not an easy process, and while the white tassels did help in moving the organs back to their original location, it was not very accurate. Thus, Li Huowang had no choice but to use the dagger to forcefully correct the placements.

Meanwhile, Puppy's hands trembled continuously as he moved Li Huowang's left ear that had fallen onto the ground. Then, he picked it up in panic and quickly spat on it before placing it back on Li Huowang's head.

At that moment, a hand tapped him on his shoulder. When he turned around and saw that it was Bai Lingmiao, he almost jumped in fright.

"Let me help suture it," said Bai Lingmiao.

Hearing this, Puppy sighed and gave her the ear.

The entire process was akin to torture, but Li Huowang managed to endure it. No one knew whether it was because he was happy at having managed to capture a Black Taisui, or whether it was because he had already gotten used to such pain.

By the time they finally finished shifting all of Li Huowang's

organs back to their rough original locations, it was already daytime. Throughout the process, Li Huowang had been grunting and shouting in pain.

Translator's Thoughts

Welp, here's the jumbled up Li Huowang.

Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin



Chapter 245 - Black Taisui

“Alright let’s stop for now. Once my wounds recover, we can slowly shift them back to the proper location,” said Li Huowang.

Hearing those words, everyone sighed.

Staring at the bloody Li Huowang, Chun Xiaoman finally stopped enduring and fell knee first onto the ground. She crouched and vomited, emptying everything in her stomach.

But there was nothing else to vomit out. She had already vomited twice before this.

On the other hand, Bai Lingmiao shakily stroked Li Huowang’s hair, her eyes filled with tears. She didn’t know what to say.

“Why are you crying? We should be smiling instead! Not only is everyone alive, we even managed to capture the Black Taisui and Han Fu! This is good news. What’s even better? Miaomiao, now I can rearrange my face; anytime you get bored looking at my usual face, you will be able to change it.” Li Huowang did his best to console them.

Li Huowang knew just how bad he looked and just how much pain he was in. But, he had to act tough. If he kept complaining, then not only would his problems not get solved, even their group’s morale would drop as well.

It was something he had learned from Lu Juren’s wife, Luo Juanhua. When you are in a situation beyond your control, you have to act as if it doesn’t bother you so that the people around you don’t end up becoming sad.

However, Li Huowang had failed to learn the essence of this trickery from Luo Juanhua. The louder he laughed, the harder Bai

Lingmiao cried.

Exhausted, Li Huowang finally closed his one remaining eye and said, "I will rest first. We will find our way back once I get up."

After saying that Li Huowang passed out.

In the haze between consciousness and unconsciousness, something familiar appeared within his mind, bobbing up and down. He wanted to know what it was but couldn't figure it out.

In between his bouts of consciousness and unconsciousness, he kept forgetting what he was about to do; it was as if his memories weren't intact.

Suddenly a sea of stars enveloped his mind. Li Huowang suddenly remembered the night where he and Yang Na stayed up to watch the night sky at the rooftop of their school. He realized that he was seeing one of his past memories.

"Yang Na, I'm sorry. I'm ill and I need to stop coming to school so that I can get treated." The youth hugged the girl.

"When will your treatment be completed? Will it take long?" asked the girl while holding his hands and swaying them.

"I don't know, but it shouldn't be too long. I will do my best to follow their treatment and get discharged as soon as I can, for your sake. After all, I've promised you that we will enter the same university and get married once we both graduate."

The girl blushed and nodded. "Ok. I will wait for you."

Both of them gradually got closer before finally hugging together.

"Huowang? Are you ok?"

"Senior Li, are you alright?"

"Li Huowang! Snap out of it!"

"Little Li, which side do you think is real? That side or this side?"

Various people were talking and tearing his most precious memory apart.

Li Huowang didn't want to go back. He wanted to stay in this wonderful moment, but he knew that it was impossible. Soon, everything started to crack and splinter, and his dream came to an end.

"AH!" Li Huowang opened his eye, covered in cold sweat. Then, he saw that his head was placed on Bai Lingmiao's lap as she gently fed him warm milk.

Feeling the warm goat's milk in his mouth, Li Huowang's scattered senses soon started to consolidate. Currently, he felt like his brain was akin to a rusted machine that sputtered and squeaked from time to time.

"Where are we?" asked Li Huowang as he looked at the top of the cow hide's tent.

Seeing Li Huowang awake, Bai Lingmiao sighed in relief. "This is Sun Baolu's house. He used to herd the lambs around here, so he brought us back. Also, you've been passed out for more than ten days. It's a relief that you finally woke up."

Li Huowang quickly removed the blanket covering his body and inspected his body.

By now, the massive wound on his torso had almost completely healed, while the other smaller wounds had already finished healing. But, his body was still slightly twisted in some ways. At the very least, someone normal wouldn't have their navel growing on their hips.

But, at the very least, he looked much better compared to when he had just crawled out from the cave. He looked human.

More importantly, his left foot had regrown halfway through. Now, he would no longer have to hobble around everywhere.

After he inspected his body, he did not rest and quickly asked Bai Lingmiao about the Black Taisui and Han Fu.

"No worries. Everything has been prepared, but we have to thank Sun Baolu and everyone else. If it weren't for all of them,

then we would not have been able to haul both of them back. All of us borrowed two cow hide's tent. We also borrowed two more tents from them and set them up further away from the others. The Black Taisui and Han Fu are being guarded by us. So you can just lie down and rest for now," explained Bai Lingmiao.

"No, we have to go to the Black Taisui now!" said Li Huowang. He didn't want to wait any longer. He wore his clothes and directly walked out of the tent.

When he got out of the tent, he saw many people looking at him. At this point, the Qing Qiu people were no longer looking at him with curiosity but with wariness instead.

It was only natural. If they were able to stay friendly despite seeing what Li Huowang currently looked like, then it would be even more unsettling for him.

He greeted them and walked away from the other tents before approaching the two lonely tents a distance away in the grassland.

When Li Huowang was walking over to the tents, he met Lu Zhuangyuan who was herding the lambs back. Lu Zhuangyuan saw the wounded Li Huowang and was surprised. "Young Daoist? I can't believe that you can already walk around after resting for only ten days! Ha, I knew it! With your supernatural powers, no evil beings can win against you!"

But Li Huowang was completely fixated on the Black Taisui. He didn't even bother with Lu Zhuangyuan's flattery.

After confirming that Han Fu's little head was still alive, Li Huowang entered the tent containing the Black Taisui. This was the most important thing for him right now.

When he entered the tent, he saw that the Black Taisui's tentacles were impaled onto the ground with spears, imprisoning it within the tent.

Li Huowang circled around the Black Taisui and inspected it. After confirming that it looked the same as the one he had seen

within Zephyr Temple, he reached out for the Black Taisui and grabbed a piece of its oily flesh. Then, he carefully cut away the piece of flesh with his dagger, causing the Black Taisui to immediately release a sharp cry as sticky black fluids flowed out from its wounds.

He looked at the piece of flesh in his hand and saw that a part of it was slowly transforming into tentacles. After a moment, he slowly opened his mouth and placed it in.

However, just as he was about to bite down, he paused.

Chapter 246 - Box

“What? Senior Li, did we go through all that trouble just to retrieve something fake?” Puppy’s voice was filled with nervousness when he saw Li Huowang pause there.

He really hoped that this thing would be useful since Senior Li was quite difficult to deal with when he was having an episode.

On the other hand, Li Huowang just shook his head with a frown, holding the Black Taisui while frozen in place.

What am I hesitating about? It’s just a hallucination over there.

He lifted the Black Taisui to his mouth, yet hesitated once again.

Everyone in the tent could tell that Senior Li was deep in thought after recovering from a major illness.

When Chun Xiaoman returned from her sword practice, she approached Bai Lingmiao to enquire about what was happening.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang slowly returned the flesh in his hand back to the Black Taisui’s body.

“Miaomiao, how much gold do we have left?” inquired Li Huowang.

Bai Lingmiao felt that it was quite strange that he would ask about this right now, but still answered honestly, “We exchanged some silver at Women’s Mountain earlier, so there should still be a few dozen taels[\[1\]](#) left.”

“A few dozen taels? That’s not enough,” Li Huowang mumbled to himself, then turned to look at Sun Baolu. “Your people should have some hard currency, right? Can you help me borrow some? Don’t worry, we will return it once we’re done.”

A rare trace of hesitation flashed across Sun Baolu’s face as he replied, “Alright, I’ll go ask.”

“Senior Li, what do you need so much gold for?”

“Yes, we should have enough money to reach the Liang Kingdom.”

Faced with all these questions, Li Huowang sighed. He shook his head, opened the curtain, and prepared to step out of the tent. “Stop asking, it’s none of your business. Is there anything to eat? I’m hungry.”

Sun Baolu was even more efficient than Li Huowang had anticipated. He had only just taken the first bite of his meal, when Baolu returned, carrying a small, round package while leading his mother into the tent.

Sun Baolu did not speak first, and instead cast a questioning glance at his mother.

Upon seeing his mother nod slightly, he carefully unwrapped the cloth in his hands. The gleaming gold within almost dazzled all their eyes.

It was an oval-shaped, palm-sized gold box, inlaid with various pieces of fine quality agate and jade. Inside this golden box, there were several gold ingots and some jewelry.

While it did not seem big, gold was very valuable. This small bundle was worth quite a lot.

Seeing Li Huowang’s surprise at the value of this item, Sun Baolu’s mom could understand that he was wondering about how a commoner could get their hands on something so valuable. She said, “Daoist, there’s no need to treat this as taboo, as this is not something taken from graves. It is my dowry, given by the host family back then.”

“The host family?” questioned Li Huowang as he reached out to take the box, nearly dropping it due to the heavy weight of the gold.

The woman’s expression was rather complex as she explained, “Yes, the host family gave it. After all, those that can afford to use a

‘beauty paper’ are all very wealthy. This item may be priceless to the common folk, but it’s practically nothing in the eyes of some. Daoist, you saved my son, so consider this as repayment. I hope you will accept it.”

“I don’t want it, and am merely borrowing it. I will return it to you once I’m done,” replied Li Huowang. From the looks of it, she wanted to use this object to pay off the favor.

She seemed to be unwilling to come into further contact with Li Huowang, and bowed respectfully before leaving through the curtain door.

“What’s up with your mother? Why the huge change in attitude?” asked Li Huowang.

Sun Baolu was evasive, as though he could not express what he wanted to. “Senior Li, you’ve likely frightened many by returning here. Being able to get out of that place alive while bringing back two strange items... It’s likely that the tribe members are gossiping about you behind your back.”

“Never mind. Also, I don’t want your family’s item. When I’m done with it, you can take it back. Do you understand?” said Li Huowang.

There was some uneasiness in Sun Baolu’s eyes as he asked, “Then, Senior Li, when do you plan to use this gold?”

Li Huowang held onto the golden box and looked slightly dejected. “In a bit, though, even I don’t know when. Baolu, I appreciate all your help. We may have to stay here for some time.”

“Senior Li, you’re being too courteous. You have saved my life,” replied Sun Baolu.

In the following days, the other disciples all found that Senior Li, who was recovering, always kept the golden box by his side. One might think of him as a miser, but they knew that he was not like that.

Among them, only Bai Lingmiao knew some details. She

understood why he was behaving like that.

At night, Bai Lingmiao turned around to see that the person beside her was sitting up straight while clutching the golden box motionlessly, almost looking like a wooden statue.

Seeing this, Bai Lingmiao sighed softly, then turned slightly away from him. "Senior Li, are you very reluctant to leave that place? Or do you still think that there's a possibility that it's real over there?"

In the darkness, Li Huowang did not reply.

"Then, Senior Li, do you hope for that place to be real or fake?"

Faced with those questions, Li Huowang sighed deeply before his extremely exhausted and hoarse voice echoed within the tent, "I too, wish to know the answer to that question."

As the days passed, Li Huowang, who had become almost unrecognizable after so many changes, gradually returned to his original appearance.

His wounds had almost healed completely, and so, he was about to go and question Han Fu. At this point, Baolu walked in. He was now dressed in Qing Qiu's local attire.

"Senior Li, the tribe chief has asked me to ask you some questions," said Sun Baolu.

"What is it?" Li Huowang looked through what he knew quickly. Things had been calm in Qing Qiu recently, and there were no significant matters.

"It's about those women you rescued from the bandit village. Some of them have caught the eyes of a few young men, and the chief wants to probe them a little. However, if you don't agree, then they won't dare to act recklessly either," said Sun Baolu.

"Sure, why not," Li Huowang readily agreed.

From Baolu's mother's attitude, staying in this place seemed like a stable option. It was definitely better than following him everywhere and risking their lives.

Back at the border of Hou Shu, quite a few of them had died because of Peng Longteng. If these women continued to follow them, who knew how many of them would be left by the time they arrived at the Liang Kingdom?

“Alright! Then I’ll head back and report to the chief!” After receiving Li Huowang’s approval, Baolu was back to normal and no longer as taciturn as before, his personality returning to his cheery self.

Just as the excited Baolu was about to leave, Li Huowang reached out and grabbed his arm, instantly turning it black and blue.

Sun Baolu turned back to see Li Huowang looking at him fiercely as he shouted, “Hurry! Get Zhijian to bring the chains over!”

“Alright!” replied Baolu.

Sensing his surroundings change around him, Li Huowang hurriedly stashed the golden box into his arms.

Soon, the noisy and bustling tent was replaced by the quiet and clean hospital ward.

It was night here, and Li Huowang noticed that his mom was sleeping on the chair beside him. At this moment, she was covered in a small blanket that he used in his own room.

“Mom.”

1. Tael refers to both a unit of the currency and the weight. Here's it's referring to the currency 🤔

Chapter 247 - Sun Xiaoqin

"Mom, wake up, please," called out Li Huowang.

As Sun Xiaoqin seemed to hear her son calling out to her, she was in a daze.

She thought that she was dreaming. When she rubbed her eyes and got up from the reclining chair, she was surprised to see Li Huowang looking at her.

"Son? You've finally awakened again?"

Sun Xiaoqin quickly took out the nearby calendar and started to jot down. "Son, look at the time intervals at which you've awakened. They seem to be shortening. Does this mean that your illness is improving?"

Li Huowang smiled at her and nodded. "That's right. Maybe it really is getting better."

"That's wonderful! By the way, are you hungry? How about an orange? Ah, when you're not awake, you keep talking nonsense, and I don't even know if you've eaten enough," said Sun Xiaoqin as she took out a red plastic bag filled with oranges and began to peel one of them.

"Mom, I'm not hungry. Have you been accompanying me all this time?" asked Li Huowang.

Sun Xiaoqin sat by his bed while extending her right hand with an orange peel as she gently stroked his face and looked at him lovingly. "Don't worry, Mom is here. Dr. Wang has also said that me staying by your side and seeing you every day might help improve your condition."

"Don't listen to him, he's a liar," Li Huowang's voice quivered

as he looked at his mother.

“Alright, alright, I’ll listen to you. We won’t call him anymore. Look at how he’s even beaten my son up. When we’ve saved enough money, we’ll go abroad and find the best doctor,” said Sun Xiaoqian.

Hearing her soothing tone, Li Huowang’s lips trembled slightly. Tears began to slowly flow down from his eyes.

“Son, don’t cry. Why are you crying? Did that Wang Wei bully you while I wasn’t around? Tell me, and I’ll deal with him!” Sun Xiaoqian’s brows raised sharply, and her indomitable spirit was back.

Li Huowang shook his head vigorously, either to deny her words or to shake off his tears, he didn’t know which. “Mom, my hands are a little numb. Can you help untie me?”

“Ah, of course.” Sun Xiaoqian readily agreed and immediately started to untie the wide cloth straps on his hands.

She did not even consider the possibility that he would suddenly go crazy and attack her; after all, he was her flesh and blood.

Li Huowang controlled his newly freed hands and massaged his numb wrists, then wiped the tears off his face. Then, he reached into his blanket and slowly pulled out the golden box that he had brought from the other side.

“Mom, here. This is all for you,” Li Huowang smiled as he softly explained and passed the golden box to his mom.

“This... this...” Sun Xiaoqian was clearly flustered at the sight of the object. Her thoughts were jumbled; where did all this gold come from?

Li Huowang took out a small ingot from the box and placed it in his palm before her. His eyes gleamed with anticipation as he said, “Mom, look. With these, not only can you buy back our house, but buy a few more as well. You can even buy some shops to rent out. In the future, you won’t have to work anymore, and can have a

steady income every month. Also, didn't you say that you wanted to travel abroad after retirement? There's no need to wait that long anymore; you can just go now. With all this gold, you can travel wherever you want."

As he spoke, he reached into his pocket and took out an exquisite pair of jade earrings, and then passed them over to her. "Mom, this is the birthday gift I owe Nana. Please pass it to her. Also, help me tell her..."

He paused, struggling with his expression as he recalled those memories. He took a deep breath and forcefully suppressed his emotions before continuing, "Mom... Help me tell Nana, I am sorry. Tell her not to wait for me anymore."

Hearing all this, Sun Xiaoqin began to panic; it almost seemed like her son was saying his final goodbyes.

She quickly placed the golden box on the table and dashed out before shouting toward the empty corridor, "Doctor! On-call doctor, come now!"

After that, she hurried back and anxiously held Li Huowang's hands as she choked out, "Son, what's going on? Did you run into some trouble? Tell Mom about it; I'll find a solution for you! No matter how big the problem is, I can help you to solve it. Don't scare Mom like this!"

Li Huowang smiled as he watched tears flow down his mom's face. He held the golden box between them and said, "Mom, why are you crying? You should be happy. Look at all this gold. Our family is rich!"

"I don't want the gold! I just want my son to come back!" Sun Xiaoqin leaned forward and hugged Li Huowang's head as she sobbed loudly.

As he heard those words, Li Huowang's heart ached deeply. He even considered not eating the Black Taisui so that this side could continue to be with him, and so that he could be together with

them. But when he recalled the swollen face he had given Bai Lingmiao, he once again steeled his resolve to never look at this side.

I can't abandon my reality because of this fake hallucination! I must take responsibility for my actions!

But... it feels so real. Is all this really fake?

Li Huowang held his mother tightly as he took in all her strong emotions.

At that point, Li Huowang saw Wang Wei, who was clad in white, entering the ward with his student.

Li Huowang smiled at him, "Dr. Wang, I'm leaving now, and we might never see each other again. How about we make a bet? Didn't you say that this side is reality? If you have the ability to make me awaken again, then I'll admit that this side is reality."

He continued to hug his mom as he said his final words, and then closed his eyes while smiling.

When he reopened them again, he found that he had returned to the vast Qing Qiu. He looked around at the azure sky and the green grass lands, then took a deep breath.

When the others finished removing the chains that bound him, Li Huowang looked at all of them. Then, he approached Sun Baolu and passed the golden box back to him before turning toward the tent that held the Black Taisui.

Chun Xiaoman watched his back with some concern. When he had been suffering from his hysteria, he had been half laughing and half crying. "Keep an eye on him. I feel that Senior Li is... a little different today."

Shortly after, they arrived at the tent and saw their Senior Li emotionally holding a piece of the Black Taisui flesh.

"Senior Li, what's going on? Eating this thing should temporarily cure your hysteria, right? Isn't that a good thing? Then why is he crying?" asked Sun Baolu. However, his questions went

unanswered.

All of them just stood there silently, watching Li Huowang cry as he consumed the flesh in his hands.

Chapter 248 - Show Off

Yang Xiaohai woke up from his dreams and looked at the cowhide tent above him, and then inexplicably chuckled to himself.

A stinky foot suddenly kicked over from beside him. “Do you want to die? What are you doing lying in bed and laughing so early in the morning?”

Yang Xiaohai sat up and looked excitedly at Puppy, who had his eyes closed and was rubbing his nose. “Senior Cao Cao, we don’t have to do anything now, and we still get to eat meat every day. Shouldn’t we be happy?”

This was genuine meat, and he had never eaten so much of it in his entire life. Even the Emperor may not be living such a grand life.

“Look at you, getting so happy over just a few meals. Kids will always be kids,” sighed Puppy.

He was different; he had higher aspirations.

After a moment, Puppy got off the bed and patted the snoring Gao Zhijian’s leg. “Simpleton, get up. We’ll likely be leaving in the next few days.”

“We’re leaving so soon?” Yang Xiaohai asked reluctantly.

“Senior Li has cured his hysteria, and so leaving is next. Why, did you plan to live here forever?” asked Puppy.

Yang Xiaohai frowned and mumbled, “It’s not a bad idea.”

“Hey! Do you think that this is your own home? You’re just a guest here! That’s why the others are treating you so well. If you stay any longer, then they are going to start throwing plates and stools at you,” said Puppy.

After lecturing Yang Xiaohai, Puppy saw that Gao Zhijian was still asleep. After a moment, he lifted the blanket and grabbed Gao

Zhijian's pants, and then abruptly yanked them downward.

Puppy sniggered as he saw the half-asleep Gao Zhijian frantically grab his pants, and then headed outside the tent. After he stepped out, he walked barefoot into the river and began to carefully wash up.

He hadn't been so diligent before, but Xiaoman had told him that women liked clean men, and so he started to maintain his hygiene.

"Your face has white and yellow patches, and you look like a rat. If you also appear messy, then you might as well just die."

This was what Chun Xiaoman had told him originally.

Puppy had thought about it and felt that she had a point. Hence, he had started to groom himself more.

Surprisingly, after he started to take care of his appearance more, some of the women from the bandit camp had become a lot more willing to talk to him.

Puppy knew that he had to work harder; after all, there were also those men from the Qing Qiu tents that had started to show interest in those women, making him more anxious.

It was not a problem for him to pick from amongst the leftovers, but he was afraid that they would all be selected, and he would be left with nobody.

After cleaning up thoroughly, he untied his belt and let out a stream of urine into the river. Then, he took out a crumpled up red flower from his pocket and placed it on his ear before swaggering back toward the tents.

After he entered the camp, Puppy noticed Li Huowang's figure. He was just about to greet him, but noticed that Li Huowang was messing around with his horrifying torture tools that were scattered everywhere.

Ah... Senior Li, what are you planning to do again?

Puppy was not going to invite misfortune for himself, and thus

quietly decided to tiptoe past him.

He did not go directly to the women's tents, and first came to the entrance of the Lu Family Troupe's tent, and then whispered from outside, "Xiucai! Xiucai!"

"Ah! Coming, coming!" replied a voice.

Not long after, Lu Xiucai came out with a milk mustache and said, "Let's go. I'm done eating."

The two of them walked together as they walked toward the women's tents.

"How is it? Is my flower nice?" asked Puppy.

"Men shouldn't wear flowers. Only women should," replied Lu Xiucai.

"Why can't men wear them? Where I'm from, men who bring flowers often attract young ladies," retorted Puppy.

When they arrived outside the women's tents, they didn't enter immediately, and only quietly waited outside.

However, their mouths never stopped as they squatted there and discussed which women were the prettiest, or who had the biggest butts or assets. Although their relationship was not particularly close, they had a lot to talk about on such matters.

As the sun gradually climbed higher into the sky, those women finally emerged. Each of them was carrying their clothes as they walked toward the river to wash up.

"Ah, here they are! Hurry, follow them!" said Puppy. Then, he spat into his palms and combed his sideburns before laughing and following behind them.

The women weren't afraid when they saw the two men approach them in such a lively manner. They just gathered around and seemed to discuss something while occasionally bursting into laughter.

"Uh~! Under the moonlit willow tree, people gather uh.. at noon!"

Lu Xiucan's sudden voice caused Puppy to jump, and also attracted the attention of those women.

"Xiucan, what did you say?" asked Puppy.

"I don't know either, I only know that line. My dad said that women these days prefer cultured men," replied Lu Xiucan.

Hearing this, Puppy looked at him with disdain, then swiped the flower on his ear, and continued to grin as he walked toward the women.

Soon, they arrived at the river side, and Puppy really found himself chatting with the women.

Having spent so many days together, these women had all learnt that Puppy was just all talk.

At the start, Puppy had thought that his words had worked. However, after some time, he understood that they were all only asking about Gao Zhijian.

At that point, a bunch of Qing Qiu men with bare arms rode their horses and whooshed by, attracting the attention of the women.

After circling around, one of them suddenly led his horse through the water and smiled at a big-mouthed lady before extending his hand toward her.

"Hurry, this man is not bad! Look at those muscles!"

"Right, Lan'er. Didn't you say you were interested in him last night?"

"We can't afford to be picky, Lan'er."

When Lan'er was led onto the horse, the crowd, be it male or female, all started to cheer, except for one.

"What's the big deal?!" Puppy felt frustrated.

"Uh~! Under the moonlit willow tree, people gather uh.. at noon!" shouted Lu Xiucan.

"Alright, Xiucan, stop howling! Has anyone even glanced at you after an entire hour of howling?" asked Puppy as he looked

condescendingly at the young man beside him. He suddenly felt that he shouldn't have partnered with him today; he was completely useless.

I don't believe it. I can't be overshadowed by that dark, short guy!

Puppy paused, then took out a small wooden pipe from his waist, and a needle wrapped with white silk. He inserted the needle into the pipe. "Cough, cough! Ladies, watch closely. This is a skill that I learned from a true master. This is a supernatural ability~"

As everyone's eyes turned to him, Puppy felt proud of himself, and began to show off with the pipe.

Hehe~ What's the big deal about horse riding? Can it compare to this?

"Look closely, don't blink! This is not something that just anyone can see!" said Puppy as he led over a sheep and placed the wooden pipe at his mouth before pointing it toward the sheep's head and taking a deep breath.

The next moment, his face turned red, as he frantically clutched at his neck.

"Ka~ Ka~~"

Chapter 249 - Success

Lu Xiucan was quite puzzled as he watched Puppy's face turn red while the latter clutched his neck.

Didn't this guy say he was going to display a supernatural skill?

Why does he look so deathly now? Could this be the supernatural ability that he was talking about? Anyone could do that.

"Ka~ Cough!" As Puppy bent over in a violent coughing fit, the short needle wrapped in white silk finally came out and fell onto the ground.

"My heavens, I nearly died here," muttered Puppy as he looked at the needle wrapped in white silk with some lingering fear in his eyes.

His brain had nearly frozen just now. He had been prepared to take a deep breath before blowing out, but instead, he ended up inhaling that thing into his throat.

Suddenly, Puppy remembered something and leapt up from the ground. Terrified, he opened his mouth wide toward Lu Xiucan and asked, "Quick, quick! Help me see if there's anything inside my mouth!"

"What? There's nothing... But why is your throat so small? It feels a bit sticky on the side," responded Lu Xiucan.

Upon hearing this, Puppy was so scared that his soul nearly left his body. After a moment, he reached two fingers into his mouth and hurriedly probed around his throat. Though it caused him to gag, Puppy found that aside from his throat shrinking a little, there were no other issues.

"That's good. Fortunately, it got stuck in the throat, and didn't go down any further. If I had swallowed it, then I might have ended up like Senior Li previously." muttered Puppy. He knew that he

didn't have Senior Li's capabilities. He would have definitely turned into a monster.

Finally feeling relieved, he heard laughter coming from the riverside causing his face to turn red from embarrassment as he quickly bent down to retrieve the needle from the grass.

Puppy felt that he had been humiliated before these women, which in his opinion, was something much more serious than the mistake that he had just committed.

"This doesn't count! Let's try again!" shouted Puppy. He was unwilling to give up, and directly placed the needle wrapped in white silk back into the small pipe.

After his previous bitter experience, he didn't dare to be careless again. He took a deep breath and placed his mouth at the end of the small pipe, and then blew hard toward the grazing sheep.

Swoosh!

The needle flew out from the pipe and pierced into the base of the sheep's black horn.

Then, everyone saw as the sheep's horn rapidly slid down on the wool, directly reaching its chin.

Instantly, there were exclamations and screams, all of which made Puppy feel extremely satisfied to the point where he almost couldn't help laughing out loud. However, he pretended to have a nonchalant look on his face as he asked, "How about that? Didn't I say that I have supernatural abilities? Who else could do this?"

As he spoke, Puppy took out another needle and blew it onto the sheep. This time, it hit its front hoof. Immediately, the sheep's foot twisted, causing it to stumble and fall onto the ground.

Heh! This thing is really effective! Next time we encounter bandits, I'll use this to deal with them! But I must remember to take a deep breath before blowing it.

Just as Puppy was feeling satisfied with his masterpiece, one of the women washing the clothes in the river approached him. She

had a pear-shaped face, and her eyes were filled with curiosity as she looked at the pipe in his hands and asked, "What is this, my lord?"

"Hehehe~" Puppy was delighted to be called a lord, his grin stretching from ear to ear. "This is the magical tool I use to display my divine abilities! You can look at it, but you cannot touch it. Ordinary people must not touch it!"

With this topic, the two of them finally began to chat properly.

On the other hand, seeing this scene, Lu Xiucan felt extremely envious. But all he could do was watch on; he did not possess any such items.

Time passed quickly, and the women soon completed washing their clothes.

As he watched them leave, Puppy was happily looking at a white stone in his hands. This was given to him by that woman; she said that she had picked it up by the roadside.

It was a very ordinary stone, at best a little rounder and brighter than the others. But the object itself was not important. What mattered was the intent behind her giving this stone to him.

The flower by Puppy's ear was also gone; he had given it to the woman.

"Hehe~! Xiucan, I'm going to get married!" Puppy sniffed the stone, and then carefully placed it in his pocket.

As he saw Puppy acting like this, Lu Xiucan started sulking; he felt that this was extremely unfair. Puppy looked like *that*, with yellow and white patches all over his face. How was he deserving of this?

"No, the flower is too insignificant. I need to give her something more valuable. I'm going to go and borrow some silver from Junior Bai!" Puppy said excitedly while preparing to leave.

"Ah, Puppy, hold on!" Lu Xiucan shouted.

"What? Want to borrow this? I risked my life to obtain this

thing!” Puppy walked to the strange-looking sheep and removed the needle before storing it carefully.

“Who wants to borrow that broken toy? I wouldn’t take it even if you gave it to me. It’s just that before leaving, my dad asked me to talk to you about something,” said Lu Xiucan.

Puppy was about to leave, but turned his head back unexpectedly. Lu Zhuangyuan had never asked him about any matters before this.

“How was the Daoist’s facial complexion today?” asked Lu Xiucan.

“Why don’t you go and see for yourself? He’s not too far away,” replied Puppy. Just as he was about to leave, he was stopped by Lu Xiucan.

“Hey, it’s already saddening enough that no woman bothers with me. Puppy, help me this once. I really dare not go there,” pleaded Lu Xiucan.

“What? What did you call me?” asked Puppy, his brows raised.

“Cao Cao, Brother Cao Cao! I beg you! You’re about to get married soon! Adults should be magnanimous,” said Lu Xiucan.

Seeing his pitiful look, there was a hint of glee on Puppy’s face. “What’s there to be afraid of? Can Senior Li eat you? Let’s go, I’ll accompany you to take a look.”

The riverside was not too far from the tents. Not long after, they leaned against the side of a tent and looked at Li Huowang in the distance.

“Is he sharpening knives?” Lu Xiucan asked cautiously.

“No; those are his special instruments that are used for torture. He probably thinks that they have dulled after use, and so he’s sharpening them,” replied Puppy.

“I can’t see his face. Brother Cao Cao, could you help me get closer for a look?” request Lu Xiucan.

“Hey! Why should I go and see? It’s your business; why don’t

you go yourself?” questioned Puppy. “But why does your dad want to ask about Senior Li’s facial expression? Does he want to discuss something with Senior Li?”

“I don’t know. My dad has been more worried lately,” replied Lu Xiucan.

At this point, the two of them suddenly noticed that Li Huowang was looking directly at them.

Seeing this, Puppy pushed Lu Xiucan on his back, sending him out from behind the tent’s cover. Then, he walked out as well while smiling widely at Li Huowang.

At that point, Puppy noticed that Senior Li had put away all his torture tools, and hanged them on the lower row of the cowhide bag. Then, he turned and walked toward the two lonely tents in the distance.

“Eh? Senior Li isn’t going to the Black Taisui’s tent, but the other one,” commented Puppy.

“Puppy, what’s in that tent?” Lu Xiucan squinted.

Puppy looked at him with disdain. “That’s none of your business. Go back and tell your dad that Senior Li’s temper hasn’t been good these past few days. If there’s anything he wants to discuss, then he should wait a few more days.”

Chapter 250 - Enquiry

“Nice to meet you. Let me introduce myself. I am Li Huowang. Now, as for you guys who tried to ambush me previously, I have forgiven you for that. After all, being a Strayed One, it’s only natural that you would like to snatch me, coveted me just like a ginseng. This time around, I am here to discuss another matter. In a nutshell, I am very unfamiliar with this world, and would like to gain more knowledge about it through you. Of course, there’s another reason as well. You are aware that I’m a Strayed One, and I’m also looking for a way to get rid of this problem. If you know something and tell me about it, then I’ll truly appreciate it.”

Li Huowang sat on the chair as he spoke to Han Fu in a serious manner.

His conversation target was not the larger of those two blurry fleshy heads drooping before him, but the fist-sized head around Han Fu’s neck region.

The ability of the white tassels hadn’t been kind on him either, completely changing up his face. Though Li Huowang called it a head, it was more like a lump of flesh with twisted organs attached to it.

This being was extremely peculiar. Its main body had completely died, and yet, it was still alive and well. Li Huowang wondered how the disciples of Luoism cultivated such techniques.

“What’s your name? Also Han Fu?” questioned Li Huowang.

The small head simply sneered and did not reply.

There was a clattering sound as various shiny torture tools were laid out in a row before Li Huowang. Then, he picked out a half-spherical iron tool, and carefully brought it toward the small head.

“Ahh~!!” The sharp cries of the small head pierced through the air.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang opened the tent cover beside him and threw the small eyeball in his hand toward the Black Taisui.

“Still not willing to talk?” asked Li Huowang.

The small head used its one remaining eye to look at the assortment of various strange-looking torture tools before finally showing a hint of fear. However, that fear was soon replaced by determination once again.

“You Ao Jing madman! Will you let me off if I speak?!” asked the small head.

“I won’t. But dying directly and dying through slow torture are two different matters,” replied Li Huowang in a matter of fact manner. “Did you know? I was never really good at torture, but I have experienced a lot of pain and various kinds of tortures. Do you want me to make you live through everything I have ever experienced?”

Seeing Li Huowang wiping the blood on a nearby towel, and then picking up a barbed hook, the head began to struggle. But at this point, its four limbs were already completely broken; its resistance was simply futile.

“I don’t know! I really don’t know!! We just left the mountain not long ago!” screamed the small head.

“Really? If you just left the mountain not long ago, then, the nineteen lifespan pills were gifted to you by your master for your travel expenses?” asked Li Huowang.

At the same time, the barbed hook pierced through Han Fu’s flesh and slowly pulled out some things. Then, Li Huowang then picked up the coarse salt he had borrowed from Sun Baolu, and evenly applied it on the wound.

The small head twitched in pain, and foam mixed with blood began to spew from its mouth.

After a while, Li Huowang kept his torture tools away and took out the Fiery Scripture and began to recite the obscure incantations with a merciful expression.

Immediately the solidified white wax melted and turned into a pool of fire centipedes that climbed onto Han Fu's body. Then, amidst the crackling and roasting sounds, the centipedes started healing the injuries caused earlier.

"Ahhh!!"

The screams echoed into the distance, frightening many of the Qing Qiu kids in the tents. They also unsettled the adults into keeping their distance.

After several rounds of torture and healing, the small head finally gave in. "I'll talk, I'll talk!"

"Alright, then let's start with the simple questions first. Can this lifespan pill be used as currency?" asked Li Huowang as he took out a pill wrapped in yellow talismans.

When he saw the other party nodding numbly, Li Huowang directly stuffed the pill into the gourd and continued, "Is it very expensive? Is there any point of reference?"

"One lifespan pill can hire someone like Han Fu to help you one time," replied the small head.

Li Huowang nodded in understanding. "How does one obtain lifespan pills?"

"By killing others; however, ordinary people won't do. They need to have been born on a Yang day, in a Yang month of a Yang year. Do you want to know the refining method?"

"No need. Next question. Han Fu mentioned that you are a disciple of Luoism? Where is your temple located?"

"Liang Kingdom's Snakebone Mountain."

"How many people are there in your temple?"

"Fifty-seven."

"How many heads?"

“Two hundred and twenty-four heads.”

“What are you?”

“I am Han Fu’s Nascent Soul.”

Li Huowang continued to ask various small questions to confirm the authenticity of the information. He already knew the answers to some of the questions, and just asked them to test if the other party was trying to deceive him.

Once he confirmed that the other party was not lying to him, Li Huowang began asking the more crucial questions, “What is a Strayed One? How is one formed? How many Strayed Ones are there in this world?”

“I really don’t know about these things. The information about Strayed Ones was only something casually mentioned by my master in passing,” said the small head.

When the small head saw Li Huowang slowly reaching for the torture tools once again, it cried out in fear. Snot and tears flowed down from its face as it pleaded, “I really don’t know! My master just told us that Strayed Ones are extremely rare treasures and that they are not to be missed if we encounter one of them!”

“Then, how do you confirm whether someone is a Strayed One?” asked Li Huowang. He had been thinking about this question for a long time—why could everyone he encountered immediately recognize his identity at just a glance?

“I don’t know how the others identify them, but my master said that everyone has three fires on their shoulders. It’s normal for these fires to be big or small, but only the fire of a Strayed One appears and vanishes intermittently,” replied the small head.

Li Huowang looked down toward his shoulder, but didn’t see any so-called fire.

That’s enough, it’s time to ask the most important question.

Li Huowang looked at the small head, and after contemplating his words for a while, he spoke again, “Have you heard, either from

your master or on your journey, the method to break free from the bewilderment and sense of doubt that the Strayed Ones suffer from?”

“No. You are the first Strayed One we’ve met.”

Li Huowang carefully examined the deformed head. This statement was likely to be true, since Han Fu was just a neophyte. Even if there was a method for one to break free of the bewilderment and sense of doubt that a Strayed One suffered from, he may not necessarily be aware of it.

“Then, what do you know about the Sitting Oblivion Dao?” asked Li Huowang.

“I know this. They are a group of scammers who love to deceive people.”

“What are their names?” continued Li Huowang.

“I heard that their names all represent the various mahjong tiles, like Ba Wan and San Bing. But I have heard that these names are just aliases. When one Ba Wan dies, another one replaces him.”

“Then, is there one called Bei Feng in the Sitting Oblivion Dao? Do you know anything? What’s his strength like?” asked Li Huowang.

This person was the Strayed One that had managed to break free from the bewilderment and sense of doubt that Strayed Ones suffered from. If Li Huowang wanted to completely break free from his own bewilderment and sense of doubt, then this person was very important to him.

“I don’t know. I haven’t dealt with the Sitting Oblivion Dao,” replied the small head.

Following that, Li Huowang asked some more questions about the Sitting Oblivion Dao, but the information known by the small head was very limited.

After a while, Li Huowang looked at the small head in front of him, and then stood up with both hands on his knees. The chair

creaked as he stood.

“Very well, I've finished asking everything. Now, I need to confirm the truth of what you said,” said Li Huowang as he reached for the torture tools once again.

Chapter 251 - *Surveillance Bureau*

When it saw Li Huowang bringing out the torture tools once more, Han Fu's Nascent Soul was beyond terrified.

"Wait! Stop, stop, stop, stop!" The little head did its best to tilt back from fear while trying to distract Li Huowang. "I really don't know much about the Sitting Oblivion Dao! If you want to fight against them, then go and find the Surveillance Bureau! They know a lot about them!"

"Surveillance Bureau?" Li Huowang lowered the tools and thought about it. "Weren't they employed by the Emperor to deal with evil beings? They know a lot about the Sitting Oblivion Dao?"

The Nascent Soul nodded its head. "Yeah! They are sworn enemies! The Surveillance Bureau captures and kills any members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao! This is even more so the case since two hundred years ago when the Emperor of Dongxia was switched with someone from the Sitting Oblivion Dao. After that, he then led the entire nation to its ruin. Since then, the Surveillance Bureau has placed the Sitting Oblivion Dao very high on their list! Also, when it comes to the Sitting Oblivion Dao, they would be happy to share any and all information without holding back. Qing Qiu, Liang Kingdom, the kingdom of Si Qi, and Hou Shu are all in cahoots with the Surveillance Bureau. They surely know something about the Sitting Oblivion Dao."

"Oh? Is that so?" Li Huowang sat on the stool and pondered about it.

Since Bei Feng is one of the Four Joys of the Sitting Oblivion Dao and both parties are sworn enemies that have been fighting for years, the

Surveillance Bureau must have information on Bei Feng! Maybe I really could find details about Bei Feng through the Surveillance Bureau.

Li Huowang was not desperate enough to directly search for Bei Feng and try to force him to spill out the secrets about getting rid of the confusion and sense of doubt of a Strayed One. Instead, he first needed to confirm whether or not Bei Feng really was a Strayed One that had gotten rid of the sense of confusion and doubt that Strayed Ones normally suffer from.

Even though he wanted it to be the truth, he would never forget that it was another member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao who had told him about that.

Thus, before acting he had to first confirm the truth, or this time, he might end up being tricked by a dead member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

Only after confirming that Bei Feng was indeed a Strayed One and had gotten rid of the confusion and sense of doubt that Strayed Ones suffer from would he decide his next course of action.

“Surveillance Bureau...” Li Huowang mumbled before once again focusing on the Nascent Soul in front of him. “Tell me everything about the Surveillance Bureau. The more you tell me, the less pain you will have to feel.”

Through Han Fu’s Nascent Soul, Li Huowang understood that the Surveillance Bureau was a department that handled matters that the regular soldiers couldn’t; this included things like getting rid of evil beings that had slipped into the city and other supernatural issues.

And one of their highest priority targets was the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

“Do they only care about the Sitting Oblivion Dao? What about the other sects like Ao Jing Sect or the Righteous Monastery?” Li Huowang was puzzled.

The Nascent Soul’s single remaining eye was filled with

confusion. “Why would they care about them? They are proper sects.”

“Bullshit! What do you mean proper sects?! They...!” Li Huowang stopped and thought about it. After thinking it through, he realized that there was indeed no reason for the Surveillance Bureau to deal with them!

One of them was just a group of people who loved torturing themselves while the other was a group of monks that, at most, broke the taboo of sex. No matter how many sins they committed, most of them were committed within their sectors and didn't affect the daily lives of other people, nor did it affect the Emperor. It was clear that they were allowed as long as they didn't do anything majorly disrupting. The Righteous Monastery was even capable of being built within the heart of a city, clear evidence that it was allowed.

Li Huowang knew that the Emperor must know about what the Righteous Monastery was doing, but since he did not interfere with their actions, it meant that the Emperor had allowed them to do so...

Originally, Li Huowang had thought that both of those sects were evil sects, but after experiencing the world, he now knew that both of those sects were much better than the bandits or the robbers.

In fact, the nuns from the Benevolent Nunnery were considered literal Bodhisattvas during these chaotic times. The nuns were just greedy, dirty, and gluttonous while not hurting anyone.

“Aren't you a disciple of Luoism? Would the Surveillance Bureau not come and apprehend you after killing so many people?” asked Li Huowang as he revealed the nineteen lifespan pills in front of the Nascent Soul.

“Cultivators would kill people from time to time for the sake of their cultivation. As long as you don't kill people with wealth and

power, the Surveillance Bureau would normally just ignore you,” said the small head.

“Hehe... So much for the Surveillance Bureau being responsible.” Li Huowang smiled bitterly.

The Nascent Soul understood the sarcasm and explained, “The Surveillance Bureau doesn’t have a black-and-white relationship with all of us. Sometimes the Surveillance Bureau would request other sects to do their business and we would just do it.”

With this, Li Huowang now knew that the Surveillance Bureau had a rigid internal structure but was more lax toward outsiders. Most of the issues like Han Fu cultivating on his own would be ignored by the Surveillance Bureau.

To the Surveillance Bureau, all they needed to do was to keep tabs on and employ some of the lone cultivators as freelancers. Then, as long as they got their job done, they would get their payment even without needing to meet up.

“The Surveillance Bureau’s major enemies are sects like the Sitting Oblivion Dao or extremely dangerous Evil Beings. But their most important mission involves dealing with the Natural Disasters,” continued the Nascent Soul.

“Wait, did you just say Natural Disasters?”

Li Huowang perked up. He knew that at least two Natural Disasters had occurred before. One was the disappearance of ‘Decay’ while the other was the disappearance of ‘Lies’ that Han Fu told him about.

The one in charge of handling the Natural Disasters was the Surveillance Bureau!

Li Huowang slapped his head for being so slow. The characters for the word Surveillance Bureau were already hinting that they dealt with Natural Disasters[1]. To think he couldn’t unravel the connection between the two even though it was so simple.

“Since the Surveillance Bureau deals with Natural Disasters,

how do they resolve them?” Li Huowang asked the Nascent Soul. He was quite curious about this crazy world.

“I don’t know! I’m not from the Surveillance Bureau! I’m not lying!”

In the first place, Li Huowang hadn’t expected it to know and was already satisfied that it had known so much.

“Daoist Li, is Han Fu’s Seven Star Sword with you?” asked the Nascent Soul.

This attracted Li Huowang’s attention. “Seven Star Sword? You mean the bronze coin sword?”

“Yes! Let me tell you how good it is! The Seven Star Sword was forged by our Master using 184 pieces of bronze coin during the Wu Hour of the Fifth Day of the Fifth Month of the Shen Year; that coincides with not only the Eight Solar Terms, but also with one of the Three Festivals! It could easily get rid of the evil energy from Er Hei and Wu Huang; this makes it very effective at dealing with evil beings!”

1. The name of the Surveillance Bureau in Chinese is 监天司, with 监 meaning to watch, inspect, or supervise; 天 meaning skies or heavens; and 司 meaning department, bureau 📌

Chapter 252 - Clue

“If you want to learn how to use the sword, then you must first learn the Luoism’s special seal, the Xiandu Cishe Seal! I know how to use it and I can teach you!” continued the Nascent Soul.

Li Huowang was not surprised by its words and even chuckled at the Nascent Soul, “It will take a long time to learn it, am I right? In order for me to learn it, I need to let you live and you can just keep dragging it on and on, allowing yourself to survive, right?”

When it saw that its plot had been uncovered, the Nascent Soul shrunk back in fear. It revealed its rotten teeth and smiled in order to pacify Li Huowang. “No one wants to die. Since Han Fu is dead, you can just pluck me off his body and place me on yourself instead! That way, I can become your Nascent Soul! Daoist Li, you might not know this, but the Nascent Souls of the disciples of Luoism are very beneficial. If you have two of them, then you can cultivate thrice as fast. We can even help you condense energy—”

“Who says you have the right to suggest conditions to me?” Li Huowang cut it off and pulled out a metal spoon before pointing it at the Nascent Soul’s single remaining eye. “Now, tell me everything about the Xiandu Cishe Seal. I have a lot of time to play with you, so you can go ahead and try any and all tricks you can think of.”

Li Huowang finally walked out of the tent on the evening of the second day. His clothes were littered with pieces of flesh and drenched in blood, but he was also holding a lambskin parchment in his hand. It contained the cultivation method of the Xiandu Cishe Seal written on it.

Li Huowang had even asked the Nascent Soul whether it knew how to use Han Fu’s talismans, but confirmed that it didn’t know

anything about it. By then, the Nascent Soul had been mutilated to the point that its face was barely recognizable.

In the end, the only thing it knew about was the method to use the Seven Star Sword.

Li Huowang sighed. If he had been able to learn how to use the talismans of the disciples of Luoism, then he wouldn't have to rely on the Profound Records every time he fought. After all, the Profound Records would severely harm his body whenever he used it.

Still, it was not very important to him at this point. He would have just considered it to be an additional reward even if he had managed to learn it. Instead, he was more concerned about the information related to the Surveillance Bureau.

The Surveillance Bureau had a direct impact on whether or not he would be able to get rid of the sense of doubt and confusion.

He dragged his tired body back into his tent, took the towel that Bai Lingmiao gave him, and wiped his face. He didn't even take off his shoes before laying on the bed.

Bai Lingmiao carefully took off his shoes and socks before covering him with a blanket and left.

However, even though Li Huowang was tired after staying up all night, he could not fall asleep. He kept thinking about what the Nascent Soul had told him. The more he thought, the more annoyed he became, to the point that he had to sit up and go through all the information one more time.

Supposedly, Bei Feng is a Strayed One who has managed to get rid of the sense of doubt and confusion that Strayed Ones suffer from. If I want to verify this information, I will have to go and find the Surveillance Bureau. However, that would be if I don't get any more clues. But... how should I go about obtaining information from the Surveillance Bureau? After all, I'm a Strayed One myself.

Li Huowang knew what it would mean if such a massive

organization found out about him.

Li Huowang sat on the bed for a very long time. When Bai Lingmiao called him for dinner, he still didn't have any ideas.

When Bai Lingmiao learned about his troubles, she hesitantly gave a suggestion, "Senior Li, aren't both you and the Surveillance Bureau standing in the same camp and fighting against the Sitting Oblivion Dao? Can't you just get the information from them directly?"

"What do you think the Surveillance Bureau would do when a stranger suddenly comes knocking on their door, asking for information about the Sitting Oblivion Dao? The best case scenario would be them beating me up before throwing me out." Li Huowang sighed as he took the bowl from Bai Lingmiao and began eating.

"But... aren't the both of you standing on the same side? Can't you just explain it?" questioned Bai Lingmiao.

"Do you think this is a game where two children become friends? It's not that easy. Miaomiao, they are strong enough to be able to use the disciples of Luoism as pawns. The Surveillance Bureau is not as upright as you think," explained Li Huowang.

However, at that moment, he suddenly had an idea that caused his eyes to light up. "Wait a minute... our identities could be switched! We could just change our identity; as long as I hide the fact that I'm a Strayed One and make sure that people aren't able to see through me, then I can just join the Surveillance Bureau!"

Li Huowang got excited and hugged Bai Lingmiao before twirling her around in circles. He felt that this idea was quite good. "Even if Bei Feng is not a Strayed One who has managed to get rid of the sense of doubt and confusion that Strayed Ones suffer from, I could still use the Surveillance Bureau and their resources to figure out another method! As long as I hide the signs of me being a Strayed One, then I can have a massive organization as my backing!

Then, I could also use the Surveillance Bureau to hide my identity so people wouldn't check and probe my background easily! The Surveillance Bureau is also quite lax when it comes to people from the outside, and since they might not even require me to meet up, I can hide my status even better!"

Bai Lingmiao smiled when she saw how happy he was. As long as he was happy, she was happy as well.

Li Huowang looked at her beautiful face and kissed her.

After a while, amidst the panting and moaning, a black fingernail gently pinched off the fire on the candles, sending the tent into darkness.

After a long time, Bai Lingmiao was lying on Li Huowang's chest, her slender body rising and falling with Li Huowang's breathing.

"Senior Li, please go to sleep soon. You haven't slept in two days." Bai Lingmiao was concerned about him.

However, Li Huowang hugged her waist and shook his head. The beginning is the most difficult part of the process. After getting some clues, he finally had an idea of what to do rather than just going around cluelessly. Worst case scenario, he could just try to avoid Bei Feng for now. As one of the Four Joys of the Sitting Oblivion Dao, Bei Feng's strength must be extraordinary. Li Huowang would most likely die if they met each other right now.

I must become stronger than Bei Feng if I want to learn the method of getting rid of the sense of doubt and confusion that Strayed Ones suffer from. But... without a Master to teach me, increasing my strength is going to be quite difficult. I don't even know how to cultivate. Plus, the sects of this world are all ridiculous. Each of them has their own method of cultivation. I might not be able to handle the brutality of it all...

Li Huowang frowned.

Seeing this, Bai Lingmiao gently persuaded him with her soft fingers. "Senior Li, please go to sleep. There's never a shortage of

things to think about. We can sleep first.”

Under her gentle persuasion, Li Huowang finally slept after staying awake for two whole days.

Chapter 253 - Baolu

By the time Li Huowang woke up, it was the afternoon of the second day. He felt refreshed after having had enough sleep. After washing up and wearing his clothes, he exited his tent.

“Senior Li, where are you going?” asked Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang looked back into the tent and saw that Bai Lingmiao was sewing some clothes. “I’m off to bid Sun Baolu goodbye. Since we are done with everything here, we should take our leave now.”

They had found the Black Taisui and he had finished dealing with the Nascent Soul. There was no reason for him to stay in Qing Qiu anymore.

Li Huowang circled around amongst the tents before finding Sun Baolu on the grassy plains. Currently, he was riding a horse while his sister was flying a kite behind him. Both of them were having fun riding on the horse. Li Huowang could even hear their laughter from afar.

When he saw Li Huowang approaching them, Sun Baolu quickly asked the girl to keep the kite away while he leaped down from the horse.

“Senior Li, are you looking for me?” asked Sun Baolu, panting.

Li Huowang stared at Sun Baolu. “Yes. We have stayed here long enough. We will be leaving tomorrow.”

“So soon?” Sun Baolu was reluctant to part with them. He had traveled with them for so long that he had come to see them as part of his family. After all, Li Huowang and the rest had traveled so far away just to send him home, and they didn’t even ostracise him for how he looked.

“Senior Li, why don’t you stay for a few more days? Everyone

is happy here,” suggested Sun Baolu.

“We can’t. It’s better if we leave soon. I would rather not have all of them get used to being here. Plus, your family keeps slaughtering lambs and cows for us. We can’t have you go broke because of us.” Li Huowang chose to decline politely.

“Don’t worry! The lambs of Qing Qiu are very cheap and much easier to take care of than the other places! If we finish eating our lambs, we just need to go to Women’s Mountain again to buy some kids[1] and calves. Soon, we will have another large herd!”

Li Huowang smiled. “It’s fine. Let’s talk about business for now. First of all, you must not tell anyone about what happened in the cave that night, especially the Lion Dances! You must treat them just as you have treated them before. Never reveal to them that you are aware of the kind of monstrosities they are.”

Since the Lion Dances had become a part of the life of those within Qing Qiu, Baolu had no choice but to keep quiet about it lest something unfortunate happened to him. After all, there was a possibility that those monsters living underneath the cave system were a proper sect here within Qing Qiu.

It would not be wise to offend them.

Looking at how serious Li Huowang was, Sun Baolu nodded. “Alright Senior Li, I understand.”

After giving further instructions, Li Huowang looked at the youth in front of him. “Does your woman know about your body?”

Sun Baolu’s smile froze and he nodded his head bitterly. “She knows but she doesn’t abhor me for it.”

“Alright, come with me.” said Li Huowang as he entered the tent without another word.

Sun Baolu didn’t know what Li Huowang was planning, but then he suddenly recalled the white tassels and became excited.

“Where’s Puppy? Bring him here!” Li Huowang shouted within the empty tent.

An hour later, Li Huowang used one of the white tassels and helped Sun Baolu rearrange his organs back to their original places once again.

At that moment, the entrance to the tent suddenly opened up. Sun Baolu's mother had brought a bunch of strong men with her as they barged into the tent. All of them gasped and shouted when they saw Sun Baolu's twisted body.

Li Huowang glared at them but continued to slowly move his hands to push Sun Baolu's anus from the front toward the back.

Puppy was also helping Li Huowang. He gently pushed Sun Baolu's penis from the armpit region down toward the crotch.

Soon, the tent became quiet as everyone stared at what was happening. Some of the men even looked at Li Huowang with respect.

Sun Baolu was not Li Huowang. They could not carve his body to pull the organs back accurately, and so there were some minor mistakes in the positions of his organs. But even then, Sun Baolu was so happy that he was practically jumping with joy.

Even if they were slightly skewed, his organs were finally back in their original places. He was not a monster anymore!

His body had returned to what it once was ten years ago!

Sun Baolu was just about to kneel onto the ground but was stopped by Li Huowang.

"I'm cured! I'm cured! I'm not a monster anymore, I'm a human!!" shouted Sun Baolu as he pranced around the tent naked.

That night, another feast was set up. Everyone ate lamb and drank wine to celebrate Sun Baolu being cured.

Sun Baolu's parents raised a toast, revering Li Huowang. The people from Qing Qiu were all treating Li Huowang with respect.

They had originally thought before that the man with the two swords on his back was different from others; when they saw him cure Sun Baolu, it confirmed their suspicions and rumors about Li

Huowang spread amongst them.

“Senior Li, this is a nice place. Why don’t we settle down over here? The Liang Kingdom might not be great,” said Puppy while munching on an entire roasted lamb leg.

“You should focus on eating your meat in peace. You can’t even be quiet with a mouthful of meat. If you want, you can just stay here; I won’t force you to follow me,” said Li Huowang as he bit into a smoking piece of lamb.

Hearing this, Puppy started contemplating what he should do.

At that moment, a massive hand suddenly patted his shoulder. It was Gao Zhijian. Puppy turned around and saw how serious Gao Zhijian looked. “Don’t... don’t stay! Some... something... something is wrong... here.”

“Something is wrong? Sun Baolu grew up here. What’s wrong with this place?” questioned Puppy.

Gao Zhijian looked at everyone who was happily eating the roasted lamb as they munched on and swallowed the lamb meat laden with spices. “I... I don’t know... But something... something is wrong!”

“You can’t even talk properly and you want to advise others. How about you fix your stuttering first before trying to persuade us?” said Puppy.

Gao Zhijian saw Li Huowang staring at him, causing him to scratch the back of his head before sitting back down. Then, he drank his cup of ant honey in one gulp.

Since this was their last night here, the feast lasted deep into the night. By the time Li Huowang and everyone woke up and placed everything onto their ox-cart, it was already noon.

The wriggling Black Taisui was being tied down by strong ropes made from dried up cow tendons.

“Senior Li, I hope we will meet again!” Sun Baolu hugged Li Huowang, his eyes red with tears.

“It’s better if we don’t meet again. I feel like everyone who meets me gets bad luck.” Li Huowang patted his back and left with everyone else.

1. baby goats 🐐

Chapter 254 - Lamb Meat

The ox-cart that had been left sitting for a long time started to move once more. This time, they were traveling to the Liang Kingdom from the border of Qing Qiu.

All along the way, Puppy covered his forehead with his hand while fanning his sweaty face. “Senior Li, it’s such a hot day today. Should we just travel tomorrow?”

“And what if it’s hot tomorrow and the day after that as well? We might as well start traveling only once autumn is here. Since Qing Qiu is so great, why are you following us? You can just follow Sun Baolu and herd the lambs over here,” said Li Huowang.

Hearing this, Puppy looked at the remaining women traveling with them and chuckled sheepishly. He was not stupid. He had almost gotten a wife for himself, so how could he stay in Qing Qiu? Having meat to eat might be great, but having a wife was his lifelong wish. Plus, he was not afraid of not having any meat to eat if he continued to follow Li Huowang.

As if sensing Puppy’s gaze, one of the women tried to shift his attention by staring at Li Huowang before giving up and rolling her eyes at Puppy. She was blushing while doing so.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang carefully unfurled the lambskin parchment and stared at the method of cultivating the Xiandu Cishe Seal written on it. Other than the Black Taisui, it was one of the other things he managed to obtain from adventuring down within the depths of Qing Qiu.

“Senior Li, what is this?” Zhao Wu turned around and asked while controlling the ox.

“This is a cultivation method of a new technique,” replied Li Huowang.

His words attracted everyone's attention. "Senior Li, did you manage to learn it?"

"Not yet. I don't want to learn it just yet, in case there's something wrong with it. After all, I did get it from an enemy," explained Li Huowang.

Li Huowang was very well aware of the possibility that the Nascent Soul might have tampered with the cultivation method. Li Huowang himself had done this before to escape from the Zephyr Temple and he did not want to end up like Dan Yangzi.

Li Huowang took the bronze coin sword off his back and tried flipping it around before placing it down. "I need someone to test the cultivation method first."

"Senior Li, me! Let me try!"

Hearing those words, Li Huowang turned around and saw that it was the last of the remaining assistants, Yang Xiaohai.

"Do your work and don't butt into adult's affairs," said Li Huowang, rejecting him. There was a chance that the method could kill someone, and so Li Huowang would never let someone close to him learn it. He needed to find someone who could technically die without affecting them.

"Senior Li, look!"

At that moment, Chun Xiaoman lifted off one of the tarps and showed them all a golden box with precious stones embedded onto it. The gold ingots contained within it were quite familiar.

Li Huowang was stunned. It was the dowry provided by the host family that gave away Sun Baolu's mother! She must've secretly hidden it in their cart last night.

As he looked at it, Li Huowang knew what she was trying to express. There was no doubt that she was extremely grateful to Li Huowang for curing Sun Baolu's body and gave it to them as a thanks.

Li Huowang looked back but saw that the tents were long gone.

All that was left were the grassy green plains.

“It’s alright. Since she gave it to us out of gratitude, we should just accept it. We can use it for our travel expenses. At least we can buy food to eat in the Liang Kingdom.”

They continued their journey. It was probably because Qing Qiu was sparsely populated, or maybe because their luck was turning for the better but their journey was relatively peaceful. Nothing happened at all while they were on their journey this time around.

They traveled for more than a month. The days were getting hotter even though the summer equinox had passed.

The sound of a bird call came from above. It was very harsh. Hearing it, Li Huowang, who was staring at the map in his hands, looked up at the bird in the sky.

After a moment, he placed the map in front of Bai Lingmiao and asked, “Can you understand this? Do you remember where the Cowheart Mountain is?”

Even though the maps of Liang Kingdom that they obtained in Qing Qiu weren’t very accurate, the major landmarks were accurate enough.

They were approaching the border of the Liang Kingdom, and so they needed to determine the accurate location of Bai Lingmiao’s home soon.

“This isn’t right... and this isn’t either...” Bai Lingmiao muttered as she traced the map with her fingers along various different routes, but she was hesitant.

It was a difficult task to determine where her home was based on just the crude lines; however, it wasn’t something that could be blamed on her. When Li Huowang saw the map for the first time he too had been confused. It was just too crude.

After a while, Li Huowang kept the map away.

It seems that I will need to buy another map in the Liang Kingdom

if we want to know where Cowheart Mountain is.

“Wait, I just remembered that you are not from the Liang Kingdom. Where are you from?” asked Li Huowang as he turned and looked at Puppy.

“No worries. I don’t have to go back. I grew up as an orphan and had to rely on the villagers for food. If I don’t go back, then I can help them save some food.” Puppy chuckled. He had no desire to go home and was staring directly at one of the girls beside the ox-cart.

Li Huowang noticed it too and then stared at the sun high in the sky. “It’s almost time to eat lunch. Since we are almost out of Qing Qiu, we can kill one of the lambs.”

Hearing that, everyone grew excited. Even though they ate a lot of meat during their time in Qing Qiu, they still weren’t satisfied. Everyone of them had grown up poor, and so eating meat was a luxury for them.

Li Huowang, however, was just being rational. Since the Liang Kingdom didn’t have as much grass as Qing Qiu, the lambs would end up becoming skinny if they stayed in the Liang Kingdom for too long.

“Meeeeeeeh~”

Puppy pulled away one of the older lambs by its horn, bringing it over to a nearby river.

Everyone had had lamb so many times during their time in Qing Qiu that they were very adept at slaughtering one. Soon, they drained the blood, skinned, and gutted it. Then, they spread the salt and spices onto the lamb’s carcass before stabbing it with Peng Longteng’s halberd. They propped it up between the two carts and lit a fire below the lamb.

If Peng Longteng saw how badly they were treating her weapon, then she might just come back to life from anger.

Staring at the crackling fire lit by dried lamb feces and the

smoking roasted whole lamb above it, Puppy licked his lips and chuckled. “Hehe, it’s a good thing to use the entire lamb completely~”

Chun Xiaoman smacked the back of his head, causing Puppy to yelp and get up before approaching the women who were collecting some wild vegetables nearby.

Once the lamb was done, the wild vegetable soup was done as well. The oily roasted lamb meat complemented the mild soup perfectly.

Everyone sat on the grass and enjoyed the delicious feast.

Puppy happily cracked open the head of the lamb and took out the roasted lamb tongue before placing it into one of the women’s bowls and saying, “Hong’er, come. I left the best part for you: the lamb’s tongue.”

The woman’s name was Hong’er. She blushed and accepted it with gratitude before eating the small pieces of meat one by one.

After a moment, Puppy approached her and sat beside her, but she didn’t move away.

As for Yang Xiaohai, the plump woman was asking him for the lamb’s tail but he refused angrily.

Meanwhile, Zhao Wu sat on the ox-cart, feeling envious of what he saw. He looked down at his powerless body and sighed. He turned and concentrated on his lamb offal and wild vegetable soup.

Chapter 255 - Employer

Li Huowang was also enjoying the meal along with everyone else as he bit into a juicy lamb leg. However, he sat slightly further away from the others to think about his own matters and to get some peace and quiet.

Even though the Nascent Soul told me that it's easy to join the Surveillance Bureau, I still need to find a way to enter. How should I contact them? I can't just ask for them on the streets. I can't even guarantee that the bronze coin veil can perfectly hide my status as a Strayed one. It might be able to fool someone like Han Fu, but it might not work on more powerful people.

I also don't have any information on the Liang Kingdom. There's no point in me thinking about this now. I should just adapt to the situation later on. The beginning is always the hardest part. As long as I take the first step, the rest will soon follow.

While Li Huowang was thinking about his next course of action, his sharp hearing managed to pick up the sound of a pair of shoes stepping onto the grass. He raised his head and saw Lu Zhuangyuan's wrinkled face as well as his flattering smile.

"Young Daoist, are you free? I would like to discuss something with you," asked Lu Zhuangyuan.

"Oh? Go ahead." Li Huowang placed down the bone in his hand and looked at Troupe Leader Lu. With having to deal with the matter of the Black Taisui, he had almost forgotten that the Lu family was traveling with them.

"Young Daoist, as you know we had to abandon all our costumes and instruments in Hou Shu to escape the soldiers, but we are still performers! We cannot just eat your food without doing anything. So I was wondering... could I borrow some money from

you to get our equipment back and start performing again?”

Li Huowang was fine with this. Sun Baolu’s mother gave them a lot of money so he wasn’t too concerned about it. “Sure, go ahead and get the money from Bai Lingmiao.”

“Haha, Young Daoist, I’m not done yet. You can keep this first.” Lu Zhuangyuan took out a wrinkled piece of paper with a handprint on it.

Li Huowang took the wrinkled piece of paper and saw the squiggles written on it. The words were difficult to read.

“What is this? A talisman?” asked Li Huowang.

Lu Zhuangyuan blushed from shame as he replied, “This is a loan paper. Please excuse me for being illiterate, but it’s still official because it has my handprint on it for authenticity! Young Daoist, we are eternally grateful to you and we don’t want you to loan us the money just like that. We even ate and drank from your coffers all this time. So I came up with this: As long as we have yet to pay back the money we owe you, you will become our employer! Everytime we perform, we will split the earnings in half. Half of it will be paid back to you, while we will keep the other half.”

“You are paying half of it to me? I’m afraid that you might not even be able to pay all of it back in your lifetime. You don’t need to worry about all this and should just take it,” said Li Huowang, wanting to return the piece of paper to Lu Zhuangyuan.

“Ai~!” Lu Zhuangyuan stopped him. “We can no longer accept your generosity for nothing. If you insist, then we dare not borrow any money from you.”

Seeing how adamant Lu Zhuangyuan was about this, Li Huowang didn’t insist any more and decided to keep the wrinkled piece of paper.

Lu Zhuangyuan was overjoyed when he saw that. He quickly called for his family and all of them stood in front of Li Huowang as they greeted him, “Good day to our employer!”

Li Huowang was too tired to care about Lu Zhuangyuan's intentions. Staring at them, he suddenly had a funny thought; it was like he had just gotten himself a hen. Even though the hen was skinny and would lay eggs inconsistently, at the very least he would have a supply of eggs for himself in the future.

"Sure, go back and have your meal. Once we are done having our meal we can continue our journey. We need to leave Qing Qiu as soon as possible," instructed Li Huowang.

"Understood, employer!" replied Lu Zhuangyuan.

Li Huowang shook his head when he saw how happy he looked as they walked away. Then, he picked up his warm bowl of soup and drank it.

"So many of the people we met used to talk about how glamorous the Liang Kingdom supposedly is. To think that I would get a chance to explore it in my lifetime," said Lu Zhuangyuan as he happily led everyone back to the camp.

While he was happy, the rest of them were not. Lu Juren looked quite gloomy as he talked to his father, "Dad, you just sold us off. Why are you so happy?"

"Sigh, you brat." Lu Zhuangyuan sighed at his own son before taking out his smoke pipe. He lit it up with the campfire and started smoking.

"What are you thinking about?" asked Lu Zhuangyuan.

"I want to go back. I don't want to go to the Liang Kingdom. I don't want to perform anymore," said Lu Juren as he stared at the pregnant Luo Juanhua.

"You!" Lu Zhuangyuan wanted to hit his son with the smoke pipe, but seeing how Lu Juren did not hide from it, Lu Zhuangyuan slowly lowered his hand. "You are making it sound so easy. If you don't want to perform, then what do you plan to do? We don't have a field at home for you to go and farm on. Do you want to be a gigolo? And even if you want to go back, the soldiers are still at war

with each other. If you go back now, you will just die!”

Lu Juren stood up, his eyes filled with longing. “Dad, what if they have stopped fighting? After all, we didn’t see any skirmishes after traveling for so long.”

“Hmph! You sure are idealistic. They don’t stop fighting once they start! That’s how soldiers are,” said Lu Zhuangyuan, leaving Lu Juren feeling conflicted.

Looking at how conflicted Lu Juren was, he sighed. “Son, please believe me. I’m not just some clueless old man. I’ve lived long enough and experienced a lot of things. Do you think everything would be over once the soldiers stop fighting? No! It’s one thing after another! After the soldiers stop fighting, there won’t be enough people to bury all the dead. What’s most likely going to happen in that situation is a plague. Once the plague is over, there won’t be enough living people to tend to the fields. By then, the food prices would soar sky high and people would be forced to sell their own children just to survive. By then, who would pay to see a performance? What would we eat if we don’t even earn any money? We can’t just eat dirt.”

Lu Zhuangyuan lowered his voice as he continued to console his son, “Son, don’t be ashamed of being a performer. If I didn’t do this, then I would have starved to death. I wouldn’t even have had children like you. We cannot forget what fed us.”

Lu Juren knew his father was right, but he still felt the decision his father made was a bit extreme. “But dad, no matter what, you can’t just sell us off to the Young Daoist. Now, we are just his slaves.”

Lu Zhuangyuan glared at his eldest son and looked at Li Huowang having his meal. Then, he pulled Lu Juren slightly further away. After he thought that they were far enough, Lu Zhuangyuan whispered to his son in a harsh voice, “Slave? What kind of slave has meat to eat everyday!?”

Chapter 256 - Birth

Lu Zhuangyuan explained to his eldest son, “The Young Daoist is someone who does big things. He won’t be driving us too hard. In fact, he might even be so busy that he won’t focus on us. That’s why we must discern someone’s behavior and temperament before we do anything. Plus, this could be a good chance for us. Didn’t you hear when Xiucan told us that the Daoist taught one of the boys with vitiligo a supernatural power? We should all be physically stronger than the boy and yet, he was the one who was given the power. That’s why we need to think things through thoroughly. Go ahead and think about this when you are alone later and see if you still think I’m being irrational.”

Hearing this, Lu Juren looked at his father in surprise. So in the end it was about the supernatural powers!

“Talk less and work more. No need to think about the useless things,” said Lu Zhuangyuan as he pulled his son back to the ox-cart.

The Lu family soon started practicing their singing and performance once again. Since they would be restarting their performances soon, they were rehearsing the basics so that they could perform well.

After everyone finished their lunch, they resumed their journey toward the Liang Kingdom.

Though they didn’t know the exact location of the Liang Kingdom, they knew that they were close when the grassy plains around them became sparser and were replaced by shrubs.

The sun gradually set on the western horizon, and a sudden scream broke the peaceful atmosphere. Everyone turned around and saw that it was Luo Juanhua screaming while sitting on top of the

ox-cart.

At this moment, she was hugging her abdomen in a panic while looking at her wet skirt. Her water had broken!

“Quickly bring her into the horse carriage! Juanhua is giving birth!” Lu Zhuangyuan’s shout caused everyone to spring into action. Their ox-cart stopped too.

Then, the women went and helped with the birth while the men stayed farther away.

“Why are you going there? It’s not like you can help with anything,” Li Huowang asked Bai Lingmiao when he saw the latter was rushing toward the horse carriage.

Bai Lingmiao blushed. “I wanted to see what it’s like to give birth. It might be useful for me next time...”

Seeing her go away, Li Huowang leaped up and landed on top of another horse carriage. He lay down at the top and stared at the beautiful red clouds depicting the sunset.

Li Huowang closed his eyes and took a deep breath while hearing the people scurrying around at the back. Without the hallucinations, he finally felt peace. He no longer needed to get caught up between reality and the hallucination again.

“Daoist, it seems that your hallucinations are no more.”

Li Huowang turned around and saw Monk’s illusion standing in the air. Beside him were Peng Longteng and Jin Shanzhao’s illusions.

Even though his hallucination was gone, he still had to deal with the illusions.

“Yeah, the Black Taisui is working. I will no longer get stuck in the hallucination. Hehe, did you know that I tried pissing Wang Wei off one last time because I had a sliver of hope that the other side was real. It’s a shame that it was nothing but a hallucination,” said Li Huowang.

As he spoke, he looked up and saw a cloud that resembled

Yang Na. His voice was filled with longing and disappointment as he continued, "I really wanted the other side to be real..."

"Daoist, what are you saying? I don't understand you," asked Monk.

"Hehe, if you don't understand me, then don't talk to me again or the others might think that I'm having one of my episodes again." Li Huowang turned around and stared at the few remaining grassy hills.

After some time, Li Huowang looked toward the back of the other horse carriage. It had been a while, but the baby had yet to be born. He didn't know if it was normal for it to take that long because he had never been in a situation where he had to see someone give birth.

"I hope the process is smooth, since I can't help with anything at all. No wait... I learned how to refine some pills while I was in Zephyr Temple. Too bad there's no furnaces here and I can't refine some Blood Nourishing Pills," muttered Li Huowang.

Sssssiii~

At that moment, a faint sound caught his attention and caused him to sit up. He tried to listen where the sound came from, but it had already disappeared.

Li Huowang slowly laid back down in confusion. "Did I misheard it? Where did that sound come from?"

He thought about it and slid his fingers into his ear to pick out the earwax. He found that there was indeed something in there.

He slowly picked it out and saw that it was an extremely large scab.

The moment he pulled out the scab, his hearing sensitivity skyrocketed. He could even hear the sound of the grass growing underneath him.

"This is too loud. I can't stay sane like this." Li Huowang took out a pair of scissors with jagged edges and leaped down. He

sheared off some of the fur off a lamb's body and stuffed it into his ear.

"Whew~ Much better." Li Huowang kept the scissors back into his satchel of torture tools.

"Hmm? What is that?" Li Huowang saw a black dot standing atop one of the distant mountains, but it was too far away even for him to see what it was.

"Wa~ Wa~ Wa~"

The sound of a baby's cry suddenly rang out. Hearing the sound, Li Huowang turned around with everyone else and went toward the horse carriage.

When they approached it, everyone saw that Lu Juren was already standing at the entrance of the horse carriage. He was smiling happily. "Hehe~ I have a son now~ I have a son~"

On the other hand, Li Huowang was confused as he saw the baby crying in Bai Lingmiao's arms.

Is the baby sick? Why is it so ugly? It's like a monkey without fur.

Chun Xiaoman saw Li Huowang's complicated look and instinctively knew what he was thinking and explained it to him, "Senior Li, that's how babies are like when they are just born."

"Oh? Is that so?"

After a careful explanation from Xiaoman, Li Huowang learned for the first time that he had been having a misconception about babies. He had always thought that all babies looked similar to a three-month-old baby. However, today he learned that it was normal for a baby to look ugly when it was just born.

Li Huowang went and congratulated Lu Zhuangyuan when he came out from the horse carriage.

"Hehehe~ Thank you, thank you." Lu Zhuangyuan's wrinkled face was as happy as a blooming flower.

Then, Lu Zhuangyuan addressed everyone and accepted their congratulations. "Everyone, I'm sorry that we don't have any

eggs[1] right now. Once we reach a town, we will give everyone some red eggs!”

Everyone was happy and celebrating the birth of the baby.

While everyone was reveling in celebration, Li Huowang suddenly felt his heart tighten. He instinctively raised his head and looked into the distance.

A small black dot had appeared on the red grass caused by the sunset. The black dot was slowly approaching them from the distant mountain!

Something's wrong!

Li Huowang growled at what he saw, “Herd the lambs! We are leaving now!”

Li Huowang’s shout immediately broke the happy atmosphere. Even though they were confused, they knew that something was wrong when they saw how serious he looked.

Amidst Bun’s barking, the white lambs, ox-carts, and the horse carriages soon started moving again.

Time slowly passed and the sky became dark. Li Huowang used the last remaining sunlight and saw that the black dot was closing in on them!

1. He wants to make red eggs as a sign of celebration 🙌

Chapter 257 - Lama

Once the sky became dark, they took out the glowing green stones to illuminate their surroundings. Everyone continued to walk nervously, especially since Li Huowang never told them to stop.

The moon gradually rose up, showering the ground with its silver light.

Li Huowang was atop the roof of the ox-cart as he looked back. He saw that the blob of darkness had disappeared.

“It’s gone? What was that? Was that thing attracted to me or the baby?” Li Huowang muttered, trying to guess what it was.

Just then, the ox-cart stopped moving, prompting Li Huowang to shout, “Don’t stop! Keep moving!”

But the ox-cart did not move. It was the only time they did not heed his warning.

When Li Huowang turned around, he understood why they stopped. The black dot was now directly in front of them!

At that moment, Li Huowang finally saw what the black dot was. It was a group of black lambs. The lambs just stood still on the spot and didn’t move, almost as if they were puppets.

There was a Lama standing amidst the black lambs. He was wearing a coat made from black lamb fur and had a drum hung on his waist. He was wearing a necklace and bracelets made from little bones. Sitting atop his head was a Lama hat. His eyes were completely black as he looked at Li Huowang.

The Lama’s face was quite weird, with patches of yellow and black. When Li Huowang examined them, he saw that those were age spots.

Li Huowang knew the Lama was hostile to them.

At that moment, the Lama suddenly raised his skinny right

arm. An old vulture flew down from the sky and landed on his arm. The vulture was almost featherless and had saggy skin.

For some reason, Li Huowang recalled the man-eating vultures he had seen back at the Women's Mountain during the process of sky burial.

"Senior Li, the Lama..." Chun Xiaoman took out her bronze bell but didn't know what to do.

"Don't worry. You guys can go first. Ignore him," instructed Li Huowang.

Under Li Huowang's orders, everyone lowered their heads and circled around the black lambs.

On the other hand, Li Huowang continued to stand atop the ox-cart and never let the Lama out of his sight.

When they got closer, Li Huowang saw that the black lambs were all lacking teeth—all of them were old lambs.

There was also a very hostile aura coming off the Lama and the black lambs. Li Huowang didn't know how to describe it.

Suddenly, Li Huowang saw something else. The black lambs in front of him were not lambs, but a group of old men wearing the fur of black lambs!

He only saw a glimpse of it before everything returned back to normal. The black lambs were still standing there motionlessly. Li Huowang didn't know if he had seen through the illusion spell or if he was just seeing things.

"Meeh~" The black lambs beside the Lama all started bleating at the same time. In response, Li Huowang's white lambs answered back.

Soon, the lambs on both sides started bleating one after another, annoying Li Huowang in the process.

"Enough!" Li Huowang roared, making the lambs all shut up. *Nothing ventured, nothing gained. I can't ignore this any longer.*

Li Huowang looked at the black Lama and broke the silence

first. “Good day senior. I am a disciple of the Ao Jing Sect, Er Jiu. I’m coincidentally passing by your territory. I seek your forgiveness if I have accidentally offended you.”

Li Huowang decided to use a fake identity to see if it was useful or not. He was hoping that the Lama didn’t know that he was a Strayed One.

At the same time, this was also a threat. By announcing himself to be a part of the Ao Jing Sect, he was threatening the Lama to not attack them. The Ao Jing Sect was an established sect after all.

But the Lama did nothing in the face of Li Huowang’s statement.

Seeing this, Li Huowang told the others to continue marching, “Let’s go!”

He didn’t know what the Lama was trying to do, but Li Huowang did not want to engage the Lama, especially since he didn’t know how strong the latter was.

At his command, the wheels started moving and they moved away from the black Lama. Everyone was focused on their path ahead and remained silent.

As they passed him by, Li Huowang felt his back prickling, his brain thinking about numerous possibilities.

At that moment, he suddenly felt the presence once again; it had appeared directly behind him.

Li Huowang decided to stand his ground and turned around. He saw that the Lama was just two meters away from him!

Li Huowang finally got the chance to see the Lama’s face up close. This was the first time he had seen someone’s face being completely covered in age spots. The Lama didn’t have any teeth and his lips were curled inwards, looking like he was more than a hundred years old. The Lama was very old.

Looking at him up close, Li Huowang almost cut down the Lama, shocked by how scary the latter looked. It took a lot of his

strength to suppress his instincts to attack the Lama.

Li Huowang lowered his head and saw the Lama's legs. They were gone, replaced with bone prosthetics. He only realized that just now because the Lama had been hiding his legs among the black lambs.

As he observed the Lama, a bizarre feeling washed over Li Huowang, attempting to make him relax and close his eyes forever.

But Li Huowang would never surrender to it. He gripped his sword and snarled, "Senior, I don't remember offending you. If you continue to do this, then do not blame me for what's going to happen next."

Li Huowang pulled his sword out a little and an intense killing intent instantly engulfed the surroundings.

Seeing this, the black Lama squinted his eyes and stared at Li Huowang's sword.

Meanwhile, the atmosphere was so tense that none of the others could breathe. Lu Xiucan had even pissed himself.

Just as Li Huowang was about to completely unsheathe his sword and fight against the Lama, something happened.

Dong~

The Lama hit the drum on his waist.

Dong~

At the same time, a similar sound came from behind Li Huowang. It was Bai Lingmiao! She was hitting the drum that she used to summon the Immortals.

Dong dong dong~ Dong dong dong~

Both drums sounded together; it was as if they were conversing with each other.

After a few minutes, the sound of the drums stopped, and the heavy atmosphere disappeared.

Then, the vulture on the Lama's arm flew up and the black lambs advanced like a black cloud, covering the Lama's horrible

lower body before lifting him up as they slowly retreated away.

Even as he saw the Lama leave, Li Huowang dared not let his guard down. He immediately told everyone to start walking again.

They walked the entire night. When the sun was out and Li Huowang finally told them to stop, everyone fell onto the ground and started panting, partly due to tiredness and partly due to shock.

What happened last night had been far too scary. They weren't even sure if the Lama had been alive or dead.

Li Huowang looked around him and saw that the Lama was nowhere in sight. He asked Bai Lingmiao, "Did the Lama say something to you with the drum?"

Bai Lingmiao nodded. "Yes. He said that he was from the Surveillance Bureau. He will let you go this time around, but there won't be a second chance."

Translator's Thoughts

You would never want to be his opponent. This is the Black Lama fanart! **Credits to** 格子的乱七八糟 **on douyin**



Chapter 258 - Large Village

Li Huowang walked alongside the horse carriage while thinking about what the Lama had said.

What did he mean by “there won’t be a second chance”?

Li Huowang thought about the Lion Dance Palace and the dead Han Fu. Those were the only things he recalled doing in Qing Qiu.

Bai Lingmiao shook her head. “I don’t know either. He just said that there will be no second chance next time and didn’t say anything else.”

Li Huowang didn’t know why the Lama had just left like that. Still, he was very interested in the Lama’s identity.

He’s from the Surveillance Bureau of Qing Qiu? So that’s what someone from the Surveillance Bureau looks like.

Li Huowang had just learned what the Surveillance Bureau would look like on the inside. He was sure that the organization would be crawling with weird people like the Lama.

But... he didn’t know if that was good news or bad news.

Li Huowang looked at the sun above their heads and told all of them, “Everyone, we can stop and rest for now. I will guard first.”

Hearing his words, everyone brought out their sleeping mats and blankets from the ox-cart and immediately fell asleep on the ground. Some of them were even snoring loudly. After walking for so long and being scared by the Lama, their body had long since been at the breaking point.

Li Huowang was also tired, but he had no choice but to stay awake. Even though the Lama said that he would let them go this time, Li Huowang still didn’t trust him.

Every time Li Huowang was about to fall asleep, he would bring out the torture tools and keep himself awake through the pain. He was already very good at this after traveling for so long.

Everyone slept until late into the evening. When they woke up to prepare dinner, Li Huowang finally laid down on the ox-cart and closed his eyes.

Even though he fell asleep due to how tired he was, he didn't really sleep all that well. Different scenes appeared in his dream.

Li Huowang suddenly woke up when one of the dreams made him realize something. "The Lama's presence! I have felt that presence before at the Baiyu Capital. It was coming from the white Bodhisattva! That's the presence of Death!"

Having said that, Li Huowang fell back limply and once again fell asleep under everyone's gaze.

The wheels of the ox-cart continued to move. They passed by some trees and fields, an indication that they had left Qing Qiu and entered the Liang Kingdom's border.

With this, everyone became much more cheerful. At the very least they would be safer within the Liang Kingdom.

Bai Lingmiao was naturally the happiest; she was finally back in her home country. She circled around Li Huowang and continued talking about her home, her parents, her siblings, and even the goose who loved to lie down on the village head's lap.

But Li Huowang was distracted throughout. He was still thinking about the black-robed Lama.

I'm definitely right! He was exuding the presence of Death. That means that he was someone from the sect that worshiped Death using that massive cauldron within the caves!

Even though he didn't know the name of the sect, he knew that they had to be powerful; after all, they used the power of Death.

He was glad that he hadn't fought against the Lama or he

might have had to pay a heavy price.

“Senior Li, I’m talking to you. What are you thinking about?” Bai Lingmiao grumbled at Li Huowang who was ignoring her.

“Hm? Did you say something?” Li Huowang stared at her sheepishly.

“I said that with this much silver, we can build our own house!” replied Bai Lingmiao, pouting.

“Oh. That’s great.” Li Huowang was about to just gloss over her when he saw that she wasn’t wearing her blindfolds and immediately took the strip of silk from her wrist. He used it to cover her eyes and held her hands. “I told you to wear it when the sunlight is strong. If you keep hurting your eyes like that, then you will go blind.”

After saying that, Li Huowang turned around and looked at the people around them.

As they approached the Liang Kingdom, he saw more and more people walking on the path. They were skinny and tanned, and held bags of grains above their heads.

It was clear that the passersby were afraid of Li Huowang and everyone else. No one would dare stand beside a group of people covered in black veils. If it wasn’t for the Lu family Troupe walking with them, the passersby would have all run off.

Li Huowang thought about something and walked up to where Lu Zhuangyuan was playing with his grandson before whispering something to him.

“Alright, I will do just that. Don’t worry, Young Daoist,” replied Lu Zhuangyuan, finally feeling that he was being useful. Then, he took his smoke pipe and happily walked up to one of the passersby.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang pulled out the lamb fur from his ears so that he could hear their conversations.

“Hello~ May I know where everyone is going?” asked Lu Zhuangyuan.

“We are heading to harvest the wheat,” replied the passerby.

“Oh?”

“Yeah, it’s almost harvest season. We are harvesters that help people harvest their wheat,” explained the passerby.

From their conversation, Li Huowang learned that the harvesters didn’t have a lot of fields of their own. To earn money, they would go and ask people with a lot of fields to allow them to help with harvesting the wheat.

Here, Lu Zhuangyuan's years of experience shined greatly, easily allowing him to obtain information from the honest men with just a few questions.

“Young Daoist, they told me that there’s a large village just further up. After passing the village, there should be a town. They told me that the town is quite large and many people from Qing Qiu would go there to sell their lambs,” reported Lu Zhuangyuan.

Li Huowang nodded in approval when he looked at Lu Zhuangyuan’s smiling face. “Do they know where Cowheart Mountain is?”

Li Huowang had not forgotten the reason they had traveled so far. They needed to send Bai Lingmiao home.

“Hmm. They didn’t know where it was. They said that the area bordering Qing Qiu mainly consists of flatlands. The deeper we enter the Liang Kingdom, the more mountains there will be,” explained Lu Zhuangyuan.

Li Huowang was not disappointed when he heard that; it was as if he had already anticipated it.

“Since they are locals, we can just follow them so as to not get lost. Once we reach the town, we can purchase a map of the Liang Kingdom and determine where to go after that,” declared Li Huowang.

“Alright~” Lu Zhuangyuan felt useful and happily walked away with his smoke pipe.

They walked along the dirt path and passed through a bamboo forest. When they finally got out of the forest, they saw the scenery unfold in front of their very eyes.

Fields of rice and millet swayed with the wind, rippling like a sea of gold.

At the same time, numerous black dots the size of ants were swinging their sickles to harvest the grains.

“The soil of the Liang Kingdom is so rich! Back in our old home, we didn’t get a harvest like this every year.” Lu Zhuangyuan was quite envious of the scene in front of him.

But no matter what they said, the passersby only saw the field as money. They walked down to discuss their prices with the owner.

“It’s good if they have a good harvest. That way, we at least know that the food and ration prices will be cheap here in the Liang Kingdom,” said Li Huowang as the ox-cart slowly moved into the village.

Chapter 259 - Show

“We don’t have wheat flour but we do have millet flour and corn flour. Do you want them?”

An old man was sitting on a flat piece of stone with a clay bowl. He was selling flours of different kinds and explaining to Lu Zhuangyuan who had been looking to buy some food ingredients.

“Why don’t you have wheat flour? There’s wheat everywhere within the field. We are willing to pay for it,” Lu Zhuangyuan huffed.

While the other kinds of flour were edible, they were coarser and not as refined as wheat flour. Also, since he was not spending his own money, there was no reason to be stingy about it. He wanted to eat something better.

The old man shook his head. “I’m afraid I can’t sell it. I have to give the wheat flour to the officials as taxes. If I don’t, my son would be taken by them to be a slave.”

“Young Daoist, what should we do?” Lu Zhuangyuan turned around and looked at Li Huowang, feeling puzzled. The latter was petting Bun at the back.

After getting his approval, Lu Zhuangyuan turned back to the old man. “Alright, we will take it. We will take the coarser flour. Since we are buying in bulk, give us a good price.”

As the bags of food were placed onto the horse carriage, the entire carriage sank slightly deeper into the ground.

There were benefits to buying in bulk. The old man agreed to their request of letting them stay at his place. He had two empty granaries that they could stay the night in.

Even though the flour they bought was coarse, Yang Xiaohai was able to make some delicious meals out of them. He first made

some dough before placing it onto the edge of the black pot. The heat cooked the dough into delicious flat cornbreads. He was also using some lamb bones to cook soup in a pot. Their dinner tonight consisted of flat cornbread with hearty lamb soup. It was a simple yet delicious meal.

“Young Daoist, there’s a lot of people in this area. We need to have some people watch over the lambs during the night, or I’m afraid that someone might come and steal them,” reminded Lu Zhuangyuan while drinking the soup.

“Don’t worry. Let Bun sleep amongst the lambs. If someone tries to steal them, Bun will bark loudly,” said Li Huowang as he threw a piece of the lamb bone downward.

Seeing the piece of lamb bone, Bun immediately snatched it up and started happily munching on it.

“It might not be adequate if we only have a dog keeping watch. How about this? I can guard the lambs along with my youngest son. I’ve heard that these lambs become extremely valuable once they’re out of Qing Qiu,” suggested Lu Zhuangyuan.

When Li Huowang did not deny his request, Lu Zhuangyuan smiled.

Hehe, the Lu family is having another chance to show its worth!

“Is your daughter-in-law fine? She gave birth out in the wilderness after all. Should we find someone to see if she’s ok?” asked Li Huowang.

“No need. She had already given birth once, and so it should come naturally to her, just like pooping. Oh, I suppose this is not appropriate to say during a meal. Sorry, young Daoist,” said Lu Zhuangyuan.

While they were happily eating within the granary, they heard some commotion outside.

Puppy turned around and gave Li Huowang a knowing look. Then, he grabbed a piece of flat cornbread and curiously walked

outside with his bowl of soup.

The granary fell silent, except for the slurping and chewing noises. The flat cornbread was quite chewy after adding in the millet flour so they had to eat it slowly.

Soon, Puppy came back with a happy face, his bowl already empty. “You guys, do you know what I just saw?”

Everyone took one glance at him before continuing with their meal.

“What did you see?” Lu Xiucui asked to dispel the awkwardness surrounding his best friend.

Puppy put down his bowl and clapped his hands. “I just saw someone performing there. There were both men and women. They set up their stage just outside the village.”

Li Huowang and the others did not react to this, but the Lu family was immediately interested. The competition between those in the same field of work was intense.

“Aiyo~” Lu Zhuangyuan placed his bowl onto the ground and wiped his mouth with his sleeves. He stood straight and walked out like a proud rooster. “Come, let’s go and see what kind of performance is being shown in the Liang Kingdom!”

Li Huowang stared at them leaving the place as he continued munching on his flat cornbread. He noticed that Lu Zhuangyuan was indifferent toward many things, but he became oddly competitive when he encountered another performance troupe.

While Li Huowang was not interested in it, the others were somewhat attracted to it. After all, they had been traveling for so long and hadn’t had the chance to relax. Thus, when they heard that there was a performance, the others wanted to watch it as well. They ate quickly and kept away their empty bowls without even washing them.

“Senior Li, let’s go!”

“Yeah, let’s go and watch, Daoist. I love performances too.”

“No,” refused Li Huowang.

“Senior Li, please don’t be like that. The performances here are incredible! I used to watch them while getting hugged by my grandmother.” Bai Lingmiao gently pulled on his wrist while trying to persuade him.

“Yeah, let’s go! Daoist, I beg you.” Monk’s illusion was also doing his best to persuade Li Huowang.

Li Huowang almost cursed at the illusion, but had to swallow his words so as to not scare Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang placed down his bowl and walked outside. As he did, he heard both Bai Lingmiao and Monk cheering from behind him at the same time.

When he walked out of the granary, he saw that the spacious entrance of the village was very crowded. There were even people sitting on the walls and the trees. It seemed that everyone within the village was gathered here, including the Lu family.

Li Huowang carried Bai Lingmiao and jumped up onto a roof. There, they sat down on the solid roof tiles and watched the brightly lit stage.

The troupe had lit numerous lanterns along the stage in order to let the audience have a good view of them.

Jiang jiang jiang jiang~

One of the performers made their entrance along with the rhythm. The performer had a red face, six flags on their back, and wore a crown with two long pheasant tails.

The performer danced briefly while holding a mace in each of his hands. Then, the performer smacked both maces together and the music stopped. Before anyone knew what was going on, the performer started singing in a strong and powerful voice.

“Hear the sound of the golden drum~ Summon your~
Courageous spirit~ Recall your warhorse and your heroic figure!
We must uphold our responsibility! We must not lose even an inch

of our land to them!”

“Yeah!”

Bai Lingmiao and Monk’s illusion clapped at the same time. Li Huowang looked at Bai Lingmiao having fun before looking back toward the stage.

Li Huowang didn’t know what kind of story it was, who the character in front of him was, nor who they were fighting against. All he could deduce from the lyrics was that the performer was a general from the Liang Kingdom and that he was boosting the morale of his men before the war.

But he didn’t really read too deep into it. Since he was persuaded by Bai Lingmiao to be here, he just sat there with her to make her happy.

At first Li Huowang thought that the performance was the same as the Lu Family Troupe’s, where they just sang on the stage. But, he soon saw what made the performance in the Liang Kingdom incredible.

Chapter 260 - Woman

As if to emulate how intense a war could be, the red-faced general who was surrounded by several soldiers leaped onto a table with only three legs and spun it on its edges.

Jiang jiang jiang jiang~

The performer spun the table for minutes even though the table only had three legs. It was quite impressive. Even Li Huowang was shocked to see the performance.

Are the requirements to become performers in the Liang Kingdom this high?

Jiang~ Jiang~ Tai!

The general did a backflip and finally landed on the stage safely. At the same time, the soldiers around the performer all fell to the ground. Then, the general posed and the crowd cheered.

Even Li Huowang was clapping his hands. He was wrong. He had thought that performances were all more or less the same. But this one was amazing!

Even someone like Li Huowang, who was not into performances could enjoy it.

When Li Huowang was engrossed in the performance, the general's body suddenly froze. The two pheasant tail feathers in his crown stood upright and shook violently. "Hm? Who's~ There?"

Just as the general said those words, the lights on the stage were blown out completely. Everything became pitch black.

When Li Huowang was confused by what was happening, the lanterns suddenly lit up once more, but this time the lanterns were an eerie green color.

The general was still on the stage, but there was someone else besides him.

It was a woman. She had her back against the crowd while her long sleeves were shaking continuously, making them look like a waterfall.

The music had stopped. The only sound on the stage was a panting sound that grew heavier and heavier.

“Hehe~”

An eerie chuckle suddenly rang out from near Li Huowang, causing the hair all over his body to stand on end.

“Motherfucker! Can’t we catch a break?!” Li Huowang snarled and grabbed his sword. He almost launched himself toward the stage.

Bai Lingmiao suddenly held him back with all her strength and quickly explained, “Senior Li, it’s fake! It’s a show!”

“Fake?” Li Huowang started at the stage warily. He saw that the general was cautiously circling the woman.

At that moment, the woman suddenly turned around. At the same time, two bronze mirrors were raised from the sides of the stage. They reflected the light from the lanterns and shone onto the woman’s face... or rather the lack thereof.

Everyone was frightened by it. Even the children were crying from fear.

But Li Huowang sighed. It was indeed all a show. He could see that the faceless head was just a prop while the woman’s real head was hidden inside the dress.

After confirming this, Li Huowang released his grip on the sword and sat down once more. “Are the performances in the Liang Kingdom always so unique? Do you guys even add horror elements into the performances?”

“Senior Li, what’s a horror element? This is how the show has always been performed since a hundred years ago. Legends say that when General Yue was on the battlefield he met such a being,” said Bai Lingmiao.

Staring at the eerie stage, Li Huowang thought to himself that if this legend was true, then it would probably be even scarier than this.

As the performance continued, the general on the stage swung his mace and easily knocked off the woman's head, causing her to fall flat onto the ground.

But the woman had just fallen when a man appeared on the side of the stage. He had a black face and two copper coins made of paper were stuck to his cheeks as he swaggered onto the stage.

“Wuhahahaha~”

Sharp fangs appeared and disappeared from his mouth! He was doing teeth play! While the drums continued to play, the fangs rubbed against each other and made fiery sparks that were easily visible in the dark.

“Hehe.”

Bai Lingmiao heard Li Huowang's chuckle and turned to him, feeling confused. “Senior Li, why are you laughing? Is the show not interesting?”

“It is interesting, but I'm not laughing at the performers. I'm laughing at Troupe Leader Lu. Looks like he's out of his depth this time. I don't think he will be able to earn even a single coin here in the Liang Kingdom with his techniques,” explained Li Huowang as he looked at Lu Zhuangyuan's increasingly frustrated face. “That said, the Liang Kingdom is indeed different from the other places. Everyone here has access to better materials and entertainment. This is indeed a very strong nation.”

That night, everyone was satisfied with the performance, including Li Huowang.

The performers also earned a lot of money. They chose to perform during the harvest season because the landlords had a lot of money on their hands and were very generous.

On the other hand, Lu Zhuangyuan came back defeated. He

was no longer as arrogant as before—his pride as a performer has been crushed.

Compared to the others who were discussing the show, Lu Zhuangyuan brought his two sons into the granary before quietly heading to a corner.

“Father, they could even make sparks from their mouths! How can we compete with them?” Lu Xiucai was the first to break the silence.

“Why can’t we compete with them? The performer at the end didn’t sing as well as I could!” said Lu Zhuangyuan, trying his best to defend himself.

But it was futile. He soon deflated like a balloon. It was not enough to close the gap between them and the performers here.

After a while, Lu Zhuangyuan took a puff of the smoke pipe and walked over to Bai Lingmiao. “Young lady Bai, can I ask you a question? Is the performance of every troupe in the Liang Kingdom as entertaining as the one tonight?”

“Yeah, and it’s not just this particular story. They can perform numerous kinds of stories. This is not even the best one,” replied Bai Lingmiao.

When he slowly walked back to his sons, Lu Zhuangyuan's back was even more hunched than before.

That night, Lu Zhuangyuan couldn’t fall asleep. He kept thinking about how to improve his performances.

If we can’t perform and earn money here, then I will just become someone who’s nothing more than a parasite.

However, he was not the only one awake that night.

When the rooster’s call was heard in the morning, Lu Xiucai saw Puppy embracing Hong’er while walking out from a small forest.

Both of them were happily chatting and flirting with each other.

When Puppy saw Lu Xiucan carrying some water from the well, he left Hong'er and happily walked over to him.

“Hehehe~ Did you know what I was doing last night? Hehehe~” asked Puppy, chuckling lewdly.

Lu Xiucan remained silent and carried the pail of water into the granary, but Puppy was too excited to stop talking.

“Ai~ That feeling~ It feels good~ Hehehe~”

Puppy's face was beyond obscene.

Chapter 261 - Object

Lu Xiucan listened to Puppy as the latter continued showing off and finally could not bear it any longer. He smashed the bucket onto the ground and glared at him fiercely. “What’s the big deal? Aren’t you just relying on your Senior? Or do you think that woman would even look at you?”

“Ah! You really said it right! I really am relying on my Senior~ But you don’t have one~” Puppy was very proud.

“What’s the big deal about that... I don’t care! When my dad buys a theater...” Lu Xiucan discontentedly picked up the bucket again and pouted as he walked back to the house.

Meanwhile, after finally leaving Qing Qiu, Li Huowang could also sense everyone’s exhaustion after such a long journey. He decided to let them rest here for a few more days first.

Coincidentally, there was a theater troupe right beside, which could provide entertainment for them.

During these few days, Troupe Leader Lu attended everyday. He was always right at the front of the stage. From how he looked at them, one would be forgiven for thinking that he wanted to swallow them whole.

At night, in the spacious granary, Li Huowang sat on his blanket and focused on studying Han Fu’s copper coin sword. From the Nascent Soul, he had learnt that this sword had a remarkable origin, and had the ability to slay evil spirits as well.

Through the process of confronting Han Fu, Li Huowang had seen that the copper coins of this sword could disperse. If he could master the use of this sword, then at least he would not need to chop off his fingertips each time for long-range attacks.

Speaking of which, even now, whenever he was faced with

danger, *Profound Records* was the thing he used most frequently. Li Huowang still wanted to replace this self-mutilating style of fighting as it was not very healthy for himself.

It was only that he had not yet found someone that could be experimented on, and so he still couldn't use the coin sword just yet.

At that moment, he turned to look at his belongings beside him.

The set of torture tools made by a blacksmith, the sword he had carried ever since his time from the Zephyr Temple, the black-tassel sword he had obtained from the Abbess, and the gourd that was filled with nineteen lifespan pills.

Lastly, there was also the sacred text, something that had been useless from start to end.

Li Huowang slowly scanned all these things and finally settled on the sacred text that once belonged to Dan Yangzi. He examined it inch by inch, occasionally pressing it with his hand.

In the end, he once again confirmed that it was just a stone tablet with inscriptions encouraging virtue, and nothing else.

Li Huowang sighed and threw the heavy sacred text onto the ground. He felt like he had some illness that made him carry this useless piece of stone over a thousand miles for no reason.

Should I just toss it?

Li Huowang pondered, then picked up the piece of stone once again.

No, this object might be useless, but it still has good hardness. It might somehow come in handy.

Li Huowang looked around and focused his gaze on Gao Zhijian, who was playing with Bun.

"Zhijian, come here. I'll give you a protective mirror," called out Li Huowang.

Soon, the stone slab, tied with a chain, was hung around Gao

Zhijian's chest. The chain was the one that was used to tie Li Huowang down before.

Gao Zhijian felt very nervous with Senior Li hanging something so valuable on him; he couldn't help but want to take it off.

"Don't take it off. From now on, this object will be with you. Anyway, it's useless for me, but it still has some value with you," said Li Huowang.

As he spoke, Li Huowang pulled out the black-tassel sword and stabbed it at Gao Zhijian's chest. It only left behind a small white spot. But looking at Gao Zhijian, he felt that it was rather awkward. This stone slab hung on the latter's chest, and looked like a child's bellyband; the area it blocked was too small.

"Peng Longteng's armor should be on the ox-cart, right? Put it on," Li Huowang told him after a moment. The armor pieces that crazy woman had been wearing were good things. They could even withstand the murderous aura from his black-tassel sword.

However, Gao Zhijian shook his head and stuttered, "Too... too heavy!"

"Who told you to wear all of it? Pick a few lighter pieces to protect the crucial areas like your shoulders and neck," said Li Huowang impatiently.

Hearing this, Gao Zhijian scratched the back of his head and walked toward the ox-cart outside.

Soon, the heavy, silver armor appeared on Gao Zhijian's body. With the face mask pressed onto his face, and the heavy wolf-tooth club on his shoulder, he instantly turned into a terrifying beast in front of Li Huowang.

Li Huowang looked at his masterpiece and nodded with satisfaction. "Go! Test it out!"

Soon, the crisp sounds of metal colliding came from the courtyard. To his surprise, Li Huowang found that the current Gao Zhijian wouldn't lose to him if he didn't use his Profound Records.

Panting heavily, Li Huowang stabilized himself and looked at Gao Zhijian before him and said, "Alright. When we encounter trouble, remember to put this on. It'll come in handy."

The visor opened to reveal Gao Zhijian's honest face. He nodded and tried to scratch the back of his head, but his hand only managed to touch the smooth surface of the helmet.

"By the way, everyone is going to watch the play. Why aren't you going?" asked Li Houwang as he sheathed his sword.

"No... no... not interesting!" Gao Zhijian, soaked in his own sweat, took off the heavy armor on his body. Then, he walked to Bun and squatted beside it, easily flipped it over as he used his strong fingers to scratch Bun's white belly.

Bun was very happy to have someone playing with it. It stuck out its tongue while wriggling its body and kicking its four limbs.

Looking at the scene of the person and dog playing, Li Huowang shook his head, then carried his sword and walked back into the house.

He arranged the things on the ground, but hesitated when faced with three swords. One was the black-tassel sword he had gotten from the Abbess, one was the copper coin sword he obtained from Han Fu, and the third was Senior Chang Ming's sharp sword from back at the Zephyr Temple.

He was no blacksmith, and carrying three swords was too heavy.

Just as he was feeling conflicted, Lu Xiucui, who had one green leaf stuck on his hair, rushed in.

When the latter saw Li Huowang alone, he passionately knelt before him and kowtowed three times. "Daoist! I bow to you to become your apprentice! Teach me your supernatural powers!"

"Hmm?" Li Huowang was puzzled, not knowing what this guy was up to.

Has he been enchanted by the play?

“Stop kneeling; I can’t teach you.”

Li Huowang was stating the truth. He could not teach the ability to displace his body, nor could he teach the use of Profound Records.

The only thing he could impart were his half-baked pill-refining abilities, or his skilled torture techniques. But it didn’t seem like this guy would be interested in either of those.

“Daoist, please teach me! If not... I won’t get up!” Xiucan kowtowed once again.

“Then keep kowtowing,” said Li Huowang as he turned around and continued to examine his three swords.

At this point, the one-armed Chun Xiaoman stepped in from outside. Li Huowang paused as he looked at the girl covered in black hair. Then, he picked up the sharp sword that had accompanied him for the longest time, and tossed it over to her.

Chapter 262 - Xiucan

“You can use this one. It was wielded by Senior Chang Ming back then. This sword is decent and cuts through iron like mud, but I never had the chance to use it,” Li Huowang said to Chun Xiaoman, who was holding his sword.

Chun Xiaoman looked at the longsword in her hand, surprised. Although it was a bit heavy for her, it was still much better than her previous weapons. “Thank you, Senior Li!”

“Practice your sword skills regularly. Although I gave you that bell, don't rely on the Wandering Gods for everything. After all, inviting them once costs three months of life. How many three months does a person have in one lifetime?” said Li Huowang.

Chun Xiaoman nodded. Then, she turned around and faced Yang Xiaohai, who had just come in. Excited, she took off her own sword from her waist and stuffed it into his arms.

“This sword is yours from now on. Let's go! Let's have some practice outside!” said Xiaoman.

The next few days passed peacefully, without the need to rush on the road while braving against the wind and the rain. Apart from eating and drinking, they spent all their time watching plays. Aside from the members of the Lu family, the exhaustion on everyone's faces had reduced significantly.

However, after four days, they had to continue on their way. Li Huowang had originally wanted to stay a few more days, but he noticed that the sheep from the Qing Qiu were starting to lose weight because they hadn't eaten enough. If they lost any more weight, they would likely die.

The sleeping blankets and iron pots were put back on the ox-cart, and they began to walk toward the town mentioned by the

harvester.

“What happened to your face?” Li Huowang asked Lu Zhuangyuan upon noticing the bruise around his right eye.

“Nothing... nothing at all. I accidentally fell when I went to the toilet at night,” Lu Zhuangyuan said with an awkward smile on his face.

“Hey, this is not from a fall. He secretly went to the backstage of someone else's house to steal some skills, and he was caught by the leader of that troupe and got beaten up.”

Puppy's words instantly made Troupe Leader Lu hang his head in shame, but he still tried to justify himself, “I... I... wasn't stealing. I just went to take a look.”

Obviously, even he himself didn't believe his own words.

To change the subject, Lu Zhuangyuan immediately sold out his own son. “Daoist, I already know about Xiucan's matter. I have scolded him severely. Be the bigger person, and don't lower yourself to his level.”

“What happened?” After a brief moment of confusion, Li Huowang immediately understood what the other party was talking about. “Oh, you mean the matter of apprenticeship? Don't worry, it's nothing. I really can't teach my abilities to others. If I could, I would have taught my juniors long ago. Then, I would have more helpers around me.”

“That's good, that's good.” Lu Zhuangyuan was hunched over, as he smiled and nodded continuously by Li Huowang's side.

“Troupe Leader Lu, how long did those harvesters say it would take to get to the town?”

“They said that it would take about four days of journey to reach there,” replied Lu Zhuangyuan.

Li Huowang nodded, slightly accelerating his pace.

I hope that the town is big enough, and that I can buy a map with Cowheart Mountain marked on it.

Li Huowang wanted to get to his destination immediately, but the journey had to be taken step by step. Though the ox-cart had strong carrying capacity, it couldn't even compare to a donkey-cart in terms of speed, let alone a horse-drawn carriage.

As the sun set, the ox-cart and the sheep formed a wall with the inside having dinner.

Today, they had knife-cut noodles for dinner. Yang Xiaohai skillfully kneaded the dough into a ball, and then held a knife in his left hand and the dough in his right. A cold light danced, and strips of noodles were shaved into the pot. During this time, while he hadn't made much progress in his swordsmanship, his knife skills had certainly improved.

When some freshly-picked bamboo shoots were thrown in, a bowl of bamboo shoot and lamb oil knife-cut noodles was quickly ready.

“Junior Yang, your skills are getting better. In the future, you can become a chef,” Puppy commented. Then, him and Hong'er each scooped a bowl and walked toward the ox-cart.

The two of them exchanged bites as they ate heartily.

With a large bruise on his head obtained from his dad's tobacco pipe, Lu Xiucan came to the pot with his bowl, and picked up some of the noodles while seething, “What's so special about this?! Wait till my dad buys a theater...”

“Brother Xiucan, what did you say?”

Lu Xiucan looked up at Yang Xiaohai. There was a round-faced woman behind Xiaohai, holding a bowl, and walking back with a cold expression.

There was no other activity after dinner, and everyone went to sleep early. Tonight, Lu Xiucan and his brother took turns to stand guard.

Li Huowang slept well in the first half of the night, but just before the third section of the night, he was awakened by a strong

killing intent.

He opened the blanket and pushed Bai Lingmiao out from his arms, then flipped around to locate his weapons on the ox-cart.

He could only find the copper coin sword. The black-tassel sword from the Abbess was missing!

“You brat!! What are you doing?! Put the sword down quickly!” Lu Zhuangyuan’s cries woke everyone up.

Li Huowang immediately turned and rushed toward the direction of the campfire. Finally, he spotted his weapon within the Lu Family’s encirclement.

At this moment, the black-tassel sword was being held by Lu Xiucan. Clearly unable to bear the killing intent released by the sword, his body was involuntarily bent backward, his expression grim as he gasped for breath.

Panicked, Lu Zhuangyuan rushed to Li Huowang’s side and fearfully asked, “Daoist, what’s going on? Why did that brat become like this?”

“Hahaha! I have divine powers now! I can kill anyone I want!” Lu Xiucan laughed maniacally.

When he saw Li Huowang coming toward him, Lu Xiucan instinctively pointed the sword at him.

However, Li Huowang just grabbed the blade with one hand, and then raised his right foot before kicking the young man’s soft stomach.

“Ooh~!” Lu Xiucan knelt on the ground and held his tummy. He vomited out all the bamboo shoot knife-cut noodles he had eaten tonight.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang resheathed the sword and looked at his bleeding palm. He casually shook off the blood, and then turned to Lu Xiucan, “I’ll say it again. I don’t have any supernatural abilities, and I cannot teach them to you. This is the first, and the last time. If there’s a next time, then you guys can leave.”

“Why won't you teach me? Why can Puppy learn, but not me? I want to be a lord too! I don't want to be an ordinary person!” shouted Lu Xiucan.

“When you really have it, you won't think like this. If I could choose, I would rather be a normal person like you,” said Li Huowang. Then, he turned toward the others and continued, “Don't stand around; go back to sleep. We still have to continue our journey tomorrow.”

After handling this trivial episode, Li Huowang grabbed the black-tassel sword and turned to leave.

Seeing that everything had been settled, the depressed Lu Zhuangyuan and his eldest son hurriedly approached Lu Xiucan.

“What kind of foolish thing have you done?! Why are you still lying on the ground?! Get up quickly!” shouted Lu Zhuangyuan. However, just as he reached out to pull Lu Xiucan up from the ground, the latter slapped him in the face, stunning him.

“Old man, get away from me! My affairs have nothing to do with you!” shouted Lu Xiucan.

This series of events didn't end that night.

The next morning, Li Huowang woke up to see Lu Xiucan being hung upside down on a tree while Lu Zhuangyuan whipped him using a rattan cane.

Even though his face was covered in blood from being whipped, Lu Xiucan still refused to admit defeat, cursing loudly at his father, “Ah ah ah! Just you wait! You dare to hit me?! Kill me if you dare, or I'm going to kill all of you!! Ah ah ah!”

Chapter 263 - Changes

Lu Zhuangyuan was enraged to hear his son say such defiant remarks even after he had been punished for so long.

“You, this——!” Lu Zhuangyuan was about to raise the rattan stick to once again swing across Lu Xiucan’s face when Li Huowang, who happened to be passing by, grabbed onto it.

Having known Lu Xiucan for a while now, Li Huowang had gotten to understand him to some extent. To the best of his knowledge, this young man had always been rather timid and he would never utter such words. There had to be something wrong here.

Li Huowang approached to study Lu Xiucan’s upturned figure in front of him. His round, blazing eyes were full of hatred and malicious intent, like a wounded wild beast.

After having gone through so much, Li Huowang had seen it all. He could tell that the fierce stare in front of him was not something an average young guy could just make up.

For some reason, Li Huowang felt an odd feeling of familiarity when he looked into those eyes.

Upon closer inspection, Li Huowang suddenly turned his head and gazed at the tall, headless female corpse behind him.

At that moment, it suddenly struck him. The current Lu Xiucan resembled Peng Longteng quite a bit.

Surprised, Li Huowang re-evaluated the black-tassel sword in front of him.

It was after Lu Xiucan had played with the sword that he reached his current state. Although this was a good sword, Li Huowang underestimated its side effects. Him being a Strayed One was the reason why he hadn’t felt anything.

Abbess once mentioned that military objects often carried a malevolent aura, but this aura couldn't dispel the bewilderment and sense of doubt of a Strayed One. However, she never told me the consequences an ordinary person would face upon coming into contact with this weapon.

Now, Lu Xiucui had cleared up the doubts that had been bothering Li Huowang—namely, what would happen when an ordinary person came into contact with this weapon, and what type of consequences would they face?

Li Huowang shifted his gaze back to Lu Xiucui, re-evaluating those resentful eyes.

Could it be that Peng Longteng wasn't always like that? That she was similar to Lu Xiucui, and that she too was affected by something that brought about this change?

Li Huowang strained his mind, trying to recall Peng Longteng's physical features from before. If he removed the flamboyant green tattoo on her face, she would appear to be nothing more than a demure maiden ready for marriage.

But it was also this very woman who had slaughtered thousands of people without batting an eye.

Li Huowang gained a better grasp of military families thanks to Lu Xiucui's change.

Individuals like Peng Longteng were just ordinary people in the past. To gain greater power, whether through cultivation or other means, their bodies were pushed to acquire certain things. It was these things that produced such severe alterations in their dispositions.

Li Huowang recalled the deeds of the monks back at the Righteous Monastery and their Bodhisattva, as well as the foul-smelling establishment of the Benevolent Nunnery.

It seems that no matter how they cultivate, they will eventually absorb something, and it will affect their character and behavior.

The Abbess and nuns' decay, the monks' lust, so what about the military? Ruthlessness? Bloodlust? Or slaughter?

Seeing Li Huowang standing there with a furrowed brow pondering the issue, Troupe Leader Lu sensed that something was amiss. He set aside his anger as a trace of concern appeared on his weathered face. It seemed that his son was not just being rebellious. The trouble appeared to be something a lot more significant.

Regardless of how Lu Xiucui hit or scolded him, he was still his son.

“Daoist, what happened to my son? Is he possessed? Can you think of a way to cure him?” asked Lu Zhuangyuan.

Pulled back to reality by the questions, Li Huowang reassessed Lu Xiucui before turning back to Lu Zhuangyuan to let him know the truth.

“I don't know much about Lu Xiucui's current state. But based on the overall situation, if his temperament gradually becomes milder, then there should still be hope for recovery. If not, Troupe Leader Lu, I advise you to be prepared,” said Li Huowang.

The meaning behind Li Huowang's words was unspoken yet clear.

Upon hearing this news that was like a bolt out of the blue, Troupe Leader Lu's body staggered, almost causing him to lose his balance.

Before anyone could react, Lu Zhuangyuan knelt before Li Huowang.

Li Huowang quickly turned around to avoid the bow from Lu Zhuangyuan, as he frowned. “Troupe Leader Lu, are you trying to shorten my life?”

“No, no, no!” Lu Zhuangyuan quickly got up, repeatedly waving his hands. He said nervously, “Daoist, it was my fault. If I hadn't started it, he wouldn't have been led astray, and tried to steal your sword!”

The atmosphere became heavy as the onlookers approached silently, listening to what Lu Zhuangyuan was saying.

Casting another glance at the inverted Lu Xiucan, Li Huowang sighed and turned toward Bai Lingmiao. "Why don't you give it a try?"

Boom, boom, boom~

The rhythmic drumbeat rang out, followed by a chant.

"The sun set on the Western mountain, and the skies went dark~ Every house closed its doors while the magpies and crows flew back to their trees~ The sparrows flew to the rafters, and the entrances to the houses were closed~ Ten houses with nine locked~ Only one remains unlocked..."

The chanting to invite the Bei Family began. The fragrant incense with dark red embers wafted gently into Lu Xiucan's throat, yet there was no response.

"Senior Li, the Immortal families said that Lu Xiucan is fine," relayed Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang sneered. These Immortal families were just like that, full of tricks when it came to their people. But when faced with real challenges, they were nothing more than a facade.

On the other hand, the aggrieved Lu Zhuangyuan turned around and gave Lu Xiucan a slap across his face. "He deserves it! This has nothing to do with you. It's his fault! He is already at this age, and still engaging in such improper behavior! This is just his karma!"

In response, Lu Xiucan's scolding became even louder.

Despite the small incident in the evening, they still had to continue with their journey. During the day, Lu Xiucan was still tied up. However, instead of hanging him from a tree, he was now tied to the ox-cart.

A shadow of gloom covered the faces of everyone in the Lu Family Troupe. But to Li Huowang who had experienced numerous

battles, it was not all that significant whether Lu Xiucan lived or died.

Li Huowang himself had enough troubles, and he didn't have the leisure to worry about others.

The journey continued, and people gradually adapted to Lu Xiucan's new changes.

Eventually, Lu Xiucan was released; after all, he was not Li Huowang. If a person was not strong enough, then his hatred would simply seem laughable. The change in temperament hadn't really increased his strength. Ultimately, he was still a frail young man. Under Lu Zhuangyuan's tobacco pipe and his elder brother's fists, he obediently followed as they continued their journey.

At the same time, Troupe Leader Lu noticed that although his younger son had become more irritable, there wasn't much change in other aspects of his behavior.

For example, he still exchanged vulgar jokes with Puppy and occasionally teased his niece, Cui'er. It was just his voice that had become much louder.

Even so, the boy still harbored deep resentment toward his father for hanging him up and beating him. He continued to glare at his father's back with a cold expression.

Yet, he dared not look at Li Huowang, who had also beaten him up.

Chapter 264 - Master

“Old bones! Just you wait! There’ll come a time when you can’t move either...” Lu Xiucan muttered under his breath with a fierce look on his face.

Puppy leaned over and used his elbow to bump him. “Ah, you’ve got guts stealing Senior Li’s sword.”

Lu Xiucan glanced at him with disdain. “Such a joke! What’s the big deal just holding a sword? Don’t you dare?”

“Of course not. That sword has such a strong bloody smell. I feel uncomfortable even getting close to it,” replied Puppy.

Hearing this, Lu Xiucan appeared even more pleased with himself. “Why would I be afraid of that? Let me tell you, I pulled it out precisely because I sensed the strong smell. As long as I want to, I still dare to do it even now!”

“Wow, very impressive.”

While the two chatted, they dropped the firewood by the iron pot, then turned back to fetch water.

“Xiucan, come over here for a moment.” Li Huowang, who was sitting on a tree stump with Lu Zhangyuan, gestured toward the slender youth in the distance.

As Puppy looked on gleefully at his misfortune, Lu Xiucan lowered his head and walked over.

As Lu Xiucan looked up at the one-eyed young man, he felt a sudden jolt of panic. He once again lowered his head and focused on the straw sandals on his feet.

“Don’t look down. Look up at me,” said Li Huowang.

Hearing this, Lu Xiucan eventually raised his head.

“How have you been feeling recently? Is your temperament still the same?” Li Huowang asked calmly.

Lu Xiucan shook his head. "Much better. It's almost like it was before I picked up the sword."

At that moment, Puppy had a mischievous grin on his face as he approached Li Huowang. He repeated the conversation he just had with Lu Xiucan to them.

Upon hearing that his son had said such words, Lu Zhangyuan sighed deeply, then lowered the tobacco pipe in his hand. "You damned brat! You..."

Lu Xiucan was about to scold Puppy fiercely, but a slap had already landed on his face.

It was Li Huowang who struck him. When he saw Lu Xiucan stare back at him fiercely, he turned toward Lu Zhuangyuan and said, "Troupe Leader Lu, all these days have passed, and yet there has been no change in him. It seems like this influence will stick with him for the rest of his life."

"Young Daoist, is there no other way?" Lu Zhuangyuan asked unwillingly. Although he had always despised his younger son for being foolish and timid, the previous version was much better than the one before him.

"If you are afraid that Lu Xiucan's tyrannical character will cause big trouble in the future, then you can just cut off the root of the problem now," said Li Huowang.

Those words not only scared Lu Xiucan, they also surprised Lu Zhuangyuan. Both of them showed fear in their eyes.

"That... that's not necessary, really not necessary," said Lu Zhangyuan as he forced a smile and pulled his younger son away from Li Huowang.

On the other hand, though Lu Xiucan had a look of disgust as his dad approached him, he dared not push him away when he saw the tobacco pipe his dad held in his other hand.

Just as they were about to leave, a shout rang out from behind to stop them.

“Hold on, I just thought of a way. Perhaps it might turn Lu Xiucan back. It depends on whether you guys are willing to take the risk,” said Li Huowang.

Lu Xiucan and Lu Zhuangyuan both turned around simultaneously, only to see Li Huowang holding a parchment filled with words.

What Li Huowang held now was none other than the technique he had forced out of Han Fu’s Nascent Soul—the Xiandu Cishen Seal that allowed one to control the copper coin sword.

If his guess was correct, the ability of any sect was the application of some object.

Since Lu Xiucan now had the influence of malicious energy on him, it was a good opportunity to use the cultivation technique of the disciples of Luoism to try and purify it. Regardless of what the disciples of Luoism practiced or absorbed, it would suffice as long as it could replace the current malicious energy on him.

Moreover, Lu Xiucan could also help him test out whether or not there were any tricks in the technique, thus killing two birds with one stone.

While Lu Zhuangyuan was still hesitating, the excited Lu Xiucan knelt directly in front of Li Huowang, and pounded his forehead on the soil, giving three loud knocks. As he raised his forehead with red mud caked on it, his eyes were filled with a strong thirst for power.

“Master! Accept me as your disciple! I am willing to learn your supernatural abilities!” said Lu Xiucan.

On the other hand, Li Huowang looked at Lu Zhuangyuan, choosing to wait for his response.

After a difficult moment of hesitation, Lu Zhuangyuan finally nodded. He decided to take the risk in hopes of seeing his son return to normal. The Young Daoist had also mentioned that the risk was not that high. And if they succeeded, then his useless son

would really end up having a meteoric rise.

“Alright, let's give it a try. Perhaps it will work,” said Li Huowang as he handed the parchment to Lu Xiucan, who was staring at him passionately.

As soon as Lu Xiucan took it, he eagerly began to read it.

However, immediately after giving the parchment to Lu Xiucan, Li Huowang sighed deeply, and used his fingers to massage his throbbing forehead in a helpless manner. “Xiucan, didn't you notice that you took it upside down?”

“Master, I can't read.” Lu Xiucan dumbfoundedly looked at Li Huowang.

“Ah... You really don't live up to your name[1].”

Li Huowang took the parchment back, and relayed its contents word by word. It was a tiring task, especially when dealing with an illiterate person who couldn't even write his own name.

Fortunately, Li Huowang had some time on his hands, and Lu Xiucan's determination to learn the supernatural arts kept him going, despite the exhaustion.

By the time they reached the town, Lu Xiucan had just learnt the beginning part of the technique.

Li Huowang's group was big, but there were also many other farmers from other villages that were traveling toward the town to sell their wares. Thus, the road had grown much busier.

Watching Lu Xiucan, who was tirelessly reciting his cultivation mantra beside him, Li Huowang asked, "Don't you want to kill me?"

“Master, what are you talking about? Why would I want to kill you?” Lu Xiucan responded calmly.

Li Huowang could tell that he was not lying. With his nature, he would have easily exposed himself if he tried to lie.

“I've beaten you up before, and I even planned to persuade your father to kill you. I'm really surprised that you aren't holding a grudge with your current personality,” said Li Huowang.

“I’ve just become a bit more temperamental. I haven’t turned into a lunatic. Besides, you taught me the supernatural abilities which have already offset that,” Lu Xiucai said matter-of-factly.

Li Huowang nodded in understanding and patted the ox pulling the cart.

“Moo~” The ox mooed and continued pulling the cart toward the town gate.

Upon entering the town, the guards insisted on inspecting the ox-cart with the Black Taisui in it. After some effort and with a few pieces of silver, the seasoned Lu Zhuangyuan finally managed to get them across safely.

They stepped back onto the cobblestone streets, and observed the lively market, where everyone seemed to have come back to life. Following their usual routine, they found an inn and enjoyed a good meal. After settling in, each person started to carry out their own agendas.

As a local, Bai Lingmiao brought Chun Xiaoman to find a map and pinpoint the position of Cowheart Mountain.

Meanwhile, Puppy, Zhao Wu and Gao Zhijian went to sell off the sheep and buy more food.

As for Li Huowang, he ventured into the town to investigate any traces of the Surveillance Bureau.

1. Xiucai in Chinese also refers to scholars 📖

Chapter 265 - Town

Usually, it was the others' responsibility to obtain information. But, this time was different; his direction of inquiry was related to the Surveillance Bureau. It was simply far too dangerous for others to inquire about these mysterious and unpredictable entities.

However, Li Huowang didn't have to be concerned about that. His newly acquired powers gave him a distinct advantage in his investigation.

As long as he kept his illusion underground, his physical body could stay outside while staying hidden.

And in any case, if he was targeted, then he had nothing to worry about. His sharp senses would allow him to anticipate those threats earlier.

All the people were scattered throughout the town like white sesame seeds on a pancake. Everybody was busy with their things until nightfall when they finally all gathered again at the inn.

"Senior Li, I've sold all of the sheep. People were in a frenzy to get these sheep as soon as they knew that they came from Qing Qiu! I also bought some refined grains. I couldn't even poop normally after eating whole grains every day the past few days," said Puppy as he walked side-by-side with Zhao Wu and playfully handed the heavy silver coins to Li Huowang.

"Give it to Zhao Wu to manage. He normally handles the accounts," instructed Li Huowang.

Feeling a bit low-spirited, Li Huowang turned and walked into his room. As he lay on the bed, he felt the piercing pain in his feet due to walking all day.

If there was anything worse than catching the attention of the Surveillance Bureau, that would be not being able to find any

information about them at all. He knew that finding the Surveillance Bureau in just one day was improbable, but he couldn't help feeling discouraged.

This way of searching won't work. It's like trying to find a needle in a haystack. I must come up with a different strategy to connect with the Surveillance Bureau as soon as possible.

Li Huowang rubbed his forehead, contemplating his next steps in the dark room.

At that moment, a pair of hands with long, sharp black nails reached out from under the bed as they removed Li Huowang's shoes and socks before gently soaking his weary feet in warm water. At the same time, the pitch-black room fell into silence, devoid of any sound.

The tranquility lasted for an entire hour before Li Huowang broke the silence himself.

Li Huowang suddenly sat up, and excitedly said to Monk's illusion standing in front of him, "Wait a minute, think about the time when that old Lama appeared! Yes, that's it! Since the Surveillance Bureau deals with things that regular authorities can't handle, I just need to get involved in as many troublesome matters as possible. That way, I'll have a better chance at getting in touch with the Surveillance Bureau quickly!"

"You're right!" Monk nodded approvingly while standing beside the headless Peng Longteng.

Li Huowang realized that he had been looking in the wrong direction before. Instead of inquiring about the Surveillance Bureau itself, he should be investigating any bizarre and supernatural incidents in the area. As long as there were such occurrences, the Surveillance Bureau was sure to make an appearance.

With this realization, Li Huowang could no longer contain his excitement. He lifted his feet from the basin, hastily put on his shoes and socks even as his feet were still too wet, and rushed out.

But as soon as he pushed the door open, the excited Li Huowang came face-to-face with Lu Zhuangyuan.

“Hehe, Daoist, have you eaten?” Lu Zhuangyuan asked with a smile.

“Do you need something?” Li Huowang asked coldly while bracing himself against the doorframe.

“Oh, um, how is Xiucan doing? If he is not behaving, then just give him a good beating! From my experience, a bit of toughness is necessary when learning a craft. Also, please, you don’t need to be too polite with me,” said Lu Zhuangyuan.

“He is very diligent. However, he is learning at a slower pace because he cannot read,” said Li Huowang truthfully.

“Oh, Daoist, why is my life so tough? I finally got a grandson, and now this happens,” said Lu Zhuangyuan.

“If there’s something, then just say it. Otherwise, I have urgent matters to attend to,” said Li Huowang, sensing that there was more to the conversation. This old man wouldn’t come here just to complain. That was not like him.

“Yes! Daoist, did you forget? It is regarding borrowing money to re-open the theater. I’ve been searching all day, and there are plenty of things in this place—costumes, mirrors, musical instruments! So, um...”

“Are you still not giving up?” asked Li Huowang. To be honest, he felt that when compared with the troupe from Liang Kingdom, the Lu Family Troupe’s modest performances gave them no competitive edge.

“Well... I want to give it a try. I’ve thought of a way. Maybe I can make a living by picking up some leftover business from these troupes,” Lu Zhuangyuan chuckled.

“Alright, go get the money from Zhao Wu. He should have enough cash available now,” said Li Huowang, pushing him aside and quickly heading toward the inn’s staircase.

Compared to the matter of the Surveillance Bureau, Lu Zhuangyuan's aspirations to revive his troupe were immediately pushed to the back of Li Huowang's mind.

In the following period, Li Huowang went to great lengths in order to locate the Surveillance Bureau in Liang Kingdom. He went out early and returned late, gathering information from the town residents.

Li Huowang decided to overlook those who died or were cursed because he knew that such insignificant instances would only draw the attention of Shamans or local mediums, and not the Surveillance Bureau.

Having been in this world for quite some time, Li Huowang also understood what kind of existence the Surveillance Bureau was and what they cared about.

The Surveillance Bureau only ever focused on significant events, such as large-scale disasters that could lead to the death of tens of thousands. For example, the town that was massacred by the Sitting Oblivion Dao, or events that defied the laws set by the Imperial Court.

However, such matters that could attract the attention of the Surveillance Bureau were not all that common. After searching for a while, Li Huowang didn't find any paranormal or evil occurrences. However, he did hear a lot of gossip and rumors about various trivial matters.

Of course, Li Huowang knew that if he took off the copper coin mask on his face and revealed that he was the Strayed One, it would undoubtedly attract the attention of the Surveillance Bureau immediately. However, that was not what he wanted.

Late into the night, Bai Lingmiao gently opened her eyes as she lay on the bed while looking at Li Huowang, who was fast asleep next to her with his head covered. A trace of concern crept into her heart.

Every day, Senior Li wakes up before dawn, and only returns after I've gone to sleep. I'm also not sure what he's in search of.

Bang, bang, bang!

Someone violently banged on the door as an eager voice sounded from outside the room, "Master! I've done it! I now have supernatural powers!"

The moment this voice sounded, Li Huowang abruptly opened his eyes, fixing his bloodshot gaze on the door. It was Lu Xiucan's voice. He sat up right away, lifted the covers, and walked toward the door.

Li Huowang had just put on his shoes when he suddenly remembered something. He turned to look at Bai Lingmiao on the bed and asked, "How is it going? Have you found your home?"

In response, Bai Lingmiao nodded with a hint of a smile in her eyes. She reached under the pillow and took out a map, handing it over. "Senior Li, I have found it, but you've been going out a lot lately, and I haven't had a chance to tell you."

Li Huowang quickly unfolded the map and saw various winding lines, among which a red line stood out, leading to the Cowheart Mountain.

"The merchant who sold the map said that if we are using an ox-cart, it would probably take us about a month. It would be faster on horseback, but unfortunately, none of us know how to ride horses."

Chapter 266 - Pink Show

Li Huowang nodded when he heard Bai Lingmiao. “It’s ok, we can go slow. How many more urns do we still have?”

“Don’t worry about them. Chun Xiaoman went to the escort office and entrusted them with the last of the urns that were to be sent back to their respective homes,” said Bai Lingmiao.

Hearing this, Li Huowang felt his heart become lighter.

Bam bam bam!

At that moment, an urgent knocking sound came from outside the room and interrupted both of them. “Master! Open the door! I did it!”

Li Huowang placed the map down and walked to the door.

Creak~

The door opened to reveal Lu Xiucan standing outside as he shouted excitedly with heavy eye-bags under his eyes. He held a single coin in his palm. It was the coin that Li Huowang had taken off from the bronze coin sword for Lu Xiucan to practice with.

“Master, I did it! The bronze coin just moved!” Lu Xiucan ran into the room without waiting for Li Huowang to say anything and placed the coin on the table.

Then, he started chanting to it while stomping his foot. “Am da mu bao tuo nan er!”

He kept repeating the chant and his voice slowly got louder and louder. His veins slowly started bulging and he looked like he was about to eat the coin. He repeated the chant numerous times before the coin finally vibrated.

Covered in sweat, Lu Xiucan excitedly looked toward Li Huowang. “Master, look! I did it!”

Li Huowang walked over, inspected Lu Xiucan, and then looked

at the bronze coin on the table. “You did it? Did you feel anything wrong with your body?”

“No, I feel great! This is the happiest day of my life! I’m finally half an Immortal! Hahaha!”

Lost in his own thoughts, Li Huowang looked at Lu Xiucan.

From the looks of it, Hanfu’s Nascent Soul did not lie to me; however, this is only the start. The side effects might manifest at the end. I only have one life, and so it’s better to be cautious.

“Continue training and don’t stop. Go back now. I will teach the other half to you tomorrow,” said Li Huowang.

Lu Xiucan nodded and left.

Once the boy left, Li Huowang turned around and smiled at Bai Lingmiao. He closed the door and lay down on the bed once again.

“Xiucan looks a lot better now,” Bai Lingmiao whispered to him.

“Hoho, is that so? I don’t think so. He’s completely different compared to before. I hope he can return to normal after learning it.” Li Huowang closed his eyes and steadied his breathing.

“Senior Li, what have you been up to all these days?”

Li Huowang closed his eyes. “Nothing much. Don’t worry, in just a few days, we will resume our journey once more. I won’t keep you from going home.”

At that moment, Li Huowang suddenly felt a pair of soft hands holding him. “Senior Li, I’m not worried about my home... I am worried about you.”

“Me? What’s there to worry about? With the Black Taisui, I won’t start hallucinating again. My left eye is slowly growing back and I can already see some light with it. It should regain vision in a few more days. Plus, no one is chasing after us this time. This is one of the best times of our lives,” said Li Huowang.

Li Huowang felt Bai Lingmiao’s soft body cuddling against him. He hugged her waist and pulled her closer.

Bai Lingmiao didn't believe him one bit—she knew him like the back of her hands.

Sensing her distrust, Li Huowang sighed. He opened his one eye and saw the three illusions standing beside him.

After a moment, Li Huowang patted Bai Lingmiao's back gently and comforted her, "Don't worry. Everything will be fine. We will solve it."

Days passed and slowly, Li Huowang had explored most of the town. Even though he had some leads, he still hadn't managed to obtain any results from them.

At this moment, Li Huowang carefully placed his illusion beneath the ground and sat on a wall while observing the people walking past him.

Horse carriages and ox-carts passed by non-stop. The oxes shat wherever they wanted, but some children with baskets took the feces away not long after.

After the children collected the feces, they would stand beside a stall that sold pancakes. They were entranced by the delicious frying smell.

Staring at the people in front of him, Li Huowang silently pondered.

Maybe this place is too small. Even though a lot of people pass by here and there is a lot of gossip, I still don't have a proper lead. Maybe I need to go somewhere larger? I can't stay here for too long. If I can't find them today, then I will have to go somewhere else. I'm sure I will meet them one day.

After pondering for a while, Li Huowang leaped down from the wall and walked over to a tea shop. It was a place where one could find the most up to date information. All of the information about the town would go through here first.

Just as Li Huowang walked into the tea shop, a group of men ran out excitedly.

“Let’s go! I heard that there’s a troupe performing a pink show over there! The show they are performing is much more exciting than the storyteller of the tea shop!”

Troupe?

Li Huowang was confused. The only troupe left in the town should be the Lu Family Troupe.

After thinking about it for a moment, he entered the tea shop. However, except for the storyteller and the waiter who were talking to each other, there was no one else.

Well, I don’t think I will be able to glean any information here.

Li Huowang walked out and followed the group of men, running after them.

Li Huowang wanted to see what kind of show Lu Zhuangyuan was able to put up to have everyone within the tea shop be attracted by it.

The stage was not too far away, located at the western side of the town. Beneath the stage was a thronging crowd. Some of them were chewing on beans while others were talking.

When Li Huowang got close, he saw Lu Juren pointing toward his wife while performing.

“Ai~ I~ Don’t want the best, nor the worst~ I want~ I want~ I want you~ and your heart~”

The crowd cheered underneath the stage.

This is not the script I remember.

Li Huowang was puzzled when he saw Lu Juren’s performance. Just as his thoughts reached this point, Lu Xiucan started singing to the beat of the music.

“I touch her nose~ Fragrance flows out from the room~ I touch her mouth~ Her eyes smile bewitchingly~ I touch her chin and she places it on her chest~ I touch her ears and they flutter to my touch.”

The lyrics were normal in the beginning, but they slowly

became more and more obscene until everyone started whistling beneath the stage.

Li Huowang now knew why it was called the “pink show”. He had been wondering why there were only men in the audience and no women.

Even faced with the incredible performance of the Liang Kingdom’s troupe, Lu Zhuangyuan had actually found a way to perform here.

He is indeed an experienced performer.

After satisfying his curiosity, Li Huowang decided to leave the performance early.

But just as he turned around, something piqued his interest.

“This is much more interesting than the pink show from Pi County.”

“I thought that a plague was sweeping through there? You still dare to go there?”

Chapter 267 - Resume The Journey

Plague?

Li Huowang was immediately attracted to what they said. His instincts told him that this was what he had been looking for.

Li Huowang stood near the two men while ignoring the stage completely. He was waiting for them to continue speaking. But what made him anxious was that they had been talking excitedly when he accidentally overheard them, but now they had gone completely silent.

After a moment, Li Huowang walked up to the fat one among the two and gently patted his shoulder. "My dear friend, may I ask what is happening within Pi County? Why is there a plague? I hadn't heard anything about it before."

The fatty, who had been concentrating on the pink show, was displeased when he got interrupted by Li Huowang. "What is it to you? Who are you?"

But when Li Huowang passed him two fragmented pieces of silver, the fatty immediately perked up and became much more polite.

"I hope this is enough. My relatives are staying in Pi County and I'm worried that something might've happened to them if there is a plague. I'm sorry for my brashness; I'm just worried about them," said Li Huowang, making up a story.

The fatty couldn't care less if Li Huowang was saying some bullshit; after all, the money was real. With this, he was more than happy to help Li Huowang.

"You could've just said so. It's nothing much, don't worry about

me,” said the fat man as he took the two fragmented pieces of silver. “Don’t worry, your relatives should still be alive. While the Pi County doesn’t actually have a plague, it would still be better to bring them out of there. The feng shui over there is quite bad.”

After speaking to this point, the fatty then whispered, as if afraid of someone overhearing them, “But let me tell you this. When I was there on business with them last time, I saw that the people over there were very nervous and their faces didn't look healthy. I don’t know what happened to them, but I could see why the people would say that there was a plague in Pi County. Those people looked worse than sick people.”

“The entire county’s people looked very nervous and unhealthy?” muttered Li Huowang.

After a moment of thought, he asked another question, “Is there anything else weird about Pi County?”

Even though this world was quite bizarre, it was still too early to know what was happening to the people of Pi County based on just these two clues.

“I don’t know. I just went there and quickly came back. If you are worried, you can go there and see them yourself. It’s just a ten day journey so it should be fine. See, I came back safely didn’t I?” said the fat man.

“Ten days?” muttered Li Huowang as he turned around and went back to the inn.

Back at the inn, Li Huowang unfurled the map with Bai Lingmiao and soon found where the Pi County was. It was in the same direction as Cowheart Mountain!

In the end, Li Huowang decided to check it out.

It was not a minor case if an entire county went crazy. Li Huowang felt that he had a high chance of encountering the people from the Surveillance Bureau over there.

This was his only choice.

Just then, Lu Xiucan ran into the room excitedly. Just as he was about to say something, Li Huowang looked at him and said, “Go tell your father to stop performing once you end with the current one. We will resume our journey tomorrow.”

Hearing this, Lu Xiucan nodded and ran off.

By now, everyone was already used to Li Huowang suddenly telling them to move out. Soon, they loaded all their stuff into the ox-cart and the newly bought horse carriage. As for where they were heading and what they were doing, they were either too lazy or too scared to ask. All they had to do was follow Li Huowang’s orders.

The only thing different this time around was that the Lu family was now much happier after their performance. All of their faces were ruddy and refreshed.

“Hehehe, Young Daoist~ This is what we agreed upon last time. Half of it is yours while the other half is mine,” Lu Zhuangyuan showed several fragmented silver and bronze coins to Li Huowang.

Li Huowang stared at the grinning Lu Zhuangyuan. “What? You managed to earn this much?”

Li Huowang knew that the Lu Family’s past performances had never been this lucrative.

“Hohoho, the Liang Kingdom is indeed wealthy. Everyone here is so rich~” said Lu Zhuangyuan as he smiled happily and placed the money onto the ox-cart.

When Zhao Wu saw that Li Huowang did not turn down the money, he took a piece of string and tied up the bronze coins.

Li Huowang naturally did not turn it down. Even though the amount wasn’t huge, they would still be able to deal with their daily expenses using it. At the very least, their meals would be more luxurious every day.

“Bring out the cured meat. Let’s make baked rice with cured

meat,” instructed Li Huowang.

When Li Huowang said that, he suddenly heard someone gulp. He felt that they should’ve eaten enough meat back in Qing Qiu, and so there was no reason for them to be so hungry for meat.

“Who did that? Did you not eat anything today?” questioned Li Huowang.

When he turned around, Li Huowang saw that it was not someone from his group, but a skinny man with white hair. Behind him was a youth. Both of them were harvesters and were on the same path as Li Huowang.

When they noticed that Li Huowang was staring at them, the old harvester started staring toward a harvested field on the other side.

Growl~

The old harvester’s stomach was still grumbling. After a moment, he placed his shoulder pole down before tying the hemp rope on his waist tighter.

Li Huowang stared at the harvester’s tattered clothes and then continued on with his journey.

Throughout their journey, no one spoke besides Puppy.

When the sun was about to set, the ox-cart finally came to a stop and everyone immediately started with their respective chores.

“Senior Li, look! There’s a wild vegetable here that we can eat to offset the oil from the cured meat!”

Due to being focused on the map, Li Huowang didn’t know who said that.

He was focused on the map because they couldn’t afford to make a single mistake. One wrong turn and they would have to waste days just to travel back.

Soon, dinner was served. Their menu tonight was baked rice with cured meat as well as some wild vegetable soup.

Looking at the oily rice with bits of cured meat within, Li

Huowang looked at the two harvesters sitting farther away from their group.

At this moment, the two harvesters were scooping up some cold water from a stream to drink while eating multigrain rice balls from their pouch. The younger harvester was staring at Li Huowang's bowl of hot rice, only to be stopped by the older harvester pressing his head down.

After a moment of thought, Li Huowang said, "Take two bowls of rice and give it to them."

"Alright." Bai Lingmiao nodded before turning to the pot.

Chapter 268 - Pi County

When Bai Lingmiao gave the two bowls of rice to the harvesters, they accepted them with trembling hands before thanking her.

Compared to Li Huowang and the others who needed wild vegetable soup to offset the oiliness of the rice, the harvesters had no such qualms and gulped down the rice with gratitude.

But they only ate the rice and picked out the cured meat before placing it within their pouch. They wanted to save it for later.

After eating, the harvesters washed the bowls by the creek and happily returned them to Li Huowang. Even though they were missing a few teeth, they were grinning happily.

The old harvester wanted to say something, but he wasn't sure how. In the end, Li Huowang broke the silence first.

"Old man, the harvest season was so good this year. Why are you still working even though you are so old?"

"The... the fields all belonged to the landlord. The bountiful harvest had nothing to do with us. We can't even eat any of it," The old harvester smiled and explained. Before continuing, "Thank you for the delicious meal, Daoist. That meal was enough to keep us full for an entire day."

"No worries. It's just a bowl of rice. Old man, are you working near the fields here? Have you been to Pi County before?" asked Li Huowang, finally revealing his intention.

"Of course! I have been there many times! After all, I've been harvesting the fields at Pi County all these years," replied the old man. He was quite excited to be able to share his experiences and became confident. He used his calloused hands to gesture in the air. "Let me tell you this. Harvesting wheat is all about technique!

Those youngsters don't have the technique and can't do as well as me! For example, you can't hold your sickle too high or too low. You need to be just right!"

Li Huowang interrupted his explanation. "Old man, have you gone to Pi County recently?"

"Yes, I went there before. I came back here this time to bring my nephew or I might've already finished harvesting all of the wheat in Pi County by now. It takes technique—"

"You went there before? Have you seen anything wrong with the people there?"

While Li Huowang was not worried that nothing had happened there, he was worried that the problem wasn't large enough. If the problem wasn't serious, then the Surveillance Bureau would not send anyone there and he would just be wasting time by going there.

Seeing Li Huowang become serious, the old harvester got nervous. He scratched the back of his head and stuttered, "I do—don't think there's anything wrong with them. They always pay and feed me, but for some reason, they prefer to stay in their houses and never come out. They would just place the food and money outside and tell us to take it for ourselves."

Panicky, looks terrible, and they love to stay in their own houses?

Li Huowang carefully pondered the three things and the relationship between them.

Regardless, it doesn't seem like the Surveillance Bureau has solved the situation yet.

Li Huowang was cautious as he asked once again, "Is there anything else wrong with them? Did their faces or physical appearances change?"

"What do you mean? They looked the same to me. One nose, two nostrils, two eyes, two ears."

Li Huowang knew that they might look human on the surface,

but the people in Pi County might be something else entirely.

No matter what happened there, I hope it was serious enough.

Li Huowang prayed for the best.

Seeing how the Daoist did not talk to him anymore, the old harvester walked back to his nephew.

But just as he was halfway there, he turned back toward Li Huowang once again. "Oh, I nearly forgot. The people of Pi County apparently like to hit their children! I remember collecting the payment and walking past a window. Back then, I heard their children crying profusely. If I was in their place, I wouldn't hit my child that badly."

Li Huowang started analyzing what he had heard.

Are they hitting their children or are they using their children for something else?

Li Huowang recalled how the water bandits sacrificed the babies to summon a monster. After surviving in this bizarre world for so long, Li Huowang would now always think about the worst-case scenario.

This was also why he grew slightly more troubled when he heard what the harvester just said. He wanted the issue to be large enough that it would attract the Surveillance Bureau, but not large enough that they would be in danger.

By the time Li Huowang snapped back, he saw that the harvesters were gone and the sky was already dark.

Li Huowang shook his head and washed up by the creek. "It's getting more and more confusing. Whatever... I will just see what the situation looks like later and decide what to do."

The two harvesters bid farewell to them on the second day. Since the wheat in Pi County had already been harvested, they were going somewhere else to find work.

Days passed and they met other people along the way. Li Huowang always tried to gain information about Pi County through

them.

Unfortunately, all they knew was that Pi County seemed to be suffering from a plague and advised Li Huowang to not go there. There was no new information. The only good thing they found out was that there were no bandits around here.

Perhaps the Liang Kingdom is very good at dealing with them.

Soon, they reached Pi County.

“Is this Pi County?” Li Huowang stood atop a hill and observed the town surrounded by walls. His other eye had grown back completely.

The day was gloomy with dark clouds hanging low. The entire town looked desolate and creepy.

Staring at how the town was built, Li Huowang finally knew why they called it Pi County.

It was because the town was built in the shape of the character “Pi”.

“This place seems ominous. Everyone, be careful,” Li Huowang warned them before walking into the town.

When they entered the town, Li Huowang was visibly uncomfortable; there were too few people in the town. The streets were empty and devoid of life, with only some passersby quickly passing by them from time to time.

At the same time, Li Huowang felt a lot of people were staring at them. The gazes were coming from behind the windows. He could feel a lot of the townsfolk staring at them through the windows.

Just then, a woman carrying a baby walked toward them with a haggard face. When she got close, she was visibly surprised by the appearance of Li Huowang and everyone else. She bit her lips, hugged her crying baby closer, and quickly ran past them.

When the woman passed by them, Li Huowang closed his eyes and smelled the air.

“Awoo.” Bun sat down and nudged Li Huowang with its paws.

In response, Li Huowang patted Bun’s head. “You smelled it too? That’s right. There’s the scent of blood and rust on that woman.”

Chapter 269 - Inn

“Oooowu~” Bun shook its tail. It could indeed smell the two scents, but as a dog it didn't know what Li Huowang was saying.

Just then, Monk's illusion spoke to him, “Daoist, if she has the scent of blood and rust on her, is she a good person or a bad person?”

Li Huowang just shook his head and looked up at the sky. Just then, a single raindrop fell into his eye.

“Let's go, it's going to rain soon. Let's find an inn to stay at first,” instructed Li Huowang.

The rain was initially light, but gradually grew stronger. By the time Li Huowang and the others finally managed to enter an inn, it was pouring in full force.

Shaking the rain off his body, Li Huowang shouted toward the inside of the inn. “Waiter! Owner!”

He shouted for quite a bit before the waiter finally appeared with a white cloth over his shoulder.

When the waiter saw so many outsiders, he was shocked and panicked momentarily as he instinctively tried to retreat.

However, Puppy jumped out and grabbed the waiter's wrist to stop him from retreating. “Where are you going? Can't you see that we are here as paying customers? Quickly ask the cook to prepare a meal for us. My wife and Senior Li are both hungry!”

“Alright, please wait,” replied the waiter, very close to losing it.

When the waiter ran back into the kitchen, Li Huowang frowned. He was worried about what was happening here.

“Xiaoman, go and follow him. Make sure that they don't try to poison us,” instructed Li Huowang.

Chun Xiaoman nodded and went into the kitchen with her

sword. Bai Lingmiao followed her soon after.

“Young Daoist, why don’t we leave here once the rain stops?” suggested Lu Zhuangyuan. He didn’t know that Li Huowang had actually come here with a purpose, but as an experienced traveler, he could feel that something was wrong.

“Don’t worry. They are afraid of us instead of the other way around. The town is big and everyone is tired. It’s best if we rest here first,” replied Li Huowang.

Hearing this, Lu Zhuangyuan dared not to argue with Li Huowang anymore.

The Young Daoist is very strong; it would be for the best if I don’t make him angry. Even if this place is weird, I’m sure he will be able to deal with it.

Soon, the fragrant dishes were brought out one by one. Every time the waiter brought out a plate of the meal, Li Huowang took a small piece of it and threw it under the table, allowing Bun to happily eat it.

It was only after seeing that Bun was doing fine that the others started eating.

Munching on the crispy lotus root, Li Huowang silently ate his meal; even so, he could feel the two gazes coming from within the kitchen.

The waiter and the cook were staring at them with fear.

Li Huowang recalled the woman they had passed by just now and remembered how she was staring at them with fear too.

Li Huowang knew that he didn’t look as horrible as he did last time—everything had grown back. And after adjusting his organs little by little, his face should also be quite normal now.

Then what are they afraid of? This is a large town, so there’s no reason to be afraid of just a few outsiders. Did they encounter something?

Li Huowang continued to think of a reason while having his

meal.

The rain did not stop even late into the night. It continued to pound the streets with water.

“Waaaa~” Lu Juren’s son, being afraid of the rain, continued to cry. Lu Juren tried comforting his son, but nothing was working.

“Aiyo~ That’s not the way to do it, here let me,” said Luo Juanhua as she took her son, opened her clothes, and started breastfeeding the baby.

“What are you doing?! Xiucai is still here!” Lu Juren quickly stood between his wife and his younger brother, using his body as a shield.

“What are you afraid of? Look at him. Do you think he’s even interested in me?” asked Luo Juanhua.

Hearing this, Lu Juren turned around and looked at his brother. He saw that Lu Xiucai had removed his shoes and was sitting on the bed. His eyes were closed and he continued to chant something. He didn’t even notice that his brother and sister-in-law were discussing him.

Lu Juren was actually against his younger brother learning supernatural powers from the Young Daoist. He knew his younger brother would not make it. Plus, he became like this from just a single touch of the Young Daoist’s sword. Lu Juren was worried that his younger brother would be lost forever.

But alas, Lu Juren was not the patriarch; Lu Zhuangyuan was still alive and he had all the power at the moment.

“Wait, where is father?” asked Lu Juren.

Hearing his question, Luo Juanhua rolled her eyes. “How would I know where your father went?”

Then, Luo Juanhua lowered her head toward her son. “My son, you cannot be as dense as your father. You will grow to be an official!”

At that moment, the door slammed open and Lu Zhuangyuan

walked in with a serious face.

“Father, where have you been?” Lu Juren approached him.

“Get lost. Why do you care what I am doing? Go to the kitchen and find me the cook,” growled Lu Zhuangyuan.

Knowing that he did not have any authority here, Lu Juren walked out of the room.

Meanwhile, Lu Zhuangyuan saw Luo Juanhua breastfeeding his grandson. He grinned for a moment, before becoming angry.

“Scoundrel! Quickly bring a cloth and cover her!”

Soon the cook was brought over. The cook had a mole on his chin and his face was as poor-looking as the waiter. His entire face was oily.

“Dear customer, did you call for me? Do you want to eat anything for supper?” asked the cook as he rubbed his hands nervously.

“Hohoho~” Lu Zhuangyuan chuckled and passed some fragmented silver to the cook. “Young man, as you can see my daughter-in-law just gave birth, but she can’t produce any breast milk. Could you please help me cook some braised pork knuckles and carp soup? It’s for her to produce breast milk.”

Hearing this, Luo Juanhua rolled her eyes and pouted. She did not need it. She had so much breastmilk that her son couldn’t even finish it. She could even feed Xiucui if she wanted.

But she chose to not say anything. After all, only an idiot would say no to a free meal of pork knuckles and carp soup.

“Oh~ Alright, I will go and prepare it. I remember that we still have half a pork knuckle in the kitchen,” said the cook as he turned around.

However, he was once again stopped by Lu Zhuangyuan. “Ai, don’t go so fast. I’m not done yet.”

As he spoke, Lu Zhuangyuan retrieved a silver ingot the size of his thumb and stealthily placed it in the cook’s hands. “Let me ask

you something. Did something happen to the people around here?”

Hearing this question, the cook, who had already been very cautious, suddenly panicked and threw the silver ingot away as if it were a venomous snake.

“Don’t ask me! I don’t know anything! I don’t know anything!!”
The cook ran out of the room in a panic.

Seeing this, Lu Zhuangyuan sighed and collected the silver ingot from the floor. He then turned to his seemingly empty left side and said, “Young Daoist, looks like the cook doesn’t want the silver.”

Chapter 270 - Fear

Amidst Lu Juren and Luo Juanhua's fearful gazes, Li Huowang's body slowly floated up from within the ground.

Then, he stared at the silver in Lu Zhuangyuan's palms and said, "It seems like he has been threatened by someone else. Alright then, there's nothing much you can do now."

With that, Li Huowang turned toward the door.

As Li Huowang opened the door, he once again sank his illusion into the ground. Once he became invisible again, he entered the kitchen.

The cook remained the same as before as he covered his body in a blanket and stared outside the window while trembling as if he was afraid of something.

Compared to the woman from earlier, the cook didn't have the smell of blood or rust on him.

While Li Huowang was stealthily observing him, the cook suddenly placed both of his hands into his pants. At the same time, his face became very snarly.

Seeing this, Li Huowang frowned and left.

Li Huowang went outside and saw the waiter wiping the tables while looking in the direction everyone was staying.

That fatty was right. The people of Pi County are indeed panicky and their faces really do look terrible.

Realizing that he wouldn't be able to find any information at the inn, Li Huowang walked out into the rain.

Just as he stepped out, he saw an old man who was wearing a raincoat and a veiled hat while coming from the opposite direction. He was wearing wooden clogs.

When the old man looked toward where Li Huowang was

standing, he was horrified by what he saw. He cried out loud before directly fainting in the rain.

What the? Did he see me? How did he see me?

Li Huowang looked down but saw nothing wrong with his technique; he was still invisible.

However, after a moment, Li Huowang then realized what was happening. Even though his illusion was inside the ground, his real body could still interact with the physical world. Now that it was raining and he was standing in the rain, others could see a human-shaped void where there is no rain.

It was no wonder that the old man fainted. Even Li Huowang would've been frightened if he saw something like that.

On the other hand, everyone had heard the old man screaming, causing them to look in his direction.

I can't do this now. I need to wait until after the rain stops.

Li Huowang returned to the inn.

Back in the room where the Lu family was staying, they were still discussing what they had seen vehemently.

"Heavens! The young Daoist can phase through walls!" exclaimed Luo Juanhua, shocked.

"Why are you so surprised? Calm down. This is normal," said Lu Zhuangyuan before turning toward his youngest son. He extended his hand and carefully patted his son's head. "Xiucai, did you see that? That is an amazing skill. You need to learn it well. Who knows what else you will be able to learn?"

However, Lu Xiucai instantly growled at his father. If it wasn't for his older brother, then he would've directly spat at his father.

"Don't bother me you old fool! I'm busy!" Lu Xiucai closed his eyes.

Seeing how his youngest son had changed so completely, Lu Zhuangyuan sighed and sat down near him while smoking. He had always controlled his youngest son by beating him; now, that wasn't

working anymore and so he didn't know how to teach his son.

The rain continued pouring throughout the night. It finally stopped the next day, but the skies were still dark.

Li Huowang wore a raincoat and exited the inn early in the morning. He walked past the awful-looking people within the town.

When they saw him, everyone scattered and stared at Li Huowang with fear in their eyes.

On the other hand, Li Huowang just ignored all of them and went straight toward the largest administration office of the town.

He had finally decided where to go after thinking about it last night.

If he wanted to find out what was happening within Pi County, then the administration office in charge of the entire county was definitely the place that would contain what he wanted to know.

I've been found.

Li Huowang glanced over his shoulder and saw two town guards following him. They were wearing blue robes and had the same awful look to them. Their lips were purple from the cold and they had heavy eye-bags under their eyes. Currently, they were glaring at Li Huowang's back.

Li Huowang decided to act as if he had not seen them before quickly turning into an alley.

Seeing this, the two town guards ran quickly and entered the alley behind him, but were shocked to find it empty.

"Old Wu, he's gone. What should we do?" asked the younger guard.

The older town guard looked at the ground, but couldn't find any footprints. After a moment, he waved his hand and said, "Let's go!"

Meanwhile, Li Huowang was hiding in a corner of the wall near the roof. After confirming that they had left, he quickly came down and carefully made his way to his destination.

Li Huowang knew that every county would have a book that recorded anything major that happened within the county. This book was Li Huowang's goal.

Li Huowang sank his illusion into the ground and turned invisible before easily entering the administration center. Once there, he searched around the offices and soon found what he needed.

Year of the Rat and Ox, Fourth Month, Famine... People sold their own children to buy food.

Year of the Earth Horse, end of the Lunar New Year, Eclipse.

Li Huowang flipped through the pages until the last entry. However, he was surprised to see that the latest entry was recorded two years ago and the only thing it recorded was that they had a good harvest that year.

Impossible. The entire County is struck with panic and fear, and yet they haven't recorded it down? Or... are they trying to cover it up?

Just as Li Huowang was thinking about it, he heard the painful cries of a boy. Surprised, he quickly placed the book back where it belonged. Then, he gently tiptoed across the hall to where the sound was coming from.

His sharp hearing could pick up the words that came from the child's mouth.

"Father... It's painful... Mother... I don't want it..."

Soon, Li Huowang found where the sound was coming from. It was coming from the firewood room. By now, the voice had also become very clear.

"Father! Stop! Don't pull it! Waaaa~ Mother~ It's painful! Stop..." The boy's voice was very miserable; it was as if he was being tortured.

Is this what the harvester told me about? They are beating up their child?

Li Huowang carefully approached the paper window and used

his wet finger to poke a hole through it.

As soon as he looked into the room, his pupils shrank in shock.

He saw a crying boy who was tied to a pillar. He looked quite awful.

Two people stood beside the boy. Based on their looks, they seem to be the boy's parents. Even though they looked reluctant, they still held a metal clamp and used it to pull at the boy's genitals.

In response, the boy shouted, his chained body shaking from the pain.

Li Huowang couldn't believe what he was seeing. The pain that the boy was suffering from was probably almost comparable to his own torture methods.

Chapter 271 - Yin And Yang

The boy tied to a pillar kept screaming as his parents continued to torture him in the small and suffocating woodshed. The sound of his screams was so miserable that even Li Huowang couldn't bear it.

After a while, the pulling force of the metal clamp eventually reduced. Taking advantage of this rare opportunity, the boy tilted his head to the side and gasped, taking in big gulps of air.

On the other hand, the brightly-dressed couple crouched down and carefully examined their son's lower body.

"How? Is it helpful?" asked the woman.

Hearing the woman's question, the man carefully used his fingers to measure a few times, his expression becoming increasingly disheartened with each measurement. "No good! We can't delay any longer. We must lock it, or it will be too late!"

Hearing those words, the child, who was drenched with sweat, was taken aback. He pleaded with a quivering voice, "Dad, I don't want to be locked! I don't want to!"

The man was also hesitant, but eventually sighed as he softly touched the back of the child's head. "Listen to me, Jing'er. A true man shouldn't be afraid of pain. Once the lock is applied, everything will be okay. It may hurt a little, but at the very least, you won't lose your manhood. Without it, you may not even be a man in the future."

"That's fine, then! I don't want to be a man! I don't want to be a man!" The boy continued to yell at his father as if trying to grasp a lifeline.

As he heard his son's cries, the man broke down in tears,

clearly feeling torn on the inside. Despite this, he still turned back and picked up an iron box from the ground nearby. After a moment, he opened the box and took out a small silver square lock with a silver chain.

“Dad!! Dad!! Please don't!!” The boy cried out in anguish, his terrified mind already anticipating the excruciating pain that was to come.

Just as the sharp lock was getting closer, the door suddenly burst open, and a gust of wind rushed in, making it impossible for the three of them to keep their eyes open.

Sensing the danger, the man holding the silver lock quickly turned around. With a panicked expression, he opened his hands to shield his son and wife as he shouted, “Who is it? Who is there? Help! Someone, quickly! Someone is trying to assassinate me!”

Upon hearing the commotion, it didn't take long for several constables clad in green to hurriedly rush in. Holding their straight knives, they clasped their fists toward the man. “Lord Yang, what's the matter?”

The county magistrate, Yang Hongzhi, pointed to the open door of the woodshed with trembling hands and fear in his eyes as he said, “The door just opened suddenly. It's here! That thing is here!!”

Meanwhile, Li Huowang was walking on an empty street with an odd expression. His mind was jumbled from what he had just seen as he kept muttering to himself, “They... they...”

Just then, Li Huowang heard another sound coming from the courtyard beside him. He immediately went into stealth mode once again. Then, he climbed over a nearby wall, and once again used his hands to peel open the paper window.

Soon, Li Huowang noticed a thin man in the room. The man was sitting on the edge of the bed, tilting his head back while ripping open his garments like a bat being dissected. He shamelessly displayed himself to the woman in front of him.

The man's expression appeared quite uneasy; it was as if he was awaiting some sort of impending judgment. "My wife... Darling... how is it? Has it shrunk at all?"

The woman carefully examined *him* for a moment, and then replied in an uncertain voice, "I think... it probably hasn't gotten smaller."

Hearing those words, the man instantly became agitated. "Liar!! I've measured it myself! It's over! Tying it up with a rope won't help! I'm going to become an eunuch soon!"

Upon hearing her husband say this, the woman couldn't help but feel anxious. "Then... then what should we do? Does tying it up with a rope not help at all?"

Upon hearing those words amidst his desperation, the man suddenly pounced on his wife and knocked her to the ground. At the same time, anger replaced the sadness on his face. "Damn it! No way! I haven't even gotten a son yet! You must give birth to a son for me right away!"

As Li Huowang watched this situation, coupled with the boy tied to the pillar he had seen earlier, he finally started to grasp what they were all up to. He stood back up with a strange expression on his face.

So, everyone in this county is afraid of that ... No wonder they were forcefully using chains earlier. But... how is that possible?

Suddenly, he felt a chill run down his spine.

Wait a minute, is all this... really happening or is all this just an act?

"Ah! Dear! You hurt me! It's locked now!"

The woman's cry of pain made Li Huowang look back into the room once again. There was not much to see among the tangled masses of pale flesh and blood. However, after a moment, Li Huowang noticed the chain close to the woman's chest.

Compared to the silver lock and chain he saw earlier, this

family could only afford iron ones.

The sharp chain was tightly wrapped around the woman's chest, forcefully pulling at her bosom, causing abrasions and bleeding where the skin met the metal chain. Rust had started to form as the blood continued to erode the chain. This device was basically torture.

With this, Li Huowang finally understood where the scent of blood and rust on the woman from earlier came from. They'd all been locking up to stop their organs from shrinking.

"Dear, don't panic. Look at me, I've locked it with a chain, so that it won't retract. You should do the same—tie it up with a chain, just like me."

Both the man and the woman are 'retracting' here. Just what kind of situation could have caused them to become like this?

Thinking about this, Li Huowang's heart felt heavier. Even with his extensive knowledge, he had never seen this kind of strange change before.

Li Huowang suddenly felt lost. Though he now understood what the residents of the county were terrified of, he did not know exactly what had caused all of this. While he was capable of dealing with the other issues, when it came to something so illogical, he couldn't even find a target to address.

Li Huowang stood on the roof, looking over the empty county. After a while, he stepped off the tiles beneath his feet and headed straight toward the inn.

No more dawdling! Who knows what caused all this. We must quickly find the reason!

In Li Huowang's eyes, the entire county now seemed like a trap. Even if it meant having to use unconventional techniques, it would still be better than sitting around idly while waiting for catastrophe.

Although the people in the county knew that something was

wrong, they were deliberately trying to keep it from him. Since diplomacy wasn't working, it was time to resort to more forceful methods.

As soon as Li Huowang entered the inn, he noticed the members of the Lu Family Troupe singing a pink show in the inn's empty lobby. Even though there weren't many people, there were still a few spectators.

Puppy was sitting with his legs crossed as snuggled with the pear-faced woman while watching the pink show with joy. Seeing Li Huowang, he waved his hand, signaling Li Huowang to come over. "Senior Li, come here! The Lu Family Troupe's performance has grown considerably more fascinating!"

Li Huowang glanced at him, then turned and walked toward his room, his voice carrying a hint of coldness, "Puppy, have the waiter come to my room."

"Alright!"

Chapter 272 - Ghost

Not long after, the waiter knocked on Li Huowang's door. When he entered, he saw the guest with the copper coin mask sitting at the round table while sipping tea.

"Yes? I heard that you were looking for me?" The waiter hunched his back as he approached the round table and asked cautiously.

"Sit," Li Huowang said as he poured a cup for the person in front of him.

"You're too kind; it's fine, I'll just stand. Do you have any instructions for me? Is there anything our inn hasn't taken care of properly?" asked the waiter.

Having been in the presence of foreigners for so long, the waiter no longer seemed to be so apprehensive of them.

Soon, a pinky-sized gold ingot was placed in front of the waiter as Li Huowang said, "I have some questions for you. If you can answer them, this gold is yours."

Before the waiter could fully comprehend what was happening, Li Huowang went straight to the point. "Why are the people in the county so afraid of genital retraction? What is the cause of it?"

Hearing this, the waiter, who had a forced smile on his face, was stunned before immediately turning around to flee.

But as soon as he turned around, his head collided with the stone slab on Gao Zhijian's chest. Seeing stars, his body lost all its strength as he staggered backward before falling onto the ground.

When he came to his senses again, he found himself bound tightly with tough ropes made of cow tendons. At the same time, a tall man was standing by, eyeing him fiercely.

Whoosh...

Accompanied by the sound of metal clanging, Li Huowang's set of torture tools slowly unfolded in front of the waiter.

As the waiter saw the sharp tools stained with dark red blood, he shuddered.

"I'm sorry, but I'm not very good with words. When I want to know something, I often tend to resort to my best skill set. I apologize for my lack of manners. After all, I haven't learned much else ever since arriving into this world. But I appear to be quite skilled at torturing people in a variety of ways," said Li Huowang.

As he heard Li Huowang's calm voice, the waiter felt like he had suddenly entered an icy cave, causing him to shudder.

"This thing is used for gouging out a person's eyeballs. Let me tell you something interesting—the eyeballs don't actually feel any pain. If you don't believe me, try prying open your eyelids and touching them. Any pain that you end up feeling will be from the flesh surrounding your eyeballs."

Goosebumps rose all over the waiter's body as the round iron instrument in Li Huowang's hands grazed the edge of his face.

The waiter was terrified by Li Huowang's words. But despite his pale face, he tightly pursed his lips, showing no intention of answering any of Li Huowang's questions.

Seeing that this approach wasn't working, Li Huowang put down the round iron clamp and picked up an iron spindle, displaying it in front of the waiter. "Do you know what this is? This is used for winding intestines, not threads. It's quite easy to use. You just need to make a small incision at your belly button, pull out one end of the intestine from within, wrap it on this spindle, and then continue pulling and pulling... Do you know how that feels? Close your eyes and think about it. If you don't want to think about it, that's fine too. After all, in a while, you'll personally get to experience it. Spoiler alert, it's not a pleasant feeling, and it makes you feel quite empty inside."

As soon as he finished speaking, Li Huowang ripped open the waiter's clothes, revealing his withered abdomen.

The waiter finally broke down just as Li Huowang's fingertips reached his navel.

"I'll talk! I'll talk!!" The waiter exclaimed as an unpleasant smell of urine slowly seeped out from his lower half.

Seeing all this, Gao Zhijian scratched the back of his head. He was quite impressed that Senior Li could intimidate people like this just by using words.

On the other hand, Li Huowang slowly removed his hand from the man's stomach. "Tell me! What's the reason behind the Pi County's people suffering from genital retraction?"

"Ghost! There are ghosts!" The waiter sounded extremely miserable and wretched, with tears and snot all over his face. "The wandering spirits and ghosts travel to the human world to take advantage and reincarnate as men! That's why they want to steal our manhood!"

Li Huowang found the waiter's words to be utterly absurd. "What kind of nonsense is this?"

This wasn't what he had in mind. Originally, he had thought that the genital retraction was caused by evil spirits.

Could they be mistaking certain evil forces for ghosts? Maybe they are being attacked by some strange evil force? But... wouldn't the Surveillance Bureau send someone to investigate such a case?

Li Huowang furrowed his brow in contemplation. Then, he looked at the waiter and asked again, "Have you ever seen these so-called ghosts? What do they look like? Are they the sort you can touch with your hands or the kind that you can't?"

He would be able to be more prepared if he encountered them after learning more about them.

When the waiter heard this, he shook his head vigorously. "No! People can't see ghosts! Their genitals just keep retracting,

ultimately shrinking until they are completely gone!”

After seeing that he was now willing to communicate properly, Li Huowang untied the waiter. Then, he helped the terrified man onto a chair.

When he asked again, Li Huowang’s tone was much gentler compared to before, “Alright, isn’t it just a simple matter of answering a few questions? Was it really necessary to hide or run away? Why didn’t you tell me anything sooner? Whether you believe it or not, we are here to help you.”

Hearing Li Huowang’s words, the waiter burst into tears and hid his face. He sounded terrified, with a trace of despair in his voice, “You can’t talk about it! Now, both you and I will be haunted by the ghost because we discussed it!”

Li Huowang felt a shiver run down his spine when he heard this. Instantly, he gazed around with heightened vigilance as one of his hands grabbed the hilt of his sword tightly.

Li Huowang examined everything in the room, from the window to the wooden door and even under the bed. However, in the end, he didn’t find anything unusual; everything appeared to be perfectly normal.

Li Huowang recalled all the strange things he had experienced in the past; this was the first time he had heard that such evil spirits could spread to others through word of mouth!

Despite the numerous loopholes in the waiter’s story, Li Huowang chose to believe that there was some truth to it and not dismiss it entirely.

Li Huowang immediately looked up at Gao Zhijian, who was guarding the main door, and said, “When we leave later, remember not to mention this to anyone else!”

Hearing this, Gao Zhijian vigorously nodded. He too, had no intention of exposing his peers to this danger.

Paying no attention to the danger, Li Huowang stretched out

and forcibly released the waiter's hands, his expression unusually grave as he peered at the man's misery. "Who told you all these things? Who said that talking about it would attract ghosts? Did they mention any ways to deal with these evil spirits?"

Though he was carrying two swords capable of exterminating evil spirits on his back, the entity he was faced with this time seemed quite unusual.

"I... I don't know! That's what everyone says!" After saying that, the waiter hesitantly leaned down to untie his belt and cautiously glanced inside, ignoring Li Huowang beside him.

The next moment, the waiter froze in place as if struck by lightning.

Chapter 273 - Death

“It’s turned smaller...” The waiter’s voice trembled, while the entire room was shrouded in an eerie atmosphere.

After checking his lower half, the waiter collapsed mentally, and did not even bother fastening his belt. Instead, he directly knelt onto the ground and started kowtowing continuously in fear. “Grandpa Ghost! I really didn’t want to say it; it was him who forced me! You should look for the right person to settle your grievances! Please don’t steal my manhood! If my manhood is stolen, then I won’t be able to reincarnate! I’ll become just a lonely wandering ghost!”

His words caused Gao Zhijian to cover himself with both hands, while Li Huowang also instinctively looked down.

Could this so-called ghost who steals people’s privates be here right now?

Li Huowang swiftly scanned around the room with an ugly expression on his face.

With his keen perceptions, he would definitely sense it if there really was something watching him within this room.

But he didn’t sense any gazes. This could mean only two things. Either the ghost was deliberately choosing to not look at him, or the entity simply had no eyes.

An invisible evil spirit? Could it be something like the Eighteenth Lunar?

Li Huowang dared not be careless when faced with an unknown enemy like that.

In this eerie place, Li Huowang couldn’t bring himself to believe that an evil spirit capable of harming an entire region was only capable of slowly stealing from others.

Unnoticed by everyone within the room, Li Huowang separated his illusion and his invisible body. At the same time, his right hand grabbed onto the hilt of the sword behind him.

Gradually, the atmosphere in the room became unusually oppressive. Just as Li Huowang was concentrating on surveying the empty surroundings, the waiter, who had been lying on the ground, suddenly stood up and dashed out of the door.

Is it possible for this thing to possess others as well?!

Li Huowang subconsciously raised his sword and stabbed at the back of the fleeing waiter.

Seeing this, Gao Zhijian raised his stone slab, using it to block the sword. They collided with a clang.

In the blink of an eye, the waiter had already rushed out of the door.

Seeing this, Li Huowang turned his gaze filled with killing intent from the waiter onto Gao Zhijian.

Is this thing really so difficult to deal with? It already managed to take control of Gao Zhijian's body?

On the other hand, Gao Zhijian, who was holding the stone slab, could see Li Huowang's look of hatred as the latter looked at himself. Feeling anxious, he quickly said, "It... it's me. I... I... I'm Zhijian."

However, Li Huowang didn't completely trust him at this moment. He looked at the honest face in front of him and asked, "You say you are, and that's it? I judge others based on their actions and not their intentions. Gao Zhijian would have never tried to stop my sword! Who are you?"

"Senior... Senior Li, that person... is not possessed!" said Gao Zhijian.

"If he wasn't possessed, then why did he suddenly run?" asked Li Huowang.

Li Huowang looked at the clear-eyed Gao Zhijian as he began

pondering. Soon, he pointed outside with his sword. “Alright, since you say that you are Gao Zhijian, then prove it. Toss aside the sacred text and go find the waiter.”

The other party’s sudden movements were very strange. Whether he was possessed or not, Li Huowang had to get to the bottom of the matter.

Under Li Huowang’s coercion, Gao Zhijian tossed aside all his belongings in the room and went out to find the waiter who had escaped earlier.

It was quite easy to find the man; he had been scared by Li Huowang into peeing his pants, and so they just had to follow the trail of urine.

The trail did not continue for long. After wandering around the inn, Li Huowang finally found the waiter, pantsless, while hanging from the rafters in the kitchen.

A thick rope was wrapped around his neck, lifting his entire body into the air. As his body gently swayed from side to side, creaking sounds rang out.

It was obvious that the man had done it himself, since there was half a winter melon lying on the floor.

Since he had hanged himself, the waiter’s tongue was stretched out, and his face had turned purplish-black. He looked quite frightening, his eyes seemingly staring at Li Huowang.

“He... he...” Gao Zhijian was quite shocked as he pointed at the waiter, not knowing what to say. This person had been fine until just a moment ago, and yet had hanged himself now. It was all too sudden.

Li Huowang studied the fear and despair in the waiter’s eyes, as well as the hands that were firmly grabbing at his own neck. Then, he turned to look at Gao Zhijian and said, “You’re right; he wasn’t possessed. This guy decided to take the initiative to kill himself while he was still alive and could still reincarnate. Otherwise, he

would have never been able to reincarnate.”

The thing that had killed the man was not some ghost stealing his manhood, but his own fear.

Li Huowang held his sword and slowly circled around the kitchen, searching for this so-called ghost. He had encountered many evil spirits before, but he had never been as clueless when dealing with one as today.

Even though he had not seen anything, someone had already died.

As he circled around, Li Huowang shifted his gaze downward to look at the waiter's genitals; they seemed quite small.

“Daoist, what should we do? We don't even know where the rest of them are. You're going to be in trouble!” said Monk, looking worried; it was as though he was genuinely concerned about Li Huowang.

Li Huowang glanced at him and said in a deep voice, “Don't panic. Since this thing spreads through speech, currently, it's now only targeting Gao Zhijian and me. The rest are safe for now. And with my current state, it's still too early for whatever it is to try and kill me. As for Gao Zhijian... he will be fine.”

“Senior... Senior Li, what... should we do?” asked Gao Zhijian. As someone who had always been slower to react, he now seemed a little panicked. He had loosened his pants and was anxiously reaching in and tugging at the thing within. He was afraid that the thing might accidentally shrink into his stomach without him noticing.

Li Huowang stood on the spot and surveyed his surroundings. The kitchen should have been very normal, but now, it seemed exceptionally terrifying. The chili peppers, the kitchen knives, the chopping boards, the firewood; each item seemed to be concealing danger within.

After a while, Li Huowang pulled his pants and looked inside.

Upon confirming that there were no changes just yet, he heaved a sigh of relief. From the looks of it, this process of shrinking yang was not something one-off. It was a gradual process, and he still had time to figure out a solution.

“Don’t panic. As long as we understand the origin of this thing and find out its weaknesses, we will definitely be able to take care of it!” said Li Huowang as he sheathed his sword and turned back toward the inn. “Gao Zhijian, stand guard in the inn! Tell everyone else to stay put and not to run around. Also, don’t tell anyone else about this matter. I will think of a way to expose this thing from its hiding spot!”

“Daoist, where are you going?” asked Monk who had half his body stuck in the wall in a confused voice.

“Now that we know that all the residents of Pi County are victims, they are on our side too. There’s no need to hide anything anymore. I am going to need the Magistrate of Pi County to help me deal with that thing!”

Chapter 274 - Method

Shortly after leaving the inn, Li Huowang once again arrived at the residence of the highest authority in all of Pi County. There were two stone lions at the entrance of the county government gate along with a large drum.

This time, Li Huowang didn't plan to sneak in. Instead, he openly walked to the entrance and had the people inside report to the county magistrate.

Perhaps if the others did the same, they might be considered unruly troublemakers and get thrown out. However, Li Huowang had two longswords on his back, a copper coin mask on his face, and was wearing a red Daoist robe. To top it off, he directly stated that he could help solve the genital retraction problem that the residents of Pi County were suffering from. As a result, he was immediately invited inside respectfully.

County Magistrate Yang Hongzhi lifted his blue-and-white porcelain teacup, used the lid to take out the tea leaves floating on the surface, and carefully took a sip. As he drank his tea, he re-evaluated the strange man before him. The man's attire was bizarre, and he wasn't quite able to guess his origin.

Based on the information he got from his head constable, this person came to Pi County with a troupe that performed pink shows. From the direction they had come from, it was likely that they came from the Qing Qiu region.

Most importantly, this person claimed that he could solve the genital retraction problem, something that had tormented him for a long time.

Since his own son was suffering from the problem, it was worth a try even if there was only a slight possibility of success.

As Yang Hongzhi observed Li Huowang, the latter was also carefully analyzing the various expressions on his face. After carefully interpreting the meaning behind his expressions, Li Huowang had an idea of what he should do next.

“Magistrate Yang, let’s talk about what’s going on. The Bureau is busy and has no time to waste, “ said Li Huowang, breaking the strange and awkward silence between them.

In order to quickly understand the details about the evil spirit causing genital retraction, and to obtain the assistance of the entire Pi County’s administration, Li Huowang had decided to pretend to be someone from the Surveillance Bureau. After all, given the situation, the local official should have already contacted the Bureau.

Since the problem still persisted, it meant one of two things; either the Surveillance Bureau had not yet arrived, or that they had arrived but had not yet solved this problem. Li Huowang could take advantage of this gap to achieve his own objectives.

Upon hearing Li Huowang mention the Bureau, Magistrate Yang was startled and accidentally scalded himself with the tea. He hastily put down the teacup and clasped his hands together before bowing toward Li Huowang. “My heavens! The Rites Department has finally sent someone! Ah, I’ve waited for quite a long time. I must have sent over a hundred letters through carrier pigeons! Each time, they only replied to get me to stabilize public sentiment and wait for good news. However, I can’t even calm myself, let alone the public sentiment!”

Seeing Yang Hongzhi continually expressing his struggles, Li Huowang felt more relieved. Since the magistrate believed him, he wouldn’t need to use the alternative explanation that he had prepared.

“Alright, Magistrate Yang, no time for idle chatter. Tell me about the whole story. How did this issue of genital retraction come

about? And when did it start?" asked Li Huowang.

Compared to the waiter, the county magistrate should know quite a bit more. If he wanted to prepare himself before dealing with this so-called ghost that could not be seen or felt, he had to understand more about it.

"Ah! The whole issue started around this year's Ghost Festival. Five miles east of this county, there was a night watchman at a graveyard..." began Magistrate Yang. However, he suddenly seemed to recall something and stopped as his mouth gaped open and fear crept onto his face.

"Go on, what happened next?" asked Li Huowang as he leaned slightly forward.

However, instead of answering Li Huowang's question, the magistrate changed the topic, and bowed to Li Huowang with a troubled expression on his face. "Lord, please save the people of Pi County! This matter affects everyone's lives!"

Li Huowang was about to ask again but suddenly stopped. He understood what the other party was hesitant about. This person also had the same reservations as the waiter who had died earlier.

"Are you afraid that the ghost will cause trouble for you if you speak? Relax, as long as you are courageous and tell me about it clearly, I'll definitely be able to help you deal with these matters," assured Li Huowang.

However, even after this reassurance from Li Huowang, Magistrate Yang didn't show any joy on his face. Rather, he fearfully hid from Li Huowang as though trying to hide from the plague.

Soon after, he brought a few green-clothed constables back. Each of them held a small copper gong, and there was a red cloth bag covering each of the gongs. They surrounded Li Huowang and started chanting while continuously striking their gongs. "If there's something strange, don't blame the one handling the matter!"

Li Huowang watched the comical performance, and asked, "What are you doing? Is this method effective at solving the invisible ghost problem?"

Magistrate Yang nodded vigorously in response.

Li Huowang noticed that each of them held a large pair of tongs and firmly used it to clamp onto their middle fingers. They refused to let go even as their fingers started to bruise.

One of the constables who was sweating profusely from banging the gong, turned around and urgently said to Li Huowang, "Hurry! You've already been targeted by that thing! If you don't want to start retracting, follow us quickly! We are all on the same boat, so do you think that I will try to harm you?"

This statement made Li Huowang instantly tense up. He reached out for a gong, and began to move in a circle while banging it.

At the same time, for some unknown reason, this series of events in Pi County gave him a strange feeling—a sense of familiarity mixed with disgust.

As he continued to ponder, the others surrounding him began to add new movements to their ritual. They draped the red bags containing the gongs on their necks and got down on all fours like turtles carrying their shells before crawling around the round table.

This scene was completely bizarre and absurd. At the same time, the others were all looking at him urgently, expecting him to follow suit.

Is this really effective? Where did they learn this from? How does this deal with the so-called ghost that steals people's privates?

Just as Li Huowang held the gong and draped the red bag across his neck, the others suddenly spread their legs apart, as though preparing to urinate.

However, they were not urinating, and simply took off their pants. Then, they grabbed a handful of red chili powder from

behind, and sprinkled it toward their genitals.

Even as they grimaced from the spiciness, these people dared not slow down and continued to crawl on the floor with the gongs on their backs, all the while sprinkling chili powder.

“Daoist, hurry! Follow us! If not, you’ll die soon!” shouted Magistrate Yang.

Watching this ridiculous scene unfold before him, Li Huowang’s brows furrowed as he slowly squatted down and picked up a handful of chili powder.

After a moment of hesitation, he slowly released his hand and watched as the bright-red spicy powder floated from his hand down to the ground.

Why do I feel like this is going overboard? Even if this world is mad, this is too preposterous! It’s like a farce!

Chapter 275 - Familiar

Li Huowang's previous perception of Pi County began to change as he stared at the people in front of him lying on the ground like dogs.

The idea of a ghost stealing people's privates, combined with such humiliating treatment methods and the finishing touch of chili powder all just seemed too ridiculous.

The entire county was buzzing with rumors about "ghosts" stealing people's privates and retracting their genitals. But... what if everything they were saying was completely false? Perhaps there never was such a thing?

As he recalled the waiter who hanged himself earlier, as well as everything else he had witnessed in Pi County, Li Huowang questioned the others lying on the ground, "You guys keep talking about the genitals being retracted, but has anyone here witnessed it themselves?"

Hearing this, the group stared at Li Huowang, and then silently exchanged stares.

Finally, one of the constables spoke up, "My father said so! He witnessed someone experiencing the genital retraction!"

"I'm not asking about your father. I'm asking about you! Have any of you personally witnessed it?" reiterated Li Huowang.

Li Huowang's sharp gaze left the constable stuttering and unable to find any words.

Seeing this, Li Huowang once again shifted his gaze toward Magistrate Yang Hongzhi and said, "Earlier, you mentioned that your son's genitals had become small and needed to be locked with a silver lock. But children's genitals are naturally small. Is it possible that there's nothing wrong with your son at all, and you're

just being overly suspicious? Have you never doubted that at all?"

"Really? But how is that possible? The person clearly stated—" said Magistrate Yang.

"Who is that person?! Where is he now?" Li Huowang suddenly raised his voice. Whoever this person was, they had to have a significant connection to this absurd situation.

"He... he... he's dead. He died from the retraction, just because he uttered those... words to someone," replied Magistrate Yang.

"Heh!" Hearing this, Li Huowang's face revealed a faint smirk, his suspicions growing even stronger.

There was no such thing as ghosts stealing people's genitals, and there certainly was no method to ward off the "ghosts". All of it was fake!

As he thought about this issue, he realized the identity of the culprit.

Coming across one's enemies often evokes a strong sense of resentment. Reflecting on their past mistreatment of him, Li Huowang clenched his fists so tightly that they produced a creaking sound. With a fierce expression, he gritted his teeth and exclaimed, "Sitting Oblivion Dao!"

Immediately, Li Huowang took off the copper gong hanging from his neck and fiercely threw it onto the ground. Then, he kicked away the constable blocking his path before charging directly toward Magistrate Yang.

At this moment, he finally realized why he felt that inexplicable sense of familiarity earlier. It was the feeling of being deceived by the Sitting Oblivion Dao, something that he had experienced once before!

Li Huowang kicked Magistrate Yang in the chest before using his longsword to slice at Magistrate Yang's chin. As Yang Hongzhi screamed miserably, his face was lifted slightly by Li Huowang.

However, there weren't any other layers beneath this man's

face. He wasn't a member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao, and neither were the other constables. They had all been deceived by the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

There was no "ghost" that could cause genital retraction through word of mouth. It was all an absurd rumor spread intentionally by the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

The Sitting Oblivion Dao had played everyone in Pi County for fools by relying solely on these rumors.

"Who told you about these methods to treat genital retraction? Where are they?" demanded Li Huowang. It was vital to track down the Sitting Oblivion Dao members if they were still residing in Pi County.

Li Huowang's bloodshot eyes frightened the injured Yang Hongzhi into revealing everything without concealing anything.

If Li Huowang had to name a nemesis, then the Sitting Oblivion Dao would undoubtedly be at the top of his list.

"It was a self-proclaimed Shaman! He insisted that a lock could secure one's genitals! However, because he revealed the divine secrets, he too, suffered from genital retraction and died two months ago," responded Yang Hongzhi immediately, struggling to collect himself.

"Oh yeah? He just spread the rumors, and then died from genital retraction himself? What a coincidence! Where's his body? I will need to open the coffin for an autopsy!" said Li Huowang.

With Li Huowang's identity as someone from the Surveillance Bureau and his unyielding stance, Yang Hongzhi eventually complied.

Creak~

Slowly, the black coffin nails were pulled out.

Li Huowang approached the scene while covering his nose. Confirming that there was no corpse inside the coffin, and only a Liu Wan[1] mahjong tile, he realized that his assumption had been

accurate. This was indeed the work of the Sitting Oblivion Dao, and the member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao had long since departed. The people of Pi County were just toys that the Sitting Oblivion Dao had grown tired of playing with and thus were casually discarded.

However, Li Huowang wasn't too disappointed either. His goal this time was to join the Surveillance Bureau, and not to single-handedly confront the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

After understanding the events that had transpired in Pi County, Li Huowang devised a plan.

"Everyone, gather around and take a good look! This is the so-called Shaman you've been talking about!" Li Huowang spoke to the others who had retreated to a distance.

However, Li Huowang's previously unusual behavior had frightened all of them. They all just stood there, covering the wounds on their chins while not daring to get too close.

"I said come over here, didn't you hear?!"

Li Huowang's stern words finally made them approach him.

When they saw the empty coffin, their eyes widened in astonishment. After all, they distinctly remembered that someone had been buried there before.

As he observed them, Li Huowang carefully chose his words before speaking slowly, "You have all been deceived. There is no such thing as genital retraction. It was just a rumor. There's no need to be on edge."

"How is that possible?" Yang Hongzhi was in disbelief. After all this time of people's hearts being in turmoil, it turned out to be nothing more than self-induced fear.

"The truth is right in front of you, and you still don't believe it? Go gather all the people in the county. I have something to tell them," said Li Huowang.

Upon hearing Li Huowang's words, Yang Hongzhi hesitated. He just stood in place with an uncertain expression as he contemplated

something.

“What’s the matter? Don’t forget my identity. Do you think a fool like yourself knows more about this than the Surveillance Bureau does?” questioned Li Huowang.

This finally convinced Yang Hongzhi. He covered the wound on his chin and walked outside. “Wait a moment, Sir. I... I need to check on my child first.”

After saying that, he dispersed the group of constables.

On the other hand, Li Huowang sheathed his bloodied sword and turned around to walk back toward the inn.

Once he was back at the inn, Li Huowang explained everything to the frightened Gao Zhijian.

“Everything is okay. They are just a bunch of poor souls who have been deceived. We’ll explain everything later,” Li Huowang sat at the Eight Immortals table and spoke to the big fellow in front of him.

After knowing that everything was a hoax and there was no danger in Pi County, Li Huowang finally eased up and was no longer as tense as before.

While he was helping these people recognize the deception of the Sitting Oblivion Dao, he hadn’t forgotten his original purpose in coming to this place. Regardless of who the Surveillance Bureau sent, as long as Li Huowang took care of the trouble in advance, they would have no choice but to contact him.

The beginning was always difficult. But once he managed to get in touch with the Surveillance Bureau, things would be much simpler.

Chapter 276 - Ghost

“Hahaha, are the people of this county idiots? Why would they believe in something stupid like their sexual organs gradually becoming smaller and disappearing?” remarked Puppy.

“You would probably act the same if you see everyone around you doing that,” said Xiaoman.

As they spoke, they suddenly saw many people converging onto the streets. They placed down their tea and walked outside.

“Everyone follow me and bring your weapons. All of you will stay near the perimeter and look for anything suspicious,” instructed Li Huowang.

They didn’t know how Yang Hongzhi spread the word, but the guards had managed to herd all of the terrified people to the streets. At the same time, there were many more who were standing on the walls and roofs in the surroundings.

Thousands of people gathered together like flies.

Yang Hongzhi carefully approached Li Huowang and exclaimed excitedly, “Daoist, this should be alright, yes? Almost every home sent out a person.”

Yang Hongzhi had gone back and checked on his son, and was relieved to see that the boy’s penis had not shrunk. Thus, he now trusted Li Huowang’s words completely.

Staring at the dense crowd, Li Huowang nodded and leaped up toward the head of the stone lion in front of the gate.

“Everyone! Do not panic! I am here to tell you that there are no ghosts that steal away your genitals! You have all been lied to! The shrinking of sexual organs is a giant lie! It was never anything more than a rumor!” shouted Li Huowang.

These words caused everyone to start panicking as they started

discussing what they had just heard. The situation almost went out of control.

Ring ring ring~

At that moment, the piercing sound of a bell rang out, covering all the noise. It was so loud that it caused everyone to hold their ears in pain.

Once the sound of the discussion finally died down, Li Huowang stopped ringing the bell and gave it back to Chun Xiaoman.

Everyone slowly removed their hands from their ears.

After a moment of thought, Li Huowang spoke in a loud voice, “Everyone! We’ve checked on the so-called Shaman that “died” from his genitals shrinking away and determined that he had faked his death! He has long since run away! I need all of you to think carefully; have any of you ever seen anyone’s genitals actually shrink back into their abdomens? I am not asking about the stories that you heard from your son or your neighbors, but ones you have witnessed for yourself! Have any of you seen it?!”

In the face of Li Huowang’s question, everyone fell silent.

“I did!” A woman with half a head of white hair walked out from the crowd. She held a baby in her arms.

She carefully undid the baby’s clothes and raised the baby high enough for everyone to see. “Everyone, look at this! My baby’s penis has shrunk! This man is a liar; you cannot trust him!”

Li Huowang carefully looked at the woman and confirmed that she was not from the Sitting Oblivion Dao. Then, he turned to look at the baby. “Is this your child? Did you see the ghost stealing his penis?”

“Correct! Look! His penis is gone! Aaaa~ My poor son is so unfortunate!” The woman held the baby and started crying.

It really shrunk?

Li Huowang stared at the baby and saw that it was indeed

missing the penis.

But, Li Huowang soon realized another possibility, causing the expression on his face to turn weird as he asked the question, “Erm... Have you ever considered that your baby is a girl?”

The baby’s crotch was far too natural and it didn’t seem like anything had shrunk back there.

Hearing the question, the woman was shocked and showed her baby to the crowd even more enthusiastically. “Fuck you! My stomach was sharp[1] when I was pregnant! How could I have possibly given birth to a girl?! I gave birth to a baby boy!”

Then, the woman kneeled in front of an old man with her baby and explained fervently, “My dear, don’t believe him! You can’t blame me! I really did give birth to a baby boy and then the ghost took away his penis! You can’t blame me for this.”

As they heard the woman pleading so fervently, everyone started feeling uneasy.

“You didn’t want your husband to be shamed and so you forcefully started telling others that your daughter is actually a son. Why weren’t you that smart when you were facing the Sitting Oblivion Dao?” muttered Li Huowang.

Just as the sound of discussion started getting louder once again, and Li Huowang was about to take control of the situation, someone screamed from within the crowd.

Soon, there was an empty space within the crowd. In the middle of the clearing was a beggar covered in tattered rags. Currently, he was holding a rusty knife high in the air while kneeling beside a man.

The beggar had chopped off the man’s penis and was now hanging it on his body with a pleased expression on his face. On the other hand, the victim was crying and shouting in pain.

After a moment, the beggar slowly stood back up and smiled creepily at everyone around him. “Hehehe~ Penises~ All of them

belong to me~ I will be able to reincarnate once I collect enough of them~”

As he spoke, his body suddenly floated like a ghost before pouncing toward another man beside him.

“AAAAA!” A woman’s scream woke everyone up as they started running away to save their lives.

On the other hand, by the time the beggar pushed down the man, Li Huowang had already sent one of his fingernails flying toward the beggar.

Dang~

The fingernail hit the beggar’s body, but the sound that rang out was akin to a loud metallic clang.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang started running toward the beggar while weaving through the crowd. By the time he arrived at the clearing, several men and women were already lying on the ground.

Jiang!

Li Huowang ran forward and slashed his sword down on the beggar.

But he would never have expected his extremely sharp sword to not even pierce the beggar’s skin. All he heard was the sound of metal once more.

Everyone else ran up to help Li Huowang.

Gao Zhijian’s footsteps were heavy as he ran over, his club already swinging down onto the beggar.

As Li Huowang fought, he rained more and more blows toward the beggar. But the more blows he exchanged with the beggar, the more Li Huowang felt like something was off. The ghost was different.

It was too weird.

How could a “ghost” not get hurt by a sword that could cut down evil beings? And why did it appear in broad daylight?

Just as Li Huowang was thinking about what to do, he

suddenly saw the ghost wink at him. For a moment, he thought that he was seeing things.

Meanwhile, the people of Pi County in the surroundings witnessed as the man wearing the bronze coin veil fought against the ghost. Their emotions rose and fell with the tides of battle.

After some time, Li Huowang managed to stab his sword into the ghost's chest. Then, he then took out a yellow talisman and placed it onto the ghost's forehead. Everything was finally over.

Li Huowang panted and looked at the crowd around him before speaking in a serious voice, "There was indeed a ghost that stole people's genitals, and here it is! I've just killed it!"

1. Superstition: Sharp stomach = boy baby, round stomach = girl baby. 🤔

Chapter 277 - Surveillance Bureau

As he spoke, Li Huowang dragged the “ghost” by the hair and raised it up for everyone to see. “Look closely! The ghost has been killed by me! It’s no longer a threat and the people of Pi County will no longer suffer from having their sexual organs shrink!”

Li Huowang’s voice echoed throughout the entire county.

Bam!

Soon, everyone within Pi County started shouting and celebrating until the entire place shook. Everyone was crying tears of joy. They were no longer plagued by it anymore!

All of them reached inside their clothing and took out the ropes or chains before throwing them high up into the air.

Many of them even kneeled in front of Li Huowang and started calling him their Godfather. It was funny to think that they had previously doubted him.

The town guards quickly used long rods and strings to tie up the ghost’s body before parading it around all of Pi County.

Soon, the news spread and everyone in the County had learned of it.

With this, Li Huowang’s position and popularity within the County rose dramatically. Almost everyone gave him some food while the elders even kneeled and thanked him for saving their grandchildren.

That night, Magistrate Yang booked the best restaurant of the County to treat the guests to a meal.

Having saved all of Pi County, Li Huowang was assigned to the main seat, and many of the high ranking officers from the

magistrate's office even poured wine for him.

The worries that had clouded the minds of the people within Pi County had now completely disappeared. The desolate county soon regained its normal hustle and bustle.

Puppy, Gao Zhijian, and everyone else ate the best meal that the restaurant could offer. All of them felt like they were in Heaven.

Even if the ingredients were familiar to them and things that they had cooked many times before, the chefs of the best restaurant were able to turn them into something extraordinary.

“Xiucui, you need to learn properly! Once you become as great as the Young Daoist and obtain justice for others, then everyone will treat you to such a good meal!” Lu Zhuangyuan was busy stuffing his mouth with the delicious food and lecturing his youngest son.

“What do you know, you damned old man? I can't believe that even such amazing food can't stuff your asshole mouth into shutting up!” said Lu Xiucui as he placed down the chicken in his hand and took a bottle of good quality wine, wanting to pour a cup for Li Huowang.

However, before he could do so, Bai Lingmiao took away the cup of wine. “Senior Li can't drink; he gets drunk too easily.”

Then, she took a bowl of the glistening shark fin soup^[1] to Li Huowang. “Senior Li, why don't you have this instead? You did quite well to save everyone within the County.”

Li Huowang smiled forcefully before throwing one of the chicken drumsticks underneath the table, allowing Bun to happily eat it.

As he sensed Bun's tail wagging and hitting his leg, Li Huowang's mood gradually improved to a certain extent.

Li Huowang took the bowl of soup and drank the shark fin soup in one go before standing up. Then, he pointed at Yang Hongzhi and said, “Take care of him and don't let him get too happy or he

will die from overdosing on alcohol.”

As everyone laughed, Li Huowang walked out of the restaurant. While the restaurant was crowded, the streets were even more lively. The sound of firecrackers rang out constantly while red paper could be seen flying everywhere, covering the streets and alleys in a festive red color.

Just as the sound of the firecracker stopped, a group of children wearing new clothes ran around while collecting the ones that had yet to explode. The children didn't know what had happened. All they knew was that they would no longer be tormented and that today they would be able to eat good food.

At the edge of the street, a man was wearing a massive puppet head while raising up a ball of flowers. They were performing a Dragon Dance.

The sound of musical instruments came from behind the Dragon Dance.

The children were all attracted to it and stopped collecting the firecrackers. Instead, they ran around happily as they watched the Dragon Dance.

The entire Pi County was reveling in festivities; it was as if they were celebrating New Year's.

However, amidst all this, Li Huowang didn't even have the hint of a smile as he walked around. He looked very out of place.

Li Huowang was not the only one upset. Some of the houses had green couplets stuck on them while white clothes covered their courtyard. These were the houses of the people killed by the “ghost” earlier today. Their families were crying inside their houses.

Li Huowang looked at the sad scene in front of him before continuing to walk. He soon arrived at the morgue.

Even though it was very lively in the town, there were still some people dutifully guarding this place.

Still, the County treated them equally well. The guards were

eating from a clay pot filled with meat and drinking wine from a massive black cask.

When they saw Li Huowang walk in, the town guards immediately greeted him politely before inviting him to eat with them.

“All of you, get out first. The ghost has been cultivating for thousands of years and I need to make sure to get rid of it properly,” said Li Huowang.

None of them objected and quickly ran out of the morgue.

As he walked in, Li Huowang saw rows of corpses that were covered with a white cloth on the floor of the cold morgue.

Li Huowang walked past all the cold bodies until he reached the final one and took off the white cloth, revealing the dead beggar who was possessed by the ghost.

The beggar's face was covered in stubby hair and his clothes were tattered, but for some reason, they looked quite neat on him and there was no stench coming from him. He looked quite normal, like someone who would easily blend into the crowd. The only distinguishing feature of the beggar was his unibrow.

As Li Huowang examined the body, the body also opened its eyes and stared at Li Huowang.

Seeing this, Li Huowang took a step back as the beggar tore off the yellow talisman from his forehead. “Interesting. What kind of talisman is this and what is its effect?”

“I don’t know. I just used it randomly. It was drawn by someone else,” answered Li Huowang calmly; it was as if he had already expected all this.

The beggar rolled off the wooden pallet and shook off the dust on his body. As he moved, a metallic clanging sound could be heard from within his body.

“How should I address you?” The beggar bowed toward Li Huowang, his eyes resolute.

“Ao Jing Sect, Er Jiu.” Li Huowang would never reveal his true name and thus, he decided to use the name of the dead Jiang Yingzi.

“If I am right, you must be from the Surveillance Bureau,” continued Li Huowang.

The beggar did not deny it. “Yep. I’m one of the underlings. You are very smart. All I did was wink at you and you followed my plan.”

1. Don’t eat shark fins folk! But I won’t be surprised if the sharks in this world have six dorsal fins 🐟

Chapter 278 - The Creditor

Li Huowang was right. There was never a ghost that stole people's genitals. It had all just been a lie that the Sitting Oblivion Dao had spread. The "beggar", however, had a different approach when it came to dealing with it.

"Was there any need to kill them? Did it really need to be that realistic?" Li Huowang pointed at the several bodies beside them.

"This was something that the Sitting Oblivion Dao came up with. If we did not do it right, then we would have failed. Did you think the people would listen to you just like that? Plus I only killed the normal civilians," replied the beggar.

Li Huowang felt his heart grow cold when he heard that.

How could he say something like that so easily? Is everyone within the Surveillance Bureau like that?

After seeing what he did, rather than feeling mad at the deaths of those innocent people, Li Huowang felt wary of the beggar.

I should be more careful when I come into contact with them next time around or I will become nothing more than their puppet.

As Li Huowang stood there silently, the beggar took the chance to introduce himself, "My name is Hong Da, and I am a creditor[\[1\]](#). A pleasure to meet you."

This was the first time Li Huowang heard of the term. The characters used for the title literally meant "someone who loaned knives to others". However, since Hong Da was able to become an underling of the Surveillance Bureau, the title he held definitely meant something else rather than its literal translation.

"Creditor?" asked Li Huowang.

“Yep, I’m a creditor that doesn’t belong to any sect. Do you want me to loan you one?” offered Hong Da as he opened his tattered robe, revealing the numerous blades hanging from within it.

The blades were all old and rusty. Some of them were even shattered or broken. They were the reason why Li Huowang’s sword had failed to cut him down.

But, this also meant that the rusted blades were not ordinary metal objects. After all, how could a regular rusty blade block the attack of a weapon that was once owned by a military personnel?

“Do you want me to loan you one?” Hong Da asked once again before picking out a broken blade for Li Huowang while smiling politely.

“How should I pay you back after you loan it to me?” asked Li Huowang.

“If I loan it to you, then you will naturally pay me back once the time has come,” Hong Da answered vaguely.

Hearing this, Li Huowang slowly extended his hands and tried to touch the rusted blades while carefully staring at Hong Da.

But in the end, he had just touched the blade for a moment before pulling his hand away. “No need, I already have enough weapons.”

“Fine, fine. No need for it then. Now, since the matters in this County are over, I will take my leave. I hope we will meet again, Er Jiu,” said Hong Da as he kept away the blade with a face full of regret. Then, he bowed and started walking out of the morgue.

Just as Hong Da had touched the bronze door knob, a bloody fingernail flew past his face and stabbed into the wooden door.

“Wait, I’ve heard that the Surveillance Bureau gives out rewards for their missions. Since I took part in the matters of Pi County, I should also get something, right?” asked Li Huowang.

Staring at the bloodied nail embedded within the wooden door,

Hong Da raised his voice eerily, “Oh? And what if I don’t want to give it?”

In an instant, the atmosphere within the morgue tensed up.

“That’s fine too. Let me join the Surveillance Bureau and I will consider the matter between us to be over,” said Li Huowang, dispelling the tense atmosphere.

Hong Da was surprised that someone would say that. “Really? Then let’s go to the Rites Department and register your name.”

“Do we need to go to the Rites Department?” asked Li Huowang, deciding against going there. It was too risky to enter their main camp. If someone found out that he was a Strayed One, then he would definitely die.

“It’s too far away, and currently, I need to urgently get something else done. Hmm... let’s do this instead. I’ve heard that the Surveillance Bureau can contact someone individually through a proxy,” suggested Li Huowang.

Hong Da thought about it for a moment and agreed. “Sure. Then, let me talk to my supervisor. That way, there will be no need to go and find him. If he agrees to your request, then he will come and find you instead. No need to worry. I’ve worked with him for a long time and I will help vouch for you.”

After saying that, Hong Da then walked out of the morgue. Back on the lively street, he quickly took a porcelain doll’s head and used it to cover his own head. Then, he took out a broken fan from his waist and started fanning himself as he walked out of the town.

Once he was out there, the surroundings finally quieted down. Only the sound of insects chirping could be heard.

He continued to walk for an hour before finally throwing away the doll’s head into the forest and saying, “Daoist Er Jiu, there’s no need for you to follow me. If I really was someone from the Sitting Oblivion Dao, then today’s matters would not have ended this swiftly.”

Hearing this, Li Huowang walked out from within the forest and gave his greeting before walking back toward the town.

It was only after Li Huowang disappeared back into town that Hong Da opened his mouth, "How about it?"

The sound of crunching leaves rang out as someone walked out. The newcomer was a rotund man and wore a red sash over his waist. He wore a green robe and a massive doll head on his head. He was still holding onto a long pole covered in a red sash used for the Dragon Dance.

"No, he's too suspicious and we don't even know where he came from. Also, when you asked him to go to the Rites Department, he directly refused. There's also a possibility that he's someone from the Sitting Oblivion Dao."

The voice was smooth and feminine, completely betraying one's expectations.

Hong Da squatted on the ground as the sound of metal clanking rang out. "I don't think he's someone from the Sitting Oblivion Dao. They wouldn't do something this simple."

The doll's head slowly turned and looked at Hong Da. "What if they guessed our motives and did this to lower our guard?"

"We already killed two of their higher-ranking disciples today. I don't think we would be that unlucky," replied Hong Da.

However, the man with the doll's head did not move and just repeated the question, "What if they guessed our motives and did this to lower our guard?"

Hong Da growled, feeling annoyed, "Enough with that. I don't feel like messing around today."

Hearing this, the man with the doll head turned and looked toward Pi County. "One of the two swords he was carrying was the bronze coin sword used by the disciples of Luoism, while the other sword that was wrapped in cloth emanated the killing intent that usually belongs to the soldiers. He's even using the secret technique

of the Ao Jing Sect. He is too mysterious.”

Hong Da nodded in agreement. “He is indeed weird... But, he is strong. Even if there’s a possibility that he’s someone from the Sitting Oblivion Dao, we could still make use of him.”

“And then?”

Hong Da squinted and scratched his chin. “And then we observe him while using him.”

1. An ancient occupation. A creditor would give someone something like a rusted knife or pot and then give them a prophecy. If it came true, they would return and demand payment 🤝

Chapter 279 - Technique

Everyone within Pi County ate and celebrated late into the night. Thus, almost everyone woke up pretty late on the next day.

After finding out that Li Huowang's party was leaving, the magistrate dragged his hungover body and his wife to send them off. "Daoist, may you have a smooth future ahead of you! I will write down a detailed record praising you and your activities before submitting it to my superiors! Safe travels!"

Despite Li Huowang's face still being bloody and looking quite scary, Yang Hongzhi sent him off while waving both his hands and smiling.

Li Huowang's acting was also perfect, not letting anyone discover what had happened last night.

Puppy was quite happy when he heard how much they were praising all of them, but Li Huowang didn't say anything about it.

"Magistrate Yang, could you give us a recommendation letter? Mine was destroyed last night from accidentally being soaked in wine," requested Li Huowang as they were leaving.

He learned from Bai Lingmiao that the Liang Kingdom was different from the other places. They might be fine in smaller towns, but without a recommendation letter, they would not be able to enter any of the cities.

Even though Li Huowang would be able to easily handle the issue, he didn't want to trouble Bai Lingmiao.

"Recommendations? Sure sure!" Yang Hongzhi readily agreed. Now that the issue of the ghost had been resolved and his career was steady, the magistrate was more than happy to write them a few recommendation letters.

Actually, the magistrate really wanted to send Li Huowang off

as soon as possible; the latter was just too dangerous. Thus, he did his part for the people by sending Li Huowang off till three or four li away before returning.

“Hmph! He was so diligent in sending us off that people might have thought that he was sending off his father. Also, why didn’t he give us some money for our travels?” Xiucan spat onto the ground and grumbled.

Pa!

Suddenly the bronze smoke pipe hit him square in the face.

Li Huowang couldn’t be bothered with their antics; he was busy thinking about what Hong Da had told him yesterday.

He had managed to take the first step and established contact with the Surveillance Bureau. However, it was much more difficult than he had thought. All Hong Da had said was that he would go back and report it. There was no guarantee that it would succeed.

Li Huowang needed backup plans in case this ended in failure.

It would’ve been fine if he had just been directly rejected. Instead, Li Huowang was more afraid that Hong Da was someone from the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

At that moment, Monk’s illusion touched the bronze coin veil on Li Huowang’s face. “Don’t worry. You didn’t even take this off while sleeping. He shouldn’t have been able to discover your true identity. As long as they don’t find out, you will definitely be able to escape.”

However, Li Huowang didn’t feel anything in the face of Monk’s encouragement. Having just a single bronze coin veil to cover up his identity was far too dangerous. He needed another layer of protection if he wanted to feel safe.

But Monk was right. As long as no one discovered what he was, he would be relatively safe.

I need strength. As long as I’m strong enough, there won’t be any problem.

The recommendation letters they got from Yang Hongzhi wouldn't just be useful when trying to enter cities, but they could also serve as temporary identities. With them, Li Huowang and the rest could be considered half-civilians of the Liang Kingdom.

Jiang jiang jiang jiang~

Someone was performing in a regular town of the Liang Kingdom.

Puppy continued to strike the gong while Lu Juren walked onto the stage with his makeup and started singing.

Captivated by their new song, the audience threw food and money onto the stage. Some of them even gave them a basket of pond loaches, causing Luo Juanhua, who was dressed as a beggar, to scurry away in fright. Seeing this, the audience laughed at her.

Meanwhile, Lu Zhuangyuan was at the side of the muddy road, happily counting the money they had received with Zhao Wu.

Li Huowang was quite surprised by just how much money they were earning. After the Lu family decided to change up their performance to something else, the money they started earning was quite a bit more than what they had earned before. And as their employer, he would be able to obtain half of it.

Even though the Lu family was no golden goose, at the very least, they were a goose that was consistently laying eggs with double yolks.

“Brother Zhao Wu, looks like our calculations match! We have earned quite a lot today, so let's have something nice to eat. We can have some pond loaches with tofu today!” suggested Lu Zhuangyuan. Since they already had the pond loaches, he only needed to buy some tofu from the village to make the dish.

Having been around Lu Zhuangyuan for so long, Li Huowang already had a general grasp on his temperament. “Troupe leader Lu, why did I not see Xiucan during the performance?”

The smiling Lu Zhuangyuan revealed a sad expression when he heard about his youngest son. “Him? Forget about him. Even if he manages to learn some supernatural powers, he would never take care of me. We should still rely on others, don’t you think so too, my good grandson?”

Li Huowang walked away when he saw Lu Zhuangyuan was playing with his grandson. He walked toward the large rock where Lu Xiucan was training.

As he got closer, Li Huowang heard Lu Xiucan chanting.

There were two bronze coins in front of Lu Xiucan. As he chanted, the bronze coins became attached together.

He then stomped the ground, causing the two bronze coins to be separated once more.

After training for so long, Lu Xiucan had finally managed to forcefully memorize the chant and learn how to use it!

As he observed the boy, Li Huowang finally came to understand just how much effort Dan Yangzi had put into his practice to obtain his powers before his death.

“Master!” greeted Lu Xiucan.

“Not bad. How are you feeling?” asked Li Huowang, silently observing Lu Xiucan.

“Good! I feel great!” replied Lu Xiucan. In fact, he was overjoyed at having managed to learn the chant. He even felt that he had changed completely into someone else.

Hearing his reply, Li Huowang was disappointed and happy at the same time.

He was disappointed by the fact that his guess was wrong. He had thought that this technique used by the disciples of Luoism would be able to drive away the rage and killing intent from Lu Xiucan’s body.

At the same time, he was happy that Lu Xiucan was fine even after having learned the technique. This meant that the technique

that the Nascent Soul had left behind did not contain anything harmful. Now, it was time for Li Huowang to learn it.

“It’s fine for you to train hard, but why did you not perform together with your father?” asked Li Huowang.

Lu Xiucan revealed a look of disgust when he heard that. “I’m now an expert that is capable of using supernatural powers. Why should I join them on stage and go back to being at the bottom of the caste system?”

Li Huowang frowned. He found Lu Xiucan to be detestable. To think that he was this prideful even though he had barely learned anything. How could he look down on his father and brother like that?

But Lu Xiucan was destined to fail. The supernatural power that he learned was only usable with the bronze coin sword. Without it, he wouldn’t be able to do anything even if he had managed to learn the chant.

Chapter 280 - Yinling City

Li Huowang followed the technique written on the parchment and used his dantian while chanting silently in his heart. He then raised the bronze coin sword with his left hand and stabbed it toward the green bamboo shoot on the ground.

The bronze coin sword trembled for a moment and then scattered, each of the coins stabbing into the bamboo shoot.

When Li Huowang retracted the hilt, the bronze coins all flew back before consolidating into the form of a sword.

Li Huowang turned his attention back to the one-meter tall bamboo shoot, and saw that it had been shredded into ribbons.

After that, Li Huowang took a piece of stone covered in moss and slashed at it.

However, at that moment, Li Huowang suddenly felt a strong power coming from within the sword. He felt as if the sword was twisting his hand instead of him swinging the sword.

Just as the bronze coin sword was about to hit the stone, it scattered and the various bronze coins flew past it. Then, the coins cut down a tree behind the stone before rearranging themselves back into his hand.

This sword is very useful.

Li Huowang smiled as he looked at the sword in his grasp. Compared to the other items, it was far more useful and it didn't have any side effects. At the same time, it was also a ranged attack, something that he needed desperately.

Meanwhile, Lu Xiucui's eyes were full of envy as he saw Li Huowang easily grasp the technique in such a short period of time compared to him.

However, even though he was envious, he still praised Li

Huowang excitedly, “Master is amazing! You are the best in the world!”

Hearing the praises of someone who hadn’t studied and didn’t know how to praise someone, Li Huowang's face was filled with disgust.

“Master, what should I learn next?” asked Lu Xiucan. His eyes revealed just how eager he was as he asked this most important question.

Li Huowang didn’t answer him. There were only two reasons why he had decided to teach Lu Xiucan: One, he wanted to see if the technique used by the disciples of Luoism would be able to chase off the rage within Lu Xiucan’s body, and two, he wanted to test and see whether the technique had any side effects.

However, now that his objectives have been attained, Li Huowang needed to think about how to deal with the annoying fellow.

Since it was impossible to chase Lu Xiucan away with his current temperament, Li Huowang needed to think of something else.

After a while, Li Huowang finally said, “Learn. You need to learn how to read.”

Hearing this, Lu Xiucan was stunned. This was completely different from what he had expected.

“Do you know why I managed to learn that technique so much faster than you? That’s because I’m literate,” said Li Huowang.

“So what if I can’t read? I can still learn how to do it without being able to read! I can cultivate to become an Immortal!” shouted Lu Xiucan angrily.

“You don’t want to? Then goodbye. I won’t be teaching you anymore,” said Li Huowang as he turned around.

Seeing him turn around, Lu Xiucan panicked and knelt in front of him before kowtowing three times. “Master, I’m sorry! I

was wrong! I will learn!”

By the time Li Huowang walked out from the bamboo forest, there was already a book filled entirely with characters in Lu Xiucui’s hands; he had to memorize all of them. He had never worked so hard before.

On the other hand, when it saw its owner walk out, Bun happily approached Li Huowang and smelled him.

Li Huowang patted its head while talking to the others, “Let’s go. We need to walk faster and enter Yinling City today.”

The ox-cart started moving once more while Li Huowang checked the map. There was a big city just up ahead: Yinling City.

Based on the information he had obtained, Yinling City was one of the largest cities within the Liang Kingdom. It was also where one of the members of royalty lived.

However, all Li Huowang cared about was the fact that they would be one step closer to Cowheart Mountain once they arrived at Yinling City.

Their journey would finally come to an end after they reached Bai Lingmiao’s house.

“Senior Li, I’ve never been to Yinling City. However, I have heard from my grandfather’s brother that the people in Yinling city are extremely rich. When he was younger, he managed to hunt a chicken-feet deer^[1] and sold it in Yinling City. When he came back, he had enough money to build three houses! He also said that Yinling City was extremely gorgeous and the food there was amazing. I can only imagine just how nice their meals would be.”

Bai Lingmiao was blindfolded as she held onto the hem of Li Huowang’s robe. Currently, she was completely different from before.

On the other hand, Li Huowang just continued to silently listen to her as she talked on and on. They were truly a match made in heaven.

Soon, amidst Bai Lingmiao's chirpy voice, they arrived at the city wall that was as tall as a mountain.

As they stood at its base, they saw that the shadow of the wall completely covered all of them. It was truly like a mountain!

"This... This wall..." Puppy stammered.

"This wall is massive!" exclaimed Yang Xiaohai.

"Why are you finishing my sentence?" scolded Puppy as he hugged his wife's waist and followed closer behind the horse carriage.

Soon, they reached one of the city gates where everyone was lining up. The guards, who were wearing robes inscribed with the character for 'soldier', checked the people who were trying to enter.

Compared to Qing Qiu, they were much more stern with the inspections over here. Only after checking everything did they let the people enter.

Seeing this, everyone felt worried; they all tightly grabbed the black veil covering their heads.

As they waited to be let into the city gates, Li Huowang heard the conversation of people in front of them.

"Why are you entering the city?" The guard's tone was cold.

"Sir, I am a performer. I hope this will be enough," said Lu Zhuangyuan as he passed the recommendation letters while hiding some silver underneath them.

The guard took the letter before throwing the silver onto the ground.

After confirming that the recommendation letter had an official stamp on it, the guards that were waiting to inspect their items backed off. "Pass. Next."

Li Huowang sighed in relief as he stood beside the ox-cart housing the Black Taisui.

After they entered, Li Huowang heard everyone behind him gasp loudly before letting out a sigh. However, this was to be

expected when they were faced with the massive buildings on the sides of the road. The entire street was busy and bustling with activity.

Staring at the busy city, even Lu Zhuangyuan didn't know what to do. He just stood in the middle of the road, unsure of where to go.

As the people around them saw him, they all had a look of disdain on their faces. It was as if they were mocking him for being a country bumpkin that had never seen a city.

“Why are all of you so worried? We should just do the same thing as usual. Let's find an inn and settle down.” Li Huowang took the lead and everyone followed after him.

However, as he led everyone else, Li Huowang stared at the scene in front of him with a complicated look on his face. He had never expected to see a place so advanced in this world. He had thought that none of the places in this crazy world were any good.

1. author's creation 

Chapter 281 - Exquisite Pagoda

There weren't any inns near the city gate. They continued to ride down the street that was wide enough to allow sixteen horses to move side to side. Li Huowang's group had to travel for almost an hour before they found their first inn.

"This place is crazy! If one of our oxen were to defecate on the street, then we would have to pay a fine of ten bronze coins! How the heck do I even go about controlling when they were to defecate?!" Zhao Wu grumbled about what had happened to them just now.

"Yeah! In fact, the ox feces can be used to burn as fuel! We are giving it to them for free here, but rather than thanking us they want to fine us! Fucking bastards!" cursed Lu Xlucai.

"Enough. Since we are in a different place, we need to adhere to their rules. Enter the inn. Since we can finally get some proper rest tonight, we should do so," said Li Huowang as he entered the inn.

Li Huowang was glad that he had asked the magistrate to write them those recommendation letters. To think that they would need them even to just stay in an inn!

"Yikes! Young Daoist, they are even charging us for water! They must be crazy! It's not even tea, but just plain water!" said Lu Zhuangyuan as he carefully hugged the jug of water in front of him.

Li Huowang, who was busy checking the map and trying to get familiar with the geographical locations of the Liang Kingdom, didn't pay him any heed.

"Hmph! To think that it's worse to stay here even though the

Liang Kingdom is so big. Our old home was better; at least, there we didn't need to pay to get water.” Lu Zhuangyuan carefully placed the water jug back onto the table.

However, at that moment, his stomach suddenly started rumbling. Since they had rushed to enter the city before nightfall, they had yet to eat lunch.

Li Huowang turned around and looked at Bai Lingmiao who was busy dealing with the bedsheets. “Are you hungry? We can deal with the bedsheets later after we eat.”

“Young Daoist, why don’t we just eat our rations? If we need to pay for even water, then their food must be quite expensive!” suggested Lu Zhuangyuan.

However, Li Huowang just shook his head as he closed the map. “It’s fine. We’ve traveled for a very long time, and should relax every once in a while. Call your family. Tonight, we will have a good meal.”

Everyone perked up when they heard that they would be getting a good meal tonight. They soon walked out of the inn.

By the time Li Huowang and group arrived at the top floor of a five story restaurant, the sky had slowly turned dark. Everyone gasped when they saw that they could see the entirety of Yinling City from up here. The scenery was so pretty that they kept staring at it for a long time.

Since Li Huowang had already seen the modern world before on the ‘other side’, he wasn’t that surprised by the scene. However, he did note that for some reason there were no sects or monasteries here within this city.

“Senior Li, look at that! It’s so pretty! It’s as if the pagoda was made from porcelain!” exclaimed Bai Lingmiao.

A pagoda made from porcelain?

Li Huowang turned around and was surprised when he saw that Bai Lingmiao had not been exaggerating—there was indeed a

pagoda built entirely from porcelain!

The roof of the pagoda was installed with rainbow tiles while the pagoda itself was completely white with streaks of blue. As the streaks went from the bottom of the pagoda to the top, they formed many different motifs. Even the bell at the top of the pagoda was golden in color. The bell swung with the wind, forming deep ringing sounds that gave the pagoda an air of exquisiteness and authority.

“It’s so beautiful...” Li Huowang admitted it. This was something that even the ‘other side’ did not have.

Hearing Li Huowang’s praises, a scholar wearing a blue robe opened his fan and said pridefully, “Of course! That is Yinling City’s Exquisite Pagoda. There is only one such pagoda in the entire Liang Kingdom.”

After speaking, the scholar turned to look at Gao Zhijian’s tattered shoes and the clothes worn by the rest of them. Instantly, his face was filled with contempt.

Ignoring the expression on the man’s face, Li Huowang pointed at the pagoda and asked, “Who stays there? Is someone cultivating there?”

The scholar laughed. “Hahaha! You are very interesting. You are right; there are indeed people ‘cultivating’ there.”

Hearing this, Li Huowang suddenly became nervous.

Oh no, is there something like the Righteous Monastery in this city?

Li Huowang squinted, allowing him to see the pagoda even clearer. Through the windows covered by a thin veil, he saw women inside the room.

The women were plump and wore translucent clothes. Their skin was as white as jade, but somehow, they had the blue veins and markings of porcelain vases.

All of them just stood there motionlessly, as if each of them were a beautiful porcelain vase.

Meanwhile, the scholar was desperately trying to hold his laughter back. “Within the Exquisite Pagoda, the men and women would all ‘cultivate’ together hahaha!! It’s a place where they seek pleasure.”

“Why did the Liang Kingdom build a brothel in a pagoda?” Puppy was confused.

At this point, the other people in the room joined their conversation.

“Hey, don’t call it a brothel. Also, why do you think they became the most famous out of all the other places? That’s because they are at the forefront of novelty.”

“As long as you have money, you could even choose one of the girls and decide what to tattoo on her body. I’ve heard before that someone drank too much and ordered the pagoda to tattoo an entire tortoise on a woman’s face.”

Soon, more and more people joined in on the conversation.

“That’s not even the end of it; I once had a chance to touch one of the ladies there. My god, their flesh was as smooth and soft as cotton! It’s amazing!”

As the conversation continued, it got more and more obscene.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang just stared at the Exquisite Pagoda with a hint of contempt on his face.

As expected of the Liang Kingdom, the place where they revel in excess. To think that they would even put so much thought into something like this .

Just then, Li Huowang looked down and saw a beggar lying on the side of the street. The beggar's robes were in tatters, but her face had the same marking as the porcelain vases, but rather than looking pretty and exquisite, the beggar’s markings looked like they were broken.

Everyone loved porcelain vases, but no one loved those that had been broken.

“Senior Li, the food is here. Let’s eat first.”

Li Huowang stared at the Exquisite Pagoda one more time before turning to the round table to eat.

At that moment, he realized that as long as you had money, you could do anything within the Liang Kingdom.

“Green Branches Hanging Over The Pond, White Heron Standing Amidst Calm Waters, Yellow Magpie On A Tree During Sunset, Phoenix Soaring Through The Heavens, Yellow Crane Final Farewell.”

The names of the dishes brought out by the waiters were also quite exquisite.

Gao Zhijian extended his chopstick before shrinking back when he saw the carrot that had been carved into the shape of a beautiful phoenix.

“What are you waiting for? Eat,” said Li Huowang as he started eating. Everyone else followed suit.

Soon, the table went completely silent with no one talking. Only the sound of munching remained. Even Li Huowang could not find any faults with the dishes today.

Everyone in the restaurant was looking toward them as they ate in a barbaric way, but Li Huowang couldn’t care less about their gazes.

Soon, it was nighttime. The stars in the skies were as numerous as the lanterns in the city.

“Senior Li, look! There’s lanterns in the skies!”

Translator's Thoughts

Ah yes, the 'porcelain girls'. They are sex workers unfortunately. Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin



Chapter 282 - Voice

“Senior Li, look! There’s lanterns in the sky!”

Hearing this, everyone raised their heads and saw the lanterns floating in the skies. They looked akin to luminescent jellyfish.

“Those are just lanterns. Nothing to be in awe about,” said Li Huowang as he brought the bowl close to his mouth and drank the best shrimp soup he had ever had.

The lanterns had numerous surnames written on them as they slowly floated into the skies and merged with the stars. The people who released the lanterns were all crying; it was as if they were conducting a ritual.

“It’s not just the skies. Look, someone is doing the same to the river too!”

There was a river that ran through Yinling City. Currently, the people were lighting candles on boats and sending them down the river.

“The Liang Kingdom sure is busy.” Li Huowang muttered as he looked at the sea of lanterns. He could feel that the Liang Kingdom was very different from the other places they had been too. Their wealth was immense.

“Miaomiao, we’ve passed through the kingdom of Si Qi, Hou Shu, Qing Qiu, and now the Liang Kingdom. Are there any more countries beyond the border of the Liang Kingdom?” asked Li Huowang.

“I don’t think so. If we traveled any further, then we would arrive at the sea,” replied Bai Lingmiao.

With this, Li Huowang’s understanding of this place solidified even further.

So the Liang Kingdom is bordered by the sea? I wonder if there are

island countries beyond that.

Even if there are island countries, they probably are...

Just as Li Huowang was busy thinking about it, he suddenly heard an extremely faint voice mixed within the crowd's chatter.

"Hungry. Mouth. Wood."

As soon as he heard the voice, Li Huowang felt all of his hair stand on end. He suddenly stood up and looked around in a panic.

Li Huowang's movements were so sudden and jolting that even the soup on the table spilled a little, causing everyone to turn and stare at him. This caused the atmosphere to become very embarrassing. The people at his table and those around him all stared at him as if he was a psycho.

"Senior Li?"

Sensing the worried gazes of his group, Li Huowang sat back down as tried to calm himself. "It's nothing. You know me. It's an old problem. Continue eating."

Hearing this, everyone continued eating. Only Bai Lingmiao noticed that Li Huowang's hands were trembling.

After finishing their meal, they walked back to the inn. All the while, Lu Zhuangyuan was busy calculating how many pigs they could've bought with the money they had paid for the meal just now. While they might have enjoyed the meal, Lu Zhuangyuan was heartbroken to see all the money he had worked so hard to earn being spent just like that.

"Senior Li, are you alright?" Bai Lingmiao approached Li Huowang and held his calloused hands. His hands had long since grown rough from handling the sword for so long.

"No worries. I'm feeling much better now after eating the Black Taisui," assured Li Huowang.

Once they reached the inn, all of them headed back to their room and discussed the things they saw before washing up.

Nothing happened even after the inn closed and they blew out

all the candles.

Late into the night, Li Huowang was sleeping on the bed when he suddenly woke up. He looked at Bai Lingmiao before slowly extracting his hands from around her neck. He then walked out of the room and into the courtyard of the inn.

As it sensed its owner, Bun crawled out from under the horse carriage. It was on duty to guard the carriage housing the Black Taisui.

Li Huowang approached the carriage and opened the tarp before looking inside it. There, he saw the Black Taisui that was still being bound by the cow tendons.

Li Huowang's face was gloomy as he looked at the Black Taisui and remembered the voice he had heard just now.

Ever since he ate the Black Taisui, everything had been normal. In fact, all of it had been too normal, to the point that he nearly forgot that he was a Strayed One. Now, he had heard the voices once again.

Li Huowang looked at the Black Taisui in front of him before calling out in a trembling voice, "Mom, could you call Dr. Wang here? I need to talk to him."

After some time, Li Huowang looked calmly at the Black Taisui. "Wang Wei, is that you? Did you give me some medications a few hours ago?"

However, the Black Taisui did not react. All it did was shift around the dirty slime on its body and make some bubbles.

"If that's you, then increase the dosage and try again," said Li Huowang.

Li Huowang waited for the illusion to come, but nothing happened.

After a while, Li Huowang's breathing became ragged as he glared at the tentacled monster. Then, he growled at it, "Stop fucking around! If you want me to think that the other side is real,

then pull me back there if you can!”

Amidst his whisper-shouting, the Black Taisui continued wriggling bit by bit. It tried to extend its tentacles, but the hardened cow tendons bound it tightly.

Pant pant~

Li Huowang took deep breaths as he tried to calm his heart. Then, he continued to stand within the stable, waiting for the world around him to crumble away.

A long time passed before he suddenly heard someone shouting outside while smacking together pieces of bamboo, “Duo~ The weather is hot~ Be careful of the open fire~”

Based on that announcement, Li Huowang knew that it was the fourth section of the night. He had been waiting here for a few hours already, but nothing had happened. With this, he finally calmed down a little.

After that, Li Huowang took out a dagger from his pouch of torture tools and shaved off a piece of the Black Taisui to eat.

He kept munching on the rubbery flesh until he suddenly paused; a feeling of sadness suddenly appeared within his heart.

He had thought that he had let it go, but his reaction even in the face of such a faint hope made him realize that he had just been lying to himself.

He realized that he could never forget about the place where he grew up.

He yearned for it. He wanted the other side to be real and this side to be fake.

Maybe I really am sick. Maybe that side is fake. I have to stop being so suspicious. It was just a fake voice. There's nothing to worry about. That's right... everything is fine.

Just as Li Huowang was lost in his thoughts, the feeling of a foreign gaze instantly made him calm down.

“Who are you?” Li Huowang quickly closed the tarp and looked

around only to find a man wearing a doll head standing within the stables.

“Someone told me to come and find you. I heard that you want to work with the Surveillance Bureau. Is that true?” At that moment, a voice as hoarse as Li Huowang’s came from underneath the doll’s head.

Translator's Thoughts

Here's a fanart for Hong Da, the Creditor!

Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin



Chapter 283 - Information

He is from the Surveillance Bureau? Hong Da honored his promise?

Li Huowang stared at the man warily. The man was wearing a female doll head. The doll head had a red dot on the forehead that shone brightly within the dark stable.

Since the man was someone from the Surveillance Bureau, Li Huowang dared not act rashly. He had deduced that the most likely development at this point would be them wanting to test him and see if he was worthy of joining the Surveillance Bureau or not. However, before that Li Huowang needed to ensure that the man in front of him was not a member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

Just as Li Huowang was thinking about what to do, the man with the doll head spoke up; it was almost as if he knew what Li Huowang was thinking. “Don’t worry, the Three Officials of the Sitting Oblivion Dao have been injured. It’s likely that they will stop their activities for a while.”

Li Huowang pondered for a moment and then spoke slowly, “About Hong Da... I helped him quite a bit last time and I think I could have even handled it on my own. There’s no need for him to get all of the rewards, so...”

Hearing that, the man with the doll head swayed a little before slowly approaching Li Huowang. “To join the Surveillance Bureau is both easy and difficult at the same time. Sometimes, you need to think a bit about others and that will make your path much easier. Do you understand?”

“Hm?” Li Huowang was taken aback. Originally, he did not understand what the man meant, but he realized it soon enough.

He wanted some bribe.

This was good news for Li Huowang. At the very least, people

with desires were people who were alive.

After having gone through so much, Li Huowang didn't have high expectations.

After a moment of thought, Li Huowang took out a chest embedded with gemstones and handed it to the man. Within the chest were a number of gold pieces.

"Gold?" The man extended his wrinkled hands and checked it out before throwing the gold and chest onto the ground.

Seeing that the man wasn't moved, Li Huowang took out the gourd from his waist. Then, he took out five lifespan pills that were covered in yellow talismans from within it.

Seeing those pills, the man's voice became discernibly more friendly, "Hmm... Not bad, looks like you know how to do it."

Once he gave the five lifespan pills to the man, Li Huowang received a metal plate that was half the size of his palm. The metal plate had the words "Surveillance Bureau" etched onto its back while the front side had the words "Tenth Pawn, Er Jiu" carved on it. The words were all encircled by depictions of constellations and the whole thing looked quite pretty.

Is this it? Did they prepare it beforehand? Isn't this too convenient?

After receiving the metal plate, Li Huowang looked at the man with the doll's head. "What does Tenth Pawn mean?"

"I don't think I need to explain about the "Pawn" part, but "Tenth" refers to your rank. One to ten, where the larger your number, the lower your rank. You will know soon enough. Now, here's your mission: Go and check if this is related to the Sitting Oblivion Dao. If it is, then you can just deal with it like how you helped Hong Da last time," said the man as he passed a red envelope to Li Huowang.

"Sitting Oblivion Dao? Now?" Li Huowang was surprised at how quickly he had received a mission.

"Why? You can't do it? Then I can just give it to the other

pawns,” said the man, wanting to take the envelope back from Li Huowang.

However, Li Huowang continued to hold onto it. “No, I will take care of it. What is my reward and how do I go about increasing my rank within the Surveillance Bureau? Also, is there any information about the enemy?”

As he asked these questions, Li Huowang’s heart was beating rapidly. The only reason he had joined the Surveillance Bureau was to learn more about the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

At the same time, he considered that they might also have information about Strayed Ones.

“Get to work first. If you do well, then you will get your reward. The information about the mission and the enemies is all written inside the letter,” said the man with the doll head. Then, he turned around and walked out from the stable. However, even though the man had turned around, the doll's head did not. The eyes of the doll head were staring at Li Huowang the whole time as the man walked out.

It was only after the man disappeared that Li Huowang turned his attention toward the envelope and the metal plate.

He knew that it wouldn’t be easy. This mission was also a test for him.

He could only join the Surveillance Bureau after passing it. If he couldn’t pass the test, then the metal plate would be nothing but junk.

Could it really be related to the Sitting Oblivion Dao again? Is this a coincidence? Or did they do it on purpose? Did they give me this mission because they are suspicious of me being someone from the Sitting Oblivion Dao?

Does this mean that they are going to send someone over to observe me while I’m doing the mission?

Li Huowang carefully opened the envelope while thinking

about the various possibilities.

The letter didn't say much. All it said was that an informant felt that there was a possibility that the Sitting Oblivion Dao was operating in a village, and so they requested the Surveillance Bureau to come and check.

Everything looked normal. There was even a piece of paper that described the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

The letter was written in an ancient format that was quite difficult to read. Li Huowang had to spend some time before he finally managed to decipher what it was talking about.

According to the description, the Sitting Oblivion Dao was an organization that appeared out of nowhere. Not even the Surveillance Bureau knew about how they came about. All they knew was that the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao only cared about pleasure.

As long as it was fun, they would even be willing to risk their lives.

They had also managed to trick the Simings into giving them power; however, no one knew how they managed to do it.

Li Huowang had already known about most of it, but there was one word that attracted his attention.

"Siming? So the Surveillance Bureau calls those beings from within the Baiyu Capital 'Siming'? Why do people call them by so many different names?" muttered Li Huowang as he committed the name to memory. Then, he continued reading.

The entire Sitting Oblivion Dao's hierarchy was based on mahjong tiles. Tiao, Bings, and Wan[1] were the lowest ranking ones.

After that were the Four Joys: Dong Feng, Xi Feng, Nan Feng, and Bei Feng[2].

Beyond the Four Joys were the Three Officials: Hong Zhong, Bai Ban, and Fa Cai[3].

Finally, above the Three Officials was the legendary Shai Zi[4] who controlled the entirety of the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

As for why they were a legend, that was because no one had ever seen Shai Zi before.

Not only were the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao bizarre and used bizarre techniques, but even the method of joining them was crazy. Rather than joining normally like the other sects, you needed to trick your way into the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

They didn't only trick the Simings and the others, but even themselves.

Thus, if someone wanted to join the Sitting Oblivion Dao, then they had to trick those who were already within it.

All the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao were both liars and victims of lies at the same time.

"I knew it. They are just a bunch of crazy bastards," cursed Li Huowang.

Li Huowang wanted to read more, but that was the end. He felt sad that the information had stopped at that point.

At that moment, a rooster called out, causing Li Huowang to raise his head.

It was already morning—he had spent the entire night standing in the stable.

1. Correspond with the Bamboos, Circles, and Characters mahjong tiles 🖐️

2. East Wind, West Wind, South Wind, and North Wind respectively 🖐️

3. Correspond with the Red, White, and Green of the Three Dragons in Mahjong respectively 🖐️

4. Dice, as in gambling dice 🖐️

Chapter 284 - Departure

Even after standing in the stable for an entire night, Li Huowang just rubbed his sore neck as he once again looked at the envelope.

His guess that the Surveillance Bureau had a lot of information he didn't know about was indeed right.

To think that he would be able to obtain so much information from just joining the Surveillance Bureau. He looked forward to obtaining more information about Bei Feng after his position within the Bureau was cemented further.

Even if Bei Feng was not a Strayed One, Li Huowang was certain that he could use the Surveillance Bureau's backing to obtain a method to get rid of the bewilderment and the sense of doubt that all Strayed Ones suffered from.

At the same time, now he was also no longer a headless fly that was just flying around in this chaotic world.

At the very least, if he didn't understand anything, then he would be able to obtain information from the Bureau.

Despite having stayed up all night, Li Huowang did not feel the slightest bit tired as he quickly ran into his room, excited.

He could think about all of that later. For now, the most important thing he had to do was to take care of the mission.

“Ganyuan Village.”

Li Huowang sat on the granite table and started reading the map. He was trying to find where the village was.

Eventually, he found it; however, the place was not enroute Bai Lingmiao's village. It would take a long detour to go there.

So now, he had to choose; he could either deal with the mission first or bring Bai Lingmiao home first and deal with it after

that.

But he was worried that the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao would run away if he chose the latter. If he were to arrive too late, then the entire village might end up like Pi County.

At that time, he might not even be allowed to join the Surveillance Bureau.

Just as Li Huowang was thinking about how to do both the things at the same time, Bai Lingmiao walked out with a cake on a lotus leaf. The cake was quite soft and made into the shape of a bunny. It looked very cute and delicious at the same time.

She blew on it before taking a bite. She savored the sweet flavor and revealed a pleased smile.

As he saw this scene, Li Huowang once again realized that Bai Lingmiao was not as mature as he thought. She was still a little girl.

“Senior Li, do you want to take a bite? It’s very sweet,” offered Bai Lingmiao as she showed Li Huowang the cake with its ear bitten off.

Li Huowang shook his head and told her to sit down, “Miaomiao, there is something I need to do first. Once I’m done, I will come back immediately and bring all of you home...”

However, even before Li Huowang could finish what he was saying, Bai Lingmiao stopped him resolutely. “No!”

Her voice was resolute as if there was no room for negotiation, “No matter what you will be doing, I want to go with you! Don’t even think about leaving me behind!”

Li Huowang laughed. “Since when did I ever think of leaving you behind?”

“You did! Back in the Benevolent Nunnery, you said the same thing and you promised us that you will catch up to us! But when I saw you again, you were already dead! I had to bury you with my own hands! Do you know how much pain I felt back then?” Bai Lingmiao started crying.

Looking at the girl in front of him, Li Huowang felt his heart ache. “I just thought that you are almost at your home and so there’s no reason for you to follow me. Plus, this is something minor and there won’t be any danger.”

“If it’s not dangerous, then why don’t you let me follow you?! Also, I can help you in case you can’t solve it yourself. Both me and my sister can help you!” said Bai Lingmiao.

“Sister? Do you call your Second Deity sister?” asked Li Huowang as he recalled how Li Zhi called his Second Deity “his wife”.

“Senior Li, let us come with you. If not, at the very least, let me follow you; you can let the others travel to Cowheart Mountain first,” requested Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang stared at her; he understood that even though the Immortals were finicky, they could still do a lot of things and might be able to help him out of some situations. But this time, he was dealing with the Sitting Oblivion Dao. Also, they were now almost at Bai Lingmiao’s home. He didn’t want Bai Lingmiao to be in danger.

As he was pondering about how to respond, there was a knock on the door.

“Master, are you in there?”

It was Lu Xiucan’s voice.

“Enter,” said Li Huowang as he removed his hands from Bai Lingmiao’s arm and looked toward Lu Xiucan entering the room.

At this moment, the youth was covered in coal dust. Even his face and hands were blackened with it.

“Master, I’ve finished writing what you told me to write,” said Lu Xiucan as he took out some papers and showed them to Li Huowang.

Looking over them, Li Huowang frowned. “Xiucan, I remember teaching you how to write words, not draw talismans.”

Lu Xiucan perked up and was happy when he heard that. “Master, are you teaching me how to draw talismans? Thank you, Master!”

Li Huowang slammed the paper onto the table. “No! I meant that your handwriting is as horrible as the runes scribbled on talismans. Don’t you understand? Is this supposed to be the character for ‘wood’? Why is it so squiggly? And the character for ‘mouth’, why is it round? Can’t you even draw a straight line with a piece of charcoal? Also, why is your entire face black if you are just writing words?”

Li Huowang ranted and scolded him to distract Lu Xiucan from wanting to learn about talismans. Even though Lu Xiucan was hardworking and Li Huowang taught well, somehow the results were still bad.

Li Huowang sighed as he looked at the disappointed Lu Xiucan. “Enough. Go and call your father. I have something to tell him.”

While Li Huowang was technically fine with letting Bai Lingmiao follow him, the same was not true about the others. He couldn’t let the Lu family, Yang Xiaohai, and the women who were with them follow him into danger.

All of them would just drag him down during a battle.

This was different from last time when trouble came to find him. This time around, he would be actively searching for the enemy, and so he needed to prepare.

When Lu Zhuangyuan entered the room, Li Huowang told him to bring everyone who couldn’t fight to Cowheart Mountain.

Li Huowang had decided that he would only bring Bai Lingmiao, Gao Zhijian, Chun Xiaoman, and Puppy to Ganyuan Village.

“Don’t worry Young Daoist, I have traveled for quite a long time; with my experience, I will safely bring them to Cowheart Mountain!” assured Lu Zhuangyuan.

Yinling City was a central hub that allowed access to various different locations throughout the Liang Kingdom.

After speaking with Li Huowang and swearing that he would keep everyone safe, Lu Zhuangyuan dragged the disappointed Lu Xiucan away with him.

Chapter 285 - Sounds Of Hallucination

Li Huowang bowed to Lu Zhuangyuan. "Thank you for your service. Once you reach there, make sure that everyone gets to settle down properly. We will also join all of you once we are done with our mission."

Li Huowang was fine with them heading off on their own because there were almost no bandits within the Liang Kingdom. If there were, then he wouldn't have been fine with this arrangement.

"Master, since I've learned how to use some of the supernatural powers, let me follow you as well!" requested Lu Xiucan.

However, neither Lu Zhuangyuan nor Li Huowang wanted him to follow Li Huowang's party.

Li Huowang glared at Lu Xiucan. "First, learn how to read and write. If you don't know, then ask your father. He might not know much, but he at least knows some of them. You can only learn supernatural powers and techniques properly once you know how to read."

After that, Li Huowang instructed Zhao Wu and Yang Xiaohai about some details.

"Senior Li, don't worry. Even if my body is weak, with me guarding them, I can assure you that I will not let a single horse or a penny disappear," said Zhao Wu.

Li Huowang wanted to say something else when he suddenly snarled and looked toward the empty space to his left.

"Senior Li, what's wrong?"

Li Huowang's face was sullen, but he soon cheered back up before saying, "Nothing. Now that everything is in order, you can

depart.”

With that, both groups waved each other goodbye before going their own way.

Lu Juren held his son while speaking to his father, “Father, what do you think about the Young Daoist?”

Lu Zhuangyuan took one look at Zhao Wu and then whispered to Lu Juren, “There’s no need to worry about the Young Daoist. You can’t control what he wants to do. Rather than worrying about that, first worry about your son. If you have the ability, then you would better pour all of your attention into your son so that he can become an official. Then, our ancestors would be proud.”

“Father, why are you...” Lu Juren felt desperate while holding his son, but in the end, he didn’t say anything more.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang led two horse carriages as they crossed a small path.

Since there were so few of them, all of them could fit onto the horse carriage and there was no need for anyone to walk. This way they could conserve their strength as well.

Li Huowang was still thinking about the sound that he had heard just now. He already ate a piece of the Black Taisui yesterday; even so, he still heard that voice. This meant that the voice was not something that could be suppressed by the Black Taisui.

What’s going on? What’s wrong with me?

Li Huowang’s heart became more and more agitated as he thought about numerous scenarios.

Is Wang Wei using some medicine? Or did my illness get worse? No, I’m not a crazy person! This is just a symptom of the Strayed Ones! But... is this a good thing or a bad one?

Lost in his thoughts, Li Huowang clenched his fist tightly, until a pair of soft hands covered his own.

Bai Lingmiao didn’t say anything, and just sat beside him to

soothe his agitation.

After a while, Li Huowang closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He reopened them as he tried to calm his heart.

Don't worry. Those were just auditory hallucinations. It's nothing serious. At least it's only appearing from time to time and not affecting me. But... why did it start happening now of all time? Then again it is harmless. It seems that I will have to keep dealing with these kinds of issues from time to time. I will have to take care of them one by one just like the symptoms of a Strayed One. For now, I must pass this test. This can wait till after that.

After he finished composing his thoughts, Li Huowang turned to look at the others. "I didn't have the time to talk about this before, but now that we have some time, I will explain about our enemies this time, the Sitting Oblivion Dao. To put it simply, they are a group of liars and tricksters with powers. You need to remember that they can change their faces, and so you have to be careful of who is approaching you; never let your guard down."

All of them listened attentively to what Li Huowang was saying.

Before this, they had always been on the passive side because trouble found them first. But now, for the first time ever, they would be actively seeking out the enemy first. Everyone was excited yet nervous.

Li Huowang did his best to explain everything he knew about the Sitting Oblivion Dao to them. After all, the more they knew about them, the better their situational judgment abilities would be.

While they were listening attentively, they suddenly heard the sound of horses coming from the front.

Soon a row of strong warhorses separated Li Huowang and the other passersby from the center of the path,

"Aiya, I wonder who is coming?" Puppy was curious.

Through the gaps of the horse legs, Li Huowang saw the guards

holding up a massive plate with the words ‘Make Way’ etched on it. Behind the main unit of guards were four guards that rang the gongs, followed by a group of feminine men.

Finally, behind the hundreds of feminine men, Li Huowang saw a massive carriage the size of a small house.

At this moment, a man wearing golden robes with a jade ring on his left thumb was sitting in the carriage. The chairs he was sitting on were all made with jade. He seemed to be the ruler of Yinling City.

Just as Li Huowang was examining the yellow banners marked with a four-clawed dragon, an old man beside him said to his grandson, “The Prince is patrolling the place. Quickly kneel down!”

Is that the Prince of Yinling City?

At that moment, Li Huowang saw the Prince snoring away in his chair. Beside him was a girl, fanning him.

The girl had the same blue porcelain markings. It was clear she came from the Exquisite Pagoda.

By the time Li Huowang snapped back to reality, he saw that everyone around him had kneeled down. Even Bai Lingmiao, Puppy, Chun Xiaoman, and Gao Zhijian did the same. This made him very conspicuous as the only person sitting on the horse carriage.

“How dare you not kneel?!” Several soldiers ran out from the prince’s entourage and surrounded Li Huowang. Then, without even waiting for him to speak, they directly drew their blades.

Li Huowang thought about it for a moment, and then revealed the identity plate given to him by the person from the Surveillance Bureau.

When the soldiers saw the plate, all of them were shocked before they quickly sheathed their weapons.

“Dear Sir, please excuse our rudeness!” The soldiers bowed to Li Huowang before leaving him alone.

Looking at their backs, Li Huowang suddenly felt repulsed by the fact that the Surveillance Bureau was making sure that royalties like the prince were all safe in their position.

Everyone else in this crazy world has changed, so why are the royalties like him still fine?

Li Huowang stared at the fat prince. “Get up and don’t kneel to him.”

After the Prince’s entourage was gone, their remaining journey was quite smooth. Nothing happened even as they reached Ganyuan Village.

The village was situated beneath a mountain. Blue roof tiles could be seen covering the entire area.

From the size of it, it was just a normal village, one that was no different than the others they had seen during their travels within the Liang Kingdom.

Chapter 286 - Ganyuan Village

A child was riding his ox while taking their dog out for a walk. Some women were washing clothes by the river. Everything seemed... normal; it was different compared to what they had seen back in Pi County. There was nothing special about the village based on appearances alone.

But the more normal it seemed, the more abnormal it was to Li Huowang.

He once again took out the envelope and confirmed that this was indeed where the Sitting Oblivion Dao had been spotted; however, the details were unknown.

Thinking back to what had happened in Pi County, Li Huowang told the others to stay back, "Since there is a possibility that members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao are inside, let me sneak in first so that we don't alert them."

"Senior Li, will you be alright?" asked Bai Lingmiao. She wanted to say something else, but stopped. Li Huowang's recent changes hadn't escaped her eyes. While he had recently gotten better, he had suddenly become paranoid once again.

Li Huowang hadn't told her anything about the voices. After all the more he explained, the more worried she would get.

After reassuring Bai Lingmiao, Li Huowang sent his illusion into the ground and made himself invisible; then, he started walking on the path beside the willow tree.

"Again. People. Wind."

At this point, Li Huowang was no longer surprised by the voice. He just shook his head and looked at Monk's illusion that was stuck

within a tree.

“Why are you looking at me? It wasn’t me who said it,” said Monk.

“Shh.” Li Huowang placed his finger on his mouth before slowly moving into Ganyuan Village.

He ignored his illusions and was focused completely on identifying any potential threats.

Once he entered, he soon realized that the entire Ganyuan Village was celebrating something. Even the couplets and Door Gods[1] were being changed and given a makeover.

Li Huowang sat on a tree covered in red cloth. As he looked down from atop the tree, he didn’t see anything unusual.

He decided to wait patiently.

It was only after lunch that the villagers suddenly congregated before heading into the depths of the village. All of them were happily chatting like normal.

Li Huowang followed them and stopped in front of a village shrine.

Here, their voices became much softer. The adults would even pinch the children to be quiet if they were too loud.

Everyone just stood there; it was as if they were waiting for something.

Just when Li Huowang was thinking about entering the shrine to investigate, the black door suddenly opened. Then, the villagers brought out a brown deity made from clay. From the vase being held in the deity’s hand, it appeared to be a Bodhisattva.

But this Bodhisattva didn’t have the usual kind and merciful face. It was as if it had gone through the worst storm in its life. Its face had melted away, leaving strands of clay on its face. Two irregular black holes had been poked to make its eyes.

“Heave ho!” The villagers of the Ganyuan village all helped carry the Bodhisattva as they paraded it all around the village.

“A Clay Bodhisattva...” muttered Li Huowang, frowning at what he was seeing.

Li Huowang climbed up a tree and looked at how the villagers paraded the peculiar clay Bodhisattva around the village numerous times. Every time they made a circle around the village, they would place another red veil onto the clay Bodhisattva. The sunlight was quite hot, but the Bodhisattva was covered in layers upon layers of the red veil.

When they were finally done, they brought it back to the shrine and placed it back inside.

After placing the Bodhisattva back inside, they once again picked it up, sang for a bit, and then brought it out of the shrine. Once the clay Bodhisattva was out of the shrine, they once again placed it back inside.

They went to and fro three times before finally placing the Bodhisattva down for good. Then, they lit up some incense sticks and started praying.

Li Huowang wanted to check what the shrine looked like from the inside, but the villagers were blocking the entrance. Thus, Li Huowang had no chance to sneak inside.

After a while, the sun slowly set and the villagers went back to their homes.

When it was night, the shrine keeper locked the door of the shrine before going to sleep.

It was only at this point that Li Huowang slowly came down from the tree.

Before long, the sound of metal being cut in half rang out. The bronze lock was slashed in half and the door was opened slightly.

By the time moonlight illuminated the dark interior of the shrine, Li Huowang had already grabbed his sword tightly.

If the Sitting Oblivion Dao is involved, then they would have definitely tampered with the shrine.

Only after confirming there weren't any traps did Li Huowang slowly tiptoed inside.

Due to the incense sticks, the entire shrine was filled with the smell of smoke. The clay Bodhisattva from before sat in the middle of the darkness, its melted face barely visible.

But it was not the only statue here. There were clay statues of other deities lined up on both sides. They were the Eighteen Arhats.

While the Bodhisattva didn't have a face, the Eighteen Arhats did. They stood there with faces filled with anger or hatred. They all looked extremely real, to the point that anyone stepping inside would feel like they were being watched.

As for the Bodhisattva, it was placed in the middle of the shrine, sitting atop a stone lotus.

The incense sticks lit up by the villagers had already burned out. All of the incense sticks lit up by the villagers were used to worship only the clay Bodhisattva.

There were two other clay statues to the left and right of the Bodhisattva. These two statues still had their faces, and from the looks of it, they were a pair of assistants for the Bodhisattva, one boy and one girl.

The shrine was quite small, and so Li Huowang managed to inspect it fairly quickly. However, he didn't find anything suspicious, and so he once again placed his attention on the Bodhisattva that was shrouded in numerous red veils.

The Bodhisattva wasn't tall, roughly two meters. But due to the stone lotus altar, Li Huowang had to raise his head to look at it.

Given the darkness of the shrine, it was quite horrifying to look at a clay Bodhisattva with its face melted off.

Li Huowang had long since thought that there was something wrong with it.

Should I just cut it apart?

Li Huowang began to ponder his choices.

While thinking about it, he suddenly turned his attention to the clay statues of the assistants.

Wait... They weren't like this just now. Did they move?

Looking at two clay statues staring at him, Li Huowang felt his body go numb from an inexplicable chill.

“You. Come.”

“Who?!” Li Huowang turned around, but didn't see anything.

Wait, was that my auditory hallucination or something from the shrine?

Li Huowang didn't know what to do; he couldn't differentiate it.

1. Deities that act as protectors to the house 

Chapter 287 - Blind

Within the dark shrine filled with the smell of incense, Li Huowang stood in front of the three clay statues as he struggled with himself.

Was that voice real or just a hallucination?

He had just entered the village, and rather than finding anything about the Sitting Oblivion Dao, he had managed to confuse himself instead.

Just as he was thinking about this issue, the door to the outside was suddenly pushed open. The shrine keeper poked his head filled with white hair into the shrine, using the light of a candle to illuminate the interior of the shrine.

With this weak light, he checked the interior of the shrine, especially the rafters. However, even after looking around for a while, he didn't see anyone.

"That's strange. There's no thief here. Did the lock break?" muttered the shrine keeper.

The shrine keeper looked around one last time before using a hemp rope to tie the gate closed.

The shrine keeper was about to head back to sleep, but felt that it wasn't safe enough. He went back, took a blanket from his home and decided to sleep in front of the main gate of the shrine. "I don't think the thief would be able to enter now."

Li Huowang would never have allowed himself to get locked in the shrine just like that; he had already sneaked out and was standing on the roof of a nearby building while observing everything that happened.

Except for the noise just now, everything looked normal.

If it wasn't for the envelope that stated the members of the

Sitting Oblivion Dao were active here, Li Huowang would've simply thought that this was a normal village.

In fact, if he had just been traveling around normally, he too might've fallen for their tricks too.

However, when he thought back to the voice that he had heard, Li Huowang's frown became tighter.

I can't even trust my own senses now. Looks like I will have to bring Bai Lingmiao and the others in here to see if they hear the same thing that I do.

With this in mind, Li Huowang no longer hesitated as he turned around and started walking out of the village.

The village was quiet at night. With the exception of barking dogs, there weren't any noises.

At this moment, Li Huowang was walking along a small path as fireflies danced around in the grass around him. The more he walked, the more he felt like something was wrong.

This feeling was not based on his observation or senses, but just his gut instinct.

After a while, he suddenly turned around and looked behind him; however, there was nothing.

Did someone notice me?

Li Huowang suddenly placed his back against a wall and hid himself in a corner. Then, he slowly made his way back toward where he had just been.

He continued to remain invisible, but moved swiftly. He was already holding his sword, ready to slash down at the person the moment he turned around the corner.

As he got closer and closer to the corner, Li Huowang's heart started beating faster and faster.

However, when he turned around the corner while tightening his grasp on his sword, the only thing he saw there was a wall made from yellow soil.

As soon as he confirmed that no one was following him, Li Huowang felt his entire body deflating. It had just been an illusion.

However, just as he was about to turn around, a pair of hands grabbed onto him tightly.

Impossible! I'm currently invisible, so how did he manage to find me?!

At that moment, without waiting for Li Huowang to even say anything, the one holding him urgently said, "Sh! Be quiet! Keep attracting them! Let them come!"

The voice was very quiet, but Li Huowang decided to obey it and didn't move. He didn't know why he did that; he was too busy thinking about who the voice belonged to.

"Aiya, our luck is bad. They ran away," said the voice.

When Li Huowang felt the hands holding onto him finally let go, he immediately turned around to see who it was.

With whatever light they had available, Li Huowang managed to see a blind man.

The blind man was quite skinny and wore a rumpled black cloak along with a pair of worn-out cloth shoes. He held a bamboo walking cane and carried a bamboo basket on his back. His eyes were completely white and he wore a black cap. His thick beard, which would normally make one look like a sage, instead made him look obscene.

As he looked at the man, Li Huowang finally realized why he was caught. The man was blind!

While Li Huowang was looking at the man, he too was 'looking' at Li Huowang; however, he was using his nose.

"The smell of blood on you is quite strong. Which army did you come from? My surname is Chen, so you can just call me Blind Chen. I'm a Ninth Pawn from the Surveillance Bureau," said the blind man as he showed his identity plate to Li Huowang.

"No, I'm from the Ao Jing Sect. My name is Er Jiu, a Tenth

Pawn. I greet my senior,” said Li Huowang, taking out his identity plate as well.

When he heard Li Huowang’s words, Blind Chen’s face lit up. “Oh~ So you are from the Ao Jing Sect. Since you are here, then you must be my reinforcement.”

As he spoke Blind Chen began to carefully knock his bamboo cane on the ground as he swiftly moved toward the exit of the village, “Let’s go. We can talk while we move. I arrived here earlier than you, so I will have to let you know about some things first.”

Li Huowang smiled and followed after him.

“Blind Chen, have you been responsible for this place for some time? Can you tell me what’s happening to the village and who are the culprits?” asked Li Huowang.

“I have no idea what that thing is either. That’s also why I’m still trying to think of a plan to use. All I know is that they move within the dirt. Earlier, I saw that they were targeting you,” replied Blind Chen.

“Is that so? The evil beings this time are so annoying,” remarked Li Huowang calmly.

“Exactly. Evil beings that can travel through the dirt are very annoying to deal with and we don’t even have any idea about what they look like; however, that’s also why the rewards from the Surveillance Bureau for this mission are so good. Oh, if you are here as my reinforcement, then do you have any powers that can be used for this mission?”

“Senior Chen, I don’t think there’s anything amazing about me. All I know are the regular tricks used by members of the Ao Jing Sect,” replied Li Huowang. He hadn’t let Blind Chen out of his field of vision throughout their conversation.

“Hoho~ You can’t say that. I know that the people from the Ao Jing Sect are powerful; it’s just that their techniques require massive sacrifices. Are you here by yourself?”

“Yeah, I came here on my own. Are you alone as well?”

“Oh, I’m alone as well. Hoho~” said Blind Chen. Then, he silently led Li Huowang out of the village.

It was only when both of them were at the exit of the village that the silence was broken.

“Senior Chen, do we really have nothing we can do against them?” asked Li Huowang.

Blind Chen sighed as he sat on a mossy rock. “To think that there would come a day when I would have to call for help. As you can see, I’m blind. On the other hand, those mud bastards are like catfishes. It’s so hard to catch them and even if I did, I could only ever catch them one at a time. Junior Er, do you have something to force them out?”

“As long as you can force them out, I will be able to kill them! Even though I’m blind, I’m confident that I’m stronger than them.” Blind Chen oozed confidence as he said this.

Chapter 288 - Reinforcement

Li Huowang leaned against a tree and thought about it. “Senior Chen, could you tell me everything that has happened ever since you came here? I need to know the situation before I can make a plan. As you know, I have to pay a terrible price to use the techniques of the Ao Jing Sect.”

Hearing this, Blind Chen nodded and started using his cane to poke at the mud below. “After I was given this mission, I entered the village as a fortune teller. Due to this, I managed to touch a lot of faces[1] for the first few days. To my surprise, on the third day, the beings within the walls actually came out and let me touch their faces so that they could get their fortune told. They thought that since I couldn’t see, I was easy to trick; however, my ears are much sharper than that of regular people. That night, I was alone, but then, three more people suddenly appeared in my room! I hadn’t even heard any footsteps coming in from outside. They just appeared out of the dirt and mimicked humans to try and get their fortunes told.”

“I touched their faces to tell them their fortune. Even though their facial structures resemble humans, all of their fortunes pointed to the fact that they were already dead! [2] I stabbed them with my cane, killing one of them and hurting another in the process. Back then, I had thought that I did quite a favor for the people of Ganyuan Village by getting rid of those evil beings, but rather than treating me to a meal, all of them chased me out! I circled back and came to learn that the entire village had fallen under the control of the evil beings. If we don’t get rid of them, then we will not be able

to save the villagers. That is why, every night, I wait until everyone in the village is asleep before coming in to kill the evil beings. But as you've seen, they are even more slippery than a catfish. There have even been times when they even tried to ambush me, but I always managed to see them coming."

Blind Chen's throat was parched after the long explanation, and so he squatted down and drank some water from a little puddle that was made from an ox stepping in the mud.

Then, with his throat feeling better, he turned toward Li Huowang and asked, "Junior, I've explained so much. Did you listen to it? Quickly think of a plan."

Li Huowang's voice came from another direction, "I'm listening. Don't worry senior. I'm thinking about how to force them out."

"Yeah. Quickly now. Ah~ next time I'm choosing a mission that is closer to my place. It's so arduous to travel here," said Blind Chen. Then, he once again sat on the mossy rock and brought out a Bagua-shaped mirror[3]. He carefully cleaned it before placing it back.

"Senior, I think I have a plan. Where do the evil beings usually hide?" asked Li Huowang.

"The shrine that houses the clay Bodhisattva. I have no idea why they like that place," replied Blind Chen.

"Then let us go there first," said Li Huowang.

"Sure, but we need to hurry; it will be dawn soon and the villagers will wake up then. It will be quite difficult to kill the evil beings later on," said Blind Chen as he immediately stood up and started using his cane to navigate back into the village. He was following Li Huowang's footsteps.

The village was still quiet and no one was walking around at night. Only the fireflies illuminated their path ever so slightly.

As they walked, Blind Chen suddenly got serious and placed

one of his ears against the ground.

“Junior Er, be careful. Something isn’t right. I’ve never heard sounds like these before. There are four people approaching us; two men and two women. One of the men is quite massive, and based on the sound of his footsteps, he should be wearing armor!” said Blind Chen.

Hearing this, Li Huowang also became serious as he looked around. “The four foreigners are probably enemies. Who else would come into a village this late at night?”

After saying that, Li Huowang ran away without waiting for Blind Chen to say anything.

Meanwhile, Blind Chen continued to place his ear on the ground to listen to those sounds.

Soon, the four people left the village.

“Senior, I’ve returned. I used an illusion technique to distract them away from Ganyuan Village,” reported Li Huowang after coming back.

“Let’s go and quickly finish our job. They must be up to something,” said Blind Chen.

Hearing this, Li Huowang nodded and quickly followed after him.

By the time they appeared in front of the shrine once more, it was already the second section of the night. To be more precise, they were in an alley close to the shrine.

“We can only go this far. Any further and you would end up alerting them. That’s how they were targeting you just now,” said Blind Chen.

Li Huowang estimated the distance, and then took out a bronze bell from his robe. “Senior, it might get a bit noisy for a while.”

Then, Li Huowang shook the bronze bell and a piercing sound exploded within the quiet village.

Li Huowang shook it hard, splitting the single Wandering God

in front of him into eight separate individuals. Then, he swiftly placed some soil in his mouth and ordered them to attack!

Following his instructions, the Wandering Gods immediately dove down into the ground.

Blind Chen didn't know what was happening; the sound of the bell was interfering with his hearing.

"Junior Er, I don't think this is going to work! At this rate, you will wake the villagers!" shouted Blind Chen amidst the ringing of the bell.

"Don't worry Senior Chen! Even though it's noisy, we can force them out very quickly like this!" said Li Huowang, shaking the bell even harder.

Hearing this, Blind Chen hobbled towards Li Huowang. Once he was behind Li Huowang, he felt his cane touch something and bent down to pick it up. However, just as he bent down, Blind Chen suddenly used his bamboo cane to stab at Li Huowang! There was a sword hidden within it.

It was a vicious strike that didn't produce any sounds under the ringing bell.

But just as the cane was about to stab Li Huowang, he moved his body, causing the sheath of his sword to block the tip of the cane. However, even though Li Huowang managed to block it, the force from the attack still forced him several meters forward.

At the same time, the Wandering Gods that had been waiting in ambush all came out and attacked Blind Chen at the same time.

Just as Li Huowang stood up and was about to shout something, Blind Chen beat him to it.

"Hmph! Sitting Oblivion Dao! Don't think that you can fool me! I never called for reinforcements, and so there's no way that you are one!"

people, a blind fortune teller would have to touch the people's faces to be able to conduct the fortune-telling 🤞

2. It means that their fortune was something that couldn't possibly exist on a living person. 🤞

3. a symbol illustrating the nature of reality being composed by opposing forces reinforcing one another. 🤞

Chapter 289 - Blind Chen

Li Huowang's words got stuck in his throat when he heard what Blind Chen was shouting.

What? He thinks that I am from the Sitting Oblivion Dao? Did he never call for reinforcement?

Li Huowang thought about many things. When he recalled how the man with the doll head gave him this mission, he became even more suspicious.

Meanwhile, without Li Huowang controlling them, the Wandering Gods stopped mid-air and floated like jellyfish without any movements.

No!

Li Huowang snarled and shook the bell even harder. In response, the Wandering Gods immediately continued their assault on Blind Chen.

I need proof! I cannot allow myself to fall into their trap!

Even though Blind Chen couldn't see, he knew where the Wandering Gods were. He dodged their attacks, took out the Bagua mirror from his bamboo basket and started chanting, "Pure Heaven and Earth, muddled Yin and clear Yang!"

As he chanted, a soft light shot out from the Bagua mirror. It swept through the air and the Wandering Gods hit by it all disappeared. Then, he swung the mirror and two more Wandering Gods were cut in half.

Just when Blind Chen wanted to point the mirror toward the remaining Wandering Gods, he sensed an incredible killing intent suddenly appear above him.

By this time, Li Huowang was already halfway to the ground, his sword just a few inches away from Blind Chen's neck.

But then, something magical happened. Blind Chen's head shrunk into his shirt like a tortoise!

This sudden development caused Li Huowang to miss his attacks and before he could do anything else, a hand appeared from the collar and caught hold of his sword hand.

Li Huowang tried to shake it off, but failed; Blind Chen held onto him very tightly, nearly making Li Huowang fall.

Blind Chen used this opportunity to try and stab Li Huowang with his cane. But with the remaining Wandering Gods coming to Li Huowang's aid, his attacks didn't work.

Both of them were attacking each other fiercely and the situation was dire.

But this stalemate was destined to not last very long; Li Huowang had already set a trap.

"Senior Li, we are here to help you!"

Bai Lingmiao, Gao Zhijian, Chun Xiaoman, and Puppy ran from afar and attacked Blind Chen.

Blind Chen couldn't even defeat Li Huowang, much less four other people. With this, his fate had been sealed.

Splat!

A needle wrapped in a white fiber hit Blind Chen's right hand, causing his five fingers to melt like a candle before shifting toward his wrist.

Blind Chen panicked when he couldn't hold his weapon. In the next moment, a gust of wind filled with bloodlust blew at his face, making his hair stand straight up.

Shit!

His heart dropped.

"Zhijian, don't kill him!" shouted Li Huowang.

When Li Huowang's voice rang out, Blind Chen felt that force bend a little before going toward his wrist instead.

With the sound of bones cracking, Gao Zhijian's mace crumpled

Blind Chen's wrist.

At the same time, Chun Xiaoman ran over and kicked away Blind Chen's cane. Then, she swiftly took the metal chain from Gao Zhijian and started binding Blind Chen.

"Did you see that? Hehe, he lost to me, Cao Cao!" chortled Puppy.

Li Huowang ignored Puppy and confronted Blind Chen. "Are you a dot or a bamboo? We can finally talk properly now."

"Ptui!"

A glob of phlegm mixed with blood flew toward Li Huowang; however, he easily dodged it.

Gao Zhijian slapped Blind Chen with his massive fist, causing the latter's nose to break and a few of his teeth got knocked out.

"Don't be so harsh." Li Huowang stopped Gao Zhijian and looked at Blind Chen. "I will ask again, who are you?"

"I'm your fucking grandfather!" snarled Blind Chen, his face bloody and red.

After a moment of thought, Li Huowang looked down to his pouch of torture tools and took out a small blade with a thin edge. "Fine, I will do it myself. Hold his head and don't let him shrink into his shirt."

As the blade slowly shaved off the skin on his face, Blind Chen shrieked and howled in pain.

Li Huowang carefully shaved off the first layer, and then started with the second layer. He was as focused as a craftsman hard at work.

Time slowly passed and Li Huowang soon realized that something was wrong. Blind Chen's face had almost been completely peeled off, and yet, there were no signs of another face beneath it!

"You really aren't from the Sitting Oblivion Dao?" asked Li Huowang as he looked incredulously at the weakened Blind Chen.

By now, Blind Chen barely had any breath left in him.

Li Huowang had thought that Blind Chen was someone from the Sitting Oblivion Dao, but now that the proof was in front of him, he knew that he was mistaken.

“Fuck you. Fuck your grandmother...”

Looking at Blind Chen cursing at him weakly, Li Huowang felt his heart tighten. He quickly turned toward the red veiled woman beside him and said, “Miaomiao, quick! Summon the Bai family Immortal and heal him!”

After some time, Li Huowang watched as the shaved off skin on Blind Chen’s face slowly healed and stitched back together.

“Sorry Senior. Even I can’t be sure without doing this. Zhijian, untie him,” apologized Li Huowang.

If Blind Chen was not someone from the Sitting Oblivion Dao, then this made the man with the doll head extremely suspicious. Maybe the entire “mission” was a trap.

When Blind Che, who was heavily injured, regained his freedom, he quickly distanced himself from Li Huowang. He was terribly weakened as he leaned against the wall and looked toward the direction he heard the footsteps from. “What are you bastards from the Sitting Oblivion Dao doing? Do you think I will ever trust you? Dream on!”

He tried to stand up but his current injuries made it extremely difficult.

“Senior Chen, listen to me,” said Li Huowang, blocking Blind Chen.

“How else can you explain it? You want to say that it was all a misunderstanding? You want me to believe that? Fine! Go as far away from here as you can and I will believe you!” shouted Blind Chen.

Just as the two of them were arguing, they suddenly heard a noise coming from the shrine, causing both of them to stop and look

toward it at the same time.

There was a person looking at them from behind the door.

It was the clay Bodhisattva. Half of its body was shrouded in darkness while the other half was exposed in the moonlight. It was using the two dark holes on its face to stare at them.

“See! Do you see now?! They saw how heavily injured I am and now they want to kill me! Now, we can all just die together!”

Just as Blind Chen’s shout rang out, the Eighteen Arhats appeared from behind the clay Bodhisattva. Everytime they moved, their bodies cracked a little, and from within those cracks peeked out something that resembled compound eyes, all of them moving within.

Chapter 290 - Sitting Oblivion Dao

Jiang~

Li Huowang unsheathed his sword before standing between Blind Chen and the statues.

“Kill them!” ordered Li Huowang, causing everyone to immediately turn their attacks toward the statues.

Li Huowang was confident in defeating them. Since even Blind Chen could win against them, and his group won against Blind Chen, there was no reason for them to retreat!

Bam bam bam!

Gao Zhijian’s heavy footsteps rang out loud as he charged toward the statues and crashed into them.

But no matter how many times he crashed into them and knocked them down, they would always get back up and surround him.

Seeing his predicament, everyone ran over and tried to help Gao Zhijian; however, the situation did not improve. No matter how many times the statues were knocked down, they would always get up again. Even Li Huowang, who was using his two swords, could not kill them.

“Quick! Help me up and give me my mirror!” Blind Chen shouted from afar.

Hearing this, Li Huowang quickly somersaulted and exited the battlefield. He took one look at Blind Chen and then kicked the bamboo basket into his hand.

Once he got his basket, Blind Chen once again took out the Bagua mirror and bit his index finger. Then, he used his blood to

quickly draw a rune on the mirror.

“The Saint’s light will shine forever! The mirror and the soul are bound together and will die together. No fear, no retreat, follow my lead. The Qi of the Heavens and Earth flows swiftly, one that is unimpeded by metal and stones. All shall fall underneath it! Open!”

As he chanted, the Bagua mirror that was stained with his blood suddenly flashed with a brilliant light.

The light lit up the dark surroundings. All of the clay statues that came into contact with the light started melting like the snow in the sun.

Once all the statues had been melted, Blind Chen, who had exhausted most of his strength, fell onto the ground with a pale look on his face.

Li Huowang approached him and carefully lifted him up. “Thank you, Senior Chen.”

“Go away! I still don’t trust you,” said Blind Chen. However, even though he said that, he did not stop Li Huowang from helping him.

At this point, Li Huowang could see quite a lot of the villagers staring at them through the alley and the windows. If they didn’t retreat now, then the entire village might notice them.

“Ouch! Do you want to shake me to death? How can we run during the night? We need to find a place to hide and heal first!” whispered Blind Chen.

Just as the villagers were surrounding Li Huowang and discussing what had happened, he quickly brought Blind Chen to an empty cooking hall. Once inside, Li Huowang took out a small bottle and started pouring the powdered Golden Wound medication on Blind Chen’s injuries.

While treating him, Li Huowang told Blind Chen about what might’ve happened.

“So you were fooled by a member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao

as well? Ha! If that's really the case, then it would mean that the Sitting Oblivion Dao has infiltrated deep into the Surveillance Bureau. Their trap might've started from the Creditor!"

Li Huowang sighed and kept away the bottle. "Maybe. I have no idea when they started paying attention to me. I didn't even—"

However, Li Huowang suddenly stopped talking. He couldn't just tell everyone that he was a Strayed One.

Blind Chen was still listening silently when he realized that Li Huowang had already finished talking. He huffed in indignation, "I still don't trust you! Once it's dawn, we will go our own ways. I have my own methods to see if you are lying or not."

"Senior Chen, how are you going to travel with your wounds? Aren't you afraid that you will be in danger?"

"Ba! I might just lose my life even faster if I decide to follow you. In the first place, who was the one that injured me?" retorted Blind Chen as he turned around with his back facing Li Huowang.

Just as Li Huowang was thinking about how to persuade Blind Chen, he heard something. "Shh. Someone's coming."

The footsteps that suddenly rang out from in front of the cooking hall made everyone stop breathing. It seemed that the owners of the footsteps were the people who had just gone to investigate the fight who were now coming back.

Soon the footsteps disappeared; it was as if the owners of the footsteps had gone back to sleep.

Just when all of them sighed in relief, the sound of footsteps rang out once again, this time much more numerous than before.

Then, it disappeared again. But not long after, the footsteps rang out once again.

This time, they stopped right in front of the door of the cooking hall.

Bam bam bam!

They were knocking on the door!

Li Huowang signaled with his finger and Chun Xiaoman carefully opened the door.

When the door opened, they saw the clay statue of one of the assistants, its eyes replaced by just two dark holes on its face, staring at everyone.

Crack~

Suddenly, the clay statue split open and antennae belonging to insects extended from the inside of the statue.

But the sound of cracking didn't just originate from there. It rang out even from behind Li Huowang.

Behind me? But there's nothing but a wall there.

Li Huowang turned around in fear, only to find several motifs of Bodhisattvas and the Buddha that were carved onto the wall using clay. Currently, all of them were glaring at Li Huowang!

Crack~

Soon, their bodies split from the wall and crashed into the hall like a tsunami.

While Blind Chen had no time to grab his mirror, Li Huowang didn't waste any time. He immediately took out a pair of metal pliers and used them to crush one of his eyeballs.

Pop!

The clear liquid sprayed around the room and covered the Arhats, enveloping them as they slowly fell to the ground.

When all of them ran out, Li Huowang was surprised to see an innumerable number of clay statues standing on the roofs of the surrounding houses. All of them were glaring at Li Huowang.

"Blind Chen, quickly!" shouted Li Huowang.

"Don't worry! They are all fakes!" said Blind Chen as he rummaged inside the bamboo basket that Puppy had passed to him. Li Huowang was standing with his back toward Blind Chen.

Splat!

Suddenly, two sharp knives stabbed into Li Huowang's heart.

Li Huowang looked down at the knives and turned around. He saw that it was Blind Chen who had stabbed him.

But what made Li Huowang confused was that even though Blind Chen was the one who tried to kill him, Blind Chen's face was currently even more terrified than Li Huowang's.

Blind Chen looked at his hand with fear in his eyes. "Junior Er, this was not me! I didn't do it! My body moved on its own!"

Just as he said that, Blind Chen's body suddenly stopped moving and his aura started to transform. His white eyeballs sank back into his skull and a pair of heterochromatic eyeballs with double irises replaced it. At the same time, the wrinkles on Blind Chen's face also disappeared. Soon, his face became just like Li Huowang.

Then, the Li Huowang with double irises spoke, "Haha! It's so outdated to trick people and evil beings. I've learned a new trick: tricking myself! How about it, boss Hong Zhong? I learned it directly from you."

Chapter 291 - Source Of Auditory Hallucination

In the dark hall, Li Huowang's hands trembled as he stared at the knife tip stabbing into his chest. He was shocked to see another Li Huowang, one with double irises.

“You... Me...”

Li Huowang fell backward as he started losing massive amounts of blood.

The sudden change in the situation left him unable to think properly. He was focused on the name “Hong Zhong” mentioned by the other Li Huowang while at the same time thinking about his impending death.

Just as Li Huowang was about to fall to the ground, the others from his group rushed toward him and carefully propped him up.

Bai Lingmiao's dark fingernails trembled; she wanted to touch the wound on Li Huowang's chest. However, after a moment of hesitation, she retracted her arm and started pounding on her drum.

Dong dong dong~

“Ox-head and Horse-face[\[1\]](#) carry the chains, the Black and White Impermanence[\[2\]](#) holds the flag!”

The sound of the drum was accompanied by her chanting.

Dong dong dong~

“If you wish to ferry the soul of the stubborn boy, life and death are but a line apart~ I know what it means when the soul reaches the gate of hell!”

Dong dong dong~

“If we can't take him away today, the Sorrow King will make his presence known before the God of Hell!”

As she chanted and the red veil on her face started wriggling, while an eerie wind started congregating around her; it was as if something was forming under there.

While Bai Lingmiao wanted to save Li Huowang, the other Li Huowang with two irises would not let her. He immediately threw out three cards toward Li Huowang.

Dang dang dang!

Suddenly, the cards fell onto the ground and made a sharp metallic noise. Gao Zhijian, wearing his armor, had blocked the attack to prevent it from reaching the dying Li Huowang. At the same time, his eyes that were glaring at the enemy were resolute.

“Oh? Boss Hong Zhong, how did you trick all of them into following you? They are so loyal, but...” The Li Huowang with double irises snapped his fingers, causing the clay statues standing atop the roofs to gather around. “...but you are not as good as me. Why don’t you back down and let me become Hong Zhong instead?”

He had just said that when the clay statues all jumped down, crashing toward them like a meteor shower.

At this moment, they realized that all of the clay statues were under his control. From the very beginning, he had been both the good *and* bad guy. The issue with Ganyuan Village was just a massive trap set by the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

Ding ding ding!!

Amidst the chaos, the sharp sound of a bronze bell rang out. As tens of Wandering Gods appeared around them and pounced toward their target, Chun Xiaoman grew taller and taller.

“AAAAH!”

At the same time, Gao Zhijian shouted and started swinging the mace he had gotten from the bandit camp, using it to crush everything in his path. His killing intent was laid completely bare.

However, even though all of them did their best to block the

clay statues, there were just far too many of them. Their group kept retreating as they fought, their situation dire.

Meanwhile, Bai Lingmiao's chanting became faster and faster. Her red veil was already halfway drenched, either from sweat or tears. However, as she saw Li Huowang slowly removing the two knives from his heart and his wound slowly healing, Bai Lingmiao persevered while hanging onto a single thread of hope.

"Don't worry! Senior Li can be saved! He won't die!" shouted Bai Lingmiao.

With the help of the Immortal families, Li Huowang soon managed to extract the two knives and mend the wounds on his chest.

Clank!

Just as the bloodied knives fell onto the ground, Bai Lingmiao saw a man appearing in front of her.

It was the Li Huowang with double irises.

He was a member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao that Li Huowang had told them about!

The fake Li Huowang looked at the Main Deity covered in a red veil and then turned toward the Second Deity before revealing a smile. "Oh? Not bad. You actually managed to heal him."

Splat!

As he spoke, three sharp daggers stabbed into Li Huowang's torso.

When the fake Li Huowang heard the girl behind him cry out in anguish from underneath her red veil, he laughed maniacally, to the point that he had to hold his stomach in pain.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang, who had originally passed out from the pain, woke up upon suffering the new wounds. Then, he took a deep breath and controlled his body which was gradually losing heat.

"Fire. Water. Mouth."

He once again heard the auditory hallucinations. At the same time, with the sound of the bronze bell and the drum, Li Huowang was having an extremely difficult time listening to everyone.

“Enough! Quiet! Quiet!!”

As Li Huowang used his final breath to shout those words, the sounds really disappeared.

But not all of the sounds disappeared. In fact, he could still hear the voice of the member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao quite clearly.

“Boss Hong Zhong~ Hehehe~”

At that moment, the fake Li Huowang appeared in front of the real Li Huowang and stared at him. When Li Huowang looked at him, it was just like looking into a mirror.

The sound of drums suddenly rang out as both the Main Deity and the Second Deity pounced toward the fake Li Huowang. However, they were immediately smacked away by the clay statues around them.

“Come now, Boss Hong Zhong, don’t lie on the ground. It’s very dirty,” said the fake Li Huowang as he grabbed the daggers stabbed into Li Huowang’s torso and used them to pull him up.

Looking at the dying Li Huowang, the fake Li Huowang had a look of relief. “Tsk tsk, you should already have had enough fun. Boss Hong Zhong, should I change you back?”

Li Huowang stared at the face in front of him but did not understand what was being said; the auditory hallucinations started again.

“Where... Where are you coming from?” Li Huowang asked the voice.

Looking at how Li Huowang did not reply to him, the fake Li Huowang sighed. “Alright, since that’s the case, I wish you a good journey, Boss Hong Zhong. I will take over your identity and trick the others. Then, I will become the next Hong Zhong. Hehehe~”

Then, the fake Li Huowang grabbed the daggers and started pulling them upward—he wanted to kill Li Huowang by butchering him, and so he steadily shoved the daggers upward toward Li Huowang’s head.

He did not just want to disembowel Li Huowang, he wanted to cut the latter into three parts!

Looking at how Li Huowang struggled even more, the fake Li Huowang laughed like a maniac.

On the other hand, the pain Li Huowang was suffering from made the voices from the auditory hallucination become even more real. Li Huowang felt like the voice was very close to him.

“Who are you? What do you want!?”

Along with his final shout, Li Huowang felt a strong urge to vomit. Then, in the next instance, his neck became as thick as his head.

Suddenly, Li Huowang moved his arms, which were almost completely devoid of blood, and used them to grab the fake Li Huowang before opening his mouth toward the latter’s face.

In an instant, numerous black tentacles covered in red blood burst forth from Li Huowang’s mouth and covered the fake Li Huowang’s face.

Neither side had expected such a situation.

Even Li Huowang hadn’t expected that the auditory hallucinations hadn’t been fake, but came from the Black Taisui within his body!

In a panic and wanting to retreat, the fake Li Huowang fell backward. But the tentacles of the Black Taisui held his face tight. It was even to the point that the stitches that Bai Lingmiao had made earlier started to break.

The tentacles quickly bore into all of the fake Li Huowang’s various orifices.

Sensing this, the fake Li Huowang quickly released his grip on

the daggers and touched his face in a panic. At the same time, he threw out four cards toward the blood-soaked tentacles.

The Black Taisui somehow detected the sharp cards that were flying toward it and used all its strength to retreat into Li Huowang's mouth.

As it retreated, the sound of flesh being torn rang out alongside the cry of the fake Li Huowang; the fake Li Huowang's face was torn off by the Black Taisui's tentacles as it retreated into Li Huowang's mouth. At the same time, it also took with it those eyeballs with double irises.

1. Undertakers that catch the souls of the dead and guard the entrance to hell. One has an ox head while the other has a horse head. 📖

2. Deities that escort and capture the spirits of the dead, another set of undertakers. 📖

Chapter 292 - Death

“AAAAAAAAAH!”

The fake Li Huowang knelt on the ground as he held his skinless face with his trembling hands while shouting in pain.

He was not just shouting due to the pain of having his face torn apart, but also from getting tricked by Li Huowang.

Meanwhile, the sound of something slimy moving rang out as the Black Taisui's tentacle grabbed the facial skin and the eyeballs of the fake Li Huowang before retreating into Li Huowang's mouth.

Dum~

With some difficulty, Li Huowang finally swallowed the black and disgusting thing in his mouth.

Staring at the fake Li Huowang who was struggling from pain, the real Li Huowang reached back and pulled out the bronze coin sword.

Shua~

As he swung the sword, Li Huowang fell down. At the same time, the fake Li Huowang also fell onto the ground, several bronze coins embedded in his body.

Before dying, the fake Li Huowang smiled creepily as he said, “You are indeed amazing, Boss Hong Zhong. It's no wonder that you are one of the Three Officials...”

Meanwhile, Li Huowang was also lying on the ground as he stared at the night sky. He felt pain all over his body and became lost in thought.

Damn, is this how I die? I can't believe it...

Looking at Gao Zhijian who was being piled on by the clay statues and the Main Deity doing their best to approach Li Huowang, he rolled to his side.

It would be such a waste to not use the pain right now.

With this thought, he tried to move his hand numerous times, but failed over and over. Finally, at the last attempt, he managed to stab his arm into his own abdomen as he shouted, “Rending flesh, pulling bones!”

Immediately, the sound of fighting stopped and was replaced by pained cries.

At that moment, every being within the Ganyuan Village, regardless of whether they were the evil beings hidden within the clay statues, the humans, and or the dogs, all of them felt the same pain that Li Huowang was experiencing.

The clay statues were the first ones to surrender. Under the pain, all of them ran off.

With this, Li Huowang had single-handedly resolved the crisis.

After confirming that the clay statues had run away, Li Huowang released his hand as his consciousness slowly started to fade.

“Li Huowang!”

Just as he was about to lose consciousness, Li Huowang heard someone calling out to him, causing him to instinctively raise his head a little. “Who’s there? I’m here.”

The last thing he saw before losing consciousness was Bai Lingmiao running toward him.

I can’t die. I can’t die.

Fifth section of the night.

Amidst the darkness, the rooster crowed as Puppy walked out of the room while carrying a bedpan. His pale face and the white cloth covering his body indicated that he too was wounded. The only reason he had to be the one to take out the bedpan was because Gao Zhijian’s wounds were even more serious than his own. The clay statues had almost torn off his arms.

Puppy emptied the contents of the bedpan into the toilet as he yawned and went back inside.

As he passed by the second room, Puppy carefully opened the window and looked inside. When he saw Li Huowang who was still lying on the bed without any signs of life, Puppy shook his head and sighed.

Back in his room, he placed the bedpan underneath the bed.

Gao Zhijian's snores suddenly stopped as he asked, "How... How... How..."

"Nothing has changed. It's still the same. Move a little and let me sleep," replied Puppy as he crawled into the bed and covered himself with the blanket. "Sigh, I don't think Senior Li will be able to come back again. Time to split the money we have. Simpleton, how much money do you think I will get?"

The only response he got was some grumbles.

As he heard the grumbling that came from beside him, Puppy hurriedly said, "I'm not cursing Senior Li, but you also saw it, right? Even his organs were disemboweled! The Shamans might be good, but Bai Lingmiao is not an Immortal. How can she possibly revive the dead?"

Bam!

Puppy was shoved off the bed.

"Ai! You!" Puppy grumbled from the pain. Now, having lost all his sleepiness from being shoved off the bed, he took the bronze basin from the wooden frame and went to the courtyard to get some water.

After washing up, he went to the nearby stalls and sat down. "Boss, give me a bowl of sweet jellied bean curd^[1], and two fried breadsticks!"

"Alright! Wait just a moment."

The piping hot jellied bean curd had some sesame seeds and brown sugar sprinkled at the top. Looking at it, Puppy was already

salivating.

He took some of the fried breadsticks and dipped them into the jellied bean curd to soften them up before eating. As he bit into it, the flavor of the oil burst into his mouth and he enjoyed his meal.

“The Liang Kingdom really is amazing. To think that they have breakfast even though they don’t have to harvest the fields in the morning, and they even have so much variety for breakfast!” exclaimed Puppy.

By the time he finished his meal, the number of people walking on the street had started to increase.

Puppy licked his bowl clean, and then took out several bronze coins, and gave it to the stall owner.

“Oh, you gave me so much. Thank you!” said the stall owner.

“Who said those are tips? I want three more portions; send them to the second floor of the inn beside us. Also, make sure that you don’t skimp out on the portion size if I’m not looking at you,” said Puppy before merging into the crowd. He was already very familiar with the layout here.

After walking for a while, he turned around and stopped in front of a shop selling coffins. He spat some saliva and smoothed his hair before walking in.

As the man who was calculating something on the abacus saw Puppy entering his shop, he let out a bitter smile.

“Boss Cao, you are here again? Let’s talk inside,” said the shop owner.

“So? I already gave you a night to think about the price. Do you agree to give me a discount or not?” asked Puppy as he patted one of the coffins.

“Boss Cao, this is excellent quality red pine wood. Stop patting it. If you keep doing that, the paint might fall off. Just tell me, do you want to buy it or not? You have been coming here every day to ask about the price, but you still haven’t bought anything. Are you

just here to survey the price so you can open up a shop of your own?" asked the shop owner.

"Hmph!" Puppy feigned disinterest. "Of course, I'm here to buy, that is, if you give it to me half a tael cheaper."

Hearing this, the owner of the shop felt his heart skip a beat and his voice lowered, "Do you mean... your Senior Li will soon...?"

Puppy closed his eyes and nodded.

Seeing this, the shop owner came to a decision. "Sure, I will give you a discount of half a tael! This is the lowest I can go!"

"Ok." Puppy walked around the coffin and told him, "Since you already gave me a discount of half a tael, why don't you give me some free funeral clothes as well?"

After two whole hours passed, the dehydrated shop owner finally agreed to Puppy's price. He didn't want to drag it anymore. If he had to drag this out, then he felt that he might die even sooner than that Senior Li that Boss Cao kept talking about.

After paying the deposit, Puppy asked one more time, "Shop owner, you know how to do the ceremony right?"

The owner of the coffin shop nodded. "Don't worry. I know how to arrange everything, from the cooks, performers, and even people to carry the coffins."

"I want the best of the best for everything! I want the best funeral for my sworn brother!" said Puppy.

"Of course! I promise you that it will be the best you've ever seen! No need to worry!" assured the shop owner.

"Oh, and help me order a few more paper dolls, and this time, make them girls. I'm afraid that Senior Li might die from boredom down there," said Puppy.

"Boss Cao is very loyal!" praised the shop owner.

"Sigh, this is the best I can do. When Senior Li dies, they will all be busy crying. None of them will even bother to think about

stuff like this. Last time as well, I was the only one who thought about such things.”

“Last time?”

1. a dessert made from tofu 🤔

Chapter 293 - Trouble

Once everything had been settled, Puppy walked out of the shop, satisfied with the prices. “Good! This time should be better than the last time.”

He squinted his eyes and stared at the blazing sun. It was already lunchtime by the time he got back to the inn.

“Oh right, the owner said that I had to measure the body to make the funeral clothes. I better do that now.”

As he talked to himself, Puppy walked back to his room, but didn’t find the injured Gao Zhijian on the bed. His heart immediately fell a little. “Wait, could it be...?”

He hurriedly ran towards Li Huowang’s room and saw that the other three were beside the bed. He took a deep breath, rubbed some turmeric over his eyes, and walked into the room.

“Senior Li! Senior Li! Boohoo~”

Puppy made it look like he was pushing Gao Zhijian away, but when he placed his body on the bed, he was surprised to see Li Huowang had his eyes open.

“You are... not dead.”

At that moment, Puppy’s heart tightened up.

If he’s not dead, then that means that I can’t take back my deposit...

“Puppy, are you injured too?”

Li Huowang’s words reeled Puppy back into reality and caused him to let out a smile. “Aiya, these are just some small wounds. Did you know that when those clay statues were surrounding me, I, the great Cao Cao, didn’t even blink!”

“Don’t listen to him. If it wasn’t for me, then he would’ve been dismembered,” interjected Xiaoman.

Puppy frowned at Chun Xiaoman, but didn't say anything. Not only was he weaker than her, now, she was even a head taller than him.

Li Huowang turned to look at the transformed Chun Xiaoman—she had aged considerably, and was now a beautiful young girl. Even though she had dark hair covering her entire body, her figure could not be contained underneath it all.

But this was not a good thing. This meant that during the previous battle, she had spent a lot of her lifespan summoning the Wandering Gods.

“No need to summon so many Wandering Gods in the future. Think properly. Just four Wandering Gods require an entire year's worth of lifespan.” Li Huowang advised her weakly.

“No worries. I'm still young,” said Chun Xiaoman. She wasn't worried about the lifespan she had lost. In fact, she preferred her current body.

“Cough cough~” Li Huowang spat out some blood before speaking slowly, “Miaomiao, go and take the lifespan pills from the gourd and give them to her.”

Not only could the lifespan pills increase one's lifespan, they could also return Chun Xiaoman's youth.

“I really don't need them!” Chun Xiaoman pressed Bai Lingmiao's shoulder with her one remaining arm before turning to Li Huowang and asking in a concerned voice, “Senior Li, you should worry about yourself first. You... What's happening to you?”

Hearing this question, Li Huowang paused. He stared at the rafters above and let out a bitter smile. “What's wrong with me?”

Li Huowang remembered what the member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao had said. However, he would never believe that he was this so-called Hong Zhong.

But why did he use the same method to try and trick me? The previous group of six from the Sitting Oblivion Dao did the same as well.

Something isn't right... Unless... everything is fake! Or one of them somehow left clues when they died, allowing the living members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao to decipher what the previous members were doing. The dead and living members are both working together to try and trick me!

“Senior Li, let's not think about other matters for now. Your body is still heavily injured so please rest more.” Bai Lingmiao took a pillow filled with rice husk before placing it under his neck, instantly making much more comfortable.

However, after a moment, Li Huowang shook his head and felt a splitting headache. Enduring the headache, he asked, “No, I'm not sleepy. First, tell me everything that happened after I passed out.”

Given that the member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao had been killed, and the clay statues chased away, there wasn't much to say except for how they cleaned up after the battle.

“Ai! Why are you talking about all these useless things? You all really don't know what Senior Li is concerned about,” said Puppy as he excitedly squatted by the bed and took out a bamboo basket. “Senior Li, look! We have all of the assets of that fraudster! I didn't even throw his clothes away. All of these are ours!”

As he spoke, Puppy pulled the curtains and allowed Li Huowang to see the items within the basket: the Bagua mirror, and the bloodstained metallic cards.

As he saw those items, Li Huowang felt relieved. He didn't want them for himself, but he still remembered the test that the Surveillance Bureau had given him.

The member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao was dead while he was still alive. With this, he was finally an official member of the Surveillance Bureau.

Now that he was an official member, he would finally have an organization behind him. No longer would he need to guess everything like Dan Yangzi when it came to cultivation or other

information.

As long as he didn't expose his status as a Strayed One, no one would attack him too.

"Hehe, and what if you managed to claim those things? As if you know how to use any of them," A haughty voice came from behind Puppy, causing Li Huowang perk up in surprise.

As if powered by an unknown source of strength, the weak Li Huowang suddenly sat up. Immediately, he pushed Puppy away before turning to look toward the illusions in front of him.

The headless Peng Longteng, the disemboweled Jin Shanzhao, the bored Monk, and finally the faceless member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao!

The face of the member of Sitting Oblivion Dao was completely skinless, and his eyes were replaced by two black holes. His teeth were displayed out in the open without any lips, forcing him into a perpetual smile.

Looking at the stunned Li Huowang, Chun Xiaoman and Gao Zhijian exchanged glances before quickly holding Li Huowang's left and right arms down.

But suddenly a massive force threw both of them away.

"Why are you here?! Why did you become one of my illusions?! Why?!"

As Li Huowang shouted, his wounds started to bleed once again. Just as he was about to say something else, he stopped and grabbed his own throat.

"Cough cough~ Blegh!" Li Huowang coughed as a single black tentacle came out from his mouth.

Seeing it, everyone was shocked.

"Quick! Pull it out!"

But just when all of them wanted to help and were about to pull it out, Li Huowang blocked them from doing so.

After stopping them, Li Huowang kneeled down and used his

trembling hands to carefully push the tentacle back into his mouth.

Under everyone's gaze, Li Huowang coughed as he forcefully swallowed the Black Taisui.

Chapter 294 - Plan

After a few days of rest, Li Huowang finally regained his calmness.

Li Huowang stood by the window as he stared at the floating illusion of the member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

The faceless member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao was sitting on Peng Longteng's shoulder as he smiled at Li Huowang, feeling amused.

There's no need for me to be troubled. It's just an illusion. It's not the first one and I'm already used to it.

Li Huowang consoled himself.

Based on his behavior, he will keep trying to annoy and trick me. Since I know that he's a liar, I just need to ignore him completely.

"Really? That might not necessarily be the case." The member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao raised his hands and clapped. "It might be a big problem for us to be residing in your consciousness. We might only be four people now, but there might be more than forty the next time around~"

Li Huowang just ignored him and slowly limped back toward the table.

"Hehe, why aren't you talking?" asked the faceless man.

Just as the faceless member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao was about to continue annoying Li Huowang, Monk spoke up, stopping him, "Sigh, stop annoying the Daoist. Can't you see that he already has a lot to think?"

"Oh? And who are you?" asked the faceless man.

"I'm no one, just a monk. What's your name?" replied Monk.

"My name?" The member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao looked at Li Huowang and smiled. "I'm Hong Zhong."

Hearing this, Li Huowang turned around and looked at him. “You are Hong Zhong? I think you want to become one so much that you’ve gone crazy.”

Right at that moment, the door opened and Bai Lingmiao walked inside while carrying some food.

Looking at Li Huowang, who was walking around, she was shocked and immediately placed the food down to assist him. “Senior Li, your wounds are still not healed. You can’t walk right now!”

After carefully assisting him and seating him down at the table, Bai Lingmiao lifted a bowl of oily chicken soup, took a spoon, blew on it, and then fed Li Huowang.

“I’m injured, not disabled,” said Li Huowang as he took the spoon before chugging down the soup. The room became quiet while he ate.

After a while, Li Huowang spoke up, “Miaomiao, to think that the Immortal family would be so useful this time around. They were even able to pull me back from the clutches of death. Looks like bringing you with me this time around was the right thing to do. How many lifespan pills did they take from the gourd?”

Bai Lingmiao hesitated. “Actually... The Immortal families...”

However, before she could finish, a long black fingernail tapped Bai Lingmiao’s shoulder.

Li Huowang stopped eating; only after seeing that it was the Second Deity did he continue his meal. “Is something wrong?”

As far as Li Huowang was concerned, it was very rare for the Second Deity to make an appearance in daylight. In fact, this was the first time it did so.

Under his gaze, the Second Deity placed a red veil to cover both her and Bai Lingmiao’s heads.

Feeling puzzled, Li Huowang stared at them and tried his best to listen to what they were whispering about.

However, he couldn't hear anything except for some minute sounds.

What are they doing? They must be quite literally stuck together at this point. Is she hiding something from me?

Just as Li Huowang's was wondering about the situation, Bai Lingmiao pulled down the red veil. At this point, the Second Deity had disappeared, leaving behind only her.

"Tell the Second Deity that it was a good magic show," said Li Huowang as he picked up his chopsticks and continued eating the remainder of his meal.

Seeing him like this, Bai Lingmiao revealed a forced smile.

"Are you alright? What did she say?" asked Li Huowang while eating.

"Nothing."

"If it's nothing, then let's eat first. Don't just stand there," said Li Huowang. He knew that forcing her to answer him wouldn't work. The best course of action for him would be to ask Chun Xiaoman later on. After all, she was Bai Lingmiao's close friend.

Just as Li Huowang was lost in his thoughts, Bai Lingmiao suddenly gasped and pointed at his nose. "Senior Li, your nose ..."

Li Huowang touched his nose, only to feel a slimy tentacle coming out from one of his nostrils. However, he did not panic and simply pushed it back inside his nose.

"Senior Li, I've wanted to say this for a while, but the thing you ate was not right! Why don't we let it go?" pleaded Bai Lingmiao.

By this point, any sane human could see that there was a serious problem with Li Huowang's body.

However, Li Huowang was adamant in his refusal. "No."

When she heard his refusal, Bai Lingmiao felt quite sad.

Seeing her like this, Li Huowang sighed. "These are just some minor issues. We can fix them."

Li Huowang naturally knew that there was something different

about the Black Taisui in his body. Something unexpected had happened and things might take a turn for the worst.

Even so, he couldn't stop eating it. Even if the side effects were big, he had to continue eating the Black Taisui's flesh so that he could suppress his hallucinations.

Compared to that, dealing with the Black Taisui in his stomach was nothing.

Li Huowang patted Bai Lingmiao's soft hands and said, "Don't worry. Everything will be fine. Eat."

Bai Lingmiao wanted to say something but the words were stuck in her mouth. She just frowned and started eating her meal.

After their meal, Li Huowang once again lay down on the bed. According to Bai Lingmiao, he needed to rest a lot.

Soon, the room turned silent, to the point that one could even hear a pin drop. However, Li Huowang couldn't rest while the issue hadn't yet been resolved.

"Let's talk," Li Huowang said while looking toward the rafters.

"Hong Zhong, I think he's talking to you," said Monk, his body halfway inside a wall.

Hong Zhong shook his bloodied head. "No, he's talking to the Black Taisui in his stomach. This is fucking interesting, hehe."

Meanwhile, Li Huowang ignored the two illusions and just waited for a reply.

Even though he couldn't stop eating the Black Taisui, he still needed to resolve this issue. At the very least he must slow it down.

Based on how it had saved Li Huowang the last time around, he had a feeling that he might be able to communicate with it.

But, it didn't look like it wanted to appear; the Black Taisui would appear whenever he didn't want it to appear, but when he needed it, it would not appear.

After a while, Li Huowang suddenly remembered something and put a finger into his ear. Then, he pulled out an entire wad of

cotton from inside his ears.

The moment he did, his ears were bombarded by a slew of loud noises.

Chapter 295 - Tuoba

After pulling out the wad of cotton from his ear, a buzzing sound completely drowned his hearing. Immediately, the sound of people talking in the room adjacent to him, the sounds coming from the streets, and even the sound of his heartbeat were magnified.

Li Huowang endured the pain and closed his eyes as he tried to locate where the voice had been coming from. After some time, he finally managed to pick out the broken voice of the Black Taisui amidst all the chaos.

“I’m talking to you! Can you hear me?!” Li Huowang shouted loudly.

The Black Taisui answered, but it was not speaking coherently; it was piecing together words that meant nothing. “Mouth. Sky. Wu.”

“What are you talking about?! Do you understand me? If I die, you die too! Let’s talk!” shouted Li Huowang once more.

Since the Black Taisui could crawl out from his nose or mouth at any time, Li Huowang knew that he couldn’t ignore it. He had to deal with it right now.

Li Huowang wanted to negotiate with it. He felt that regardless of what its plans were, they could surely come to agreeable terms.

But no matter what Li Huowang did, it did not react as he had thought. It was still using simple words to answer.

As he continued listening to the fragmented words, Li Huowang had a feeling that he was talking to a child who had just learned how to talk.

“Wait... a child?! A CHILD?!” Li Huowang suddenly remembered something. He immediately crawled out from the bed and called for the servant to bring him a brush along with some ink,

and paper. Then, Li Huowang ignored the chaotic sounds around him while writing down what the Black Taisui was talking about.

“Mouth. Wood. Water. Fire. Field. Art.”

He wrote down the characters one by one and looked at their arrangements. They were very familiar to him. He then remembered something.

“No wonder the arrangements of the characters sounded so familiar! It’s learning what I taught Lu Xiucui!”

Li Huowang finally understood why the Black Taisui was speaking in such a fragmented manner; it only knew these words!

The Black Taisui had only learned these words coincidentally while Li Huowang was teaching Lu Xiucui. It didn’t even know the meanings of the words and was only repeating it.

“It can’t even speak right now. How should I communicate with it?” Li Huowang wondered aloud as he stuffed the wad of cotton back into his ears and started wandering around his room. He thought of a few different solutions, but in the end, he rejected all of them.

In order to suppress his hallucinations, Li Huowang had no choice but to keep the Black Taisui inside his stomach. Due to this, he needed another way to get rid of this trouble.

After thinking for a while, Li Huowang finally decided on the crudest method—teaching the Black Taisui words.

After it learned how to talk, Li Huowang would then be able to converse with it. The battle with the Sitting Oblivion Dao this time around had shown Li Huowang just how much of an asset it could be. As long as he could communicate with it, he might even be able to use it as a secret weapon.

Li Huowang didn’t know how long it would take to teach a bunch of tentacles, but he knew that it would take a long time. Thus, this method could be considered quite crude.

“Fine, if I have to teach it, then so be it,” said Li Huowang as

he sat down, took out another piece of paper, and started to write. Since it would take a long time to teach the Black Taisui how to speak, Li Huowang had decided to take it slow.

Compared to this, he had a much more urgent matter to attend to—to get his reward from the man with the doll head. This was the first mission he had completed after entering the Surveillance Bureau.

After his wounds had healed halfway, Li Huowang told everyone to prepare for travel. No one could stop him this time.

Bai Lingmiao argued with him and finally managed to persuade him to buy a carriage so that he could lie down in it during their trip.

They traveled for a long time before Li Huowang and group once again reached the prosperous Yinling City. By this time, the wounds on Li Huowang's torso had also finished healing. However, his missing eye and the ribs hadn't yet grown back.

Li Huowang had noticed that compared to his fingernails, skin, and flesh, it took quite a bit longer for him to regrow his bones and eyes.

"Senior Li, according to the map, we can just take the side path. There's no need for us to enter the city. Troupe leader Lu's group is likely to be performing along the way and we might be able to catch up to them," suggested Puppy suggested as they waited at the gates of Yinling City.

"No need. We will enter the city. Go and get some rooms at the same inn as last time," said Li Huowang. He would never tell Puppy that he was actually here to collect the rewards.

Their mission this time had been quite arduous, and so Li Huowang was looking forward to it.

Li Huowang had thought that he might have to stay for a few more nights if the man hadn't come yet, but it was clear that they

had many informants within Yinling City.

During the second section of the night, just as Li Huowang was hobbling into the stable, the man was already there, waiting for him. He was holding a yellow sack while sitting on a pile of horse feed.

Without waiting for Li Huowang to speak, the man jumped down and approached him, his tone much friendlier than usual. “Hoho, looks like you are indeed quite strong. Good job on the mission in Ganyuan Village. We hadn’t expected you to be able to keep casualties to zero.”

Hearing his friendly tone, Li Huowang felt his heart relax a little. This meant that he had passed the test and was finally officially a part of the Surveillance Bureau.

“No, no. It was just luck,” said Li Huowang humbly.

“Luck is also part of your skill. No need to be humble. Also, are you hurt? The Surveillance Bureau can treat you no matter the injury,” said the man with the doll head.

In response, Li Huowang shook his head.

Then, the man then grabbed the doll head and took it off.

Beneath the doll head, Li Huowang found a man with a friendly face. He looked well off, plump, and had eyes the size of beans. It was an amicable looking face.

The man smiled and shook Li Huowang’s hands. “Sorry about that. Without testing your powers and background, I really wouldn’t dare bring you into the Surveillance Bureau.”

Then, he fished out five lifespan pills covered in yellow talismans from his sleeves and handed them to Li Huowang. “Here, you gave me these the last time around, and so I’m returning them back to you.”

Just as Li Huowang was about to refuse, the man stopped him.

“Take them first and listen to me,” said the man as he pushed the pills into Li Huowang’s hands and began to explain in a calm

manner, “You should know that I would have to take responsibility for you to join the Surveillance Bureau. If anything had happened, then I too would have been held responsible. Those lifespan pills were just collateral for that. But now, since you want to join the Surveillance Bureau for real, there’s no need for it.”

The man revealed a smile, providing an offer that no one could reject.

“My surname is Tuoba, and my given name is Danqing. Junior Er Jiu, if you don’t mind, then you can just call me brother Tuoba,” said the man.

This was the first time someone told Li Huowang their surname with good intentions. He knew what it meant and immediately bowed politely. “Thank you brother Tuoba.”

“Haha, then I will take it that you’ve joined the Surveillance Bureau. From now on, we are one family. I wish brother Er Jiu the best of luck!” said Tuoba.

Looking at the lifespan pills in his hand, Li Huowang felt a warmth in his heart. While he didn’t care all that much about the pills, he was touched by Tuoba’s attitude.

After coming out from the Zephyr Temple, except for the now deceased Abbess Jingxin, everyone else he had seen had been trying to kill him or fight him. Not once did the onslaught of enemies stop.

At this point, Li Huowang was no longer a naive boy. He knew that Tuoba had most likely put an act to be courteous; however, he had never been treated this kindly before in this world, not even for the sake of trickery.

Then, Tuoba Danqing extended his hands and brought Li Huowang out of the stable. “Come now, this is not the place to talk. Let’s go somewhere more comfortable.”

Chapter 296 - Treasure

After some time, Li Huowang was sitting on the stool while running his hands across the golden sandalwood table in front of him, feeling the soft animal skin beneath his feet. As he surveyed the luxurious interior of the room, he knew that having a meal at this place was bound to be quite expensive. He'd seen this restaurant next to the Exquisite Pagoda before. Judging based on where it was located, it must be pretty well-known in all of Yinling City.

Creak~

The door opened, and a beautifully dressed woman with a light fragrance entered the room and placed various delicious dishes on the round table.

As Li Huowang looked at the dishes, he realized that he couldn't even discern the ingredients used to make some of the dishes on this table, let alone having eaten them before.

"Hehehe~ Come, come, Brother Er, let's toast," said Tuoba Danqing as he lifted the silver pot, about to pour a cup of wine in front of Li Huowang.

Li Huowang felt a little uneasy. "Brother Tuoba, I'm not good with drinks. Please forgive me."

After saying that, Li Huowang picked up the teapot beside him and poured some tea for himself. "I'll use the tea instead of wine. I raise this toast to Brother Tuoba, wishing you all the best!"

Tuoba Danqing grinned as he raised his wine glass and clinked it against Li Huowang's teacup. "Alright~ Here's to Brother Er's smooth journey to the Immortals' residence!"

Li Huowang placed the teacup under his mask and took a small sip.

Meanwhile, Tuoba Danqing rolled up his sleeves, lifted his chopsticks, and started jabbing them into the dish placed before him, emitting white steam. "Come, come, let's eat! Try this dish! It's called 'Myriad of Colors', and is a specialty of Yinling City. You won't find it anywhere else."

With their chopsticks raised and cups clinking, the atmosphere in the room soon became much more relaxed. Mealtime conversations had a distinctly different ambiance compared to discussions that happened elsewhere.

Tuoba Danqing's plump face turned rosy as he smacked his lips a few times while savoring the food. Then, he leaned on the round table with his elbows, and slurred, "Brother Er, from now on, we're like family. If there's anything you don't understand about the Bureau, feel free to ask me. Also, remember this: You're part of the Surveillance Bureau now. If you ever encounter any issues in official matters, then you can always invoke the name of the Surveillance Bureau. As long as it's not a major issue, most government offices will show some leeway."

"Thanks a lot, Brother Tuoba. In that case, I've indeed encountered some difficulties," said Li Huowang as he extended his hand, bringing out the Bagua mirror he had prepared in advance. "This item belonged to a member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. It's incredibly powerful, but I can't find the method to activate it. Brother Tuoba, please take a look."

"An item that was originally owned by someone from the Sitting Oblivion Dao? Haha, they don't have anything of their own. It's obviously something they swindled. Let me take a look," said Tuoba Danqing as he took it and carefully examined it. However, even as he started examining it with his hands, his mouth never stopped talking. "Brother Er, how did it go that day? Tell me, how did you deal with that member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao?"

Naturally, there was nothing to hide, and after glossing over

some of the details about the Black Taisui, Li Huowang told Tuoba Danqing most of what had happened that night.

“Ha, those damned scammers from the Sitting Oblivion Dao, always claiming that others belong to their group. This kind of scam is as old as they come,” Tuoba Danqing sneered with a hint of disdain on his face. “However, even with such a simple scam, there will always be a few naive individuals who fall for their tricks. The truth is that I’ve already seen through all their tricks. I’ll kill as many of those bastards from Sitting Oblivion Dao as they come. All that talk about the Three Officials or the Four Joys, and the dices or the flowers, it’s all useless nonsense!”

By this point, it was obvious Tuoba Danqing was starting to brag. Naturally, Li Huowang wouldn’t expose him and just went along with it.

There was nothing wrong with a bit of boasting over drinks. In fact, it actually made Li Huowang feel that Tuoba Danqing was also a human being.

“This looks like a Daoist artifact. But can you see? The positions of the symbols on this Bagua mirror are not right. The Kun is above, and the Qian is below. In Daoism, this is the opposite of the reversal of heaven and earth. As far as I know, there are only three families in the Liang Kingdom that practice something like this,” said Tuoba Danqing as he handed the mirror back to Li Huowang. “Alright, take it back for now. I’ll look into it and get back to you. If there’s a matching cultivation method, then I’ll send you a letter. Regardless, this thing should be quite valuable. I estimate it to be worth at least three to five decades of lifespan. Brother Er, you are very lucky to have this.”

If one looked beyond the surface, this also implied that within the Surveillance Bureau, the currency for transactions was not gold or silver, but rather lifespan.

“Thanks again, Brother Tuoba,” thanked Li Huowang as he

took back the mirror.

“You don’t have to thank me for such small matters. We are all on the same side. Let’s drink!” Tuoba Danqing lifted his wine glass and took a gulp, letting out a satisfied burp. Then, he picked up his chopsticks to start eating.

After a while, Tuoba Danqing suddenly seemed to have thought of something. He placed his chopsticks on the edge of his dish and reached his hand into the cloth bag under the table. After digging around for a while, he pulled out over a dozen dark pills.

“Here, I almost forgot. This is your reward, thirteen years of lifespan. Take them, and use them well. They are sealed with elixir techniques, and are slightly different from your usual methods,” said Tuoba Danqing as he handed the pills over to Li Huowang.

Li Huowang took out the gourd from his waist. With a few movements of the small mouth of the gourd, its entire front half cracked open, revealing a sharp opening. Then, the gourd swallowed the lifespan pills one by one.

Upon seeing Li Huowang’s gourd, Tuoba Danqing’s slightly intoxicated expression revealed a hint of satisfaction as he said, “Brother Er, that won’t work. That thing is not even as strong as my tattered cloth bag. Though mine is worn out, it can hold more than yours. In the future, find some time to go to the capital and buy some useful goods.”

“Oh? The Surveillance Bureau has a dedicated place for trade?” Li Huowang was taken aback, realizing the potential significance of this fact for both future intelligence-gathering and strengthening of his abilities.

“Wouldn’t it be weird if they don’t have one?” asked Tuoba Danqing.

Hearing this, Li Huowang agreed before quickly pouring himself a small amount of wine, raising his cup to toast Tuoba Danqing.

Li Huowang's sharp senses made it easy for him to get tipsy, but sometimes, getting a bit drunk was just what he needed.

As the night went on, the drinks kept flowing. Slowly, their camaraderie became so strong that it almost reached the point of them performing traditional rituals like burning yellow paper and sacrificing a chicken to become sworn brothers.

As he listened to Tuoba Danqing's voice, Li Huowang was reminded of his dormitory mates; it was as if he had returned to the time when he was in high school before his illness began. Back then, he wasn't mentally ill, and there was no transmigration. Yang Na was real, and his future was bright.

Ah... how great would it be to once again go back to that time...

But now, I've already joined the Surveillance Bureau. The precarious days are behind me, and from now on, each day will surely be better than the last. Some day, I'll live a life even better than the one before!

In a daze, Tuoba Danqing embraced Li Huowang's shoulders, leaned against the window sill, and gazed at the quiet Yinling City outside. His voice carried a hint of emotion as he said, "Dear brother~! Look at how beautiful Yinling City is. Honestly, I haven't been here much."

"Brother Tuoba, I apologize! I'll punish myself with three cups! I'm sorry for making Brother Tuoba run around!" said Li Huowang. He was so drunk that his tongue was tied, and at times, he didn't even know what he was saying.

"What are you apologizing for? What nonsense are you talking about? I just happened to pass by. It's not specifically for you, my friend. Can you guess what I was doing before?" said Tuoba Danqing.

"How could I guess? Brother Tuoba...", Li Huowang hiccuped before continuing, "...look, the sun is almost up. How about we call it a night?"

Hearing that Li Huowang didn't pick up on his cue, Tuoba Danqing got a bit annoyed. "Come here, let me show you a real treasure! It'll broaden your horizons, my friend!"

Then, he pulled Li Huowang back to the table, plopped down on the ground, and rummaged through his tattered yellow cloth bag. Soon, he forcefully pulled out a man's head, along with a mass of bloody and mushy internal organs.

"Hmm?" Li Huowang looked at it in bewilderment. "Brother Tuoba, what is this?"

"Hehe, you don't know, huh? This is the Strayed One we specially obtained from the depths of Qing Qiu with Lord Jixiang," said Tuoba Danqing.

As soon as these words came out, the illusion of Hong Zhong burst into laughter, doubling over as he struggled to catch his breath.

Chapter 297 - Strayed One

“Hahaha!” Hong Zhong’s laughter echoed within Li Huowang’s head incessantly. “Strayed One! Li Huowang, hahaha!”

Meanwhile, Li Huowang held the cup in his hand and just sat there, dumbfounded. He looked at the half-corpse in Tuoba Danqing’s hands, at half the head of the half-dead person and the internal organs hanging from the head. After a long pause, his eyes gradually widened, and shock appeared on his face, “So... this is a... Strayed One..”

At that moment, his clenched fist under the table tightened, but his face showed no emotions.

The drunken Tuoba Danqing was quite satisfied with Li Huowang’s surprise, and replied with pride, “How’s it? You haven’t seen it before right? Truthfully speaking, it’s also my first time seeing a living Strayed One!”

Li Huowang reached out a trembling finger to touch that Strayed One’s face. It was a square-faced middle-aged man with a beard. He seemed to be around forty years old. Just based on appearance, he had an average-looking face. However, his five organs were extremely distorted. The sorrow and despair in the eyes was something that was frozen in death.

Li Huowang understood his agony very well. He knew that only those that died under extremely painful situations would sport such an expression. This person, who had an identity extremely similar to his own, had suffered a pitiful death.

“Ah, touching him once is good enough. In fact, normally you wouldn’t even be qualified to see such a treasure. Even letting you

have a glance of him is already making a huge exception. After all, this is a coveted treasure that is about to enter the treasury,” said Tuoba Danqing.

Hearing this, Li Huowang numbly raised his arm and poured the contents of his wine-cup into his mouth. His expression and body gradually became relaxed as he asked, “Brother Tuoba, why... does this Strayed One only have a brain and his organs left?”

This question seemed to strike something within Tuoba Danqing’s heart, and he slammed the table in frustration. “Ah! We wanted to keep him alive, since Strayed Ones are much more useful alive than dead. But guess what? When Lord Jixiang and I got close to the border, we were unexpectedly intercepted! We tried our best, but only managed to seize this much. It’s quite a pity.”

Li Huowang nodded. The strong smell of alcohol covered the astonishment on his face. “Ah, Brother Tuoba, it’s a pity indeed. If only this Strayed One was still alive. I heard that the bewilderment within the Strayed Ones’ brains is very useful.”

Tuoba Danqing continued, “That’s not all! The physical body of a Strayed One is also a treasure! Brother Er, the Strayed One’s flesh, organs, and bones are all precious materials! Let me tell you something: Lord Jixiang has a powerful artifact made from the Strayed One’s wealth attraction. It can immerse the consciousness of others into bewilderment when they least expect it. Apparently, he did not sell it even when someone offered two hundred years of lifespan!”

“Wealth attraction?” questioned Li Huowang.

“Wealth attraction is the tongue, and the tongue is the wealth attraction. Brother Er, you don’t even know such euphemisms. You still have a lot left to learn,” said Tuoba Danqing.

“Regarding Strayed Ones, I’ve only ever heard about them, and never seen one. I didn’t expect there to be so many intricacies to the whole thing. Brother Tuoba, you’ve truly broadened my horizons,”

said Li Huowang as he raised his wine-cup to toast Tuoba Danqing.

“Broadened your horizons, right? Hehe, follow me more in future, and there’ll be even many more eye-opening things to see. Come, drink some more!” said Tuoba Danqing as he casually stuffed the Strayed One back into his cloth bag before continuing to drink.

They drank from the second section of the night all the way until dawn before Tuoba Danqing finally fell asleep and they called it a night.

Li Huowang supported the mumbling Tuoba Danqing to the guest room and onto his bed. Then, he gently shifted the yellow cloth bag containing the Strayed One and placed it beside the man’s pillow.

Creak~

As Li Huowang closed the door and left, Tuoba Danqing, who had been snoring with his mouth open, suddenly opened his eyes. At this point, there was no trace of sleepiness in his eyes. He propped up his head and first looked toward the door, then reached for the yellow bag beside his pillow. He had a look of admiration on his face.

Not bad. This person saw the Strayed One, but did not reveal even a single trace of greed. This person that Hong Da brought this time around is much more trustworthy than the one from before.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang swayed down the large street, reeking of alcohol. Apart from the two swords on his back, he was also carrying a large bag of items.

Basking in the early morning sun, Li Huowang’s expression was neither happy nor sad as he silently walked on.

When the other people on the road smelled the pungent odor of alcohol and saw his strange attire, they instinctively covered their noses and avoided him.

“Where did this drunkard come from? Drinking so early in the morning.”

“Exactly! The younger generation nowadays is more and more unbecoming.”

As he listened to these voices, Li Huowang soon arrived at his own inn. When he pushed open the door, Bai Lingmiao, who had been anxiously pacing around, immediately came forward.

“Senior Li, why did you leave without saying a word? You made me so nervous! Did you drink?” asked Bai Lingmiao.

On the other hand, Li Huowang just opened the items in his hand, revealing food boxes woven with bamboo. “I went out for dinner with someone. Let them all come out and taste some of this delicious food.”

After saying that, he lay down on the bed and took a deep breath.

Seeing Li Huowang’s low spirits, Bai Lingmiao couldn’t care less about eating. She sat on the bedside and looked at his back as she asked, “Senior Li, what happened to you?”

Li Huowang once again sighed deeply. “Nothing much. It was just that some things were not as I had expected. Miaomiao, I once again realized that nothing is reliable in this damned place. We can only rely on ourselves for everything.”

As he spoke, he recalled that twisted face once again.

Aside from the Abbess’s son, this was Li Huowang’s third time encountering a Strayed One. And this one was forcibly torn into two halves due to being contested by different parties.

As he remembered that face, Li Huowang understood that the Surveillance Bureau, a powerful organization, was not his backing, and it never could be. On the contrary, they might become his enemies at any time. It was wishful thinking to rely entirely on the Surveillance Bureau to find his footing in this dangerous world. He realized that these dangerous people could only be used from a distance and should never be approached with good intentions. As long as he tore off his mask, a friend who was drinking with him

just a moment ago might bind him up to sell him.

He was a Strayed One, and that was an original sin. As long as he carried this identity, he would be a piece of meat which everyone would want to take a bite out of.

Bai Lingmiao seemed to sense Li Huowang's gloomy mood as she knelt down beside him. She reached out her hand and gently patted his back to make him feel more comfortable. "Senior Li, don't worry. No matter what, you still have us."

Translator's Thoughts

This is a good fan art of Tuoba Danqing!

Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin



Chapter 298 - Going Home

While the two of them were engaged in conversation, a ruckus emerged from the neighboring table.

Hearing a loud thump, Li Huowang lifted his head and peered toward the source of the sound, only to see Puppy sneakily making his way outside while holding a food box.

“Senior Li, is the food you brought back for us to eat?” Puppy asked cautiously.

Li Huowang laid back down with a wry smile on his face. “Yeah, after all, it is only you guys here.”

In this world, his group of fellow disciples were the only ones that he could trust, even if they might not be particularly helpful.

After a moment, Li Huowang propped himself up from the bed. As soon as he sat up, the exhaustion on his face immediately vanished.

“Puppy, put down the food box, and call Gao Zhijian and Chun Xiaoman over. Let’s all eat together. Once we’re done eating, we’ll leave,” said Li Huowang.

“Where are we going?” asked Puppy.

“We are heading home!”

A few days later, Li Huowang, Puppy, Gao Zhijian, Bai Lingmiao and Chun Xiaoman set off in a carriage.

Bai Lingmiao drew down the curtain and warmly spoke to the carriage driver, “Sir, thank you for allowing us to catch a ride. If we were to travel on foot, then it would have taken us a few days to get there.”

Hearing this, the old carriage driver let out a smile, revealing

his few remaining teeth. “No problem, it’s conveniently on the way. But, young lady, your home is quite remote. If you hadn’t told me about it, then I wouldn’t have known that there was a village at the foot of that mountain.”

Hearing this, Puppy immediately expressed his discontent. “Remote? We agreed on a fixed payment before! What’s this? Are you trying to hike up the price?”

Chun Xiaoman gave Puppy a disapproving glance and scolded, “Shut up! Why are you so full of nonsense?! No one will mistake you for a mute even if you don’t speak!”

On the side, Gao Zhijian huddled his limbs, stammering as he tried to intervene.

Sitting in the back, Li Huowang silently watched the lively show inside the carriage. Things were definitely way more relaxed than they were before.

Ever since he transmigrated, Li Huowang had rarely seen such a vibrant scene.

At that moment, Bai Lingmiao’s soft arms wrapped around Li Huowang’s hand. With a smile, she asked, “Senior Li, what’s on your mind right now?”

Knowing that she was about to reach home, Bai Lingmiao was radiating joy from head to toe.

“I’m wondering what Cowheart Mountain is like. I don’t know if we’ll be able to get used to staying there. You also know that it’s hard for me to get along with others,” said Li Huowang as he rolled up the bamboo curtain and gazed at the lush greenery outside. The area was covered with thick, dense forests.

“You’ll get used to it for sure! Everyone in our village is awesome, just like my grandpa. He grows melons. If someone is passing by the village and gets thirsty, they can even have the melons for free. You’re also nice, and so you’ll definitely get along with him. And my parents too! If anyone in the village is faced with

any trouble, both of them would always pitch in, offering money and effort to help. Despite living in the village for such a long time, they've never had any disagreements with anyone! Oh, and my younger brother and his buddies. Don't worry, they won't dare to be rowdy. If they give you a hard time, then just let me know and I'll straighten them out!" said Bai Lingmiao as she eagerly showed off her fair-skinned fists, waving them in the air as if she was ready for action.

Seeing her adorable behavior, Li Huowang smiled to himself. It seemed like she had a completely different personality in front of him compared to what she showed her family.

Li Huowang wrapped his arm around her shoulders and shook his head. "I'm not worried. If they could raise you so well, then they must be doing something right. By the way, Miaomiao, I remember that you used to wear a gold bracelet. Your family must be quite well-off, right?"

Hearing this, Bai Lingmiao smiled modestly and replied, "We are not exactly wealthy; we are just a bit better off than the average folks."

Li Huowang chuckled. If the girl's family had money, and he continued sticking around, then he might just unintentionally become the burdensome son-in-law.

Guess I will be the burdensome son-in-law then. Regardless of how the place turns out to be, after drifting around aimlessly for so long, it's finally a chance to settle down.

Then, all of a sudden, Bai Lingmiao got excited as she eagerly pointed out of the carriage window. "Look, everyone! That's Cowheart Mountain!"

Li Huowang squinted, focusing on the distant mountain covered in green.

It's really massive, but how on earth does it resemble a cow's heart?

Brushing aside this silly question, Li Huowang's thoughts

drifted elsewhere as he began to worry about the Lu Family Troupe.

They left quite a bit before us. They should have already reached the foot of Cowheart Mountain. Let's just hope that nothing unexpected has happened to them.

With this lingering concern in mind, Li Huowang gradually made his way toward the foot of Cowheart Mountain.

But his worries were short-lived. All of Li Huowang's worries dissipated in an instant when he saw Yang Xiaohai, barefoot and accompanied by a round-faced woman, standing in the rice paddies as they gathered loaches.

"Senior Li is back!! Senior Li is back!"

Accompanied by Yang Xiaohai's enthusiastic yell, the rest of the group started appearing from the stacked layers of tiled houses.

After nearly half a month of not seeing each other, this reunion filled Lu Zhuangyuan with excitement as he enthusiastically grabbed Li Huowang's hands. "Daoist! You're finally back! We've been anxiously waiting for you."

"Troupe leader Lu, the journey here must have been quite tough. Did everything go smoothly?" asked Li Huowang.

"No, no, it wasn't tough at all! The number of people is the same as before! No one went missing!" said Lu Zhuangyuan before subsequently showing concern for Li Huowang's lone eye; it was as though they were very close to each other.

"Let's go, don't just stand here. We'll discuss more inside," said Li Huowang.

Just as Li Huowang was about to step in, Lu Zhuangyuan stopped him. Then, he sneaked a glance at Bai Lingmiao as a trace of unease appeared on his face.

"Uh, Daoist... There's no need to head in so quickly. First, I have to speak with you privately," said Lu Zhuangyuan.

Li Huowang clearly didn't quite understand what he meant. "Just say whatever you need to. Why does it have to be in private?"

Li Huowang couldn't fathom a reason for him and Lu Zhuangyuan to have a private conversation.

"Oh... Daoist, you see... it's better to discuss some matters privately," said Lu Zhuangyuan as he came closer to Li Huowang while making subtle facial expressions in the direction of Bai Lingmiao.

Seeing this, Li Huowang's heart skipped a beat as he glanced at Bai Lingmiao who was standing beside him.

If Troupe Leader Lu is insisting on discussing things privately with me, could it be because there's a major problem with Miaomiao's hometown?

Li Huowang finally understood what Troupe Leader Lu was trying to convey, but unfortunately, Bai Lingmiao had also caught on to it.

"Troupe Leader Lu... What happened to my hometown?" asked Bai Lingmiao.

As she saw Troupe Leader Lu shiftily avoiding her gaze, tears welled up in Bai Lingmiao's eyes.

"Dad! Mom!" Tears streamed down Bai Lingmiao's face as she brushed past the others and ran along the winding path toward the village.

Sensing her unease, Li Huowang hurriedly followed suit.

"Dad! Mom! Grandpa!! Your daughter is back! Where are you guys?" shouted Bai Lingmiao, her cries mixed with sobs echoing continuously throughout the village. She opened every door in the village, hoping to find her family, but only disappointment awaited behind each one.

Translator's Thoughts

Blind Chen, or the fake Hong Zhong? Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin



Chapter 299 - Cowheart Village

“Dad! Mom! Where are you guys?!” Tears streamed down Bai Lingmiao’s face as she continued to search throughout the entire Cowheart Village.

Behind her was Li Huowang, who was also searching with her; however, he could see that they were the only ones left in the entire village.

At this point, Lu Zhuangyuan approached carefully with a smile.

“What’s going on?” Li Huowang furrowed his brows as he questioned Lu Zhuangyuan.

In response, the latter wore an innocent look and replied, “Daoist, how would I know? I just arrived here and there was nobody in the entire village. At first, I was surprised and thought that I had gotten the location wrong, so I went searching several miles around here. But after covering the entire Cowheart Mountain, this was the only this place left.”

Li Huowang remained silent. After a while, he took a deep breath and walked toward Bai Lingmiao in the distance. Currently, she was constantly searching the entire village tirelessly without finding anything.

As Li Huowang saw her sweating profusely, and turning back toward the first house to restart her search, he rushed over and grabbed her shoulders, and then pulled her into his embrace.

At this point, Bai Lingmiao finally couldn’t hold it in anymore. She leaned on his shoulder and burst into tears, “Senior Li, my family is gone!”

Such a long period of anticipation had culminated into nothing. Li Huowang knew what kind of feeling it was, and he could empathize with her. “Don’t cry; maybe they just left temporarily. They may yet not have faced anything unexpected. Think positively.”

Standing beside her, Lu Zhuangyuan also tried to console her as he spoke, “Miss Bai, the Daoist is right. Perhaps they were seeking safety and left just like us. When they return from their refuge, you will be able to meet them again.”

The rest of them also saw the situation and came up to console her.

However, their words did not ease Bai Lingmiao much. She was no fool. The disappearance of all the people of an entire village wasn’t a trivial matter.

Bai Lingmiao’s crying completely overwhelmed the joy of reunion, and cast a shadow upon the entire group. Not a single person spoke all throughout dinner.

After dinner, Li Huowang wandered around the entire village with the moonlight guiding him. He was not looking for people, but searching for clues.

The entire village couldn’t just have vanished without a trace; they must have encountered some troublesome situation. Even if they had been devoured by evil spirits or deceived by the Sitting Oblivion Dao, there must be some traces left behind.

“Daoist, I previously told Ms. Bai that her family was hiding from a crisis. But that was just to make her feel better. In my opinion, they’re probably not hiding from a crisis. Who would hide from disasters without even locking their doors? When we first entered the village, the pigs in the backyard were starving and didn’t even look like pigs anymore.” Lu Zhuangyuan followed Li Huowang as he babbled on.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang squatted down to examine the

patterns on the stone path. "When you guys first came here, was this village in a mess?"

"No, not at all. The clothes were still hanging outside. Cows, dogs, everything seemed fine. Just that the people were missing. I even specifically checked through the cabinets in each household. The clothes weren't missing. It's clear that they didn't just leave for a long trip," explained Lu Zhuangyuan.

Li Huowang gazed through every inch to look for details and any potential dangers. When he pushed open a door and still found no clues, he removed the cotton from his ears before carefully listening to his surroundings. He roamed around the village, and even invited a Wandering God to help search underground.

But this time was different. There were no hostile gazes, evil spirits, or anything.

When Li Huowang returned to the Bai Family's courtyard, he saw Luo Juanhua and Chun Xiaoman standing in the bright hall, one on each side as they consoled Bai Lingmiao. The others were also standing around, discussing in groups of twos or threes. When they saw Li Huowang return, they all looked over.

"Go and rest first; let's discuss tomorrow," said Li Huowang.

After Li Huowang spoke, the rest did not stay around, and left with their groups.

Given that she had been crying, Bai Lingmiao's pink eyes had become somewhat red. They were filled with deep sorrow as she turned to look toward Li Huowang and sniffled.

"It's getting late. Where's your room? Go and take a bath first," said Li Huowang.

Hearing this, Bai Lingmiao pursed her lips and stood up before walking toward the bathroom.

After some time, the two of them silently lay down in a bedroom filled with a faint fragrance.

The layout of the room and the white mosquito net hinted that

this was Bai Lingmiao's previous bedroom.

At this moment, Bai Lingmiao was curled up on the bed, her shoulders shuddering constantly as she tried not to bawl. Then, in the next moment, she felt herself being carried over before leaning against a strong chest.

"Don't cry. When we encounter trouble, we solve it. We are now people with some abilities. Do you think we can't find them?" assured Li Huowang.

With this, Bai Lingmiao's shoulders finally stopped twitching. Her head nuzzled against Li Huowang's chest. Then, she suddenly broke free of his embrace and picked up her drum that was placed before the mirror before dashing out of the house.

Dong dong dong! Dong dong dong!

"In the heavens, matters are handled by flying Immortals; while on earth, they are handled in red and yellow! While in the netherworld, summon the sorrowful King to assist... I stop the horse to ask for the country's name, hold the reins and look for the homeland. Whether surnamed Zhang, Wang, Li or Huang... Zhao, Qian, Sun, Li, Cun, Xiao, Zhou, Wu Zheng, Wang, Yan, Zhang..."

As Li Huowang listened to the rhythmic drumbeat outside, he slowly closed his eyes.

The next day, when he opened his eyes again, he found that Bai Lingmiao, who was usually an early riser, was lying soundlessly on the bed.

"How is it? What did the Immortal families say?" Li Huowang asked as he wore his clothes.

"They can't find them," replied Bai Lingmiao through her agony. "Even the Immortal families cannot find them... Senior Li, do you think that my parents are really gone?"

Li Huowang walked over, patted her shoulder, and then turned to walk out of the room. "I'm leaving. While I'm away, help keep an eye on things."

Just as he turned to leave, Bai Lingmiao opened the door. With her reddened eyes, she asked dumbfoundedly, “Senior Li, where are you going?”

“Where else? Since even the Immortal families can’t help, I have to think of a way to find out where all the members of the village went. Can I ignore it if you’re like this?” said Li Huowang.

Hearing this, Bai Lingmiao leapt toward him and hugged his waist. Her tears stained his clothes as she thanked him profusely, “Thank you, Senior Li...”

Seeing that his reaction had consistently been cold, she had assumed that he did not care about her family’s situation at all. She had never expected him to have already figured out what he had to do, and it was just that he hadn’t mentioned it.

Translator's Thoughts

Ah, this is the fake Hong Zhong of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin



Chapter 300 - County Magistrate

“Do we still need to thank each other? If it weren’t for you, I would have died a long time ago. Your troubles are my troubles as well. Don’t cry, and just wait for my updates,” said Li Huowang as he gave Bai Lingmiao’s hand a reassuring pat before gently letting go of it and leading her outside.

Li Huowang wasn’t good at expressing affection, but he didn’t want Bai Lingmiao to go through the same things that he had gone through. That feeling was too painful.

Bai Lingmiao quickly followed, her voice filled with concern as she asked, “Senior Li, do you know where my parents went?”

“I don’t know,” replied Li Huowang.

“So where do we even start looking?” asked Bai Lingmiao.

“Don’t worry, I have some status now; there is bound to be a solution.” Li Huowang took out his Surveillance Bureau badge and waved it in front of Bai Lingmiao.

Villagers disappearing overnight wasn’t a small matter. The county magistrate who oversaw Cowheart Village must know something; for now, he could start investigating from there.

After deciding on the course of action, Li Huowang checked the map, led out a horse, and then mounted it. He wasn’t an expert at riding horses, but that wasn’t a problem for him. He’d figure it out after a few tumbles. He was completely unfazed, unlike the others who would be hurt.

After a day and a night of tumbling, Li Huowang finally reached the largest nearby county town right as dawn broke.

Glancing at the moderately-sized county town ahead, the dusty

Li Huowang walked in, leading the horse by its reins.

Meanwhile, County Magistrate Wang woke up and gently kicked the covers with his eyes still closed. The concubine on the other side of the bed quickly got up, knelt on the floor with her forehead touching the ground, and said, "Master, please change into a fresh pair of clothes."

County Magistrate Wang slowly opened his eyes. With the gentle support of his concubine, he sat up. A peeled willow branch was already within his reach as he extended his hand. Gently dipping the willow branch into the fine salt held by the maid, he placed it in his mouth and started using it to brush his teeth. After he finished brushing his teeth, the maid promptly handed him the prepared sandalwood spittoon.

He took a sip of the warm water and puffed his cheeks before lowering his head and spat into the spittoon.

As County Magistrate Wang closed his eyes, the maid held a towel as she carefully and meticulously wiped his face. Then, she stepped back as another maid slowly approached him while holding the official attire.

After several maids helped dress him up, he finally strolled out from his bedroom, adorned in a navy-blue official uniform.

As soon as he stepped out, a wave of heat hit him. He looked up at the blazing sun, as a hint of displeasure crossed his face.

"Another scorching day. There's hardly been any cooling days lately," complained County Magistrate Wang as he walked forward, with two maids holding fans, hastening their steps to catch up to him.

He had walked only a few steps before reaching his usual large wooden desk. Here, his trusted assistant, Steward Hu, had been waiting for him for quite some time.

"Update me. Has anyone lodged any complaint or accusations recently?" asked County Magistrate Wang.

The mustached steward revealed a faint insincere smile. “Master, there’s only one today. The informant handed over ten pieces of silver.”

“Really?” County Magistrate Wang picked up the crystal-clear noodles and took a few bites while leisurely asking, “And who is the accused?”

“The accused is a horse dealer from Qing Qiu; he offered up one piece of gold,” replied Steward Hu.

“Mmm~! The noodles are quite good today! Too bad there’s not enough,” commented County Magistrate Wang.

Hearing this, Steward Hu immediately grasped the situation. “Understood, Master. I will handle it privately with them.”

Then, reaching into his pocket, he took out a piece of paper and began reading the written complaint.

While nodding and swaying as he listened to the written complaint, County Magistrate Wang suddenly noticed a man emerging from within the ground. Witnessing this bizarre scene, he was initially startled, and then his expression turned anxious. Finally, he abruptly stood up, causing the bowl of noodles in his hand to spill all over the table.

“Who... who are you? How dare you try to assassinate an Imperial Official! The Surveillance Bureau will not let this go unpunished!” shouted County Magistrate Wang.

Li Huowang looked at the trembling man before him, not bothering to engage in small talk. He directly took out the badge and displayed it to the man before him. “I have some questions for you.”

Seeing the badge in Li Huowang’s hand, County Magistrate Wang immediately emerged from behind his assistant, his face showing a fawning smile. “Ah~ A high-ranking official from the Surveillance Bureau! Sir, please, have a seat and enjoy some tea!”

“Enough with the formalities. Tell me, what happened to the

people in Cowheart Village? It's been a while since anyone has seen any of them. You wouldn't happen to be clueless about it, would you?" asked Li Huowang.

The man was clearly taken aback when he heard this. He then whispered to Steward Hu, "What's going on in Cowheart Village?"

"Master, have you forgotten? The entire village disappeared, and you instructed Constable Cao to look into it. He wanted to discuss something with you earlier, but you were occupied and didn't have the time to listen," replied Steward Hu.

"Stop standing there! Go and get Cao Xin immediately!" ordered County Magistrate Wang.

"Constable Cao has gone out for patrol! I don't know where he is," said Steward Hu.

Upon hearing this, County Magistrate Wang gave Li Huowang an awkward smile. "Sir, shall I take you to find Constable Cao? He's responsible for handling such matters."

"Let's go. I don't have time to waste," said Li Huowang as he walked out.

Seeing Li Huowang heading out, County Magistrate Wang and Steward Hu quickly followed after him.

Clang~

At that moment, a sharp noise echoed.

"County~ Magistrate~ is~ heading~ out~"

Then, under the deliberately prolonged announcement, County Magistrate Wang, donned an official hat and took his seat in a blue sedan chair. Halfway through, he turned around and smiled at Li Huowang before suggesting, "Sir, why don't you take a seat?"

"Hurry up, and get on. I don't have time to waste," said Li Huowang.

"He he he." County Magistrate Wang sat in the sedan chair, smirking to himself. However, before he could get comfortable, Li Huowang's words sent shivers down his spine.

“With the disappearance of so many people, haven’t you reported the situation to the Surveillance Bureau?” asked Li Huowang.

Hearing a hint of accusation in those words, County Magistrate Wang panicked. He quickly opened the curtain of his sedan chair and began to shift the blame. “Sir, we are still investigating the matter. Reporting without conclusive evidence could lead to mistakes. If I end up making a wrong report, it’s just me who bears the consequences. I wouldn’t want to waste your time on a wild goose chase. Ah, I sincerely apologize. It’s all because of my incompetent subordinates taking their time. It’s a shame that a person of your stature has to personally investigate. After sorting out this mess, I must invite you to the White Tower for a feast as an apology. I’ll punish myself with three cups!”

Hearing his fawning, Li Huowang impatiently gestured forward. “Hurry up.”

If not for Constable Cao’s potential findings, he wouldn’t have even bothered talking to such a talkative person.

The sedan chair swayed with a creaking sound as the bearers moved in unison.

The town was relatively small, so finding the patrolling constable was not all that difficult. Soon, Li Huowang spotted him in green clothes, standing at the entrance of a brothel, flirting with the women inside.

When the constable and his subordinates spotted the County Magistrate’s sedan, they promptly straightened their expressions, adjusted their hats, and continued their patrol along the streets with a purposeful stride.

“Ah, County Magistrate.” Constable Cao bowed with clasped hands, acknowledging the presence of the sedan. “County Magistrate, you’re out quite early, trying to understand the sentiments of the people. Please take care of yourself too, and don’t

exhaust yourself for the sake of the common folk.”

“Ah, what’s a little hardship for the sake of the people?” started County Magistrate Wang, but upon seeing Li Huowang’s face darken, he quickly became serious and asked, “Constable Cao, have you found anything on the case of the missing villagers from Cowheart Village? Think carefully before you answer. This is a high-ranking lord from the Surveillance Bureau. He came personally to handle this matter!”

“Ah?” Constable Cao looked at Li Huowang in surprise. “But it was the Surveillance Bureau who took away the people of Cowheart Village.”

Chapter 301 - Sounds Within The Mist

“But it was the Surveillance Bureau who took the people of Cowheart Village away.”

Constable Cao’s words shocked Li Huowang.

How is that possible? Why would the Surveillance Bureau take away Bai Lingmiao’s family?

But he recovered quite quickly.

Wait, maybe that wasn’t the real Surveillance Bureau. Maybe someone was impersonating them!

But whether it was genuine or an impersonation, it was not good news for Bai Lingmiao’s family.

Having witnessed this from Hong Da, Li Huowang knew that the Surveillance Bureau was quite ruthless and would not hesitate to take people’s lives to accomplish their mission. But, if it was an impersonation, then it would be even more complicated. The only possible outcomes were bad and worse.

“Which way did they go?” Li Huowang asked Constable Cao with a serious expression. At this point, they could only try chasing after them. It was uncertain whether they could even catch up.

“From the looks of it, they were headed toward the capital. I don’t know how far they’ve gone,” replied Constable Cao.

Seeing Constable Cao pointing toward the west with his trembling hands, Li Huowang swiftly stepped onto the saddle with one foot, mounted his horse and galloped in that direction.

Watching Li Huowang’s figure receding into the distance, County Magistrate Wang breathed a sigh of relief. At that moment, his assistant approached him from the side.

“Master, I think there’s something suspicious about this matter. Do you think that there might be some conflict between these two groups of people?” said Steward Hu.

County Magistrate Wang looked impatient as he replied, “If it’s suspicious, then so be it. What do the Surveillance Bureau’s matters have to do with the Magistrate’s office? Let’s head back!”

Clippity-clop.

Meanwhile, the sound of horse hooves echoed continuously as Li Huowang rode his horse to move in the direction pointed toward by Constable Cao. On the back of the horse, he swayed rhythmically, his mind a chaotic mess filled with various conjectures.

If it’s not the Surveillance Bureau, then, could it be...

“Hehe... don’t be so jumpy. From my perspective, this doesn’t seem like the work of any other faction besides the Surveillance Bureau.”

Hearing those words, Li Huowang immediately turned his head to look at Hong Zhong who was lying in mid-air, looking bored as he yawned. “From your perspective? Can I even trust half the things you say? With the way you put it, I’m even more inclined to suspect that the Surveillance Bureau is being impersonated by the Sitting Oblivion Dao.”

“If you don’t believe me, then so be it. But remember, the Sitting Oblivion Dao is known for pulling off their schemes openly. There’s never been a notion of changing locations,” said Hong Zhong as he sat up. Then, he stretched lazily, and chuckled before continuing, “Hehehe, besides, who says that we don’t speak the truth? The art of lying requires one to mix a single truth with nine lies. If all we did was tell lies, then who would fall for it?”

In the end, Li Huowang chose to ignore him and focus on the road ahead, mentally preparing for whatever challenges might lie ahead.

Riding for several days straight took its toll on both the horse and on Li Huowang. Although Li Huowang could endure it given his resilient body, the horse still needed sufficient rest.

One evening, Li Huowang tied the horse to a tree and promptly climbed up before closing his eyes to rest.

Li Huowang wasn't sure how much time had passed when the whispers of the Black Taisui woke him up. When he opened his eyes again, the sky had already turned completely dark.

Shaking off the drowsiness, Li Huowang rolled down from the tree and gently patted the neck of the horse who was still sleeping. Soon, the sound of horse-hooves resumed, echoing through the empty dirt road and into the distance.

As Li Huowang was pondering how long he would be able to endure this life on the road and whether or not he would be able to find them, he noticed something.

Under the dim moonlight, Li Huowang crouched down by the roadside and studied the densely packed footprints on the ground. He observed the multitude of footprints that came in various sizes and instinctively felt that these must be the people he was looking for.

As Li Huowang noticed the specks of blood in some of these footprints, he pulled the reins and urged the horse forward. "Let's go!"

Perhaps because they were traveling in a large group, these folks weren't able to move all that fast. As Li Huowang relentlessly chased on horseback for an hour, the footprints on the ground became more and more pronounced.

At this point, Li Huowang decided to dismount from the horse to avoid arousing suspicion. He concealed his illusion in the soil before moving forward stealthily.

The pitch-black sky gradually gave way to a deep blue. Just as dawn was about to break, Li Huowang finally found a group of

prisoners huddled together, dozing off in a nearby grove.

People of all ages and genders could be seen wearing wooden shackles around their necks, giving them the appearance of heinous criminals in custody.

Initially, Li Huowang hadn't been sure whether these really were the people he was searching for. However, when he spotted a pretty woman who shared a strong resemblance with Bai Lingmiao, he realized that he was on the right track.

Despite their worn-out appearance and ragged clothes, all of them appeared to be healthy, and with all their limbs intact. This fact finally allowed Li Huowang to ease up slightly.

As long as these people are still alive, there is still room for redemption.

Li Huowang didn't reveal himself immediately. Instead, he began to circle around these people, searching for those responsible for escorting them. If they were enemies, then he would confront them. If they were from the Surveillance Bureau, then negotiation was the way forward. Either way, Li Huowang was determined to rescue this group of people.

He circled around them for a while, but didn't catch sight of a single person of authority.

There's no way that nobody's keeping an eye on them. If that really were the case, then the Bai family would have long since made a run for it.

While he was still confused, he heard an incredibly peculiar clattering sound from behind him. It was like the sound of something swaying in a bamboo tube.

Li Huowang slowly turned around and noticed that a faint white morning mist was starting to rise up from within the dim forest. The clattering sound was coming from within this mist.

As the clattering sound drew near, and the slumbering Bai family members began to wake up. Upon hearing the sound, fear

emerged in all their eyes, and some of the children instinctively started crying.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang could catch the whiff of a pungent odor, and he clearly sensed that something was stirring within the white mist. Yet, he couldn't quite make out what it was.

By now, Li Huowang no longer wanted to wait idly. Ignoring whether it was a blessing or a curse, he grabbed the hilt of his sword with one hand, and held his breath as he cautiously ventured into the white mist.

As he approached, the clattering sound slowly grew louder. Li Huowang slowly followed the sound to its source.

Clatter~ clatter~ clatter~

Along with this peculiar sound, a wooden figure, wearing a black watermelon hat with two rosy cheeks, swayed and floated out from within the thick and white morning mist.

Clatter~ clatter~

Each time the wooden figure's head swayed, the peculiar clattering sound emanated from inside its head.

The instant Li Huowang laid eyes on this thing, every hair on his body stood on end. However, when he noticed that it wasn't paying any attention to him, he didn't act immediately.

What on earth is this thing?

As the wooden head slowly floated closer, Li Huowang clenched his teeth, and remained on high alert. Soon, a powerful gaze descended from above and pressed down on him, making every breath feel difficult.

At this point, Li Huowang suddenly looked up and saw a devilish and pale face slowly descend from within the hazy mist, with a wide, bitter smile.

Li Huowang finally grasped what it was as it fully presented itself before him.

Chapter 302 - *Impermanence*

The face stretched out to several feet wide, and had a blood-red tongue that measured two or three feet in length hanging from its mouth. Beneath this terrifying face was a hunched figure that was over thirty feet tall. It was a grotesquely large White Impermanence!

That wooden head swaying in the air was just a pendant hanging from its chest!

Clatter~ clatter~

Accompanied by this strange sound, the White Impermanence crouched down, and then peered and sniffed in Li Huowang's direction, making humming and grumbling sounds as if it were searching for something.

While Li Huowang was currently invisible, this entity could still sense something. It was just a matter of time before he was discovered.

This thing is not easy to deal with!

Coming to this conclusion, Li Huowang didn't hesitate and unleashed his killer move. He faced the White Impermanence and lifted his right hand with his fingers spread open.

With a swift motion and a slicing sound, his left arm was cut off. Then, it flew out at an incredible speed, and pierced through the White Impermanence's[\[1\]](#) eyes.

Racked with pain, the White Impermanence opened its mouth and let out a deafening roar.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang didn't hesitate and immediately leaped into action. With a single hand, he raised his sword and

jumped straight toward its open mouth.

In response, the White Impermanence sent its sharp nails whistling toward Li Huowang. But because of its injured eyes, its aim seemed off; it only managed to leave a deep wound on Li Huowang's neck.

In the next instant, Li Huowang slid down its throat amidst the continuous sound of flesh being torn apart. Just as he was about to slide to the bottom, a wooden mask appeared from seemingly nowhere and covered Li Huowang's face.

In an instant, Li Huowang felt the world go dark; at the same time, he suddenly couldn't breathe.

Li Huowang vigorously shook his head as he tried to remove whatever was on his face. However, no matter what he did, the mask clung to his face without budging in the slightest.

Realizing his situation, Li Huowang didn't hesitate as he pulled out a thin willow-leaf knife and inserted it along the edge of his jaw. He nearly suffocated as he peeled off a substantial portion of the skin on his face. Then, he immediately tried to breathe, only to find himself unable to inhale anything.

What on earth is going on?!

Li Huowang quickly surveyed his surroundings in a state of panic. When he realized that he couldn't see Hong Zhong and Monk, alarm bells rang loudly in his mind.

But then, he suddenly snapped out of it.

In the next moment, there was no sign of the towering White Impermanence being around. At the same time, the mist-covered forest was now brightly lit.

The only thing that remained the same as before was that he still couldn't breathe.

His face soon turned a shade of purple as he reached for his neck and found a rope that had completely sunk into his flesh. After a moment, he grabbed the handle of his sword, and exerted

pressure with his thumb as he tried to forcefully cut the rope.

Accompanied by a spine-chilling scream, foul-smelling blood started continuously spraying out of Li Huowang's neck. At the same time, the rope around his neck shrunk toward the forest, and Li Huowang fell from the air like a lifeless corpse.

"Daoist, are you okay?" asked Monk as he quickly approached Li Huowang and expressed his concern.

Holding his neck, Li Huowang shook his head and got up unsteadily. "I'm fine."

After answering Monk, Li Huowang immediately looked around.

Rays of sunlight seeped through the gaps in the leaves as they cast a pattern on the forest floor. The scene appeared so normal that it was as if everything that had just happened earlier was nothing more than an illusion.

Was it an illusion?

Li Huowang glanced at his perfectly intact left arm with a hint of confusion. However, when he touched the wound left behind by White Impermanence's nails, his gaze became more determined.

This was definitely not an illusion. I just don't know what method that thing used when we fought.

Luckily, the attack just now injured it. It shouldn't come back for a while.

"Oh no!" Suddenly, Li Huowang suddenly remembered something and rushed back.

When he rushed out of the woods and saw that the Bai family members were still huddled together, he finally breathed a sigh of relief.

As long as everyone is safe, that's all that matters.

As Li Huowang approached them, the Bai family members were visibly startled by his presence.

A Daoist with a bronze coin veil and blood dripping down his

neck, approaching them while holding a sword. It was a sight that would instill fear in just about anyone.

Soon, a sharp crack rang out, and the thick wooden shackles were split open. Li Huowang wielded his sword and freed all of them from their restraints.

Gradually, the Bai family members grasped that the Daoist was here to rescue them. As the truth finally sank in, tears welled up in the eyes of some of the women.

The one with the greatest authority in a clan would usually always be the elderly, and Cowheart Village was no exception.

Soon, an elderly individual, with just a single lower front tooth remaining, led the others forward. He was about to kneel before Li Huowang. "Thank you, Sir, for rescuing our entire village."

However, Li Huowang quickly reached out to support the elderly person. "Elder, please don't kneel. I came here at the request of Miss Bai Lingmiao to rescue all of you."

As soon as he said that, several people in the crowd became incredibly excited. The middle-aged woman who bore a striking resemblance to Bai Lingmiao was overjoyed and tearful as she turned to the man beside her and exclaimed, "Our daughter is safe! She's alive! Our daughter is alive!"

In an instant, a hum of excitement filled the air as Li Huowang was surrounded by Bai Lingmiao's relatives. Questions flew at him from all directions, and he found himself unsure about which one to respond to amidst all the clamor.

"Enough!" At that moment, a loud and commanding voice silenced everyone. The voice came from a robust man who was supporting the elderly person with a single tooth. He had a look of composed confidence with a slight stubble on his chin.

"Don't you see that our benefactor is injured? Moreover, is this the appropriate place for questions?" asked the robust man.

With that, he clasped his hands together and bowed toward Li

Huowang and said, "I am Bai Sai, the leader of the Bai family. Benefactor, what do you think about leaving this place for now?"

Li Huowang touched the wound on his neck and nodded. "Alright, let's leave."

Although he had driven that thing away, there was no guarantee that it wouldn't return with others of its kind to seek revenge.

With their wooden shackles removed, they gathered around Li Huowang as they left the area together. Along the way, it was clear that the others were eager to talk to Li Huowang, but were clearly hindered by the robust man's authority and dared not speak up.

However, unable to contain her emotions, Bai Lingmiao's mother walked over to Li Huowang and handed over her handkerchief. "Benefactor, your neck is still bleeding, use this to cover it for now."

Li Huowang expressed his gratitude and accepted the handkerchief.

Then, the woman couldn't help but ask, "Sir, how is my daughter? Has she grown taller? Has she lost weight? Is she facing any mistreatment outside?"

Her words were filled with deep concern.

Seeing her like this, Li Huowang was reminded of his mother. His mother was just like her, constantly worrying about the same things.

"She is doing well and hasn't faced much hardship. But she often mentions you," said Li Huowang.

Upon hearing Li Huowang's response, the beautiful woman couldn't help but burst into tears.

On the other hand, Li Huowang maintained his composure. He knew that without unraveling the cause and effect of this matter, it couldn't yet be considered resolved.

After thinking for a moment, Li Huowang shifted his gaze

toward Bai Sai who was still supporting the elderly man, and asked, “Chief Bai, do you mind shedding some light on what exactly happened? Why were all of you captured? Also, what was it that I just fought with?”

As soon as Li Huowang posed his questions, the discussion around him instantly quieted down, and all eyes turned in his direction.

After a long sigh, Bai Sai replied, “Benefactor, to be honest, I don’t know what is going on either. Ever since my son picked up that stone, strange things have been happening. One day out of the blue, we just found ourselves wearing wooden shackles and forced to move forward by the person wearing a wooden mask. Fortunately, you saved us. Otherwise, who knows where we would have been taken.”

Li Huowang frowned. Despite the lengthy explanation, it felt like the other party hadn't really said anything at all.

“Heh, Li Huowang, be careful. He is trying to deceive you.”

Li Huowang lifted his gaze, and looked toward Hong Zhong who uttered those words.

1. a deity in chinese folk religion that plays a role in guiding the deceased through the afterlife 🙌

Chapter 303 - Bai Family Members

“Heh, Li Huowang, be careful. He is trying to deceive you.”

Li Huowang lifted his gaze, and looked toward Hong Zhong who uttered those words.

Hong Zhong, who had no facial skin or eyes, sat atop Peng Longteng’s shoulder as he grinned to reveal his white teeth.

As he looked at this scene, Li Huowang’s lips twitched slightly. He did not say anything as he looked around at the crowd.

He was still not composed enough. He couldn’t remain completely calm in the face of this illusion’s words.

After that, Li Huowang completely ignored the words spoken by Hong Zhong. He wouldn’t even believe the punctuation marks of whatever came out of that fellow’s mouth.

Li Huowang’s gaze shifted from Hong Zhong to Bai Sai beside him. He wanted a more detailed explanation about what he had said previously. “Chief Bai, you mentioned that your son picked up a stone and then they came to cause trouble for you guys. Could you tell me more about the stone?”

Bai Sai tried to think back and then gestured with his hands to illustrate the size. “It was an orange-colored stone. It was about this big, and was warm to the touch. The kid picked it up from the fields and brought it home, planning to give it to his grandmother to help her warm her knees.”

“Is the stone still around? Can I have a look?” asked Li Huowang.

Bai Sai sighed in frustration. “Our whole family was taken away, so that thing didn’t manage to escape either. It was taken

away long ago by that person with the wooden mask.”

A fist-sized stone that generates its own heat?

If that stone was some kind of natural treasure, then this could just be a matter of someone impersonating the Surveillance Bureau to try and seize treasures for themselves. However, that didn’t quite make sense to him either. Li Huowang tried to place himself in the shoes of the thief. If he were the thief, then he would either steal it or openly rob them, and then exterminate all these people.

It was simply not logical to keep all these people bound with wooden shackles and drag them on such a long journey toward the capital. There must have been some purpose behind these actions.

After consolidating his thoughts, Li Huowang faced Bai Sai once again and asked, “Chief Bai, how tall was the person with the wooden mask that you mentioned?”

He had a feeling that this person was the one responsible for the illusion of the White Impermanence that he had seen earlier.

“About the same as you. They had a young voice. Along the way, if someone didn’t obey their instructions, that wretched thing just caused them to see terrifying things in their head,” replied Bai Sai.

As they heard him, some of the people in the crowd showed a hint of fear. From the looks of it, they had previously been tormented by that masked man’s ability.

Li Huowang nodded silently. It seemed that the White Impermanence he had seen earlier was fake, and something fabricated by that person through some method. However, calling it an illusory technique didn’t seem right either. After all, ordinary illusory techniques shouldn’t be able to deceive him now.

As it was, there was too little information available right now, and Li Huowang was still puzzled about what had happened earlier.

“Benefactor, since we’ve escaped, let’s not care too much about it. For now, we should focus on leaving. If that person holds a

grudge and comes back, then we'll be in big trouble," said Bai Sai, worried for the well-being of the entire Cowheart Village.

Li Huowang still wanted to continue questioning, but stopped upon hearing Bai Sai's words.

Anyway, these people were Bai Lingmiao's family, and he definitely had to save them.

Without the wooden shackles to bind them, everyone walked much more effortlessly. Now that they had survived their ordeal, their faces were much more relaxed.

Just like this, they walked all the way until noon; by then, the elderly and children among the crowd couldn't continue any longer, and so they decided to take a break.

"Mom, I'm hungry," said a child as he tugged on his mother's clothes.

The adults were hungry as well, just that they were not saying anything.

While Li Huowang did have some dry rations on his horse, with with so many people to divide it, that wouldn't even be enough to fill the spaces between their teeth.

As Li Huowang looked at their empty hands, it was obvious that they had no food. He thought about it for a moment, and then said, "We should be able to reach a village tomorrow and buy some food there. As for today..."

He paused for a moment as patted the slender neck of the horse before continuing, "...let's kill the horse first."

One horse would provide enough meat for quite a few people.

However, Bai Sai immediately shook his head. "Benefactor, there's no need to do something like that just to fill our stomachs a little. There's no need for Benefactor to kill your own steed."

After that, Bai Sai turned around and barked orders toward the crowd, "That... Liang Zi! Bring the members of the third and fourth houses with you to the forest and find something to eat. Hurry!"

“Yes!” replied a sturdy youth. Then, he led a few people toward the forest.

Li Huowang was about to go and help them, but was stopped by the others. “Benefactor, please sit down first. Let the juniors handle this. Feng, look at how much he is sweating. Go and grab some big leaves to fan him!”

Unable to push away their help, Li Huowang was forced to sit down as he was fanned by a plump lady.

Originally, Li Huowang had thought that Liang Zi’s group had gone into the forest to find some wild fruits or vegetables. However, after an hour, when he heard the rustling of the leaves, he saw that they were actually carrying back two flower deers and several smaller roe deer.

When Bai Sai noticed Li Huowang’s surprised look, he was very pleased as he said, “We rely on the mountains for sustenance. Our Bai Family is naturally good at hunting. Catching these wild animals is nothing astonishing.”

After that, he immediately shouted for some people to start a fire. Soon, the best parts of the deer were served to Li Huowang on a flat stone.

As he looked at the expectant faces around him, Li Huowang felt a bit awkward; he had never been treated like this before.

The others only began to eat the reminder of the deer after they saw Li Huowang pick up his portion and stuff it into his mouth beneath the bronze coin veil.

That night, when he was on night guard, Li Huowang once again enjoyed special treatment.

“Benefactor, you can go and rest. Let the younger generation keep watch. They have a strong spirit, and the ordinary supernatural beings won’t dare to approach them,” said Bai Sai.

“Young people have a strong spirit?” Li Huowang glanced at the youths beside the fire and asked, “Chief Bai, what type of saying

is that?”

“Ah... saying? There’s nothing like that. My dad taught me this,” replied Bai Sai.

Hearing this, Li Huowang sighed in disappointment. In the end, it turned out to be something he had just heard and was without any foundation.

Why are the people here all so superstitious?

When Li Huowang slowly closed his eyes, the surroundings gradually became quiet. Aside from the crackling sound of the burning wood, the breathing sounds of the people also became slower.

After some time, in a daze, Li Huowang suddenly felt something approaching him. When he opened his eyes, he found himself in a hazy mist. There was also no sign of Hong Zhong or Monk, allowing him to immediately realize that this was not a real place.

“Who?” shouted Li Huowang, his voice echoing within the misty world.

‘Who?’

‘Who?’

Through the mist, he caught a glimpse of the giant White Impermanence he had seen earlier. It did not walk out, and was hung by a rope around its neck.

“Who are you?” a creepy voice rang out in response to Li Huowang’s question, echoing through the mist, “Why did you ruin my plans?”

‘Who are you?’

‘Who are you?’

‘Why did you ruin my plans?’

‘Why did you ruin my plans?’

Chapter 304 - Deceived

Li Huowang stared at the White Impermanence shrouded in white mist, his expression solemn as he contemplated how to negotiate with this entity.

However, at that moment, he suddenly felt someone near him and woke up.

He quickly turned his head and saw a young boy who seemed to have just learned how to walk. The young boy was sitting on the ground in open-crotch pants, and out of curiosity was using his fingers to touch the bronze coins on his veil.

Li Huowang glanced around to see that the others were still sleeping. After a moment, he bent down to pick up the child, and then walked over before quickly handing him to a woman's embrace. Then, he stood up and quietly walked toward where Bai Sai was sleeping.

Before Li Huowang could even get close, Bai Sai had already woken up. They exchanged glances, and then he walked toward the surrounding forest.

Once there, Li Huowang swatted a mosquito on his neck before speaking in a solemn voice, "I dreamt of that person just now. He's still watching us and hasn't left."

"What?!" Bai Sai's face turned deathly white as he anxiously started pacing back and forth anxiously in the woods.

"Don't panic. I was just giving you a heads-up. No matter what that thing is, I've already promised Bai Lingmiao that I'll bring all of you back," assured Li Huowang.

Hearing this, Bai Sai's expression improved slightly. "That's good to hear. With your help, they won't dare cause trouble easily. But... what do you think that person is trying to do? Why are they

still coming after us even after taking away that stone?”

Li Huowang shook his head; without having that thing before him, he couldn't really figure out why the other party was behaving like that.

“Let's go back. If something happens to the others, please inform me immediately,” said Li Huowang as he turned to leave.

However, just as Li Huowang was about to leave the forest, Bai Sai's voice rang out once again, “Benefactor, do you have some relationship with the Second Niece?”

“What?”

“Oh, Second Niece is Lian's daughter, Bai Lingmiao. Based on seniority, she needs to address me as Second Uncle,” explained Bai Sai.

When Bai Sai saw Li Huowang stunned in place, he walked over emotionally and started sizing up the young Daoist in front of him.

“Ah~ the Second Niece has found herself a good family. Very good.” The more he looked at Li Huowang, the more fond he became of him.

After a while, Li Huowang said awkwardly, “Chief Bai, let's talk about this matter again after overcoming this difficulty together.”

“Alright. Rest assured that I won't tell anything to Second Niece's parents. When you are ready, you can tell them yourself,” said Bai Sai.

With this, Li Huowang could feel that the sense of distance between them had reduced by quite a bit.

“Alright! Let's work together and get through this calamity, and then we can enjoy ourselves at your wedding feast!” said Bai Sai.

After this conversation, Bai Sai's worries about the danger from before vanished without a trace.

The next day, everyone woke up and they resumed their journey. This time, they continued till they arrived at a village.

Once at the village, Li Huowang immediately took out some pieces of silver to buy all the livestock in the village.

When the single-toothed old man witnessed this, he wanted to dissuade Li Huowang. However, after Bai Sai whispered something in his ear, he just climbed onto a bullock-cart without saying a word.

Originally, due to the delay caused by the young and old, their progress hadn't been very fast. However, after they purchased the livestock, their speed instantly increased to another level.

During this period, Li Huowang was extremely nervous. Even while sleeping, he kept one eye open, wary of being on the receiving end of an unexpected attack.

However, strangely, nothing happened after that night. The gigantic White Impermanence never reappeared, not even in his dreams.

This won't do. How can we defend against the enemy from afar? Instead of waiting, we should find a way to pull him out of hiding.

Just as he was contemplating what to do, Li Huowang felt something amiss. "Chief Bai, I don't think this is the road back to Cowheart Mountain?"

Li Huowang arrived here by riding on the back of a horse, and now, his surroundings were clearly different. Even a dull person would notice that something was wrong.

Bai Sai wiped the sweat from his face and nodded as he explained, "Yes, we won't return to Cowheart Mountain just yet. I know of a place, and reaching there requires going through a winding path. Perhaps this will allow us to shake off the one following us."

"Oh? Is there such a place? Where is it?" asked Li Huowang, feeling curious.

"Actually, it's not too far ahead; in fact, we should reach there today," said Bai Sai as he pointed ahead.

Li Huowang looked forward, but all he saw was a dirt road without much else.

However, the environment soon changed. The ground became more muddy, and Li Huowang's boots were completely covered in black mud. Occasionally, they would also see pools of stale water emanating rotten stench and the countless black bugs wriggling within. The hot weather mixed with the foul odor made them feel even more dizzy.

As they continued to advance, the environment around them gradually transformed into a swamp.

Just as Li Huowang felt like asking Bai Sai whether they were going in the right direction, a vast golden reed marsh appeared in the distance. The reeds all towered a few meters tall, and they swayed gently in the wind.

“This is it. Once we enter here, even Immortals won't be able to find us there. With this, we should be able to shake off our pursuer!” said Bai Sai as he moved to lead everyone inside.

Just as he wanted to lead the Bai family members into the reed marsh, Li Huowang stopped him and asked with a worried look on his face, “Chief Bai, entering might be easy. But will we be able to come out?”

No matter how Li Huowang looked at it, this place did not seem safe.

Bai Sai confidently patted Li Huowang's shoulder. “Relax. Since I dare to bring my family in, I naturally have a way out. Even my son and parents are inside. I should be more worried than you.”

Li Huowang was surprised. He had a feeling that this Chief Bai had some cards that he did not know about.

Since the other party had spoken, Li Huowang did not try to stop him. Soon, the carts and mules started making their way into the reeds.

However, just as they stepped in, a thin mist began to pervade

the surroundings.

Li Huowang was exceptionally familiar with this mist. Without any hesitation, he grabbed the hilt of his sword and decisively stood before them all. “Go ahead! I’ll hold them off!”

At the same time, with Li Huowang’s declaration, the ground began to shudder. That giant White Impermanence gradually revealed a part of itself through the mist. A wooden mask could be seen hanging on its chest.

Seeing that the Bai family was about to escape its pursuit, this thing could no longer restrain itself.

After a moment, the White Impermanence opened its mouth to reveal a long, red tongue. At the same time, a dense white mist spewed out and caused their surroundings to become even hazier.

Whoosh!

The black-tassel sword was unsheathed, and a dense killing intent enveloped Li Huowang as he stood there as though he was unmoveable.

Meanwhile, the White Impermanence continued to remain motionless within the mist.

Amidst the chaos, Li Huowang thought of what Tuoba Danqing had told him, and whipped out the badge on his waist. “The Surveillance Bureau is on official duty! If you don’t want to die, then scram!”

Immediately, the swirling mist around them ceased moving.

“Ah, so you’re from the Surveillance Bureau. Why didn’t you say so earlier? Then this is just a misunderstanding between internal parties.” This abrupt voice came from the giant White Impermanence’s mouth.

“You’re from the Surveillance Bureau? How can you be?” asked Li Huowang, feeling astonished as he looked up at the three-meter tall White Impermanence. Ever since the first time he had seen this thing, he had completely ruled out the possibility of it being related

to the Surveillance Bureau.

“Hold on,” said the giant White Impermanence as it sank into the white mist. Soon, a man with a wooden mask on his chest stepped out from within the mist. As he approached, he also brought out a badge which was quite similar to Li Huowang’s. It was the Surveillance Bureau badge.

“See? I’m even one rank higher than you,” said the man.

After confirming that the opponent’s token was genuine, Li Huowang suddenly felt relieved, and his expression warmed up. “Since you’re also from the Surveillance Bureau, that’s easier to handle. There must be some sort of misunderstanding here.”

However, the person with the wooden mask shook his head. “No, no, there’s no misunderstanding. The White Lotus Sect is extremely wicked. They are a bunch of evil cultivators. My senior and I spent a great deal of effort to capture them. Yet, you barged in and broke through my senior’s restraints.”

“What? Impossible!” Li Huowang’s mind buzzed as he looked at the reed marsh behind him.

By now, the last member from the Bai family, Bai Sai, had already stepped in. As he entered, he glanced at the badge in Li Huowang’s hand, revealing an incomparably cold as he turned around and disappeared into the reed marsh.

“Brother, think about it. If they were not responsible for the deaths of too many, would the higher-ups send people from the Surveillance Bureau here? That too two of them together?”

Chapter 305 - Reed

When Li Huowang saw Bai Sai enter the thick reed marsh, he rushed after him, “Wait!”

However, at that moment, a giant hand, larger than his own body, suddenly grabbed onto Li Huowang. But when he lowered his head to see the assailant, he found that there was no claw around him. He abruptly turned his head and glared at where the Surveillance Bureau person with the wooden mask was. He had a feeling that this must be another one of his illusory techniques.

When the other party saw Li Huowang’s hostility, he raised both his hands as he took a few steps back and said, “Brother, I’m just trying to help you. With everyone now being aware of your identity, going in alone like this is just asking for trouble.”

However, Li Huowang just shook his head impatiently as he tried to recall the bits and pieces of information that Bai Lingmiao had described to him previously.

Based on what Bai Lingmiao had said, her family members were all kind and good-hearted people. It was completely different from the description given by this person.

Could it be that... Bai Lingmiao lied to me? No, she couldn't have!

Li Huowang’s doubtful gaze soon turned confident.

His previous interactions with the Bai family did not match what this person said.

There must be some sort of misunderstanding. I need to clarify things with them in person!

After deciding that, Li Huowang left the masked person from the Surveillance Bureau behind and headed straight into the reed marsh.

As Li Huowang entered the reed marsh, the sky immediately

darkened. The sausage-like reed stalks above seemed to cut off any and all connection with the outside world. He carefully examined the footprints on the ground and followed after them.

“Chief Bai! It’s me! Come out and talk!” shouted Li Huowang.

However, in the end, Li Huowang received no response. He looked back at the vast field of yellow reeds behind him, and then spoke once more, “Don’t worry. I am very close with Second Niece! If the Bai family is facing any undisclosed troubles, then I will undoubtedly offer my full assistance!”

Li Huowang’s voice resonated through the reed marsh as he continued to shout, “I’m on your side! This is also my first time encountering that guy with the wooden mask. He won’t dare to harm you guys as long as I’m around!”

After Li Huowang finished speaking, two young men from the Bai family emerged from the reed marsh and silently started observing him.

Upon seeing them, Li Huowang breathed a sigh of relief and continued speaking, “I understand that you may doubt me due to my affiliation with the Surveillance Bureau. In reality, my connection with the organization is not as close as you might think. How about this? Let’s return to Cowheart Village. Second Niece is already there. She can explain everything to you.”

The two young men remained silent, widening their stance as they stripped off their clothes and assumed a defensive position.

Li Huowang couldn’t understand what they were doing. It looked like some sort of martial arts stance, yet they were not clenching their fists. If it was some spell technique, then there were no distinct hand gestures.

As their hands moved through the air, the two men started chanting incantations, “Immortals bestow true divine skills, heavenly soldiers and generals reveal divine abilities. All Immortals, heed my command, swiftly enter my mortal body!”

In the next moment, Li Huowang saw as a tall and slender glowing shadow wrapped in black cloth emerged from the ground before drifting toward their bodies.

What kind of evil spirit is this?

Li Huowang quickly unsheathed his bronze coin sword, ready to ward off the evil entity.

However, before Li Huowang could approach, the two young men from the Bai family suddenly looked up and glared ominously at him.

A shocked expression appeared on Li Huowang's face as he came to a halt and observed the two individuals before him exhibiting an demeanor entirely different from before.

What... is this? Divine intervention? Have they been possessed by evil spirits?

If Li Huowang had previously had any doubts about the statements made by the member of the Surveillance Bureau, seeing these two individuals' demeanor had only solidified his doubts.

"Listen, I don't want to fight. Whatever you've done in the past is none of my concern. It's the Surveillance Bureau that is finding fault with you guys!" said Li Huowang.

Swoosh!

Suddenly, the two bare-chested youths suddenly lunged toward Li Huowang. There almost seemed to be a phantom image following behind them. They appeared to be possessed by some unknown evil spirit, with each part of their body seemingly existing independently.

As they approached, their fingers split apart in different ways, like the heads of slithering snakes, thrusting straight toward Li Huowang's neck.

These two individuals didn't appear to be all that strong, and so Li Huowang did not retaliate. He knew that all the techniques that he had learned were lethal moves. If he were to retaliate, then

these two individuals would either end up dead or at least severely wounded, something that he did not want to do.

Thus, Li Huowang twisted and turned in the reed marsh, constantly dodging the two individual's blows.

While he did not know what kind of evil spirit had possessed them, their agility was beyond imagination. Li Huowang found himself in a very passive situation.

Snap!

When the two opponents directly pounced on him, Li Huowang was taken by surprise. Instead of attacking Li Huowang directly, they moved to snatch the bronze coin sword in his hand.

Li Huowang tightened his grip, but in the next instance, he suddenly felt something approaching him from behind. "Oh no!"

Clang!

Li Huowang turned his head, only to see a cold light flash as the sinister black-tassel sword stabbed fiercely toward his face. He wanted to block and retaliate, but both of his hands were restrained by the two Bai family youths.

In this critical moment, Li Huowang instantly shifted his position, forcefully moving his body a few inches to the left. At the same time, he muttered an incantation, and his bronze coin sword split apart. Immediately, a red radiance flashed and effortlessly cut through the fingers closing in on him. Then, he forcefully kicked the person in front of him, creating a distance between himself and the others.

As soon as Li Huowang met eyes with the person holding onto the black-tassel sword, the latter suddenly knelt. At the same time, the eerie look on the man's face quickly faded away, giving way to a twisted expression. The black-tassel sword in his hand fell weakly to the ground as he knelt there with a furious expression while letting out wild roars.

Li Huowang looked at the two young men and their sliced-off

fingers, and then toward the other Bai family member who was possessed by the potent killing intent, and then sighed. "Did it have to come to this extent? Couldn't we have had a civilized conversation instead?"

Just as Li Huowang finished speaking, the reeds surrounding him started to shake. Soon, those men's sinister faces emerged and vanished amidst the yellow reeds.

As he looked at those lifeless faces, a chill ran down Li Huowang's spine. Almost half of the Bai family had been possessed by evil spirits, their faces cold and lifeless.

Amidst the crowd, a single-toothed old man, supported by Bai Sai, came forward and began to speak in a trembling voice. The old man chanted rhythmically, almost as if he was mimicking a song. Noxious black mud oozed out from the corner of his mouth.

As the familiar yet abnormal voice echoed in the surroundings, several familiar figures appeared in front of Li Huowang.

These were the Wandering Gods.

Although the figure of the Wandering Gods that was condensed was unusually blurry without the support of the bronze bell, Li Huowang could still recognize their appearance after having encountered them so many times.

As he stared at the elusive figures of the Wandering Gods in mid-air, Li Huowang recalled the things that Bai Lingmiao had told him about back when they were at Zephyr Temple.

Why did an ordinary girl like Bai Lingmiao know about evil spirits such as the Wandering Gods?

This scene finally made everything clear. This old man was probably the grandfather who used to tell her stories.

Chapter 306 - Punctured Stomach

Seeing the cold look in their eyes, Li Huowang sighed. There was nothing he could say to change things. If he continued to push on, then blood would definitely be spilled. He didn't want to hurt Bai Lingmiao's family.

Li Huowang knew more than anyone else just how much her family meant to Bai Lingmiao.

After a moment, Li Huowang turned around and walked into the dense reeds to try and find his way back.

If that masked man is still there, then I need to think of a way to hold him down and stall for time. The Bai family needs time to escape.

However, the more he walked, the more uncertain he grew. Based on the amount of time he had walked for, he should've already exited the field of reeds.

After a while, he suddenly remembered what Bai Sai had said before: it was quite easy to get lost within the reed fields.

Wait, am I lost here?

Li Huowang stood still and turned around as he tried to get his bearings by observing his surroundings.

Shua!

Suddenly, a flash of metal shot out from amongst the reeds, forcing Li Huowang to dodge it.

But in the next instant, he felt an excruciating pain from his waist.

Suffering from the pain, Li Huowang instinctively opened his mouth, only to see black tentacles as they trembled and tried to come out of his mouth.

Sensing the tentacles in his mouth, Li Huowang realized something terrible.

Oh no, they have punctured my stomach!

However, before he could even react to it, more and more arrows shot out from within the reeds. The rain of arrows completely covered Li Huowang.

When arrows finally stopped, Li Huowang walked out from within the pile of arrows while holding onto his bleeding abdomen. At the same time, he eyed the field of reeds around him warily, the warmth in his eyes gone completely.

Based on the number of arrows, it was clear that the Bai family had hidden weapons within the field of reeds. This meant that the reed field was their territory and that Bai Sai hadn't been truthful with him.

After a moment, Li Huowang carefully projected his illusion underneath the ground. After turning invisible, he slowly walked away.

I need to ask Bai Lingmiao what is going on!

Li Huowang moved slowly, his surroundings completely silent. He couldn't hear anything else.

After four hours, Li Huowang finally stopped, panting for breath. He released the grip he had on his abdomen and looked at the bloody mess with a worried look in his eyes.

While the Black Taisui is injured, it isn't dead. I just hope that it can still suppress the illusions.

Just as his thoughts reached this point, his surroundings suddenly started to shimmer, causing him to panic. He only sighed in relief after confirming that his surroundings hadn't changed.

Don't scare me like that. If I end up getting trapped in a hallucination right now, then I'm fucked!

At that moment, something suddenly burst out from the ground and phased through Li Huowang's abdomen.

Immediately, Li Huowang felt an agonizing pain; it was as if his intestines had been severed. Cold sweat instantly covered his body.

Then, at that moment, another Wandering God appeared from beneath the ground and attacked Li Huowang. When Li Huowang cut it down with his sword, it dissipated like the wind.

Meanwhile, the remaining Wandering Gods continued to hover over Li Huowang like spirits, waiting for an opportunity to attack.

“What is happening? I’m already invisible, so how did they find me?” muttered Li Huowang.

After a moment, he looked down and saw how.

Blood.

His blood that had been dripping onto the floor was the thing that revealed his location!

At that moment, as if sensing an opening, all of the Wandering Gods attacked together.

In the face of this furious assault, Li Huowang replaced his sword with the bronze coin sword. As he chanted, the bronze coin sword exploded and sent the Wandering Gods flying, killing them.

“What are you guys doing? Don’t forget that I saved all of you!” shouted Li Huowang.

Li Huowang felt quite depressed. He had already done his best to not hurt them, so why were they attacking him relentlessly?

Suddenly, the earth beside Li Huowang bulged and exploded before a man leapt out and swung his blades down upon Li Huowang.

Finally, Li Huowang snarled and decided to fight back. Even if he killed someone, it would be better than him dying.

But just as he was about reach out for his torture tools, Li Huowang stopped his hands.

He saw the face of the man in front of him.

It was Bai Lingmiao’s father!

“Stop!” Li Huowang instinctively raised his hands to guard

himself, causing his palm to be cut in half.

Then, several spears shot out from within the reeds and stabbed Li Huowang, puncturing his abdomen and nailing him to the ground.

As if on cue, even more spears shot out and stabbed Li Huowang's limbs into the ground. Everything seems to be under the Bai family's control now.

Li Huowang looked at their cold faces and spoke up with difficulty, "Is there a need to do this? What did I ever do to you?"

In response, one of the ladies from the Bai family said hatefully to Li Huowang, "You have no idea just how much we hate the Emperor and his officials! Since you are a dog of the Emperor, we will do whatever we want to you!"

Li Huowang swallowed his saliva with difficulty. He felt that his head was heavy and that he was disoriented, but still forced a bitter smile. "Now that you've won, bring me back to Cowheart Village. Ask Bai Lingmiao what to do with me. I'm her husband after all."

Immediately, sounds of discussion erupted all around him.

After a moment, Bai Lingmiao's mother ran to the front and glared at Li Huowang. "The parents have the last say in who their child marries! We will decide who she gets married to; we will never let her marry one of the Emperor's dogs!"

On the other hand, Bai Lingmiao's father looked at Li Huowang and his sorry state. Then, he threw away his blade and pulled his wife back before whispering something to her; it looked like he had his own plans.

After that, he walked over and looked at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang looked back at him, only to see that the man looked like an orange. This caused Li Huowang to laugh out in pain.

But the more Li Huowang laughed, the more realistic it looked to him. The man's head slowly became a mushy and moldy orange.

“An orange?”

At that moment, a raindrop fell from the sky and splattered onto Li Huowang's face, causing him to wince from the pain.

Li Huowang suddenly found himself squatting beside a garbage can in the rain. He was shivering while holding onto the moldy orange in his hands.

As if he had been electrocuted, Li Huowang jumped out and threw away the orange, causing it to fall into the mud.

Then, he looked around and realized what had happened. “Shit! The Black Taisui in my stomach got attacked, and now it has lost its power to hold back my hallucinations!”

But, at the same time, a thought popped up in his mind.

But... why am I on the streets? Shouldn't I be locked up inside the mental hospital? What happened?

Li Huowang looked down and saw what he was wearing. He was wearing a dirty jacket over his body, while his cotton pants were completely soaked in water. He was wearing a shoe with a hole that was showing his left toe, and he only had a sock on his right.

Soaked in the rain, he looked completely like a beggar.

Unable to find an answer to his questions, he felt a sudden pain from his abdomen.

He was hungry.

He had never felt this hungry in his life; it was as if he hadn't eaten for ten days or more.

After a moment, Li Huowang squatted down beside the dirty water and picked up the moldy orange and started eating it.

Just then, a car ran past a puddle and splashed him. However, he didn't care.

Completely drenched, Li Huowang was soon shivering from the cold. He cuddled himself as he sat beside the green trash can while continuing to eat the moldy orange.

Chapter 307 - Cold

When he bit into the cold and rotten orange, Li Huowang not only tasted the mold, he also tasted the weird taste of the rotten fruit. But Li Huowang was too hungry to care. Right now, this moldy orange was even more delicious than an extravagant meal.

After eating the orange, Li Huowang stood up, feeling quite a bit better. Then, he shouted into the rain, “Chief Bai! Don’t be afraid! It’s my illness! I have an illness!”

At that moment, a man holding an umbrella saw Li Huowang and quickly pulled his wife before running away. At the same time, the others on the street did the same. Soon, the street that already had very few people due to the rain was completely deserted.

However, Li Huowang ignored whatever was happening around him. To him, the situation on the other side was more dire. After all, on the other side, he was practically bound and waiting to be executed. He had to do something to save himself!

Li Huowang continued to stand in the rain but felt like nothing had changed. This made him very annoyed. Based on his experience, the other side should also change according to what was happening here.

“Chief Bai! Where are you? Give me a sign! As I am now, I can’t see you!”

As he shouted, Li Huowang saw several men holding an umbrella coming toward him, causing his eyes to light up.

Wearing his torn shoes and socks, Li Huowang ran toward them while stepping into the puddles and shouted, “Chief Bai!”

The man was visibly frightened by Li Huowang who suddenly approached him in the rain.

“Chief Bai! You have to remember that I was the one who

saved all of you! Do you really want to hurt the person who saved you?” Li Huowang felt that this was not enough and said something more convincing, “Also, Bai Lingmiao is pregnant with my child! No matter what, I’m already half a step into the Bai family!”

“Where did this lunatic come from? Shit... he’s scary.” The man holding the black umbrella took two steps back and tried to go around Li Huowang.

However, Li Huowang would never let him go past. He took another step and blocked the man with his arms. “Chief Bai, if you don’t believe me, then you can ask Bai Lingmiao herself!”

When the man saw Li Huowang blocking him again, he sighed. “Sir, please spare me. You are indeed pitiful, but so am I. I still have to go to work to pay off the mortgage.”

“What are you talking about? Sorry Chief Bai, but now that I’m in a hallucination, your words are twisted into something else. Wait here for just a moment. I will return back to normal soon,” said Li Huowang.

The man clearly didn’t know what Li Huowang was saying. However, he was horrified when he realized that Li Huowang wanted to stay close to him.

“Shit! There’s a crazy bastard here!” shouted the man as he ran away.

Li Huowang wanted to chase after him, but fell over after just a few steps; his body was too weak. He had been holding on purely because of adrenaline.

“Cold.” Li Huowang’s lips were purple and his teeth never stopped chattering. It was so cold that he couldn’t even feel his fingers.

Li Huowang just lay there in the rain, his body completely limp. He didn’t have any strength left.

He didn’t know how long had passed before his will to survive kicked in. Then, he used whatever remaining strength he had to

crawl toward the sidewalk where the rain would not reach him.

“Go away, you crazy bastard! I will hit you!”

“Eh! Aiya! You stepped on my store’s rug!”

“Mom! Look! There’s a lunatic in front of our house!”

Li Huowang shivered as he hobbled forward while sounds continued to swirl around him. Looking at his surroundings, he felt slightly at ease.

Since I’m not dead, my words from just now must have worked.

However, he soon started to feel terrible. His head started to swim; it was as if he had gotten a fever from the rain.

“If... if I die here, I would still be fine in reality... right?” Li Huowang’s voice was weak and uncertain.

At that moment, he suddenly saw a place where he could hide from the rain. It was a small opening under a bridge. Gritting his teeth, he ran straight toward the opening. He almost got hit by a yellow school bus, the various faces inside staring at his back.

Finally, once he was under the bridge, all of the noises stopped. Li Huowang panted as he slid down against the wall.

However, even though he was out of the rain, Li Huowang’s body was still in shambles.

Why is it taking so long? Why have I not returned yet?

Just as Li Huowang was waiting for time to pass, he saw something on the ground. He slowly inched forward. Once there, he found some plastic straws, bottles, some aluminum foil, and a lighter with very little fuel left.

Li Huowang stretched his hands out, picking up the lighter. At the same time, he realized that he had lost his sense of touch.

He tried igniting the lighter but there was no fire. Just as his head was once again starting to become heavy, a small red fire lit up.

“It’s lit.” Li Huowang smiled, his smile as innocent as a child’s.

He looked around and saw the plastic bottles. He carefully

picked them up and placed them underneath the fire. The plastic straws lit up and slowly burned down toward the plastic bottle.

As the bottles started to burn and a small flame was made. Then, Li Huowang carefully placed his frostbitten hands close to it. The fumes were toxic and smelly, but it was warm.

When the warmth from the flame started spreading into his hands, he finally felt his body warming up. Soon, his body stopped shivering and his lips turned from black to purple.

“Who’s there?!” At that moment, Li Huowang looked toward the entrance of the opening, and felt his scalp go numb.

There was a young child wearing boots standing there with an umbrella. She was a cute little girl, around eight years old with double ponytails and a cute cherry shaped red-colored hair clip.

Her large eyes were filled with curiosity. However, as soon as she saw Li Huowang, that curiosity turned into fear.

“Eighteenth Lunar?” Li Huowang stared at that child in disbelief. It was the very same child he had held hostage when he crashed into her kindergarten.

From her school bag, it was clear she had graduated from kindergarten and was now in her first year of primary school.

No, she’s not the Eighteenth Lunar. She doesn’t correspond with anything in the real world. There’s no one within the field of reeds except for the Bai family, so she’s probably one of them.

Li Huowang thought about it and slowly walked toward her. But just as he started moving, the child ran away shrieking.

Li Huowang reached the entrance and found a small piece of the chocolate that she had thrown down. After a moment, he picked it up and ate it. It was sweet and delicious. It reminded him of the chocolate Yang Na had given him on Valentine's Day.

Why am I homeless and on the streets? Was I abandoned by my family?

The bitterness Li Huowang felt in his heart was not undone by

the sweetness of the chocolate.

After a while, Li Huowang sniffled and walked back to the small fire he had made. He squatted down and stared at the fire.

“It’s just a hallucination. This is for the best... This is for the best...” He kept mumbling to himself.

Chapter 308 - Warmth

Time slowly passed. As he stared at the flames that were dying out, Li Huowang took off his punctured shoes. He wiped off the water before throwing them into the fire.

With the addition of new fuel, the fire grew stronger and the temperature rose a little. It was to the point that Li Huowang was forced to retreat a little from the flames.

However, even though he moved back, Li Huowang felt the temperature growing higher and higher instead. He, who had been on the verge of dying from hypothermia until just a moment ago, was now covered in sweat.

“Wait, why is it suddenly so hot?” Li Huowang removed his wet clothes and saw a plume of black smoke rising from his body.

Phew~

Li Huowang breathed out, only to see sparks coming out from his mouth.

“Hot! It’s too hot!” shouted Li Huowang as he stood up and removed all of his clothes.

But in an instant, Li Huowang saw as the small fire grew large and enveloped him.

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!”

Li Huowang knelt on the ground in pain. The pain was so intense that it almost caused him to faint.

“What is happening?” Li Huowang raised his head and saw that flames had covered everything around him. There were flames everywhere. The entire field of reeds was on fire. Not a single inch of it was left untouched.

Through the flames, Li Huowang saw the people around him running and crying until they could no longer move. Then, they fell

onto the ground and became fuel for the fire.

At that moment, Li Huowang realized something—he was lighting up some plastic bottles in his hallucination, but in reality he had lit up his own body to conduct one of the rituals from the Profound Records!

“No! Nonononono!” Covered in flames, Li Huowang stood up and ran toward them in a panic.

Li Huowang got close, but in the process, the flames burning his body became even more intense. The closer he got, the faster the people around him burned up,

At that moment, Li Huowang saw a lady fall in front of him, her finger pointing toward the direction of Cowheart Mountain as she muttered, “My little girl...”

“Why is this happening? I had already suppressed it! So why?!” Li Huowang punched the ground with his blackened fist.

Li Huowang didn’t know when the fire stopped. When he finally came back to his senses, everything around him had been burned to the ground while he just kneeled there motionlessly with white smoke coming off him.

His entire body was in immense pain, but it was nowhere near the pain in his heart.

He was the one who burned all of Bai Lingmiao’s family, and now he had to tell her the truth himself.

“Tsk tsk tsk.”

At that moment, the man with the wooden mask appeared and looked at the surroundings in awe. As he looked at Li Huowang’s bronze coin veil that had been heated to the point of glowing red, the man with the wooden mask slowly approached and checked on Li Huowang. “Hey, are you still alive?”

Hearing his voice, Li Huowang raised his head slightly. Black ash fell from his neck.

Seeing that Li Huowang was still alive, the man with the

wooden mask sighed in relief and quickly helped him up. Then, they slowly walked out from within the field of reeds that had been burned to the ground.

“Why are you risking your life? This was just a minor mission from the Surveillance Bureau. You must be new right? Let me tell you this: the next time you see a mission with very little reward, you don’t have to go all out. Plus, they are just a group of people from a regular sect, the White Lotus Sect. Do you need to go all out like that? Are the people from the Ao Jing Sect all this irritable?” said the man.

However, Li Huowang didn’t say anything and just continued walking.

“I’m Liu Zongyuan from Moongate. What is your name? Wait... are you practicing noble silence like the monks?” asked the man as he introduced himself.

At that moment, having walked out from the burnt field of reeds, Li Huowang suddenly remembered something and touched the wound on his stomach. He saw that the lance that had stabbed into his stomach had been burnt into charcoal and was embedded within his abdomen.

Li Huowang carefully pulled it out and saw a hole the size of a walnut in his abdomen. Then, he carefully placed his burnt finger into the hole.

“Yikes.” Liu Zongyuan felt his scalp go numb when he saw what Li Huowang was doing.

Just as Li Huowang’s finger was about to push into the hole, a dried tentacle trembling stretched out from the hole. Then, it coiled around Li Huowang’s finger. At the same time, a bizarre eyeball could be seen within his stomach.

“Huh? You are quite weird. What’s that thing inside your stomach? I’ve never heard of the Ao Jing Sect having something like this,” said Liu Zongyuan.

Li Huowang looked at Liu Zongyuan and lied, “Nascent Soul.”

“A Nascent Soul? Don’t they usually place those on the neck? Why is it inside your stomach? Aren’t you afraid of turning it into poop?” questioned Liu Zongyuan.

However, Li Huowang just ignored him and continued walking.

“Aiya, there’s no need to be so cold. The mission is already over,” called out Liu Zongyuan as he followed Li Huowang.

Hearing this, Li Huowang smiled bitterly. “Yeah. It’s over. You are right.”

“Are you feeling sad for them? You don’t need to. Do you know why the other villages around Cowheart Mountain disappeared? It’s because they killed all of them. They have killed many times more people than you ever have. So, you were actually enacting justice for the Heavens,” said Liu Zongyuan. He thought that Li Huowang was feeling guilty about killing all of them.

At this point, Li Huowang removed his hands from Liu Zongyuan’s shoulder. “You should go. We will go our separate ways from here.”

“Go?” Liu Zongyuan stood there with a confused look on his face as he looked at the charred Li Huowang. “Where can you go looking like that? The bugs will directly eat a delicious chunk of barbecued meat like you.”

“Don’t worry. I can handle them. Just go,” said Li Huowang as he sat down on the ground.

Liu Zongyuan scratched his head and turned toward a small forest. He took a few steps, but then sighed and approached Li Huowang once again. “Nevermind. I would rather help you out all the way. Close your eyes.”

“What are you doing?” asked Li Huowang as he looked at the wooden mask.

“Just do as I say. Do you think I would hurt you? If I don’t take care of you, then you will just die in a couple of days,” said Liu

Zongyuan.

Hearing this, Li Huowang raised his burnt hands and covered his eyes. His eyelids had also been burned off.

Shua shua shua~

His eyes closed, Li Huowang suddenly felt something moving on his body. He felt the soft fur and thought it resembled a brush.

Half an hour later, Liu Zongyuan's voice rang out once more, "Ok, you can take down your hands now."

Li Huowang put down his hands and saw that the skin that had been burned off had regrown. But on closer inspection, Li Huowang noticed that it wasn't his skin. It was a thin layer of pink paper. The color reminded him of the paper dolls that people burned for the dead.

At this point, Li Huowang not only had a layer of paper skin, but he was also wearing a paper shirt.

But for some reason, even though it looked cheap, all of the pain was completely gone; it was as if he was never burned.

"Don't touch water and don't get wet in rain or it will lose its effectiveness," said Liu Zongyuan.

"Which sect are you from? This is very special." Li Huowang looked at the person wearing the wooden mask.

"Didn't I tell you? I'm from Moongate. This is a special method that involves gluing. Other than that, we also specialize in arrangement, fusion, pass, moon, parting, pull, and open," replied Liu Zongyuan.

When Liu Zongyuan saw Li Huowang just sit there in a daze, he laughed. "You don't understand it? Hehe, that's a good thing. We intentionally explain it as such so the others wouldn't know the specifics of our powers. Oh, you haven't told me your name yet."

"Er Jiu."

"Alright, goodbye Er Jiu." Liu Zongyuan turned around and disappeared into the forest.

As he saw Liu Zongyuan disappear into the forest, Li Huowang inspected the skin made of paper. He found that the skin would easily puncture or break if he used too much force.

However, the pain couldn't do anything to Li Huowang. He just remained seated and stared in the direction of Cowheart Mountain.

His eyes were filled with despair.

“ *I have killed everyone within the Bai family. How am I going to tell her...?*”

Chapter 309 - Return

“Cough.”

With a light cough, Li Huowang instantly caught everyone’s attention. All of them looked at Li Huowang with confidence as he continued speaking, “Everyone! We don’t have to travel anymore! We will settle down within Cowheart Village. From now on, this will be our new home!”

“Senior Li, what about Yang Xiaohai? We still haven’t sent him home,” asked Puppy while patting the assistant’s head.

Hearing his name suddenly being mentioned, Yang Xiaohai panicked. He had never thought that they would suddenly talk about him, causing him to stammer. “I ...”

However, he was interrupted by Li Huowang, “He’s lying about his home. He never had one. He’s a beggar.”

At that moment, Li Huowang suddenly felt someone holding his arm and saw that it was Bai Lingmiao. He looked at her eyes and saw her expectant gaze. Seeing that gaze, Li Huowang felt his chest warm up as he turned toward everyone. “Since we are now here, I will tell you about everything. Everyone has seen how chaotic this world is. If all we cared about was having our own piece of land, then we wouldn’t be all that different from the oxen in the fields. If we want to protect ourselves, then we cannot rely on others! From now on, I will teach everything that I can to everyone! I will also think of a method to have everyone know at least one technique or superpower.”

Hearing this promise, everyone became excited as they started excitedly discussing what they would be able to do in the future.

On the other hand, as he looked at everyone, Li Huowang’s eyes turned serious. He had come to understand that he couldn’t

rely on the other sects or the Surveillance Bureau. He could only rely on himself and the people in front of him. If all of them wanted to survive in this bizarre world, then they had to have their own strength! Only then would they be able to avoid suffering like him.

“Everyone, the first thing we are going to learn is to learn how to read and write!” announced Li Huowang.

“Read and write?”

“Yes! Read and write,” said Li Huowang as he touched his abdomen, “That’s right, all of us have to be literate first. After that, we can establish our own sect that would allow us to stand firm in this world! Everyone thinks that we are a bunch of freaks, but we will let them see that even we can survive on our own in this world! We will show them that we are not freaks! That no one can sell us off anymore! That no one can bully us anymore! That we too can get better and better as long as we work hard every day!”

“Yeah!”

“Hooray!”

“Yay!”

Everyone’s cheers almost caused the entire village to shake. As he looked at everyone who had traveled with him for so long, Li Huowang revealed a happy smile.

As rainwater splattered on his face, Li Huowang’s smiling face and everyone’s cheers suddenly disappeared.

The rain continued to fall as Li Huowang just stood there while holding a paper umbrella. He stood in front of Cowheart Village and stared at the white smoke rising from the village.

At this moment, there was no one else around him; he was the only one standing on the yellow dirt path.

All that from before had been nothing more than his memory.

Li Huowang stood there for an entire day and night. Due to the humidity, his paper skin soon started to get moldy. Even so, he did

not care.

It was only when he saw Yang Xiaohai walk out of the village with a raincoat that he moved his almost immobile joints toward the village.

Seeing Li Huowang finally move, Hong Zhong, with half his body stuck in a tree, started chuckling. He nudged Monk and said, "Monk, hehehe, get ready for a good show."

As soon as Li Huowang approached the entrance of the village, Yang Xiaohai spotted him immediately and happily ran over to greet him, only to be horrified by the man's appearance.

"Yikes! Senior Li! Where is the skin on your face? Why are you wearing paper clothes?" asked Yang Xiaohai.

"Where is Miaomiao?" Li Huowang's hoarse voice was filled with the scent of blood.

"Senior Bai should be in the house. Senior Li... what's wrong? Do you have news about the Bai family?" asked Yang Xiaohai, concerned.

Li Huowang remained silent for a moment before walking toward Bai Lingmiao's house one step at a time.

Gradually, everyone saw that Li Huowang had returned and ran over to greet him. However, the cheerful atmosphere soon turned cold when they saw what he looked like.

Puppy carefully approached him and asked, "What's wrong, Senior Li? Looks like you couldn't find them? It's fine. None of us blame you."

Li Huowang gritted his teeth and pushed him away. Then, he started running.

When Li Huowang arrived at the main gate of Bai Lingmiao's house, he ran into the anxious-looking Bai Lingmiao.

As soon as Bai Lingmiao saw that Li Huowang had returned alone, she felt her heart drop. But when she saw just how terrible Li Huowang looked under the rain with his burnt skin, she felt a pang

in her heart. She immediately grabbed his wrists and pulled him toward her room.

Once inside, Bai Lingmiao used a soft towel to carefully dab Li Huowang's body and pull away the moisture from his skin. She didn't dare to rub his body for fear that she would rub off his skin and flesh.

Bai Lingmiao had seen just how serious his wounds could be. She knew that Li Huowang must've encountered grave danger to force him to use a technique that would hurt himself to this extent.

As Bai Lingmiao washed the towel in a bronze basin, she said, "Senior Li, it's alright. I'm fine. There's no need to worry about me. After staying here for so many days, I've already come to terms with the fact that they are gone. Since they are missing, let's just wait here. I'm sure they will return one day."

However, Li Huowang just gritted his teeth, both his hands shaking continuously.

Just as he was about to tell Bai Lingmiao the truth, Hong Zhong suddenly appeared beside him and started gesturing excitedly. "Quick! Tell her that you didn't find them! Tell her that the Bai family most likely ran away to avoid some disasters!"

Hearing this, Li Huowang glared at the annoying Hong Zhong.

"Why are you glaring at me? I'm only saying this to help you! Look, the Bai family is already dead. There's nothing to be gained even if you tell her now. She would be completely devastated! She may even come to hate you, the one responsible for the deaths of her family members! But if you do as I say, then she won't be sad and would even be able to retain a sliver of hope!"

Chapter 310 - Speak

"You want me to lie to her!" Li Huowang spat out his words from the gaps of his teeth.

"And what's wrong with that? Do you dare to look down on lying? We can use it for both evil and good! If you do as I say, then at most, you would just be telling a little white lie," said Hong Zhong.

Seeing this, Monk sighed and pulled the excited Hong Zhong away from Li Huowang.

On the other hand, when she sensed that something was wrong, Bai Lingmiao's voice became a lot more gentle, "Senior Li?"

She extended her soft white palm and carefully caressed Li Huowang's charred fingers. "Senior Li, don't think about it too much. You must be tired after traveling for so long. Rest now. We can talk tomorrow."

After saying that, Bai Lingmiao carefully held Li Huowang's hands until he reached the bed. She was not the slightest bit afraid of his horrifying looks and just let him sleep in her bed.

As he lay down, Li Huowang took a light breath. The smooth silk sheets and the rice husk pillow were both filled with Bai Lingmiao's scent.

"Senior Li, you were completely soaked in the rain earlier. Let me make some ginger soup for you to stave off the chills," said Bai Lingmiao as she stood up and headed to the kitchen.

However, at that moment, Li Huowang raised his hand and caught her wrist. "Miaomiao, can I ask you a question? What were the members of Bai family like in your eyes?"

"My family? All of them were good. They all helped each other and never argued with each other," said Bai Lingmiao matter-of-

factly. Then, she suddenly asked, "Senior Li, why are you asking me this?"

"Was there anything weird going on with your family?" continued Li Huowang.

"No, but for some reason all my family members would enter the ancestral hall quite frequently. When I was younger, I wanted to take a look at what it looked like on the inside. Back then, I kept pestering my grandfather to let me see it, but he said that I can't go inside because I'm a girl," explained Bai Lingmiao.

As she spoke, Bai Lingmiao suddenly caught on to something and covered her mouth with her hands. "Senior Li, did you find them? Where are they? Are my parents still fine?"

Li Huowang tried to take deep breaths, but the pressure within his heart was still there. He really wanted to do as Hong Zhong told him so that nothing would change, but he just couldn't do it.

"Miaomiao, I'm sorry. They are all dead. I killed all of them," said Li Huowang.

Hearing this, Bai Lingmiao immediately froze up like a statue.

Li Huowang continued to lay on the bed as he carefully and slowly told her everything that had happened.

As she continued to listen, Bai Lingmiao remained silent, but her hands grew colder and colder.

When Li Huowang finished telling her the truth, the room turned silent. Only the sound of rain could be heard.

After a while, Bai Lingmiao's white lashes fluttered and tears started streaming down her eyes. Her voice trembled as she spoke, "Senior Li, did I do something wrong? Why did you murder my entire village?"

Li Huowang recalled everything Bai Lingmiao had done for him and everyone, how she sold her gold anklet to secure money for their travels, how she cried every time he got hurt, and how she looked forward to getting back home.

“I don’t know why. I just felt cold and wanted to start a fire. I really just wanted to start a fire to warm myself up...” Li Huowang kept repeating over and over.

Bai Lingmiao’s face showed fear as she suddenly pulled her hand from his and slowly backed away.

She suddenly sprinted toward the door, but Li Huowang caught her and hugged her from behind.

With this, Bai Lingmiao finally broke down. She cried and struggled, her fists landing on Li Huowang’s body as she screamed. She even turned around and bit into his charred body, ripping off some scabs.

However, when she saw the blood flowing out from Li Huowang’s body, she clasped her hands over her face and cried loudly as she slowly slid onto the ground.

Soon, both of them turned silent. One of them was standing still while the other was crying on the ground.

As Li Huowang silently looked at Bai Lingmiao’s white hair, no one knew what he was thinking about.

They remained there for a long time until the room slowly became dark.

Still sobbing, Bai Lingmiao finally stood up when it was night. She didn’t even look at Li Huowang as she headed for the exit.

Li Huowang stopped her again. “No, this is Cowheart Village, your home. The one who should leave is me.”

After that, Li Huowang didn’t say anything as he directly left. He didn’t even want to defend his actions.

“You already knew that your relationship with her would be over once you told her the truth. Why do you still do that?”

Li Huowang’s face was as still as a wooden doll as he ignored the illusions.

“Do you regret not telling her a white lie instead?”

“A lie is a lie! There’s nothing like a kind lie or an evil lie! I

will take responsibility for my actions! I will not lie to her!” shouted Li Huowang, his sudden outburst scaring the others.

“Senior Li, why are you leaving when you just got back? Miaomiao is worried about you. At the very least, you should consider her feelings, right?” asked Chun Xiaoman.

“Take care of her. Live a stable life here. This world is too chaotic, and you all should just stay here and not move anywhere,” said Li Huowang before moving toward the exit.

As Li Huowang passed through the village, more and more people gathered around him. By the time he finally arrived at the entrance of the village, their entire group was gathered around him.

“Senior Li, where are you going? Should we follow you?” asked someone.

“Stand there! Don’t follow me!” shouted Li Huowang, causing all of them to be rooted in place.

Drenched in the still falling rain, he turned around. He looked at everyone before taking a deep breath and shouted, “Scram! Don’t come any closer! We are done sending everyone’s ashes back to their homes! Even the final words that all of them entrusted to me have been sent to their families! I’ve fulfilled all of the promises, so what else do you want me to do?! Do all of you see the wounds on my body? I’ve already done enough for all of you! I’m tired! Do you bunch of freaks want to drag me down for the rest of my entire life?!”

When he saw the pained expressions on all of their faces, Li Huowang turned around and ran away. He wasn’t sure whether his face was wet from the rain or due to his tears. He had already made his decision while on the way back to the village.

He couldn’t stay with them. The closer he was to them, the more afraid he was that he would burn all of them down like he did the Bai family.

A lunatic who didn’t know what he would do was fearsome

enough, but a lunatic with supernatural powers was even worse.

Chapter 311 - Lunatic

After departing from the Cowheart Village, Li Huowang silently walked down a muddy path.

As he walked through the rain, the paper clothes and skin became damp from the rain and slowly fell onto the ground in a mush.

Currently, Li Huowang has buds of fleshy growth growing from his burnt skin. As the rain fell onto these buds, it caused Li Huowang intense pain. Even so, he did not try to avoid it. He just took it all.

Soon, the rain stopped and the skies gradually grew brighter.

Finally, Li Huowang stopped when he saw an abandoned temple. He hadn't slept for a few days and was really tired.

Standing in front of the temple, he looked at the broken sign and the couplets covered in moss. Even though the couplets were faded, he could faintly read the words inscribed on it.

"Nothing is set in stone, everything is done by another man; your state of mind is within your control, take a step back and feel it expand."

After reading the couplet, Li Huowang entered without a word. The temple wasn't all that large. Other than a clay statue that was cut in half, everything else had been taken away from inside it.

The roof was leaking and there was water everywhere. Li Huowang stood at the only corner without a leak and stared at the rain that was dripping into the temple.

"See, you didn't listen to me and now you are alone. You should have just listened to me," said Hong Zhong as he circled around Li Huowang with a face full of glee.

On the other hand, Monk walked over and consoled Li

Huowang. “Don’t be too sad. This was not your fault. You didn’t want to kill them. You can just do more good deeds and pray to Amitabha. Buddha will not blame you.”

However, Li Huowang completely ignored the two illusions. He kept thinking about how he had become a beggar within the hallucination as well as Bai Lingmiao’s cold eyes.

Not only did his family abandon him, but he was also the one who caused Bai Lingmiao to no longer have a family. He was nothing but a walking disaster.

Jiang~

After a while, he unsheathed his sword and stared at his reflection.

At that moment, a question popped within his mind.

Why do people live? Since my life is already so miserable, what use is it for me to remain alive?

In an instant, everything turned quiet as Jin Shanzhao, Peng Longteng, Monk, and Hong Zhong all surrounded Li Huowang.

“Hey hey hey, what are you thinking? Li, calm down,” said Hong Zhong as he tried to calm Li Huowang down in a panic.

“Yeah. Daoist, why are you doing this? If you really think that there’s no meaning to life anymore, then you can become a monk instead. Why do you seek death?” said Monk.

Meanwhile, the silent Peng Longteng moved as she gestured at him with her headless body, trying to show that she really looked down on him.

On the other hand, Jin Shanzhao, who always had his mouth open but couldn’t speak, had shut his mouth as he stared at Li Huowang worriedly.

However, Li Huowang ignored all of them and examined the blade of his sword. He had never looked back on his life as intensely as he had right now.

“Aiya, it’s just a girl. There’s no need to worry about anything;

even if you don't have all of them, you still have us!" Hong Zhong smiled and pointed at himself.

Hearing this, Li Huowang finally snapped. He snarled and slashed Hong Zhong's body, causing the clay statue behind Hong Zhong to be split in half.

Cold steel flashed within the abandoned temple as Li Huowang sliced mercilessly and wildly at the faceless Hong Zhong, the headless Peng Longteng, the bodiless Jin Shanzhao, and the merciful Monk.

But no matter how sharp the blade was and no matter how hard Li Huowang swung it, he still couldn't hurt them.

"You guys! It's because of you! What are you!? Why do you keep following me!?" Li Huowang roared in anger.

"WHY AM I A STRAYED ONE?! WHY AM I THE ONE WHO IS ILL?! WHY ME?! WHAT DID I DO WRONG? WHY COULDN'T IT BE THE OTHERS? I JUST WANT TO LIVE PEACEFULLY! WHY IS THIS SO HARD?!!"

He swung his sword again and again until he stumbled, sending the sword flying away.

He fell onto the ground and stopped moving. He was tired, too tired.

He was sleepy, but he couldn't fall asleep. His head kept pulsing nonstop.

At that moment, Hong Zhong slowly approached and consoled him, "Don't worry. All you need to do is listen to me and I will be able to trick many women for you."

However, Li Huowang did not react to him. All he did was lay on the ground without even blinking his eyes.

Soon, his surroundings started to distort and shift. When Li Huowang snapped back to reality, he saw that he was lying face down underneath the bridge. It was extremely humid and cold.

When he realized what was happening, Li Huowang chuckled

bitterly. “Hehe... Heh.”

He chuckled and laughed until he felt very thirsty. At that point, he stood up and started walking toward the river.

Due to the rain, the water level had risen. After reaching the river bank, he lay down on the ground and dunked his head into the water to drink some of it. When he had drunk his fill, he felt very hungry. He stood up, wiped his face, and walked out from under the bridge.

After the rain, the sky was clear and the air was crisp. There were many people walking around on the streets too.

However, when Li Huowang appeared on the streets, no one walked within a radius of five meters around him. His clothes were in tatters and he was very dirty.

“It’s that lunatic again. What are the urban management officers doing?”

“Shh. Don’t let him hear you. His ears are very sharp.”

“He’s also someone pitiable.”

Li Huowang just ignored all of them as he continued to search for something on the streets. After a while, he stopped beside a trash can. Then, he opened the lid and looked inside, trying to find some food.

People nowadays were quite wasteful. Soon, Li Huowang found two cups of unfinished boba tea and a single vegetarian bun with a chunk bitten off from it.

Snap!

At that moment, a sudden flash of light occurred as a man put his phone down from beside Li Huowang. The man was smoking as he uploaded the photo he had just taken. “Hey, look! It’s the new beggar model.”

Meanwhile, Li Huowang, after finding several cold skewers in the trash can, started walking back toward the area underneath the bridge while eating them.

Several youths ran past him. All of them were laughing and pointing at him when suddenly one of them threw a pebble and shouted, “Hahaha! Hey you crazy bastard. Do you want a smoke?”

Seeing this, Li Huowang suddenly grinned and started laughing. “Hahaha! You are right! I’m indeed crazy! I’m just a lunatic!”

Chapter 312 - Li Huowang

Li Huowang waved his food as he leaped onto a parked car. Immediately the car's alarm started blaring.

"I'm a lunatic! I'm mentally ill!" shouted Li Huowang, his voice spreading out far and wide.

Li Huowang's behavior soon attracted everyone's attention. When the owner of the car ran over with a broom to brush Li Huowang away from his car, more and more people started gathering around them.

On the other hand, Li Huowang just kept laughing maniacally, stopping only when he spotted a cute little girl. He saw that the girl's mother was dragging her far away from him.

The little girl was wearing a cherry hair clip.

When he saw her, the maniacal expression on Li Huowang's face slowly dulled down, gradually replaced by pain.

After a while, he jumped down from the car and left with his food, completely ignoring the car owner who was beating him with the broom.

Back underneath the bridge, Li Huowang refilled the cup of boba tea with some river water and drank it. Then, he ate the bun. It tasted weird from being spoiled, but he didn't care. He didn't want to know what he was eating on the other side either.

Li Huowang ate the bun quite slowly, savoring its taste.

"Uncle?"

Hearing the voice, Li Huowang turned around and saw a little girl in a white dress standing beside the bridge. The sunlight reflected off her dress and made her look like she was glowing.

As Li Huowang looked at her face, he unconsciously called out, "Eighteenth Lunar?"

The little girl was visibly afraid and hesitantly said, “I’m... I’m not Eighteenth Lunar. My name is Liu Yuhuan, and my mother calls me Huanhuan.”

When Liu Yuhuan saw Li Huowang stand up, she took a few steps back. Then, she hastily opened her bag, took out a piece of paper, placed it on the ground, and then placed something else on the paper. After that, she took one hurried glance at Li Huowang and ran away.

Li Huowang approached the paper and saw that it was a bag of buns. The buns were shaped like the faces of pigs, something that would be quite appealing to children.

After a moment, Li Huowang smiled, took the bag, opened it up, and started eating the buns.

The buns were warm, a clear indication that they were freshly baked. These weren’t her leftovers but something she bought specially for him.

Li Huowang sat down and carefully ate the meat-filled buns. They were delicious.

As Li Huowang munched on the buns, his surroundings once again started shimmering. He soon found himself sitting on the side of a muddy road while eating a mudball.

“Hehe...” Li Huowang shook his head in defeat as he finished the mud ball.

After finishing his meal, Li Huowang returned to the temple and picked up his sword under the gaze of the four illusions.

Just then, Li Huowang heard the sound of footsteps and a horse-carriage. He was quite familiar with those footsteps.

“Miaomiao?!” Li Huowang ran out with his sword, only to see someone unexpected.

It was the Second Deity.

Even though the rain had stopped at this point, the Second Deity’s red veil was wet. Tears were streaming down from

underneath the red veil.

Li Huowang stood in front of the temple with a complicated look on his face. He stared at the horse carriage for a moment and then turned to the Second Deity and asked, "What are you doing here?"

"Woof woof!"

At that moment, Bun squeezed out from the back of the horse carriage, shook the rain water off its fur, and happily ran over to Li Huowang. As it excitedly jumped on Li Huowang, it left behind many muddy pawprints on his shirt.

Just then, the Second Deity removed the tarp covering the horse carriage, allowing Li Huowang to see the Black Taisui that was being bound inside the carriage. Then, she took the horse carriage and held Li Huowang with her cold hands before leading him into the temple.

Once they were back at the only dry spot within the temple, the Second Deity used a towel to wipe Li Huowang dry. Then, she took out new clothes and shoes from within the horse carriage and handed them to him.

After the Second Deity waited for Li Huowang to wear his shirt, she took out his old red Daoist robe and donned it on Li Huowang.

Just as the Second Deity lowered her head to help Li Huowang tie his belt, Li Huowang extended his hands and pulled off the red veil.

At that moment, Li Huowang saw the Second Deity's face blossom like a flower.

The Second Deity's face was like a flower covered in snake scales, porcupine quills, and many other animalistic features. And in the middle of the flower was a face, half of which resembled Bai Lingmiao's face. She was crying as she looked at Li Huowang. The other half resembled a fox-like creature. With time, her face shifted and her facial organs twisted and turned. Sometimes, the face

would look more human-like, while at other times it looked more like a beast. Even the number of eyes changed.

The Second Deity hugged Li Huowang lightly, but eventually tightened her grip. “Husband.”

As she spoke, the Second Deity reached behind Li Huowang and carefully pried open his palm to let the sword fall from his grip. She then removed the white cloth wrapped around her wrist and used it to carefully cover Li Huowang’s eyes which didn’t have any eyelids.

“Husband, we will wait for you. We will wait until you’ve been treated,” said the Second Deity.

Hearing those words, Li Huowang finally hugged her back. He looked at her feline eyes and hugged her even tighter.

This bizarre world was a pit of despair to many. Li Huowang’s life thus far had been steeped in pain.

Even so, no one truly wanted to die. Sometimes, all it took was one pull from someone to save a person’s life.

The Second Deity eventually left, but not before handing over the horse carriage with the Black Taisui and Bun to Li Huowang.

After the Second Deity left, Li Huowang sat on the ground as he stared at the ceiling. A long time passed before he once again picked up his sword.

Looking at his face through the reflection on his sword, he snarled and stabbed it into the air, aiming right at a black pigeon.

“Wait, a pigeon?”

Just as Li Huowang was thinking about what it was, the pigeon flew down and landed on Li Huowang’s shoulder. He then saw that there was a small letter tied to the leg of the black pigeon.

When he opened the letter, he saw that there was a symbol at the top. Li Huowang thought that the symbol looked like an eye under the character of Heaven. As he read its contents, he was shocked and quickly rode the horse carriage away from the temple.

The letter was from Tuoba Danqing. He was telling Li Huowang to once again meet him at Yinling City, at the same place.

Li Huowang then remembered his plan. He needed to find out more about Bei Feng through the Surveillance Bureau.

At that moment, a strong sense of unwillingness surged up from deep within his heart and suppressed all his pain.

“Bun, let’s go! This fucking place won’t kill me that easily! Since I have nothing to lose, I’m not afraid of anything! Even if I die, I’m going to gouge a chunk of flesh out of death itself before going down! I *will* get rid of my status as a Strayed One! And then... And then I will finally...”

Chapter 313 - Yinling City

Still wearing his veil, Li Huowang controlled the horse carriage while walking amongst the crowd. Yinling City was still just as prosperous as he remembered. No one paid attention to him.

On the other hand, Bun, who was afraid of the crowd, was currently hiding under the horse carriage as it slowly moved forward.

Once Li Huowang arrived at the inn from before, he took some of the broken pieces of silver from the horse carriage and paid for a room.

The horse carriage had everything he might have needed. This included not only silver and clothes, but even dry rations.

After a while, Li Huowang opened the tarp and checked on the bound Black Taisui. He then took a piece of jerky and shoved it into the Black Taisui's sticky body. After that, he took out a knife and cut a portion of the Black Taisui and ate it. While it was disgusting, he was used to it.

By now, he had eaten a lot, but the Black Taisui's size remained almost the same.

After inspecting the cow tendons that were tying the Black Taisui down, Li Huowang talked to it, "Can you hear me? Can you repeat what I'm saying?"

However, the Black Taisui did not respond to his questions and just continued to undulate its disgusting body, expelling gunks out from within its body. There wasn't even a reaction.

Lost in thought, Li Huowang patted his own abdomen.

*Maybe only the piece of Black Taisui inside my stomach can talk?
Or maybe it's only because my hearing is so sharp that I can hear it?*

He didn't know whether it was normal or not because he hadn't

encountered anyone else who had eaten a Black Taisui.

After a while, he covered the horse carriage and talked to Bun instead, "Make sure you guard it well. If the Black Taisui moves or if someone gets close to it, you have to bark loudly. I can hear you even from my room."

"Woof woof!" Bun shook its tail.

Li Huowang patted Bun's head and walked into the inn.

Once inside, Li Huowang opened the window and looked down at the prosperous city before taking a book out from within his clothes.

Li Huowang didn't know whether the Black Taisui inside his stomach could learn from him like this, but he felt that there was no harm in trying.

In fact, if the Black Taisui could talk to him, then he might even be able to benefit from it. Even if it couldn't help Li Huowang directly, it would already be very helpful if it didn't do anything else and just sat quietly inside his stomach.

"All humans are kind in the beginning, but their behavior changes according to their environment..."

As he spoke, a black tentacle sprouted out from his belly button, shook around, and then retreated back.

"Lychee, this is a lychee," said Li Huowang as he peeled the fruit, "Eat."

He then placed the translucent fruit into his mouth.

"No, it's not kill, but eat."

When the other houses lit up their lights, Li Huowang finally felt that the time was right and walked out. He came to where he previously drank with Tuoba Danqing. When he walked in, he was immediately guided by a server.

It was clear that Tuoba Danqing had instructed the server beforehand as the moment Li Huowang sat down, delicious food was served.

Li Huowang waited in the room for a while before he heard Tuoba Danqing's unique laughter.

"Hehe~ Junior Er, long time no see." The door opened with a creak and Tuoba Danqing walked in. He was wearing a robe made from brocade silk. "No need to stand up. Please sit. We are all brothers here, and so there's no need to be courteous."

As Tuoba Danqing walked in and closed the door, Li Huowang removed his veil.

Tuoba Danqing's eyes revealed a myriad of emotions when he saw Li Huowang's charred skin behind the bronze coil veil. Even so, he managed to hold it all in and didn't say anything. He just laughed and poured a cup for himself. "Come, drink with me."

However, after learning how Tuoba Danqing did stuff, Li Huowang was no longer hasty. Slowly, Li Huowang drank his fill of wine. Thankfully, he had drunk a lot of water beforehand, and thus didn't get drunk that easily.

After drinking and eating, Tuoba Danqing coughed lightly, signaling that he was about to start talking about business. "Junior Er, about the mirror you asked... I managed to find the owner. The member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao fooled a blind person to acquire it from him."

"Oh? Is he a blind old man with the surname Chen?" asked Li Huowang.

"Huh? How did you know?" questioned Tuoba Danqing, puzzled.

Seeing the man's response, Li Huowang took a quick glance at Hong Zhong's illusion. As he had thought, that member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao had even used the fake identity he stole from someone.

"Junior Er, the man in question said that he can't teach you how to use the mirror, but if you return to him, then he can trade it back with a talisman guidebook," said Tuoba Danqing.

“What kind of talisman guidebook?” asked Li Huowang.

“He told me that the guidebook contains various chants and methods to draw different talismans. If you are able to master it completely, then you would be able to do many things related to fortune-telling and healing,” Tuoba Danqing chuckled slyly as he explained, “But I have a feeling that he’s lying. The book might be useful, but it’s probably not as good as he is making it out to be.”

After a moment of thought, Li Huowang took out the mirror. He had no idea what to do because he was inexperienced in these matters.

Thus, he looked at Tuoba Danqing. “Senior Tuoba, could you guide me about what I should do?”

Tuoba Danqing was someone who was experienced in dealing with the Jianghu, and so he sought out the man’s advice.

Hearing Li Huowang’s request, Tuoba Danqing picked up a piece of glistening fish and placed it in his mouth. “Hmm... I think you should agree to the exchange. Even though he didn’t tell me, it was clear to me that the mirror was something precious to him. If you don’t give it to him, then he might come and look for you himself. Plus, even though the mirror is good, it’s useless to you as a member of the Ao Jing Sect. As long as you have the resolution to harm yourself and use the *Profound Records*, you don’t even need it. On the other hand, there might be some unique talismans recorded in the guidebook that could cover the weaknesses of the Ao Jing Sect’s methods. Additionally, in these chaotic times, it’s always good to have an extra ally. Maybe the blind man could even help you out next time.”

Li Huowang carefully considered the advice and found that it was indeed quite helpful. “Thank you for your guidance, Senior Tuoba.”

“No need to be so courteous. If you want to thank me, then you can just let me in on some good stuff in the future,” said Tuoba as

he raised his cup for a toast.

After that, both of them drank, the distance between them gradually shortening.

When they almost finished with their meal, Tuoba Danqing's drunk face suddenly turned serious. "Junior Er, now that the trivial matters have been discussed, we should talk about official matters. If you want to climb the ranks, then you need to work hard. Thankfully there's something you could do down toward the South."

Chapter 314 - Matters

As soon as Li Huowang heard Tuoba Danqing's words, he perked up. The whole reason he had even joined the Surveillance Bureau was to earn their trust and to find out more about Bei Feng. Since he was this close to getting the information that he needed, he was more than happy to play the part of a good subordinate. "Oh? Senior Tuoba? What is the mission this time?"

Li Huowang was handed a piece of paper. It recorded an incident that happened within one of the counties of the Liang Kingdom. As he read through the details of the bizarre case, Li Huowang frowned.

Is this... Related to the Sitting Oblivion Dao?

Just as this thought occurred to him, Hong Zhong stood up and spat at him. "Oi oi oi, who said that it's the Sitting Oblivion Dao behind it? Since when did it say that the Sitting Oblivion Dao was responsible for this incident? At this point, you might as well say that every single incident out there was caused by the Sitting Oblivion Dao. Heck, you might as well just say that the Sitting Oblivion Dao is the one responsible for the Natural Disasters that happen every ten years or so."

Li Huowang ignored him and quickly finished reading through the letter. After he kept it away, he affirmed Tuoba Danqing, "Don't worry. You can leave this to me. I have been prepared to do my best for the Surveillance Bureau ever since I decided to join you!"

Tuoba Danqing's eyes revealed a bizarre emotion upon seeing how Li Huowang agreed to the task so easily. "Junior Er, why did you agree to it so fast? Aren't you afraid that I will take some of your lifespan pills?"

"Of course not. I trust you. Plus, the reward is nothing

compared to being able to serve the Surveillance Bureau,” said Li Huowang.

Hearing Li Huowang’s righteous words, Tuoba Danqing grabbed his cup and smiled eerily at him.

Bam!

He slammed the cup onto the table and said, “To be frank, we don’t care who the emperor is. We, who joined the Surveillance Bureau are all the same: we want to be able to feed ourselves and our families, as well as find allies. Junior Er, I really do look at you as a true brother, but I fear that the reason you joined the Surveillance Bureau is different from ours.”

The relaxed atmosphere turned cold in an instant.

“Stay calm. You agreed too fast, and so he’s suspecting you.” Hong Zhong tried to help by explaining the situation.

The sudden turn in the situation caused the drunk Li Huowang to snap out of his stupor and calm down. He needed to give the correct answer or he might lose his chance at gaining further access to the Surveillance Bureau!

Various thoughts flashed past his mind until he remembered something.

The Liar’s Scripture!

“Why did I join the Surveillance Bureau?” Li Huowang’s breathing became faster and his eyes were suddenly filled with hate. “That’s because I want to kill all the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao!”

“They tricked me and the rest of us at the Cross Temple! They even killed everyone except for me. I hate them! I’ve heard that the Surveillance Bureau actively hunts down the Sitting Oblivion Dao, and that’s why I’ve joined! As long as they exist, I will never rest!” said Li Huowang as he smashed the wine cup in his palm.

His reasoning was fake, but his hatred was real.

When Tuoba Danqing saw how agitated Li Huowang was, he

sighed. "Is that so? I've heard about what happened back in the kingdom of Si Qi, but to think that you were involved in it. Sorry, I've made you remember such an unfortunate incident. This is my fault, and so I will punish myself by drinking three more cups."

Tuoba Danqing emptied his cup of wine in one go.

After drinking all three cups, the drunken Tuoba Danqing consoled Li Huowang, "Don't worry. I will be sure to help you in your journey of revenge. Since you want to fight against them so much, then I will send any missions related to them toward you first."

Li Huowang's reasoning hadn't just been decided randomly. It also included his objective of finding out more information on Bei Feng.

After getting Tuoba Danqing's acknowledgement, Li Huowang leaned forward and said agitatedly, "Senior Tuoba, I've heard that there is confidential information about the Sitting Oblivion Dao within the Surveillance Bureau? Could I obtain it since I'm already a member of the Surveillance Bureau?"

Li Huowang needed that information. If he could obtain it today, then it would be the best possible scenario.

However, Tuoba Danqing sighed when he heard Li Huowang's request. "Aiya, Junior Er, even though I know that you have a grudge against the Sitting Oblivion Dao, I still can't give it to you. You can't just gain access to the Heavenly grade information while you are merely a Tenth Pawn. Even if I were to help you, you would at least have to climb and become the Seventh Banner."

"Does that mean that I can read it once I reach the Seventh Banner rank?" asked Li Huowang.

"Of course. The reason why they safeguard the information about the Sitting Oblivion Dao so seriously is because we were afraid that a bunch of lunatics would infiltrate us and change the information or burn it all down," explained Tuoba Danqing.

Hearing this, Li Huowang nodded. With this, he had found his next goal: to reach the Seventh Banner rank and obtain the information about Sitting Oblivion Dao.

Having identified his new goal, Li Huowang asked once again, “May I ask how you can rise up the ranks within the Surveillance Bureau?”

Tuoba Dangqing picked up a tender piece of chicken and smiled as he ate it. “I knew that you were going to ask this. I know that you want revenge, but you can’t rush it. All changes in the ranks are individually approved by Lord Jixiang’s master, Lord Qin Tianjian. Usually, they would record how many missions you’ve done and once they think that you’ve contributed enough they would promote you to the next rank. But this doesn’t mean those at the highest ranks are particularly strong. Sometimes those who are strong, but don’t contribute all that much to the Surveillance Bureau would be confined to the Tenth Pawn ranking. Initially, most people see their ranking increase in a short amount of time, but each promotion would be slower than the last. You did a good job the last time around and if you continue to do so, then you should be able to reach the rank of Ninth Troop in half a year. Even though it’s only one rank, your position would be vastly different, and the benefits you would get from the Surveillance Bureau would improve a lot, and so you shouldn’t underestimate it! Many people even join the Surveillance Bureau solely for the rewards.”

“Half a year?” Li Huowang couldn’t afford to wait for half a year. Who knew how long he had to wait until he obtained the rank of Seventh Banner? “Senior Tuoba, half a year is too long. Are there any methods to speed up the process? I don’t mind even if the reward is little. I can’t even sleep in peace knowing that the Sitting Oblivion Dao has not been eradicated!”

“Hmm...” Tuoba Dangqing thought about it. “Alright. I will make an exception just this once. I do have a problematic case. I

should be the one going there, but if you can deal with it, then I will recommend you to Lord Jixiang. Then, you should be able to quickly rise to the rank of Ninth Troop.”

After saying that, Tuoba Danqing revealed a peculiar smile. “Once you return, I will show you someplace that will allow you to realize just how important status is.”

Seeing that his goals had been achieved, Li Huowang revealed a smile and toasted Tuoba Danqing. “Thank you, Senior Tuoba, for your help! I dedicate this toast to you!”

After that, they kept drinking and eating. Half an hour later, Tuoba Danqing drunkenly walked out of the room.

“Alright~ Remember to go to the place I told you about soon. Don’t waste any time. Also, the blind man is waiting at the City God Temple[1] in Yinling City. Go find him to return the mirror.”

1. A tutelary deity that was believed to protect cities. Also called God of the Moat and the Walls or God of the Boundary 🙌

Chapter 315 - City God Temple

Once Tuoba Danqing left, Li Huowang naturally left the restaurant as well; there was no reason for him to stay there all by himself.

At the same time, he needed to slowly sort out all the information that he had learned today.

Just then, Hong Zhong clapped, applauding him. "Not bad, not bad. You are indeed one of the Three Officials. To think that you managed to add a bit of the truth into your lies. Even if they went and investigated, they might not be able to discover it's a lie."

Hearing this, Li Huowang glared at him. Just as he was about to snap back at him, the waiter from before walked out of the restaurant.

The waiter bowed down toward Li Huowang, only to be ignored by him. Just as Li Huowang was about to walk away, the waiter called out to him, "Dear customer, quite a lot of the dishes are still untouched. Do you want to pack them up like last time?"

Li Huowang's face was sullen as he snapped back, "No need! I don't need them anymore!"

Li Huowang's sudden outburst left the waiter feeling taken aback.

But... but you wanted to pack all of it up the last time around. Why is it different today?

On the second day, Li Huowang sat in his carriage as he traveled across the wide street. Given that his destination was the City God Temple in one of the most prosperous cities of the kingdom, it was easy to find out where it was.

Thus, he soon found the City God Temple that was located at a busy crossroad.

Sitting within the horse carriage, Li Huowang saw the entire temple and its beauty. It was surrounded by lush trees and flowers. The temple wall was pale yellow and it had grayish-blue roof tiles. It was hard to imagine that such a beautiful and grand temple was not some large sect but just a City God Temple that could be found in any city.

“Amitabha, Amitabha.” Monk’s illusion prayed to the temple earnestly.

The temple was cloaked in the scent of incense and that there was a steady group of people entering it.

As Li Huowang stood at the side for a while, he saw that most of the people entering the temple to pray were the ladies that worked within the Exquisite Pagoda. Their faces were covered in the markings akin to that of a porcelain vase. The girls were all very earnest. All of them placed their palms together and raised them over their heads before lying down on the ground to pray. Several generations of them praying toward the City God every day had contributed to the dents on the stone slab of the temple that could be seen.

As he observed them, Li Huowang’s sharp sense of hearing allowed him to hear what they were praying for.

“Dear City God, please, I beg you. I wish for a man to buy me off and make me his wife.”

“Dear City God, please take pity on me. Let me reincarnate as a man in my next life!”

Li Huowang stood outside the temple and stared at the interior. Inside, he saw the three statues of the City God situated in the middle of the temple. Beside the three statues, there were two imposing statues, one with an Ox-head and the other with a Horse-face. It didn’t seem like the City God was a deity that would grant

their wishes.

After a while, Li Huowang used the horse whip to guide the carriage toward a corner of the temple. There were several people setting up stalls there. All of them were either fortune tellers or people offering writing services.

Soon, Li Huowang found the man he had seen before, Blind Chen. Blind Chen was currently telling the fortune of a woman.

“Ai~ Your fortune is very bad~ It’s terrible even. Not only will your husband turn out to be useless in his career, but there’s nothing you will be able to do. You will either have to secretly get married to another man, or you will have to live off the charity of others.”

However, when the woman started scolding him, Blind Chen just shook his head and sat there silently as he waited for her to finish scolding him.

Once the woman left, Blind Chen looked toward Li Huowang and said, “Don’t look at me like that. I just tell others their fortune, not fix it for them.”

Even though Blind Chen was blind, Li Huowang felt like he was being watched.

“Hoho, if I’m right, then you must be the man who is here to return the mirror,” continued Blind Chen.

Li Huowang was anxious to leave, and so he didn’t talk much. He just took out the mirror and placed it on the stall.

Blind Chen reached out toward the mirror with his wrinkled hands. When he touched the mirror, he revealed a rare smile. “Yes, this is the mirror I lost. Oh, and what happened to the member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao who pretended to be my granddaughter? Where is he?”

“He’s dead. I killed him,” replied Li Huowang.

Hearing this, Blind Chen laughed happily. “Hahaha~ Excellent! It’s good that he’s dead! How dare he bully me for being blind and

trick me by pretending to be my granddaughter?! He got what he deserved!”

Hong Zhong’s illusion scoffed at him. “Hmph! Nothing but the yappings of the dog who lost to me.”

“Senior Chen, where is the reward that you promised to Tuoba Danqing? Please do not try to weasel your way out of it,” asked Li Huowang.

“Of course. I would never dare to play tricks on the people of the Surveillance Bureau,” said Blind Chen as he rummaged around inside his bamboo basket.

He soon procured a dark blue book from within and passed it to Li Huowang. “This used to be the technique that we would never show to outsiders. Unfortunately, after our Master went crazy, everyone else scattered and now, there is no one that would uphold the rules anymore.”

Li Huowang opened the book and saw that it was indeed a guidebook on how to draw various talismans. The book detailed everything, ranging from how to chant, draw, use, and what type of materials to use when crafting each talisman. There were various talismans too. There were talismans that could be used to exorcize evil beings, to heal others, for fortune telling, and even for blessing a new house to ensure a good life. The book of talismans was very useful. Not only could it be used in a wide range of situations, but the materials used to make the talismans were simple as well, requiring only some blood and yellow papers. It was just that Li Huowang didn’t know how effective the talismans were.

As he went through the book, Li Huowang did notice something bizarre with the talismans—they were different from the one Han Fu had drawn. The talismans in this book were drawn with curved lines, and within each talisman, there was a distorted face hidden within.

Just as Li Huowang was about to ask about it, Blind Chen, as if

predicting what he was about to ask explained first, "I have not lied to you. The thing I gave you is extremely useful, but there are some taboos to it. First of all, all of the talismans can only be used three times a day. Secondly, you must never look at them when you draw them or use the talisman."

"And what happens if I do end up looking at them?" asked Li Huowang, curious.

"If you see your talisman?" Blind Chen chuckled and used his milky white eyes to stare at Li Huowang. "If you did, then the talisman would come to life and set its sight on you. After that, if you want to live, then you would have to blind yourself just like me."

Li Huowang contemplated the benefits and caveats before nodding. "It's not too bad."

After saying that, Li Huowang slapped the horse. He was ready to move out.

"Hm? Are you fine with it?" Blind Chen was stunned. He had not expected Li Huowang to be so casual with it. "Wait, don't go so fast. Since you helped me exact revenge, I am indebted to you. I will repay you the favor right now as I hate to be indebted to others. Sit down, and I will tell your fortune!"

"No need!" Li Huowang touched his bronze coin veil out of reflex.

But at that moment, Blind Chen suddenly pounced forward and touched Li Huowang's shadow on the ground.

"Hmm..." Blind Chen carefully touched Li Huowang's shadow while thinking of something.

On the other hand, Li Huowang frowned when he saw how bizarre Blind Chen was acting. When he saw that the man was not moving, he warily walked away with the carriage.

Just as he was almost out of the area, he suddenly heard Blind Chen shout at him from behind.

“The moon is both full and empty. Several remaining stars circle around the incomplete moon. A bright lantern is lit in front of the house, but the house is empty throughout spring and autumn.”

Chapter 316 - Talisman

The wheels of the horse carriage slowly rolled down the path. The weight of the Black Taisui and Li Huowang's belongings made the heavy carriage leave a trail on the muddy path.

Li Huowang carefully drove the carriage as he glanced at Bun who was walking beside the carriage. Then, he held Bun's neck and pulled it up onto the carriage.

Bonk bonk bonk bonk~

Bun's wagging tail was like a wooden stick that kept hitting the wooden carriage.

Seeing this, Li Huowang irritably pushed Bun and said, "Calm down!"

Then, he took out the letter that Tuoba Danqing had given him.

Just as before, there was an address written on it, but compared to last time, there was nothing else written on it about what had happened at the place. The only thing that was written on it was that two Yellow-ranked informants had died at the location, and so the person going there had to be extra cautious.

While Li Huowang didn't know how strong Yellow-ranked informants were, he knew that it was not a minor issue.

There was no way that Tuoba Danqing would be able to use this to help him get promoted to the next rank if this were a minor issue.

While he knew that it might be dangerous, Li Huowang wasn't afraid. He was already used to it after encountering so many deadly situations. After all, a man who had overcome the fear of death would be fearless.

After that, Li Huowang took out the talisman guidebook and read it once again. He read the first page which contained a brief

introduction on talismans.

The introduction explained that there was either a Daoist by the surname He or someone called He Dao who discovered a method to use the power of the world through observing nature, either by listening to the calls of the bird or by looking at the patterns left behind by insect bites[1].

The method that was born through listening to the sound of bird calls and beast howls used sound as a medium. These were categorized as ‘Chants’. On the other hand, the method that was born through the observation of the insect’s bite marks and the constellations used drawings as a medium. These were categorized as ‘Talismans’.

However, the introduction only said that the methods were derived through observation. Thus, Li Huowang didn’t think that the power of the world would bite back at the user just by looking at it accidentally. Who knew what kind of power they’d borrowed from in this crazy world.

At the same time, he realized that everyone had their own logic in this crazy world, and that most of their viewpoints clashed with those of others.

However, Li Huowang didn’t care about which one was correct; be it the power of the world, The Three Pure ones, the Three Corpses, or the Five Realms of Buddhism. The only thing he cared about was which one could help him, even if it meant summoning the Jade Emperor to the mortal realm.

“A single talisman has to be made in one stroke. First, draw the character for four, then diagonally move toward the left before going down vertically, then draw the character for ‘ugly’ before writing the two characters for fire. After that, draw four circles with an inverse stroke to form the lotus...”

Blind Chen had warned him before that it was risky to use the talismans and it wasn’t easy either. Li Huowang had to chant while

drawing the talisman. If he made a mistake in either the chant or the drawing, the entire talisman would become useless. Even more vexing was the fact that he couldn't confirm whether or not his talisman was drawn properly or not.

It would take some time for him to learn how to use the talismans in the book.

Li Huowang suddenly felt that compared to using the Profound Records, it was much harder to use the talismans. Even though the price was much more steep, it was far easier to use the Profound Records.

As he continued chanting, Li Huowang placed a piece of yellow talisman paper on the horse carriage and bit his finger. Then, he used his bloody finger to draw the talisman.

“...The essence of the Heavens and Earth, the essence of the sun and moon. Combine the essence of the Heavens and Earth. Combine the brightness of the Sun and Moon!”

Li Huowang finished the chant in his heart and placed the talisman onto the rump of the horse.

At that moment, Li Huowang suddenly heard a faint whispering sound.

However, before he could hear what it was, the black horse pulling the horse carriage suddenly neighed as the veins throughout its body bulged and it suddenly started running much faster.

The sudden gust of wind blew Li Huowang's veil upward, revealing his face to the outside world.

However, when Li Huowang heard the creaking of the axle, he suddenly felt nervous.

I hope the carriage doesn't fall apart.

After running for some time, Li Huowang took the talisman off the horse, causing the beast to return to normal. But in just that short amount of time, the horse carriage managed to travel several miles. Despite his low expectations, the talisman was surprisingly

useful.

Meanwhile, the black horse was sweating profusely as it drank water by the mouthful from the river. As Li Huowang scrubbed the sweat off the horse, he saw that it was an oily red liquid.

Are there really no other side effects to using the talisman?

“Woof woof!”

At that moment, Bun suddenly snarled as it ran toward the main path.

When Li Huowang raised his head, he saw that it was a peddler. As he saw the peddler walking into the distance, Li Huowang quickly chased after him with his horse carriage. He was quite close to the destination and he needed more information on the town.

“Hey! Wait up!”

When the peddler saw the bronze coin sword on Li Huowang’s back and his red Daoist robes, he placed down his shoulder pole and rubbed the sweat on his face. Then, he stared warily at Li Huowang. “What do you need, Daoist?”

“Nothing much. I was just thinking that it would be safer to travel with others. No reason to lose our lives to the bandits,” replied Li Huowang.

“Haha, Sir Daoist is quite the jokester. I don’t know about the other places, but there are no bandits around here. Rather than bandits, we should be more wary about the beasts within the forest,” replied the peddler.

“Really? But I’ve heard that this area is not very safe?” said Li Huowang, throwing out the hook as he waited for the fish to bite.

“That’s just within the county, and has nothing to do with us. Besides, there’s the merchant guild within the county and they don’t really need peddlers like us.”

“Oh? Is that so? This is my first time here and I don’t know the place all that well,” said Li Huowang, trying to dredge up some

more information.

However, faced with his questions, the peddler kept his mouth sharp; it was as if he was wary of something.

Seeing this, Li Huowang did not ask any further but instead looked at the peddler's wares as he asked, "What do you have for sale?"

Seeing that there was business to be done, the peddler instantly perked up. "I'm a food peddler, so I naturally sell food. I have a lot of types of pastes, orange dumplings, maltose sweets, and other such knick-knacks."

After buying half of the peddler's wares, Li Huowang once again raised his earlier queries. This time, the peddler finally answered after much hesitation.

The peddler looked toward the forest warily before whispering to Li Huowang. "Remember; you mustn't tell this to others. I've heard that the Cangshui County has ghosts."

"Ghosts?" Li Huowang was shocked. He had never expected someone to tell him something like this.

"Yeah. Do you remember the Ghost Festival that we celebrated recently in July? It's said that the King of Hell forgot to close the gates, and now the beings of Hell have escaped."

However, Li Huowang did not believe any of it. The peddler would have to be a God to know that the King of Hell forgot to close the gates to Hell. "What has happened to Cangshui County? Don't exaggerate anything and tell me only the truth."

1. Bite marks refer to the path certain insects make when feeding, such as termites where you can see the hollow paths in the wood they chewed through 🖐️

Chapter 317 - Fortune Telling

The peddler was embarrassed when Li Huowang did not believe him. "I've only heard all this from the village elder. He said that the ghosts wanted to be reborn, and so they stole many young babies that were less than a year old. Moreover, because they were stuck in Hell for so long without anything to entertain them, they are also targeting women."

"You mean that a lot of people have lost their babies and many women were raped within the Cangshui County?" asked Li Huowang.

"Yes! Wow, a Daoist sure is amazing. It only took you one word to explain everything that has happened," said the peddler.

Li Huowang frowned. If it was only babies being kidnapped and women getting raped, then the county could just send the guards instead of informing the Surveillance Bureau. There had to be something that the peddler didn't know.

After he finished talking to the peddler, Li Huowang urged his horse and the horse carriage continued moving.

Li Huowang managed to enter the city just before the gates closed. When the guards saw the identification token on Li Huowang's waist, they immediately called the town guards and had them escort him to the magistrate's office.

On the way to the magistrate's office, the sound of footsteps rang out incessantly. As Li Huowang saw several strong men running past his carriage while carrying a torch, he asked the guard that was escorting him, "Who are they?"

The guard clasped both of his hands together before answering,

“My Lord! These are the men the magistrate has chosen to patrol during the night. Everyone within Cangshui County is very nervous right now, and so we have imposed a curfew. We will capture anyone who’s loitering outside after curfew.”

Hearing this, Li Huowang silently nodded.

Meanwhile, Bun felt quite uneasy in the new environment; it kept pushing its head into Li Huowang’s body.

As they moved, Li Huowang scanned the streets but didn’t find anything unusual.

Soon, they arrived at the magistrate's office. The people inside had already been informed of Li Huowang’s arrival and were currently standing there, waiting to receive him near the two stone lions at the gate.

“We greet the Lord!” The magistrate bowed. He was wearing the robes of an official. Following his lead, his deputy, secretary, and the other officers bowed as well.

Li Huowang jumped down from the horse carriage and saw that the magistrate was around forty years old. He was shorter than the others, something that was made even more apparent when he was surrounded by the officers.

“Let’s cut to the chase and talk about the official matters,” said Li Huowang as he walked into the building. The others followed suit.

Inside the building, Li Huowang read parchment after parchment while everyone else looked at Li Huowang carefully. By the time Li Huowang finally placed down the parchments, the tea on the table was no longer hot.

“So you have lost nine babies and five women were raped?” asked Li Huowang.

The magistrate stepped forward. “My Lord, I think the number of women who were raped far exceeds that, but they did not report the matter to us out of shame.”

“Is that it? Is this all?” Li Huowang looked at all of him, his penetrating gaze staring into the magistrate’s eyes.

A single drop of sweat rolled down the magistrate’s forehead. After a while, he bowed toward Li Huowang before he turned around and ordered, “All of you, disperse from this room. Guard Zhou, tell your team to surround the entire office.”

With this, everyone left the room. Soon, only Li Huowang and the magistrate were left.

“My surname is Lou. Even though I was not born in Cangshui County, my hometown is nearby. As a magistrate, my heart hurts when I see my people in distress. Please save us all!” Magistrate Lou cried and knelt on the ground.

However, this was a bit overwhelming for Li Huowang; he and the magistrate did not have a superior-subordinate relationship. There was no need for the man to beg and kneel.

However, Li Huowang still wasn’t sure whether the magistrate was being sincere or just putting up a show.

“Let’s just stick to the case. Other than these cases, did anything else happen in Cangshui County?” asked Li Huowang.

“Yes! There were some thefts; however, I don’t think they were anything serious. Please look at this, my Lord!” Magistrate Lou took a map from the table and unfurled it in front of Li Huowang.

It was a map of the entire region. This region was called Jiang Nan. Beside the Jiang Nan region was the Zong Luo region. Yinling City and Cowheart Mountain were located within the Zong Luo region. The Liang Kingdom had a total of six regions, some larger than the others. Jiang Nan region was considered to be the smallest region.

“My Lord, look here,” said Magistrate Lou as he pointed at several small dots on the map. “The incidents weren’t contained within just the Cangshui County. The areas surrounding Cangshui County, including Ping Cheng, An Shan, Pan Shui, and fifteen other

counties are all experiencing the same things!”

Li Huowang looked at the dots on the map and knew why Tuoba Danqing had been called for this mission even though the cases were mostly minor.

There were too many! Even sand could pile up into a mountain if there was enough of it.

Li Huowang looked at the map. “This is serious. To think that there are so many cases. How many babies went missing?”

“Fifty-seven, and the numbers are still rising. Thankfully, we are dealing with this rather seriously and the number of cases in our County are not as serious. In some of the other places, the criminals are using this chance to commit heinous crimes before blaming the whole thing on supernatural beings[1].”

“Why are they stealing babies no older than one year?” muttered Li Huowang. Thinking about all that he had experienced in this world, Li Huowang had a feeling that those babies did not survive.

“My Lord! Please save the people in my county!” Magistrate Lou knelt once more.

“There’s no need for that. Didn’t you say that the women were raped? Would you bring them in? I will investigate them,” said Li Huowang. He needed to know what was going on. Why did the culprits steal babies and rape women at the same time throughout the entire surrounding region?

Soon, a serious-looking girl was brought in front of Li Huowang; however, she couldn’t answer any of his questions.

She didn’t know who it was that raped her nor did she know when it happened. If it weren’t for her parents finding out that something was wrong, she wouldn’t have even found out about it or reported it.

Having reached a dead end, Li Huowang didn’t know what to do next. He wasn’t really an expert on such matters.

No, maybe I have one more method.

Staring at the girl who was leaving, Li Huowang thought about it and took out the guidebook on making talismans. He flipped through it and turned to Magistrate Lou. “Do you have a human bone? I need the bone to be wide.”

Blind Chen told him that there was a talisman that could be used to do fortune telling to guide him. He decided to try it out.

“A... human bone?” Even though the magistrate didn’t know what Li Huowang was doing, he still told the guards to go and get one.

By the time the sky brightened up, the human bone that Li Huowang needed was brought in front of him. It was a skull.

“My Lord, please rest assured that it’s a human bone. We dug it up from a wild grave,” said the guard as he passed the skull, eager to be praised.

Li Huowang took the skull, pulled out a piece of yellow talisman paper, bit his finger, and used his blood to swiftly draw the talisman.

“As busy as you are, I summon the Impermanence of Yin! Heed my orders, tell my fortune, and guide me from desolation!”

He then placed a bronze coin on the talisman before pressing it onto the skull. Then, a sudden cracking sound rang out as cracks appeared on the skull.

When it was done, Li Huowang examined the cracks on the skull and compared it to the patterns described in the book.

“Hmm... This pattern...”

1. This is referring to the unexplained cases of girls being raped. Some of the commoners likely raped the girls and blamed it on supernatural entities to escape blame. 🙏

Chapter 318 - Seamstress

“Hmm... This pattern...”

Li Huowang frowned as he looked at the cracks on the skull and compared them with the pattern marked in the book.

“The Heaven’s at the top. The wind is situated below the Heavens, but just above the strong women. A mountain beneath Heaven, asking to be kind but strict to despicable people...”

These were the three patterns that Li Huowang identified with the help of the book. But surprisingly, the book did not explain them, nor did it tell what to expect. The only instructions about it that were written told the reader to burn the talisman and swallow the ashes.

Staring at Magistrate Lou who was waiting for an answer beside him, Li Huowang took out his flint and burned the talisman.

The talisman burned in an eerie green fire. As he stared at the flames, Li Huowang raised his chin with unease. He could hear something whispering around him, but he could not make out what it was talking about.

The talisman continued to burn, but rather than scattering to ashes, it slowly contorted and shrunk for a while before turning into a piece of burned paper, looking quite similar to his burnt skin.

As he stared at the thing in his hands, he hesitated for a while before dunking the burnt paper into his tea and drinking it whole.

Then, Li Huowang waited. He waited, but nothing happened.

Soon, the rooster was crowing outside but Li Huowang and Magistrate Lou just continued to stare at each other silently.

Wait, is it working? Isn't it supposed to guide me? What's going on?

Li Huowang stared at the book and started doubting it.

Sensing that something was wrong, Magistrate Lou read the

room and tried to break the uncomfortable silence, “My Lord, you’ve worked hard through the night. How about you go back and rest first?”

However, Li Huowang was too awake to rest. He frowned and continued flipping through the book.

Just then, a youthful girl walked into the room and tugged at the magistrate’s clothes. “Father, why are you still awake?”

Magistrate Lou was extremely kind to his daughter, to the point that he couldn’t bear to scold her. Thus, he tried his best to persuade her to leave the room. “Aiya, my cute little daughter. Go ahead and have breakfast with your mother first. I will come soon.”

“Hmm~ But I don’t want to! You said the same thing last night,” said the little girl, clearly showing just how close she was to her father.

Just then, a low shout startled the father and daughter duo. When Li Huowang approached them, Magistrate Lou paled and quickly hid his daughter behind his back. “My Lord, this is my daughter!”

However, Li Huowang pushed him away and approached the girl. Under her fearful eyes, Li Huowang tore off the cloth pouch hanging from her waist. When Li Huowang examined the patterns on the pouch, he had a revelation.

“Who made this?” asked Li Huowang. The patterns on the pouch were similar to a portion of the pattern on the skull!

The magistrate’s daughter, feeling frightened by the fierce man, turned toward her father. However, when she saw that her father did not try to help her, she started trembling. “This... th-is was given to me by my seamstress...”

“Seamstress? Bring her in!” said Li Huowang. Coincidences did not exist in this world. He had a feeling that the talisman might be working, and this was the guide that Li Huowang needed!

Soon, the guards brought the seamstress in question and

presented her in front of Li Huowang. She looked to be slightly older than the daughter of the magistrate, and was equally dainty, as if a wind could blow her off the ground.

“Did you make this pouch?” Li Huowang questioned the seamstress.

“Yes...” The seamstress answered in a small voice, not daring to raise her head.

“Why are the birds embroidered onto the pouch?” asked Li Huowang.

“These are Mandarin Ducks...” replied the seamstress.

“I’m asking you why did you embroider them onto the pouch?!” Li Huowang’s angry shout startled everyone.

Scared by Li Huowang’s sudden outburst, the seamstress was on the verge of tears. “Mandarin Ducks... That’s how they are embroidered...”

Li Huowang stood up and approached the seamstress. His steps echoed loudly as he slowly unsheathed his sword. When he fully unsheathed the sword, the killing intent radiating from it suffocated everyone within the room. With this, Li Huowang looked even more menacing.

Now standing right in front of the seamstress, Li Huowang’s pressure almost made her crumble and go crazy.

“I don’t know! My grandmother taught me how to do it! The Mandarin Ducks have always been embroidered in this pattern since a long time ago!” The seamstress dropped to the ground and started crying.

However, the entire room was silent. Everyone was stunned by what they heard, regardless of whether they were the guard or the officers. All of them were staring at the seamstress.

Her voice had suddenly turned into a man’s voice!

One of the guards was the first to react and immediately ran over to the ‘seamstress’. Then, he touched the seamstress’s chest and

was surprised. “My Lord! These are fake!”

Hearing this, Magistrate Lou's face paled and he immediately turned to look at his daughter.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang grabbed the ‘seamstress’ by the neck and raised him up into the air. “Magistrate Lou, it seems that we have managed to find the man responsible for the rape cases.”

“Lock him up in the prison! Interrogate him!” Magistrate Lou shouted in a fury. Both of his hands were trembling from anger.

Finally having found a clue, Li Huowang did not pass up on the chance to interrogate the culprit. He followed the guard into the prison while holding onto the culprit.

Soon, the culprit was crying out in pain within the prison.

“Talk! Where are your comrades? Where are they hiding? Why are you stealing the babies?!” asked the interrogator.

Li Huowang frowned when he saw the culprit’s skin bubbling from the hot red brand, as well as the whip immersed in the salty water.

“Alright, step down for now,” said Li Huowang as he stood up and approached the culprit. At this point, the culprit had already been beaten beyond recognition.

Li Huowang ignored the interrogator’s branding iron. Instead, he approached the culprit directly and removed his veil.

The rate at which Li Huowang recovered was very fast. However, while his face was already halfway healed, he still looked monstrous.

When the culprit, who had already grown tired from the torture, saw Li Huowang’s face, he felt a sudden surge of energy in his body. He quickly retreated, fearing that Li Huowang would eat him.

Ding ding ding~

The sound of metal clanking rang out as Li Huowang unfolded his bag of torture tools. “Talk.”

“I really don’t know! I did rape the girls, but I didn’t steal the babies!” The culprit’s pants were already wet, but he still didn’t say who stole the babies.

“Is that so?” Li Huowang picked up a small hacksaw and pressed the culprit’s head onto the wall as he started sawing.

Immediately, the culprit howled out in pain and despair, far exceeding the cries of pain he was letting out before.

An hour later, Li Huowang started chanting the Fiery Sutra to heal the culprit who was on the verge of death.

That’s strange. Does he really not know who did it?

Li Huowang was sure that the culprit was telling the truth after he interrogated him. There was no way the man wouldn’t have cracked under so much pain.

Unless... there were two people responsible for the cases? One who did the raping while the other stole babies? Maybe the two cases were happening at the same time and everyone just thought that it was all done by a single culprit?

Realizing that he might have lost his only lead, Li Huowang suddenly felt frustrated.

Li Huowang hadn’t felt this powerless in a long time. An enemy that refused to show itself was extremely irritating and hard to deal with. It was only now that he realized that the missions given out by the Surveillance Bureau were not as easy as he had thought.

Just then, Li Huowang heard his stomach rumbling. He hadn’t eaten for quite some time and was hungry.

Li Huowang took one more look at the mutilated man before walking out of the prison.

The interrogator saw Li Huowang was leaving but didn’t send him off. Instead, he kicked one of the prison guards beside him.

Left without a choice, the prison guard in question forced a smile as he escorted Li Huowang out of the prison. “My Lord, please have a safe trip and come visit us again if you have the time. My

Lord's technique was quite exquisite!"

Chapter 319 - Fortune Telling Pattern

After exiting the prison, Li Huowang went to the backyard of the magistrate's office. There, he saw Bun who was drinking from the water trough along with the horses.

Catching a whiff of the familiar scent, Bun hurriedly approached Li Huowang. It was also hungry.

Li Huowang brought Bun out on the street. Because of the incidents with the babies being stolen, everyone within Cangshui County was still very anxious. Even so, there were still quite a few people doing business on the streets.

“Chili Oil Wontons?” Li Huowang saw some types of foods that he had never eaten, and then brought Bun to another stall. “Bitter lettuce noodles?”

The waiter served up two bowls of green noodles that were marked with black dots. The noodles were lightly coated in a layer of fragrant chili oil.

After seeing Bun eating them happily, Li Huowang finally started moving his chopsticks.

The noodles were quite peculiar. Even though they didn't have any peppercorns, eating them made his tongue go numb. He soon realized that the numbness was caused by the small hooks that were on the surface of the noodles. The noodles were made from bitter lettuce. However, its hooks and spines were surprisingly soft when he bit into them.

Just as Li Huowang was eating the noodles that were exclusive to the Liang Kingdom, two people walked into the stall. Both of them were whispering and laughing in a way that only other men

would know what they were talking about.

“It’s true! You know what kind of person I am, right? How could I lie to you? Not only did the male ghosts escape from Hell, but even the female ones did too! Hehe~ The female ghosts were quite pretty too~ She had been enduring her lust for far too long and I had no choice but to help her. When I woke up the second day, I’d lost at least eight taels![\[1\]](#)”

Li Huowang frowned when he heard what they were talking about. The people here were very superstitious and often liked spreading rumors. All of them just believed rumors without verifying whether they were real or not. They didn’t even know whether what was happening was real.

Li Huowang continued eating his noodles while listening to the man continue talking about his ‘fortunate’ encounter.

Li Huowang quickly finished his noodles before recalling the talisman that he had used earlier. After a moment, he decided to try it again.

He once again burned the talisman and swallowed the ashes, but this time nothing happened.

Why is it so fickle? Do the talismans only work half the time? Did I draw it incorrectly?

Li Huowang read the book and tried to learn more about the talisman. This was only the second time he had used the talisman to guide him, and so he was still inexperienced with it.

“My Lord! The boss of the Wellness Hall is here to become an official!”

At that moment, one of the guards shouted, only to be quickly dragged away by Magistrate Lou. “Shh! Don’t interrupt the Lord’s work!”

I don’t think capturing the one stealing the babies will be all that hard.

Since the talismans weren’t working, he decided to do it the

old-fashioned way, staking out.

Over the next couple of days, he staked out at numerous places, but nothing happened. It was as if the culprit knew that Li Huowang was here and had hidden himself away. For the next few days, none of the babies were stolen.

One day, Li Huowang was woken up from the sudden commotion. He opened the window, only to see the civilians running on the streets toward the East side of the town. Everyone was weirdly excited.

“What is happening?” Li Huowang quickly left the guest room and followed the people.

He followed them and soon realized where they were going. The people were all crowded at one of the crossroads. It was jam-packed with people! In the middle of the crossroad was the man who had disguised himself as the seamstress. At this moment, he was tied to a wooden pole.

“Start his execution!” Magistrate Lou threw the red sign onto the ground, causing everyone to burst into cheers.

When the man saw Li Huowang, Magistrate Lou stood up and vacated his seat for Li Huowang. “My Lord, you are here? It’s thanks to you that we were able to capture this vile man!”

“You are killing him now? I thought you would want to interrogate him further,” asked Li Huowang.

Magistrate Lou glared at the culprit with disgust and replied, “He’s too vile and wicked! How could we just execute him like that? We are going to torture him first before killing him!”

Just as they were talking, the executioner, who was wearing a red robe, walked up to the man. Then, he drank a cup of wine and started his work. Every time he sliced a piece of meat from the culprit, the crowd cheered.

“Why are those people giving the executioner coins?” Li Huowang pointed at some of the people in the corner.

“Those people are members of the victims’ families. They don’t want the culprit to get reincarnated, and so they want to buy some of the culprit’s flesh and bones. They will then feed that flesh to the dogs. If their grudge is big, then some of the people might even eat the flesh themselves. To be fair, this doesn’t really align with the laws of the Liang Kingdom, but whenever I think about how my daughter was about to be raped by him, I myself want to bite off a chunk of that man’s flesh! He’s too despicable!” explained Magistrate Lou.

The culprit was slowly disassembled, looking more and more horrifying. Even so, the crowd just got more and more excited. It was a surreal sight.

Every time the executioner cut off some of the culprit’s flesh and caused him to cry out in pain, everyone else cheered.

However, as more and more time passed, the culprit started glaring at everyone and cursed at them rather than crying out in pain. “Stop playing the victim! So what if I played with the girls? I’ve raped so many women but none of them were virgins! All of the women in this County are sluts! Useless! Prostitutes!”

When the crowd heard his remarks, all of them instantly became incensed, and if it wasn’t for the guards, they would’ve gone up and killed the man themselves.

“Hm? Hold up!” Li Huowang noticed something and immediately ran over.

When he approached the man, he was surprised to see that the blood that was flowing down the culprit’s body, as well as the wounds were quite similar to the pattern he saw when he used the talisman for fortune telling!

“Are you telling the truth?” questioned Li Huowang.

“I’m telling the truth! Hundreds of girls, but none of them were virgins! The women of Cangshui have all been raped by someone else!” said the culprit.

Everyone else might've thought that the man was just spouting lies, but Li Huowang did not. After all, the patterns shown by the fortune telling talisman were also appearing on the man's body.

"Virgins... Hymen..." Li Huowang suddenly remembered something and ran up to Magistrate Lou. "You had mentioned that other than the women being raped and the babies being stolen, there were also some cases of thefts?"

"Yes. Did my Lord discover something?" asked Magistrate Lou.

"Quick, show me the records of what was stolen! How much did they steal, and what did they steal? I need to know!" said Li Huowang.

When he saw how adamant Li Huowang was, Magistrate Lou immediately went and compiled the data.

While it was not easy to find stolen babies, it was quite easy to obtain the list of items that had been stolen. Soon, Li Huowang was presented with the list of stolen items.

"Dang Gui... Cinnabar..." Li Huowang read through the list and frowned.

He recalled the culprit saying that none of the women here were virgins, then he recalled the man at the noodle shop talking about the female ghosts, and finally the stolen babies.

Li Huowang picked up a brush and started writing down several words on the paper.

Red pills, nectar, baby flesh and bones...

By the time he finished writing the list, Li Huowang's eyes were wide with shock.

"This recipe... It's a pill recipe! Someone's refining pills!"

1. roughly 0.3kg, not a lot 🤔

Chapter 320 - Objective

Li Huowang once again confirmed the stolen ingredients with the list on the paper. While he didn't know what the effect of the pill was, as a disciple of Dan Yangzi, he was sure that this was a pill recipe.

Is there another Dan Yangzi?

Thinking back upon the happenings at the Zephyr Temple, Li Huowang's eyes were gloomy.

After seeing Li Huowang's reaction, Magistrate Lou carefully asked, "My Lord? Did you discover something? Do you know where the babies are?"

"No, at least not yet. But I do have a clue," said Li Huowang as he kept the paper. "I don't know what they are trying to refine, but some of the methods will always remain the same. There are certain ingredients needed to refine pills and they still lack some of them. To complete the refinement, they will have to steal some fifty other ingredients. Go and take an inventory of those ingredients and guard them well! The culprit will definitely come to steal them again!"

Regardless of whether or not it was another Dan Yangzi, Li Huowang had to first find the culprit. As long as he did that, the rest of it would be much easier to deal with.

"Alright! As long as we can help the people to find their babies again, I will listen to you! I will go and contact all of the herb shop owners," answered Magistrate Lou.

"Wait." However, Li Huowang stopped him. "You might alert the culprit if you do it like this. I will handle this. You will aid me in putting on a show."

"A show?"

That evening, Magistrate Lou brought several people with him and sent off Li Huowang with a grand parade. As he sent Li Huowang off, Magistrate Lou held onto Li Huowang's hands tightly and made quite a few oaths to repay Li Huowang.

On this day, the people learned that it was Li Huowang who had caught the culprit that had been raping women left and right. Soon, the civilians also crowded around the parade. Many of the people were filled with gratitude and kept trying to put various gifts into Li Huowang's carriage, but all of them were stopped by him.

After they were five Lis away, Li Huowang told Magistrate Lou and his men to return. Thus, Magistrate Lou and the others reluctantly turned back.

Now that the rapist had been caught, there were no longer any cases of women getting raped. Even though they hadn't found the missing babies, at the very least no more babies were being stolen either. Thus, the anxious people of Cangshui County soon calmed down.

Several days later, on an empty street in the night, a hunchbacked timekeeper was yawning as he beat his bamboo drum. "The weather is hot and everything's flammable~ Be careful with fire~"

At first, nothing happened. Finally, something changed during the third section of the night.

As the hunchbacked timekeeper continued beating the bamboo drum, his shadow stood up and its limbs became long and narrow. Then, it slowly moved forward in tandem with the timekeeper.

The shadow was somehow being held upward by something, and there was something in the middle of the shadow.

The hunchbacked timekeeper used the wooden stick to once again hit his bamboo drum and shouted, "The weather is hot and everything's flammable~ Be careful with fire~"

As the hunchbacked timekeeper approached one of the

apothecaries, some of the ingredients that were wrapped in oilcloth phased out through the wall of the apothecary and disappeared into the timekeeper's shadow. At the same time, the shadow grew slightly larger.

Meanwhile, the hunchbacked timekeeper kept beating his drum, "The weather is hot and everything's flammable~ Be careful with fire~"

As more and more ingredients vanished into the shadow of the timekeeper, the shadow became more and more engorged. Soon, it no longer even looked humanoid.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang observed everything that was happening.

He had asked the Magistrate to put on a show, faking the entire send-off. Li Huowang wanted the culprit to lower their guard and think that Li Huowang had left.

With his power of invisibility, Li Huowang had quickly discovered the places with the ingredients needed for the pill recipe.

After that, Li Huowang had been staking out on a nightly basis before finally catching the culprit. After all, refining pills also depended on the date and Li Huowang knew the culprit could not afford to delay it any longer.

"Daoist, since we've found the culprit, why are we still waiting here? We need to capture them immediately and stop them from stealing any more babies!" said Monk, somehow more anxious than Li Huowang himself.

"Calm down. We won't be able to get to the bottom of this by just catching the thief. We need to let the thief go back to the main base so that we can capture all of them at once," said Li Huowang while maintaining his invisible state as he stalked the hunchbacked timekeeper and the monstrous shadow.

Time slowly passed. By the time it was the fourth section of the

night, the engorged shadow had grown to the size of a small house as it moved like a giant.

At that moment, a baby in a bamboo basket phased out from a wall and vanished into the shadow, causing Monk to start jumping out of anxiety.

On the other hand, upon sensing that it had gotten almost everything, the shadow detached itself from the hunchbacked timekeeper and flew into the skies.

“Daoist! It’s running away! Chase it quickly!” shouted Monk, already on the verge of tears.

“Shut up!” Li Huowang ran onto the roof as he chased after the thing.

The shadow continued flying through the night sky as Li Huowang chased after it on the ground. Thankfully his sight was excellent or he would’ve long since lost the shadow in the night sky.

Chasing it, Li Huowang ran further and further away. Soon, he exited the Cangshui County and started running on a dirt path.

By this point, he was starting to pant from tiredness; on the other hand, the shadow monster was still flying further and further away.

Shit! I can’t let it get away!

Coming to a decision, Li Huowang quickly brought out some talisman paper and started drawing with his blood. Then, he stuck both the talismans on his knees. Instantly, all his veins on his face bulged up. Now looking quite gnarly, Li Huowang’s heart was quickly enveloped by an unpleasant heat.

But the price was worth it. His speed instantly increased drastically.

Thanks to his speed, Li Huowang managed to quickly catch up with the shadow monster.

As the sky slowly brightened and the first ray of sunlight appeared, the shadow burst with a pop. When the shadow burst

open, all of the items that it had stolen fell into a large river.

When Li Huowang arrived at the riverbank, he saw several shadows moving the items that had fallen into the river. However, due to the river being murky, he couldn't see what they were. All he saw was the ingredients being transported to a hidden underwater cave nearby.

Li Huowang raised his head and saw that the cave was mostly submerged, leaving only the top part exposed to the air. "Is this their lair?"

The cave was situated at the base of a massive rocky mountain. The cave was like a massive mouth that swallowed the river.

After checking his location on the map, Li Huowang realized that the location he was at was at the center of where all the cases of missing babies in the numerous counties were reported.

"I don't know who they are, but they should be like Dan Yangzi if they are hiding in a remote place like this," muttered Li Huowang.

Having found the enemy's lair, Li Huowang should have been happy. However, all he could do was stare at the river and the water that was entering the cave.

"How do I get in?"

Chapter 321 - Water Son

Should I swim?

However, after giving it some thought, Li Huowang decided against it. After all, he couldn't use any of his techniques while underwater and thus would be quite helpless.

At the same time, as Li Huowang thought about his techniques, he realized that almost all of his techniques were incompatible to use underwater.

Should I go back and ask Magistrate Lou to send me a ship?

Just as Li Huowang was thinking about doing this, he suddenly heard the sound of an instrument from far away with his sharp hearing.

A Suona?

He hid in the bushes and looked toward the direction where the sound was coming from.

Soon, he saw a group of people parading while playing the instruments. The people playing the instruments were at the back while several people were carrying a wooden rowboat. Within the rowboat was an old lady. However, even though her hair was completely white and all of her teeth had fallen off, she still looked quite lively.

The old woman smiled as she looked at the joyous parade that everyone had made for her. The wooden boat was adorned with red and white cloths, making it look as if flowers had blossomed on the boat.

Li Huowang didn't know what the strange group of people was doing, and chose to continue observing.

The parade did not pass by Li Huowang but instead stopped by the riverside. Then, amidst the sounds of the drums and other

instruments, they placed the wooden boat with the old woman onto the river and lightly pushed it toward the cave.

As all this happened, the people standing by the riverbank began to happily send the old woman off.

“Madam Liu, you led quite an amazing life. I don’t think I will have the same luck as you.”

“Yeah, Madam Liu, you are very lucky. Even though you don’t have any children, the Water Son can still help take care of you until you die.”

“Auntie Liu, please take care. I will drop by to visit you from time to time.”

As he heard all this and saw what was happening, Li Huowang felt chills run down his spine.

They might’ve made it sound nice by saying that they were sending her off, but it was clear that these people intended to take over Madam Liu’s assets.

There were no Water Sons. All they were trying to do was to send away an old person who didn’t have a family and then take away her assets.

As Li Huowang saw the wooden boat gradually moving toward the cave, he suddenly had a great idea. He once again turned himself invisible and quickly leaped onto the boat.

His sudden jump into the boat made it rock, but the old woman didn’t see anything when she looked back. She just tightened her grip on the cane in her hands as she bid her neighbors farewell.

Meanwhile, the invisible Li Huowang saw the cave getting closer and closer.

Water Sons? I want to see what you truly are!

As they got closer and closer to the cave, the sounds of musical instruments gradually faded away. Then, when the wooden boat entered the cave, everything turned silent. There were no other sounds except for the waves hitting on the wooden boat.

At the same time, there was very little light here, making the cave look dark and ominous.

Madam Liu was clearly spooked by the atmosphere but kept reassuring herself as she held onto her cane. “No, it’s fine. That sister of mine would never lie to me. The Water Son will come and fetch me. He will take care of me and I will finally be able to have a son.”

Li Huowang looked at the old woman’s frail back and felt sympathy for her. It was clear that she was just lying to herself.

Hu~

At that moment, a small light suddenly appeared on the surface of the water, shocking Li Huowang. He squinted and saw that it was a white candle.

“Is that you, Water Son? I have the surname Liu but my deceased husband’s surname was Hu. Will you take on his surname?” the old woman asked politely while turning toward the white candle; she wanted to show her good side without scaring the Water Son off.

But, the candle did not move. Instead, Li Huowang realized the boat was slowly floating toward the candle.

Li Huowang gripped the hilt of his sword and tensed up as he stared at the candle. He didn’t know who or what the Water Son was, but since they stole the babies and were probably using them to refine pills, they were definitely not kind beings.

As the boat slowly floated toward the candle, the white candle also floated backward. But after a while, the candle finally stopped.

At that moment, Li Huowang lurched forward and realized that the boat had reached the bank.

The riverbank was uneven, causing the old woman to fall to the ground.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang stepped over the old woman who had fallen onto the ground and slowly walked toward the candle. He

approached carefully and finally saw the being that was holding the candle.

It was a humanoid being with various defects.

Its hair was frighteningly long and covered its hunched-back. Its nails were even longer than its fingers and curled into spirals. Its teeth were growing messily in its mouth while its face was uneven and with lots of bumps. Li Huowang also saw some of the creature's hair grow into its eye sockets. It was blind!

“Li Huowang, be careful. That is a Human Xiao[1],” Hong Zhong finally spoke after being quiet for a long time.

Hearing this, Li Huowang looked at him with a puzzled expression.

After a moment, Hong Zhong continued explaining, “When a human is stricken by bad luck and can’t die even though they are already very old, their white hair would eventually turn green, their teeth would grow long in their mouth, and they would no longer be able to speak human languages. Instead, they would only be able to converse in their language. From that point on, they are considered as evil beings that are half human and half ghost.”

Just then, the Human Xiao placed the candle on the tip of its finger and moved it lightly, using it to lure the old woman deeper into the cave.

Li Huowang wanted to chase it but suddenly stopped. He just stood there and saw the candle disappear before whispering to Hong Zhong. “Are you telling the truth or just spouting some random bullshit?”

Hearing this, Hong Zhong scoffed, “You think that I would lie for something so trivial? Just to toy with you? I’m still one of the three leaders, Hong Zhong. If I wanted to trick you, then I would’ve made it so you would die for sure! Fine, since you don’t believe me, I won’t explain anything else about Human Xiao to you.”

However, Li Huowang just stood there and stared at Hong

Zhong.

Seeing Li Huowang's reaction, Hong Zhong suddenly felt confused. "Is there something on my face? Why are you staring at me? Are you here just to sit around or to find out what's happening?"

Li Huowang frowned and shook his head. "I just thought that something was fishy. You are an illusion of mine, so why do you know things that I don't?"

After that, Li Huowang turned around and looked at the other illusions around him. "If you guys are not illusions, then what are you?"

This time, it was Hong Zhong's turn to look at Li Huowang, smiling mischievously as he did so. "That, I don't know. You have to ask yourself."

1. A type of evil being in China. Don't really have a counterpart in English history. The closest you can get is an undead I think? 🤔

Chapter 322 - Human Xiao

Li Huowang looked at Hong Zhong silently before looking at Monk, Peng Longteng, and Jin Shanzhao.

Ever since all of them had appeared, they had been constantly following him. Thus, he had thought that it had something to do with his identity as a Strayed One.

But when Hong Zhong told him about Human Xiao, he instantly knew that something was not right.

Maybe Tuoba Danqing knew more about this, but Li Huowang dared not to ask. He was afraid that Tuoba Danqing would find out his identity.

If they are not illusions, then what are they? Why are they following me constantly?

This was the first time that he had thought about it seriously.

He then recalled Jiang Yingzi who had appeared abruptly and then disappeared just as abruptly.

She appeared when I felt ashamed, but then she disappeared on her own when she felt ashamed instead. Maybe...

Li Huowang felt like he had a clue, but the answer was still very far from him. It was as if his thoughts on the matter were shrouded in a veil that would not dissipate. The more he thought about it, the less he knew.

Hong Zhong smiled wider when he saw Li Huowang thinking about it. "You don't know? Maybe I can help you a little. Do you know about the story of the spirits that serve the tiger? [\[1\]](#) Legends says that people killed by the tigers would become ghostly slaves in their stomach, luring others to also be eaten by the tigers. Maybe

you are something like that and we are the enslaved souls?”

“Enslaved souls?” Li Huowang looked at Hong Zhong in disbelief before continuing in a serious tone, “If you guys really are my enslaved souls, then you’ve brought me nothing but trouble. You guys are useless! The only thing you do is to make others think that I’m going crazy when I’m talking to you!”

Hearing this, Hong Zhong smiled and laughed. “Hey, maybe you really are going crazy. I’ve always thought that you were abnormal.”

Li Huowang glared at Hong Zhong as if he wanted to bite Hong Zhong’s head off. His veins pulsed on his forehead.

“Hohoho~ You are glaring at me again? What can you do if I keep scolding you and calling you a crazy person? My little Huowang~” Hong Zhong arched backward, his skinless face rippling as the flesh wiggled, revealing an absurd smile.

With that taunt, Li Huowang suddenly felt his brain go numb. He immediately grabbed his sword and placed it against his own neck, the sharp edge piercing the skin. Then, he snarled, “Oh? Come on then! Let’s fucking die together!”

Hong Zhong panicked when he saw the blood spraying in the air, “Hey hey hey, what are you doing?!”

However, before Hong Zhong could say anything else, a massive halberd pierced through him and lifted him up before smashing him onto the ground.

It was Peng Longteng’s halberd. She was the one who swept her weapon filled with killing intent at Hong Zhong.

At the same time, Monk quickly ran over and tried to persuade Li Huowang. “You can’t die, Daoist! You still haven’t gotten rid of your status as a Strayed One. Didn’t you want to go back and find your family? You can’t give up.”

Just then, a tentacle wriggled out from within Li Huowang’s belly button and wrapped itself around his wrist tightly.

As more and more tentacles sprouted out to grab his arm, Li Huowang sat on the ground, panting.

Li Huowang didn't like this feeling. It felt like his internal organs were being moved around.

Seeing that Li Huowang had finally stopped, Monk ran over to Hong Zhong and scolded him, "Stop taunting him. The Daoist has nothing else to lose and would not hesitate to throw away his life. He's like a dry match that can light up instantly."

Hong Zhong glared at Li Huowang from afar and then scoffed before he sunk himself into the water, "What a crazy bastard."

Li Huowang cooled down after being stopped by the tentacles and Monk's persuasion. He removed the sword from his neck and the black tentacles quickly plugged the wound.

At that moment, Li Huowang realized that he was not who he was. Why did he become so irritable and why was he so easily taunted? Was that really him?

"Daoist, let's move quickly. They are using the babies to refine pills. Saving a person's life is much more noble than constructing numerous temples. You have to persevere in doing good deeds; after all, Buddha is watching. Maybe Buddha will come and help you if you save enough people," said Monk.

Monk's words made Li Huowang laugh out loud as he placed his sword back into its scabbard. Then, he stood up and started walking in the direction where the candle had gone.

"Monk, you are not my enslaved spirit. You were not killed by me, and I don't even know if you are still alive or dead yet," said Li Huowang.

Hearing this, Monk's illusion flickered lightly; however, this went unnoticed. At the same time, Monk's eyes opened wide as he muttered to himself, "I'm not dead? Then who am I?"

Li Huowang did not answer him as he navigated through the dark cave.

Li Huowang hadn't gone too far when another Human Xiao crawled over to where he was earlier. It licked Li Huowang's blood that was splattered on the ground before quickly receding into the darkness.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang remained invisible as he continued to look for the Human Xiao that had disappeared with the candle. Since he had found them, it was time to deal with them. Li Huowang was feeling quite pent up and needed a place to vent.

As he continued walking, Li Huowang heard a voice. The voice was chaotic, yet was rhythmic, as if it was chanting something.

Li Huowang followed the voice and saw something bone-chilling. A group of Human Xiao were sitting around and listening to another Human Xiao who was chanting something while wearing a tattered Daoist robe.

The Human Xiao with the Daoist robe had a black horse-tailed whisk stuck to the back of its neck. Based on how it was chanting something while reading from a paper, it was most likely the leader.

Even though the Human Xiao's four limbs were gangly, all of them still somehow managed to sit cross legged with their absurdly long toenails.

Li Huowang was surprised at the suspiciously familiar sight.

Is this a morning lecture? They are having a morning lecture?

The Human Xiaos were indeed having a morning lecture. Li Huowang remembered how he did the same back in Zephyr Temple. The same monsters and the same dreams to become Immortals.

When he realized the familiarity, Li Huowang wanted to puke. He suddenly felt extremely disgusted.

What kind of fucking monsters are cultivating to be Immortals?

Li Huowang gritted his teeth as he ran toward the leader.

"Wait, Daoist! We need to find the babies first! If the babies can't return home, then their mothers will be stricken with grief,"

called out Monk.

Li Huowang slowly came to a stop when he heard Monk's words. He hesitated for a bit before slowly walking back to the darkness.

However, just as Li Huowang was about to start searching for the babies, he saw another Human Xiao crawling swiftly on the ground as it approached the leader of the Human Xiaos and whispered something to it.

1. A folklore story where people killed by tigers would have their souls enslaved by it. The enslaved souls would then help the tiger to trick other victims. As an idiom, it means helping evil people do their bidding and luring victims 🐾

Chapter 323 - Method

Immediately, all of the Human Xiaos exploded into action. They quickly scattered at a blinding speed, disappearing in an instant.

What's going on? Did they find me?

Li Huowang felt his heartbeat suddenly quicken. The situation had changed much faster than he could have imagined.

As Li Huowang quickly weaved through the rooms to find the babies, he realized that not only did the things all of them do resemble the Zephyr Temple, but even the decorations and rooms here resembled it!

Li Huowang suddenly stood still while searching for the babies. In a dark environment like this, sound was the best method to determine directions. Thus, Li Huowang quickly removed the cotton from his ears.

Immediately, he was overwhelmed by the sound of the river, the crawling Human Xiaos, dripping water, and various other noises.

Amidst all the noise, he closed his eyes and did his best to discern the noises and their sources. Gradually, he managed to hear some words.

"Uncle?"

That noise...

As Li Huowang tried tracing the sources of the sounds, he suddenly heard crying noises.

I've found them!

He immediately ran towards the source of the voices. He ran through the caves, quickly going over uneven ground. In the end, he finally found a smaller cave with a light. The babies were inside

there!

At this moment, there were several old people carefully using cinnabar to dot the foreheads of the babies. Even the old woman from before was here.

At this moment, she was holding a baby girl, but rather than joy, her face was filled with uneasiness.

There were still twenty to thirty babies that were alive, but he also saw several discarded baskets that were producing a rotting stench. He didn't want to see what was inside.

With Monk urging him, Li Huowang gradually revealed himself and whispered to the old people, "Don't worry. The caves are a bit chaotic now. Wait here and I will bring you out later."

Hearing his voice, the old people raised their heads and saw Li Huowang. Seeing him, some of their numb eyes gradually grew bright.

After a moment, one of them, who was around a hundred years old, slowly stood up with his cane and started shouting, "Water Sons! Water Sons! Someone has sneaked in here!"

His shout instantly caused a chain reaction and most of the other older people started shouting as well.

Seeing this, Li Huowang snarled and swept his sword at them, decapitating three of them in a single go.

But even if he killed all of them at this point, it would be useless. The Human Xiaos had heard their shouts.

In just a few moments, someone threw a handful of black glutinous rice at Li Huowang, black smoke trailing off them.

In that moment, Li Huowang shifted his body and the black glutinous rice phased right through his illusion before hitting an old woman instead. With a startled cry, her flesh started melting off and she soon became a smoldering corpse.

"Go!" shouted Li Huowang as he used his sword and shaved off all the freshly-grown nails on his left hand.

As he heard the Human Xiaos crying outside, he quickly hid his illusion underneath the ground and once again turned invisible.

However, just then, one of the old people stood up and warned the Human Xiaos, “My son! That man entered into the ground! He must know of a method to travel straight through it! Be careful!”

A strong killing intent instantly bloomed within Li Huowang’s heart. He had never hated someone so much. The old people here were even worse than the Human Xiaos.

One of the Human Xiaos had heard the old person’s warning and used its long fingernails to pick up two dried leaves. Then, it placed them on both of its eyes and wiped them. As it wailed, all of the other Human Xiao ran straight at Li Huowang, carrying black horse-tail whisks, Daoist bells, and cherry wood swords.

Seeing this, Li Huowang took out his bronze coin sword and started chanting. The sword instantly split apart and the various coins pierced through numerous Human Xiaos.

In an instant, the dark cave was lit up by metal sparks.

As Li Huowang was fighting against the Human Xiaos, one of them grabbed a purple talisman and placed it on an umbrella before trying to use it to stab Li Huowang from the back.

Li Huowang’s ears moved slightly and he quickly turned around. When he saw the Human Xiao attempting to backstab him, he opened his mouth. At that moment, a bunch of black tentacles burst forth and covered the Human Xiao’s face, ripping half of it apart.

At the same time, the red thread of the bronze coin sword also wrapped around several of the Human Xiao’s necks.

With this, he pulled the bronze coin sword and decapitated all of their heads.

With Li Huowang’s rampaging attack and self-mutilation, the number of Human Xiao’s decreased rapidly. None of them could fight against Li Huowang.

Seeing that they were losing, the Human Xiao soon changed tactics.

An incense burner made with an old man's head was placed on the ground. Three white candles were placed in front of it and the Human Xiao that was conducting the morning lecture stood up from the ground. Then, it took out several wriggling pills and placed them in its mouth. It then took a stance with its mangled legs and suddenly drew its cherry wood sword. There was a black talisman stabbed into the sword.

Then, the Daoist Human Xiao started chanting in a non-human language. Even though it wasn't accurate, the rhythm and tone were still there.

At this moment, a monster with no eyes, twisted limbs, and sharp teeth was chanting to use a technique. This was both surreal and scary.

But what was even scarier was that Li Huowang didn't know what technique it was using. All he knew was that he had to stop it.

Li Huowang quickly ran toward the Daoist Human Xiao while using his sword to cut at his own left hand. Without hesitation, he chopped off two of his fingers and immediately turned them into bone bullets that shot at the Daoist Human Xiao.

But, the bone bullets were blocked by two other Human Xiaos.

Meanwhile, the Daoist Human Xiao saw Li Huowang and quickly threw out two black flags, implanting them on both sides of Li Huowang. It then stabbed its smoking cherry wood sword into the ground.

Immediately, the black smoke drained into the ground and a ritual circle appeared with Li Huowang at the center. The circle was written in a curious language.

Chapter 324 - Monster

The Daoist Human Xiao saw Li Huowang and quickly threw out two black flags, implanting them on both sides of Li Huowang. It then stabbed its smoking cherry wood sword into the ground.

As the black smoke drained into the ground, a ritual circle appeared with Li Huowang at the center. The circle was written in a curious language.

As soon as he saw what was happening, Li Huowang knew that he needed to run. Thus, he instantly tried to escape from the circle.

When the Daoist Human Xiao saw what Li Huowang was doing, it instantly made a few seals with its hands. In response, the black flags beside Li Huowang shot upward and stabbed into his feet, pinning him onto the ground.

With this, Li Huowang felt as if his legs were welded to the ground. He could not escape no matter what he did. At the same time, he also realized that the black flags had also sealed away his power to shift his body.

Seeing that Li Huowang was trapped, the other Human Xiaos also unleashed their attacks. All of them threw various talismans, glutinous rice, and bronze coins toward Li Huowang.

Li Huowang did his best to block the incoming attacks with his sword, but his body was soon covered in wounds caused by the hail of objects.

Forced to the brink, Li Huowang fished out his flint and snarled as he tried to light up his skin.

Since this mission had been entrusted to Tuoba Danqing, he knew that it wouldn't be so simple. Thus, it was only natural for Li Huowang to be fighting against these dangerous enemies. Even though it was extremely painful to sacrifice his skin to Ba-Hui, he

had no intention of backing down. He had already prepared himself for the possibility of death during this mission.

When the Daoist Human Xiao saw that Li Huowang wanted to do something, it quickly took the black horse-tail whisk from its neck and performed a finger seal on it. Immediately, the soft fibers of the horsetail whisk turned hard and became like a halberd. Then, the Daoist Human Xiao threw it toward Li Huowang.

Just as Li Huowang lit up his left hand, the sharp blade chopped his entire hand off.

The Daoist Human Xiao once again started chanting, causing the blade to fly back to it, this time with Li Huowang's left arm.

When it saw that Li Huowang no longer had the flint, the Daoist Human Xiao grinned and leaped upward as it slashed its blade down toward Li Huowang's head. At the same time, several purple talismans were attached to the blade, causing it to start smoking. In an instant, the blade exuded an incredible aura that could oppress anything and everything.

Li Huowang didn't know if he could take it, but given the situation, he had no choice but to try. Thus, he raised his bronze coin sword. At the critical moment, Li Huowang remembered the fragmented words of the Black Taisui and muttered, "What are you talking about?"

Seeing the blade closing on him, Li Huowang roared and used both hands to hold his bronze coin sword. The pain and the adrenaline from being so close to death made him look like a maniac.

"Open!"

Li Huowang directly cut his body in half, instantly himself similar to Jin Shanzhao's illusion.

Immediately, black tentacles burst forth from below his torso along with his blood. The tentacles tensed up for a moment before jumping upward, allowing Li Huowang to avoid the Daoist Human

Xiao's blade altogether.

The blade then swept past his lower body and crashed heavily into the ground.

Bam!

The entire cave shook as stalactites started to fall from the ceiling. At the same time, black smoke spread everywhere, causing everything it touched to start decaying.

Thankfully Li Huowang managed to avoid it or he would've died.

Meanwhile, the Daoist Human Xiao stood up from the ground and looked at its ruined horse-tail whisk. Then, it snarled at the enemy that had dodged its attack with such a bizarre method.

At this moment, Li Huowang's body was cut in half, but black tentacles had sprouted from underneath his torso. The black tentacles were lifting him up, as if he was some half-human and half-octopus monstrosity.

The Daoist Human Xiao saw that Li Huowang's body was practically torn in half, but his internal organs did not fall out. Only blood flowed down through the tentacles. As it stared at the half-man and half-octopus monster, the Daoist Human Xiao realized that it had met a formidable foe.

After a moment, the Daoist Human Xiao quickly took a cherry wood sword from one of its disciples and swung it around before pointing it toward the ground and picking up a black talisman with the tip.

On one side was the half-man, half-octopus Li Huowang holding a bronze coin sword that was sewn together with red threads.

On the other side was the Daoist Human Xiao with its twisted limbs and elongated fingernails holding onto a cherry wood sword with a black talisman on its tip.

As they watched all this unfold, the remaining old people that

were still alive felt as if their souls were about to leave their bodies. “What... what is this...”

Li Huowang glared at the Daoist Human Xiao with his bloodshot eyes. All of the problems, from the stolen babies to the other Human Xiaos, all originated from the Daoist Human Xiao. As long as he got rid of it, all the problems here would be solved for good.

“Forward!”

Hearing the command, the Black Taisui immediately started moving and rushed straight toward the Daoist Human Xiao.

The Daoist Human Xiao was also not afraid and directly ran toward Li Huowang with its disciples.

In such a fight where death was just a hair’s breadth away, the Black Taisui dared not do anything on its own. After all, its life was tied to Li Huowang’s life. If Li Huowang died, then it would die as well.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang chanted and transformed his bronze coin sword into a long whip which he used to restrain the Daoist Human Xiao’s cherry wood sword.

Just as the bronze coin sword and the cherry wood sword came into contact with each other, a crackling sound rang out. It was as if both weapons were rejecting each other.

When he saw that the Daoist Human Xiao had its weapon neutralized, Li Huowang threw aside the bronze coin sword and used his steel sword to cut open his stomach, shaving off a massive piece of flesh and skin that had just regrown.

Then, he threw the piece of skin and flesh into the air. Instantly, it expanded and flew toward the group of Human Xiao like a net.

Meanwhile, the Daoist Human Xiao somehow seemed to know where Li Huowang’s weakness was. It roared out some orders and the other Human Xiaos immediately scattered. Then, all of them

surrounded Li Huowang.

Li Huowang was fighting alone while the Daoist Human Xiao had numbers on its side. Thus, it was an excellent strategy; Li Huowang couldn't possibly fight so many of them at once.

At that moment, a sword with the motif of Taichi was suddenly stabbed toward Li Huowang. However, instead of dodging it, he crashed right into the sword.

The sharp sword stabbed straight into his brain and popped out from the back of his head.

But, there was no blood!

What the sword had stabbed was Li Huowang's illusion! His real body was invisible and was three meters away!

Chapter 325 - Gift

The direction of battle changed in an instant.

When Li Huowang saw the opening generated by most of the Human Xiaos missing their attacks, he instantly seized it.

He had realized that while the Daoist Human Xiao was strong, it was also similar to a regular Daoist. It, too, had to either chant or do something as a condition to use its powers. As long as Li Huowang could force it into a melee fight, the Daoist Human Xiao would not be able to find the time needed to use the techniques.

“Jump!”

As Li Huowang commanded, seven to eight tentacles curled and then forcefully launched him into the air, bringing him even closer to the Daoist Human Xiao.

Clang!

The Daoist Human Xiao’s cherry wood sword broke. The black-tassel sword that the Abbess had given him was extremely sharp, to the point that the Daoist Human Xiao’s weapon was not able to win against his own.

Seeing that it was starting to lose, the Daoist Human Xiao used the force from Li Huowang’s assault to retreat.

But how could Li Huowang allow it to escape? He kept chasing and attacking it left and right, forcing the Daoist Human Xiao to not have the time to use its special techniques.

Meanwhile, when they sensed that their Master was losing the battle, one of the Human Xiaos threw a white horse-tail whisk with a small black talisman on it toward the Daoist Human Xiao.

Seeing this, the Daoist Human Xiao quickly used its curled fingernails to grab the horse-tail whisk. Then, it used the horsetail whisk to whip at Li Huowang, using the white fiber to entangle his

sword. It was using a gentle approach to deflect Li Huowang's strong attack. Even though Li Huowang's sword was sharp enough to cut through the fibers, it would still take a bit of time.

At this point, both of them were locked into a stalemate. If Li Huowang wanted to win, he needed to cut off all of the entangling fibers before the rest of the Human Xiao could chase him to where he was.

But, Li Huowang had another trick.

He smiled cruelly at the monster in front of him. "Since you used your disciples to surround me, don't blame me for using an underhanded tactic as well! Do it now!"

Following his command, several black tentacles moved and instantly grabbed numerous tools from within Li Huowang's satchel of torture tools. Then, the tentacles used those tools as they stabbed, mauled, sliced, crushed, and pulverized the Daoist Human Xiao's abdomen.

By the time the Daoist Human Xiao held its abdomen and fell to the ground, Li Huowang had managed to free his black-tassel sword from the white fibers and sliced it downward, instantly decapitating Daoist Human Xiao's head.

Then, Li Huowang turned around with blood staining his robes as he stared at the remaining Human Xiaos. Even though they were quite numerous, none of them attacked Li Huowang. They were all afraid.

"Go!"

However, Li Huowang was currently filled with murderous intent as he charged and roared, running straight toward the hundreds of Human Xiao with his black-tassel sword in hand.

Without a leader, the remaining Human Xiaos soon scattered. It was a complete massacre as they turned their backs toward Li Huowang and ran.

Four hours passed by and the entire cave was mostly purged.

While some of the Human Xiaos did manage to escape, they were not likely to pose any threats.

After finishing all this, the black tentacles skittered like a spider as they pulled Li Huowang toward his lower body.

By now, Li Huowang was extremely fatigued, and was holding through sheer willpower. Once he reached his lower body, he grabbed it and pulled upward, almost as if he was wearing pants.

As the two halves of his body were placed together, the wriggling tentacles once again entered his flesh as they started stitching and reconnecting his nerves, bone, flesh, and sinews.

At first, Li Huowang couldn't feel anything in his lower body. But soon, he was able to feel his toes, and pain started radiating from where the black flags were stabbed into his feet.

Now that the circle on the ground had disappeared, Li Huowang bent over and pulled out the black flag.

Then, he stood up and looked at the chaotic scene all around. The entire floor of the cave was covered in mud and blood. It was almost impossible to find a dry spot.

Now that all the enemies were either dead or chased away, Li Huowang suddenly started laughing. At the same time, he realized that recently, he loved laughing more and more. He used to rarely laugh in the past.

After a while, he stopped laughing and touched his abdomen. "Thank you. Also, it seems that I have been underestimating you. You are much more useful than I thought."

In response, Li Huowang heard some fragmented sentences in his ear. Compared to the last time, the Black Taisui was now able to use some simple words to converse, albeit in an incomplete manner. This was all thanks to Li Huowang teaching it over a long period of time.

After this battle, Li Huowang decided to invest more time and energy into the Black Taisui.

He didn't know why the Black Taisui in his stomach was much more intelligent than the one outside. He wasn't sure whether it was caused by the Black Taisui absorbing something from his body and that caused changes to appear within it.

Maybe the flesh and blood of a Strayed One can help elevate the Black Taisui's intelligence?

Li Huowang was thinking about the various possibilities as he looked at his tattered body. At this point, there was barely any flesh left on him. Even though it hurt, he had gradually gotten used to it.

"Careful. The Black Taisui is not as kind as you think. It's probably trying to take over your body by entering your stomach."

Hong Zhong's sudden words made Li Huowang frown. "Who cares! I would rather it do that! Who asked for your advice?"

"Why are you so stubborn? You can't even differentiate good advice from lies." Seeing his attitude, Hong Zhong got irritated and once again disappeared under the ground.

Li Huowang just scoffed as he took out the Fiery Sutra and started to heal himself.

Afterward, he slowly hobbled back to the cave where the babies were. His steps made him look like someone who was learning to walk for the first time.

When he returned, the old people within the caves were still there. There wasn't much they could do. Escape was not an option for any of them.

"Grab the babies, We are leaving this place," Li Huowang ordered in a cold tone.

At this point, the remaining old people did as they were told. None of them dared to say anything as they saw the blood that was still dripping down from Li Huowang's body.

The reason they all sought the Water Son, even if they knew that they were being lied to, was because they didn't want to die.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang counted the babies and saw that only

thirty-one of them had survived. There should have been more of them, but some of them were killed in the battle just now.

After counting the number of babies, Li Huowang carried one of them with one arm as he led the old people to slowly follow him toward the entrance of the cave.

However, just as they were about to exit the cave, the headless Daoist Human Xiao once again started to move.

Seeing this, Li Huowang instantly placed down the baby in his arm and pulled out the bronze coin sword, its tip aimed at the headless Daoist Human Xiao.

When he saw that the Daoist Human Xiao was trying to retrieve something from its clothes, Li Huowang directly cut off the arm in a single slash.

The arm flew into the air and fell, releasing the pouch in its grasp. At the same time, several lifespan pills wrapped in black talismans scattered into the semi-coagulated blood pool.

“Lifespan pills?” Li Huowang was surprised as he inspected some of them with his sword.

What was it trying to do? Was it trying to beg for mercy using the lifespan pills?

The headless Daoist Human Xiao once again started to move. This time, it raised its other arm and pushed the lifespan pills toward Li Huowang.

After it did that, its body stopped moving completely.

Li Huowang counted up and found that there were a total of seventy-nine lifespan pills. If one were to eat all of them, then they could probably live long enough to turn into a Human Xiao.

Chapter 326 - Good News

As Li Huowang looked at the seventy-nine lifespan pills, he felt his heart pounding uncontrollably.

Why did it give these pills to me?

Maybe it wanted him to eat the pills, or maybe it was trying to explain how it became a Human Xiao.

But at this point, the Daoist Human Xiao was dead and so this question would remain unanswered. After all, the dead couldn't be revived.[\[1\]](#)

After hesitating for a moment, Li Huowang decided to cut the Daoist Human Xiao's body into eight pieces to prevent it from moving, just to be safe.

Then, he picked up the lifespan pills and placed them all into his gourd.

Once he was done with all this, he turned toward the frightened old people and shouted, "Move! Don't stop moving!"

While these old people did look miserable, when he thought about how they were in cahoots with the Human Xiaos, Li Huowang had no intention of being kind to them. In fact, he would've killed all of them if it wasn't for the fact that he couldn't carry so many babies out by himself.

They continued to move slowly before finally exiting the cave the babies were being held in.

After that, Li Huowang searched the entire cave system. He wanted to remove any and all possible threats.

If they are using babies to refine pills, then they must've had books, recipes, or some notes somewhere.

Li Huowang wouldn't be able to rest unless he destroyed those books, lest someone else find them and start learning from the same

recipes once again.

Li Huowang searched the entire area and found something useful. It was a furnace the size of a watermelon that was placed beside a larger furnace.

There were several corpses of babies beside the furnaces. It was clear this was where the Human Xiaos refined their pills. But different from Dan Yangzi, they deboned the babies before refining the pills.

As he looked at the furnace, Li Huowang had an idea. He would finally be able to use the pill recipes he had learned from Dan Yangzi. With this, he would finally be able to replenish his stock of pills .

After searching for a while, Li Huowang then found several books written in a strange language.

Since Li Huowang could not decipher the language written by the Human Xiaos, he decided to directly burn all of them down without even trying to confirm if there were any recipes that were using babies written in them.

After that, he once again looked around, only to find a gray stone slab. Li Huowang was quite perplexed as he looked at the strange object.

“The sacred text? Why is it here? Where did it come from and why is it so proliferant?” Li Huowang grabbed the heavy stone slab as he thought about it.

“Did the Human Xiaos learn the recipe to refine pills using babies from reading the sacred text?” guessed Li Huowang.

He read through the text on the stone slab, and found that it was exactly the same as the one he had found back in Dan Yangzi’s chambers. The contents were still asking the readers to be kind to others.

“Do you know anything about this?” Li Huowang turned around and asked Hong Zhong who had been hiding himself.

Faced with the sudden question, Hong Zhong smiled mysteriously and shook his head. "Hoho, I don't know. I don't know anything."

Hearing his reply, Li Huowang directly threw away the sacred text into the underground river, instantly causing Hong Zhong to start panicking.

"Hey! What are you doing? It might be something valuable! Quickly, pick it up!" said Hong Zhong anxiously.

"Since you think it's a treasure, you can go and pick it up yourself," said Li Huowang as he picked up the crying baby and approached the boat he had used to come in here.

The boat was quite small, and he had to row against the current. Due to this, it took him several trips before he was finally able to get everyone to the river bank.

When Li Huowang brought the group of old people and the babies back to Cangshui County, the entire town exploded in a flurry of activities.

While Li Huowang did look quite monstrous due to his wounds, none of them paid any attention to him. All their attention was focused on the babies on the ground. Among them, the families who had lost their babies were at the forefront.

The families who found their babies all kneeled in front of Li Huowang and thanked him profusely, while those who didn't see their babies started crying loudly on the ground.

Meanwhile, Magistrate Lou and the other officials all bowed to Li Huowang out of respect. "Thank you! Thank you, my Lord! You are the biggest benefactor of Cangshui County."

"Don't get too happy yet. We still have things to discuss," said Li Huowang as he told the man about the old people and their actions.

"What? You mean they were helping the evil beings?" asked Magistrate Lou.

Magistrate Lou was shocked. He had originally thought that Li Huowang had rescued them from the evil beings.

“What is their punishment according to the laws of the Liang Kingdom?” asked Li Huowang as he looked at the old people who stood there silently.

“Dismemberment!” replied Magistrate Lou, his eyes cold.

“Oh? Is the punishment that harsh? Since they are already so old, wouldn’t it be better to just cut off their heads?” asked Li Huowang.

Hearing this, Magistrate Lou disagreed with him for the first time. “My Lord, we can’t do that. A person’s age and the crime they commit have no relation at all. If we spare them due to their age, won’t the babies who were killed be even angrier down on the Yellow Spring Road[2]?”

Li Huowang thought about it for a moment and agreed. “You are right. Then I will leave it to you. It’s time for me to go.”

However, Magistrate Lou held him back. “My Lord, why are you in such a rush? Please give us a chance to serve you before sending you off.”

When Li Huowang looked at his tattered and bloodstained clothes, he nodded. “Sure. I haven’t slept in two days. I will go and rest first. Help me prepare some clothes.”

Li Huowang fell asleep the moment he reached his inn. Even the pain he was experiencing was not enough to win against his fatigue.

He didn’t know how long he passed out before finally waking up from hunger. He rubbed his eyes and saw that it was still sunny outside. He just wasn’t sure what day it was.

“Daoist, you’ve been asleep for an entire day and night. Magistrate Lou came by to see you, but returned when he saw that you were still asleep,” said Monk.

Li Huowang looked at the smiling Monk. “You seem to be

happy.”

“Of course! We did good deeds together, and it's very meritorious indeed! Shouldn't we be happy?” asked Monk.

“We should. We should,” replied Li Huowang lazily as he endured the pain and sat up. Then, he changed out of his disgusting clothes and wore some new ones.

Magistrate Lou had placed quite some thought into it and prepared a set of clothes that was identical to the ones that Li Huowang was originally wearing. He even dyed the Daoist robe in the same dark red shade.

In fact, there were five new sets of Daoist Robes.

“Hoho, Magistrate Lou sure is generous,” commented Li Huowang as he wore his clothes.

After wearing his clothes, Li Huowang left the inn through the back exit and went to the stables.

“Daoist, they wanted to treat you to a meal. Are you sure you don't want it?” asked Monk.

“No. It's a waste of time. Since the mission is over, we need to quickly head back to Yinling City now. It's a long journey.” To Li Huowang, completing the mission was his priority.

However, when he entered the stable, he was shocked to see what had happened to his horse carriage.

At this moment, his carriage had been thoroughly cleaned. There was not even a speck of mud on the wheels. Even his horse had been groomed, its mane looking neat and tidy.

At the same time, various types of preserved meats and food had been placed all around the carriage. Bun was seated in the middle of all the food while munching on a bone.

“Woof woof!”

Bun excitedly greeted its master and wagged its tail. Li Huowang hadn't seen Bun in a few days and somehow had a feeling that the dog had grown fat.

Meanwhile, Monk smiled again and said, “Daoist, look. This is what I meant when I said that good people often have good karma.”

1. except for MC apparently 🤔
2. In Chinese folklore, it's a passage where all the dead have to pass to reach the Gates of Hell. 🤔

Chapter 327 - Noodles

Clip-clop, clip-clop.

The rhythmic sound of the horses galloping accompanied the departure of Li Huowang's horse carriage from Cangshui County.

In the carriage, alongside the Black Taisui were numerous dry goods. As they traveled, Li Huowang took out a dried date and savored it slowly.

"Is it sweet?" asked Monk as he leaned in.

"Yes," replied Li Huowang as he chewed on a cluster of walnuts that he took out. Then he asked, "Do you think they are happy now?"

"Surely they are. If they weren't, would they have bought all these things for you?" replied Monk.

"It's good that they're happy. This world is too painful. If you can be happy then you should just cherish that happiness."

Li Huowang muttered to himself as he acknowledged his own struggles between the pain and suppressing his hallucinations. Yet, the feeling of helping others escape from situations similar to his own didn't seem all that bad either.

Hearing something stir beside him, Li Huowang turned his head and saw Bun wagging its tail. The dog used its paws to pull at the basket, and then buried its entire head in to busily munch on something.

Li Huowang used his fingers to grab the loose skin on Bun's neck and tossed it onto the nearby dirt road. "Get down and start running. If you keep eating like this every day, then you will end up like a grown pig ready for slaughter!"

Bun let out a low whimper, expressing its discontent. However, seeing that Li Huowang didn't care for its opinion, it quickly moved

its paws and started running alongside the carriage.

The dirt road seemed to stretch on endlessly. Thus, Li Huowang released his grip on the reins, letting the horse move forward on its own.

Unlike cars, horse carriage did not need to be watched all the time. Horses were smart creatures, and they knew how to avoid danger and stop at crossroads.

With his hands now free, Li Huowang took out an enlightenment book from his pocket. As he touched his stomach, the Black Taisui inside immediately stirred. Then, a black tentacle emerged from his belly button before entwining itself around his finger.

He bowed his head and watched the tentacle, all the while contemplating something. After his past few experiences, his aversion toward the Black Taisui had diminished quite a bit. The fact that it intervened when he was on the verge of self-destruction and extended a helping hand in critical moments made having such a thing around quite beneficial. Of course, it would be even better if it wasn't constantly trying to take over his body.

When his thoughts reached this point, Li Huowang paused and removed the earplug from his right ear. With this, the clattering sounds amidst the piercing noise instantly became clear.

“Earlier, eat, hungry, I help you.”

“I know you helped me, so don't keep bringing it up all the time. Now, be quiet,” said Li Huowang.

Just as Li Huowang finished speaking, the Black Taisui's voice softened, “Okay... Hungry? Eat.”

“No eating. You should study and read. Your sentences are all so confusing. There is still lots for you to learn.”

After that, Li Huowang held the enlightenment book in his hands, and began to read it word by word. He didn't know how much of it the Black Taisui in his stomach could absorb. However,

the smoother their conversation flowed, the better it would likely be for him.

As he continued reading, a new tentacle extended from inside Li Huowang's belly button. A pair of eyeballs were entwined at the tip of this tentacle. The pair of eyes twisted and turned, looking at everything around it. It observed slowly, yet with intense focus. It was clear that it was brimming with curiosity.

Sensing the gaze from the two eyeballs, Li Huowang paused and reached out to grab them. As he carefully examined them, he pointed at one of them and asked, "Hong Zhong, isn't this your eyeball? Why wasn't it digested by the Black Taisui?"

Hong Zhong, who hadn't made an appearance in a long time, rose from beneath the turning wheel. "This thing is quite a treasure. I went to great lengths to deceive someone and acquire it back then."

"Another treasure? This wasn't your original eyeball?" asked Li Huowang.

"Of course not. Why don't you guess where I got this thing from?" asked Hong Zhong with a proud smile.

Li Huowang cast a brief glance at Hong Zhong, dismissing the matter entirely. Then, he nonchalantly placed the eyeball back into the Black Taisui's tentacle and continued reading.

Unaffected by Hong Zhong's enticements, Li Huowang chose to not delve any further into the conversation. Through their ongoing interactions, it seemed that he had learned how to navigate through the intricacies of the Sitting Oblivion Dao's tactics.

As he continued teaching, time gradually passed, and it was soon mid-day. Along the roadside, he found a makeshift stall that offered a place for weary travelers to rest. At this moment, several wooden tables were occupied by people who were ravenously devouring bowls of noodles.

Li Huowang pondered for a moment, and then pulled the reins

to bring the carriage to a halt. He then walked over to the stall with Bun by his side.

“Sir, what can I get you?” The stall owner, a man with a small mustache, asked with a hint of caution when he caught a whiff of the extremely strong scent of blood coming from Li Huowang.

“What is there to eat? Just bring me something,” asked Li Huowang. With readily available food, he had no need to use up his dry rations. Moreover, the taste of dry rations wouldn’t quite measure up, since they were made to have an extended shelf life.

“Why don’t you take a seat first and enjoy some herbal tea? I’ll get your order ready right away!” The mustached stall owner made his way to the stove, deciding to assist his pregnant wife in the bustling kitchen.

Hearing this, Li Huowang sat down and grabbed the teapot filled with herbal tea and poured some over for Bun, who was sticking out its tongue beside him. After he saw the dog drinking the drink without any reaction, Li Huowang poured a bowl of tea for himself.

Although this place wasn’t that far from Cangshui County, Li Huowang was still cautious. He could never be too careful, and he certainly didn’t want any unpleasant surprises.

Now that I have a furnace, the next step is to find some ingredients. The pharmacies in Yinling City should have them. If not, then I can just ask Tuoba Danqing.

Just as Li Huowang was pondering over these matters, he saw the mustached man approaching him with a bowl of noodles in hand.

“Sir, your noodles are ready.”

A steaming bowl was brought in front of Li Huowang, featuring a mixture of various animal parts, wild vegetables, and dried radishes. Combined together, these ingredients emitted a surprisingly delightful aroma.

After Bun had its share, Li Huowang too started devouring the meal. The stall served a blend of different types of wide noodles, giving the dish a hearty and satisfying chew.

With Li Huowang being the only customer, the stall owner didn't have much else to do. Thus, he supported his wife and sat down at a far corner. With his keen hearing, every detail of their conversation could be heard by Li Huowang quite clearly.

“Darling, you should take a break! Don't tire out our child.”

“Er Lang, don't just worry about me. There aren't many customers right now, and so you should also go take a break and grab a bite to eat.”

“Hehe, I'm not in a hurry. As long as I'm with our child, I don't feel the slightest bit hungry.”

The stall owner crouched down and carefully caressed his wife's belly and softly whispered, “My child, can you hear me? I'm your daddy. Come on, be good, say ‘daddy’.”

In response, the pregnant lady displayed playful annoyance and gently pinched the stall owner's arm. “What nonsense are you talking about? Which child can speak before being born? Sometimes you are so silly.”

“Don't interrupt me. I'm having a conversation with our child. The fortune teller said that chatting more with our kid now will set him up for a better future!”

With that, he crouched down, placed his ear against his wife's protruding belly, and spoke lovingly, “My child, can you hear me? I'm your daddy. Go ahead, say ‘daddy’.”

Just as the stall owner's words faded, a muffled voice, akin to distant thunder, echoed within Li Huowang's ears. “Daddy...”

Chapter 328 - Mid-Autumn

Whoosh!

Li Huowang was so frightened that he abruptly stood up, and then took a few steps back.

The sound of the stool being overturned immediately caught the attention of the stall owner, causing him to approach cautiously. “Dear customer, what’s the matter? Were the noodles not tasty or was the soup not to your liking? Shall I get you another bowl?”

However, Li Huowang just glanced at him with an ugly expression, and then at his pregnant wife. Then, without a single word, he threw down a piece of silver and boarded his carriage before hastily leaving.

“Sir, you’ve paid too much. A bowl of noodles doesn’t cost this much!” called out the stall owner.

However, the stall owner’s voice only seemed to make the carriage leave even faster.

On the speeding carriage, Li Huowang had a strange look on his face as he clutched his stomach.

What's going on? Did Black Taisui just repeat that phrase by copying what that man was saying, or does it really think that I'm its father?

Previously, he had always believed that the Black Taisui, like Dan Yangzi from before, existed solely to take over other people's bodies.

However, recent events seemed to indicate that it was not like that.

“Daddy?”

The voice rang out again, only to be met with Li Huowang’s immediate rebuttal. “Don’t call me Daddy!”

“Why?”

Black Taisui’s words momentarily left Li Huowang speechless. However, after some thought, he regained his composure.

Why couldn’t it call him that? This matter might not necessarily be bad for him.

The crowing of a rooster woke up Yang Xiaohai. He rubbed his eyes and looked around. He still found living alone in a room to be a bit challenging to adapt to.

In the first few days, he couldn’t sleep well without the smell of his Senior Cao Cao’s stinky feet.

Yang Xiaohai got up and started to stretch lazily before putting on his clothes.

At his age, as he grew day by day, and so the Daoist robes he wore before had obviously become too short for him to fit.

Faced with the cold morning wind, Yang Xiaohai, shrunk his neck downward and walked toward the kitchen.

Living in Cowheart Village was much better than staying outside. There was a well in the courtyard across from the kitchen, making it quite convenient for all of them to wash their clothes and dishes without having to fetch water early in the morning.

After heating up some water and putting the soaked rice on the stove, Yang Xiaohai started to cook porridge in a practiced fashion.

Although porridge was a simple dish, the way it was made mattered. If cooked slowly and carefully, then the rice oil would emerge from within and give the whole dish a unique flavor.

Yang Xiaohai opened the jar of pickled vegetables, and then picked some of them out with his chopsticks and began to cut them into strips on the cutting board.

The focused Yang Xiaohai was interrupted by a set of footsteps. He looked up and saw that it was the plump lady.

“Little fellow, you’re up so early again today,” said the plump woman as she held a new set of men’s clothes in her arms.

“Bring out the leftover tofu from last night, and have it with the porridge,” Yang Xiaohai told her. As said this, he couldn’t help but feel emotional; their days were now so good that they even had leftovers.

“Okay,” replied the woman as she obediently followed the instructions.

After the porridge and vegetables were prepared, the rest of them also came to the hall for their meal.

At this point, Li Huowang had been gone for a long time, and everyone here had already grown accustomed to it. Even so, all of them felt a little empty in their hearts; since they had nobody ordering them around, it was as though they had lost their backbone.

None of them bore a grudge against him for the hurtful words from before. After all, they had gone through life and death together, and their wills had grown stronger. Even if Li Huowang were to scold them for an entire night, they would just laugh and brush it off.

But they were not blind, and they all could tell that Li Huowang had left.

At the same time, Bai Lingmiao hadn’t revealed a single smile ever since his departure, and her approachable aura had also waned considerably. It seemed like she had become a block of ice that repelled people.

Chun Xiaoman sighed, then picked up a piece of vegetable with her chopsticks and placed it into Bai Lingmiao’s bowl. She had been accompanying her to sleep all this while, just in case she had any thoughts about trying to harm herself.

Bai Lingmiao picked up the piece of vegetable and gnawed on it.

“That, Miss Bai.”

Lu Zhuangyuan’s words caused Bai Lingmiao to look over as she blinked and asked, “Troupe Leader Lu, what’s the matter?”

“You see, we’ve already rested here for such a long time. I feel that the Lu Family Troupe can begin to work now. Since the farmers finished harvesting during autumn, they will now be preparing for winter, and would thus be free to watch our show.”

“Alright, but since it’s the Mid-Autumn Festival now, how about we leave after that?” suggested Bai Lingmiao.

Hearing this, Troupe Leader Lu nodded awkwardly, “That’s alright.”

Originally, he had wanted to use this opportunity to bring his family out so that they could be exempted from having to awkwardly continue living in this village. However, since the other party had already stated so, they could only follow.

It had already been so long, and he had already made his inquiries. He knew that this girl’s entire family had died, and that it wouldn’t be a pleasant Mid-Autumn festival for her.

“I’ll make the mooncakes!” Yang Xiaohai volunteered bravely. “Back then, that Baldy used to have us make mooncakes for every Mid-Autumn Festival. At that time, among the assistants, I was the one who made them the fastest and the best!”

Seeing Chun Xiaoman glance at him, Yang Xiaohai paused, and then quickly sat back down as he continued with his breakfast.

After the meal, Yang Xiaohai took out the mooncake mold. They could only get this thanks to the Bai Village having whatever they needed, otherwise it was not something that could be acquired so easily.

Meanwhile, Puppy pretended to peer out from the kitchen. “Xiaohai, do you need my help?”

“No, I can manage on my own.”

“Alright, then I’ll wait to eat it at night. In the meantime, I’ll bring Gao Zhijian to tile up the kiln,” said Puppy.

All of them hustled and bustled for the entire day. As night fell, the bright moon hung high in the sky. Pastries and snacks were bought from the traveling merchant, while mooncakes were stacked on the table.

Wine was definitely needed while appreciating the moon. Thus, a bottle of cellar wine was also brought out.

Bai Lingmiao was seated at the main seat as she raised her glass to toast the others. “A full moon, and a table full of people. May all things go well for us. I wish each and every one of you peace and prosperity!”

Everyone looked around and raised their glasses as they mumbled back unclearly.

After downing her wine, Bai Lingmiao’s eyes were a little red as she said, “Come, don’t just drink. Let’s have some mooncakes too. Junior Yang’s mooncakes look quite great. They must be very delicious!”

As she spoke, she picked up a piece of mooncake and started gnawing on it.

As she looked at their cautious expressions, Bai Lingmiao suddenly burst out laughing and said, “Look at how forgetful I am becoming. I didn’t even change the offerings in the ancestral hall for the Mid-Autumn Festival. Everyone, please enjoy the food. I’ll return shortly after changing them.”

Then, she picked up a stack of mooncakes before heading toward the Bai Family’s ancestral hall.

After she left, the rest were finally able to relax. Puppy even tugged at his sleeves and commented, “Ah, this is rather unbearable.”

“You guys eat first. I’ll go check on her,” said Chun Xiaoman as

she followed after her.

However, Gao Zhijian held her hand and shook his head slightly, "Let... let her... be alone... for a while!"

Meanwhile, Bai Lingmiao placed the mooncakes before the ancestral tablets and said, "Everyone, please have the mooncakes. These mooncakes that were made by Junior Yang are pretty good."

All these ancestral tablets were new and placed neatly quite neatly. All of them belonged to the various members of the Bai Village, be it male, female, young, or old. The white characters that marked the black tablets formed a massive black wall that bore down on the last descendant of the Bai family with a sense of oppression.

Chapter 329 - One Family

“Dad, this is the lotus seed paste mooncake. I remember that you love lotus seed paste the most,” said Bai Lingmiao as she deliberately took a mooncake with a red seal atop, and tiptoed to place it before one specific ancestral tablet.

“Brother, you like red bean paste, right? We couldn’t find any in the village, so try this sesame one instead. It tastes pretty good too.”

After distributing some of the mooncakes, Bai Lingmiao once again lit three incense sticks. Then, she knelt on the ground and bowed toward the ancestral tablet before placing down the remaining mooncakes.

A faint scent of smoke drifted before the ancestral tablets as the scent of incense once again filled the Bai family’s ancestral hall.

After that Bai Lingmiao looked up at the black wall, seemingly lost in thought. After a long time, a faint smile appeared on her face. “Today is the Mid-Autumn Festival. Let me accompany you all for tonight.”

Then, she picked up a piece of mooncake from the plate and took two steps forward to sit on the steps of the ancestral hall. She gazed at the bright moon in the sky while nibbling on the mooncake.

As she was eating, a figure appeared beside her. Bai Lingmiao extended her hand, sending a piece of the mooncake inside the Second Deity’s veil. Then, she gently leaned her head to the left, resting on her red silk robe.

Just like that, two women with identical heads silently leaned against each other on the steps outside the Bai family ancestral hall, eating the same mooncake and appreciating the same round moon

in the sky.

Suddenly, a fire lit up in the distance. Bai Lingmiao stood up and looked at the makeshift earthen kiln that was built with tiles and stones.

The kiln was very tall, much taller than the other buildings in Cowheart Village. Soon, the flames soared and enveloped the kiln like a giant bonfire.

Puppy was standing on a roof nearby, while making strange noises and taking various old clothes before throwing them into the fire.

Mid-Autumn Festival often meant lighting up the earthen kiln. Bai Lingmiao recalled that every year was the same, and that it was usually only done by the males in the village, and the girls didn't particularly like it.

As Bai Lingmiao watched the roaring flames in the distance, she was reminded of her troublesome younger brother. As the elder sister, she had been responsible for taking care of him, especially since her parents were always busy. Thus, she had personally watched as the infant in the cradle slowly grew into an active, young boy.

However, one day, everything suddenly came to a halt.

As her longing for her family reached its peak, she trembled and reached toward the drum hanging at her waist, and then began to beat it.

Dong dong dong~

The rhythmic drum beats slowly echoed in the quiet village.

Bai Lingmiao hesitated for a moment, but then, with a trembling voice, started to sing. At the same time, the tears she had been holding back all night finally began to flow.

She used her deeply sorrowful voice to sing a tragic tune from the Bei Family. Even the surroundings seemed to be trembling with her singing.

“Cold wind ah~ smoke and soul~ Wu wu...”

At that moment, as she resonated with the lyrics, she finally realized the profound emotions required for one to sing this tune. Previously, she had just been following along under the coercion of the Immortal families, but now, she suddenly felt a deeper sense of understanding and connection.

Only when enough of one's family members had died, would one be able understand the feelings needed to sing this song.

As she sang, she found that her emotions had affected the Immortal families. This feeling was rather unique. It could even be said that in regard to this piece of the Bei Family, Bai Lingmiao was even more well versed than Li Zhi from back then.

However, this was a price that she didn't want to pay.

The drumbeats continued, followed by the rhythmic and desolate chants.

“Smoke and souls~ Three realms above ground for the living, wu wu wu... three cities in the underworld for the smoke and souls ah~”

“They say the heavens cover the treasure, and the earth turns into a pond~ People are like fish in the muddy waters of the three realms~ Wu wu...”

“Muddling through one moment leads to another, muddling through two moments leads to one less...”

This time, the Second Deity just watched Bai Lingmiao from the side. As she sang the tune to summon souls, gusts of cold wind blew past the Bai family's ancestral hall. It blew past the Second Deity's red veil, and then finally extinguished the lantern before beginning to revolve around Bai Lingmiao.

As though she had sensed something, Bai Lingmiao almost could not continue on anymore. But she finally gritted her teeth and firmly continued to beat the drum hanging on her waist.

“Hearing the smoke and the souls shed tears of sorrow~ The

heart seems to taste the bitter yellow lotus~ Unjust grievances with nowhere to appeal, there's nowhere to cry out for such justice..."

As the drum beats and the chanting continued, the cold winds slowly grew stronger, and the ancestral tablets inside the hall started to shake vigorously. The roof tiles also started to shake, making it look like the entire ancestral hall had come to life.

As the singing continued, a gust of wind gently blew past the hem of the Second Deity's skirt and into the blood-red veil.

At that moment, a sudden charred smell started emanating from the Second Deity as she shivered and raised both her hands before sluggishly leaning toward Bai Lingmiao. "Daughter.."

When she heard this voice, Bai Lingmiao's heart froze. Immediately, she reached out with both her hands and called out, "Mother!"

When she touched the Second Deity, Bai Lingmiao seemed to find her support again as she poured out everything that was accumulated in her heart. She closed her eyes and spoke for a long time, but received no response until she stopped.

When she finally opened her flushed-red eyes and looked toward the Second Deity's red veil, she only received a disappointing result; she realized that the moment she had stopped singing, her mother was already gone.

"Did my mother say anything before she left?" Bai Lingmiao asked gently.

The Second Deity stared at Bai Lingmiao through the red veil for a long time, and then finally said, "She... is not your mother."

"No, she is my mother! My father and grandfather also returned! They are all blaming me!" Bai Lingmiao denied loudly.

The Second Deity did not speak any further, and only spread her arms to embrace Bai Lingmiao. She lowered her body and picked Bai Lingmiao up as she gently swayed her.

Bai Lingmiao kept her eyes open as she swayed gently. She

silently looked toward the roof of the ancestral hall, seemingly contemplating something.

By this point, the earthen kiln outside had already been extinguished. The two of them just continued silently sitting in the dark ancestral hall.

“If I leave, can you accompany Senior Li? He cannot have nobody around him,” Bai Lingmiao suddenly said.

However, the Second Deity only continued to hold onto her and did not react.

“Sorry, but I really can’t hold on anymore. I can’t do anything, and I can’t even avenge my family!” said Bai Lingmiao, tears streaming down her face. Then, she broke free of the Second Deity’s embrace and took out a rope that she had prepared earlier.

She walked to the center of the ancestral hall, then threw the rope toward the roof beams and started to tie a knot.

Seeing this, the Second Deity stood up as well, walking up to Bai Lingmiao as she held her slender legs to assist her in completing the following steps.

When the Second Deity gently let go and took a step back, the rope tightened with a creaking sound, followed by the uncontrollable sounds of a person wheezing.

However, the Second Deity just ignored those sounds, and silently returned to sit at the steps in front of the ancestral hall as she continued to gaze at the full moon in the sky.

Behind the red veil were Bai Lingmiao’s gently swaying white shoes. And behind those white shoes was a densely packed wall of pitch-black ancestral tablets for the deceased.

Chapter 330 - Taisui

Just as she was suffocating, Bai Lingmiao suddenly found herself floating above the ancestral hall's beams. When she looked down, she saw herself with her whitened eyes as well as the red-veiled Second Deity.

Is this what it's like to be dead?

Bai Lingmiao lowered her head to check her 'body', only to find that it was empty and devoid of any substance. Seeing this, she recalled something and felt a surge of joy.

My parents must not have gone too far. I can still catch up with them!

However, as she raised her head to look for her family, she noticed incomprehensible masses obscuring the entire night sky.

When she saw their ever-changing appearances, Bai Lingmiao was positive that they were the Immortal families. They appeared to be from the Bei family, because of her emotions that they had just absorbed.

"I'm already dead, so what more do you want from me?" asked Bai Lingmiao as she attempted to move right through them, only to be bounced back and end up face-to-face with her suspended body hanging from the rope.

As she looked at her current self, she noticed a drastic change. The originally pink eyes had been completely replaced by a red pair of long and menacing beast-like eyes. Even more peculiar was the fact that her own face also had several cracks, revealing several beast-like eyes staring right back at her.

At that moment, Bai Lingmiao saw herself raising her nail-covered hand and aggressively clutching at her own head as she opened her mouth to swallow herself whole. At the same time,

flipping snake scales pierced through Bai Lingmiao's skin, effortlessly cutting through the tightly stretched rope.

Bai Lingmiao fell heavily to the ground. However, even before she could recover, an intense pain erupted from the depths of her brain, causing her to scream while holding her head. The pain was excruciating, completely unlike anything she had ever experienced before.

Immediately after that, a number "two" appeared in Bai Lingmiao's mind.

This was the number of tasks she had to do for the month. If she couldn't complete it, then she would have to figure out the consequences on her own. It could also be foreseen that this number would only gradually increase in the future.

Bai Lingmiao felt her bruised neck as she hopelessly looked up at the pitch-black beams above.

Ever since the day she became a Shaman, she knew that her life no longer belonged to her. Even death was not an option.

Her previous experiences had made her really pleased because she was able to help Senior Li. However, the Immortal families had finally exposed their true colors this time around.

Bai Lingmiao recalled what Li Zhi had said before he died.

It was too suffocating to be a Shaman, and he wouldn't even want to be reincarnated as one[1].

At this moment, she finally understood the meaning behind his words. As a Shaman, she was nothing but a slave to those Immortals, devoid of any freedom.

"Wu wu wu..." Bai Lingmiao covered her face with both hands as she crouched within the pitch-black ancestral hall and started sobbing uncontrollably. Her cries echoed continuously within the hall.

Upon hearing the sobbing, the Second Deity, who had been admiring the moon, appeared to recall something. With its three

mouths beneath the red veil, it let out a deep sigh and retrieved a jade pendant from within its robe and started examining it closely.

“Daddy?”

“I’m not your Dad, I am your master.”

“Daddy?”

Li Huowang had been working quite hard to control his temper. He now deeply regretted going to that stall to eat noodles. How could he have imagined that trouble would arise simply from having a bowl of noodles?

Gaga, gaga!

The ducks in a nearby cage were making a racket, adding to his annoyance. He couldn’t understand why there were so many people heading to the Yinling City to sell goods today, causing the normally spacious road to feel so congested today.

“...Daddy?”

“Alright, shut up,” said Li Huowang as he stuffed two more wads of cotton into his ears, making sure that they were tightly sealed.

After sitting in the carriage for half the day, Li Huowang finally arrived at his destination. Once here, as soon as he presented his Surveillance Bureau badge, he was promptly granted passage into the city.

Finally back inside the bustling Yinling City, Li Huowang breathed a sigh of relief. He drove the carriage toward the inn from before. After such a long journey, he had finally arrived.

When Li Huowang saw the makeshift earthen kiln at the crossroad, he felt puzzled and asked, “What is this?”

Monk quickly explained, “Daoist, today is the Mid-Autumn Festival. Don’t you know that building earthen kilns is a tradition for celebrating the Mid-Autumn Festival?”

Li Huowang shook his head as he flicked the reins. “We didn’t

have this custom where I come from.”

“Then what customs do you practice?” asked Monk.

“Nothing much. We just eat mooncakes,” replied Li Huowang.

After Li Huowang settled into the inn, it gradually darkened outside. The curfew had been lifted in the bustling Yinling City. The brightly lit market had many children carrying pomelos and lanterns. All this had turned the entire Yinling City into a city that did not sleep.

Throughout all this, Li Huowang waited in the inn, hoping for Tuoba Danqing to come. However, after waiting for a long time, all he got was a messenger pigeon delivering a letter.

“Today is the Mid-Autumn Festival, and I need to return home to reunite with my wife and children. Let’s discuss matters in detail tomorrow evening.”

Seeing this note, Li Huowang felt a little disheartened. Did the Surveillance Bureau also celebrate festivals? This new piece of information allowed Li Huowang to gain an entirely new perspective of this enormous organization.

With nothing to do, he sat inside the room, a little confused. What should he do next?

“What else can we do? Let’s celebrate the festival. Besides welcoming the New Year, I love the Mid-Autumn Festival the most,” said Monk.

“Celebrate? With whom?” asked Li Huowang.

“With us,” Hong Zhong chimed in.

Hearing this, Li Huowang glanced at the four illusions in front of him. Then, he walked over to the window, and whistled toward the stable where Bun was guarding the carriage, causing it to bark happily as it rushed over while wagging its tongue.

Then, he summoned the waiter to book a feast from the kitchen before requesting for it to be delivered to their room.

Once the adequate amount of silver had been handed over, the

table was filled with a variety of delicacies made with chicken, duck, fish, and meat. After Li Huowang watched Bun devour the food under the table, he too picked up his chopsticks and began to eat.

The chicken tasted quite good, but Li Huowang always felt that it lacked flavor. He picked up a ceramic pot filled with wine and poured a large mouthful directly into his mouth. Overwhelmed by the alcohol, he gradually became drunk. In a tipsy state, Li Huowang raised his wine cup. As he swayed, he toasted the full moon in the sky. "I would have much preferred the time when we were cooking noodles out in the wild. That had much more flavor compared to this."

"Daddy?"

"Yeah! Son!" Li Huowang kicked Bun with his foot. "The three of us are celebrating the Mid-Autumn Festival!"

Li Huowang fell asleep at some point. When he woke up again, he saw Bun crouching in front of him. It was snarling and growling as it faced the black tentacles that were emerging from within his body.

Seeing this, Li Huowang curved his fingers and flicked the tentacle, causing it to instantly retract back into his belly.

Can the Black Taisui come out on its own now?

This might be bad news, but Li Huowang didn't really care about it right now.

"Go down and watch the carriage." As Li Huowang pointed toward the door, Bun slinked away with its tail between its legs.

After Li Huowang sat up, he once again picked up his chopsticks as he started eating the now cold feast on the table.

After eating and drinking to his heart's content, Li Huowang sat by the window and took out a book, this time opting for a much more advanced one.

"...The sword is named Giant Que, the pearl is called Night

Light. Exquisite fruits like plum and pear, rich vegetables like mustard and ginger. The sea is salty, the river is fresh, scales dive, feathers soar...”

As he continued to recite, Li Huowang felt a vague echo in his ears. At first, it was chaotic, but gradually, it started becoming clearer.

“...Singing and music are highly esteemed, humble rites distinguish between honor and inferiority. Harmony between the upper and lower, husband sings, and the wife follows...”

1. This happened back in C66, for anyone who wants a refresher. 

Chapter 331 - Banquet Dinner

As Li Huowang sensed the outside sky gradually darkening, he slowly stopped his recitation. His mouth felt dry and his throat was parched.

As he recalled how the Black Taisui had helped him when dealing with the Human Xiao, he touched his stomach.

As he reflected on recent events, he slowly formulated a plan on how to interact with the Black Taisui.

Although it was continuously occupying his body, it didn't seem to harbor any ill intentions toward him. Since it meant no harm, there was no need for him to treat it as he did Dan Yangzi. After all, in the past, he had done everything in his power to get rid of Dan Yangzi. However, with Black Taisui, not only could he not get rid of it, he also couldn't live without it.

It resided within his body, and thus, a good relationship between them would bring only benefits to both of them and no harm. Perhaps, once they became more familiar with each other, he could persuade it to stop trying to encroach upon his body.

“Daddy?”

Li Huowang took a deep breath and touched his stomach again. “Listen, from now on, you'll be called Li Sui. Until we find a method to break free from the bewilderment and sense of doubt that a Strayed One suffers from, let's try to coexist peacefully. We're all in the same boat. As long as you help me, I won't ignore you. Let's work hard to achieve a relationship that is mutually beneficial for both of us.”

“Okay.”

Li Huowang was surprised to hear the Black Taisui's response. The fact that it agreed meant that the enlightenment books he had been reading to it previously weren't in vain; it could actually understand the things Li Huowang said.

Gu gu~

A familiar sound rang out, causing Li Huowang to instinctively look up at the beam. There was a pigeon perched there, observing him.

"Alright, behave yourself when it's time to eat later. I won't forget your portion," said Li Huowang as he stood up. Then he slung his two swords onto his back before walking toward the outside of the inn.

Back at the same familiar place as always, a booming voice rang out, "Hahaha. Brother Er Jiu, long time no see. I've missed you so much."

Tuoba Danqing walked in with his usual kind and round face. At the same time, a line of maids followed right behind him, all of them holding exquisite dishes and fine wines.

After several encounters, Li Huowang had figured out the routine. Thus, he sat down and accompanied the man in eating and drinking. At this point, he was unsure about whether this was just his personal quirk or a common trait among the members of the Surveillance Bureau. It almost seemed like he wouldn't talk if eating or drinking wasn't involved.

After several rounds of wine and dishes, the atmosphere was now more adequately set. Finally, Tuoba Danqing reached into his robe and pulled out a waist token before pushing it across the dining table. "Come, Brother Er, take a look at what this is? You did quite a good job this time. I'm afraid that I couldn't have done it any better even if I had gone there myself."

Li Huowang raised the waist token to take a look. As he looked at the characters for "Ninth Troop" on it, he suddenly felt extremely

emotional. With this, he had taken yet another step closer to success.

“Enough with the token, what’s so interesting about it? Let’s eat, Brother Er. Now, what’s the story with this recent matter? Tell me about it,” asked Tuoba Danqing.

Since there was nothing to hide about this matter, Li Huowang just tucked away his waist token into his robe and slowly explained the whole situation to Tuoba Danqing.

After narrating the events, Li Huowang enquired about his earlier confusion, “Brother Tuoba, what was the deal with that Daoist Human Xiao? What’s the story behind him? Why was he so peculiar?”

“Oh, there’s nothing peculiar about it. That person had just lived for a long time. If he hadn’t attained the Dao and became an Immortal, then he would have naturally turned into an evil spirit. After all, the cycle of birth, aging, sickness, and death is the way of the universe. Trying to change fate and go against the order is not that simple,” explained Tuoba Danqing. “I’ve seen many such cases. These are usually cultivators who are too stubborn and obsessed, forcefully using lifespan pills to extend their lives, only to end up becoming Human Xiaos. However, I didn’t expect the commotion this time to be this big. Being a Human Xiao and raising another; that’s a first, even for me.”

“Using lifespan pills forcefully to increase longevity will eventually lead to one becoming a Human Xiao?” asked Li Huowang, feeling surprised. Wouldn’t this make lifespan pills useless?

“Not exactly. Normally, around the age of 120 is a critical point. The closer you get to 120, the weaker the effects of the lifespan pill get. Once past 120, you have to find a way to dispel your obsessions. If you can’t, then forcefully using the lifespan pills will only turn you into a Human Xiao. Each sect has their own

methods for this, some good and some bad. But don't expect others to tell you all this so easily. They keep these things well hidden. There are also some methods that everyone knows about, but they are not easy to accomplish. For example, using the bewilderment of a Strayed One to dispel one's obsessions is the simplest and the best method," explained Tuoba Danqing.

Hearing this, Li Huowang's fingers bent ever so slightly without anyone noticing.

"But think about it, having a living Strayed One with you is dangerous. After all, you would have to be on guard against others trying to snatch it away. Thus, telling you this method is the same as not telling you anything, right?" Tuoba Danqing continued to talk, almost as if he was having a casual conversation with an old friend.

As they continued drinking, Tuoba Danqing suddenly remembered something and slapped his own forehead. "Oh, look at my forgetful mind. Brother Er, since you're now a Ninth Troop, why not go to the capital for a promotion? In the future, when you go to the Rites Department, you can use the lifespan pills you have earned to exchange for things inside the Bureau. There, not only is there an abundance of variety, there are also some items that you can't find in the markets outside. But remember, it must be the lifespan pills earned within the Bureau; those from the outside won't work."

"To the capital?" Li Huowang's mood tensed as soon as the headquarters of the Surveillance Bureau was mentioned. "No hurry. I haven't earned much yet. I'll go when I've earned some more."

"Hehehe, Brother Er is indeed different. Others would rush to the capital without question upon learning of this, but you always seem to avoid it. Hehehe," Tuoba Danqing tilted his wine cup toward his mouth, and then shifted his intoxicated gaze towards Li Huowang. Then, he moved his chair closer and asked, "Brother Er,

since we're already so close, it wouldn't be too much to ask you something, right?"

"Brother Tuoba, feel free to ask," replied Li Huowang.

Tuoba Danqing chuckled for a moment and then pointed to the bronze coin veil on Li Huowang's face. "Why do you always wear this thing? Is there something hidden behind it?"

At that moment, Hong Zhong suddenly came to Li Huowang's side. "This old guy has been probing you ever since he arrived. Be careful."

As soon as Tuoba Danqing raised his question, the atmosphere became a little tense. Li Huowang understood that no matter how close their relationship was, everything would be over once his identity was exposed.

Seeing Li Huowang continue to remain silent, Tuoba Danqing patted his own cheeks. "Oh, I talked too much. I spoke too carelessly after drinking. Brother Er, don't be angry, don't be angry. I'll punish myself with three cups."

However, Li Huowang knew that the other party was withdrawing now just so that they could advance later. If he didn't resolve this today, then there would be more trouble later.

Various thoughts flashed through his mind as Li Huowang pressed his stomach and started retching. "No worries, Brother Tuoba, if you want to know, then I'll tell you. I have some things that tend to easily come out, and so I need to cover it up with something."

After a while, two black, sticky tentacles slowly extended from the sides of the veil. What was even more peculiar was that these two tentacles were entwined with a pair of double-pupiled eyeballs.

Tuoba Danqing's eyes twitched. "Alright, alright, quickly put it away."

Tuoba Danqing took a bite of food to suppress his shock, and then looked at Li Huowang with some trepidation. "Brother Er, I

won't ask much about your cultivation methods. But aren't you afraid of going crazy with such messy cultivation techniques?"

However, Li Huowang just used two of his fingers to push the tentacles back into his mouth, suppressed the nausea and swallowed as he replied, "It's alright."

Chapter 332 - Human Cup

Within the exquisite guest room, Li Huowang dipped the duck meat in some sauce before munching on it in an attempt to suppress the disgusting feeling he had to just go through.

Even though he hated it, it was well worth it to reduce Tuoba Danqing's suspicion against him. At the very least, he now had an excuse as to why he had to wear the bronze coin veil at all times.

Judging by Tuoba Danqing's shocked expression, Li Huowang knew that he had made the right move. As knowledgeable as Tuoba Danqing was, he had definitely never seen someone who had tentacles with eyes in their mouth.

Meanwhile, Tuoba Danqing sipped on his wine to suppress his fear and shock. "Junior, I think you are treading on the path of Black Cultivation. Please excuse my rudeness in saying this, but if possible it is best if you don't cultivate such techniques, or you might find yourself getting consumed by the technique instead..."

Hearing this, Li Huowang reciprocated the man's toast. "Thank you for the advice. I have my own methods."

"It would be best if you do. But truthfully, I knew that you were destined for greatness from the moment when I first saw you," said Tuoba Danqing before proceeding to talk randomly, causing the atmosphere in the room to once again become lighthearted. Both of them kept drinking back and forth.

As he drank, Tuoba Danqing slowly got more and more excited. At the peak of his ecstasy, he suddenly looked at Li Huowang in a bizarre way and chuckled in a way that only men understood. "Junior, let me show you what those at the Ninth Troop can enjoy, but the Tenth Pawns can't."

After saying that, Tuoba Danqing clapped lightly. Immediately,

four curvaceous women walked into the room.

Just as Li Huowang thought that they were going to sing for them, the four women removed their clothes and stood before them, stark naked.

Blue veins covered all four of their bodies, making them look like four delicate porcelain vases. All of them had the same hourglass body shape, something that made them look even more like vases.

However, different from vases, two of the women walked over to Li Huowang's side and cuddled against his body as they offered to feed him the dishes and pour the wine. Li Huowang realized that these vases were soft, warm, smooth, and very attractive.

As if he was trying to show Li Huowang what he knew, Tuoba Danqing made a gesture of drinking wine. Understanding the gesture, one of the women carefully drank the wine. However, instead of drinking it, she held it in her mouth as she straddled herself on Tuoba Danqing's lap and rolled her tongue into a funnel before slowly pouring the wine into Tuoba Danqing's mouth.

Tuoba Danqing drank the warm wine with pleasure and looked at Li Huowang. "Junior Er, do you know what this is? This is called the 'human cup'. What do you think? I bet you've never seen one of them in the kingdom of Si Qi before, right? Hahaha~"

Li Huowang looked at the two women beside him with uneasiness. "Senior Tuoba, I don't think we can discuss anything if they are here."

Tuoba Danqing was hugging one of the girls as he turned to Li Huowang with pride and said, "Don't worry. These were handpicked by me. They are deaf and can't speak. We can just talk normally and don't have to worry about them leaking anything since they can't hear. These girls were specially groomed for people like us."

As Tuoba Danqing spoke, he drank another mouthful of wine

from the human cup.

At that moment, Li Huowang suddenly recalled Sun Baolu's beautiful mother who was made to lick other people's asses and felt disgusted. He had almost forgotten that the Liang Kingdom used people as tools.

"Come on, you've finally returned after quite some time; you should take some time to rest. Relax, these are being paid for by the Surveillance Bureau so we can just take it easy." Tuoba Danqing winked at Li Huowang.

Looking at the two pitiful girls hugging his sides, Li Huowang shook his head. "Senior Tuoba, thank you. But I'm just here to have a drink. I don't feel like doing anything else."

Tuoba Danqing was perplexed when he saw that Li Huowang wasn't attracted to the girls. "Oh? Are you perhaps the same as me? I've gotten bored of girls, and so I sometimes like to play with guys instead. Just wait a moment, I will ask the guys to come in instead."

Hearing this, Li Huowang's expression froze for a moment before he raised his voice a little, "Senior Tuoba, as long as my revenge is not achieved, I will not rest. I don't have time for matters like these."

When Tuoba Danqing realized that Li Huowang wasn't joking, he waved his hands, and the women instantly turned around and left.

Once they were gone, Tuoba Danqing drank his wine and sighed. "Junior Er Jiu, you are very righteous. There are not a lot of people who would go to such lengths for their Master and brothers. Everyone is just backstabbing everyone else in this world."

"They were not just my masters, but also my parents. It's the least I could do for them after they were all murdered," replied Li Huowang.

"Fine. Since that's the case, then you should just stay in Yinling City. I know that you want to take revenge as soon as possible and

that will make it easier for me. If you stay here in Yinling City, then I can easily find you,” said Tuoba Danqing.

“Sure. Thank you Senior Tuoba! Here’s a toast for you!” said Li Huowang as he raised another toast.

When Li Huowang returned to his inn, he was covered in the scent of wine. He directly crashed into his bed with his eyes closed while slowly massaging his temples.

To him, drinking and talking with Tuoba Danqing was just as hard as fighting outside. After all, Li Huowang still didn’t know the extent of Tuoba Danqing’s knowledge and trust. He had to keep his guard up at all times to prevent his status from being exposed.

At that moment, Li Huowang suddenly remembered something and took out his identity token. He saw the words ‘Ninth Troop’ etched on it and smiled. He was one step closer to his goal.

Li Huowang knew that the higher his rank was, the more power he could use within the Surveillance Bureau.

Bei Feng, who had lived for 190 years, was definitely strong, but it wasn’t necessary for him to fight Bei Feng on his own.

When his thoughts reached this point, Li Huowang suddenly sat up and started mumbling, “Wait, since I have the Surveillance Bureau behind my back, I don’t have to fight at all. The Sitting Oblivion Dao and the Surveillance Bureau are each other’s arch nemesis. As long as I let them fight among themselves, I can just reap the rewards for myself.”

“Hehehe.”

Li Huowang turned around and saw that it was Hong Zhong chuckling to himself.

“You are so stupid. You can’t even lie, so how are you going to pit them together? The Four Joys and Three Officials are incredible tricksters. Don’t be surprised when you find out that they’ve trapped you before you could even execute your plan,” said Hong Zhong.

Li Huowang didn't ignore him this time. "Didn't you say that I was the true Hong Zhong? I believe it now. Since I'm at the same rank as them, then why can't I pitch them to fight against the Surveillance Bureau?"

Hearing his words, Hong Zhong finally started getting excited. "Yeah! You are right! This might all be Hong Zhong's plan! You suppressed your own memories and sneaked into the Surveillance Bureau before causing some damage."

"Yeah! That's right! That's what I thought too!" Li Huowang stood up, looking just as excited as Hong Zhong.

Suddenly, both of them started laughing. Their laughter got louder and louder before stopping completely as both of them glared at each other in a taunting way.

Chapter 333 - Meeting Someone Familiar

After a while, Li Huowang rolled to the edge of the bed and closed his eyes.

Meanwhile Hong Zhong was smiling while thinking about something when Monk suddenly approached him. “What other tricks are you planning to do? Don’t harm the Daoist. He’s a good person.”

“A good person? Hehe, a good person indeed.”

That night, Li Huowang slept quite soundly. He wasn’t sure if it was because he drank a lot of wine, but he only woke up late in the morning the next day.

After waking up, Li Huowang yawned and washed up.

Since Tuoba Danqing had told him to stay here, he knew that he would temporarily be staying in Yinling City.

Plus, he had nowhere else to go.

As to how long he would have to stay, it all depended on Tuoba Danqing. However, based on their conversation yesterday, Li Huowang was sure that he wouldn’t need to wait all that long.

“Crepes~ Delicious crepes~”

“Sweet~ Sweet sweet Tanghulu~”[\[1\]](#)

“Scissors~ Knives~ I grind them all~”[\[2\]](#)

“General Jiang was eight feet tall and four feet wide! He stood in front of the enemy camp and shouted with all his might: Ai~ Hei!! The thousands of soldiers from the Qi Kingdom were instantly horrified!”

As Li Huowang strolled around, various sounds entered his ears.

“How much for a crepe?” asked Li Huowang.

“A single coin. Look at how big our crepes are. They are cheap yet filling~”

Li Huowang bought four of them, and walked as he ate. He didn’t walk very fast. The reason he was taking a stroll through the city was to let Li Sui learn how to talk by listening to the other people.

Li Sui had heard someone saying ‘daddy’ just once and could already repeat it. Not only was it capable of speech, it could also mimic the voices of others.

Thus, Li Huowang wanted to test and see if Li Sui could speed up its learning process if there were more people talking around him. And based on the numerous fragmented words that Li Sui was parroting off, Li Huowang knew that he had made the right decision.

Unfortunately, with this approach, he could not choose what Li Sui would learn. It had even learned how to cuss after hearing some women arguing on the streets, causing Li Huowang to frown and quickly leave the area.

After a while, he stood in the middle of the street and took in the prosperous city. The Liang Kingdom was indeed very advanced and prosperous. They had everything they needed.

But at the same time, it was revolting to learn that the people with power would use something like a human cup.

Still, it was because they were so prosperous that they could afford to do something like that.

Just as Li Huowang was reflecting on the city, he saw something that caused him to frown. He quickly ran toward it.

As he ran, he quickly started picking up speed and even used his powers to shift himself as he weaved through the crowds.

After he got through the crowd, Li Huowang patted someone’s shoulder. Before this, the man was staring at someone selling food.

When the man turned around and saw Li Huowang, he instantly became excited and shouted loudly, “Master!”

Lu Xiucan was so overjoyed that he almost hugged Li Huowang.

“Stop. I’m asking you a question. Why are you here? Where is Troupe Leader Lu?” questioned Li Huowang.

Hearing his father’s name, Lu Xiucan scoffed. “I’m sick of him! Shit. If it wasn’t because of me needing—”

However, Li Huowang’s cold stare instantly made Lu Xiucan shut up.

After a moment, Lu Xiucan continued, “Master, I’m someone with special powers now! Why should I continue performing with him? I want to experience the world!”

Li Huowang looked around before pulling Lu Xiucan to sit at a food stall.

“Experience the world? Where are your spare clothes? Your travel money? Your weapon? You just came out from the village with nothing?” asked Li Huowang.

Faced with these questions, Lu Xiucan gritted his teeth while seething with anger. “I did! I bought everything, but someone stole it from me yesterday! I will tear them apart if I catch them!”

“Fine, fine.” Li Huowang was annoyed. Lu Xiucan reminded him of a poodle. Small and weak, yet extremely arrogant.

However, even though the black -tassel sword changed his character, Lu Xiucan was still just a seventeen-year-old youth.

“Your travel money got stolen? You must be starving now. Boss, give us two bowls of whatever you are selling,” said Li Huowang.

Lu Xiucan was so hungry that as soon as the seller brought out the dried shrimps covered in sesame seeds, he grabbed it with both hands.

As Li Huowang saw Lu Xiucan burning his mouth, he frowned and lowered his voice as he asked, “How’s the village after I left?”

“Ha~ Hah~ Hah~ It’s still the same,” Lu Xiucan gasped for air and swallowed the food in his mouth before continuing, “Everyone is still fine. My useless father bought several cows to prepare the fields for spring next year. He wanted to utilize all the farmland that was left behind. He also said that he didn’t have enough people and was trying to find some temporary laborers.”

“What about Miaomiao?”

“Senior Bai is still fine. She still eats and sleeps as normal, but she seems to always lack focus.”

Li Huowang sighed, his elbows on his knees as he clasped his own face and muttered, “As long as she’s fine.”

Lu Xiucan had finished eating half of the bowl in no time. Once his hunger had been staved off, his spirit returned as he requested, “Master, let me follow you!”

However, Li Huowang shook his head. “No, once you finish your meal, I will give you some money for you to return to Cowheart Mountain. Do not go anywhere else. Go straight back home.”

Li Huowang could not afford to have someone dragging him down right now, especially since he was not even related to Lu Xiucan. He was already being generous by giving him travel money.

“No! I will not go back! If I do, then my brother will use his fists to threaten me to work in the fields!” refused Lu Xiucan.

Hearing this, Li Huowang grabbed Lu Xiucan’s shirt collar and warned him sternly. “Only your father will tolerate you, and I’m not your father! I have enough to worry about on my plate and I don’t have time for this! If you say one more stupid thing, then I will break your legs and leave you out on the streets!”

Lu Xiucan’s lips quivered, but he dared not say anything when he saw just how serious Li Huowang was.

“Also, when you go back, don’t tell anyone that you saw me.” Li Huowang took out a piece of silver the size of his thumb and

placed it in front of Lu Xiucan. Then, he turned and left.

As Lu Xiucan saw Li Huowang leaving him behind, he felt extremely unreconciled. Just as Li Huowang was about to disappear into the crowd, Lu Xiucan shouted from behind, “You were the one who taught me those powers! But you only taught me how to use the sword, and didn’t even give me the sword! What kind of master are you?! You are incorrigible!”

When Lu Xiucan saw Li Huowang turn to look back at him, he quickly placed the silver in his clothes and prepared to run when.

However, before he could leave, Li Huowang waved his hands and five black coins shot out, nailing themselves into the wooden table in front of Lu Xiucan. The coins were taken off the bronze coin sword. Even though there were only five, Lu Xiucan should be able to use them with the method he was trained in.

“We are even now! Don’t call me master anymore!” said Li Huowang.

After meeting Lu Xiucan, Li Huowang lost all his interest in strolling through the city. He directly returned back to the inn.

“Miaomiao?” At that moment, the Black Taisui’s voice rang out in his ear.

“Since Li Huowang is your father, Miaomiao is your mother.” Hong Zhong chuckled as he walked beside Li Huowang.

“Mother?”

Li Huowang was stunned.

Li Sui can hear the illusions?!

1. A type of street snack. Berries and fruits are coated in liquid caramel before cooling off. 📖

2. A grinder who grinds sharpens utensils for a living, 📖

Chapter 334 - Ji Xiang

Dak dak dak~

The sound of horse hoofs rang out non stop. Due to the rain, there weren't a lot of people on the streets. Thus, the horses could run faster as well.

The veil of one of the riders flew in the wind, revealing Li Huowang's resolute gaze. He held the reins in one hand as he took out a letter from inside his robes. It was a letter from Tuoba Danqing. It didn't say much.

"Ji Xiang summons. Come Immediately. Yinling Prison."

By now, Li Huowang had a good grasp of Tuoba Danqing's personality. With his character, if he didn't inform Li Huowang of something over food and wine, then it meant that the mission was critical.

Li Huowang didn't know if this was a blessing or a curse. Thus, the best he could do was prepare for the worst-case scenario.

Thankfully he was all alone now, and so there was nothing for him to be afraid of.

Soon, Li Huowang reached his destination and jumped down from the horse. He looked up and observed the eerie building made from bricks. The guards guarding the door were all exuding a murderous aura, a clear sign that this was the place where they kept some of the more heinous criminals.

Li Huowang also had a faint feeling that the guards possessed a military background too.

Just as Li Huowang dismounted his horse, he felt a slight pricking sensation from his organs, a sign that someone was aiming hidden weapons at him from the shadows.

He quickly displayed his identity token and walked through the

main gates. The gates of the prison were being guarded by two stone lions.

Just as Li Huowang walked in, he saw Tuoba Danqing sitting on a bench as he waved at him. “Junior Er, come here! Quick!”

When Li Huowang walked over, he saw someone familiar. It was Hong Da, the Creditor.

Without waiting for Li Huowang to greet him, Tuoba Danqing happily pulled Li Huowang and forced him to sit with him on the bench. “Junior Er, as you can see, I do care about your circumstances quite a lot. See, I notified you immediately the moment that a good mission came up.”

“Oh? Is this a good mission?” asked Li Huowang as he sniffed the cold and rotten air of his surroundings. He looked around the cells and wasn’t sure whether any of the prisoners were dead or alive. This wasn’t really a good indication.

On the other hand, Tuoba Danqing slapped his legs and smiled happily. “Of course, it’s a good mission! After all, we will be fighting against the Sitting Oblivion Dao! Since you have a grudge against them, I’ve nominated you to come with us so that you can have your revenge. See how well I am treating you?”

Li Huowang was surprised. “Please tell me the details about the mission.”

“Don’t worry. Once Ji Xiang comes, he will tell you about everything. We don’t know much about it yet,” Hong Da replied instead of Tuoba Danqing as he calmly sipped on his tea.

“Senior Hong, long time no see. It was only thanks to your referral that I could join the Surveillance Bureau,” Li Huowang greeted Hong Da while secretly estimating the scale of the mission.

If Ji Xiang has to come here personally from the capital, then the mission this time might be quite dangerous...

Li Huowang knew next to nothing about Ji Xiang. All he knew was that he was Tuoba Danqing’s superior. But since Ji Xiang was

someone who could work at the headquarters, he should be quite powerful.

“No need to thank me. You were the one who chose the path. Just don’t blame me for letting you join the nest of thieves if something were to happen next time around,” replied Hong Da.

“Ai~ Hong Da, you can’t say that. How could you compare the Bureau to a nest of thieves? You receive so many lifespan pills after every mission and they even compensate you for food and clothes. Plus, the bureau also gives out lots of mooncakes during the Mid-autumn festival. They even pay the money when you go to a gambling den. How could you insult the bureau in front of a newcomer when we are treating you so well?” questioned Tuoba Danqing.

“Fine, fine. You are the loyal worker while I’m the traitorous one.” Hong Da was annoyed by Tuoba Danqing. He rolled his eyes before turning around.

Tuoba Danqing was just about to launch into another tirade when Li Huowang stopped him. “Senior Tuoba, why are we talking about the mission in a prison today?”

“Junior Er, do you see that over there? Yes, the second-to-last cage. We will be escorting the prisoner locked inside there today,” replied Tuoba Danqing.

Just as Li Huowang was about to stand up and take a closer look, a shrill male voice came from behind him.

“Danqing, it seems that everyone is here. Looks like I’m the one who is late today.”

Hmm? An eunuch?

Li Huowang turned around and saw a plump middle-aged man wearing official clothes.

Li Huowang saw the man had white makeup covering his face, was wearing official clothes, and had a repulsive smile. If he hadn’t walked in, Li Huowang would’ve thought the man was a zombie he

had seen in movies.

The man stood there while holding onto a golden abacus, smiling as he looked at everyone. He was Ji Xiang.

Li Huowang got nervous and was worried his disguise would be useless. He only sighed in relief when he saw Ji Xiang did not react to him.

On the other hand, Tuoba Danqing became even friendlier when he saw Ji Xiang. He bowed and became very polite as he quickly greeted the man. “Aiya aiya~ Lord Ji Xiang. How could you say that? You are not late. It’s just that we were there too early.”

Tuoba Danqing held the fat eunuch’s hand while wearing a jade ring before letting him sit down on the table. Instantly, a sharp fragrance burst out from within Ji Xiang, instantly causing Li Huowang to frown. Li Huowang’s nose was too sensitive and he managed to determine that the fragrance was weird, because it had the scent of pee as well.

“Lord Ji Xiang, you already know Hong Da. Let me introduce you to the other person. He is Er Jiu. His powers as a member of the Ao Jing Sect are quite amazing. Even a Human Xiao on the Black level was not his opponent. He will definitely be of help to us!” introduced Tuoba Danqing.

Hearing this, Ji Xiang looked at Li Huowang, his eyes twinkling suspiciously.

Feeling uncomfortable, Li Huowang quickly greeted the man, “I greet Lord Ji Xiang.”

“So you are Er Jiu? I remember you. Liu Zongyuan told me about you before. You come from the Ao Jing Sect but it seems your temper is very bad. Last time you burned down all the members of the White Lotus Sect that was supposed to be sent to the capital. If it wasn’t because of Liu Zongyuan saying that he didn’t mind it, and the fact that you were Danqing’s subordinate, the Bureau might have actually wanted to summon you and demand an explanation,”

said Ji Xiang as sized up Li Huowang.

Hearing this, Tuoba Danqing did his best to smooth the atmosphere. “Haha, my junior over here is indeed slightly temperamental. The only person I could think of who’s both strong and likable within the bureau is you, Lord Ji Xiang.”

Hearing this, Ji Xiang smiled till his eyes were wrinkled. “Hehehe~ Danqing, I really love hanging out with you. Your words soothe me so much~”

Just at that moment, Hong Da interrupted both of them who were complimenting each other, “Ji Xiang, can you explain to us about the mission first before we have to continue listening to you guys talking crap?”

Immediately, both of them stopped and turned serious. Just as Li Huowang thought Ji Xiang was about to teach Hong Da a lesson, the man instead pointed his finger toward the cage.

“Danqing~ Bring Master Xin Chi^[1] over here. We will explain the mission after that,” said Ji Xiang.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang, a newcomer to the Surveillance Bureau, silently observed everything that was happening.

It seems that the hierarchy was not as serious as I thought.

1. Master here doesn’t refer to his superior but a title for a Buddhist monk, as in Zen Master 🙏

Chapter 335 - Buddha's Skeleton Temple

Soon, a creaking sound rang out as a man with a massive frame walked out from the shadow of a cell.

Li Huowang raised his head and saw that it was a monk. The monk was skinny and expressionless, his body unusually tall. In fact, he was as tall as the headless Peng Longteng's illusion. The monk's hands and feet were shackled, but he didn't seem to mind. He just placed both his hands together and sat on the ground without any intention of trying to release the shackles placed on him.

"Alright~ Now that everyone's here, let me explain about what we are going to do," said Ji Xiang.

Hearing this, all of them immediately turned serious. At the same time, the prison guards surrounding them turned around and left.

Ji Xiang coughed before continuing in a slow voice, "This time we have to go to the Buddha's Skeleton Temple. We have received news that Fa Cai from the Sitting Oblivion Dao is planning to do something, but we still have no idea what exactly."

Fa Cai, one of the Three Officials!

Hearing the unexpected name, Li Huowang clenched his fist.

It's no wonder that Ji Xiang, someone that's stationed in the capital, would come all the way here. This is indeed an important mission.

I wonder if I can obtain information about Bei Feng from Fa Cai?

While Li Huowang was thinking about his chances of obtaining information, Ji Xiang continued with his explanation, "Since it's Fa Cai from the Sitting Oblivion Dao, the mission is naturally going to

be difficult. This is why we have to invite Master Xin Chi to help us.”

Hearing this, the three of them looked at the monk at the same time. In response, the monk also looked back at them silently.

“Master Xin Chi has taken an oath of silence. Since Fa Cai’s tricks would be useless on Xin Chi, once you reach Buddha’s Skeleton Temple, you must remember that whatever he says is the truth. Secondly, once there, you must never leave each other’s sights. Even if it’s just for a moment, it’s possible for a member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao to exchange their identity with you. Thirdly, Fa Cai is a devious foe. I fought her once ten years ago and here’s my advice: Don’t believe her, but don’t always do the opposite of what she tells you either. Basically, you can’t ignore her words completely,” explained Ji Xiang.

“Huh? We can’t ignore her completely?” Tuoba Danqing’s eyes were wide with shock as he pulled back theatrically.

“Yes. Sometimes you might end up falling for her trap even by ignoring everything she says. The best method when dealing with her is to treat a third of her words as true, a third of her words as false, and a third for yourself to decide instinctively,” said Ji Xiang.

“Aiya, what a devious foe. To think that you have been fighting her for ten years. I guess we will be almost useless later,” said Tuoba Danqing.

“You think she’s difficult to fight against, right? Hoho~ The best method is to kill her before she even opens her mouth. Er Jiu, amongst us three, you are the most ruthless. When Master Xin Chi tells you to kill, kill immediately,” said Ji Xiang.

“I understand, Lord Ji Xiang. But... I thought that Master Xin Chi had taken an oath of silence. How will he tell me?” Li Huowang thought about this problem. The monk could not speak. How would the monk tell the others even if he did manage to not get tricked by Fa Cai?

Just as Li Huowang had asked this question, a foreign voice sounded in his brain, "Amitabha, I know telepathy. You need not worry."

Finding out about the monk's telepathy suddenly reminded Li Huowang of the nuns from the Benevolent Nunnery. Since he was similar to them, Li Huowang immediately took a liking to the monk.

"Alright, we can discuss the rest as we travel."

With this, all of them stood up and walked out of the prison. There were already four carriages waiting for them.

None of them asked what Fa Cai looked like. Since she was someone from the Sitting Oblivion Dao, she could look however she wanted.

The stations within the Liang Kingdom were very complete. All Ji Xiang had to do was to show his identity plate and they could exchange their carriages at every station.

This was far beyond the speed that Li Huowang could achieve with just walking. In just two days, they arrived at Langzhong City where the Buddha's Skeleton Temple was located.

It was nighttime when Li Huowang hopped down from the carriage. He hadn't even stretched his sore limbs when he saw a temple that dwarfed the other buildings in the distance.

"Remember what I've said. Let's go," Ji Xiang reminded them once more before heading toward the temple.

As they closed in on the temple, everyone grew more serious. At the same time, Ji Xiang also started using his golden abacus, clicking away at it.

Even though it was already night, the temple was still open. Devotees could be seen walking in and out with incense.

The temple is as popular as the Righteous Monastery it seems.

The moment they walked into the temple, Li Huowang's heart became serious. There were people everywhere, but Li Huowang knew that the Sitting Oblivion Dao had infiltrated this place. Thus,

except for the three people beside him, he could not trust anyone else.

Since all of them knew this, they all held onto their weapons. Ji Xiang was still using his golden abacus, the clacking sound muting the ambient sound around them considerably.

As they entered, their curious garments attracted a lot of attention from the devotees. However, the four of them just ignored the crowd.

“Come, follow me. Let’s enter the front palace first,” said Ji Xiang as he led the three of them.

There were no statues of Bodhisattvas or Buddhas in the front palace. Instead, sitting in the middle of the palace was a mummy. Its body was blood-red in color and its face was distorted, and yet the devotees were all praying to it.

“Is that the doing of the Sitting Oblivion Dao? Are they letting the devotees worship that corpse?” Li Huowang asked as he held onto the black-tassel sword.

“No, that is the Flesh Bodhisattva. It’s a living Bodhisattva that the Buddha’s Skeleton Temple worships,” Xin Chi explained.

A Flesh Bodhisattva?

Li Huowang inspected the horrifying corpse. At that moment, he suddenly realized why the temple was called the Buddha’s Skeleton Temple.

Just then, Xin Chi’s voice exploded in his mind, “Benefactor, move now! Three steps to your left, the devotee who’s kneeling and praying. Kill!”

Li Huowang’s right arm moved faster than he could think as he slashed at the devotee, his sword that was cloaked in a murderous aura cutting straight through the devotee like a piece of paper.

Blood sprayed everywhere as the devotee was cut in half, his organs falling apart. The man shouted briefly before he stopped moving.

Seeing this scene, the surrounding devotees ran in fear.

At that moment, Xin Chi walked over even with his wooden shackles still on. He clasped his hands and prayed in front of the corpse before using two fingers to inspect the face of the dead man.

“Master, how is it? Was it Fa Cai or someone else from the Sitting Oblivion Dao?” asked Li Huowang as he kneeled on one knee and inspected the corpse. He thought to himself that Fa Cai would never get killed like this so easily.

“Amitabha, I was mistaken. Benefactor Er, let’s continue.” Xin Chi threw the head of the corpse away before standing up.

Chapter 336 - Abacus

Standing within the Buddha's Skeleton Temple, Li Huowang took deep breaths as he did his best to suppress the urge to kill Xin Chi. He had never hated someone this badly. He had listened to Xin Chi and thought that he killed someone from the Sitting Oblivion Dao, but to think that the man had claimed to be mistaken?

He knew that the Surveillance Bureau didn't care about the lives of the innocents when fulfilling their duties. But Li Huowang had never thought that he would end up being the one to do something like that! Because of Xin Chi, he had killed an innocent man!

At the same time, compared to Li Huowang, Monk's illusion was even angrier, to the point that he was jumping around and crying at the same time. "How could he do that? He doesn't have the qualifications to be a monk! He just killed someone!"

As he spoke, Monk's illusion ran over to punch and kick Xin Chi; but as an illusion, he just phased through the man's body.

"You have no qualifications to shave your head! You don't do any good deeds and only do malicious ones! You are not a monk!" shouted Monk.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang just stood up and followed after them; however, his gaze as he looked at Xin Chi was quite different now. Whatever little respect and good feeling he had for the man had now been turned into disgust and anger.

He had originally been suspicious of why Xin Chi had been locked within Yinling Prison. However, now he knew that it was too light of a sentence for the man.

Unfortunately, Li Huowang understood that now was not the time to raise the issue. If he didn't cooperate now, then they could

easily get ambushed by the Sitting Oblivion Dao. Thus, Li Huowang would rather let the issue go for now. However, this didn't mean that he couldn't hate the monk right now.

"How is it, Xin Chi? Was that man someone from the Sitting Oblivion Dao?" asked Hong Da.

"No, I was mistaken." Xin Chi's voice appeared in everyone's mind.

Hearing this, Tuoba Danqing scoffed at him. "Master Xin Chi, weren't you rumored to have learned the Six Paths of Buddhism? How could you discern the wrong person? Don't forget that Lord Ji Xiang is quite busy, and that we can't delay him."

Even though he said that, Ji Xiang ignored them, which was something rare. Instead, the man was frowning as he surveyed the entire palace, all the while his fat fingers never stopping their work on the abacus.

Li Huowang noticed that something was off and quickly calmed himself down as he observed the eunuch in front of him.

Can that abacus find the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao? Then why do we need Xin Chi?

At that moment, Ji Xiang's fingers suddenly stopped. "Let's go to the main palace."

Hearing this, everyone shut up and quickly followed after him.

Soon, they arrived at the main palace. The main palace was honoring relics^[1].

Once here, Ji Xiang quickly used his abacus as the sound of clicking got faster and faster. However, he soon stopped and once again told them to move. "No, it's not here. Let's go to the next palace."

Everyone silently followed him to the next palace.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang was curious as to why Ji Xiang was doing this.

Isn't he afraid that he might end up missing someone from the

Sitting Oblivion Dao?

Just as they were about to walk out of the palace, a group of monks approached them. An old monk led them as the others surrounded Li Huowang's group while holding Bo Staves.

"Who are you? Why are you breaking the rule of no killing inside our temple?" shouted one of the monks beside the old monk.

In response, Li Huowang held onto his sword and asked, "Who are you?"

"Are you blind? We are the monks of the Buddha's Skeleton Temple."

Hearing his words, the three of them turned to look at the tall Xin Chi. Only he could determine who among them was from the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

It was only when he nodded that all of them sighed in relief.

After that, Tuoba Danqing stepped forward and showed off his identity plate and said, "We are from the Surveillance Bureau. Return back to your rooms and don't come out!"

The monks who heard his words all frowned. All of them looked at the old monk.

In return, the old monk clasped his hands and asked, "Amitabha, may I know why are you here in my temple? Nothing has happened in the temple for the past few days and everything is calm."

"Of course, you would think that the temple is calm. But you have no idea that underneath the calmness, a lot of people have infiltrated into the temple. Go back to your rooms and don't come out!"

This time, the monks heeded his warning and dispersed.

Just as Ji Xiang was about to bring them to the next location, Li Huowang stopped them and asked, "Wait, don't you think that something is wrong? Everything is too normal here. The Sitting Oblivion Dao is a group of people that loves to trick others for fun,

to the point that they would even risk their lives. Things would never be this peaceful if they came here.”

“Don’t deduce this on your own. The informants of the Surveillance Bureau are much smarter than you. If they have detected that the Sitting Oblivion Dao is here, then they are definitely here,” said Hong Da.

However, Li Huowang shook his head. “No, I’m not saying that the Sitting Oblivion Dao isn’t here. All I’m saying is that maybe there’s another reason behind why the Sitting Oblivion Dao infiltrated this place rather than just doing their regular petty tricks.”

Li Huowang thought that Ji Xiang would contemplate on his words, but the man merely frowned and said, “Just do your job.”

Then, he turned to exit the palace.

What’s going on?

With this, Li Huowang was even more bewildered. It was as if Ji Xiang knew what the Sitting Oblivion Dao was doing.

As he followed them, Li Huowang knew that something was wrong as he followed them.

That eunuch must be holding something back from us.

At this point, Li Huowang thought that the whole mission was fishy even though he hadn’t even seen the Sitting Oblivion Dao’s shadows.

As Li Huowang’s boots stepped onto the clean marble floor, his footsteps echoed loudly. This time, rather than observing the devotees and the monks, he concentrated on Ji Xiang instead.

After much observation, Li Huowang saw what was wrong.

If Ji Xiang had been fighting against the Sitting Oblivion Dao, then he should’ve been paying attention to the people around them. Rather than that, he was instead concentrating on the pillars of the temple. At the same time, his abacus never stopped; it was as if he was looking for something.

Is he looking for something specific?

Li Huowang didn't dare ask the question because he didn't know Ji Xiang's true power.

“Benefactor Er, five steps to the left, kill!”

Hearing the command, Li Huowang unsheathed his sword halfway before seeing that it was a woman praying diligently on the prayer mat. Thus, he sheathed his sword back.

1. pearl or crystal-like bead-shaped objects that are apparently found among the cremated ashes of Buddhist spiritual masters. Believed to embody the spiritual knowledge, teachings, realizations or living essence of spiritual masters. 🙌

Chapter 337 - Collapse

“Master Xin Chi, are you sure you are right this time?”

While the Surveillance Bureau would not hesitate to kill innocents for the sake of their missions, Li Huowang still couldn't stomach the fact that he had to kill innocents for no reason.

When Li Huowang asked that question, the woman's body shrank until only her clothes were left.

“Er Jiu! Why did you not listen to me?”

Li Huowang scoffed when he saw Xin Chi becoming angry, his eyes wide like an Arhat. Then, he walked over to where the clothes were and stabbed his sword into the cushion. A puppy-like cry was heard as blood flowed from the cushion.

The girl had not run away. Instead, she had shrunk and flattened herself to hide in the cushion.

“Master Xin Chi, if you were this accurate all the time, then I wouldn't have to hesitate at all.”

Li Huowang did not want to become a weapon for others who killed innocent people, especially if he was being ordered by someone disgusting.

Sensing that the two of them were about to erupt into open hostilities, Ji Xiang stepped in. “Enough! I'm not dead yet. You had better be good! Don't forget why I called you here!”

Even though Ji Xiang was still smiling, both Li Huowang and Xin Chi knew that Ji Xiang was not someone to be trifled with. Thus, both of them chose to remain silent after that warning.

Time slowly passed and they circled around the entire temple. Except for that member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao that Li Huowang had killed, they found no one else even after an entire hour.

Thus, there were only two possibilities: either the Sitting Oblivion Dao had run away, or they were hiding themselves.

Still, even though they hadn't had any results in so long, Ji Xiang was not the slightest bit anxious, and was even getting more and more excited.

This only further reinforced Li Huowang's idea that there was another reason behind why Ji Xiang had come to Buddha's Skeleton Temple.

When they once again entered the palace with the dried corpse, Ji Xiang's face suddenly lit up with joy. At the same time, his fingers on the abacus started moving so fast that they left behind after-images. Sparks flew from the golden abacus.

"Come quick!" called out Ji Xiang as he stepped on the marble floor in a complicated pattern. After he circled the place three times, one of the Bodhisattva motifs on a pillar started moving on its own.

At this point, Li Huowang was sure.

I knew it! Ji Xiang is here to find something! Clearing out the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao was nothing more than a ruse!

The motif on the pillar quickly shriveled up, turning into a dried up corpse in no time. The corpse then used both its hands to open up its torso before jamming its fingers into its ribs.

However, Ji Xiang's face went blank from surprise as he stared at the dried corpse on the pillar.

There was nothing within its abdomen.

"Where's the Muddled One? Did someone take it before me? That can't be. Only I can access it," muttered Ji Xiang.

Muddled One?

Li Huowang, who was a Strayed One, was extra sensitive to terms that were similar to it.

Is a Muddled One another type of human treasure, just like a Strayed One? If the Strayed Ones are burdened by their sense of

confusion and bewilderment, then what are the Muddled Ones? What kind of curse do they have to bear?

However, before he could even ask Tuoba Danqing about it, the sound of wood creaking and groaning came from the ceiling above, causing all of them to look up at the same time.

Before any of them could react, Hong Da shouted at them, “Run! It’s going to collapse!”

The moment he said this, the entire palace rumbled as the roof crashed downward, the tiles crushing everything underneath it. Dust blew up everywhere and covered the entire area.

It hurts.

Li Huowang felt pain all over his body. Everything was dusty and he couldn’t see anything. He tried to move but felt that something was crushing his body. He realized that he was stuck under a pile of debris.

Just as he was thinking about how to escape this situation, the sound of roof tiles being moved away rang out. Soon, the dust cleared up a bit and Li Huowang saw a man with a strong body appear in front of him.

Li Huowang finally managed to escape when the man lifted the debris weighing hundreds of kilos from atop Li Huowang’s body.

Li Huowang stood up and shook off the dust on his body as he thanked the man, “Thank you, Senior Tuoba.”

Tuoba Danqing’s face was dusty as he placed the debris back down. “No need to thank me. We are brothers who have shared a glass of wine together. How could I not rescue you? But, are you alright? Where are the others? The Sitting Oblivion Dao must’ve caused the roof of the temple to collapse.”

As Tuoba Danqing spoke, he patted off the dust on his body.

Hearing his words, Li Huowang nodded. “It must’ve been them.”

At the same time, Li Huowang carefully inched away from

Tuoba Danqing, leaving a gap between the two of them while ensuring to never let the man out of his sight.

While the two of them were talking, someone else walked out from the dust cloud. It was Xin Chi with his tall frame.

As soon as he saw Li Huowang and Tuoba Danqing, Xin Chi's face became serious. Then, he pointed with his massive finger at Li Huowang. At the same time, Tuoba Danqing heard something in his mind and instantly retreated away from Li Huowang.

As the three of them stood apart from each other, Xin Chi and Tuoba Danqing stared at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang immediately realized what was going on. Xin Chi had told Tuoba Danqing something. Thus, Li Huowang immediately shouted at Tuoba Danqing before any of them could act, "Senior Tuoba, you can suspect that I'm from the Sitting Oblivion Dao, but why aren't you suspecting that Xin Chi might be the fake one?"

"Stop lying. The Sitting Oblivion Dao doesn't know his telepathy." At this moment, Tuoba Danqing's usual friendly gaze was beyond cold.

"They don't know his telepathy? They can steal any power easily!" said Li Huowang as he unsheathed his sword.

"We knew that you would say this, but Lord Ji Xiang told us before that even if it was Fa Cai herself, she too would need to spend at least six hours to learn Xin Chi's telepathy. Thus, he is real and you are fake," concluded Tuoba Danqing.

Faced with their accusations, Li Huowang got angrier and angrier.

"He's visibly fake!" shouted Li Huowang as he pointed at Xin Chi.

However, at that moment, a familiar voice rang out inside his mind. It was Xin Chi's telepathy. "No, I am real. I also know that you are real, but right now, my voice is the truth. If I say that you are fake, then you are fake."

“What?!” Li Huowang’s eyes were wide with shock. He could not believe what Xin Chi was saying! He had thought of many possibilities before this, but he had never thought about his own allies betraying him.

“Are you crazy? You are accusing me and betraying us just because of that incident from earlier? Just because I challenged your authority?” questioned Li Huowang.

Xin Chi smiled for a brief moment before once again becoming serious. “That’s right. I’m a petty person.”

Having said that, he and Tuoba Danqing started running toward Li Huowang.

“You crazy fucker!” Li Huowang roared as he directly slashed toward Xin Chi.

However, as he got closer, something metallic flew out from the dust cloud, aiming for Li Huowang’s neck!

It was a rusted short blade, and the one behind it was Hong Da. At that moment, Li Huowang was surrounded by three people.

What is happening? Did they find out my identity? Is this a trap for me?!

Chapter 338 - Sitting Oblivion Dao

Jiang!

The sound of metal clashing rang out as Li Huowang's black-tassel sword blocked Hong Da's rusted blade.

The rusted blade cracked and shattered, but a shrapnel still magically flew toward Li Huowang's face.

However, faced with this deadly attack, Li Huowang had no intention of guarding against it. He twisted his sword, choosing to cut off Hong Da's head at the expense of getting injured himself.

But at that moment, a strong wind came from Li Huowang's side. It was Xin Chi. He raised his right leg and stepped on Li Huowang.

At that moment, a dark shadow twisted out from within Li Huowang's Daoist robe and grabbed the bronze coin sword before stabbing it at Xin Chi's feet.

It was one of Li Sui's tentacles. He was helping Li Huowang take care of the surprise attacks.

Li Sui and Li Huowang worked in tandem, allowing them to fight against two people at the same time. However, given that there were three opponents, they were just not enough.

A dull explosion rang out as Li Huowang spat out blood and flew into the debris, sending out a plume of dust. At this point, Li Huowang's face was stabbed full of shrapnel.

Even though he felt like his organs had rearranged themselves, Li Huowang stood up. When he did, he saw that he was surrounded once more.

Suddenly, Tuoba Danqing, who had attacked him just now,

warned everyone. "Don't attack his back. It seems that he has armor there. His body was tough."

Li Huowang swallowed his blood and roared at Tuoba Danqing, "Senior Tuoba, you saw the tentacles on my body just now! Ask yourself, can the Sitting Oblivion Dao copy my techniques?!"

Tuoba Danqing glanced at the black tentacle that was holding the bronze coin sword, his eyes filled with a hint of hesitation. But in the end, he decided to not believe Li Huowang. "Hong Da, lend me a blade."

Hearing this, Hong Da opened his clothes and chose the longest blade from his collection.

At this point, it was clear that they did not trust Li Huowang, and so there was no point in trying to talk any further.

"No need to explain it to them! Kill them all! Kill! Kill! Kill!" At that moment, a domineering woman's voice exploded in Li Huowang's mind.

At the same time, a surge of anger flooded into his mind as Li Huowang stood his ground, ready to fight against Tuoba Danqing.

If he wanted to survive, he needed to break through their formation, and Tuoba Danqing, without his weapon, was clearly the weakest link!

Xin Chi wanted to help Tuoba Danqing by fighting against Li Huowang first, but Li Huowang was one step faster than him. Li Huowang directly cut open his mouth, removing half of his teeth in the process. Then, from his open cheek, everyone saw Li Huowang's exposed mouth and the bloody wound.

Li Huowang took a deep breath before spitting out, sending his bloodied teeth flying out of the wound as they shot toward Xin Chi.

After making Xin Chi retreat, Li Huowang raised his black-tassel sword and charged at Tuoba Danqing. At the same time, Li Sui raised the bronze coin sword as well.

As he saw the sword stabbing toward him, Tuoba Danqing

quickly used his arms to block, causing his sleeves to be torn open by the sword and reveal a pair of wristbands made from red-colored walnuts.

As Li Huowang's sword stabbed into the walnuts, the sound of metal grinding rang out.

Unexpectedly, the wristbands made of red-colored walnuts managed to block Li Huowang's sword, its edges wedged between them. It was most definitely an artifact!

At that moment, the walnuts shivered as if there was something hiding within them. At the same time, several venomous gazes trained on Li Huowang's head.

"Don't get close to him! He's raising several Gus! [\[1\]](#)" At that moment, Hong Zhong, who had originally been invisible for some time, suddenly appeared and warned Li Huowang of the danger.

At the critical moment, Li Huowang suddenly shouted at Li Sui. "Li Sui, now!"

Immediately the black tentacle holding the bronze coin sword stabbed toward Tuoba Danqing's chest.

Ding!

However, the bronze coin sword stopped right at Tuoba Danqing's chest, unable to pierce any further.

As Tuoba Danqing's shirt was torn off, a golden longevity lock was revealed on his chest [\[2\]](#).

At that moment, Li Huowang's sharp hearing also picked up Xin Chi's footsteps that were approaching him from behind at the same time.

"Haha, how's this, Sitting Oblivion Dao? Didn't expect this right?" gloated Tuoba Danqing.

As he stared at the man's gloating face, Li Huowang suddenly opened his mouth and spat the two teeth that he had intentionally kept hidden in his mouth.

The teeth exploded, smashing half of Tuoba Danqing's face in.

“AAAAAA!”

Li Huowang kicked Tuoba Danqing’s chest, finally allowing him to escape their formation.

However, just as he sighed in relief and was about to escape the collapsed temple, he ran into a familiar face.

It was another Li Huowang.

Looking at each other’s faces, both Li Huowangs looked surprised.

“Er Jiu! Kill him! That’s a member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao!” At that moment, Xin Chi’s voice rang out in the fake Li Huowang’s mind.

Hearing that, the fake Li Huowang revealed an expression of disgust and unsheathed the bronze coin sword on his back before running toward the real Li Huowang. “Sitting Oblivion Dao! You dare disguise yourself as me! Die!”

With this, Li Huowang was once again trapped and surrounded.

At that moment, Xin Chi ran up to the real Li Huowang before using his massive legs to step on him.

Surprisingly, the real Li Huowang just phased through his legs.

Xin Chi was caught unaware as he watched Li Huowang sink into the ground.

However, that had just been an illusion. The real Li Huowang had long since turned invisible and hidden himself away.

After escaping the encirclement, Li Huowang was currently hiding atop one of the roofs as he looked at the four people standing on the ground.

“Damn! That fellow from the Sitting Oblivion Dao knows how to travel through the ground!” said the fake Li Huowang in frustration.

Just then, XIn Chi approached the fake Li Huowang carefully and then used his telepathy to warn the other two. “Careful, this man is a member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao.”

However, without waiting for the two of them to react, the fake Li Huowang showed off a surprised expression, his eyes growing wide. “Master Xin Chi, what is the meaning of this? If I’m from the Sitting Oblivion Dao, then doesn’t that mean that the person from just now had been real? Since he had been real, then why were you framing him? Do you want to kill both the fake and the real Li Huowang? Just because I challenged your authority once? Are you that petty? Can you really tell the real person apart from a fake or were you perhaps mistaken once again?”

As he spoke, the fake Li Huowang retreated away from Xin Chi.

At this point, even Tuoba Danqing and Hong Da stopped as they looked at Xin Chi.

On the other hand, not knowing how to explain the situation, Xin Chi started panicking.

Meanwhile, as Li Huowang looked at the situation down below, he started chuckling. He had never thought that his enemy, the Sitting Oblivion Dao, would end up helping him like this.

1. A Gu is a venom-based poison associated with cultures of south China, particularly Nanyue. The traditional preparation of *gu* poison involves sealing several venomous creatures (e.g., centipede, snake, scorpion) inside a closed container, where they devoured one another and allegedly concentrated their toxins into a single survivor, whose body would be fed upon by larvae until consumed. The last surviving larva held the complex poison. 📖

2. A pendant in the shape of a lock. The lock shape itself symbolizes an actual security lock, embodying the parents' wish for its wearer to be "locked" to the earth or "locked to life", to ward away death. 📖

Chapter 339 - Fa Cai

Faced with the accusations of the member of Sitting Oblivion Dao, Xin Chi wanted to explain himself. However, Li Huowang was not capable of hearing what he was talking about.

At this point, Xin Chi's own actions were impeding himself. He had never thought that the Sitting Oblivion Dao would copy Li Huowang's identity to try and trick them.

However, compared to seeing who would end up getting the short end of the stick here, Li Huowang was much more concerned about what he should do next.

After some deliberation, he decided on his course of action.

This mission is too dangerous. Both my allies and enemies are targeting me. Rather than going in with them, I would much rather act alone. Then once they fight, I will get to reap the rewards when the time is right. I can't trust anyone here! I can only trust myself. At least, I won't lie to myself.

He gave the four people down below one final look before scaling down from the roof while still being invisible.

He saw that the four of them weren't fighting anymore, and were instead walking together. Seeing this, he realized that Xin Chi must've chosen to remain silent and admit that the fake Li Huowang was the real one to uphold his reputation.

However, Xin Chi was still cautious, ready to fight against the member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao at any moment.

The four of them seemed to be searching for something.

Li Huowang knew what they were looking for. They were searching for Ji Xiang. Ever since the temple palace collapsed, the golden abacus-wielding Ji Xiang was missing. Li Huowang hurried his steps to follow them.

But before he could do that, a hand suddenly patted his shoulder.

Instantly, Li Huowang started sweating profusely. He was invisible at the moment, and yet someone had still managed to spot him!

He turned around with his sword unsheathed, only to see that there was a scholar standing behind him.

Hua~

The scholar opened his fan, and Li Huowang saw that there were four words written on it: Everyone has their values.

“You must be Er Jiu. I am curious as to why out of your five elements, you only seem to have fire and metal. Where are the other three?” asked the scholar.

However, Li Huowang just stared at the stranger, his guard up as he prepared himself to deal with any strange movements.

In this bizarre place, that stranger could be anyone. But it was highly likely that the other party was from the Sitting Oblivion Dao, or someone worse.

Thus, Li Huowang was ready to act the moment he detected any hostility or attacks.

“Your face... Doesn’t it hurt to have those shrapnel blades embedded into your face? Those blades belong to the blade of the Creditor. If you borrow a weapon from him, then he will seek your luck and fate in payment.” As the scholar spoke, he waved his fan and the rusted shrapnel blades were instantly removed from Li Huowang’s face. Then, with another wave of his fan, the wound on Li Huowang’s face mended itself.

Seeing the scholar’s movements, Li Huowang instantly grabbed his flint and placed it against his own skin.

“Who are you?” Li Huowang stated each word clearly.

Looking at Li Huowang’s wariness, the scholar sighed and thought about it. After some time, he simply answered, “Never

mind. I still have some matters to attend to, and so I will leave now. Since you've joined the Surveillance Bureau, then you should live a good life. Sometimes ignorance is bliss."

Then, the scholar knelt down and took out a black spindle and placed it on the ground. "I will leave you with something. This works much better than your coin veil."

After placing it down, the scholar didn't do anything else and just nodded at Li Huowang before turning to the temple. "We will meet again in the future, Er Jiu. My name is Zhuge Yuan. If you have problems that you can't solve, then come and find me at the Xing Island of the Western Seas. My powers are limited, but I will help you out as much as I can."

With those words, the scholar left. However, Li Huowang did not move for a long time. As he thought about the scholar's actions, he soon realized that it was the rare act of kindness exhibited in this world.

It was something that he had only ever experienced in his hallucinations so far.

Back then, even Abbess Jingxin never showed any kindness, choosing to keep it buried deep in her heart. While she still helped him, she was unfriendly on the outside.

On the other hand, the scholar from just now had shown genuine kindness.

However, after some time, Li Huowang shook his head and braced himself.

No! That scholar is definitely fishy! I cannot let him rope me in. I've already fallen for these tricks enough and I must not fall for them once again.

With these thoughts, Li Huowang took one final look at the black spindle on the ground before walking toward the side palace.

This mission and the people he had met today made Li Huowang feel restless. He wasn't sure why, but he had a feeling

that he was somehow looking at everything through a veil. He could not see through any of it.

When he walked into the side palace, he was stunned.

The original group of four people had now turned into six. At this point, there was one more Xin Chi and one more Hong Da.

As Li Huowang saw them fighting, he chuckled. "Interesting."

Then, he patted the dust off his shoulder, rearranged his robes, and kept his sword before entering the side palace. This time, he was not invisible.

When the real Li Huowang stepped in, the fake Li Huowang inside directly palmed his head. "Oh shit, here comes another one!"

"This is the real Er Jiu."

"No, he is fake. He's from the Sitting Oblivion Dao."

Both Xin Chis also used telepathy at the same time and gave two completely different answers.

Li Huowang looked at the two Xin Chis and contemplated. At this point, even he couldn't differentiate between which was the fake one and which was the one who framed him.

The palace soon grew rowdy with their arguing voices. Since the extra Xin Chi had appeared, they no longer had any methods that could be used to reliably tell who was real and who was fake.

There were numerous times when they wanted to start fighting, but stopped when the others held them back. Thus, no one fought for a long time.

However, Li Huowang did not care about any of this. He did not need to know who was real and who was fake. He was just here to watch the show.

All he needed to do was to wait for them to fight and for one of them to emerge as the victor. He would act after that.

At that moment, Li Huowang smiled as he looked at the chaos in front of him. Now, he could somewhat understand the Sitting Oblivion Dao's thought process.

As long as it did not involve him, any crisis would be interesting in his eyes.

“Enough!” A shrill voice suddenly rang out, causing everyone to stop fighting as they looked toward the entrance.

It was Ji Xiang who was holding a half-shrunken head.

At this moment, Ji Xiang’s sparse eyebrows were trembling from anger. It was the first time he looked this angry. He approached all of them and looked at the two Li Huowangs, the two Hong Das, and the two Xin Chis. Then, he raised his hand and showed all of them the head. “Stop playing now! This is Fa Cai’s head! Fa Cai died a long time ago!”

As soon as they heard this, everyone felt a chill in their gut. Fa Cai, one of the Three Officials of the Sitting Oblivion Dao was dead just like that? Then how strong was the killer?

Chapter 340 - Zhuge Yuan

Fa Cai from the Sitting Oblivion Dao was killed by someone else.

Wait, could it be?

Li Huowang suddenly recalled Zhuge Yuan.

How is that possible?

“The Sitting Oblivion Dao wasn’t the only one who came here looking to find the Muddled One! Tell me right now who took the Muddled One?” shouted Ji Xiang, his aura vastly different from before. At the same time, his eyes were bulging to the point of almost popping off from their sockets and the white makeup on his face cracked.

He glared at the three sets of people in front of him.

But the palace continued to remain silent. No one answered him.

“Fine! Everyone, return to the capital! Once we are there, I’m sure you will spit out the answers!” Ji Xiang threw the head and left.

At this point, no one dared to go against him for fear that they would be branded as someone from the Sitting Oblivion Dao. All of them followed him quietly.

Since the carriage was not large enough to fit everyone, some of them sat on horses as they started returning to the capital with Ji Xiang.

As he sat on the horse, Li Huowang was feeling quite anxious. He only had the bronze coin veil and wasn’t sure whether that would be enough to hide his identity as a Strayed One.

But it was clear that some of them were even more anxious than Li Huowang.

Suddenly, one of the Li Huowangs jumped down from the horse and ran into a forest. The moment he did, the fake Hong Da and the fake Xin Chi also ran into the forest at the same time.

In the next instant, the roof of the carriage exploded as Ji Xiang held onto his golden abacus and chased after one of the members from the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

“Go and capture the other two! I want them alive!”

With this order, all of them scattered, each chasing after one of the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao members.

Xin Chi ran into the forest as fast as he could. His body was big so he could not move as nimbly as he wanted in the forest. He was also the slowest.

At that moment, he suddenly heard something and he tilted his head, barely dodging a blade.

But his body suddenly shuddered and he found himself being lifted off the ground. As he endured the intense pain, he saw that it was an arm covered in bone spikes piercing out from the ground and into his abdomen.

“What is this—” He opened his mouth, but realized too late that he had spoken!

At the same time, a whip made from bronze coins being tied together by a red thread wrapped around his neck.

Amidst all this, someone shouted in his ear, “You think you are petty? I’m equally petty, motherfucker!”

The bronze coin whip dug into Xin Chi’s neck as Li Huowang continued to strangle him tightly.

Struggling, Xin Chi opened his mouth and coughed out blood. He tried to reach behind him to catch Li Huowang. But even if his hands became bloody, there was nothing he could do.

After that, Li Huowang used all of his strength, even resorting to biting into his bronze coin whip as he tightened his stranglehold.

At the same time, numerous tentacles burst forth from Li Huowang's body and entangled Xin Chi's limbs.

Xin Chi continued to struggle fiercely until he suddenly stopped. Then, he collapsed onto the ground with a forceful impact. He was dead.

Just as Li Huowang was retrieving his bronze coin sword, he saw Hong Da appearing from the side as he stared at Li Huowang his black tentacles cautiously.

After a moment, Li Huowang blinked and pointed at Xin Chi's body. "He's from the Sitting Oblivion Dao."

Hearing this, Hong Da looked down at the corpse and saw that its face was indeed distorting into that of a mahjong tile and slowly nodded. "But Lord Ji Xiang said that we needed to capture them alive. Why did you kill him? What should we do now?"

"I couldn't hold back in time. Sorry," replied Li Huowang as he shook his gourd and waved it at Hong Da. Instantly, its jaws opened and it spat out several lifespan pills toward the man.

Hong Da's large sleeve was like a bag that captured all of the lifespan pills. Then, he nodded with satisfaction. "It's normal for youngsters to not be able to hold back. We still have two more people, and so Ji Xiang will not blame you."

Hearing this, Li Huowang nodded and smiled, his black tentacles slowly retreating back into his body.

"Come, let's go catch the other one," said Hong Da as he turned and left.

Li Huowang was now slightly more knowledgeable about the Surveillance Bureau and the dynamics between their members.

The Surveillance Bureau was just a place for all of them to earn money, and they were not colleagues. At best they were acquaintances. It all depended on the benefits you could provide them. Depending on how much you gave them, they could either sabotage or help you in a mission.

When Li Huowang and Hong Da brought the other person back, they saw Tuoba Danqing and Ji Xiang were already back in the carriage.

However, at this moment, there was blood everywhere. In the middle of the pool of blood was a human face, a skeleton, and some discarded flesh.

Looking at Tuoba Danqing holding onto his mouth, it was clear that the victim had been tortured to this point.

Meanwhile, Ji Xiang was pacing back and forth as he muttered something.

“Senior Tuoba? What’s wrong?” asked Li Huowang as he approached Tuoba Danqing.

“Lord Ji Xiang managed to force the member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao to confess. He had only said one name, Zhuge Yuan, before he was suddenly transformed into his current state. I don’t even know who that is,” explained Tuoba Danqing.

Zhuge Yuan? He was the one who killed Fa Cai?!

Li Huowang’s pupils shrank. He remembered the few words that Zhuge Yuan had told him.

First the Surveillance Bureau, then the Sitting Oblivion Dao, and now Zhuge Yuan. Since neither the Sitting Oblivion Dao nor the Surveillance Bureau managed to get their hands on the Muddled One, Zhuge Yuan must’ve obtained it. Just who is he?

At that moment, Ji Xiang suddenly stopped and looked at the remaining three people. “Let me ask you this. While we were at the Buddha’s Skeleton Temple, did any of you feel anything strange? Maybe someone did something suspicious yet reasonable at the same time?”

Li Huowang recalled his experiences and frowned. What was Ji Xiang talking about?

“Lord Ji Xiang, what is happening? Who’s Zhuge Yuan?” asked Li Huowang. He didn’t know why, but he felt like he was being

sucked into even greater danger.

Ji Xiang didn't reply and just continued mumbling, "I should've known that it was Zhuge Yuan's power. It must be him. The world must be changing quite rapidly if even he is coming here to steal the Muddled One."

After pacing back and forth for a while, Ji Xiang grabbed a horse and left quickly without telling them anything else.

"Lord Ji Xiang, Lord Ji Xiang!" Tuoba Danqing shouted but to no avail. He turned to look at Li Huowang and Hong Da. "Go back. Sigh, it seems that something has happened and I fear that we won't be able to get any rewards."

When Tuoba Danqing left, Hong Da looked at Li Huowang and asked. "Let's go together?"

"Thank you, but I prefer traveling alone," replied Li Huowang.

Hearing this, Hong Da nodded and left on horseback.

On the other hand, after Li Huowang ensured that there was no one else around, he walked back to the Buddha's Skeleton Temple.

Chapter 341 - Spindle

The sounds of crying could be heard throughout the Buddha's Skeleton Temple. The monks and the devotees were busy carrying out the injured from within the collapsed palace.

At the same time, many of them were also busy cleaning up the debris as they tried to save the Flesh Bodhisattva from underneath the rubble.

Amidst all the chaos, no one noticed the black spindle that had rolled to a corner of the wall.

At that moment, two bloody pikes picked up the black spindle like a chopstick.

As he looked at the item that Zhuge Yuan had given him, Li Huowang frowned.

The spindle was made from a yellow bone. The bone was slimmer in the middle and thicker on both its ends. The marking on it showed that it was an old item. There were black threads wrapped around the bone, turning it into a spindle. The threads were extremely black and fine.

What is this? Are there any side effects to it?

Li Huowang wasn't sure what to do with it.

As he thought about it, he remembered the kindness that Zhuge Yuan had shown to him. If Zhuge Yuan really was the one who had killed Fa Cai, then his strength would definitely be above Li Huowang. Thus, if Zhuge Yuan wanted to kill Li Huowang, there would be nothing the latter could do.

Li Huowang used the pikes and examined the spindle while sitting on the stairway. He slowly tried to rationalize everything that had happened.

Zhuce Yuan... Zhuce Yuan ...

Firstly, based on how that damned eunuch reacted to that name when he heard it, I can confirm that Zhuge Yuan belongs to another faction. Zhuge Yuan's faction should also be much stronger than sects like the Righteous Monastery or the Benevolent Nunnery. Secondly, the mission this time, to obtain the Muddled One, was leaked to the Sitting Oblivion Dao and Zhuge Yuan. What happened was that Zhuge Yuan ended up killing Fa Cai and avoided Ji Xiang before obtaining the Muddled One, thus becoming the winner this time.

After having been here for some time, Li Huowang was well aware of the Surveillance Bureau's strength. If even they were cautious of Zhuge Yuan, then that would mean that the latter was much more powerful than he had originally thought.

There was also the issue with Zhuge Yuan's power. Even though he looked like a scholar, he had still managed to defeat Fa Cai.

Li Huowang recalled what Ji Xiang had asked them before.

Let me ask you this. While at the Buddha's Skeleton Temple, did any of you feel anything strange? Maybe someone did something suspicious yet reasonable at the same time?

This was what Ji Xiang had said. However, Li Huowang didn't know what he meant. What did he mean when he said suspicious yet reasonable? Why was it related to Zhuge Yuan and why was Ji Xiang so shocked?

Li Huowang closed his eyes and carefully remembered everything that had happened within the Buddha's Skeleton Temple. The only thing that happened back then that was suspicious yet reasonable at the same time was Xin Chi suddenly framing him as someone from the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

Xin Chi might be petty but it was definitely strange that he would try to frame Li Huowang at a time when they could be attacked by the Sitting Oblivion Dao at any time.

Also, when that member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao masquerading

as me appeared, he could've just said that it was yet another member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. But he didn't. Instead, he became somewhat conflicted and then chose to remain silent.

As Li Huowang carefully analyzed the situation, he found more and more suspicious issues.

Is that Zhuge Yuan's power? Can he control someone's actions without them knowing? Is this a technique or mind control?

Li Huowang began thinking about the various possibilities.

Wait, if he is capable of controlling others, why didn't he use it on me?

If Zhuge Yuan had this kind of power, then there was no reason for him to talk to Li Huowang in order to obtain his goals. He could just control Li Huowang and do whatever he wanted.

Unless...

Li Huowang's pupils suddenly shrank and his heart started beating faster.

Unless he doesn't have any goals at all?

Li Huowang lowered his head and looked at the spindle.

Then why did he give me this? Was it out of kindness? Did he pity me? Impossible! That doesn't make sense! There's no way that there are people like that out there! I don't believe it! He must have an ulterior motive!

At that moment, Monk's illusion approached him and said, "Daoist, you can't say that. I became a monk because I wanted to do good deeds, and Abbess Jingxin was also a good person."

Hearing this, Li Huowang just stood there. He kept thinking and thinking, but there was no satisfactory answer.

After a while, he shook his head and sighed deeply. He had become so used to wickedness that kindness seemed much more foreign and scary to him. He would rather Zhuge Yuan just attack him. At the very least, that way he wouldn't have to think so much.

"Amitabha, benefactor, I'm sorry to disturb you."

Hearing the sudden voice, Li Huowang raised his head and saw that it was the old monk of the Buddha's Skeleton Temple. He was standing there with a kind look on his face.

"Benefactor, I know we mustn't lose sight of the bigger picture, and I know that the Surveillance Bureau has a great goal, but, if possible, please stop killing. Because of you, five of our monks have returned to Nirvana today," pleaded the old monk, kneeling in front of Li Huowang with his hands clasped together.

Looking at the nine scars on the old monk's head, Li Huowang just stood up and walked out of the temple.

Another kind person? Maybe, but I don't trust him.

Once out of the temple, Li Huowang had decided on his new goals.

Rather than waiting here and thinking, I would just prefer to ask Ji Xiang and see if my questions can be answered. That eunuch surely knew who Zhuge Yuan was! Once I know who Zhuge Yuan is, I can think about what to do with the spindle.

Having made his decision, Li Huowang lowered his head and placed the spindle in his bag of torture tools before hopping onto his horse.

The horse started galloping across the muddy road, never stopping once.

As he moved, the cold rain splashed onto the horse's back and on Li Huowang's face.

Li Huowang looked up at the dark skies as he continued to travel on the muddy road.

Back when he came here, they were in a horse carriage where he could hide from the weather; however, while traveling to the temple the skies had been perfectly clear. On the other hand, now that he was returning on horseback, the rain didn't seem like it would ever stop.

Even though it was already late at night, it was still raining. Li

Huowang knew that he shouldn't be riding the horse, but he knew that if he stopped then he would be thoroughly soaked. He needed to find a place to take shelter from the rain.

Just then, Li Huowang saw a flag that had 'station' written on it, causing his eyes to light up as he urged the horse to run faster. The flag was flowing wildly in the rain.

The stations were places provided by the Liang Kingdom where messengers and officials could rest, eat, and exchange horses.

Just as the person in charge of the station yawned and lazily walked out with a lantern, Li Huowang shoved his identity plate into the person's face.

Immediately, the half-asleep station master was freed of his drowsiness.

Soon after, the stable boy was awake. He came and took Li Huowang's horse and started treating it carefully.

The chef was also woken up, tasked with cooking the best of meals before serving them to Li Huowang in his room.

Chapter 342 - Huanhuan

“Hehe. Sir, if there’s anything else you need, please just let us know.”

The station master’s flattering smile reminded Li Huowang of his own superior.

“Go to sleep. And don’t come near my room if there’s nothing,” instructed Li Huowang.

“Alright, have a good rest~ I will go back now. If you need anything, just call out for Old Wu, and I’ll arrive as soon as I can,” said the station master as he turned back.

The door shut with a creak. Then, Li Huowang fastened the door and took out the soaked rations from his bag, and began to gnaw on them.

Without Bun around, he was even more wary and dared not eat random food from outside, even if it was at a relay station of the Liang Kingdom.

At that moment, Li Huowang suddenly stopped eating and looked at the scabs on the back of his hand. There seemed to be something moving there.

When he examined it carefully under the candlelight, he found a fine, black tentacle there. It resembled an earthworm, and was continuously wriggling around inside his blood vessels. Li Sui’s tentacles had followed along his blood vessels and reached his hand, which was something unprecedented.

“I called it, didn’t I? See, the omen has appeared. This is just the beginning. The Black Taisui will gradually occupy all the meridians in your body. At that point, you will be dead meat. Even the Immortals won’t be able to save you then. Do as I say, and quickly get rid of the Black Taisui!” said Hong Zhong.

However, Li Huowang just continued to chew on the flatbread in his mouth while eyeing Hong Zhong coldly.

“Daddy?” Li Sui’s voice rang out again, this time with a hint of grievance and hesitation.

Li Huowang withdrew his gaze, and then placed the remainder of his rations back into his pocket. Then, he directly blew out the candle. At this point, he was too lazy to even take a bath, and just directly decided to lie down. He was exhausted. The moment the back of his head hit the pillow, he had already entered dreamland.

Li Huowang woke up to the pitter-patter sound of rain outside his window. He had finally had a good sleep after a long time.

Still in a daze, he was suddenly hit by a strong bout of queasiness.

What’s going on?

Li Huowang walked over to retrieve his water gourd and hydrate himself.

But as soon as he opened his mouth, before the water had even poured in, several tentacles burrowed out from within his throat.

“What are you doing? Get back in!”

However, as he spoke, more and more tentacles started to emerge.

“Li Sui! What are you doing?!” Li Huowang bellowed in his mind.

“Daddy, you... won’t die!”

As Li Huowang bent over to vomit, the wriggling tentacles that came together to form Li Sui were soon vomited out, covered in mucus. Then, the mass of tentacles quickly crawled its way underneath the bed.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang swallowed a mouthful of saliva mixed with blood, and then glared at Hong Zhong with annoyance. “Will you die if you don’t speak?”

He turned back and walked toward his bed. But before he

could even reach it, he clutched his head in agony as the surroundings around him started changing rapidly. When he finally came to, he found that he was no longer standing, but lying on the cold, muddy ground.

Li Huowang looked around dumbfoundedly. He was still in the area under the bridge, but now, he was much dirtier than before.

Back again...

Li Huowang sighed helplessly. He turned around to lie flat on the ground, and watched the spiders spinning their webs at the bottom of the bridge.

The only fortunate thing was that his mother and Yang Na were no longer around. Thus, he did not need to carefully mull over what was real or what was fake. He just had to quietly wait for time to pass.

Li Sui is beginning to recognise words faster and faster now. Now, it can even understand what Hong Zhong is saying. But I have to teach it that not everything some people say is definitely true.

Covered in his tattered clothes, Li Huowang thought to himself as he continued lying on the ground underneath the bridge.

At that moment, footsteps rang out from the entrance along with a voice. He remembered that it was Huanhuan's voice.

Li Huowang turned around to look and saw the cute little girl carrying her red bag while holding out a few shumais. She was just standing there uneasily. At this point, she seemed slightly taller than before, and her clothes had also been changed. The only thing that did not change was the cherry-colored hairpin on her head.

"Huanhuan, there's no need to bring me food. I won't starve to death. Actually, it might even be better if I do starve to death," said Li Huowang.

Li Huowang's words caused Huanhuan's eyes to widen. "Uncle, you can recognise me! You haven't recognised me in a while."

Hearing this, he chuckled silently, then stood up and walked

toward her. This time, she did not move away as usual, and just stood there uneasily as she looked up at Li Huowang.

Then, Li Huowang took the five shumais from her hands and stuffed them into his mouth as he said, “Back at the kindergarten, I’m sorry about what happened. You know too that I have a mental illness. Sometimes, I cannot differentiate things very well.”

Huanhuan smiled sweetly as she watched him eat, then shook her head, her two ponytails swinging from side to side. “It’s alright, I know that you are not intentionally trying to harm me.”

Li Huowang raised his hand to pat her head, but decided against it when he saw just how filthy his palm was.

“Thank you for your shumais. Remember, don’t bring food for me in future. I might end up harming you when I am mad,” said Li Huowang before pausing abruptly. Why was he spouting such nonsense in this obvious hallucination?

“Mm, I got it! Goodbye Uncle! I’ll head home first!” Huanhuan gave Li Huowang a big hug, and then turned to leave.

Li Huowang walked to the edge of the area under the bridge. Standing in the shadows, he watched the petite figure dashing off in the sunlight. There was a sense of warmth in his eyes.

Back there, he would treat every act of kindness with extreme wariness. Conversely in this hallucination, kindness was everywhere. If he could choose, then he would much rather this side be the real one.

Just as he was going to turn around and head back to the area under the bridge, a fatty emerged from a corner in the distance. He was smoking and was wearing a large golden chain on his neck. This made Li Huowang’s expression freeze.

The fatty occasionally stole shifty glances toward this direction, which made the warmth in Li Huowang’s expression slowly turn into chilliness.

What’s he trying to do to Huanhuan?

Li Huowang immediately thought of a movie scene, which made his skin twitch. Even if this was just his hallucination, he would not let such disgusting events unfold.

He looked around and picked up a cobblestone that was within reach from the riverside, and then started moving toward the fatty.

By the time the fatty turned to see Li Huowang, he had already been hit on his head.

Immediately, the fatty's head started bleeding, causing him intense pain. By the time he realized what was going on, Li Huowang had already dragged him to the area under the bridge. When he looked down, he saw that a piece of shattered glass had pierced through his left palm, causing him to start screaming in pain.

At that moment, Li Huowang suddenly punched the fatty's chest, causing the fatty's cries to stop abruptly and lose his breath. "What are you screaming for? I haven't even started yet."

When the fatty finally regained his composure, Li Huowang looked at him coldly and asked, "Speak. What were you trying to do with the little girl?"

The fatty looked extremely wronged as tears almost fell from his eyes. "Why would I be watching the little girl? I have been keeping an eye at you!"

Chapter 343 - Da Long

The other party's words caught Li Huowang completely off guard. He stared at the fatty with the big, gold chain in disbelief. "Keeping an eye on me? What for?"

Looking fearfully at the blood-stained piece of broken glass, the fatty stammered, "I... I don't know. My distant cousin just asked me to keep an eye on you. He said that he'd pay me 2,500 a month. I thought it was crazy to watch a lunatic. But with 2,500 a month, and no boss to bother me, and the fact that I could play games, it was better than working in an electronics factory. So, I took up his offer."

Li Huowang reached out to pull the gold chain, but felt that something was wrong. The gold felt much heavier in his hands than it should, and was likely fake. As he thought about it, he suddenly felt that the fatty was probably telling the truth, and he was just sent here to keep an eye on him.

The fatty had an ingratiating smile on his face as he spoke, "I bought this thing from a stall for 30 bucks. I don't have money required to buy a real gold chain. That bastard Wang Zhilong hasn't paid me for two months."

Hearing this, Li Huowang's gaze suddenly became vacant.

What has been happening in this hallucination? Who is the person that sent people to keep an eye on me?

However, as his thoughts reached this point, Li Huowang's breathing quickened as he forcefully shook his head.

No! All this doesn't matter since it's just a hallucination. There's no logic here, and I don't need to care or understand what happens here.

"Li Sui!" Li Huowang turned around and shouted toward his surroundings, "Li Sui! Have you had enough fun? If you still

recognize me as your daddy, then come back now!”

Since he had already given up on it, there was nothing left to care about. He did not want to continue staying in this hallucination. He still had many matters left to deal with on the other side!

Meanwhile, when the bound fatty saw Li Huowang’s bizarre actions, he was so frightened that he was about to wet his pants. After observing him for such a long period of time, he knew that this person was not just faking it. This person was a genuine lunatic. Moreover, from what he knew, this madman had even chopped at someone before.

The fatty struggled as he tried to retreat backward while shouting, “That’s none of my business! I’m just doing my work! It was that kid Da Long who asked me to inform him immediately if you created any objects to appear out of the blue! If you are looking for trouble, then go look for him instead!”

As he heard this, Li Huowang’s eyes shrank. He turned to look at him. “What did you say?!”

Li Huowang quickly walked across and picked him up from the ground, then stared at his fat face and asked, “What’s going on? Who is this Da Long? Why does he know that I can create things out of the blue?”

Everything that had just been extremely absurd until just a moment ago now started to have some logic in it. At the same time, this inexplicable logic made him start to feel a little nervous.

“I only know so much. His contact is on my phone. You can call him, and I’ll lure him over for you!” said the fatty.

Hearing this, Li Huowang took out the fatty’s phone and unlocked it via face verification. Then, he opened the contact list, and dialed the person named Da Long.

“Hey~ Brother Long! Come quickly! The lunatic has conjured something out of thin air, just like magic! Yes, yes! There’s gold

too!” The fatty spoke to the person on the phone, his voice filled with conviction. Then, he looked toward Li Huowang with an ingratiating expression.

“Bro, he said that he would arrive in just a moment. I’ve already helped you trick him over, so can you let me go now?” asked the fatty.

Li Huowang tossed the fatty’s phone into the fast-flowing river, and then took off his socks, rolled them into a ball, and stuffed them into his mouth.

The so-called Da Long was not far away, as Li Huowang soon heard the screeching brakes from the outside.

When three men rushed under the bridge and saw the fatty tied up, the man with a crew cut and muscular face revealed a look of surprise. After they rushed over and released him, Wang Zhilong grabbed him and asked, “Where’s Li Huowang?”

However, before the fatty could answer, a dark shadow emerged from the river beside them. The shadow held a cobblestone and smashed it directly onto the man’s head.

The man hastily dodged, but the stone still managed to hit his collarbone, causing the area to visibly swell up.

That was just the beginning. These people were completely unprepared when they were faced with Li Huowang’s sudden ambush. The four-against-one situation unexpectedly resulted in their retreat.

“Damn it! I’ll fight you!” A short man steeled his heart, and then pulled out a dagger as he stabbed Li Huowang in the arm. However, he became a little flustered after hitting his target and subconsciously released the dagger while taking a step back.

The next moment, Li Huowang grabbed the handle of the dagger and pulled it out. Then, without hesitation, he stabbed it into the man’s arm. Miserable cries soon rang out from the area under the bridge.

With lightning speed, Li Huowang pulled out the dagger and stabbed it onto another person's thigh.

As he saw this horrifying scene, Wang Zhilong obviously started panicking. He hadn't expected the other party to be so terrifying. At this point, he wanted to run. However, faced with the armed Li Huowang, it was too late. A kick on the back caused him to fall and taste mud.

Soon, the four men were tied up like pigs waiting to be slaughtered. Their limbs were bound by their own shoelaces and belts, as they lay on the ground.

Then, Li Huowang dragged Wang Zhilong by the hair and brought him to the riverbank before pressing him directly into the muddy water. He held him down until the man started struggling violently, and then lifted him up forcefully. This went on for a few times until Wang Zhilong was gasping for air.

Finally, Li Huowang lifted him up again and asked, "How do you know that I can conjure up things?"

Wang Zhilong was somewhat dazed, and he spoke weakly and intermittently, "I... I overheard it."

"And what else did you do?" Li Huowang released his hand, causing Wang Zhilong's face to be a few centimeters away from the water.

The fear of suffocation caused the man to start speaking rapidly while sputtering, "I heard that you have a special ability to conjure gold out of thin air! And so, I had some bad ideas to find some connections and use them to sneak you out of the hospital so that I could use you to conjure some gold for myself!"

They didn't abandon me?

A strong surge of happiness flushed Li Huowang's heart.

They didn't abandon me!

He had always told himself that he didn't care. But only after hearing how this person had sneaked him out of the hospital did Li

Huowang realize just how much he cared.

Meanwhile, Wang Zhilong saw Li Huowang's emotions stabilize, and hastily pleaded, "Please spare me! I had a wrong idea and thought of this crooked path! I am wrong, I am wrong!"

Hearing his pleas, Li Huowang looked down at him, the intense emotions in his heart quickly vanishing. At the same time, a strong sense of doubt started growing.

"You're lying! If you wanted to control me to conjure gold, then why didn't you kidnap me? Instead, you left me out in the open so casually. This is fake! It's a hallucination!" shouted Li Huowang.

Wang Zhilong wailed in despair, "I wanted to capture you, but the problem was that I couldn't tie you up! The rope was clearly bound on your hands, yet it loosened the next moment. The door was clearly shut, yet you managed to appear outside! If you hadn't shown this special ability, then I would have just thought that you were some ordinary lunatic and would have given up long ago!"

Chapter 344 - Li Sui

Li Huowang's eyes shrank.

This ability... Is it my shifting ability? I have such an ability in my hallucination as well?

Meanwhile, Wang Zhilong burst into tears as he continued to complain in a sullen voice, "I didn't even get a single dollar. Do you know how much I've invested for this exchange? Tens of thousands! And how many strings I had to pull for the officials to not take you away! This could only be done with the help of dozens of credit cards used by us few! Please, I'm begging you! Conjure up a few gold pieces. We're all at the end of our wits about how to deal with all the debt!"

At that moment, Li Huowang suddenly released his grip and looked around with some confusion.

What's going on? Why does it seem like this world suddenly became more realistic?

He looked down at the bleeding wound on his body, then raised the dagger in his right hand and stabbed it towards his left hand.

This pain... Why does it feel so real?

Even if there's only a miniscule chance that it's real, doesn't this mean that Yang Na and my mom... They didn't abandon me! And they might even be looking for me right now!

Li Huowang's heart started racing as he quickly dashed outside. But right as he was about to get out into the sunlight, his footsteps gradually slowed down.

But in my current state, so what if they find me? Other than letting them continue with their suffering, and for me to continue to be thrust into bewilderment? I can't keep being a burden to them.

Dispirited, Li Huowang turned back as he walked back to the area under the bridge with heavy steps.

This is fake. Since I've ascertained this side to be fake, then there's nothing else to hesitate about.

He released Wang Zhilong's restraints and freed him, then lay on the ground and stared vacantly toward the ceiling.

Finally freed from his restraints, Wang Zhilong did not try to release his comrades, and instead looked back at Li Huowang, his gaze hesitant.

"Brother Li, since you're conscious now, tell me. Do you really have any special abilities?" asked Wang Zhilong.

However, Li Huowang completely disregarded everything around him. He was trying to think of how he could persuade Li Sui to go back into his tummy.

"Through the surveillance cameras, I saw that gold box that you gifted your mom! It was full of precious stones! Any one of them could buy you a house! That should be true, right? Otherwise, how could they have the money to issue missing person notices all over the internet and the streets?" continued Wang Zhilong.

"Scram..."

"Ah, Brother Li, don't be like that. If you really don't want to go back, then give me some gold. In return, I'll tell your mom that you're dead so that she can finally give up hope completely," offered Wang Zhilong.

Hearing those words, Li Huowang once again focused on Wang Zhilong's greedy face as killing intent surfaced within his eyes. "You want gold, right?! I'll give you some!"

As he spoke, Li Huowang took out the fatty's gold chain from his pocket and wrapped it around Wang Zhilong's neck. Then, he kicked the man's calves and pulled up. In an instant, his eyes began to turn white.

Wang Zhilong struggled for his life as tried to reach toward Li

Huowang's face. But even as the back of Li Huowang's hands was scratched up and bloodied, he did not release his grip at all.

As time passed, Wang Zhilong's struggles only grew more intense. Gradually, his facial color turned from red to purple and then to black.

As he saw all this, Li Huowang's bloodshot pupils suddenly shrank. He found that this scene was extremely similar to when he previously killed Xin Chi.

A surge of fear caused Li Huowang to release his hands. He started trembling as he looked down at his hands.

Since when did he become like this? Killing people without even blinking?

Li Huowang turned around to look at his reflection on the river surface. The beggar in tattered clothes looking back at him was a complete stranger to him.

The ordinary high school life he had led was just a few years ago at this point. But to the current him, it was as distant as his previous life.

His past memories had already started to become hazy, as the bizarre and crazy events that had happened started replacing them in his mind.

Li Huowang had finally found the reason.

After experiencing various events, he was gradually assimilated by the other side. At some point, he had started becoming indifferent to human life, just like those from the Surveillance Bureau, and filled with resentment.

Even worse, he was slowly turning into another Dan Yangzi.

No, this is not me, this is not Li Huowang.

He turned around and walked back before sprawling beside Wang Zhilong, who was clutching his neck, and then reached out to support him. Then, he emotionally pleaded, "I beg you, stop provoking me! I'm a lunatic! I really don't want to kill anyone!"

Wang Zhilong had just been on the brink of death, and dared not say anything. He just abandoned his three other companions and sprinted out from under the bridge.

The recent events had truly scared him. He could sense that the other party had really wanted to kill him.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang sighed deeply. He approached the other three and untied their restraints. Then, he ignored their hasty retreat, as well as the bleeding wounds on his body. He knelt on the ground and closed his eyes.

This is fake, this is fake...

After some time, Li Huowang felt his surroundings go dim.

He looked around, and unsurprisingly found the entire room in chaos, as though a strong wind had blown through.

Finally back...

Now that he was finally back in this crazy world, Li Huowang felt an inexplicable sense of security.

He walked back to the collapsed bed, knelt down, and reached under his bed. Then, he used the gentlest tone possible and called out, "Li Sui, don't be afraid, that person is a liar. Whatever he says is false. You won't hurt me by staying in my tummy."

After a short while, a hesitant black tentacle emerged from the darkness under the bed and entwined itself around Li Huowang's hand, "Hmm.."

With a gentle pull from Li Huowang, Li Sui was completely dragged out. Li Huowang embraced him, soothing the various long and short tentacles. "Li Sui, be good, and come in. Daddy really cannot do without you now."

Hearing this, two tentacles that were entangled with a pair of double-pupiled eyeballs looked at Li Huowang affectionately.

"Ugh... ugh!"

Amidst the pangs of nausea, Li Sui once again entered Li Huowang's throat.

With a strange sensation, Li Sui's tentacles filled the veins throughout Li Huowang's entire body.

At the same time, Li Huowang rubbed his belly and breathed out a sigh of relief. As long as Li Sui was with him, he didn't need to go to the other side anymore.

Afterwards, Li Huowang walked to the window and looked outside. The sky was still gloomy, but it seemed to be getting brighter.

After a night of turmoil, Li Huowang had no intention of sleeping anymore. He picked up his luggage and headed downstairs toward the stable.

However, as soon as he entered the lobby, Li Huowang saw the pitiful Old Wu, who was with the cook and the stableman, all of them bandaging each other.

When he saw that Old Wu's injuries were in similar positions to Wang Zhilong's, Li Huowang immediately understood what was going on.

"When did you get close to my room? Didn't I tell you not to come near my room if there wasn't anything?"

Hearing this, Old Wu forced out a bitter smile, and quickly knelt on the ground. "I heard a commotion and was afraid that something had happened to you, so... I deserve to die! I deserve to die! My blood has stained your hands. I should pay you back for dirtying them."

Li Huowang yanked at his clothes and straightened the man up, "Stand still!"

Then, he began to chant as the white wax of the Fiery Scripture quickly melted and became a fiery centipede that leapt onto Old Wu's wounds.

"Ahh!" Old Wu's cries reverberated in the lobby.

"Stop shouting! It's treating you!"

By the time their throats were hoarse from shouting, the

injuries on each person had been replaced by a slight burn mark.

Then, Li Huowang took out two silver ingots from his pocket and placed them on the table. "This is compensation for your furniture."

"This... I cannot accept it," Old Wu was about to decline, but Li Huowang stuffed the silver directly into his arms.

"If I tell you to take it, then you take it. I don't want to be assimilated by this damn place!"

Chapter 345 - Bai Lingmiao

“Dong dong dong~! Dong dong dong~! Summon the gods~”

A rhythmic drumbeat sounded from a simple-looking house, followed by a chant.

“Small drum whip of one foot three, that colorful ribbon tied on it! Dong dong dong~”

“Go down and make a bend, go up and point a finger! Dong dong dong~”

“Hit it once, bounce three times. Hit it thrice, make it nine! Dong dong dong~”

“The whip sounds with every beat, the drum sounds and the gods are pleased! Dong dong dong~”

Two red-veiled ladies were standing in the house, surrounding an ashen-faced child while beating their drums continuously.

Beside the child’s pillow was a mound of soil. Three incense sticks were placed in it, and the incense smoke wavered continuously, forming fuzzy characters.

However, just before the characters were about to solidify, a strong gust of wind blew open the tightly closed window, dispersing the strands of smoke.

In an instant, the tempo of the drum beats increased, the turn suddenly becoming urgent and fast.

At the same time, the Second Deity swirled her slender and black nails in the air, causing the dispersing white smoke to turn into substantial white threads that entwined around her hand. The sharp fingers followed the guidance of the white threads and ruthlessly pierced a point three inches below the child’s thumb.

With a swift downward motion, the child's tender palm was cut open, revealing clusters of yellowish things that resembled fish wriggling inside as though it was trying to emerge.

At that moment, a pair of black scissors, tied to a red string, was plunged in, causing the hole to become even larger.

“Waa waa waa~!”

The child who had seemed lifeless until just a moment ago, now suddenly sat up and started crying for his father. He did not notice that the objects emerging from his palm were turning into a puddle of yellow water that joined his tears in soaking the cool mat on his bed.

“My son~!” A shriveled and short man stepped in from outside, and exclaimed loudly when he saw that his almost-dead son had now been awakened.

He rushed over and quickly embraced the sweating and crying child. Then, he then quickly turned to the red-veiled Bai Lingmiao who was standing by side and bowed to express his gratitude.

On the other hand, Bai Lingmiao's expression was pale and agonized. She just shook her head and turned to leave.

“Fairy, hold on, I haven't paid you.” The man hastily rummaged through his belongings and picked out fifty pieces of copper coins from the bottom of a drawer. They were good coins that did not have any worn edges. He grabbed them and presented them to Bai Lingmiao with both hands.

Bai Lingmiao glanced at the patches on the man's clothes, then at his straw sandals, and then again at the shabby walls of this house. In the end, she shook her head to decline the payment. “It's alright, Uncle. Leave it for the child and buy some food for him. He's too skinny.”

“No, Fairy, you must take the money. My Zhou family only has this one offspring left. If not for you saving his life, then there would have been no one left to take care of me in old age!” said the

shriveled man.

After several refusals, Bai Lingmiao was finally forced to accept the fifty coins.

When she came out of the house, the one-armed Chun Xiaoman, who was practicing swordplay beside the carriage, quickly sheathed her sword and approached her. "Miaomiao, how's it going? Are you done?"

When she saw Bai Lingmiao nod, Xiaoman smiled slightly and then pulled her toward the carriage. Once they were seated, the mud-covered wheels began to roll back toward Cowheart Mountain.

"Thank you, Sister Xiaoman, for accompanying me here," said Bai Lingmiao.

Chun Xiaoman replied, "Aren't we good sisters? There's no need to be so courteous. I can help out too if we happen to meet any bandits along the way."

As she spoke, Chun Xiaoman peeled open a corner of the curtain, and then glanced at Bai Lingmiao inside the carriage before sighing softly.

Of course, she had just made up those words. Bai Lingmiao did not need her protection. However, when she saw the black scar that had not yet faded from her pale neck, Xiaoman couldn't help but worry.

Logically, no matter what happens, things would generally improve with the passage of time. This was the same when her own parents sold her off. She was not as hurt about it now as she was back then.

But this sister of hers wasn't the same. Senior Li had already been gone for such a long time, and yet she still remained so dejected. Ever since that time, she had not smiled, and the gaze in her eyes was vacant, as though she had lost something.

The carriage continued to hurry along, and only stopped when it was deep in the night. While they had not yet reached Cowheart

Village, there were no villages nearby, and so they had to spend a night in the wilderness on the way back.

They ate some of their dried rations, and then lay in the carriage to rest.

In her half-asleep state, Chun Xiaoman suddenly felt rather uneasy, and reached out a hand to touch the face of the lady beside her.

When she felt that her eyes were actually opened, Xioaman sighed, "Miaomiao, you can't go on like this. I know you're very sad, but it's been a long time. You have to move on. People who have passed away cannot come back to life. Even if you keep tormenting yourself like this, they won't come back to life."

Seeing that she didn't get a response from the other side, Chun Xiaoman changed her angle. "Since we're sisters who speak from our hearts, I'll be straightforward. I know Senior Li saved us, but looking at things holistically, he isn't that great. At the same time, without even mentioning the other things, considering your current condition, as long as you offer yourself for marriage, many people would want to marry into the Bai family. You can ask for anyone that is as fat or as thin as you want. Which one of them wouldn't be better than Li Huowang? In fact, separating from you is a much bigger loss for him than for you. With his crazed state, he's destined to be an old bachelor. No other woman would want him."

Though Chun Xiaoman knew that Senior Li was not as bad as she had just described, this criticism would be worth it if it could help lift her sister's spirits. Besides, scolding him here wouldn't hurt him anyway.

Bai Lingmiao curled her body up like a baby, and nestled into Xiaoman's arm. "Don't say anymore, Sister Xiaoman..."

"You don't need that stinky man! You and me can be comb sisters[1]! No matter what, you must pull yourself together! What you're doing now is the same as giving up on yourself!" Chun

Xiaoman was getting emotional as she started to shake Bai Lingmiao by the shoulders. But then, she started to hear sobbing, which immediately caused her heart to soften.

“Alright, I won’t say anymore. Stop crying and get some rest,” Chun Xiaoman held Bai Lingmiao in her arm and ran her hand through her waist-length hair.

A night of silence passed.

The next day, the two acted as though nothing had happened the night before, and just continued on their journey. With the two strong horses pulling them, they arrived at the village entrance in the afternoon.

“Uncle Lu, going to put up a play?” Chun Xiaoman greeted the oncoming carriage.

Lu Zhuangyuan chuckled and nodded as he took a puff from his tobacco pipe. “I’m going to the south to see if there are any villages. This Liang Kingdom sure is wealthy. One trip can cover several years of my expenses.”

“Why are there so few of you? Your younger son isn’t back yet?” asked Xiaoman.

1. Comb Sisters, also known as Self-comb Women, are a group of women who set up their own hairstyle in a way that resembles that of married women. This is seen as a demonstration of their determination to remain single for the rest of their lives. 🤔

Chapter 346 - Heavenly Mater

Hearing Chun Xiaoman bring up Lu Xiucan, Lu Zhuangyuan could no longer continue puffing his pipe. He looked very indignant.

“Don't even mention that trouble-maker! He actually dared to steal money! If you meet him on the road, then remember to bring him back for me. We'll see if I can break his legs then!” spat out Lu Zhuangyuan.

As the two carriages passed each other, Chun Xiaoman continued toward the village.

Once they arrived at the Bai family's courtyard, Bai Lingmiao got down and walked toward the ancestral hall. “Sister Xiaoman, go and take a rest. I'll go and light some incense in the ancestral hall.”

Hearing this, Chun Xiaoman anxiously looked around, and then said to the passing Puppy, “Take this carriage to the stable.”

“Why should I? Is 'stableman' written on my face? My wife is pregnant! I need to go and cook egg soup for her!” said Puppy.

However, Chun Xiaoman completely ignored his protest and directly handed him the reins before rushing toward the Bai family ancestral hall.

Chun Xiaoman's breathing slowed down considerably when she stepped through the entrance and saw the rows of black ancestral tablets. She looked around at this unfamiliar place with both curiosity and fear.

Aside from Bai Lingmiao, the others would rarely come near this area. There were even rumors circulating that this was an eerie place.

Chun Xiaoman breathed a sigh of relief when she saw that Bai Lingmiao was just kneeling in front of the ancestral tablets.

There wasn't much else to see here; the hall was rather empty. Aside from the few objects placed against the wall, there wasn't even a chair to sit on.

She glanced again at Bai Lingmiao, who was whispering something, and then her gaze swept over the objects placed on those tables. As someone from a humble family, Chun Xiaoman couldn't understand the significance of these peculiar decorations.

There were stones placed on strange plates, and some bright-colored ceramics. Why were these things placed inside the house?

After inspecting everything, a palm-sized bronze ornament caught Xiaoman's attention. It depicted three monkeys squatting side by side. One covered its ears, another covered its eyes, and the last covered its mouth.

What does this trio of monkeys represent? Why do wealthy people like to have things that are so difficult to understand? But these monkeys are quite interesting. They are rather delicately made.

Chun Xiaoman walked over and wanted to pick them up for a closer look. But just as she touched it, she found that they wouldn't budge.

Huh? What's going on? Is it stuck by its base?

Just as she tried to move it left and right a couple of times, the monkeys suddenly shifted to the left.

At the same time, a rumbling sound rang out, and a large piece of the wall, holding the ancestral tablets, beside her collapsed. A chilly black hole was revealed before them.

"Dad!"

Bai Lingmiao rushed in emotionally, picking up the fallen ancestral tablets tenderly. However, she soon paused, and then looked toward the black hole, astonished just like Chun Xiaoman.

As she stared at the entrance, Bai Lingmiao felt like something

inside was attracting her. Soon, she started walking toward the entrance, almost as though she was in a trance.

However, at that moment, a figure walked past her, stepping into the black hole before her. "Wait here. I'll go in and take a look first."

Not long after, Chun Xiaoman emerged from the hole. "There are a lot of words written on the walls inside. Go and get Gao Zhijian!"

In a short while, Gao Zhijian walked into the Bai family ancestral hall. He was in a fully-armed state—dressed in half-armor with a stone slab on his chest and wielding a heavy wolf-toothed club.

"There's no need for all this. Since it's the Bai family's ancestral hall, there shouldn't be any danger inside."

"Just in case!" Gao Zhijian stood before the two and stepped in first.

The dark room was spacious, and the words on the wall stumped Gao Zhijian temporarily.

"Mud originates from chaos! White lotus emerges, ushering in a flourishing era!"

As he read, he looked toward the top, where some white flags imprinted with lotuses were hung.

"Isn't this the Bai family ancestral hall? Why would there be such things in this secret room?" Gao Zhijian was puzzled. Although he didn't know what these things were, he had a feeling that something was amiss.

"Don't stand in the middle of the path. Continue walking forward."

Hearing this, Gao Zhijian gripped his weapon tightly as he slowly walked onward. Based on the fact that they were going down a flight of stairs, it could be seen that they were descending.

The secret room was quite large, and the phrases that appeared

on the walls from time to time deepened Gao Zhijian's sense of unease.

"White lotus descends! The people rise!"

"Heavenly Mater! Hometown of true void!"

Whenever Chun Xiaoman asked about what was written on the walls, he just shook his head in response.

After circling for a few times, the stairs finally stopped, and a pitch-black expanse appeared in front of them. The green glow of their glowing stones could only illuminate a small part of their surroundings.

"Stick... to the walls! Be... be... be careful!"

Gao Zhijian led the way while leaning against the walls. As he felt around, he found a book, then began reading it in the light from the glowing stones.

The words did not seem contemporary, but he could understand them. However, the content was much more difficult for him to grasp.

"Gao Zhijian, what do you see? Don't just read silently, say something! You're killing me with suspense!"

Prompted by his companion's urging, Gao Zhijian stammered as he translated the content into understandable words.

"The Heavenly Mater is an ancient Buddha who transcends birth and death! She can save us from the worldly realm and return us to the true void, avoiding all calamities!"

"In the beginning, everything was supposed to be the Heavenly Mater! Every inch of the earth and sky was originally the true void."

"We were born, grew, and aged under the care of the Heavenly Mater, until someone betrayed her! It was someone amongst the most trusted Tian Huang nobles!"

"When those armies of unspeakable origin grew out of the Heavenly Mater's dantian, a group of Tian Huang nobles betrayed

her.”

“They conspired with the unspeakable armies to betray the Heavenly Mater! They killed the Tian Huang nobles who refused to defect and stripped the Heavenly Mater of everything!”

“They threw away what they didn’t want and swallowed what they needed. In the end, they shamelessly stood in the position where the Heavenly Mater should have been!”

“These treacherous rebels feared that their shame would be discovered, and so they modified the history books, altering everything in people’s hearts.”

“But we didn’t. Our history books will always belong to the Heavenly Mater. We will always remember, waiting for the moment when the Heavenly Mater returns!”

“The Heavenly Mater is neither born nor dies; while she has been deprived of everything, it also means that she can no longer lose anything.”

“When a person is covered in wounds, they will never have new wounds. When an existence has been stripped of everything, it will no longer be possible to deprive it of anything!”

“The Heavenly Mater is always trying, whether it’s day or night, whether it’s a man or a woman, whether it’s yin or yang.”

“Those unfaithful rebels are watching. They are afraid, and they are constantly obstructing the return of the Heavenly Mater, who is with us.”

“They can always send their lackeys to stop us, but it doesn’t matter. As long as we succeed even once, the Heavenly Mater will return on the six ceramic horses, and openly occupy the spot that is hers!”

“I will wait, no matter how long it takes. As the only surviving Tian Huang noble, even if I am killed, my son crawling out of my body will continue waiting. When my son dies, he will be replaced by my grandson. Generation after generation, we will wait forever!!

Heavenly Mater, hometown of the true void!”

Chapter 347 - White Lotus Sect

“Gao Zhijian, what are you talking about? Could it be that you read it wrongly?” Chun Xiaoman looked suspiciously at the brown book in his hands. The content spoken by him was messy and confusing. She couldn’t understand what was being said. What did it mean by no birth and no death? What were the things emerging from the dantian?

How could the son crawl out from the person’s own corpse? Was that still a human being?

A strange thought emerged in Xiaoman’s mind, “Could the person who wrote this book be just as crazy as Senior Li?”

Gao Zhijian sensed her doubts, and put his hands back into his pockets as he silently continued forward while sticking to the walls. “Hmph...”

Chun Xiaoman was about to pull Bai Lingmiao and follow along, but found that her hand was surprisingly icy to the touch.

“What’s wrong, Miaomiao?” asked Xiaoman.

Bai Lingmiao’s expression was pale, but she shook her head in response before following Gao Zhijian in the distance.

As they walked, they came across yet another book. This seemed to be a place where books were stored. However, the content of this book was even more obscure and difficult to understand than the previous one.

“Miaomiao, why does your ancestral hall have these strange books?” Chun Xiaoman asked the only living member of the Bai family.

This place didn’t really seem dangerous, but everything, right

from the white lotus flags to the contents of the previous book, all felt weird.

Who would create such a large space beneath the Bai family ancestral hall and place such messy objects within? Weren't they afraid of disturbing the ancestors in the ancestral hall above, and receiving their scolding in their dreams?

Bai Lingmiao paused, as though trying to recall something. "I... I don't know. I'm a woman, and so they never let me enter during any of the ancestral rituals."

Just then, Gao Zhijian stopped again. His tall figure stood stiffly, preventing the two behind from seeing what was ahead.

"Horse," Gao Zhijian said, without his usual stutter.

Bai Lingmiao suddenly let go of Chun Xiaoman's hand and walked in front of Gao Zhijian. She looked up and saw a ceramic horse head that was even larger than her own body.

The horse head was extremely lifelike. Its two eyes were staring straight ahead, placing immense pressure on the hearts of anyone standing before it.

After a moment, Bai Lingmiao walked under the horse before touching its smooth and hard body with her hands. A trace of confusion appeared in her eyes; this feeling was very familiar to her.

"This ceramic horse is really big. It must have taken a really large kiln to fire it," Puppy exclaimed.

"Eh?!" Chun Xiaoman was surprised to see Puppy suddenly appear out of the blue, "When did you come?"

"Why can't I come? I saw the few of you running over here, so I thought that you were hiding the spoils from me," Puppy said as he examined the ceramic horse before them. "Junior Bai, was your Bai family involved in the ceramics business? Selling such a large horse would probably fetch at least twenty to thirty taels of silver."

He turned around as he spoke, colliding with a person in the

darkness startling himself. However, when he saw that the figure had no head and limbs, and was just made of ceramic, he cursed silently and kicked it.

“This place... I’ve been here before.”

Bai Lingmiao’s voice attracted their attention.

Staring at the tall horse head, she tried her best to recall the vague memories. “My grandfather brought me here when I was very, very young. That day, I was crying and wanted to ride a horse, but he said that riding a real horse was too dangerous. So he brought me here and let me ride this ceramic horse. That day... I had a lot of fun.”

As she spoke, her brows furrowed, “I seem to remember... This horse flew and took me into a painting. It was quite lively there. There were so many adults and children that played with me! Yes! There’s a painting here!”

Bai Lingmiao quickly turned and dashed toward a corner in the dark. The others were shocked as they hurried to keep up with her.

After a few steps, they saw Bai Lingmiao stop before a wall. There was a painting on the wall, full of pure white lotuses on an ink-black water surface. It was not full of the many people that she had mentioned.

“This... what is this place?” Bai Lingmiao seemed to recall Senior Li telling her previously that her Bai family had done some wrong things. However, she had been completely overwhelmed by the despair of losing her entire family, and had not paid attention to these things.

“No, it’s impossible... My grandfather... My father and mother...” Bai Lingmiao thought of the perfect image of her family members in her heart, while a trace of hesitation appeared on her face.

“Look, the small lotus flower on the wall is actually an oil lamp,” said Puppy as he took out a small tinderbox and went to

light it.

As each white lotus lamp was gradually lit up, everything around them began to brighten. The entire expansive underground hall was gradually revealed to them.

The first thing that caught their attention was a large painting at the forefront of the hall. It was huge, and there was a censer for burning incense placed before it. This indicated the importance of the painting to the original owner.

The painting depicted six lifelike black horses galloping, carrying a blooming white lotus flower on top. There was surprisingly nothing else on the lotus flower.

The base color of the painting was a bright yellow. However, on this lotus, there was a twisted area that strangely lacked even the base color. It directly exposed the uneven adobe wall, making it appear even more abrupt.

After viewing this painting with an unclear meaning, they turned to look around at the entire hall.

The hall was rectangular, and was about six meters tall. It seemed to be interconnected, with many exits that led to other unknown places.

It almost seemed like there was another underground village beneath the entire Cowheart Village.

Various exquisite patterns were drawn on the top portion of the walls. However, most of them featured white lotus flowers against a black background.

In the center of the hall were three giant ceramic black horses, as well as hundreds of unfinished ceramic figures.

As he saw all this, Puppy's jaw dropped in amazement, "Tsk tsk, is this the majestic style of the emperor?"

Seeing that there was no danger around, Gao Zhijian put down his wolf-toothed club and scratched his head in confusion, as he turned to look toward Bai Lingmiao.

“Miaomiao? What’s the matter? Your expression isn’t looking great. Are you feeling uncomfortable? Should we head up first?” Chun Xiaoman supported Bai Lingmiao and asked gently.

However, Bai Lingmiao just shook her head and gently pushed away Xiaoman. She had a complex expression on her face as she searched for the vague memories in her mind.

As she pondered, she saw a blurry childlike figure appear amongst the ceramic figures.

The child wore a tiger head hat, had tiger head shoes, and was wrapped in a cotton padded jacket. Her wide pink eyes made her look very adorable.

“Grand... Ah grand~!”

The child stumbled forward and tripped, but fell into the arms of a smiling old man.

“Ah~ Good girl~ Do you like Grandpa?”

Chapter 348 - Tombstone

Bai Lingmiao recalled everything as she looked at the fuzzy phantom images. That child was her from her younger days, and this was an event that had happened before, a long time ago.

Bai Lingmiao watched as her grandfather lifted her up, carried her on his neck before starting to run and jump among the ceramic figures, shouting and amusing her.

She silently followed them, gradually recalling everything that happened in this place.

“Wa, wa~ Waa waa~”

Bai Lingmiao watched her childhood self cry, sitting in the corner with her open-crotch pants. She was covered in mud.

“What’s wrong, little one? Who bullied you?” An elderly woman with white hair hurried over as she comforted and lifted Bai Lingmiao up.

“Waa waa wa~ Waa waa” Bai Lingmiao was nestled in the arms of the old woman as she pointed her fat fingers toward the wall. With only three teeth in her mouth, she babbled some words that only she could understand.

“Oh~ Did it scare our little one? Don’t cry. Look, Grandma will fight for you!”

The old lady led Bai Lingmiao to the wall, then stamped her foot, “Ah! Who scared our obedient little girl? Bad thing, I’ll stomp you to death!”

When Bai Lingmiao saw her childhood self stop crying with her grandmother’s comforting, another scene appeared in her mind. At the same time, her expression suddenly changed. “I recall now.”

“Recall what?”

“I recall what scared me back then!” said Bai Lingmiao as she

rushed over, dispersing the phantom image of her younger self and her grandmother.

She came to the wall, raised her sharp black nails and dug into the solid rammed earth.

“Miaomiao! What are you doing?” Chun Xiaoman walked over, looking at her good friend with worry.

However, when she didn’t get a response even after asking several times, Chun Xiaoman also decisively pulled out her sword and stabbed it into the earth, digging it together with her.

Seeing this, Gao Zhijian also rushed over. He removed a piece of armor from his body and started using it to dig out the soil.

“Is there a treasure buried in the soil?” Puppy also rushed over and started helping excitedly.

However, this didn’t last long before Puppy’s horrified cry caused everyone to stop.

Bai Lingmiao reached out with her trembling hands. There was a woman buried in the soil, her eyes closed tightly. Her eyeballs were shriveled up and even sewn with threads. Her face was ashen, and seemed exceptionally terrifying.

At that moment, a large hand reached over and blocked Bai Lingmiao’s hands. “This... this... this is a... human... human pillar...”

However, before Gao Zhijian could even finish, Bai Lingmiao once again started digging. Slowly, more and more dead bodies were dug out from the mud. They were all tightly packed together, just like bricks stacked against each other.

It was not just adults; there were people of all ages buried in the soil.

After digging for a while, Bai Lingmiao stopped. She could see that these people were not just randomly buried here; they were all positioned right at the perimeter of the entire hall. At the same time, the back of each person’s hands had a white lotus flower

painted on it. This was obviously deliberately designed.

“They used people to build the foundation. Just how many dead people are buried in this large underground area? Just what kind of people can be so heartless?” Puppy exclaimed in shock. However, he immediately felt that he had said something wrong, and covered his mouth as he looked toward Bai Lingmiao’s direction.

This was the Bai family’s ancestral hall. Even if he only used his butt to think, he could know who had buried so many dead people here.

Bai Lingmiao tried hard to hold back, but how could she endure such a thing? She soon started crying just as loudly as younger self with the tiger head hat. However, this time, she didn’t have a grandmother to comfort her.

All the beautiful memories of her hometown in Bai Lingmiao’s heart collapsed at this moment. What was even more tragic was that she didn’t even have anyone left to question or blame.

They had all been burned to ashes by Li Huowang. Not a single one remained.

“Why is this happening?! Dad! Mom!! Why did you kill so many people?! Why did you become villains?! Don’t you know that these people could also have been someone else’s parents? Or grandparents? Do you know how painful it is to lose your loved ones?”

Seeing Bai Lingmiao on the verge of collapse, Chun Xiaoman quickly embraced her and comforted her softly, “It’s okay. It’s not your fault. It’s not your fault...”

Gradually, Bai Lingmiao’s cries stopped. She had cried enough, and she understood that crying wouldn’t change anything.

She wiped away her suppressed tears and nudged her way out of Xiaoman’s embrace. “No... This is my fault. This is our Bai family’s fault! Since it’s our fault, then as a member of the Bai

Family, I must take responsibility!”

After that, the stiff corpses were dragged out from the dark room and laid out on a cart, to be taken buried on Cowheart Mountain.

The bodies were extremely rigid, as though filled with lead. Bai Lingmiao couldn't even give them a decent burial.

Each time a body was buried, a tombstone was erected. Then, Bai Lingmiao would kowtow and offer incense as a gesture of apology. She knew that perhaps this was useless, but this was the only thing left that she could do.

There were many dead bodies in that dark room, and they worked for a long time, even working until after the Lu Family Troupe returned from their performance.

After finishing, Bai Lingmiao looked extremely haggard, and her face was completely drained.

After kowtowing three times before the final tombstone, she looked up with her bloodshot eyes. With her cracked lips, she asked Chun Xiaoman beside her, “Sister Xiaoman, if they could do such evil things, then why did they teach me to be kind? If I just became as evil as them, then I wouldn't be so upset...”

This question stumped Chun Xiaoman.

Lu Zhuangyuan, who was beside them, was helping to shovel the soil as well. He wiped off his sweat and sighed. “Girl, as a father myself, I can guess what your parents were thinking about. Actually, they knew that such things would bring about much retribution, and so they didn't want you to get involved. Besides, you were just a young child. Once the daughter is married off, it's like water thrown out. As long as they kept it from you until you were older and found a good family for you to marry into, then whatever happens in the family wouldn't have much to do with you. In the end, they were doing this for your own good.”

“For my own good?” Bai Lingmiao wanted to say, yet the

words stuck in her throat.

Chun Xiaoman sighed, embracing her as she tried to console her. In such a situation, whatever she said as an outsider would be futile.

“Sister Xiaoman...”

“Yes?” Chun Xiaoman turned her head, lightly brushing against Bai Lingmiao’s white hair.

“Even if my family was so evil, I still can’t forgive Senior Li for killing them...”

Chapter 349 - Arrival

Puppy carried a hoe as he walked briskly down the mountain. Though they had just buried many bodies, he was not acquainted with any of them, and thus it didn't affect his joyful mood at all.

Now, he had a house and his own fields. More importantly, his wife was about to give birth. Everything he had dreamt of previously was now going to materialize.

"Ah, I, Cao Cao, am truly a genius. Every step I took was right. If I was not so smart, how could I have a share of these things!"

If the journey back wasn't so long, he really would have wanted to return with glory to his hometown and announce all his accomplishments to everyone.

He glanced at the people behind him, then quickened his pace to increase the distance between them. Then, he carefully took out a book from his pocket.

Just as he happily touched the words he could not understand in the book, a hand covered in black fur reached over and snatched it away.

"Hey! What's wrong with you!" Puppy anxiously tried to snatch it back, but was stopped by a stern glare from Chun Xiaoman.

Puppy withdrew his hand indignantly and said, "In the tigerless mountains, monkeys become kings. Look at you. If I didn't know any better, then I would have thought that you were the one that rescued us from Zephyr Temple."

"Where did this book come from?" asked Xiaoman.

"I... I bought it from a street vendor, to teach my son how to read!" replied Puppy.

"Stop lying. We've only met street vendors twice so far, and neither of them was selling books!" said Xiaoman as she flipped

through the book and looked at those incomprehensible words.

With the help of Gao Zhijian translating, Chun Xiaoman learnt what this book was called—Verses of Hard Work and Enlightenment. Even if she couldn't read, she could tell that there was something amiss with the title; it was as though it was some sort of cultivation technique.

"Spit it out, where did this thing come from! I saw that you have been acting sneakily for a while now," asked Xiaoman.

Feeling that things were not quite right, Gao Zhijian frowned and took a step forward with his shovel.

"What's wrong? Am I breaking the law? Why do so many people need to get involved in this? I picked this book up!" Puppy raised his hand in annoyance and finally snatched the book back from Xiaoman's hands.

"Picked up? Can you just pick such a book randomly?" asked Xiaoman.

"Of course!" said Puppy before continuing in a softer voice, "But it was from the cellar under the Bai family ancestral hall..."

"You—!" Xiaoman was about to speak, but Puppy immediately shushed her nervously.

He stole a glance at the dispirited Bai Lingmiao, and then leaned toward Xiaoman and said, "Sis, think about it. Do you think the Bai family did so much and built all that for fun? Think again, Senior Li came back in such a state. We all know his incredible skills. Could the Bai family have forced him into such a state if they didn't have skills of their own? They must have some methods! Regardless of what they used before, since they're all dead, their things all belong to us now!"

Hearing all this, Chun Xiaoman's expression turned cold. "What's the point of learning those things? Are you going to learn to use living people as a foundation? If you dare to learn that, then don't blame me for not being cordial!"

“Hey! You’re so inflexible. Let’s only learn things that won’t harm our conscience. We can just ignore those techniques that involve killing people,” retorted Puppy. “Let me tell you, there are many things in the house! There are still many more books, and there must be more techniques as well! Once we learn those easier things that don’t involve killing, who would dare to bully us then?”

Xiaoman looked down at the sword on her waist, as a trace of hesitation appeared on her face.

Now that Senior Li was gone, could she really protect all of them with this longsword if they were faced with a crisis?

After a moment, she reached out and snatched the book back from Puppy’s hands, then examined it carefully. “Don’t tell Miaomiao for now. Her condition is not too good. Let’s look at this from all angles before we make a decision.”

“Alright, we’ll listen to you. This time’s gain is enough for the three of us to share in.” Puppy readily agreed.

Meanwhile, back in Yinling City, the dusty Li Huowang dismounted from the horse before tying it in the inn’s stable. He was somewhat surprised to not see Bun shaking its head over there.

He circled his own carriage a few times before spotting the dog standing with its claws on the manger, stealing the horses’ feed.

“So fat and still eating?” Li Huowang lifted it up, “Come here. I brought you here to watch the carriage, and not to eat more.”

“Woof woof!”

Bun was rather excited after not having seen its owner for some time. It shook its head and wagged its tail, twisting its body like a maggot.

Just as Bun was about to lick Li Huowang’s boots, it was pressed down by Li Huowang.

“What’s going on? Are you injured? Who did this?” Li Huowang looked at the notch on Bun’s ear and frowned slightly.

Bun obviously did not know what Li Huowang was talking

about, and just wagged its tail as it tried to burrow into Li Huowang's arms.

"Come here!" Li Huowang grabbed the nape of its neck and lifted it, then headed toward the lobby.

"Innkeeper, didn't I give you enough silver? Why can't you even look after a dog?" asked Li Huowang.

The fat innkeeper looked helpless. "Ah, dear guest, this is not my fault. Your dog ran out by itself."

"You know too that this is a female dog. It ran to the street and fought with another female dog for attention from a male dog. In the end, it lost the fight and was bitten like this by the other dog," explained the innkeeper.

Bun didn't know what the two people were talking about, and just looked innocently at Li Huowang as it sat on the ground.

This made Li Huowang rather speechless. He didn't even know how to get angry. "Where's the dog that bit it?"

"That female dog ran away. After mating, those wild dogs usually run away," said the innkeeper.

Feeling helpless, Li Huowang patted Bun's head, and then headed back upstairs to the guest rooms.

In his haste to travel, they had only been eating and sleeping when he could. Thus, Li Huowang was exhausted, and slept for an entire day and night.

After waking up, he called up the kitchen to order some dishes. After washing up, Li Huowang began to eat heartily.

While eating, he started pondering on what excuse he should use to ask Ji Xiang about information on Zhuge Yuan without directly approaching and asking more.

I should contact Tuoba Danqing first, and confirm the situation with Ji Xiang. With how he looked the last time, the consequences for the failure of this task should be quite severe.

Just as Li Huowang was thinking to himself, the cooing sound

of the pigeon rang from the rafters.

Chapter 350 - Storyteller

Li Huowang looked up and saw a black pigeon perched up high, looking down at him. This was the messenger pigeon that Tuoba Danqing had sent for him.

When he removed the letter from the pigeon's leg and read its contents, he immediately forgot about his meal and turned to head out of the door.

Li Huowang hadn't expected that Ji Xiang was still in Yinling City! Not only that, he had specifically requested to see Li Huowang by name. This was his opportunity.

What surprised Li Huowang was that the appointed meeting place was not any grand location, but a simple study. It seemed that he had a rather different style from the way Tuoba Danqing did things.

Upon entering, his attention was immediately drawn to a withered tongue. The human tongue was somewhat shriveled, and it was nailed to a decaying piece of wood. At the sight of this, Li Huowang instantly remembered how Tuoba Danqing boasted that this artifact was made with a Strayed One's tongue[\[1\]](#).

After taking a slow and deep breath, Li Huowang respectfully bowed to the pale-faced old eunuch before him, who was busy with an abacus. "Greetings, Lord Ji Xiang."

"Hehehe~ This isn't the palace, we're all family here. Please, have a seat," said Ji Xiang.

Li Huowang followed Ji Xiang's finger and noticed that tea had already been poured for him on the table.

However, rather than sitting down, Li Huowang directly asked, "Lord Ji Xiang, do you have any important instructions for me?"

He remembered how the eunuch had left in a panicked hurry

before this. However, he was now sitting comfortably, suggesting that some things must have happened in the meantime.

“Hehehe~ No rush. I heard that you’re quite capable?” commented Ji Xiang as he eyed Li Huowang.

Faced with the old eunuch’s scrutiny, Li Huowang suddenly felt uneasy.

“Hong Da said that when the three of them faced off with you, you even managed to escape? Seems like being a mere Ninth Troop is a waste of your talents,” continued Ji Xiang.

However, Li Huowang did not feel like the other party was praising him, and he felt tense instead. “Lord Ji Xiang, please get to the point.”

“Alright, it’s refreshing to have someone so straightforward. I reckon that you’ve already guessed what we were trying to do previously?” asked Ji Xiang.

Seeing him remain silent, Ji Xiang continued, “That’s right, our task was to retrieve the hidden Muddled One in the Buddha’s Skeleton Temple. But the mission failed! What do you say we should do now? Returning directly and accepting punishment is not an option. So, we need to make up for it!”

At that moment, Ji Xiang suddenly stood up. “Let me be frank with you. This matter is not trivial. We cannot afford to fail again!”

He placed his finger on the mahogany table and forcefully drew a line. “If we are unable to complete this task, then all the blame will fall on us!”

Having listened to so much, Li Huowang finally understood what he was trying to say. “Lord Ji Xiang, are you saying... that we should find another Muddled One as a replacement?”

“Smart! This is the type of talent that we need in our Surveillance Bureau!” Ji Xiang’s round face broke into a smile. “Since they want a Muddled One, we’ll provide them with a Muddled One. It doesn’t matter where the Muddled One comes

from. It's just that back then, the one in Buddha's Skeleton Temple was dead, and so now we need to capture a live one."

Li Huowang's heartbeat quickened.

A live Muddled One? Is that similar to an existence like myself, a live Strayed One?

For some reason, even though he didn't even know the other party's name, Li Huowang began to feel a sense of sympathy for that Muddled One.

While Li Huowang was still contemplating, Ji Xiang's words hit him like a bomb. "We also understand that this is not a proper task for those within the Bureau. There is no reward, and it's dangerous to deal with a live Muddled One. If you're unwilling to, then we will understand. Danqing said that you've always wanted to read the records in our Four Repositories that are related to the Sitting Oblivion Dao. Isn't that right? As long as you can handle this matter smoothly, I will personally go there and memorize all of it for you, even at the risk of my own dismissal!"

Hearing this, Li Huowang's breathing turned heavier. On one side was a Muddled One that he had never met, and on the other was information that might allow him to break free of the status of a Strayed One. The choice was easy.

Li Huowang once again bowed to Ji Xiang. "Yes, Lord Ji Xiang!"

Seeing Li Huowang agree, Ji Xiang once again laughed like a flower blooming. He could only tempt him at this point. If he had refused, then there was nothing else he could have done. After all, this young man was said to have a bad temper. If threatened, it might even backfire on him. Fortunately, he had agreed, and this gave him a lot more confidence now.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang's heart quivered slightly as he looked at the eunuch before him and asked, "Lord Ji Xiang, back in the Buddha's Skeleton Temple, the Muddled One was intercepted by

someone. Then this time, won't that person come again? What was that person's origin for them to even dare to intercept things from our Surveillance Bureau?"

However, Ji Xiang's face remained indifferent as he said, "A Muddled One isn't much, and one is enough. Zhuge Yuan will not dare snatch it again. If one live and one dead Muddled Ones are merged together, that might be too much for him to handle. Also, don't worry. The Sitting Oblivion Dao has lost Fa Cai this time. Before a new Fa Cai has been appointed, they will definitely not dare to make a scene. So this time, there's nothing else to worry about other than the live Muddled One."

Ji Xiang chuckled as he patted Li Huowang's shoulder.

However, that only made Li Huowang frown slightly. After all that talk, Ji Xiang had simply disregarded his inquiry. He still could not determine whether Zhuge Yuan was good or bad.

"Lord Ji Xiang, can you tell me more about the background of Zhuge Yuan? I'm afraid of encountering such a strange person again in future. Please enlighten me." Li Huowang looked up at Ji Xiang, his eyes filled with determination.

Since the other party had specifically requested for him, he may not have a better opportunity to ask about this in future.

At the same time, since Li Huowang had asked the question like that, Ji Xiang could not pretend to not have heard it.

After a moment, Ji Xiang sighed. "It's inauspicious to bring up this person. But since you insist, let me tell you. Do you know his nickname? Others often call him the Storyteller."

Ji Xiang slowly sat down and used his hand to pinch his jade ring. "He is a very strange character. Despite dressing like a scholar, he never takes the imperial examinations. Instead, he likes to go to busy places and tell stories. Also, his stories don't involve romance or military accomplishments. He only speaks about historical records."

“Historical records?” Li Huowang was puzzled.

“Yes, historical records. Moreover, he fabricates his own records. He claims that 900 years ago, there was no internal strife in the Qi Kingdom, and that the Qi Emperor unified the world. Today, as a new emperor ascends the throne, proclaiming the era of intelligence, auspicious signs appear from the heavens, and birds flock to the young ruler, while the palace is illuminated with a red radiance. However, it’s pure nonsense. If Qi Kingdom did not fall into chaos, then where did the present Liang Kingdom come from? Where did the kingdom of Si Qi come from?”

1. C297. It mentions that the artifact is made of a Strayed One’s Wealth Attraction, which Tuoba Danqing mentions is a person’s tongue. 🤔

Chapter 351 - Gather

Faced with Ji Xiang's endless chatter, Li Huowang did not speak and just continued to listen. If this person only spoke about fabricated historical records, then it wouldn't have been enough to scare Ji Xiang so much. There must be some other reasons.

"This person is easy to recognize. He has a fan with the words 'Everyone has their values' written on it. If you encounter him, remember to stay far away. He's not a good person."

Li Huowang thought for a moment and probed, "Lord Ji Xiang, when we came out from the Buddha's Skeleton Temple that day, did you ask me that question because Zhuge Yuan's abilities are strange?"

"Yes," Ji Xiang nodded. "This person can somehow change fate."

"Change fate?"

"Not change a person's fate, but change destiny itself. He has an old almanac. Whatever he says is auspicious will definitely happen. If he says otherwise, then it will definitely bring bad luck."

"Words creating reality?" Li Huowang was stunned. Although he had seen a lot on his journey so far, this kind of supernatural ability was still a first for him.

If this person had goodwill towards him, that would give him great support. But if he harbored ill intentions...

After some contemplation, Li Huowang asked again, "Lord Ji Xiang, does this person use his abilities more for good or for evil?"

"How would I know? I only know that whenever he appears, something bad is bound to happen. He is like a jinx," replied Ji Xiang as he picked up a cup of tea and took a sip. Then, he continued, "Alright, I've told you enough. It's already a rare

exception. Do your job well, and if you succeed this time, then I'll put in a good word for you when I return to the Bureau."

"Thank you, Lord Ji Xiang." Li Huowang turned to leave.

His expression remained serious as he looked at the wrapped spindle. Although he had learnt some information about Zhuge Yuan from Ji Xiang, he still did not know if Zhuge Yuan's goodwill toward him was genuine or not.

If it was, that didn't make sense. But if it was false... that made even less sense! What was his objective?

Asking directly like this won't work. I must think of a way from this spindle, and I need to figure out what this thing is first.

But for now, I should set this matter aside and help Ji Xiang find a Muddled One. It's the most crucial step to get information regarding Bei Feng.

Shortly after Li Huowang left the simple study, an elderly woman with graying hair walked out from behind a folding screen. Although her face was covered with wrinkles, one could tell that she was quite beautiful in her youth.

The elderly woman asked Ji Xiang with a concerned expression, "Lord, is this person reliable?"

"Ah, I can't be sure either. He came from a faraway place to Great Liang, so who knows where he originated from. In any case, whether or not he's reliable, we have to use him. We cannot let those in the capital know, or it'll mess everything up!" said Ji Xiang.

Still sporting the same worried expression, the woman walked over to Ji Xiang's side, and held Ji Xiang's bejeweled hand. "Ah, Lord, if it doesn't work out, can't we just resign? We live in constant fear every day. What's the point of living a few more decades like this?"

"That's easier said than done. How could it possibly be so simple?" Ji Xiang had an agonized look on his face. He took out a

red handkerchief from his left sleeve and wiped the sweat off his forehead. "This matter involves many high-ranking figures. It's a task from the Imperial Preceptor, and might even have the emperor's intentions behind it. If we small fry get entangled in such a big matter, the best we can hope for is to escape with our lives."

The elderly woman gently embraced Ji Xiang, her voice filled with a hint of pleading as she said, "Brother, when we're done with this, let's go back to Liu Pan, and grow old under the mulberry tree where we used to play when we were young. When we left the village, you said that you wanted me to enjoy life. But no matter where we are, I'm the happiest as long as I'm with you."

Ji Xiang patted the old woman with his red handkerchief, but didn't say anything.

Feeling anxious, he notified all of them to gather at Yinling City gates the next day at the fifth section of the night.

It was still too dark, but Li Huowang had already gotten up. He first came to the stable and pulled apart the curtains. After that, he cut off a piece of meat from the tentacles of the beast squirming inside, and then wrapped it up for the journey ahead. Next, he threw some dried meat into the carriage before starting to nail up a wooden plank.

He did not know how long he would be gone this time. Thus, it was better to nail up everything to prevent any mishaps.

Before long, under Li Huowang's hammering, this carriage had become a large coffin.

After finishing all this, he placed his belongings onto the horse, mounted it, and rode toward the city gates.

"Woof woof!" Unexpectedly, Bun followed after him.

"Go and watch the carriage! When I return, if I hear you've been out fighting other dogs, I'm going to stew you in a pot!" said Li Huowang before leaving.

It was dawn. Aside from a few vendors setting up their stalls,

there were not many people on the streets. Thus, Li Huowang reached the city gates quite quickly.

Hong Da and Tuoba Danqing also appeared as expected, but there were two new faces that he hadn't anticipated.

Including Ji Xiang and himself, there were a total of six people. This was enough to show the other party's determination.

From the two newcomers, one was a Moongate kid with the surname Liu, and the other was a Shaman.

Li Huowang carefully observed the drum hanging on his waist, and was rather certain that this was a Shaman's drum. It was identical to the one that he had previously seen on Li Zhi's waist.

However, compared to the beggar-like Li Zhi, this man was obviously very different. He wore a black fur coat, and he seemed quite fierce with two diagonal black knife scars across his face. It seemed that a machete would fit him better than the drum on his waist.

He greeted those who he knew, then turned to the man with the scarred face and asked, "Are you a Shaman? Where's your Second Deity?"

The scar face crossed his arms and glared at him. "Who the hell are you? Why are you prying into my business?"

At that moment, the kid from Moongate, Liu Zongyuan, saw that Li Huowang had unsheathed his sword by half an inch and quickly stepped forward to block Li Huowang, trying to mediate. "Ah ah. Brother Er, there's no need for this. Consider it as giving me some face, alright?"

Li Huowang looked at Liu Zongyuan before turning to them, and then pressed down slightly, the killing intent immediately vanishing.

"Come, let's go over there. Don't make things difficult for Ji Xiang," said Liu Zongyuan.

Li Huowang may not give face to others, but since it was Liu

Zongyuan who had helped him once, Li Huowang decided not to confront this person.

He glanced at the wooden mask on Liu Zongyuan's face, and then asked, "Brother Liu, how have you been lately?"

"Still the same. Let's help Ji Xiang through this difficult time first. If he's not doing well, then we won't either," said Liu Zongyuan.

This was true. They were like grasshoppers strung together with a string. If Ji Xiang fell, whatever he promised would also go up in smoke.

"What's the background of that person? Why does Ji Xiang want to find a Shaman as a companion? From what I know, they aren't usually very capable," asked Li Huowang.

"Ah, your words are rather subjective. There are talented people in every profession, and the Shamans are no exception," said Liu Zongyuan.

Chapter 352 - Spouse

The strong horses pulled the large carriage as they quickly ran down the road. But the carriage man was still unsatisfied with the speed and kept whipping the horses to go faster.

Li Huowang was resting his arm as he stared outside the window and saw the lush green forest.

This place is near Cowheart Mountain. I wonder how they are all doing. Since Bai Lingmiao still has the Second Deity and Gao Zhijian is also there, normal bandits shouldn't be able to defeat them.

At that moment, Li Huowang suddenly felt a pair of eyes looking at him from within the forest. However, when he turned his head, he didn't see anything.

"Cough~ We are reaching our destination soon, and so let me explain to you the details of the mission."

Ji Xiang's voice pulled Li Huowang's attention back as he turned to look at the old eunuch. Ji Xiang was holding onto the wish wood.

"I've called all of you over since this will be a difficult mission. I also know that many of you have probably already guessed what's going on. We are here to capture a Muddled One, dead or alive."

No one said anything as Ji Xiang continued explaining.

"I'm not sure if you've heard of the powers of a Muddled One, but since we have time I will explain it again for everyone." Ji Xiang looked at Li Huowang purposefully. "The Muddled One is similar to the Strayed One and the Twisted One. All of them are people with certain qualities in their body. As the name suggests, the Muddled Ones are afflicted with a sense of unclearness. Not only are their inner selves unclear, but they could also muddle everything around them with their karmic obstacle."

At that moment, Ji Xiang's explanation was suddenly interrupted by someone, causing Li Huowang to feel displeased, and as expected it was the Shaman.

"Feng Erniu, no need to tell what everyone already knows. Just let us know what to do later on. Also, let me get this clear first. No matter what happens, the debt I owe you will be cleared after this."

Ji Xiang scoffed unhappily when he heard someone calling out his true name, but he didn't dare offend that man and swallowed his anger. "Shen Tugang, at least give me some face. There's no need to rush since we have some time. You can rest first while I continue explaining."

Hearing this, the Shaman hugged his chest and closed his eyes.

On the other hand, Ji Xiang continued with his explanation. "I will try to make my explanation short then. The Muddled One and the Strayed One are opposites. If a Strayed One is likened to a star in the dark sky that everyone can see from afar, then a Muddled One can be likened to a black cloth hidden in the night. Normal people could never hope to find them."

Li Huowang grumbled when he heard that.

If I was a Muddled One rather than a Strayed One then I wouldn't have to suffer so much.

Ji Xiang continued his explanation. "Also, the Muddled Ones can use their karmic obstacles to hide themselves as well as other items, both dead and alive. As an example, if you fight against a Muddled One, you might suddenly forget where your weapons are, and then suddenly find out that you've lost the Muddled One."

Li Huowang slowly noted down everything that he heard and remembered his own situation. At the same time, a question popped into his mind.

That sounds dangerous. Can a Muddled One control their techniques as they wish?

"But be careful! Don't think that this is the extent of their

abilities otherwise I never would've asked all of you to come here. Out of the three of them, the Muddled One and the Strayed One are the toughest to fight against. Do not look into a Muddled One's eyes or else your soul would be immediately tarnished by their karmic obstacle, and then you would be hidden by them. Once you are hidden by them, no one else can find you again, forever! Another thing to note is that some of them who grow old enough can use different techniques and you need to adapt on the fly. Still, since their powers mostly revolve around using their karmic obstacle, their techniques should be similar," continued Ji Xiang.

Everyone was listening to his explanation seriously but Li Huowang sighed secretly.

To think that the Muddled Ones can't even look at people directly. They must've accidentally hidden many of their close friends and family members.

Li Huowang felt pity for them.

The Muddled Ones and the Strayed Ones both led difficult lives.

As the sound of horse hoofs grew slower, Ji Xiang started talking faster, "Once we are there, Little Liu and Danqing will surround the perimeter to prevent the Muddled One from escaping. Me and Shen Tugang will force her out while Er Jiu will kill her immediately. Since the Ao Jing Sect doesn't need weapons to kill people, the Muddled One's karmic obstacle should not work on you. Disembark now!"

The carriage's tarp opened and the six of them stood beside the road. A very special secluded village appeared in front of them.

It was similar to the mountain villages that Li Huowang had seen before, but the village in front of him seemed to be abandoned. The ground, walls, and roofs were all covered in ivy.

"Little Liu, go. Remember that this mission will determine whether I die or not so you must be careful," said Ji Xiang.

Liu Zongyuan nodded with his wooden mask. Then, he leaped off the ground and entered the forest like a monkey. Soon, a faint mist appeared and covered the entire area. At the same time, the white impermanence with its red tongue flickered within the mist.

Then, without waiting for Ji Xiang's order, Shen Tugang walked into the village.

Seeing this, Ji Xiang sighed and carried his golden abacus as he too walked into the village.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang cautiously scanned his surroundings.

It was too quiet. Except for the sound of the clicking abacus, there were no other noises. The birds and insects had also gone silent.

Just as they had entered the village, they saw a single flower appearing in front of them. It was clear that the flower was well taken care of since there were no weeds surrounding it.

"Who's there? Come out!" Li Huowang unsheathed his sword halfway and the murderous aura instantly enveloped his body.

At the same time, everyone else also took out their weapons and pointed at a short wall.

Suddenly, a pair of feet wearing red shoes appeared from the darkness.

Remembering Ji Xiang's advice, Li Huowang instantly lowered his eyes.

But when he saw those feet again, he hesitated. They looked familiar.

Wait! Those are Miaomiao's feet!

Li Huowang raised his head and saw the familiar red veil.

At the same time, Hong Da had already thrown his rusted blade toward her.

Chapter 353 - Muddled One

Seeing that the blade was about to hit the Second Deity, Li Huowang elongated his bronze coin sword into a whip and hit it away.

“Wait!” Li Huowang ran up and stood between them. “Wait, she’s not the Muddled One. She’s my wife!”

Hearing this, Ji Xiang placed down the wish wood and asked, feeling confused, “Your wife? I don’t believe it! Ask her to remove her red veil. I don’t want the Muddled One to try and trick us.”

At that moment, without waiting for Li Huowang’s approval, Shen Tugang gently hit the drum on his waist. In response, the Second Deity’s drum rang out as well, almost as if they were conversing.

Once the sound of the drums stopped, the Second Deity removed the red veil on her face.

“Aiya! What is that? Junior Er, is she really your wife?” Everyone was shocked to see the Second Deity’s half-human half-beast face.

Li Huowang just ignored them and pulled the Second Deity a distance away. “Why are you here? Where is Miaomiao? Did she follow us?”

The Second Deity shook her head and trembled as she hugged Li Huowang’s waist. She had three feline eyes, and all of them contained her love for him. “Husband... I miss you.”

Her sharp fang bit Li Huowang’s neck shallowly as two tongues came out and licked his neck.

“Enough!” Li Huowang held her properly and looked at her

seriously. "I don't have time for this. This place is very dangerous and you must leave now!"

"Husband, are you worried about me?" The Second Deity smiled, her mouth opening all the way to her ears.

Li Huowang approached her and held her head before looking into her largest eye. "Leave here, now!"

"Alright." A long tongue licked his face. Then, she left with a mysterious smile.

"Mother?"

At that moment, a voice rang inside his ears that caused him to feel even more sullen as he said, "Shh! She's not your mother!"

"Junior Er, is she really your wife?" Tuoba Danqing was so shocked that he completely stopped playing with the walnuts in his hand.

In response, without waiting for Li Huowang to explain, Shen Tugang said in an unfriendly voice, "Why? Do you have a problem with it?"

Then, he turned toward Li Huowang and nodded approvingly, "She's a good girl. Don't mess up."

"Alright alright, that's enough. Let's continue our mission. We are here to get a Muddled One and not on a date." Ji Xiang said anxiously.

Li Huowang looked at where the Second Deity disappeared before continuing their journey into the village. He was afraid that the Second Deity would ignore his warning and bring Miaomiao into the village.

Meanwhile, Ji Xiang's golden abacus once again started clicking while Tuoba Danqing started playing with his walnuts. The sounds they generated covered the entire village.

At the same time, Li Huowang also raised his awareness, afraid of the Muddled One suddenly appearing.

They kept walking until they saw a collapsed wall. Through it,

they saw several shadows standing underneath the guava trees.

After looking carefully, Li Huowang saw that those weren't humans but were instead human dolls made from straw and other plant materials. Their surroundings were also very clean.

Just as Li Huowang was wondering whether the Muddled One was the one who did that, Hong Da threw out two small rusty knives toward it, destroying those effigies in an instant.

"Aaaaaa..." A sharp voice rang out from the depths of the village.

"Let's go!" Shen Tugang, who had been bored until now, immediately leaped into action as he hit the drum on his waist while running toward the source of the voice.

For some reason, his chants were much different than Li Zhi's and Bai Lingmiao's. His chants were exceedingly domineering.

"Hear me out for there are monsters in the city! Swallow them whole so peace befalls us! I call for the Immortals and they must come! I call for the Gods and they must listen!"

Li Huowang suddenly felt as if all of the colors around him were being drained, leaving behind a world of monotonous gray.

He felt goosebumps on his skin. He knew that something was here, but he didn't know what.

Shen Tugang's was visibly different from the other Shamans.

He might be as strong as Dan Yangzi. I wonder where Ji Xiang found him.

"Er Jiu, borrow my blade!" Hong Da passed a rusted blade to Li Huowang.

Seeing this, Li Huowang nodded and accepted the blade.

The shouting in the distance meant that Shen Tugang and Ji Xiang had found the Muddled One. The sound of drums and abacus encompassed the entire village, causing their surroundings to start shivering and twisting.

Even though the Muddled One hadn't revealed herself, it was

clear that they were already fighting.

Li Huowang had many killing techniques but none of them would work for now.

However, rather than just waiting, Li Huowang decided to use what he could. He bit his finger and used his blood to draw a talisman.

He didn't know if it would work, but there was no harm in trying.

After remembering the pattern on the skull that he had brought here, he started looking around to find a similar pattern.

Amidst the chaos, Li Huowang looked everywhere before suddenly looking down at the rusted blade in his hand. The rusted blade that he had loaned from Hong Da was pointing at an abandoned well. There was a spider web at the top of the well.

The spider web was torn, and the pattern on it looked similar to what he had seen on the skull.

Does Hong Da's rusted blade amplify fortune-telling powers?

Li Huowang unsheathed his weapon and slowly approached the well. Once at the well, he carefully cut off the vines and looked down, only to find someone standing in the well, leaving him shocked.

When the person inside felt the light coming from above and raised their head, Li Huowang instinctively looked away to prevent himself from looking into their eyes.

At the same time, Li Huowang shouted at everyone, "Quick! There's ..."

However, he suddenly stopped.

"Wait, what did I want to say? Why am I here?"

When the others heard his voice, they looked at Li Huowang. Feeling puzzled, Tuoba Danqing asked him, "Junior Er, why are you holding the rusted blade while standing at the side of that well?"

"Rusted blade?" Li Huowang looked at Tuoba Danqing, Ji

Xiang, and Shen Tugang. “Wait, where did the rusted blade come from? Why is it in my hands?”

Chapter 354 - Appear

“Hm?” Li Huowang looked at the rusted blade in his hands with confusion.

Where did this blade come from? I already have two weapons so why do I have another?

Li Huowang threw the rusted blade onto the ground and used his own sword to poke at it. He was confused by the sudden appearance of the rusted blade.

Is this the power of the Muddled One? Is she using her power?

Li Huowang stared at the rusted blade carefully while slowly retreating to where everyone else was.

“Junior Er, is everything alright?” Tuoba Danqing looked at the anxious Li Huowang.

“I don't know why I suddenly had a rusted blade in my hands,” explained Li Huowang.

“But the karmic obstacles of the Muddled One are used to hide objects. How could it give you something?”

Li Huowang checked his entire body and shook his head when he found nothing. He then looked at Shen Tugang who was currently beating his drum.

“May the God of Venus command his army, and order them to stand in a row of fifty-five thousand. They shall wear black armor and hold the black flag. Those in shiny armor are the rookies. Don't call them to join the war or I will chase them away myself!”

As Shen Tugang continued to beat his drum, the atmosphere around them slowly shifted. Something condensed and then disappeared within the mist.

Looking at how Shen Tugang was sure of victory, Li Huowang did nothing and waited for them to chase out the Muddled One.

He would rather sit back and not interrupt them.

The sound of the drumbeats, walnuts clacking, and the abacus never stopped.

Just then, Shen Tugang suddenly shouted, “The Muddled One we are facing is an old one! She made one of us disappear! Erniu, stop conserving your strength and go all out!”

Hearing those words, Ji Xiang forcefully smacked his golden abacus.

Immediately, Li Huowang saw his surroundings start shimmering.

When Li Huowang looked at his sword, he suddenly saw it multiply. Sometimes there were two and sometimes there were three. The concept of ‘numbers’ around them seemed to have been affected and rendered useless. One could be five and could be nine at the same time.

Just then, Shen Tugang used all six of his hands to beat the drum forcefully. Rather than sounding like a chant, his voice was now a bellow. “A rainbow cloud descends upon us! I summon all of the Immortals of the Southern Palace! I call for the Eight Immortals and Eight Barbarians to take their post, protect the Eight Gates and Eight Doors!”

In response, dark clouds above the heavens descended and stopped just above their heads. Something seemed to be moving within the dark clouds.

Just then, Li Huowang saw a figure appearing from a distance away. Her body seemed to be shimmering as she phased in and out of reality from time to time. She was wearing a blue robe and black markings covered her face. Her trousers were also caked in mud.

“Er Jiu! She’s the Muddled One! Attack now!”

The moment Ji Xiang shouted, Li Huowang cut off half of his sixteen fingers. Then, while the Muddled One was busy with his fingers, Li Huowang tore off a large chunk of his flesh and skin

before throwing it at the Muddled One.

However, when Li Huowang turned around, he saw his finger bullets and flesh net slowly disappear under the Muddled One's power.

He had to do something!

Li Huowang looked down at the feet of the Muddled One and whipped his bronze coin sword toward it.

When she saw that she wouldn't be able to dodge it, a beggar suddenly appeared beside the Muddled One. before being used as a meat shield to block the bronze coin sword.

It was Hong Da who had previously disappeared! He had now been unhidden by the Muddled One!

The sound of metal screeching rang out as the bronze coins impacted Hong Da's body and shot out sparks.

Li Huowang was mad when he saw his attacks being blocked so many times and instantly used his own sword to slice open his abdomen.

"You motherfucker, do you think you can hide all the time? Let's see how you hide this!" shouted Li Huowang as he stabbed both of his arms into his abdomen and forcefully tore out two of his rib bones. He then stabbed his rib bones into his own torso.

At that moment, Li Huowang took a deep breath from the shock of the pain, while the Muddled One also cried out as both of them fell to the ground at the same time.

Despite the pain, Li Huowang laughed maniacally. His sense of pain was currently being shared with the Muddled One. With her being crippled, it would now be much easier to capture her.

At this point, Li Huowang used a pike to rip one of his fingernails, using the impact to shoot himself upward.

The Muddled One's entire body was cramping from the pain. She wanted to attack again, but when she saw Li Huowang about to rip off more of his fingernails, she was finally afraid and ran away.

However, Li Huowang would never let her go. He immediately placed two talismans onto his knees. Veins started bulging throughout his body as he ran toward the Muddled One, leaving behind many afterimages.

As he used various torture methods, the distance between Li Huowang and the Muddled One was slowly getting shorter and shorter.

But when he crashed into a dusty house, the Muddled One once again disappeared.

“What’s happening? Where is she?” Li Huowang refused to give up. He was extremely close!

When he looked back at the rest, Ji Xiang answered his question. “Let us rest first. It’s not easy to force the Muddled One out.”

Ji Xiang’s face was pale and his fingers were trembling. Shen Tugang was equally tired too. Both of them had used up a lot of their powers to force out the Muddled One.

“You’ve already wounded her. One more time and she will no longer be able to run away again. Erniu specifically found people who can counter the Muddled One’s power this time around,” said Shen Tugang.

Compared to their initial meeting, Shen Tugang was now much more friendly with Li Huowang. He wasn’t sure if it had anything to do with Miaomiao's Second Deity.

Li Huowang nodded his head. “Fine. Once we catch the Muddled One, we can... Hm? What was I trying to say again?”

As Li Huowang’s anger cooled down, he looked around feeling confused.

It was not a large house, and there were even some sweet potatoes in a corner of the house. There was also a patch of dried grass with an indentation on it. It was clear this place was recently inhabited by someone.

Did someone live here?

As Li Huowang touched the rib bone on his torso, the intense pain made him remember again. “Yes! That’s right! It’s the Muddled One! She’s hiding my memories!”

Realizing this, Li Huowang took out some yellow talisman papers. Just as he was about to write something, he stopped. Then, he recalled her powers and used a small pike to start writing on his left forearm.

He quickly wrote their mission as well as the dangers of facing the Muddled One on his own flesh and then sighed.

“Look, there are writings on the wall!”

Tuoba Danqing’s sudden shout made all of them look at the walls.

Chapter 355 - Hidden

Li Huowang turned around and saw there were indeed some words written on the wall covered by the ivy vines. As he looked at the wall, he used his bronze coin sword like a whip and cleared off the vines.

Why me? And when will it end? Such a bizarre fate.

I don't want to kill! I want to look people straight in the eyes!

They couldn't see me the moment they turned around. I hate that!

"These things seem to have been written by the Muddled One. But... it doesn't seem to have been written by just one person," spoke Tuoba Danqing as he looked carefully.

"Danqing, stop looking. Also, give me some of your Gu poison. I need to use it with some of my lifespan pills." Ji Xiang took out some lifespan pills and ate them. At the same time, Li Huowang saw the white hair on Ji Xiang's head reduce significantly.

"Lord Ji Xiang, you've already used so many lifespan pills. Any more and it would be dangerous." said Tuoba Danqing.

"Sigh~ Do you think I don't know that? For now, let's finish the mission or I won't even have the chance to live long enough to become a Human Xiao," replied Ji Xiang.

Li Huowang ignored their bickering as he surveyed his environment while enduring the pain from the wounds he had inflicted on himself.

Now that the situation was under control, he wanted it to end as soon as possible to prevent any unforeseen circumstances.

"Hehe."

Hearing the sudden laughter, Li Huowang raised his head. At that moment, he was eye to eye with a woman with a dirty face!

Her hair was long and her face looked pretty even though it

was caked in filth. As she appeared in front of him, she looked into his eyes excitedly.

She's the Muddled One!

Li Huowang suddenly realized who it was didn't hesitate in the slightest as he stabbed the woman's abdomen!

The Muddled One coughed up blood and fell onto the ground. She looked at Li Huowang with shock as she muttered to herself, "You are fine? Nothing's happening to you?"

However, Li Huowang was too excited and shocked to care about such details. He quickly approached her and raised a metal spoon, ready to gouge out her eyes that were capable of making people disappear.

"Er Jiu! Don't gouge out her eyes! Even if you kill her you must not gouge out her eyes."

Hearing this, Li Huowang dropped the spoon and immediately snapped all of her joints. By the time he was done with her, she could do nothing but move her eyes.

Even though Li Huowang wasn't sure what was happening, since the Muddled One appeared in front of him just like that, there was no way he was going to let her go.

After that, he cut out a strip of cloth from his red Daoist robe and used it to cover her eyes.

Surprisingly, when Li Huowang was covering her eyes, she did not try to struggle. Instead, all she did was stare at the words on the wall while screaming in fear.

"No! I didn't kill them! I don't know what happened to them, but I didn't kill them!"

Li Huowang used three strips of cloth to cover her eyes. He only let out a sigh of relief after he was done.

Li Huowang relaxed a bit before looking at Ji Xiang and the others. All of them were looking at him in surprise.

"Junior Er, how did you not get hidden by the Muddled One?"

Why did she just appear in front of you and allow herself to be captured?”

Li Huowang thought about Tuoba Danqing’s question for a moment, and then replied vaguely, “I don’t know. Probably luck.”

He actually knew that it might’ve been something to do with his status as a Strayed One, but he couldn’t really tell them that.

On the other hand, while Tuoba Danqing didn’t question it any further, he was still feeling puzzled.

What do you mean it was luck?!

At that moment, the Muddled One cried out once again, “NO! I didn’t kill them! I don’t know what happened to them, but I didn’t kill them!”

Li Huowang turned around and his pupils shrank from the shock.

The blindfold on the Muddled One’s eyes had disappeared and she was looking at the texts on the walls again.

Damn! Inanimate objects can’t cover her eyes! I need living objects.

“Li Sui, come out and help me!”

Following his call, two wriggling tentacles sprouted out from the wound on Li Huowang’s abdomen and wrapped around the Muddled One’s eyes. With this, everything finally quieted down.

Seeing that the Muddled One had really been captured this time around, Ji Xiang ran over and excitedly shook Li Huowang’s hands. “Er Jiu! Thank you so much! You’ve helped us a lot this time! Come and find me anytime you need help from me!”

“Lord Ji Xiang, there’s no need for that.” Li Huowang knew what Ji Xiang was talking about. Essentially Ji Xiang owed him one.

Even though it was unexpected, their objectives had been fulfilled and mission was finally over.

“It’s time to leave. The Surveillance Bureau is in urgent need of the Muddled One,” said Ji Xiang. He was much more anxious than the others.

Li Huowang nodded and carried the Muddled One on his back. As he did, he took one more glance at the wall.

My wife died. I threw her to the edge of the wall. Why are there so many corpses there?

As he read this, Li Huowang was puzzled and moved the pile of straw near the corner of the wall, only to reveal numerous corpses underneath the pile of straw.

“Why are there so many corpses? And all of them are women.” Even Shen Tugang was put off by what he saw.

Faced with this new discovery, everyone stopped.

“There are more texts on the wall,” said Tuoba Danqing as he read the texts aloud.

“These... These are all the Muddled One’s wives. There are more of them, but most of them were hidden away by him.”

“Wait, the Muddled One is a woman, so how could she have wives?”

“Let’s go, who cares if she had a wife or a husband,” said Ji Xiang, itching to go. Only when the Muddled One was delivered back to the capital would he be able to calm down. He couldn’t be bothered with figuring out whether the Muddled One was a guy or a girl.

But at that moment, Li Huowang, whose awareness was heightened, suddenly had a thought that caused his heart to drop. “Wait, what if there’s more than one Muddled One?”

As soon as he said that, everyone felt the atmosphere suddenly become heavier.

“Fuck! Why should we be afraid? Do you think I’m afraid of them? If it weren’t for the fact that they are very hard to find, I would’ve fought three of them at once!” Shen Tugang’s bellows snapped all of them back to reality.

“That’s right! Even if we can’t fight anymore, we still have junior Er Jiu. The Muddled One’s power is useless against him!”

Tuoba Danqing chuckled and patted Li Huowang's shoulder.

Soon, they made their way out of the village. However, even as they passed through the entrance, the other Muddled One still didn't make an appearance.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang took notice of Hong Da and realized that the man had been very quiet after he reappeared. "What's wrong, Hong Da? You've barely escaped death so why aren't you smiling?"

If it weren't for the fact that the Muddled One wanted to use him as a meat shield, Hong Da might've really been hidden away until the end of time.

Hong Da's lips were white as he tried to smile, but couldn't.

"There were so many people... So many of them..." His voice was hoarse.

"What do you mean 'a lot of people'?" asked Li Huowang.

Hong Da stared at the Muddled One on Li Huowang's back and said, "A Muddled One's karmic obstacle affect themselves even more than it affects the others. When I was hidden away by the Muddled One, I saw many of her enemies, but also a lot of her friends and family. They all told me that the Muddled One had hidden them away when they were facing danger. She hid all of them within her karmic obstacle.^[1] The Muddled One wanted to let them all out once it was safe, but... she forgot. She forgot everything. At first the Muddled One could still control her powers, but the older she got, the more she lost control of it. She hid her memories, her age, and even her gender. You could say that the Muddled One could become someone entirely different in just the next hour!"

1. It seems that Muddled Ones can hide people within a pocket dimension of their karmic obstacle. 🤔

Chapter 356 - Man

“It’s too horrible to be stuck inside...” Hong Da continued his story, “Those stuck within the karmic obstacle are neither alive nor dead. Even if they want to, they can’t change their condition. They can’t starve, and they can’t die from fatigue, but they still have to suffer the pain of hunger and fatigue. They are tormented by it at all times. You know, when I was hidden away by her karmic obstacle, her father told me that he didn’t hate his daughter. At the very least, the torture he felt was proof that his daughter was still alive.”

Hong Da sighed as he recalled his experience inside the Muddled One’s karmic obstacle; it had made him realize a lot of things.

Having heard all that, Li Huowang’s heart couldn’t remain calm either. He moved the Muddled One from his back to his arms and looked at her with a complicated look on his face.

“If only she could just remember... I’m sure that she wouldn’t want to torment her family and friends...”

The Muddled One’s life was pitiful. Her actions subjected those she saw to an eternal life of torment. Compared to her, Li Huowang’s status as a Strayed One was marginally better.

“Daoist, she’s so pitiful. We should let her go.” Monk’s illusion took pity on the Muddled One.

However Li Huowang sighed and shook his head. “No. Disregarding the fact that we need her to obtain information on the Sitting Oblivion Dao, if we let her go now, she would harm even more people. Do you want to do that?”

Even if she didn’t want to hurt people, a single glance from her was all it took to harm others. If his guess was right, the village had

once been filled with people, but now, everyone was gone, and it was most likely because of her.

Monk felt conflicted. He wanted to do good deeds, but when he was presented with a pair of choices that contradicted each other, he didn't know what to do.

At the same time, Li Huowang realized something. He had always questioned why the Surveillance Bureau would hunt down Strayed Ones with such prejudice, but after he saw the Muddled One's powers, he understood why.

Disregarding their ethics, by hunting down the Muddled One, they were indeed protecting the country and the life of everyone in it.

Just the existence of a Muddled One and a Strayed One was more than enough to wipe out an entire kingdom, and so it was natural for the Surveillance Bureau to hunt them down.

"Junior Er, who are you talking to?" Tuoba Danqing looked at Li Huowang, feeling puzzled.

Li Huowang blinked and patted his abdomen. "I'm talking to my Nascent Soul."

No one else spoke. All of them kept away their weapons and let down their guard. Shen Tugang even yawned and stretched his body.

Just as Li Huowang was about to leave the village, Tuoba Danqing, who was playing with two large walnuts, approached him before pulling him slightly backward and whispering anxiously, "Junior Er, let me give you a warning. Once Ji Xiang returns to the capital, if he doesn't summon us for a period of time, then we should run to Qing Qiu and hide there for a while. We could technically work there too."

Li Huowang was shocked.

Is he asking me to run?

"Senior Tuoba, do you know something?" asked Li Huowang.

Hearing this question, Tuoba Danqing sighed before pulling him to keep up with the others.

We already obtained the Muddled one, so Ji Xiang should be fine. If something happens to him, what about the information that he promised me as the reward?

Thinking back on the Muddled One's power, as well as Ji Xiang's anxiety, Li Huowang had a feeling that the reason why the Surveillance Bureau needed the Muddled One so badly was because they wanted to use her power for something grand.

But Li Huowang was just a rookie who had joined the Surveillance Bureau only recently. He had absolutely no idea what was happening with the higher-ups.

There was no reason for him to know that either; his rank was just way too low.

Li Huowang looked at Hong Da who was still in shock, before following Tuoba Danqing.

They continued to move swiftly and soon reached the entrance. At that moment, the white mist surrounding the village slowly dissipated and Liu Zongyuan appeared in front of them, still wearing the same wooden mask.

"Lord Ji Xiang, how is it? Did you succeed?" Liu Zongyuan looked at them excitedly.

"Little Liu, go and call for the horse carriage. I want to rest." said Ji Xiang. His pale face was disheveled and his voice weak.

"Since you guys are going back now, we will part ways here. I won't be returning to Yinling City. Erniu, remember that my debt to you has been cleared off now. Next time, I won't help you even if you grovel in front of me." Shen Tugang turned to leave.

When Li Huowang saw that he was leaving, he immediately stopped him. "Senior Shen, could I ask you a question?"

Shen Tugang frowned slightly as his thick eyebrows quivered but this time, he wasn't cussing. "Ask quickly. I still have urgent

work to do.”

Li Huowang looked at his drum and asked, “I’ve heard that Shamans are the slaves of the Immortal families, and that can never be free. However, you seemed to be free of them. Could you tell me why?”

Li Huowang had already noticed that Shen Tugang’s chants was extremely different from Bai Lingmiao’s. His chant did not respect the Immortal families but instead had a slightly threatening tone to them.

“Are you asking this for that girl from just now?” Shen Tugang instantly knew the reason behind his question.

Li Huowang nodded. He wanted to help Bai Lingmiao change her situation. Even if she could not escape their control, he wanted her to at the very least secure the initiative and not let Immortal families control the reins.

Shen Tugang nodded and whispered something to Li Huowang.

As he heard the secret, Li Huowang’s eyes grew wide; it was as if it was extremely impossible. “Is that how you do it?”

“Time for me to leave. I will treat you to a meal if I meet you again.” Shen Tugang smacked the wound on Li Huowang’s torso before leaving.

Just then, the horse carriage also arrived. Li Huowang snapped back to reality and rode the carriage.

Just as Li Huowang was thinking about the method Shen Tugang had just told him, Hong Zhong’s words shook him awake. “Li Huowang, wake up. Stop thinking about that for now. Why do you have an extra person in front of you?”

Hearing those words, Li Huowang looked up and saw a skinny man. As he looked at the skinny man, Li Huowang was on the verge of thinking he was not part of their crew.

However, Hong Da’s reaction was the strongest when he saw the skinny man, his eyes wide from shock. “HOW DID YOU GET

OUT?!”

The skinny man looked at them and quietly said, “I suddenly remembered that I’m a Muddled One. I had asked that woman to hide me in her karmic obstacle so that I can find my family, but then she forgot about me.”

Chapter 357 - Hidden

“KILL HIM!”

Everyone’s killing intent flared up as numerous weapons were hurled toward the skinny man.

Li Huowang was the first to react, and he was also the one that the skinny man took notice of first. The man looked at Li Huowang before disappearing.

The moment he disappeared, Li Huowang felt his chin go cold. His bronze coin veil has been hidden by the Muddled One!

Li Huowang reacted to it but now was not the time for him to think about it. He was in an extremely dangerous situation right now!

Blood surged into his brain as his body trembled. He looked at everyone around him. Ji Xiang, Hong Da, Tuoba Danqing, and Liu Zongyuan.

Fwoosh~

As he used his flint, Li Huowang felt his body being engulfed in flames, and a burning pain enveloped his body.

Kill them! They know that I’m a Strayed One now! I need to kill all of them and I must not let any of them escape!

Just as Li Huowang’s body started burning, Liu Zongyuan’s body shriveled up into a ball and escaped into the forest.

He wasn’t sure who did it, but at that moment, Li Huowang felt a strong force sending him flying backward.

As he was flying through the air, the burning Li Huowang bellowed and crushed his left eye, instantly covering everyone in an eerie light.

Seeing this, Ji Xiang grabbed the wish wood and pointed it at Li Huowang, only to realize that there was no effect.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang took out his sword as he prepared to chop off his own left arm.

“Er Jiu! What are you doing?!” A giant white impermanence shouted from within the forest.

“Stop wasting your breath! He’s being controlled!” Hong Da was very haggard as he stabbed himself with a rusted blade.

However, his words were enough to snap Li Huowang out of it. He looked at them in disbelief.

Wait, they can’t see that I’m a Strayed One?

At that moment, Li Huowang suddenly recalled one specific item.

He remembered the spindle that Zhuge Yuan had given him. Back then, Zhuge Yuan had pointed at his bronze coin veil and said that the spindle would be much more effective compared to his bronze coin veil.

It was only now that Li Huowang understood what he had meant at that point in time.

The reason why they didn’t know he was a Strayed One was because of the spindle that Zhuge Yuan had given to him.

Li Huowang looked down and saw that his bag of torture tools was also burning. The bag had almost been destroyed by the fire.

I can’t let it drop from my body.

With this in mind, Li Huowang quickly took the spindle out of the bag.

But then he realized a problem. He needed to place it somewhere safe on him, but he didn’t even have his own skin, much less a pocket.

After a moment of thought, he finally decided to tear open a section of his flesh before placing the spindle inside his abdomen.

Once done, he slowly approached everyone. “Guys, it’s fine. I just defeated the Daoist that tried to take control of me.”

“Stop there!” Ji Xiang was still in shock as he pointed his

golden abacus at the fiery Li Huowang. "I don't care if you are awake or not, just stand there!"

When they saw Li Huowang just standing there quietly as told, Ji Xiang discussed something with Liu Zongyuan and Hong Da.

Li Huowang wasn't sure what they were discussing, and so he grew more and more concerned about how to put out the fire on his body.

He suddenly thought about a method and pulled out the Profound Records that was embedded within his body.

Once the Profound Record was thrown onto the ground, the raging fire on Li Huowang's body was soon snuffed out.

At this point, since it had only been a short time since he set himself on fire, Li Huowang still had some of his skin remaining intact. Even so, Li Huowang looked like a candle that had just started to melt.

While this was still painful, it was much better than when he had been nearly completely burnt into charcoal.

"Thankfully I brought some spare clothes."

Just as he thought this, Li Huowang looked back and saw that the carriage was on fire.

"Sigh." Li Huowang had nothing to say as he used the Fiery Scripture to heal himself.

As the wax crawled across his skin, Li Huowang remembered Zhuge Yuan.

Not only did he see through my identity and not capture me, he even gave me the spindle to help hide myself. Is his kindness real?

A warm feeling appeared in Li Huowang's heart.

Li Huowang suddenly felt like he wanted to meet Zhuge Yuan again. There were many things he wanted to discuss with him.

"Er Jiu."

Li Huowang turned around and saw the three of them approaching him. They had finished their discussion.

“Er Jiu, could you determine who it was that tried to take control of you just now?” Ji Xiang’s tone was serious.

“Yeah, I saw a bald Daoist trying to harm me.” Li Huowang flat out lied.

“Hmm...” Ji Xiang thought about it for a moment, before sighing. “Fine, let’s go back. We can talk about it later.”

Once everyone agreed all of them started walking on the dirt path.

However, they still didn’t trust Li Huowang as they surrounded him.

They had just taken two steps when Li Huowang stopped and asked them. “Wait, do any of you remember what our mission was?”

Hong Da was also curious and looked at Ji Xiang. “I only remembered that Ji Xiang summoned us, but not anything else.”

“I was also summoned by Ji Xiang. Lord Ji Xiang, what is our mission this time?” Liu Zongyuan asked.

Li Huowang also looked at Ji Xiang. He too remembered nothing else besides the fact that Ji Xiang had called for them. Ji Xiang had promised him that once the mission was over, he would give Li Huowang the information about the Sitting Oblivion Dao. Without such a reward, Li Huowang would have never accepted a mission with such vague details and rewards.

With the three of them staring at him, Ji Xiang became serious as he wiped the ashes off his face. He was thinking hard.

“I... I can’t remember.” Ji Xiang was unsure. “Why did I call the two of you again?”

Hearing this, Li Huowang and Hong Da looked at each other. They didn’t know why either. Ji Xiang called both of them out, but forgot why he had even summoned them in the first place.

Are the superiors all this frivolous?

“Never mind that. Let’s first find a village and we can discuss

from there later on. Now that we don't have a carriage, we need to walk faster or we will have to camp outside tonight," said Ji Xiang.

Li Huowang and Hong Da also stopped hesitating and picked up their pace when they saw the weather.

Chapter 358 - Main Deity And Second Deity

“Wear this. You look ugly being naked.” Hong Da gave Li Huowang his smelly robes.

Li Huowang thanked him and wore the robe with all of the rusted blades inside of it.

Just as he was about to put his arms into the sleeves, Li Huowang saw his own wounded forearm. There was something written on his skin, but the words were burned and had melted into each other.

“Hm? What is this?” Li Huowang placed his arm down as he wore the robe.

As he was about to catch up to them, Li Huowang suddenly stopped. “Wait! Something’s not right!”

Li Huowang quickly rolled the sleeves up and looked at the melted wound. Then, he used a dagger and cut open the wound on his forearm.

He slowly pulled the skin away, revealing his muscles and tendons.

Because of how deeply he had etched the words into his forearm, the words were still visible on his muscles.

When he saw what he had written, he quickly shouted at Ji Xiang. “It’s the Muddled One!”

As soon as he heard that, Ji Xiang’s face also lit up. “I remember now! We were here to help me catch the Muddled One!”

The three of them immediately grew serious as the atmosphere became heavy.

“The Muddled One has escaped and they are hiding away our

memories!” said Li Huowang as he unsheathed his black-tassel sword and looked around carefully.

“It might not just be our memories. The Muddled One may have hidden someone else too. It’s just that we can’t remember them anymore. Careful not to look into his eyes.” Ji Xiang used his abacus as he started calculating something.

Soon, the sound of clicking stopped. Three out of the five beads had shot upward.

“Three people. The Muddled One has hidden three people.”

Ji Xiang’s words made Li Huowang and Hong Da’s scalps go numb. They had already lost three people without them even knowing.

Li Huowang quickly etched the new information onto his arm so that he would not forget it again. That way, the Muddled One’s powers would be less effective.

“Let me try to force them out of hiding. Protect me!” Ji Xiang placed his abacus onto the ground and started smacking on it.

Seeing this, Hong Da cautiously walked over and placed his rusted blades around Ji Xiang. The rusted blades were all pointed inward and resembled a lotus.

On the other hand, since Li Huowang could not do anything, he just waited there cautiously.

Time slowly passed and Ji Xiang used his powers again. Once again, the concept of ‘numbers’ was affected. However, it wasn’t very effective this time around. Even though Ji Xiang was drenched in sweat, the Muddled One still didn’t show up.

Suddenly, Li Huowang growled as he looked around. When he looked down, he realized that there were more sentences etched on his arm.

It was his own handwriting. It was just that thanks to the Muddled One, he had lost his memories of etching them onto his skin. He had forgotten when he wrote it.

Ji Xiang's method is working, but it's weak. We need to use our hearing and fast! The Muddled One has hidden not only Tuoba Danqing and Liu Zongyuan, but also Miaomiao! Earlier, the Second Deity hadn't left and secretly brought over Miaomiao to help us. We need to save them; we must not let them become like the Muddled One's family!

As he read the sentences etched into his own palm, Li Huowang's body trembled as goosebumps covered his skin.

Li Huowang didn't hesitate in the slightest as he took out the cotton from inside his ears and used his sharp hearing to scan the environment. At first, Li Huowang almost fainted from the explosive sounds. The sound of the abacus exploded incessantly in his ears.

"Daddy! It hurts! It's too loud!"

"Endure it! Just endure it! We need to save your mother!" Li Huowang gritted his teeth and closed his eyes. He needed to focus.

While it was very loud initially, he soon calmed himself down enough to be able to hear other voices.

"Uncle... Crazy..."

"No, not that," Li Huowang bit his lips and pressed onto his own head.

He continued to differentiate more and more sounds before he finally heard the sound of footsteps appearing and disappearing somewhere.

"It's... here!" Li Huowang opened his eyes and slashed at a tree behind him.

The massive tree was cut in half and a skinny man appeared from behind it.

At that moment, the Muddled One used his eyes and looked at Li Huowang, hiding away the black-tassel sword.

"Are you trying to pull off the same trick again?" asked Li Huowang as he stabbed his arms into his abdomen before breaking off two more ribs.

With the sound of Li Huowang stabbing his own ribs into his

torso, both the Muddled One and Li Huowang bent over from the pain as they started howling in pain.

Enduring his pain, Li Huowang started running toward the Muddled One.

Seeing this, the Muddled One glared at Li Huowang. However, he realized too late that his ability did not work on the other party.

By the time the Muddled One realized what was happening, Li Huowang was just meters away from him. At the same time, Li Sui's tentacles were already wriggling in the air, ready to cover the Muddled One's eyes.

However, faced with this dangerous situation, the Muddled One did not panic and just waved his left arm.

Suddenly, a figure appeared and flew toward Li Huowang, it was Tuoba Danqing!

Then, another figure flew out as well. This time, it was Liu Zongyuan!

When the third person flew out, Li Huowang felt his heart become lighter, because he saw that it was Miaomiao.

Without waiting for the Muddled One to do anything else, Li Huowang stretched open his arms unconsciously and caught Bai Lingmiao.

As he caught her, they looked at each other. Even though they didn't exchange a single word, their eyes conveyed a lot of emotions.

After a moment, Li Huowang placed her down but she suddenly disappeared once again.

The Muddled One had hidden her once more!

"Muddled One!" Li Huowang roared and chased him down.

As Li Huowang once again closed in on him, the Muddled One threw another figure at Li Huowang. This time it was the Second Deity.

Just like that, the items hidden by the Muddled One were

thrown out again and again like stones.

Various items appeared and were hidden away over and over.

Compared to the female Muddled One, this male Muddled One was much more well versed in the use of his powers.

Li Huowang knew he couldn't drag this out any longer or Ji Xiang would collapse. Once Ji Xiang collapsed from fatigue, it would be extremely hard to flush out the Muddled One.

And so, Li Huowang needed a plan.

When he saw the two girls being thrown out once again, Li Huowang quickly winked at them.

When she saw this, Bai Lingmiao nodded.

Soon, Bai Lingmiao and the Second Deity disappeared again.

When the Muddled One once again started throwing out various items, they appeared once more.

At the same time, Li Huowang stabbed his arms into his torso and twisted his ribs, causing the Muddled One to bend down in pain.

At that moment, the Second Deity turned in the air and kicked Bai Lingmiao's feet, launching her toward the Muddled One.

Bai Lingmiao used the force and flew directly toward the Muddled One. Along the way, she reached out and grabbed the sword beside her.

"WAIT, DON'T TAKE THAT!" Li Huowang shouted to stop her.

That was his black-tassel sword!

Bai Lingmiao also knew she shouldn't take that, but there was no other choice.

Just as the Muddled One finally managed to resist the pain to raise his head, a sword pierced into his forehead.

Everything became quiet when the Muddled One died.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang's eyes were wide as he stared at Bai Lingmiao holding onto the black-tassel sword.

"Hehe."

Bai Lingmiao suddenly started chuckling, her body bent slightly forward. At the same time, the Second Deity also started laughing. Gradually, their laughter grew louder and louder.

“HAHAHAHA!”

Chapter 359 - Change

Bai Lingmiao laughed. She laughed hard, almost as if she was venting everything inside her heart.

Even after spending so much time with her, Li Huowang had never seen Bai Lingmiao act like that.

“Quick! Return the sword!” Li Huowang hobbled towards Bai Lingmiao.

But when Li Huowang approached her, he saw the white-haired girl suddenly raise her arm and stab the sword toward his torso. She tore open his torso and revealed Li Huowang’s heart into the cold air.

Then, Bai Lingmiao walked over and hugged him, his blood staining her clothes red.

“Aaaa~” At that moment, Bai Lingmiao's face had an expression of relief.

Li Huowang wanted to say something to Bai Lingmiao, but she kissed him first.

After a few breaths, she moved backward and looked at him, her lips inching upward as she laughed.

On the other hand, Li Huowang's hands were trembling as he held her face. He felt extremely conflicted about the current situation. “Miaomiao, let’s stop. Alright?”

It was just like what happened to Lu Xiucan; the black-tassel sword’s murderous aura had transformed Bai Lingmiao’s behavior.

Hearing Li Huowang’s words, Bai Lingmiao slowly calmed down and returned back to the gentle girl she was as she spoke in a sheepish voice, “Senior Li, is this how you want me to be?”

However, when she saw the ray of hope in Li Huowang’s eyes, Bai Lingmiao’s shy expression immediately changed into one of

excitement. “Hahaha! Impossible! Dream on! I will never return to my introverted self! I’ve seen many things and I don’t want to take care of all of them! I finally feel free! If I knew how nice it was to be free of such thoughts, then I would’ve touched your sword much earlier! Plus, look at you and me! We are now much more compatible! Hahahaha!”

While she was shouting, some of the features of the Immortal families, such as hairy ears or snake scales, appeared intermittently on her face.

As he heard those words, Li Huowang trembled from the pain, both physical and mental. In the end, he just hugged her gently. “Miaomiao, I’m sorry.”

Finally in his embrace, Bai Lingmiao closed her eyes and felt a sense of euphoria from smelling the stench of blood on him. “Li Huowang, you can return to the village now. Everyone’s waiting for you.”

Li Huowang released her and looked at her strange yet familiar face. He struggled a bit before saying, “Don’t worry. I will find a way to turn you back. This is my fault.”

However, as soon as he said that, Bai Lingmiao snarled and shoved her thin arm into his chest before grabbing his heart.

“Did you not hear what I said? I said that I love this feeling of freedom! How dare you try to dictate what kind of person I can or cannot be?” Bai Lingmiao raised one of her sharp fingernails as gently poked a hole in his heart.

At that moment, several tentacles sprouted out from within Li Huowang’s abdomen and entangled Bai Lingmiao’s arm, no longer letting her harm Li Huowang.

“Li Sui, don’t do that.”

Only after Li Huowang’s command did Li Sui’s tentacle retreat.

Bai Lingmiao chuckled as she removed her arm from his chest before using his robes to wipe off the blood of her hands. Once she’s

done with that, she hugged him tightly, almost like a long-lost lover.

Even though they looked like they were deeply in love, her words were anything but lovely. “Don’t think that I will keep relying on you all my life. We aren’t even married yet. I’m a living human, not an accessory to you.”

Li Huowang looked at her with a complicated look in his eyes. He was not as easily startled as before. Since it had happened, he was thinking about how to reverse this change.

While they were talking and hugging each other, the others caught up to them. They saw the Muddled One’s corpse on the ground and sighed before turning to look at Bai Lingmiao.

Bai Lingmiao was not afraid of them and glared right back.

“Junior Er, as the saying goes, one should get a kind and gentle wife. Your wife is very hot-tempered. If both of you stay together, then your house is bound to never get an ounce of peace,” Tuoba Danqing advised Li Huowang based on his past experiences.

Hearing those words, Bai Lingmiao was about to say something but Li Huowang stopped her.

At the same time, Ji Xiang also felt that this was not a good time for this. “Danqing, now’s not the time to talk about this. Let’s go back. I’m very tired.”

After using his power for so long, Ji Xiang was so weak that he could fall over at any moment. He could barely stand up, let alone walk.

Meanwhile, as Li Huowang was being supported by Bai Lingmiao, he recalled the past moments he had shared with her.

Since Bai Lingmiao became like this due to me, I will definitely find a way to bring her back!

Li Huowang swore adamantly in his heart. He was already doing what other Strayed Ones could only dream of achieving. By comparison, dispelling the murderous aura from her body was just a

minor issue.

As his thoughts reached this point, Li Huowang looked at the people around him. Compared to the last time, when he was all alone and had to do everything by himself, this time around, he might be able to get some help from the people around him.

But right now, Bai Lingmiao was beside him, and so he couldn't ask for their help.

On the way back, no one spoke. All of them were busy thinking about their own issues.

Due to their fatigue and the accident from earlier, they failed to reach a village before nightfall. However, they didn't complain and just found some firewood to light up a bonfire and rest.

That night, Bai Lingmiao and Li Huowang slept while cuddling.

Li Huowang had not felt such comfort in a long time.

However, neither of them could fall asleep. Under the illumination of the bonfire, the two of them just stared at each other.

When she saw Li Huowang staring at her, Bai Lingmiao smirked as she slyly whispered into his ears, "Why are you staring at me like that? Are you still thinking about having sex even though you are injured so badly?"

Hearing this, Li Huowang sighed and hugged her closer.

In response, Bai Lingmiao tore open his torso and put her face into his chest cavity before kissing his heart. "Relax, I'm still the same Bai Lingmiao who will die fighting with you. I will never forget what you did for me throughout our travels. None of that will change. The only thing that has changed is the way I think."

"But you still changed." Li Huowang's voice was filled with self-loathing and defeat.

"Oh? Do you dare say that you did not change at all throughout our journey? In fact, weren't you the one who changed the most?"

“I changed?” Li Huowang shook his head. “No, I did not. I’m still Li Huowang.”

“Are you lying to yourself?” Bai Lingmiao rolled her eyes. “You’ve changed much more than me. The past Li Huowang would never chop off his fingers or gouge out his eyeballs without hesitation.”

“Are you saying that the past me is the real Li Huowang while the present me is not?” asked Li Huowang.

Chapter 360 - It'S Over

Li Huowang continued to listen to Bai Lingmiao as they cuddled near the bonfire.

“Hah, listen to yourself! Maybe I’m in the same situation as you. I was Bai Lingmiao in the past, and I’m still the same Bai Lingmiao in the present. In fact, I’m a better Bai Lingmiao now!” As she said this, her eyes shone with a mysterious light.

“Also, don’t forget that you are the one that killed my entire family,” added Bai Lingmiao.

As soon as he heard those words, Li Huowang felt his body go numb.

“I had always been struggling in the past, not being able to choose a side. I can’t forgive you, but I couldn’t let go of my family. However, I’m different now. Now that I know that they were from the White Lotus Sect, and what they were trying to do to you, I can only say that you did not kill them thoughtlessly. In that situation, it was either them killing you or you killing them. See, I can think much more clearly now. No more hesitations, no more pain!”

Li Huowang looked at the unfamiliar Bai Lingmiao, her words making him realize that she had become another person altogether.

If he had to compare her to someone, then she was definitely similar to Peng Longteng.

Bai Lingmiao’s actions and choice of words were very similar to Peng Longteng’s, and he didn’t want that.

Just then, a soft body gently hugged him from behind as a forked tongue slid past his ears.

When he realized that it was the Second Deity, he immediately stood up, surprising both of them.

At the same time, Li Huowang’s sudden actions attracted

everyone's else's attention as well.

In the end, he forced a smile as he looked at them. "I'm going to the toilet."

Then, he looked at Ji Xiang and pointed at the dark forest to the side before walking into it.

Soon, Ji Xiang also entered the forest. When he looked at Li Huowang, he revealed a bright smile.

"Er Jiu, is something wrong? You can tell me and I will definitely help you if I can."

Li Huowang's actions just now had been very clear. If Ji Xiang couldn't even recognize such a simple message, then he might as well gouge his own eyes out.

After thinking about what Bai Lingmiao had said to him just now, Li Huowang carefully asked Ji Xiang, "Lord Ji Xiang, are there any methods to dispel the murderous aura that enters one body from a soldier's weapon?"

The current Bai Lingmiao was not the one from his memories. Even if he knew that she would never forgive him, he still needed to change her back.

"Murderous aura entering the body? You are going to need to ask the military for that. I'm not quite sure either," replied Ji Xiang.

After a moment of thought, Li Huowang asked a different question, "Lord Ji Xiang, do you know anyone from the military within the Liang Kingdom? Could you recommend me to someone?"

Ji Xiang glanced at the fireplace. "Sure, I can do that."

If it wasn't for Li Huowang, all of them would be dead. By comparison, this was a simple request.

Of course, he would just be referring Li Huowang to someone. As for why Li Huowang needed to find someone in the military, Ji Xiang avoided prying too much.

After agreeing to Li Huowang's request, Ji Xiang recalled the dangerous encounter just now. "Thankfully the mission is over for

now. I will see if I can bribe my superiors so that I can be dispatched to a place that's not as dangerous. The missions within the Surveillance Bureau are inhumane."

"Thank you, Lord Ji Xiang." Li Huowang thanked him.

He didn't care about whether or not he would succeed, but Li Huowang would definitely work hard to restore Bai Lingmiao back to how she was.

"Alright, are there any other matters? If not, let's go back. We still need to travel tomorrow morning," asked Ju Xiang.

Just as Ji Xiang was just about to leave, both he and Li Huowang turned to look into the forest at the same time.

"Someone's there!"

It was already night and they were in the wilderness. Thus, it was clearly unnatural to have someone looking at them.

Li Huowang immediately pulled out two talismans that he had drawn with his own blood and slapped them onto his knees before running toward the direction of the gaze.

On the other hand, Ji Xiang stood where he was for a moment, before running back to the bonfire. He needed to look after the dead Muddled One to make sure that no one tried to steal it.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang weaved through the darkness of the forest as he approached his target.

When he saw that the other person was still running, Li Huowang immediately chopped off one of his fingertips.

The bone in his fingertip exploded outward and shot toward that person.

Soon, the bone bullet landed a hit and Li Huowang managed to catch up, finally allowing him to see who it was.

It was similar to a human, but it was very skinny and short. The skin on the person seemed to be supported by its skeleton. Its eyes were large and fish-like, as if they could fall off at any moment. Its mouth was caved in and there were very few teeth left

inside.

As he looked at it, Li Huowang wasn't sure if this being was a human or an evil being.

At the same time, the thing was not afraid of Li Huowang's weapon, and just stared at it with a stupid gaze.

Shit! Is this a distraction?

Li Huowang broke the limbs of the being before carrying it back to the bonfire.

When he arrived back at the bonfire and saw that everyone was still there, including the Muddled One's corpse, he sighed in relief.

"Lord Ji Xiang, do you recognize this thing? It was the being that was staring at us in the forest." Li Huowang raised the thing up.

"Oh?"

Just as Ji Xiang was about to inspect it, a blood-curdling cry came from behind him.

Li Huowang turned and saw that it was Hong Da.

Hong Da was staring at the being with extreme fear. "That thing... That's a human that was hidden by a Muddled One! If the Muddled One did not release it back to reality, then... that means..."

In the next moment, Hong Da suddenly grabbed some soil and munched on it, as if he was possessed. The fear in his eyes deepened.

"There's no taste! Nothing! I can't swallow it either! WE ARE TRAPPED IN A MUDDLED ONE'S KARMIC OBSTACLE! We have been hidden by it without us even realizing!"

Hearing this, everyone felt their heart drop as they looked toward the dark forest.

Suddenly, Ji Xiang ran up and shouted. "Stop spouting bullshit! The Muddled One we were trying to catch is dead! A dead Muddled One can't hide us! Or are you trying to tell me that there's another

one?”

Hearing this, Li Huowang felt his heart skip a beat. “Lord Ji Xiang, there’s indeed another one! The female Muddled One!”

“What are you talking about? A female Muddled One? Wasn’t there only one?”

Everyone looked at Li Huowang and thought that he had remembered wrongly.

But when Li Huowang saw the words that were etched onto his arm, he shook his head. His memories were still intact. It was just that everyone had forgotten.

“No! We were here to capture the female Muddled One, not the male!” declared Li Huowang.

“Then where is the female Muddled One?” Ji Xiang’s voice was shrill, cold sweat pouring down his face.

Li Huowang pointed at the corpse on the ground. “She’s probably hidden within his karmic obstacle.”

Hearing this, Ji Xiang’s face paled, the blood draining from his face. His legs went limp as he crumpled onto the ground.

“A dead and a live Muddled One touched each other. The dead one is hidden within the live, and the live one is hidden within the dead. We are fucked! It’s over! We are done for!”

Chapter 361 - Yin And Yang

Li Huowang's face was unusually grim as he watched the collapsed Ji Xiang before him.

He remembered that Ji Xiang had mentioned that the male Muddled One was dead, but the female Muddled One was still alive. Even Zhuge Yuan couldn't possibly handle them together.

Li Huowang wasn't sure of Zhuge Yuan's true strength, but he knew one thing for sure: he was in deep trouble.

"Huowang, what happened to this eunuch?" Bai Lingmiao asked, looking around vigilantly, clearly unaware of the severity of their current situation.

Li Huowang took a deep breath and suppressed the strong unease in his heart. Whether he would live or die didn't matter to him; what mattered to him was that Bai Lingmiao couldn't get involved!

Li Huowang helped Ji Xiang up before saying with urgency, "Lord Ji Xiang! Do not be discouraged; we can still fix this! Just think about the fact that others in the bureau have survived something similar to our current situation!"

Ji Xiang looked back at Li Huowang with despair written on his face. "You don't understand. It's impossible to survive this!"

Just as Li Huowang was about to reply, gazes from all directions made him grip his sword tightly. A group of people emerged slowly from the woods, all with the exact same appearance as the creature Li Huowang had captured.

They were hunchbacks with large bellies swaying as they stared at Li Huowang and his group with their bulging fish-like

eyes.

“There are newcomers again? Great!”

“That girl looks pretty, hehe...”

“Yes, and she has a pretty big butt.”

Li Huowang's expression turned fierce at the hunchbacks' remarks. He brandished his bronze coin sword and tugged at the red threads, swinging it like a whip toward the hunchbacks. However, the hunchbacks didn't avoid Li Huowang's attack and chose to take it with their thin bodies. The sharp bronze coins sliced through the hunchbacks as if it were a hot knife slicing through butter.

The hunchbacks seemed indifferent to their injuries, squirming on the ground.

“We're in no rush, and we're not going to do anything. We're just going to wait.”

“We'll wait one, two, or perhaps even three years until you become just like us.”

Li Huowang felt a shiver down their spine at the hunchbacks' words. These hunchbacks were no longer humans. They had long forgotten themselves and became monsters themselves after the Muddled Ones had spirited them away.

Li Huowang cursed inwardly and ignored the hunchbacks to lift Ji Xiang off of the ground. “Lord Ji Xiang, this is nothing, really! We're trapped, but that's it! Anyway, just think about the people waiting for you to go back home!”

Ji Xiang's eyes stirred, seemingly recalling something.

The fear and despair in Ji Xiang's eyes vanished as he said, “Yes, she's still waiting for me at home! I'm going to bring her back to the village, and I'm going to resign!”

Li Huowang breathed a sigh of relief. “Now that you've calmed down, Lord Ji Xiang. Can you start thinking of a way to get us out of here?”

Ji Xiang tried to stay composed by patting his cheeks vigorously while in deep contemplation. Moments later, Ji Xiang looked up and said, "One of the Muddled Ones is alive while the other is dead. The karmic obstacles in their bodies are coincidentally Yin and Yang. The Yin and Yang have blended, so we can't escape.

"We must find the living female Muddled One to escape!"

Ji Xiang became more and more composed and articulate as he continued, "Yes, that's right! We have to find the female Muddled One! We might be able to live if we kill her!"

At Ji Xiang's remark, everyone set everything aside and made a mad dash into the forest to find the so-called female Muddled One. The scenery around them peeled away as Li Huowang led Bai Lingmiao through the forest.

"Huowang, what's going on with this damned place? I've been beating the drum for quite a while now, but I still can't get any response from the Immortal families," Bai Lingmiao said, sounding frustrated.

Li Huowang wasn't surprised to hear Bai Lingmiao's remark. He knew those low-level Immortals wouldn't be helpful to them at all.

"This is like looking for a needle in a haystack. It seems that we have to use talismans and divination to aid us in our search," Li Huowang said, but he quickly realized that he had run out of yellow paper.

"Do you have any yellow paper on you?" Li Huowang asked Bai Lingmiao.

Bai Lingmiao pondered briefly before pulling out a tiny paper horse folded with yellow paper. "I use this as a Shaman. Try it out."

Li Huowang accepted the yellow paper and unfolded it. Then, he looked around and dashed toward a man peeking at them behind a tree. Soon, Li Huowang returned with a bloody skull, and he immediately started his divination.

Li Huowang swept his gaze across the divination symbols. Moments later, he tossed the skull away and continued his search. Divination was usually reliable, but it was ineffective this time. Li Huowang had tried his best, but he couldn't find any reliable information from the divination symbols.

Li Huowang continued the search with Bai Lingmiao until Tuoba Danqing found them a day later.

"Come here, quick! Hong Da has already found it!" Tuoba Danqing exclaimed. Li Huowang regrouped with Tuoba Danqing, and the three ignored their exhaustion to return to where they had come from.

Upon regrouping with the others, Tuoba Danqing immediately got to work as he ruthlessly twisted the female Muddled One's head and hurled it to the ground.

Li Huowang's heart tightened as he looked around; as always, he still couldn't see anything other than darkness. The group waited for quite a while but found no changes whatsoever. Those who had been spirited away were still here.

"What's going on?" Li Huowang asked incredulously.

Just then, the bloody head of the female Muddled One moved and rolled slowly toward its body. The female Muddled One's head remained glazed, clearly lifeless, but she was undeniably alive.

A peal of jeering laughter echoed from all around them.

"*Hahaha!* You actually tried to kill her? It seems that you people have no idea that no one can die here."

"Do you really think that we don't want to die? We want to die, too! Living forever like this is scarier than death!"

The hunchbacks' words sent a chill down everyone's spine.

They had to kill the female Muddled One for them to escape, but no one could die here!

Just then, Bai Lingmiao pulled out Li Huowang's purple-tassel sword and slashed out, targeting Hong Da's neck. Hong Da bled

profusely, but he didn't look like he was going to die.

Everyone understood their predicament just then—they were in an unresolvable deadlock.

Ji Xiang became downcast. He opened his mouth to say something, but a fist struck him right in the face.

"This is all your fault, you damn eunuch! If you hadn't brought us here to catch a Muddled One, this wouldn't have happened to us!" Tuoba Danqing roared, abandoning his sunny demeanor as well as any respect he had for his superior as he rained down punches and kicks upon Ji Xiang.

Chapter 362 - Plan

Tuoba Danqing had a complete mental breakdown, and everyone else was in bad shape as well. Liu Zongyuan fell to the ground on all fours, pounding his fists in frustration. Hong Da stood frozen in place, staring blankly into space.

Despair enveloped everyone, and the incessant jeering laughter of those who could never die became a cacophonous din. It seemed that nothing would make a difference at this point, and even death was already a luxury they could only wish for.

However, Li Huowang was different. After experiencing a variety of hardships, he developed a will that was seldom defeated by any difficulties.

Li Huowang looked around, and his gaze landed on Bai Lingmiao, whose expression was particularly fierce. Li Huowang's voice was trembling as he said, "Don't worry, I'm here. No one can harm you with me around!"

The Second Deity approached Li Huowang from behind and leaned gently on Li Huowang's back. Surprisingly, Li Huowang didn't show any negative reaction.

"Do you have a plan?" the Second Deity asked.

Bai Lingmiao looked up at Li Huowang before her. Their situation was so dire that she found it hard to believe that Li Huowang could possibly have a plan.

However, Li Huowang nodded and stared at the pitch-black dome above them. He smiled bitterly, saying, "The Immortal families can't enter this place, but there's an entity that can definitely come here."

"Who?"

"Ba-Hui—Baiyu Capital's Ba-Hui!"

Li Huowang had been to Baiyu Capital before. Even a Muddled One that had blended life and death was paltry before an entity that others dared not even imagine. Li Huowang contemplated for a while before saying, "I'm going to use the Cang-Qiang Ascension and Ba-Hui's Shou San to break this deadlock."

Li Huowang's plan seemed to be the only plan with the highest chance of success.

Bai Lingmiao's heart skipped a beat; she could still remember Li Huowang's words.

"Isn't that..." Bai Lingmiao trailed off.

"Yes, that's right," said Li Huowang before turning to look at Tuoba Danqing, who was busy creating new holes in Ji Xiang. Li Huowang then led Bai Lingmiao toward the dense forest.

The others didn't even bother following Li Huowang; perhaps it was because they didn't care where he was going, or perhaps they no longer cared about everything.

"The Cang-Qiang Ascension requires the dual suffering of the mind and body. Extreme physical pain is easy, but it's going to be difficult to find extreme mental suffering—" Li Huowang stopped upon recalling something. His eyes showed a hint of hesitation that he immediately suppressed.

Bai Lingmiao saw that and trembled, but she sounded decisive as she said, "Tell me, what do you need me to do? I can endure everything."

Li Huowang shook his head, and his lips quivered as he said, "I don't need you to do anything. I just need you to keep an eye on me because... I have to enter the hallucination to find—"

Li Huowang's eyes glimmered in intense struggle, but it was soon replaced by the light of determination the moment his gaze landed on Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang wasn't an ordinary person. He was a Strayed One. If the Muddled Ones could use their abilities, then he could

definitely use his own abilities as well.

It would be the same as his first Cang-Qiang Ascension. He just had to do something in the hallucination, and that side would definitely inflict the utmost mental agony on him.

Li Huowang examined the young woman before him carefully as the two of them stood in the depths of the dark, desolate, and dense forest.

“Don’t worry; I’m going to save you from this predicament, just like back in Zephyr Temple.”

“No! You have to think of another way!” exclaimed Bai Lingmiao, rejecting his plan.

However, Li Huowang had no intention of listening to her at all.

“Li Sui, come out. I want you to be obedient and stay with your mother. I’ll be back soon,” Li Huowang muttered, and black tentacles abruptly emerged from his chest before transforming into a squirming cluster of tentacles.

“Miaomiao, don’t be afraid; this is my son,” Li Huowang explained.

This was Bai Lingmiao's first time seeing Li Sui.

"What did you say?" Bai Lingmiao’s eyes widened as she stared at the terrifying monster before her. “T-this is your son? Who's the mother?”

Li Huowang chuckled, but he didn't explain anything. He didn't have the luxury to explain as the surroundings were changing.

“Wait for me. Stand back a bit farther away, so you won’t get hurt. We can't die here, but it's still going to hurt.

Li Huowang's surroundings were melting, but the ongoing changes had become much slower than before. Eventually, Li Huowang found himself in that dark and filthy cave under the bridge.

Li Huowang looked around and took in the familiar sight for a

while. Then, he stood up and rushed to the nearby riverbank to wash his face. Li Huowang stared at himself on the water's surface.

Miaomiao is waiting for me. I need to use the hallucination to find the extreme mental suffering necessary to save her! Li Huowang thought, seemingly hypnotizing himself. Li Huowang repeated it thrice before standing up. Then, he started pondering how he could accomplish his goals. However, it didn't take Li Huowang that long to receive an answer to his question. He knew just what to achieve extreme mental suffering.

Just then, Li Huowang heard footsteps outside.

Huanhuan soon appeared in Li Huowang's line of sight; she was holding a basket of steamed buns.

Huanhuan grinned upon seeing Li Huowang. "Uncle, you're awake again?"

Extreme pain and extreme mental suffering. It doesn't matter. This is all fake. Everything here is just a hallucination. Li Huowang thought as he looked around. Then, he picked up a rope from the ground and started walking toward Huanhuan.

This must be fake. Otherwise, how could this kid appear so soon when I've just returned? Yes, this must be fake. There's no need for me to hesitate. Li Huowang loomed over Huanhuan, and his right hand holding the rope trembled violently.

"Uncle?" Huanhuan muttered fearfully, taking a step back. The uncle before her seemed to have become a bit different from before.

Just then, Li Huowang deflated like a balloon and slowly exhaled all the air from his lungs.

No, this is wrong. Li Huowang turned around; his teeth chattered as he gnashed them amidst his inner turmoil. *She's not going to be enough. It hasn't been that long since I've met her, so even if I kill her, the mental suffering I'll experience will not be enough. More... I need so much more than her!*

Li Huowang knelt and wrote two names on the ground—Yang

Na and Sun Xiaoqin. Li Huowang's eyes filled with fear as he stared at the two names on the ground, and he even started trembling in trepidation.

This is just a hallucination—a hallucination! I transmigrated a long time ago! This isn't real!

Li Huowang raised his trembling hands, but he retracted them quickly as if he had been electrocuted. All of a sudden, Li Huowang grabbed a rock on the ground and slammed it on his own head.

Blood flowed from the wound on his head, but it wasn't enough. He smashed it on his head again and again until the blood, sweat, and tears created a grotesque mixture that made him appear extremely frightening to anyone's eyes.

This is fake—this is clearly fake! This is all a hallucination! Why the hell am I hesitating, then? Miaomiao is waiting for me—she's waiting for me to save her!

Chapter 363 - School

This is a hallucination; this is a hallucination; this is a hallucination! Li Huowang trembled and repeated to himself, seemingly trying to assert his own beliefs as he knelt on the muddy ground of the dark cave with his head covered in blood.

This scene frightened Huanhuan. The steamed buns in her hands fell to the ground as Huanhuan turned around and rushed out of the face.

Li Huowang knelt for a long time as the cave alternated between dim and bright. After three cycles of dim and bright, Li Huowang approached the nearby riverbank to wash the scabs off of his face.

Then, Li Huowang turned around and stepped out. He looked up and saw the cold light piercing between his fingers.

Meanwhile, one of the two names on the ground had been covered completely in blood, and only the words "Sun Xiaoqin" were legible.

Li Huowang could still remember where Yang Na's school was located. She had described to him the delicious street food she had eaten at the time, and they even promised to explore the streets together once Li Huowang got better.

Li Huowang's memories of Yang Na were vivid, including her mentions of events she had described only once to him.

Li Huowang cut off his own hair that had clotted together with his blood, revealing his head covered in scab. Li Huowang then took off his filthy old clothes and put on clean clothes that he had dried in the sun.

Li Huowang could finally walk among other people without anyone pointing fingers at him, as he looked like a completely

ordinary individual. Li Huowang took advantage of the night and sneaked into the train station. He disguised himself as someone seeing a relative off with luggage.

The dazed Li Huowang ended up falling asleep on the train. When he woke up once again, he found himself in the city where Yang Na lived.

Li Huowang glanced at the sign hanging above the bus stop and walked slowly in the direction of the university. Li Huowang walked at a snail's pace as if he were walking on an endless road.

However, Li Huowang knew that he would one day arrive at his destination.

Li Huowang found himself sitting on a plastic stool in a barbecue shop, staring blankly at the campus gate in the distance. His unusual behavior attracted quite a few curious glances.

What are you waiting for? This is just a hallucination! Yang Na is fake! Get up and take action! I can't give up on reality to live in a hallucination! Do you really want Miaomiao to become one of them?! I've transmigrated long ago, so Yang Na is going to be fine; she's living a great life in that world! A lunatic can't obstruct her from achieving happiness!

What are you waiting for? Go on! You're the reason behind Miaomiao's plight. I thought you wanted to save her?

Li Huowang struggled against his inner turmoil. He truly wished that someone would help him overcome his dilemma so that he would no longer be so indecisive.

"Hey, student. Are you okay?" the chubby female boss asked. She had approached Li Huowang at some point. "You look rather pale."

Li Huowang remained indifferent, completely immersed in his own world.

The chubby lady boss shrugged and wiped the table in front of Li Huowang clean with a cloth. She turned around and was about to

attend to her own business when a scream burst out from the distant campus.

The chubby lady boss turned and found students running out of the campus in a panic.

“Huh? What’s going on?” asked the chubby lady boss.

However, the students ignored the chubby lady boss, prompting her to stand in the way of a male student, who was a frequent customer of her barbeque shop.

“What’s going on, Fatty?” the chubby lady boss asked.

“Call the police, Sister Liu! Have you heard of the gang that recently robbed a bank? They’re on our campus right now, and they barged into the female dorms! One of them even has a gun!”

Li Huowang turned slowly to the student and smiled. *It can't get any faker than this. I guess this is really a hallucination. An incident like this is just a bit too rare.* Li Huowang finally set aside his misgivings and stood up, walking toward the gate.

Li Huowang walked along the main road, sweeping his gaze across the fleeing female students in hopes of seeing a familiar face among them.

The tremors running through Li Huowang got even stronger the closer he got to the university. Li Huowang stopped and decided to attempt to address the trembling by turning to the blooming magnolia tree on his left, saying, “Miaomiao, I’ll definitely attain the necessary extreme mental suffering.

“If I somehow became paralyzed from the mental suffering, then please help me inflict on me extreme physical pain. It’s not going to be difficult. Do you still remember that person who dug his throat out? Just follow what he did and do it on me.”

Li Huowang still felt a little worried, so he turned to the fallen bicycle next to him and said, “Li Sui, you better not stop Miaomiao if she has to do what I said, right? She’s not going to hurt me. She just has to do it to help us escape from that damned place.”

“No matter what appears, remember to keep following me. I’ll save whoever I can from the Surveillance Bureau. If I can’t save those who can still be saved, then forget it.”

The university was huge, and Li Huowang was struggling to find Yang Na. When he reached the female dormitory, the university was already filled with police sirens.

Li Huowang looked up at the tall building before him and heard roars from inside the building. It seemed that hundreds of female students had been trapped in the upper floors of the building.

This is a hallucination—this is all a hallucination! Li Huowang exclaimed to himself as he stepped past the iron gates. The first and second floors were empty, as all the female students living on those floors had already escaped. Li Huowang walked up the stairs until he stumbled upon two men carrying a young woman downstairs.

Li Huowang nodded at them and stepped aside to make space for them to walk past him. Li Huowang was planning to go upstairs, so there was no need for him to stop here.

“Stop! I told you to stop! Don’t come over here! Do you really think that I have no idea what you’re up to? You’re an undercover, aren’t you? I could tell from a mile away!” one of the two men screamed. He was a bald man, and he pointed the dagger in his hand at the young woman’s neck.

Despite the bravado, however, the bald man seemed extremely nervous. Li Huowang could tell from the bald man’s irregular breathing.

“We want three SUVs with full tanks! And five million—No, ten million! Police officers and anyone related to them are not allowed to approach this building.

“You have one hour to prepare everything we need, and you better hurry up because we’re going to kill one person every thirty minutes!”

Li Huowang ignored the bald man and turned to the disheveled young woman in the bald man's arms, asking, "Are you familiar with Yang Na? Which floor does she live on?"

The young woman was so scared of everything that was happening to her that she couldn't speak at all amidst her anguished and terrified sobbing.

Li Huowang didn't mind it and was about to continue his journey upstairs.

"Damn it, stay there!" someone screamed and pointed a rusty pistol from the bottom nose of the stairs directly above the landing. The rusty pistol was aimed at Li Huowang's head.

Li Huowang looked up and saw a tall, gloomy-looking man walking downstairs while pointing the same rusty pistol at Li Huowang.

"Can you not see what's in my hands? It's a gun!"

Chapter 364 - Suffering

Li Huowang chuckled and shook his head. Then, he turned to the wall next to him and said, "Miaomiao, take Li Sui a little farther away. You can't die here, but it's still better to be safe than sorry."

"Who the heck are you speaking to?! Are you wearing a Bluetooth earphone? Take it off!"

"Do you have any idea just how bad my mood is right now? I'm on the verge of exploding right now," Li Huowang said; his exhausted voice echoed in the spacious stairwell.

Li Huowang's words had yet to finish echoing when he flipped his hand, revealing a dagger. Li Huowang's expression became ferocious as he stomped his feet on the ground and rushed at the trio before him, akin to a hungry tiger pouncing on its prey.

Bang!

A gunshot echoed, wounding Li Huowang. Li Huowang's blood scatted haphazardly everywhere, but the pain only made Li Huowang feel excited rather than afraid.

A cold light flashed as the hand of the tall, gloomy-looking man flew away, along with his gun and fresh blood. The tall, gloomy-looking man let loose a piercing scream, but it was immediately silenced by Li Huowang lacerating his throat.

A gurgling noise soon followed as the tall, gloomy-looking man collapsed to the floor.

The scene scared the remaining two men out of their wits. They held the young woman firmly and roared, "Don't come over! We have a hostage!"

"That's only going to work on a real police officer! In this world of yours, I am nothing but a madman!" Li Huowang exclaimed.

The blood that had pooled on the floor soaked Li Huowang's

feet, but Li Huowang remained undeterred. He ignored the two men and the young woman, proceeding to walk up the stairs with a dagger stuck in his chest.

Li Huowang's voice sounded hoarse, akin to a howling ghost, as he exclaimed, "I'm sorry, Yang Na! But I'm here... here to find you!"

Li Huowang searched every single room on each floor. Upon arriving on the fourth floor, he finally found the four remaining hostage takers.

Li Huowang tilted his head and swept his gaze across the necks of each of the four men while seemingly indifferent to the hole in his chest.

The four men were afraid of Li Huowang. Even with hostages and weapons in their hands, they felt like they were mere prey before the blood-soaked Li Huowang.

Just then, the weakest and most timid among the four men let go of the young woman in his arms and said, "Can we surrender? We really didn't do much! I wasn't even willing to rob that bank. Leopard forced me to do it, and he's the mastermind!"

Li Huowang pulled out the dagger sticking out of his chest and laughed maniacally.

Tears then streamed down his cheeks as he rushed toward the four men. There was a stark difference between murderers and those who had yet to kill people. Dark-red blood soon dripped down the stairs, flowing down every step of the staircase.

Li Huowang panted heavily as he sat on two corpses. He was injured, and pain radiated all over him. Li Huowang reckoned that either the nerve or the tendon of his right arm had been severed, as he was having issues lifting it.

"Huo... Huowang?"

Li Huowang shuddered upon hearing the familiar voice, and he suddenly felt like leaving and running away as far as possible. However, Li Huowang immediately suppressed the urge to run

away by muttering to himself that he was in a hallucination. He couldn't falter here, as Bai Lingmiao had yet to escape the Muddled One's prison.

Having made up his mind, Li Huowang looked up and saw Yang Na.

Yang Na was wearing an exquisite jade earring on her right ear—it was a gift that Li Huowang had entrusted to his mother to give to Yang Na on her birthday.

“*Sniff...!* Huowang! What happened? How come you're seriously injured?!” Yang Na exclaimed, rushing over to Li Huowang's side with tears streaming down her face. She cast a helpless gaze upon Li Huowang's wounds. Then, she tried to stem the bleeding by putting pressure on the wounds with her hands, but it wasn't working at all.

This is fake, this is fake, this is fake... Li Huowang thought as he tightened his grip on the dagger in his left hand. He inhaled sharply and was about to raise the dagger when Yang Na screamed, "Why did you even come here to save me?! Are you crazy?! Why did you even come here?! How am I supposed to forget you now?"

Yang Na's words made Li Huowang feel as if the dagger in his hand weighed a ton, and Li Huowang almost gave up on his goal.

However, Li Huowang chose to remain true to his goal and used all of his willpower to resist the agonizing pain, all for the sake of thrusting the dagger in his hand toward Yang Na's chest.

"*AAAH!!!*" Li Huowang exclaimed as the dagger pierced Yang Na's thick sweater and then her skin.

Yang Na blinked at the sharp pain, and her eyes quivered as she stared at Li Huowang.

However, her eyes shone not in fear, disappointment, or fury. Her gaze held nothing but deep grievances as she muttered, "Huowang, why?"

Yang Na's anguished gaze was like a sharp dagger that pierced

Li Huowang's heart.

No, it was way more painful than a stab in the heart.

Li Huowang was about to put more strength into his hands when he suddenly felt a burning pain envelop his throat. The pain intensified rapidly, and the scenery around him distorted.

Clang!

The dagger in Li Huowang's hands fell to the floor as he trembled violently under the extreme pain.

Yang Na ignored her own wound and rushed over to pull the falling Li Huowang into her arms.

Boom!

The scenery peeled away, and Li Huowang found himself in a pitch-black forest. He was kneeling, and the red Profound Records were right in front of him. In addition, there seemed to be something nestled within the bamboo slips.

Just then, a tongue peeked out of the bamboo slips. The Profound Records came to life as the tongue started speaking, "A tongue to turn the wheel of reincarnation! An eyelash for the boundless universe! Words cannot describe the intricacies of the realm!

"The sinister Heavens reveal what was hidden! My Master, the highest authority! Who dares disturb it?!"

The Profound Records' voice made Li Huowang feel as if he was transcending the boundaries of human perception, allowing him to sense Ba-Hui's existence. Li Huowang also managed to confirm that the Profound Records was indeed alive.

Li Huowang touched the red bamboo slips, which had transformed into red wriggling worms. Li Huowang looked up and saw a rift in the pitch-black dome. A colossal eyeball that appeared to be larger than the sky itself peered inside through the rift.

The eyeball wasn't Ba-Hui. Li Huowang could feel Ba-Hui, but it was distant. Li Huowang estimated that Ba-Hui was still in the

Baiyu Capital.

The eyeball soon vanished, allowing Li Huowang to *sense* Ba-Hui—no, see Ba-Hui.

Li Huowang *saw* Ba-Hui receiving a portion of his agony, and an extreme agonizing pain descended, interweaving with Li Huowang's agony before bursting out in all directions.

Soon, everything felt the extreme agonizing pain, including Bai Lingmiao and those hunchbacks. Eventually, the extreme agonizing pain pervaded the trees, the soil, and even the air, which trembled ever so slightly in pain.

Li Huowang lifted his hands, and the pain intensified. Every new wave of pain was under Li Huowang's control. Li Huowang's transcended perception smelt two eyeballs. One black, one white, intertwined in harmony. There were no boundaries between the two eyeballs, as their boundary canceled each other out.

Li Huowang was smack in the middle of the two eyeballs. Li Huowang raised his hands higher, peeling away all the pain from himself and poured all of it onto the two eyeballs.

Chapter 365 - Sky

Li Huowang stared blankly; he could sense everything around him, but he could no longer feel any pain. His transcended perception allowed him to feel that the fused Yin and Yang had split apart.

It wasn't because Yang was missing; it was all because the Yin had come alive. Only living beings could feel pain, so the dead Muddled One came alive and let out a heart-curdling scream, just like the screaming rocks and trees.

Li Huowang staggered when he tried to walk. He was utterly exhausted and could only stagger forward. Just then, several pitch-black tentacles reached out to support him before becoming pillars sticking out of the ground for Li Huowang to lean against.

"Dad..." Li Sui tore open the wound in Li Huowang's chest and burrowed inside of it.

Li Huowang's mouth fluttered open as he tried to say something, but all that came out of his mouth was blood; he couldn't make any noises at all. Li Huowang raised his right hand, which had been stripped off of its nail, and pointed south. He could feel a rift somewhere south.

Bai Lingmiao instantly understood what Li Huowang was trying to say. She picked up the Profound Records on the floor and carried Li Huowang to head south along with the Second Deity's help.

They had just taken a few steps when the world suddenly inverted, sending them plummeting straight toward the rift in the pitch-black dome below them. When they passed through the rift, the piercing sunlight made everyone squint.

The world inside the dome was pitch-black, but daybreak had fallen outside.

They were finally out!

The Second Deity spun upon realizing that they were getting closer and closer to the ground. She took Li Huowang and Bai Lingmiao in her arms and braced for impact.

Boom!

A deafening noise echoed as they landed harshly on the ground.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang's merged perception separated slowly as Ba-Hui averted its gaze on him. Li Huowang's sense of pain also returned.

"Huowang! Are you okay? Listen to me!"

Li Huowang heard a familiar voice. He opened his eyes and saw Bai Lingmiao, but Yang Na's face overlapped with Bai Lingmiao's face. Their faces overlapped as if they had become one person, and their mouths opened at the same time as they shouted at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang was so disoriented by the sight that he couldn't distinguish whether he was in reality or he was back in that hallucination.

"Huowang!" Bai Lingmiao exclaimed, patting Li Huowang's cheeks lightly with her soft hand. However, Li Huowang didn't respond.

Bai Lingmiao held her whip and got ready to beat the drum on her waist to ask for Granny Bai's help.

However, Li Huowang grabbed Bai Lingmiao's hand and shook his head slightly. Li Huowang had finally distinguished that he was in reality.

Bai Lingmiao was standing before him, and Yang Na wasn't here. Bai Lingmiao turned and sprawled out on the ground. As he gasped heavily, some of his flesh and blood slid out from the hole in his mouth and onto the ground.

Li Huowang mustered all of his remaining energy to raise his

head and look around. He saw the Profound Records lying in the distance, stained with mud, and then he started crawling toward it.

Bai Lingmiao quickly ran over to fetch the red bamboo slips still dripping with blood.

Li Huowang extended his hand and opened up the Profound Records. The bloody tongue and the throat appeared before him.

Li Huowang weakly raised his hand and opened his mouth wide before raising the Profound Records and dropping it directly into the horrifying hole in his mouth.

Soon afterward, the tentacles burrowed out from Li Huowang's mouth and wrapped around Li Huowang's tongue and organs. The tentacles rearranged and bound Li Huowang's organs into their rightful positions.

"It's good that you're fine. You really scared the hell out of me!" Bai Lingmiao exclaimed as she embraced Li Huowang.

Li Huowang thought back to his experience in the hallucination and forced a smile. He reached out to hug Bai Lingmiao and controlled his icy tongue as he coughed. "Why.. did you... suddenly... do it?"

He had yet to kill Yang Na in the hallucination, but Bai Lingmiao had already taken the initiative to perform the Cang-Qiang Ascension.

"You told me to make a move once you could no longer take it? I saw that you were about to pass out, so I made a move. Did I do something wrong?"

Li Huowang shook his head. "No, It's fine..."

Yang Na was injured, but she was still alive.

"Thank you... Miaomiao..." Li Huowang kissed Bai Lingmiao on the neck. Her timely intervention had saved Yang Na. Otherwise, his attack would have pierced though, if things had gone according to his plan.

Li Huowang truly didn't understand why he cared so much

about something that was clearly fake, but the thought that Yang Na was still alive made him happier than anything.

Li Huowang finally understood that Ba-Hui only wanted suffering, not death. The other Simings were a different story. Perhaps that giant white-boned Bodhisattva or something else would want death.

Yang Na's death wasn't necessary. The heart-wrenching pain that had inundated him when he decided to kill Yang Na was enough to perform the Cang-Qiang Ascension.

“Yang Na, I’m sorry..” Li Huowang muttered dazedly, “I scarred your chest. You should hurry and seek medical help...”

Bai Lingmiao frowned at Li Huowang's words, but she did not say anything. Bai Lingmiao struggled to help Li Huowang up, and the two started walking away. Their priority was to leave this eerie place.

Li Huowang finally managed to take a good look around. However, he couldn't see anything but soil, which was a completely different scenery from what he had been expecting.

“Where are we? Haven't we already escaped?!” Li Huowang exclaimed. He looked ahead and saw a dense forest up ahead. Unfortunately, the trees were extremely tall with thick canopies. They were on a distant cliff as well.

As far as Li Huowang could remember, there weren't supposed to be any cliffs or tall mountains here.

A cliff? Why is there a cliff here? Li Huowang looked around and noticed towering cliffs, but he soon realized that they weren't cliffs. They were at the bottom, while the surface was above them. In other words, they were in the middle of an expansive basin.

The moment the living and dead Muddled Ones made contact, they had actually not just spirited them away. They had also dug roughly a meter deep and spirited away everything in the vicinity for miles.

“Huowang, look! What’s that in the sky?!” Bai Lingmiao exclaimed.

Li Huowang looked up with great difficulty and found that the cloudless sky above seemed to be missing a piece for some reason. Li Huowang quickly realized that they had come from that missing piece, and it was a pitch-black dome at the time.

“Can this really be the doing of a Muddled One...” Li Huowang was stupefied, and he couldn't help but question, “What exactly is a Muddled One? How come when a living and a dead Muddled One make contact, they can spirit away even the sky?”

Chapter 366 - Carriage

Li Huowang finally understood what it meant to face trouble that even Zhuge Yuan would find difficult to handle.

What exactly were Muddled Ones? How could they affect both heaven and earth? Li Huowang thought. He could still remember Ji Xiang telling him that Muddled Ones and Strayed Ones were a troublesome bunch. In other words, Strayed Ones had an ability comparable to that of Muddled Ones.

What is my ability? Do I have the ability to change positions, or is it my ability to project my body's illusion? No, no, no... Li Huowang shook his head vigorously. His ability was insignificant compared to the Muddled Ones' ability to spirit away a chunk of the sky.

His ability was not even worthy of being compared to the Muddled Ones' ability.

However, Li Huowang believed that he had a latent ability as a Strayed One. Perhaps his latent ability was comparable to the Muddled Ones'.

Upon recalling the condition of the male and female Muddled Ones, however, Li Huowang felt complicated emotions. Was it really a good thing to have such a powerful ability?

Li Huowang had no idea, but one thing was for sure—he had never stumbled upon something good in this cruel world. Li Huowang also didn't really think that he would stumble upon something good without paying the price.

Perhaps he would live a life more miserable than living as a Muddled One the moment he awakened his latent ability.

"Huowang, someone falling over there! One of them looks like that old eunuch!"

Li Huowang turned and saw a few black dots falling from the

torn sky.

The torn sky was also becoming more and more unstable as time went on.

Li Huowang and Bai Lingmiao found Ji Xiang in the middle of emaciated corpses. Ji Xiang held the corpse of the male Muddled One in his arms, unwilling to let go despite the injury to his head.

Li Huowang and Bai Lingmiao eventually found the others. Through the scars on his hands, Li Huowang found that one person was missing—Tuoba Danqing. It seemed that Tuoba Danqing had been thoroughly spirited away by either the male or the female Muddled One. In other words, he would never be able to return.

Li Huowang asked for an explanation, and he heard the same story from the others. Tuoba Danqing was too slow while they were escaping, and he was ultimately left behind.

Although Li Huowang was a bit skeptical, he chose to believe them, as they were together and Tuoba Danqing was the only one missing.

Soon, Li Huowang, Liu Zongyuan, Hong Da, and Bai Lingmiao found themselves at the relay station located in Yinling City. They bid farewell to Ji Xiang, who had decided to return to the capital.

“I’m leaving now. You guys should go back first. I’ll send you guys a letter once I’m back in the capital. Don’t worry; the rewards are definitely going to be satisfactory. I’ll confront the management first before anyone else if they dare to short-change us! We almost died, so we’re not going to let them short-change us!”

After saying those righteous words, Ji Xiang turned to Li Huowang holding Bai Lingmiao’s hand. Ji Xiang thought briefly before reaching into his sleeve and pulling out the bronze coin veil. Then, Ji Xiang held it out to Li Huowang.

“Er Jiu, I believe this belongs to you. I saw it by chance when we were fleeing, so I picked it up for you,” said Ji Xiang, sounding much more amiable than before.

Li Huowang had intentionally distanced himself from Ji Xiang and the others to perform the Cang-Qiang Ascension, so there was no way they would know what Li Huowang had done.

Despite that, Ji Xiang's attitude toward Li Huowang changed greatly for some reason, but it wasn't a sense of camaraderie that brought the two men closer. It was more like Ji Xiang regarded Li Huowang with respect and a hint of fear.

Ji Xiang took advantage of the opportunity and lowered his voice, saying, "Rest assured, I'll fulfill my promise to you. In ten days to half a month, I will send you what you want using a carrier pigeon."

"Farewell, Lord Ji Xiang," Li Huowang said, accepting the bronze coin veil and wearing it. He already had Zhuge Yuan's black spindle, which was much more useful than the bronze coin veil, but an extra layer of insurance wouldn't hurt.

"You saved our lives, and we owe you this favor. My position will become yours."

Li Huowang let go of Bai Lingmiao's hand and nudged her gently to the side before approaching Ji Xiang. Then, he leaned closer into Ji Xiang's ear, whispering, "Lord Ji Xiang, if you really want to repay me, then please introduce me to those military families. I'm in urgent need of such connections."

Returning Bai Lingmiao to her original state was even more important than getting rid of the Strayed One. Li Huowang's survival didn't matter, as he had treated her badly enough.

"Okay, okay, I understand," Ji Xiang beamed. He pulled out a red silk scarf from his sleeves and wiped away the dust on Li Huowang's robes. Then, he got onto the carriage.

The sound of horse hooves echoed and slowly faded away as Ji Xiang disappeared into the distance in the carriage, which was also carrying a Muddled One's corpse.

The remaining three exchanged glances.

Liu Zongyuan scratched his head and said, "I hear there's a new brothel on the eastern side of the city, so how about—"

The other two turned around and left before he could finish.

The severely injured Li Huowang sat in a carriage that was slowly making its way to an inn. Li Huowang took a slow breath as he sprawled out on the soft cotton bed. They had endured all kinds of hardships for a Muddled One, and it was great that they had completed their objective.

At this point, Li Huowang could only wait for Ji Xiang's carrier pigeon.

At last, Li Huowang had taken a big step forward in his plan. Moreover, Ji Xiang owed him a huge favor. After all, if it hadn't been for Li Huowang, Ji Xiang would have been doomed. Li Huowang knew that Ji Xiang's favor would be of huge help as long as he used it in the right way.

"*Sniff, sniff!*" Bun placed its head gently on Li Huowang's elbow. It seemed to have sensed that Li Huowang was seriously injured, and its ears seemed to droop in anguish.

Just then, two dark fingers grabbed Bun by its scruff and hurled it out the carriage.

"Huowang, why don't you throw away those bamboo slips? You get injured every time you use them. Aren't they painful to use? I can't believe you've been using them despite that," Bai Lingmiao said. She picked up a pillow from the side and placed it behind her head.

Li Huowang smiled lightly while staring at Bai Lingmiao's face, "Yes, I'm in pain. I'm in so much pain that I feel like dying. However, Miaomiao, don't you think that the Profound Records is the easiest to use? Just imagine cultivating one of those messy things."

Bai Lingmiao cast a contemptuous gaze at Li Huowang. "Why don't you give it a try? You won't know until you try. At this rate,

I'm afraid you'll die if something goes wrong."

"Die..." Li Huowang muttered. He exhaled slowly, and his eyes showed no fear as he said, "There's nothing scary about death."

Bai Lingmiao seemed to have noticed Li Huowang's intentions to die, so she pounced on Li Huowang like a cheetah; her dark fingers grabbed Li Huowang's neck, and she stared into his eyes as if she were a wild beast.

"You still want to die? This always happens every time you use the Cang-Qiang Ascension! Do you still consider yourself a man? Why do you want to take the easy way out? Have you already forgotten how you killed my entire family?!"

"You still have to pay me back for the rest of your life, so you are not allowed to die!"

Li Huowang nodded gently, and Bai Lingmiao leaned over, biting Li Huowang's shoulder. Moments later, she stood up, leaving a bloody row of teeth markings.

The atmosphere inside the carriage was oppressive.

Bun had stuck its head out of the window, but it immediately retreated.

"Miaomiao, I met a Shaman, and his name is Shen Tugang," said Li Huowang. Then, he told Bai Lingmiao about Shen Tugang's unique way of interacting with the Immortal families.

As their conversation went on, the atmosphere in the carriage warmed up slowly.

Chapter 367 - Shaman

A spacious carriage slowly rolled down the streets of Yinling City, heading to the inn where Li Huowang was staying.

Li Huowang covered in injuries was inside the carriage. He turned to Bai Lingmiao and calmly said, "If the Immortal families are going to follow you for your entire life, anyway, then you'd be better off using Shen Tugang's method rather than allowing them to use you as a mere laborer.

"However, his method is risky, and whether or not to use it depends on your situation."

Bai Lingmiao was currently not under any threat by the Immortal families, but Li Huowang couldn't help but worry about her upon recalling Li Zhi's words.

Bai Lingmiao stared at Li Huowang in surprise. "Does the man's lyrics really look down on the Immortal families? Just what are the lyrics?"

Li Huowang pondered briefly over Shen Tugang's words before saying, "Drive away the wolves and devour the tigers. The Immortal families are a bunch of creatures that bully the weak and fear the strong. Intimidate them, and you can negotiate with them."

"What did Shen Tugang do to intimidate the Immortal families?" asked Bai Lingmiao with a solemn expression.

"He decided to rear evil spirits," Li Huowang replied, "However, he didn't go into the specifics, but there's no way he would have told me about it, as it's a cultivation that is closely intertwined with his own life and death."

Bai Lingmiao silently repeated his words with a thoughtful look.

"Shen Tugang said it's like balancing something almost equally

heavy on both sides. Neither can be too heavy or light. Both sides can be employed together if done properly, but if done improperly, it can be dangerous.”

Li Huowang reached out and patted Bai Lingmiao’s hand.

“Don’t worry, I’ll come and help you once I’m done.”

Li Huowang had to prioritize things, and he felt that returning Bai Lingmiao’s personality back to her original personality was the top priority.

Bai Lingmiao’s face showed a hint of distress upon seeing Li Huowang’s torn right hand.

Bai Lingmiao pulled her hand away and said, “No need. It’s useless for me. I’m fine now, and the Immortal families haven’t really done much to me.”

“Really?” Li Huowang stared at the black scar on Bai Lingmiao’s fair neck.

“Why would I lie to you? You should be more concerned about yourself,” said Bai Lingmiao, changing the topic.

The Immortal families were plotting against her, but she had no plans of telling Li Huowang about it. Li Huowang had suffered enough, and she believed that there was no need to make him go through even more suffering.

Bai Lingmiao believed that the method Li Huowang had mentioned was worthy of pondering over.

“Don’t say things like that. It’s better to be prepared than sorry. I’ll pay attention on your end. If the Immortal families cause you any trouble, I want you to let me know as soon as possible.”

The carriage came to a stop just then, as they had arrived at the inn. The Second Deity bent down and carried Li Huowang off the carriage.

The two walked upstairs amidst the strange gazes of the people in the lobby. The Second Deity walked into the room and closed the door to the room.

“How about you come back to Cowheart Village with me? I'm sure everyone has been waiting for you,” Bai Lingmiao said, looking down at Li Huowang on the bed.

Li Huowang thought about it, but he eventually shook his head and said, “No, I'm just going to wait here. I would miss Ji Xian's message if I were to go back to Cowheart Village.”

In addition, Li Huowang had no intentions of getting involved with others. The best outcome for them was to live a peaceful life, and if Li Huowang were to get involved with them, they would never be able to live a peaceful life.

There were already enough people who had died by his side.

Bai Lingmiao's lips curved into a smile just then. She then took off her clothes and lowered her head to kiss Li Huowang.

“I'm still injured...” Li Huowang muttered, sounding in pain.

“*Heh*, that makes it even better. You can't die, after all. Also, you still haven't told me who Yang Na is!” Bai Lingmiao exclaimed.

Soon, the thin threads keeping Li Huowang's wounds together tore one by one. After a long time, Bai Lingmiao lay spread eagle on the bloodstained bed with her left foot on Li Huowang's chest. She was gasping for breath with a soft smile.

Li Huowang was about to say something when Bai Lingmiao lifted her slender left leg and smacked it down Li Huowang's chest, making the latter exhale sharply.

“Do you really think I don't know the matter between you and the Second Deity? Now there's Yang Na. You have too many women, Li Huowang,” Bai Lingmiao said, sounding resentful. It seemed that she wanted to take revenge on Li Huowang.

Li Huowang noticed that Bai Lingmiao brimming with killing intent, and Bai Lingmiao with nary a trace of killing intent had markedly different reactions in the face of the same situation.

Li Huowang caressed Bai Lingmiao's leg without saying anything.

Li Huowang closed his eyes slowly and was about to drift off when Bai Lingmiao suddenly said, "The Second Deity is a part of me. If I die someday, you can treat the Second Deity as myself. However, that Yang Na nonsense is unacceptable!"

"If she dares to appear before you, then don't blame me for not showing any mercy!"

Li Huowang looked helpless as he said, "Yang Na exists solely in my hallucination. Are you jealous of a mere illusion?"

Just then, Li Huowang realized that Bai Lingmiao had become the Second Deity. The Second Deity wasn't wearing that red veil, and her peculiar appearance was completely exposed to Li Huowang.

Her slender mouth opened slightly, and a voice filled with grievances echoed soon afterward. "Senior Li..."

Li Huowang was stunned, and he felt as if the past Bai Lingmiao was right before him.

"Senior Li..." Tears flowed from the five eyes of the Second Deity, and she appeared like a puppy that had been bullied as she choked up in tears while in Li Huowang's embrace.

"Miaomiao? Is that really you?" Li Huowang muttered, but he felt a shiver down his spine upon coming up with a terrifying idea. Could it be that Bai Lingmiao had failed to absorb the killing intent and that she had been replaced by the Second Deity?

Was she forced to become the Second Deity?

While holding the Second Deity in his arms, Li Huowang cast a fierce gaze at the empty room and shouted, "Second Deity! Come out and tell me what's going on!"

Li Huowang realized just then that the hairy body of the Second Deity had become smooth and soft.

"Main Deity, Second Deity, is there any difference?" Bai Lingmiao asked. She was still in Li Huowang's embrace and was staring at Li Huowang seductively with her pink pupils. "Do you

really care about who you use? You're not picky, anyway."

"Tell me... who are you?" Li Huowang asked with a solemn expression. Despite his injuries, he looked exceptionally intimidating.

Chapter 368 - Hope

Bai Lingmiao smiled upon seeing Li Huowang's terrified look. She shifted to a more comfortable position in his arms and rubbed her head gently against his chest.

“It’s funny to see you so scared. Lie down, and I’ll explain things to you,” Bai Lingmiao said.

Li Huowang's body relaxed, but his heart was still pounding madly against his chest.

Was the Bai Lingmiao before him the Main Deity or the Second Deity?

He had to know before he could determine what to do next.

Bai Lingmiao squinted, and then she burst into laughter.

“Why are you laughing? Hurry and explain!”

“Well, I don’t know how to explain it to you; it’s difficult to put into words.”

“Then, keep it as simple as possible. The simpler, the better.”

Bai Lingmiao pondered briefly before asking, “Huowang, do you know what’s inside the human body? What are humans made of?”

Li Huowang frowned unconsciously. He couldn't understand what she was trying to explain with such a nonsensical question.

“Ah~ Huowang, guess~” Bai Lingmiao said coyly, which made Li Huowang feel uncomfortable. Bai Lingmiao had never been the type to behave like this.

“Are you talking about the physical mortal body?”

“Nooope,” Bai Lingmiao shook her head and said, “How should I put it? Let's just say that humans are made of ten emotions and eight sufferings. The ten emotions are joy, anger, sorrow, greed, hatred, infatuation, fear, love, and evil^[1], and the eight sufferings

are birth, aging, sickness, death, resentment, separation from loved ones, unfulfilled desires, and the dominance of the five aggregates.”

“Everyone has varying degrees of intensity of the ten emotions and eight sufferings, but they all exist. Your identity and your actions are spurred by those things.”

Li Huowang’s heart quivered. “Who told you that? The Immortal families?”

“Why are you in such a hurry? Let me finish,” Bai Lingmiao said, glaring in displeasure at Li Huowang before continuing, “Those who are not making use of their ten emotions and eight sufferings still have those—they exist but are hidden.”

“Ordinary people can hide them just fine, but Shamans are different. Most Shamans have two sides—a Main Deity and a Second Deity.”

Li Huowang glanced at the two girls on his left and right and urged Bai Lingmiao to continue.

“Though we share the eight sufferings, the ten emotions are separate. Back then, the Immortal families used my hidden ten emotions and combined them with some of their scattered things to create the Second Deity.”

“That means...”

“It means we’re one person. Our memories are a bit different from each other, but we are indeed both Bai Lingmiao. The killing intent is making me make use of more joy, anger, hatred, evil, and greed, allowing her to have less of them.”

“The Second Deity used them, as the past Bai Lingmiao wasn’t really making use of her joy, anger, hatred, evil, and greed.”

Li Huowang looked at the faces right before him. His mind was in a mess, as it was the first time he had heard of something like this.

“Who told you that? Was it the Immortal families? Don’t trust them; they could be deceiving you for all we know!”

"The Immortal families aren't the Sitting Oblivion Dao. They're not going to have fun fooling you with knowledge that everyone probably knows," Hong Zhong said upon appearing out of nowhere.

Li Huowang instantly covered Bai Lingmiao with a blanket the moment he saw Hong Zhong before asking, "Are you aware of the so-called ten emotions and eight sufferings, too?"

"How cute, you're actually asking something that is common knowledge. Aren't you hiding in the Surveillance Bureau? Ask the people there, and you'll know whether I'm speaking the truth or not," Hong Zhong replied.

Li Huowang had spent so much time in this world, but it was his first time hearing the so-called ten emotions and eight sufferings.

I think Luoism had a Nascent Soul kid who liked talking about all these, but I wasn't really paying any attention. Li Huowang could still remember that the goal of cultivation was to escape from the ten emotions and eight sufferings.

"So, Huowang, do you finally understand? I have just a bit more joy, anger, hatred, evil, and greed. Bai Lingmiao is still Bai Lingmiao. I'm the freer and better Bai Lingmiao!"

"No, the original Bai Lingmiao is the only Bai Lingmiao that I know!"

Bai Lingmiao wasn't agitated at all, and she pointed at the Second Deity next to her before saying, "Then, that's your Bai Lingmiao right there. She's that obedient, indecisive, and weak Bai Lingmiao."

Li Huowang turned to look at the Second Deity. When he saw her pitiful beast eyes along with that familiar yet foreign gaze, Li Huowang unconsciously reached out to embrace her.

"All right, you two should go on. I'll give you some space," Bai Lingmiao said, putting on her belly band as well as revealing pants. She then pulled apart the curtain and left.

The cold snake scales prickled Li Huowang, but he didn't flinch as he pressed his face against it.

“Don't worry; I'm going to turn you back! I promise!” Li Huowang vowed.

Li Huowang gradually recovered under the care of Bai Lingmiao and the Second Deity.

However, Li Huowang became more and more restless with every passing day. He still hadn't heard anything from Ji Xiang, and Li Huowang was starting to get worried that something had happened to Ji Xiang.

Li Huowang woke up to another day. He sat up on the bed, and a foot kicked him almost immediately.

“You're getting really annoying! You woke me up again!”

Li Huowang didn't respond. He had gotten used to it long ago. He pulled apart the blanket, got up, and quickly covered the blanket again to make sure that the warmth wouldn't escape.

Li Huowang then opened the window and used it to climb onto the roof. He patted his abdomen to shake off the dust on his hands before taking out an enlightenment book.

A tentacle with a pair of eyes burrowed out of his navel and read the book with Li Huowang. Li Huowang listened quietly to the voice in his ears that had completely taken over his own reading. Li Huowang realized that the book was about to accomplish its task and that he would soon have to find something else to teach Li Sui.

The issue was what would he teach Li Sui. Li Huowang could only teach Li Sui using these enlightenment books, as advanced and obscure literature was beyond him.

Should I just forget it? It's not like I'm planning to let him take the imperial examination. He can speak clearly, and our relationship has become more harmonious. I've already achieved my previous goals.

“Dad, I want to learn this,” Li Sui said, showing Li Huowang a piece of turmeric paper with his tentacle.

“You want to learn to draw talismans?” Li Huowang wasn't sure whether Li Sui could use them, but he found it strange to have a tentacle monster draw talismans for him.

While Li Huowang was hesitating, a black shadow fled across him from above.

Li Huowang looked up, and a stack of letters fell from the sky.

“Those are...” Li Huowang's heart thumped. He snatched them out of mid-air and opened them to see the greetings with the name Er Jiu at the start. Li Huowang's pupils constricted. *This was what Ji Xiang had promised me!*

Li Huowang read every single word, looking for the words “Bei Feng.”

Li Huowang's eyes darted left and right, and his gaze soon came to an abrupt halt as his breathing turned into ragged pants. Li Huowang's sweat drenched the paper in his hand as he muttered, “It's been two months since we parted in Yinling, and today...”

The records of the Surveillance Bureau stated that Sitting Oblivion Dao's Bei Feng was just like Li Huowang—a Strayed One!”

It was precisely because he was a Strayed One that he managed to make use of the bewilderment in his heart to disperse the mounting obsession that came with age, allowing him to live 194 years old.

Based on Bei Feng's long relationship with the Surveillance Bureau, Li Huowang deduced that Bei Feng had a way to break free from the hallucinations!

Li Huowang's heart filled with excitement as tears streamed down his face. He had experienced so many hardships along the way—hardship that always made him feel despair, but today, he finally felt hope for the first time!

Chapter 369 - Double Happiness

The rooster crowed, and Yinling City woke up once more; the quiet streets gradually became bustling, filled with pedestrians and donkeys.

Everyone was busy with their own affairs, and no one took notice of a visibly excited red-robed Daoist sitting on the roof tiles of an inn. Of course, no one could understand Li Huowang's mood.

“Dad?” Li Sui was rather surprised as he used two tentacles to touch Li Huowang's rapidly beating heart.

It had been two hours since all this started, but Li Huowang had yet to calm down. He was still reading the contents of the letter in his hands. No one could understand what this letter meant to him. However, it was a meaningful letter for Li Huowang. It meant that he wouldn't be trapped in pain and bewilderment forever, that his life wouldn't be filled with suffering and despair, and that he still had hope.

All the suffering he had to go through over these years would be worth it the moment he learned the method to dispel the hallucination from Bei Feng. By then, he would be able to live like an ordinary person and spend his life peacefully with the people he loved.

The desire to die in Li Huowang's heart vanished. Now, he only had one goal—live on and escape the Strayed One's bewilderment!

“Huowang, why are you on the roof?” Bai Lingmiao's familiar voice echoed.

Li Huowang snapped back to reality, and he jumped down to hug her tightly. Then, he took a good look at her delicate face and

said excitedly, "There's a way, there's a way, there's a way!"

Li Huowang had just established a clear goal, and Bai Lingmiao's issue could finally be resolved. The happiness had just doubled, as Ji Xiang had said in his letter that he had some connections to military families who could get rid of Bai Lingmiao's killing intent!

"What's going on? Are you losing your mind?" Bai Lingmiao asked, sounding confused.

Li Huowang shook his head lightly, and then he gently pecked her pink lips before running away with a spring in his steps.

"Let's go! Pack up, and we're going to the capital!" Li Huowang exclaimed before disappearing.

Meanwhile, a group of adults with their children in tow had surrounded the Bai Family Hall in the Bai Family Village; they wore excited looks as they stared into the hall.

Lu Zhuangyuan's slick demeanor had vanished, and he emitted a solemn air as he sat on the master's chair. Five children of varying heights, each holding a cup of tea in their hands, were before Lu Zhuangyuan.

The tallest of the children spoke first, saying, "Disciple Zhan Yuansheng would like to join Trope Leader Lu Zhuangyuan to learn how to make a living. In the meantime, any silver I gain will belong to you, my master. In the case of any natural disasters or misfortunes, I will accept my fate. If I were to selfishly escape or become disobedient, then I would be beaten to death!"

The child then served the tea in his hands to Lu Zhuangyuan, who took a sip with a gleeful visage. The child then knelt down and kowtowed thrice before Lu Zhuangyuan, all the while calling him "Master."

The other children followed until all five had sworn allegiance to Lu Zhuangyuan.

Lu Zhuangyuan then put on airs and said seriously, "A scholar

is produced every 3 years, but it takes 10 years to produce an actor! Though we are in the lower aspect of the 9 classes, there are still 360 trades, and each can produce a scholar!"

"Disciples, you must practice diligently and make sure not to slack off! I want you to become renowned figures that everyone will remember through the ages!" Lu Zhuangyuan exclaimed, painting his grand picture. Then, he cleared his throat and turned to his eldest disciple, saying, "Juren, take them to test their skills."

Juren and the children soon departed.

Left all alone, Lu Zhuangyuan jumped down from the master's chair and dropped his act, grinning like a fool.

Holding a handful of melon seeds, Puppy teased him, "Troupe Leader Lu, your Lu Family Troupe is thriving. I think it's about time you buy a theater in Yinling City!"

Although it was said in jest, Puppy's words resonated in Troupe Leader Lu's heart. Lu Zhuangyuan broke out into a smile. " *Hehe*, thank you for your good wishes!"

Zhao Wu leaning on a wooden crutch sounded confused as he asked, "Troupe Leader Lu, where did you find those children? Are their parents really willing to let their children act with you?"

People with land usually wouldn't send their children to act in a theater as people like them usually found it shameful to become actors.

"Hehe, of course, they must be willing first," said Lu Zhuangyuan. Then, he pulled out a tobacco pipe from his back, lit it, and took a few puffs with a triumphant look. "They were all little beggars whom I had encountered while traveling for performances. They couldn't refuse my offer when they heard about food and shelter.

"Ah, I hope you won't be surprised knowing that despite the Liang Kingdom's prosperity, there are still beggars out there."

"What's surprising about that? Unfortunate people are a dime a

dozen. However, I want to know why they even bother becoming actors when there is so much land for the taking. Couldn't they simply become landlords?"

Lu Zhuangyuan recalled the fields surrounding Cowheart Village and felt a pang in his heart. In the end, he nodded, saying, "Well, becoming a landlord and an actor are not mutually exclusive."

Lu Zhuangyuan couldn't feel reassured. Those lands didn't belong to him. Without Li Huowang around as the master of the house, they would have no way of fighting back if they were driven away one day.

However, Lu Zhuangyuan knew that building a theater meant that every brick and tile of that theater would belong to him. He would also be able to live with peace of mind by then.

Lu Zhuangyuan actually wanted to discuss it with Miss Bai, but her family had gone through something, and he hadn't been able to find the right time to talk about it with her.

Lu Zhuangyuan's plan was to wait for Miss Bai's recovery before sending his daughter-in-law to make inquiries. Unexpectedly, Miss Bai became like that young Daoist, and she disappeared without a trace.

"Puppy, do you perhaps know where Miss Bai went? When is she coming back?" Lu Zhuangyuan asked the shifty-eyed Puppy. After all, the entire Bai Family Village belonged to Miss Bai. She had to be here for anyone to discuss land ownership, tenantry, or even what crops to plant.

They seemed like immortals and could survive on dew, so they can afford not to get involved in the mundane world. However, they should have told me before leaving.

Puppy's face lit up with joy upon hearing Lu Zhuangyuan's question. "Ah, yes, my wife is pregnant. I'm going to be a father, but it'll be at least around the New Year or during the Qingming

Festival.”

Lu Zhuangyuan’s face wrinkled with disdain. *That's not my question; why is this guy even showing off to me? Does he not know that I'm already a grandfather while he's still about to become a father?*

“What about Miss Chun? I haven’t seen her around for quite a while now.”

Puppy tossed a salted melon seed into his mouth and cracked the shell with his teeth before saying, “How would I know? She’s not my wife, and there’s no way she’ll become my wife with that stinky temper of hers.”

Lu Zhuangyuan chuckled at Puppy’s defensive remark before leaving the hall.

Puppy spat out the melon seed shell and left the Bai Family Hall. He was well aware of who was an insider and an outsider. He could tell his fellow disciples what he had found in the cellar of the Bai Family Ancestral Hall, but he couldn’t share that with the Lu Family Troupe.

Puppy wandered around the somewhat deserted Bai family village before walking toward the entrance of a high-walled courtyard in the eastern side of the village. Puppy grabbed the tiger-head door latch and knocked. “Simpleton, open the door. It’s still daytime, so why did you even lock the door?”

Chapter 370 - Bai Family

Puppy shouted outside and opened the door soon afterward. Gao Zhijian wasn't wearing any upper clothing. He frowned as he stared at Puppy. The sweat dripping down his body created steam despite the freezing weather.

“Do you smell that? Yang Xiaohai’s side is steaming dumplings today! Pork and green onion dumplings!”

Gao Zhijian stared briefly at Puppy’s mischievous expression before shutting the door harshly. Gao Zhijian could still hear Puppy’s grumbling behind the door, “Ah, you really are boring. Lu Xiucan is more fun than you, but I don’t know where that kid went. It’s been a while long, and I kind of miss him.”

Gao Zhijian remained silent and allowed Puppy to grumble for a while. Once he could no longer hear Puppy’s ramblings, he turned around and gripped the heavy halberd before him by the hilt. Then, he grunted and pulled it up.

The heavy halberd was made exclusively for Peng Longteng.

Gao Zhijian felt like he were a child riding a horse as he swung around the heavy halberd. Gao Zhijian swung it a few times, and the ground trembled with each swing as the heavy halberd shattered the stone slabs on the ground.

Gao Zhijian panted heavily and looked down at his trembling hands; they were red because the blood vessels in his hand had ruptured. Gao Zhijian turned around and picked up the military manual he had found on the late Peng Longteng.

Gao Zhijian wiped the blood from his trembling hands on the military manual, and the content of the book changed completely. It turned out to be a military cultivation manual.

Gao Zhijian sat down cross-legged and followed the notes in the

manual. He concentrated his killing intent and circulated the latent energy inside of him according to the manual.

Gao Zhijian performed a few cycles while sitting cross-legged like a fierce-looking Arhat in a temple. Faint strands of blood qi seeped out of Gao Zhijian, and anyone with keen eyes would see that Gao Zhijian's figure had slightly grown bigger.

A bug happened to fly by. Gao Zhijian opened his eyes, and his gaze landed on the fly. Inexplicably, the fly stiffened and fell to the ground.

"Time to eat!" Yang Xiaohai shouted.

Gao Zhijian closed his eyes slowly, and when he opened them again, he became the honest Gao Zhijian once more. Based on Peng Longteng's appearance, Gao Zhijian deduced that the manual was dangerous, so he wanted to try it out himself first before sharing it with anyone else.

Gao Zhijian walked to the well in the courtyard; he hoisted a bucket of ice-cold water and poured it over himself. He freshened up, put on his clothes, and then he finally opened the door to head toward the kitchen.

The others were already eating hot porridge and delicious steamed dumplings. They chatted casually as they ate, sitting together without any regard for genders

Gao Zhijian picked up a bowl and plucked fifty dumplings with his chopsticks before sitting down and eating slowly by himself. He poured himself a saucer of dark vinegar, but he decided not to eat porridge.

Gao Zhijian took a bite first and dipped the bun into the dark vinegar before stuffing the whole thing into his mouth. Gao Zhijian ate slowly, and he would sometimes glance at the doorway.

Time went on, and as more and more people dispersed, Yang Xiaohai scratched his head in confusion. "Is Senior Xiaoman not going to eat again?"

Yang Xiaohai pondered briefly before covering a bowl of dumplings with a plate. Then, he proceeded to wash the steamer baskets along with the round-faced lady.

Gao Zhijian chucked the last remaining steamed dumpling into his mouth and washed it down with the dark vinegar. Then, he picked up the bowl of dumplings that Yang Xiaohai had set aside and walked outside.

His destination was clear—the Bai Family Ancestral Hall. The three monkeys arranged side by side turned, and the secret door appeared before Gao Zhijian.

Gao Zhijian bent down and entered. The oil lamps hanging on the walls illuminated the dark staircase. Gao Zhijian soon found himself in the main hall, and he saw Chun Xiaoman chanting something inscrutable.

“Disciples look up at the blue sky. Fellow masters are beside. Twenty-four divine beings help disciples learn to drag knives. Dragging knives transform into goose feathers. Iron rulers transform into lamp wicks. Rolling stone transform into water bubbles...”

Chun Xiaoman heard footsteps, prompting her to turn around. Her eyes immediately brightened upon seeing Gao Zhijian. “Zhijian, come here and take a look. Am I reading this right? How come there aren't any reactions?”

Gao Zhijian grabbed the book and examined it for a while before handing over a bowl of dumplings to Chun Xiaoman, saying, “Eat.”

Chun Xiaoman noticed that Gao Zhijian had more or less recovered. Unfortunately, Gao Zhijian had become incredibly taciturn since then, and he would often only say one word. However, it wasn't really an issue as long as everyone could understand him.

“I'm not going to eat. I want to examine the contents of that book,” said Chun Xiaoman, looking a bit impatient as she pushed

the bowl of dumplings away.

However, Gao Zhijian wasn't going to accept Chun Xiaoman's excuse. He extended the bowl over toward Chun Xiaoman and said, "Eat."

Gao Zhijian's attitude made it clear that he wouldn't say anything unless Chun Xiaoman ate the dumplings.

Chun Xiaoman accepted it reluctantly. Then, he ate the dumplings with small but urgent bites.

"Is Miaomiao back?" asked Chun Xiaoman.

Gao Zhijian shook his head while reading the book in his hand.

"Where did that brat go? She didn't even send me a letter," Chun Xiaoman grumbled, and then her heart suddenly skipped a beat. "Could it be that she has—"

"No, no, no," Chun Xiaoman interrupted herself, "She won't do silly things again."

Chun Xiaoman continued eating, but she was to eat not to feel full but to drive the anxiety that had gripped Chun Xiaoman's heart. Chun Xiaoman ate vigorously, so she ended up choking and hiccuping.

Gao Zhijian put down the book and patted Chun Xiaoman's back gently.

Chun Xiaoman eventually came to her senses, and she said, "If it really doesn't work out, let's gather everyone and look around where Miaomiao was last seen. I'm really worried since there's no news at all."

"Okay." Gao Zhijian nodded.

Chun Xiaoman wanted to continue eating her dumplings when Puppy barged in and rushed forward with a smile. "Junior Bai's letter has just arrived!!"

Chun Xiaoman stood up immediately and asked, "Where is she? What's in the letter?"

"Why are you asking me? I don't know how to read," Puppy

said with a shrug before handing over the letter to Gao Zhijian.

With Gao Zhijian's help, Chun Xiaoman understood that Bai Lingmiao was fine and that she had decided to go to the capital to handle some trivial matters. More importantly, Bai Lingmiao said that she would return after she was done with everything.

"As long as she's fine..." Chun Xiaoman finally breathed a sigh of relief.

Bai Lingmiao's absence had been giving her nightmares.

Gao Zhijian leaned even closer to the letter and examined it carefully for a while before stammering, "T-t-this is Senior Li's handwriting!"

Senior Li was the only one who preferred to write in square-shaped characters, and the latter's handwriting was quite distinct.

Puppy chuckled and pointed at Chun Xiaoman before sneering, "I told you that they were having a quarrel. You're just an outsider, so you shouldn't have gotten involved, but the milk has already spilled. You may have indirectly chided her husband, and there's a high chance that they simply made up at the end of the day.

"You really should have believed in me. I told you so, right?"

Chapter 371 - Shangjing

Clop, clop, clop!

The sound of horse hooves seemed incessant as Li Huowang's carriage traveled along with the other passersby. Li Huowang could see many peddlers and wheelbarrows[1] as they closed in on the largest and most prosperous city in the Liang Kingdom, Shangjing.

Bai Lingmiao sat on top of the carriage while staring at the castle walls. The castle walls looked ancient, seemingly standing for more than a thousand years. The castle walls were made from black bricks, and they stood as tall as small mountains.

Meanwhile, the moss that had covered the walls indicated its old age.

“So this is Shangjing? It’s very unique.” Bai Lingmiao was looking at the capital with excitement.

Li Huowang stood up and carried Bai Lingmiao down before covering her eyes with a silk cloth. “It's so bright, so don't open your eyes. You're going to hurt them.”

The headquarters of the Surveillance Bureau was here—in Shangjing. If it hadn't been for the black spindle, Li Huowang wouldn't have dared to ever come here.

Bai Lingmiao felt annoyed, but she didn't remove the silk cloth.

Bai Lingmiao sat on Li Huowang's lap and stretched lazily. “I'm definitely going to change these useless eyes of mine one of these days!”

Li Huowang stifled Bai Lingmiao's excitement by saying, “Stop the nonsense. We're entering the capital now, so be quiet.”

Li Huowang's carriage followed the travelers and soon arrived at the gates. The guards took just one glance at Li Huowang's carriage, which resembled a coffin, and they instantly knew that

something was up.

Upon seeing Li Huowang's identity token as a member of the Surveillance Bureau, however, they didn't say anything and simply allowed Li Huowang entry.

Li Huowang suddenly felt happy with his decision to join the Surveillance Bureau.

If it hadn't been for his identity as a member of the Surveillance Bureau, he would have had issues entering and exiting cities.

When the carriage entered the capital, Li Huowang was surprised to see the sheer number of people beyond the gates. There were people as far as Li Huowang's eyes could seem, and they stretched all the way to the watchtower in the distance.

"Let's find a place to stay first," Li Huowang said, guiding the carriage to move slowly amidst the crowd.

The sun was starting to set, and the rays of sunlight reflecting off of the blue roof tiles and red walls were starting to dim. The buildings were tall, and each of them showcased large banners. Meanwhile, there seemed to be an infinite number of people and carriages moving to and fro along the street.

This was a testament to the Liang Kingdom's strength. It looked similar to Yinling City, but there was a stark difference between them.

If one word were to be used to describe the difference, it would be the word "history."

After all, Shangjing was one of the surviving cities of the previous dynasty, the Qi Kingdom.

While Li Huowang was busy looking around the capital, the crowd abruptly moved toward the left of the street. Everyone wore excited looks, and they seemed to be waiting for something.

Li Huowang followed the crowd and soon arrived at an empty crossroad. There were three white towers several meters tall while a group of topless youths were carrying pouches in their hands. They

were warming themselves up around the white towers.

While Li Huowang was thinking about what was going on, a short man walked out of the crowd.

The short man was carrying a gong on his back, making him appear like a tortoise, which elicited quite a few peals of laughter from the crowd. The short man ignored the laughter and raised three incense sticks toward the three white towers. Then, the short man closed his eyes and prayed.

Is this a prayer ceremony for the people of Shangjing? Li Huowang was intrigued, but it wasn't an unusual sight in this crazy world.

Just as Li Huowang was in the middle of his speculations, the short man took off the gong from his back and struck it hard, shouting, "Grab the Bun Mountains!"

The youths leaped onto the three white towers with their pouches. They used both their hands and feet to grab something off the white tower before storing it in their pouches.

Hm? Li Huowang did a double take at the three white towers and saw that the white towers were made out of white buns. As the youths climbed up the three towers of buns, the white towers became human towers as the youths climbed onto each other to climb even higher.

The youths fought each other to seize the buns, and as they fought, the buns at the top of the tower fell to the ground. The nearby onlookers wasted no time, rushing over to the fallen buns and ignoring everything, even manure, just to grab a bun.

Meanwhile, Bun poked its head out from under the carriage and snatched one of the white buns on the ground. Bun chewed the bun with delight, attracting Li Huowang's gaze.

Li Huowang saw that the white bun had the character for "longevity" stamped on it.

Bai Lingmiao swept his gaze across the wasted buns on the streets and chuckled sarcastically. "Hahaha, looks like the people of

Shangjing are just different. To think they would waste white buns made out of wheat flour.

"There are regions where the people can't afford to eat such buns even during the New Year."

Li Huowang turned his gaze somewhere and asked, "Don't you think those towers looked like three incense sticks? I think they're praying to something."

"Prayer? You should stop guessing," Bai Lingmiao replied.

Li Huowang went silent as he looked at the crowd before guiding the carriage away.

There were so many people, and Li Huowang wasn't familiar with the place, so it took him quite a while to find a suitable inn for them to stay in.

It was already night when they arrived at the inn, and it looked so much better than the others. There was even a stage in the middle of the inn's main hall, clearly to attract customers using plays.

Everyone ate and drank happily; no one really paid any attention to Bai Lingmiao.

However, the waiter was an exception. Upon seeing Bai Lingmiao and his group, he immediately ran over to them and asked, "May I know what you would like to order, esteemed guests?"

"Two seasonal vegetables and two meat dishes."

"All right, please sit and wait. Your meal will be served soon," said the waiter before turning around and leaving.

Li Huowang placed both of his swords on the table, and he instantly felt like a massive weight had been taken off of him. "You should go ahead and rest once we're done eating. I still need to find Ji Xiang."

"Why are you looking for that old eunuch? Do you need any help?" Bai Lingmiao asked.

Li Huowang glanced at Bai Lingmiao and patted her head without answering her.

“Fine, fine, you are the head of the household. Your words are the rules, and you don’t need to discuss things with me,” Bai Lingmiao said, looking away and pouting.

The two went silent and waited for their meal. Eventually, the food was served; they chose to feed Bun first before enjoying their meal. Li Huowang wasn’t sure whether it was because he had been traveling for a long time or the cooks of the inn were simply amazing, but he ate a lot.

Li Huowang wolfed down his food while watching the performers on the stage. Just then, the performers jumped down the stage and moved around the main hall to greet the customers.

One of the performers came to Li Huowang’s table and performed. However, Li Huowang’s face remained indifferent, and the sight made the performer feel like his pride was being trampled upon, so he went all out.

The performer closed in on Li Huowang and shook his head; the makeup on his face changed instantly. The performer waved his hand in front of his face, and his makeup changed once again. [2]

The performer thought that the customer would surely be impressed, Li Huowang grabbed his sword instead and pressed it on the performer's neck.

“Who told you to change your face?! Why the fuck are you changing your face?!” Li Huowang snarled.

1. Quite literally a wooden wheelbarrow used to move objects in ancient China 📖

2. This is a reference to the face-changing show, a subgenre of Chinese Sichuan opera 📖

Chapter 372 - Kindness

Li Huowang wanted to peel off the face of the performer to see if he was hiding other faces underneath. The performer was so shocked and terrified that he trembled all over.

The owner of the inn noticed the commotion and rushed forward to Li Huowang, saying, "I'm so sorry that he has offended you, dear guest! As an apology, your meal is on the house, and I'll even give you two a free bowl of soup. Will that be okay?"

Li Huowang stood quiet for a few seconds before he sheathed his sword and sat back down.

"What's wrong with you? Why did you get so agitated?" Bai Lingmiao asked, sounding confused by Li Huowang's outburst.

Li Huowang sighed. The performer's rapid makeup change reminded him of how the Sitting Oblivion Dao could change faces. Now that the ordeal was over, Li Huowang acknowledged that he had overreacted.

Li Huowang continued with his meal as he explained. "Don't worry, we're in Shangjing. The Headquarters of the Surveillance Bureau is here, so there's no way the Sitting Oblivion Dao can come here."

Li Huowang made quick work of his meal and decided to look for another inn without plays. Afterward, Li Huowang went to the address on the letter. Of course, he was by himself.

He wasn't familiar with Shangjing's streets, so he only managed to find it when the curfew started at midnight.

The door opened, and Ji Xiang peeked from behind the wooden door with a lantern in hand. He looked around to make sure that no one else was around before pulling Li Huowang inside.

Li Huowang looked around the tiny courtyard and saw nothing

but a well and a giant jujube tree that occupied half of the courtyard. Li Huowang was surprised that Ji Xiang was staying at such a small place, even though he was a high-ranking member of the Surveillance Bureau.

In addition, there were no maids around, either.

Regardless of its size, the house was perfect for a family of three.

“Er Jiu, I’ve been waiting for you.” Ji Xiang smiled, holding Li Huowang’s hand firmly.

Li Huowang retracted his hand forcefully, and he sounded resolute as he said, “No worries. I’ve always been grateful for Lord Ji Xiang’s kindness!”

“Hehe, no need to thank me,” Ji Xiang said, smiling as he looked at Li Huowang.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang had no idea what Ji Xiang was thinking at all.

Li Huowang decided not to waste any more time, as Ji Xiang was in the flesh right in front of him. Moreover, there was indeed a debt that had to be settled. “Lord Ji Xiang, you said that you found someone from the military capable of removing someone else’s killing intent. Was it true?”

Li Huowang thought that Bai Lingmiao’s issue had to be addressed first.

“Yes, of course. Everything has been prepared, so let’s go.”

Although Li Huowang had no idea why Ji Xiang seemed much more anxious than him, there was no reason to delay things, so Li Huowang followed Ji Xiang through the long corridor and arrived at the back door. There were two sedan chairs^[1] waiting for them.

“Please enter~” the four bearers said, kneeling with grace, which was a result of countless hours of training.

It was Li Huowang’s first time riding a sedan chair, and he found it uncomfortable.

He felt like throwing up every time it swayed.

Ji Xiang opened his curtains and turned to Li Huowang's sedan chair, saying, "Brother Er Jiu, where are you staying here? Remember that little house where we came from earlier? If you like it, I can just give it to you as a gift."

"I appreciate Lord Ji Xiang's offer, but I don't like receiving gifts with nothing in return. I also don't think that I can accept such an expensive gift."

For some reason, Li Huowang thought that Ji Xiang had become much more compassionate after he had saved the latter from the Muddled Ones. It made sense, as there was no way someone would give an entire house away after exchanging just a few words with them.

Ji Xiang pretended like he was upset and replied, "Ai~ Brother Er Jiu, that's not right. You're not going to receive it with nothing in return. In fact, a broken house is not enough repayment for your help.

"I prepared it for my retirement, so I hope you'll like it. Anyway, let's just say that it's yours now. The deed to the place and the keys are underneath your seat. I even left you something inside the house."

Li Huowang checked and saw three bronze keys and several pieces of paper.

Li Huowang looked down at the items and pondered over why Ji Xiang had decided to give his house away.

After a while, Li Huowang realized what was going on. Ji Xiang wanted to repay Li Huowang for his favor in one go. That was why he decided to give Li Huowang a house. *The item he left in the house must be priceless, too. But why did he give me the house that he bought for his retirement? Is he going to resign from the Surveillance Bureau?*

Li Huowang was in deep contemplation when the curtains to the sedan were opened; the bearer's voices soon echoed,

announcing their arrival. “Please disembark~”

Li Huowang placed the keys and the documents behind his shirt and exited the sedan chair. He then looked up and saw a massive stone lion snarling at him.

Li Huowang took a few steps backward and realized that he was at the entrance to a prison. It seemed Ji Xiang had a robust network with prisons.

The door opened slowly, and Ji Xiang led Li Huowang into the prison.

The main gates were shut, and Li Huowang saw another gate. It was a smaller gate, and they had to walk like ducks to enter it. The multiple gates and towering walls made the prison extremely secure.

They walked past the second gate and saw another gate.

Li Huowang saw the image of a tiger painted on the gate, but Ji Xiang told him that it wasn't a tiger but a legendary beast, Bi'an. [2]

Li Huowang felt quite a few gazes landing on him the moment they walked past the third gate. Li Huowang squinted and had to adjust to the darkness first before he could finally see who was looking at him.

If he were to describe his location, he would say that he was in a room full of someone like Peng Longteng.

Every single individual in the room had tattoos on their face, and they were either drinking or fighting. Each of them was from a military family, and the killing intent in the air was so dense it was palpable, making it hard for anyone to breathe.

Li Huowang couldn't imagine the prowess of the prisoners here that the prisons actually had to employ a group of prison guards that reeked of killing intent just to suppress the prisoners.

“Aiya~ is that you, Grandpa Chen? Why are you here?” said an old prison guard while staring at Ji Xiang. The old prison guard's white hair beard stretched to the underside of his ears.

“Hehe~ Cao Baihu~ Long time no see. How's your family doing?” Ji Xiang replied with a smile before approaching the old prison guard.

“They're doing pretty fine. It's just that my daughter-in-law is still fighting with my son-in-law every day. Wait here, I'll go and pray to the Prison God[3] first.”

Cao Baihu moved to the left.

Li Huowang saw an indent in the left hall, where a small shrine was enshrined. There were three deities inside the shrine. The one in the middle resembled a kind-looking old man, but the ones on the left and on the right looked like goblins with fierce expressions.

The deity in the middle has to be the Prison God, thought Li Huowang.

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1. A mode of transport where a VIP is carried in a wooden box by four to eight men. 📖
 2. One of the legendary beasts, also the seventh son of a dragon. 📖
 3. God overseeing prisons. There are three main ones. 📖

Chapter 373 - Small Favor

Li Huowang sat on the bench as he looked at Cao Baihu lighting up an incense to be offered to the Prison God.

Usually those from the military don't light up incense nor pray to any gods, but I know basically nothing about them. Perhaps this is a custom of the Liang Kingdom's military?

After lighting up the incense and offering it to the Prison God, Cao Baihu sat back down and took just a glance at Li Huowang's bronze coin veil before turning to Ji Xiang, saying, "You must have a favor to ask me, as you had come all the way to this inauspicious place."

"Hoho, Cao Baihu is an astute man indeed. I will keep it short. This is Brother Er Jiu, and someone in his family has been inundated and is being plagued by the killing intent of a weapon. I suppose that's a minor issue for you, right?"

Cao Baihu nodded.

Li Huowang sighed in relief. Li Huowang thought it was a serious matter, but he was happy to know that it was just a minor issue for Cao Baihu.

Li Huowang grabbed his gourd and poured out all of the lifespan pills he had onto the table, saying, "Cao Baihu, this is just a tiny gesture of my good faith for you; please accept them."

However, Cao Baihu pushed the lifespan pills back to Li Huowang. "No need for that. I'll just consider us friends from now on, so you don't have to give me these. Even though we're from different departments, both of us are still working for the sake of the Liang Kingdom."

Ji Xiang chuckled and smiled. "So, Cao Baihu, are you going—"

"I would have immediately come out to help you, but..." Cao

Baihu interrupted, trailing off.

An hour later, Ji Xiang and Li Huowang walked out of the prison with frowns.

Ji Xiang slammed the doors harshly and said, “What kind of man is he?! How dare he ask us for a favor before helping us with our minor issue! Rather than Bi’an, they should just draw the Pi Xiu[1] instead!”

“It’s fine, Lord Ji Xiang,” Li Huowang said, “We’re asking them for a small favor, so it is only natural for us to repay it.”

“Sure, that’s the correct thing to do, but ...” Ji Xiang trailed off. He clapped and sounded regretful as he said, “*Sigh*, I’m sorry for finding someone like him for you.”

Li Huowang knew that Ji Xiang was just putting up an act, but it was a very convincing one.

“No worries. It’s just a small favor. I will do it,” said Li Huowang. He didn’t sound disappointed, as he never really expected to receive a free lunch in this world. Li Huowang just had to escort a prisoner in exchange for Bai Lingmiao’s treatment; it was a profitable trade.

“I’m so sorry.” Ji Xiang smiled regrettably.

“Lord Ji Xiang, no need to apologize. Let’s go back first. If you still feel that you owe me, you can just tell me more information about the prisoner. Of course, only if you know anything about them...” Li Huowang said. He was still unsure as to what he was supposed to do. After all, this was his first time accepting a mission from the Liang Kingdom’s military.

“No need to worry about that. Old Cao is right; it’s just a small favor. It wouldn’t affect you as long as you have no plans of becoming an official.”

“An official?” asked Li Huowang, sounding curious. The two sedan chairs arrived at the small courtyard house once more. To show his appreciation, Li Huowang offered Ji Xiang some tea in the

house to talk things over.

Ji Xiang smiled and accepted the offer. The two sat in the hall, and Li Huowang's question made Ji Xiang's smile freeze.

"Lord Ji Xiang, are you really going to leave? Are you not going to reconsider it?"

Li Huowang had never once thought that it was taboo to say such words out loud. He needed to make things clear, after all. *What am I going to do once he leaves? Tuoba Danqing is already dead, so who else should I find to get more missions?*

Ji Xiang sighed and placed the teacup down slowly. "You know what we went through last time. Plus, I'm too old, and it's time for me to rest. There are still people waiting for me at home, so I will leave the world to the youths like you~"

Ji Xiang clasped his hands together and kowtowed toward the northeastern corner of his house before saying, "I'm not sure what the superiors are thinking. I dared not ask nor listen for any news. I think it's wise for me to prioritize my life."

Li Huowang frowned as he sipped his tea. *If he's telling the truth, it means Shangjing might become chaotic in the near future. I need to be careful, and I can't get involved. Regardless of what the higher-ups are doing, I need to steer clear of them.*

Li Huowang had only one goal: to find Bei Feng for the sake of removing his issues as a Strayed One.

Ji Xiang seemed to have seen through Li Huowang's thoughts, and he pulled out something from his clothes. It was an intricate-looking identity token. Ji Xiang pushed it over to Li Huowang, and the latter finally saw the words written on it—Seventh Banner.

Li Huowang was surprised. "I got promoted again? And I even skipped a rank?!"

Ji Xiang chuckled and said, "Er Jiu, I could only help you this much. I couldn't promote you any further. Upon my departure, you can go to the headquarters to take on missions. You now have the

right to do so, and your revenge will not get delayed.

"You're already a Seventh Banner, so the other Ji Xiangs cannot order you around anymore. You're also free to choose any missions. If you need help, you can order those at the Tenth Pawn rank to help you."

Li Huowang stared dazedly at the identity token. He thought Ji Xiang wanted to return Li Huowang's favor by giving him a house, but Ji Xiang had decided to do more than just that, which meant Li Huowang now owed Ji Xiang a favor.

"Lord Ji Xiang, I don't think this is..." Ji Xiang trailed off, shaking his head.

"Er Jiu, you're a great person and a powerful fighter. You're even better than me. All I ask is don't forget me once you've become famous, all right?"

Ji Xiang smiled and patted the imaginary dust off of his clothes. Then, he bowed to Li Huowang before leaving through the back door.

Left all alone, Li Huowang sat quietly in the hall he stared at the identity token in his hands. Eventually, Li Huowang stood up and walked into the house. He could still remember Ji Xiang's words about how he had left him something in the house.

He instantly identified what Ji Xiang had left for him.

It was the wish wood with a withered Strayed One's tongue nailed to it.

The withered tongue trembled ever so lightly as if it had sensed someone's presence.

Li Huowang poked the withered tongue gently; he also poked the nail that had pinned the tongue to the wood.

It was a priceless artifact, but Ji Xiang gave it away so easily.

Li Huowang was unsure of what Ji Xiang thought of him, but Li Huowang was convinced that Ji Xiang had misunderstood something about him.

Meanwhile, Ji Xiang sprinted through the darkness and soon appeared in front of another small house. He opened the gates and saw a brand new horse carriage waiting inside the courtyard.

An old woman peeked out from within the carriage and saw Ji Xiang.

“Brother, how was it?” asked the old woman.

Ji Xiang leaped onto the carriage and ushered it northward. “The man from the Ao Jing Sect has arrived at Shangjing. I’ve done what I promised him, and I even gave him many things. I no longer owe him any favor, so we can leave now!”

“Really? That’s amazing! We can finally go home!” the old woman exclaimed in delight. The old woman's delight made it clear that Ji Xiang was treating her well.

The old woman took out a guokui[2] and tore a small piece to feed Ji Xiang. “Why are you treating that man from the Ao Jing Sect so well? You even spent a long time waiting for him.”

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1. A mythical beast that attracts wealth 🙌
 2. it's a kind of flatbread 🙌

Chapter 374 - Emperor Of The Liang Kingdom

Ji Xiang munched on the guokui while explaining, "It seems that you don't understand just how special he is. I rummaged through all of the books from the first to the fourth archive before finding out how he had saved us all. He used the Ao Jing Sect's secret technique, Cang-Qiang Ascension!"

"What is that?" the old woman's tone of voice lowered upon sensing the severity in Ji Xiang's voice.

"I don't know. I couldn't check any further than the fourth archive. All I know is that the majority of the people who had used it had perished, while the survivors became extraordinary cultivators.

"Now that I think about it, it makes sense. Why does the technique have the word Ascension? In its name? Ascension to where? Those who had used that technique are no longer humans. Do you really think we can offend someone like that?"

The old woman nodded. "I think you did the right thing, Brother. We can't afford to owe him a favor."

"I think there's another reason why he decided to join the Surveillance Bureau. I don't think he simply wants to take revenge on the Sitting Oblivion Dao," Ji Xiang said.

The old woman took out her handkerchief and wiped the beaded sweat that had formed on Ji Xiang's forehead. "It's fine. Let's just forget about these. They're no longer of concern to us, and we should just go home."

Ji Xiang nodded and stared at the city gates with a pensive gaze. Ji Xiang revealed his identity token, and the city gates

opened, allowing them to leave.

Soon, the towering city gates closed once more.

Li Huowang woke up the next day and prepared everything he needed before he embarked on a journey to the prison.

However, Li Huowang was surprised to find out that he wasn't alone.

There was a child guiding a blind man toward the prison.

Does he need that many people to escort a prisoner? Li Huowang pondered and waited silently.

Soon, a man sitting on a cow arrived, and he was dressed in clothes that Li Huowang had never seen before. A four-armed statue of a female Buddha was on the man's lap, and the man's head was lowered while his mouth fluttered open with inscrutable chanting.

Li Huowang reckoned that the people in Shangjing seemed to have an idea as to what was to happen, as they dared not approach the prison. The shops near the prison were all closed, and the entrance to the prison was desolate.

The heavy doors of the prison soon opened, and a metallic cart carrying a cage with a prisoner inside of it appeared before everyone's eyes.

The man in the cage was different from what Li Huowang had imagined, and a golden face mask covered the prisoner's face. The mask was unique and special; it was rectangular in shape with two circular holes for eyes, a triangular nose, and large ears.

If it hadn't been for the patterns and carvings on it, Li Huowang would have thought that it was a Three Star Mound mask[\[1\]](#).

"You just have to escort the prisoner to the main gate where he will be executed; that's all you have to do," said the prison guard to the three escorts, which included Li Huowang.

"The main gate? We're not even leaving the city?" Li Huowang thought that he had misheard. It would only take them four hours

to reach the main gate at the slowest, so Li Huowang couldn't help but be surprised.

"Yes, that's right," the prison guard replied, sounding anxious. He turned around and immediately retreated.

The prison guard had pushed the cart over to the three escorts, and it rolled slowly toward them. Li Huowang glanced at the other two escorts before walking over to the cart and pushing it outside.

Regardless of what was going on here, he had to complete this task for the sake of Bai Lingmiao's treatment.

As the cart moved slowly in the city, more and more people gathered nearby, creating an uproarious din. The majority of the people were pointing and smiling at the prisoner; none of them seemed shocked by the golden mask.

Li Huowang reckoned that they had long gotten used to it.

The noises awakened the prisoner in the cage, and the prisoner immediately smashed his head on the beams of the cage, shouting, "How dare you people treat me like this?! I'm the Emperor—the Emperor of the Liang Kingdom!"

Li Huowang's heart tightened at the remark. He looked around but was surprised to find that the crowd didn't listen to the prisoner at all.

The blind man next to Li Huowang chanted, "Blame those involved; don't blame those working. Blame those involved; don't blame those working."

Li Huowang decided to ignore the prisoner and focused on his job. Li Huowang finally knew why the military wanted outsiders like him to do this job and why it might affect him if he ever wanted to become an official or minister.

The cart traveled slowly, and they eventually reached a huge road next to the large red walls of the palace.

Li Huowang felt numerous gazes landing on him from above the palace wall, but he didn't dare to look back, afraid of raising

any suspicions. Li Huowang focused entirely on his job.

“Ji Song! You think you’ve won? We’ll see about that! One day, you’ll end up like me!” the prisoner roared toward the palace walls.

The people on the palace walls didn’t reply as they stared quietly at the prisoner

The cart moved slowly, but it reached its destination without any accidents. The executioner was already waiting for them. It was already noon, and a crowd had formed at the execution site.

“Ji Man has been sentenced to death for treason, and there is no pardon for such a crime!”

A red token was thrown to the ground, and the prisoner was dragged out of the cage.

The prisoner was limp, and a yellow stain had marred his trousers.

The executioner promptly shackled the prisoner.

Li Huowang stared at the prisoner and found the latter’s body to be a bit weird. His stomach was large, while his limbs were skinny. It didn’t look like a bulging stomach from excess fat. From what Li Huowang could see, there seemed to be countless tiny orbs trying to burst out of him beneath his skin.

The executioner sprayed the wine in his mouth onto his blade before raising it up high and decapitating the prisoner in one swing. Blood haphazardly scattered in the air, drenching the ground.

The executioner took off the prisoner’s golden mask before presenting it with both hands to the minister.

The minister wrapped the mask with golden silk before running back into the palace with haste. The other ministers left as well, abandoning the corpse to grow cold on muddy ground.

The crowd rushed over to dip their white buns in the blood that had pooled beneath the corpse, and they ate the buns with relish. Two women even fought each other, as they had failed to dip their buns evenly into the blood.

Li Huowang scoffed at them.

Is that it? Is it really this easy? Li Huowang thought with a frown. He was about to leave when he turned around upon recalling something and approached the headless corpse.

Li Huowang took a dagger and sliced open the prisoner's abdomen. Numerous small orbs popped out of the corpse.

Hm? Li Huowang picked up one of the fist-sized orbs. *The body of the "Emperor" is stuffed with pills. He was engorged by all the pills that had been forcefully stuffed into his stomach and intestines.*

1. Sanxingdui, an archaeological site in China that has many bronze age artifacts. The types of masks found there are quite unique 🙌

Chapter 375 - Coffin

Li Huowang retreated from the execution site while his mind was still full of the scenes he had just seen. It was hard to imagine someone would stuff themselves full of pills until their stomach bulged visibly.

Li Huowang pondered over the prisoner's status and was convinced that there was a deeper reason behind it.

Historically speaking, emperors often consume pills to extend their lives. The practice may hold true in this world as well. Even Dan Yangzi, that damned illiterate baldy, wants to become immortal, so how could the Emperor of the Liang Kingdom, which was the strongest kingdom, not desire immortality? It's normal for people to fear death, but...

Li Huowang could still remember Emperor Xu Fu, who had taken five hundred children with him to find the secret of immortality.[\[1\]](#)

However, Li Huowang couldn't even begin to comprehend just how crazy the Emperor of the Liang Kingdom's search for immortality had been, as they were in a crazy world, after all.

Li Huowang looked up at the palace walls, and he couldn't help but think about what was happening in the palace.

Upon sensing the wary gazes of the guards, Li Huowang shook his head and walked toward the prison.

The happenings in the palace weren't Li Huowang's business. The mission was complete, and Li Huowang just wanted to acquire the method to treat Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang entered the heavily-guarded prison once again. Cao Baihu grinned upon seeing Li Huowang. “Oh? You're back, Brother Er Jiu? Tell me everything that happened during the mission.”

There was no reason to lie, so Li Huowang recounted everything.

“Cao Baihu, I've completed the mission. I hope you'll fulfill your end of the deal.”

“Of course, of course.” Cao Baihu smiled and reached into his clothes. He took out a tiny black coffin, which was the size of a forearm, and gave it to Li Huowang.

Li Huowang wasn't sure whether he was just being too sensitive or not, but staring at the large red "longevity" character on the coffin made him feel as if the coffin was exuding the air of death. Li Huowang felt like it truly contained a corpse.

The coffin emitted the same air as the droves of deceased sheep beneath Qing Qiu.

This definitely doesn't belong to the military. It belongs to another sect. Li Huowang was certain of it. It was far too "different" from the items usually associated with the military. The difference was quite literally heaven and earth.

Cao Baihu rapped his fingers on the table three times. “Take the coffin, aim it at the person who had been inundated by killing intent, and then open it. The killing intent will vanish in just three breaths.

“However, you have to remember that the coffin must not stay open for more than three breaths, or there will be consequences.”

“It's that easy?” Li Huowang accepted the black coffin and was astonished by its light weight. The coffin was so light that he thought it was made out of paper.

“*Hoho*, it's just killing intent, right? It's not a serious matter. If it weren't for my post, I would go and deal with it myself. It wouldn't take long,” Cao Baihu said nonchalantly before downing a cup of wine.

Rumble!

The ground shook lightly just then, and an unknown aura rose

from the bottom of the earth. Li Huowang stood up instinctively as goosebumps broke out all over him. It was clear that something sinister was sealed underground.

“Fucking hell! That shitty thing!” Cao Baihu slammed the cup on the table and picked up his blade. He started walking toward the prison door while saying, “I need to do something so I won’t force you to stay here. Just return the coffin to me once you’re done using it, as I don’t want to go and collect it myself.”

Li Huowang soon walked out of the prison and found everything surreal. He looked down at the coffin in his palm and thought, *It's that easy? I can turn Bai Lingmiao back just like that? Was he lying to me? Wait, what if everyone lied to me? Do they know that I'm a Strayed One?*

Li Huowang felt cold at the absurd idea. Li Huowang grimaced and looked around, feeling as if everything around him was out to get him, including but not limited to the roof, stone lion statues, the tiles on the floor, and even the pebbles on the ground.

Li Huowang took a while to calm down, and he looked down at the coffin in his hands once more. He patiently rummaged through his memories to try and make sense of what was going on.

Li Huowang took a deep breath. *No, I don't think they know my true identity. Otherwise, they wouldn't have let a variable like me anywhere near the palace.*

Li Huowang was soon convinced that he was overthinking things. Since the military could make use of killing intent, it wasn't strange that they could disperse it as well.

Perhaps it was truly just a small issue.

Now that I got the item that I needed. Li Huowang put away the coffin in the pocket behind his shirt and returned to the inn. Upon opening the door to his room, Li Huowang instantly clapped his eyes on Bai Lingmiao sitting in front of a mirror.

Bai Lingmiao was combing her hair with a dark fluid.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m using black vinegar to dye my hair black. I don’t really like this white color; it doesn’t suit me at all.”

Li Huowang went silent and took a deep breath before taking out the small coffin.

Before returning to the inn, Li Huowang had paid a man to raise his sword against Li Huowang. Li Huowang used the coffin on that man, and the man’s killing intent was sucked away by the coffin.

Bai Lingmiao saw the object in Li Huowang’s hand through the bronze mirror.

“What is that? A coffin?” Bai Lingmiao asked.

Li Huowang opened the coffin while aiming it at Bai Lingmiao. A strange suction force rushed out of the coffin, and it sucked away Li Huowang’s hesitation and regret. Li Huowang even felt that the coffin was sucking away his will to find Bei Feng; the coffin was insatiable, seemingly capable of sucking away everything.

“One, two... three!” Li Huowang exclaimed and closed the lid. Then, he stared at Bai Lingmiao.

A crisp noise echoed as the comb covered in black vinegar fell to the ground.

Bai Lingmiao turned around slowly, and she stared at Li Huowang in fear with her tear-filled eyes.

Li Huowang trembled at the familiar sight, and he rushed to hug her as hot tears welled up in his eyes.

Li Huowang hugged her tightly for a long time before releasing her. Then, he examined her to see whether there were any side effects. “How are you feeling? Do you feel uncomfortable anyway? Tell me!”

Bai Lingmiao was crying, but she didn’t respond.

Soon, she reached out for the purple-tassel sword.

Li Huowang smacked Bai Lingmiao’s hand away and retreated.

When Li Huowang looked up, he found that Bai Lingmiao's eyes were filled with pain and resentment.

“Senior Li, please... I can't live without it,” Bai Lingmiao muttered.

1. Actually, it was recorded to be 3000 children 🤔

Chapter 376 - *Surveillance Bureau*

Li Huowang hesitated in the face of the crying Bai Lingmiao, but he eventually relented.

Li Huowang stared blankly as Bai Lingmiao gripped the purple-tassel sword. The pain in her eyes was soon replaced with pleasure.

The murderous Bai Lingmiao was back.

Li Huowang finally understood that the crux of the matter wasn't the killing intent that had pervaded Bai Lingmiao; the crux was permanent, and it was the fact that he had killed her entire family.

“*Hehe.*” Bai Lingmiao let loose a carefree and nonchalant laughter. Then, she bent over and picked up the comb before drenched it in vinegar. She sat down in front of the bronze mirror and combed her hair once more.

Li Huowang stared at Bai Lingmiao's back, and he finally let go of his obsession to treat her. He approached her carefully and hugged her from behind.

“No matter what, you will always be my Miaomiao,” Li Huowang muttered.

Bai Lingmiao shoved him away, and she glared at him before shouting, “Do you really think that I'll forgive you so easily? Have you already forgotten my question not too long ago? I asked you whether you truly liked Bai Lingmiao or you simply wanted someone who would listen to your demands!”

Bai Lingmiao hurled the comb away before storming off.

“Where are you going?”

“Why do you even care?! I'm going to look for another man to

marry! I'm going to look for someone who deserves me! I'm not going to marry a paranoid man like you!"

Bai Lingmiao ran away. Li Huowang wanted to give chase, but something soft struck Li Huowang from behind and engulfed him. The Second Deity had just hugged Li Huowang from behind, and she pressed herself against him.

"Don't worry, she's not going to do what she said," the Second Deity said.

Li Huowang held the Second Deity's hand and kissed it. Then, he sounded dejected as he said. "It's fine. Her departure is probably for the best. Anyway, just wait for me at Cowheart Mountain. Once my issue is resolved, I'll go back and look for everyone."

The Second Deity rubbed her hairy face against Li Huowang's neck before retreating. Li Huowang looked back and found that he was all alone in the room.

Li Huowang stared off into space for quite a while before walking outside and shouting, "Waiter! Bring me an urn of strong wine!"

The wine was soon delivered to the room.

Li Huowang quietly opened the wine and drank in big gulps. Li Huowang's senses had been heightened drastically by the Cang-Qiang Ascension that he had performed many times by now.

Unfortunately, the heightened senses had the unfortunate side effect of low alcohol tolerance, as Li Huowang couldn't even remember when he passed out. All he knew was that he was awakened by the crowing roosters from outside.

Li Huowang grabbed his head; the splitting headache made him feel dizzy. He stood up shakily and walked toward the window. Halfway there, however, he tripped over himself and fell face first on the ground.

Li Huowang stood up slowly and caught a glimpse of a black tattoo on the back of his hand. Li Huowang shook his head; it

wasn't a tattoo—it was Li Sui's wriggling tentacle.

I don't have much time. Li Huowang had to remove his hallucination before Li Sui obtained full control of his body. Otherwise, he would become like his past self once more; he would be forever at the mercy of his hallucination.

Li Huowang would rather die than let that happen.

It was simply too agonizing to be unable to differentiate between reality and a mere hallucination.

Li Huowang opened the window, and sunlight struck his face. He gnashed his teeth and snarled at the sun before pumping his fist into the air.

"You motherfuckers want to torture me that badly? I'll fight to the bitter end to change my fate! COME ON! DO YOU WANNA KNOW WHO'S CRAZIER BETWEEN US?!"

Li Huowang jumped down the window and started walking toward his next destination—the prison. Once morning had truly arrived, Li Huowang had already returned the coffin and was already making a beeline for the Surveillance Bureau.

Li Huowang glanced at the six gates sandwiched between the two stone lion statues. He flashed his identity token groggily at the guards before walking into the stone plaza.

The plaza was huge, but there were only a few people. A massive celestial globe larger than a house was in the middle of the plaza. Astonishingly, it was made completely from stone!

Li Huowang looked around and walked to one of the smaller buildings in the south.

Li Huowang was instantly struck by the strong smell of ink upon entering.

A man holding several books turned to face Li Huowang.

"Hey, hey, hey, who are you? This is where we print almanacs, and outsiders are not allowed here," the man said.

Li Huowang showed his identity token to the man. The man

examined it briefly before pointing in the opposite direction. "You came to the wrong place. You're supposed to go in the opposite direction."

"I came to the wrong place?" Li Huowang muttered and took a quick look at the building's interior, finding several documents hanging on the walls.

"The Surveillance Bureau sells the official almanac. Those who are caught illegally printing it will be executed, along with their immediate family members and spouses."

Li Huowang nodded and bade goodbye before turning around to leave. He walked toward an empty-looking building. The massive metallic mask on the building had attracted his attention.

The mask was roughly three meters tall, and it was covered in green rust after being exposed to the elements for such a long time.

The mask looked similar to that unique golden mask; the only difference between the two was that the eyeholes had been replaced with protruding cylinders. The cylinders protruded from the eyeholes and were soaring into the boundless sky.

Li Huowang looked away and walked into the building.

The interior wasn't big, and it was roughly the same size as a classroom in the modern world. Surprisingly, the building was completely empty; there was just an empty square when Li Huowang walked in.

Just as Li Huowang was feeling confused, several gazes landed on him. He turned to where the gazes were coming from, but he couldn't see anyone. Li Huowang knew just then that he was at the right place and revealed his identity token.

Deep thuds echoed as a wooden wall transformed, revealing a hidden door. A skinny man walked out from the hidden door, and there was a blind black bird perched on the skinny man's shoulder.

"Is this your first time here?" asked the black bird.

Li Huowang nodded. "I'm usually in Yinling City, and this is

my first time in Shangjing. Greetings, Senior.”

“Follow me, and I will show you the path.”

The skinny man walked into the hidden door with the black bird on his shoulder.

Li Huowang followed closely behind them and was surprised to see that the hidden passageway wasn't covered pitch black. The oil lamps hanging on the walls illuminated the path, and clanking noises constantly filled the passageway.

Li Huowang stared at the skinny man's back and decided to be a bit more proactive.

He had found it a good idea to do so in situations like these, so he said, “Senior, my name is Er Jiu, and I am from the Ao Jing Sect.”

“Sima Lan, from the Mo Family. No need to be so formal. You're a part of the Surveillance Bureau, so we're considered half-brothers,” the black bird replied.

“Mo Family?” Li Huowang's pupils constricted. It had been a long time since he last heard of the Mo Family's name. The Mo Family was a famous family with a deep history back in the modern world.

However, Sima Lan misunderstood Li Huowang's reaction and explained, “Don't worry, my family is from the Qi faction, not from the evil Liang faction.”

Chapter 377 - Sima Lan

“Qi faction? Liang faction?” Li Huowang had no idea what Sima Lan was talking about. *Is the Mo Family separated into two different factions? Why is the Liang faction considered evil?*

Li Huowang stared deeply at the skinny man with a black bird on his shoulder for quite a while before finally asking. “Senior Sima, what are the Qi faction and the Liang faction of the Mo family?”

Sima Lan was confused about why Li Huowang seemed ignorant of the two factions, but he chose to reply, and the black bird on his shoulder spoke in his place, “They were once united, but their cultivation led them into nurturing different ideologies, which resulted in a clash of ideologies after the family head's death.

“The family split into two factions by then. The Liang faction believes in ghosts, fate, and destiny, but they've misunderstood the family head's teachings. They walked down the wrong path and allied themselves with the detestable Dongzhen Sect, becoming half-human bastards.”

Sima Lan's expression was soured, and he looked like he had recalled something he didn't want to remember.

Li Huowang went silent; he knew that the Liang Kingdom's standards when it came to orthodox, official organizations were quite loose. The Liang Kingdom would recognize an organization as an “official” organization as long as it would bring profits to the kingdom and would not harm it; it didn't matter whether the organization's practices were evil or upright.

Li Huowang didn't ask any more questions out of courtesy. It had already become clear to him that the Mo Family's issue was the difference in ideologies and techniques.

Li Huowang had to focus on his own issues first before even thinking about anyone else's issues. Li Huowang had learned that Bei Feng had the method to stop the hallucinations of a Strayed One, so Li Huowang just had to find Bei Feng and learn that method from the latter.

Cooperation? It was his first choice, but he cast it aside immediately. The Sitting Oblivion Dao couldn't be trusted. If they found out that Li Huowang was a Strayed One, Li Huowang's life would forever be chaotic.

The only thing Li Huowang could do was find Bei Feng and extract the information from the latter.

To do that, Li Huowang had to find a helper within the Surveillance Bureau. He was sure that he could find someone useful, and that was actually one of the reasons he decided to join the Surveillance Bureau.

They walked along the hidden passageway.

Li Huowang's keen ears picked up some noises. He could hear wood clanking against each other, birds flapping their wings, and the footsteps of people running around.

Li Huowang ignored those noises and followed closely behind Sima Lan. Just then, an eunuch appeared in the distance. The eunuch lowered his head and walked silently on one side of the passageway.

The eunuch passed by Li Huowang and pushed a brick on the wall.

A low rumbling echoed as the same wall opened, revealing a room. Li Huowang looked around and saw a massive window on one end of the room; a variety of birds flew in and out of the room through the window.

One of the eunuchs inside the room untied the papers tied to the birds' feet before placing those papers in a bamboo tube. The eunuch then dropped the bamboo into an odd structure—an array

of bamboo pipes that resembled a spider.

The bamboo spider exuded the smell of mold, and it looked quite aged. Even the gears made out of bamboo inside of it had been devastated by mold. Regardless, the bamboo spider was still working, and its gears turned and clacked as it worked.

The letters inside the bamboo tube were distributed to the eunuchs in the room.

The eunuchs skillfully placed the letters into their own categories before placing them all into a cabinet that resembled a medicine cabinet.

Eunuchs, carrier birds, a bamboo spider. Every single one of them moved fast and efficiently to fulfill their role in the Surveillance Bureau.

Li Huowang's curiosity was piqued when Sima Lan turned and started walking toward a nearby staircase. Li Huowang snapped back to reality and followed after Sima Lan, who turned left to go down the stairs.

"Memorize the markings. You can enter from both the Gate of Rest and the Gate of Life. Make sure not to enter the wrong door," Sima Lan said, pushing one of the doors open to reveal a dim hall.

The hall was filled with screens. There were shadowy figures either standing or sitting behind those screens, which meant every screen was occupied. They were so close to Li Huowang, but even his keen ears couldn't quite make out their conversation.

Goosebumps broke out all over Li Huowang as he walked through the forest of screens amidst the muffled voices in the hall. Li Huowang had to reassure himself that he was in the Surveillance Bureau, not in a town filled with ghosts.

Li Huowang was worried that his identity would end up getting revealed the moment he entered. Fortunately, the spindle that he had received from Zhuge Yuan was pretty effective.

Li Huowang looked around and found that the interior of this

hall was similar to the previous hall. The screens and pillars were riddled with molds. Li Huowang didn't expect that the grand hall would be so musty and dirty.

“Senior Sima, why is everything here moldy? Is the ventilation here that bad?” Li Huowang asked casually.

“Maybe. The molds appeared at the beginning of this year; they weren't here last year,” Sima Lan replied. Then, he pointed at something and said, “Since this is your first time here, go ahead and register yourself over there. Once you're done, I'll tell you more about certain things.”

Li Huowang followed Sima Lan's finger and saw a plain-looking man in the distance.

The plain-looking man wearing a long robe was counting something with his fingers behind a tall counter. The tall counters reminded Li Huowang of the counters at the pawn shops of the modern world.

If Li Huowang had no idea that he was in the Surveillance Bureau, he would have thought that the plain-looking man was a storyteller working in a tea shop.

Sima Lan's black bird flew toward the tall counter and pecked the plain-looking man.

The plain-looking man didn't even glance at Li Huowang; he continued counting in one hand while he extended his other hand to Li Huowang and said, “Give me your identity token.”

The plain-looking man's surname was Nangong, and he stroked the engraving on the token for a few moments before throwing it back to Li Huowang. “You must be Er Jiu. Erniu told me about you before he left.”

Li Huowang nodded. He could still remember that Ji Xiang's real name was Feng Erniu.

Nangong started talking with Sima Lan.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang mulled over his next steps.

Eventually, the conversation between Nangong and Sima Lan ended. Sima Lan turned to Li Huowang and got ready to bring him somewhere else.

Li Huowang stared at Sima Lan and asked, "Senior Sima, who should I find if I want to accept missions?"

Sima Lan was surprised, but he didn't show it on the outside as he replied, "You've become a Banner, so you don't need to accept missions from others. You have to choose your own missions."

Sima Lan then led Li Huowang to the great hall and pulled open one of the screens.

A table surrounded by a few stools was behind the screen.

Sima Lan's bird pecked the table, and a pale-looking eunuch arrived. The pale-looking eunuch bowed toward Li Huowang and Sima Lan. At this point, Li Huowang had become one of the shadowy figures he saw behind the screens earlier.

"Ask him if you need any missions. He has the latest list of missions, but of course, those missions were updated this morning. If you need any help from someone below your rank or from someone idle, you can ask him to enlist them for your mission."

Li Huowang nodded at Sima Lan's explanation and turned to the pale-looking eunuch, asking, "How do I accept missions?"

Chapter 378 - Records

At Li Huowang's question, the pale-looking eunuch politely explained, "Sir, only those below the Seventh Banner would have to look for someone to give them a mission. The procedure changes slightly from the Seventh Banner onward."

Li Huowang nodded, verifying that Tuoba Danqing hadn't lied to him.

The Surveillance Bureau was very lax to outsiders but strict to their own members.

The higher Li Huowang's rank, the stronger the restrictions he would have to face.

If Li Huowang were to become a Ji Xiang, it would be no different from becoming an official of the Imperial Palace. Li Huowang would have his own custom-made uniform as well as daily missions to accomplish.

Of course, the Surveillance Bureau would become more generous to him by then.

The Surveillance Bureau might bestow upon him the method to disperse a person's obsession, which would allow them to keep on extending their lifespan using lifespan pills. Of course, that wouldn't be it; Li Huowang would also gain access to the Surveillance Bureau's treasures and hidden techniques.

The higher his rank, the stronger the treasures and techniques he could receive. A mercenary like Li Huowang would never be able to have access to such things unless he made a drastic move. At best, Li Huowang could buy items from the Surveillance Bureau using lifespan pills.

Li Huowang's quality of work and speed would be the deciding factor when it came to when the Surveillance Bureau would

officially allow him entry into their inner circle.

Once the higher-ups of the Surveillance Bureau believed that a certain worker was smart, hardworking, strong, and with a reputable background, they would send someone to negotiate with the said worker, asking them to enter the inner circle.

Of course, Li Huowang didn't really care about that. He just wanted to fulfill his own goals. "Are there any missions related to the Sitting Oblivion Dao?"

"Please give me a moment, sir. I'll go and fetch the relevant documents," said the pale-looking eunuch with a bow. Then, he turned around and walked out of the screen.

Sima Lan frowned, and the blind black bird spoke in his stead, "Why are you looking for the Sitting Oblivion Dao?"

"I have a grudge against them," said Li Huowang. His excuse was both believable and reasonable.

Sima Lan didn't probe any further, but it was unsure whether he believed Li Huowang or not.

Soon, the pale-looking eunuch returned with a stack of parchment and papers.

"Sir, these are all—"

The pale-looking eunuch's words had yet to finish echoing in the air when Li Huowang grabbed the documents and read them. He read through all of them but found none of them contained anything about Bei Feng.

Li Huowang looked up and saw that Sima Lan had disappeared somewhere.

Li Huowang merely shrugged and asked the pale-looking eunuch. "What's wrong with these missions? These are just some random small fries. The majority of them are suspicions as well rather than confirmed sightings. Do you have any missions involving the Four Joys or the Three Officials?"

The pale-looking eunuch became even more pallid at Li

Huowang's remark as he hurriedly said, "Oh, no, sir. If there were any missions involving the Four Joys or the Three Officials, we would send people to deal with them immediately!

"Those figures are exceedingly dangerous, and we can't let any missions related to them rot in here, waiting for someone to take the mission during their spare time.

"Missions are divided in ranks as well, sir, and the missions involving the Four Joys or the Three Officials would always be considered Third-rank missions.

"The leader would immediately dispatch people to deal with such missions as soon as they appear. There's no way we'll wait for someone to take it here."

Li Huowang nodded, finding the pale-looking eunuch's explanation as reasonable.

The Surveillance Bureau had to react fast enough to the appearance of the Sitting Oblivion Dao's higher-ranking members; otherwise, the Liang Kingdom would suffer greatly.

Unfortunately, the discovery put Li Huowang at an impasse. He was in the Surveillance Bureau, but he still couldn't find Bei Feng.

Li Huowang pondered briefly before asking, "Are there any information or records about the Four Joys and the Three Officials? Anything is fine."

"We do have those. Please give me a moment, sir."

Li Huowang had just in case, but the pale-looking eunuch moved speedily and soon returned with a massive stack of documents. "Sir, you're a Seventh Banner, so you can read all of these."

Li Huowang decided to do just that. Of course, his goal was to find any information related to Bei Feng. After reading the entire stack of documents, Li Huowang finally discovered something. Bei Feng was in Tanyang County's Wu State three years ago.

According to the records, Bei Feng had accompanied Dong

Feng to seize control of a Strayed One. They had blackmailed the Strayed One, saying that Bei Feng would kill the family of the Strayed One if the latter refused to cooperate with Bei Feng.

Li Huowang frowned and continued reading.

Bei Feng was one of the Four Joys, so he was extremely strong. He was strong enough to instantly drown anyone in confusion. He had excellent synergy with Dong Feng, allowing him to exchange bodies with others.

They needed just a single eye contact to exchange bodies with that person.

To make matters worse, they would retain their abilities even after the exchange.

The records revealed that they had plunged the entire Tanyang County into chaos, and they exchanged the bodies of many people; a notable example of it was the incident wherein they exchanged the bodies of the wife and the grandmother while they exchanged the bodies of the grandson and the husband.

They caused great confusion in everyone's relationship with each other.

Bei Feng was an exceptional expert at exploiting others through tricks and deception by taking advantage of their desires, which was the hallmark of the Four Joys.

Bei Feng managed to fool a ton of people into becoming his accomplice. He even managed to transform a seventeen-year-old girl into a member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao in just two hours, effectively turning her into Wu Tiao[1].

The battle on that fateful day resulted in the deaths of a Ji Xiang and a Jian Zheng. However, they managed to secure the Strayed One, and they also killed Dong Feng.

Li Huowang memorized every single piece of information related to Bei Feng. Li Huowang knew of the Ji Xiang position, and he reckoned that Jian Zhengs were most likely higher in rank

compared to Ji Xiangs.

The Surveillance Bureau had sent over a dozen people, but they still lost two members, which was enough evidence of Bei Feng's formidable strength.

Moreover, Bei Feng possessed the strange power to make anyone else exchange bodies with someone else; he could also transform someone into a member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao through deceit.

The pressure on Li Huowang's shoulders abruptly became heavy upon realizing the true strength of the Four Joys. Based on the records, it was impossible for Li Huowang to stand against them alone.

Thankfully, Li Huowang no longer needed to fight by himself.

Can Bei Feng threaten to kill the people inside the hallucination of a Strayed One?

Li Huowang hesitated at the thought, and his expression turned ugly at the thought that his mother and Yang Na could fall for the deceit of the Sitting Oblivion Dao or die in the worst-case scenario.

Li Huowang handed over the stack of documents to the pale-looking eunuch.

"You may return these," Li Huowang said.

"Yes." The pale-looking eunuch bowed and turned around to leave.

"Wait," Li Huowang stopped the pale-looking eunuch and asked, "With my rank, can I read the majority of the documents here?"

"Yes, you may read anything in the first to fourth archive."

"I need information about Strayed Ones. Anything will do," said Li Huowang with clenched fists. Li Huowang was a Strayed One, but he wasn't actually quite clear as to what exactly were Strayed Ones.

Li Huowang was already here, so he decided to take complete

advantage of the Surveillance Bureau's resources to understand the Strayed Ones.

1. unknown position for now, will change after more info 🤔

Chapter 379 - Strayed Ones

“Father?” Li Sui lifted his two eyeballs and saw a rapidly beating heart overhead.

Li Sui had no idea why his father’s heart was beating so fast, and the discovery amused Li Sui rather than unnerved him. It wasn't the first time that it happened, but the experience never seemed to get old.

Li Huowang had ignored Li Sui's call, prompting Li Sui to carefully poke Li Huowang’s heart with his tentacle. Upon receiving no reaction, Li Sui tugged on it gently.

“Ouch! What are you doing?! Stay still!” Li Huowang scolded.

Li Sui was startled, and he immediately retracted his tentacle.

Li Sui dared not move upon getting scolded.

After a while, Li Sui started moving once more, but he didn't change spots. Instead, he decided to toy with the black spindle that his father had given to him.

Li Sui had no idea what the word "spindle" meant, but his father called it "spindle," so he decided to call it that as well. Li Sui circled the spindle numerous times with his two eyes before getting bored. However, he didn’t want to go out. He liked to stay in Li Huowang’s abdomen, as it was quiet and peaceful.

After a while, Li Sui carefully extended a single tentacle with an eyeball out of Li Huowang’s belly button to examine the world outside. Li Sui saw a table before his father. Aside from a cup of tea, there was nothing else on the table. Li Huowang looked anxious, as if he was waiting for something.

Where are we? Li Sui tried to listen to his surroundings, but he

could only hear muffled noises.

Oh, someone's here. Li Sui cast a careful gaze at the pale-looking man holding a stack of documents. *Why are there so many books? Is father going to teach me how to read again? I don't want to learn anymore.*

The pale-looking man placed the documents on the table.

Li Sui wanted to read, but he was unfamiliar with the words on the documents aside from a few words.

Strayed Ones? What does that mean? Li Sui tried to take a closer look, but Li Huowang had picked up the book.

Li Huowang's pupils quivered as he read the book. He read it carefully, afraid of missing even a single letter, as it contained a ton of information about the Strayed Ones!

Li Huowang flipped through the pages and was taken aback.

The book truly had a ton of information about the Strayed Ones, but they were all descriptions rather than what Li Huowang needed. Li Huowang needed the method of using a Strayed One's eyes and a Muddled One's hair to make an artifact.

"Next," said Li Huowang as he grabbed the next book to start reading it. Li Huowang read book after book, but all of them were books about using a Strayed One's body or mind for cultivation purposes.

Li Huowang was disgruntled by the discovery. The information was useless to him unless he cut himself open and refined his own organs into weapons or artifacts.

Chirp!

A shrill chirping interrupted Li Huowang, startling him.

"Why are you reading about the Strayed Ones? Do you have a Strayed One?"

Li Huowang turned around and saw Sima Lan.

Is he suspicious of me? Li Huowang was slightly flustered. He took a quick breath and arranged the books neatly before replying,

"I read that Bei Feng is a Strayed One, so I'm trying to learn more about the Strayed Ones."

"How about the elders of the Ao Jing Sect? Did they not tell you about them?" Sima Lan asked.

Li Huowang removed the cloth bag from his back and opened it, revealing the artifact that Ji Xiang had given to him—the wish wood. The Strayed One's tongue was still pinned to the wood.

"The elders at Cross Temple always told me that the Strayed Ones are living treasures. We must not fight them head-on and must coax them gently. They never told me why, though. There's no way I can try coaxing Bei Feng if I ever meet him next time, so what am I supposed to do?"

"I see," Sima Lan said, nodding. "Then, you don't have to check the fourth archive. You're a Seventh Banner, so I'm just going to tell you."

Li Huowang's ears perked up as Sima Lan said, "Beings that live and die cannot produce another being that can't live and die; beings that can't change cannot produce beings that can change. Those who can't live and die can produce beings that can live and die; those who can't change can produce beings that can change. Beings that can live and die *must* live and die; beings that can change *must* change.

"This is why such beings live, die, and change."

Li Huowang's head throbbed in pain as he attempted to comprehend Sima Lan's words. In the end, he decided to stop Sima Lan and said, "Senior Sima, please keep the explanation simple enough for me. I'm not exactly educated, so you can just keep things simple for me."

Sima Lan frowned, and his gaze on Li Huowang briefly contained contempt and disdain. However, he didn't express it and simply knocked the blind black bird on its head.

The blind black bird answered, "Our master said that everyone

has ten emotions and eight sufferings, but Strayed Ones are different. Not only do they have the ten emotions and eight sufferings, but they also have the primordial breath. In the beginning, everything is just starting to take form; when there is form, there is essence, but it is incomplete.

"Strayed Ones are like that—they have both form and essence, but they're still incomplete. The Strayed Ones are extraordinary foes, as they possess the primordial breath.

"They can make use of their primordial breath to meld their ten emotions and eight sufferings with the Heavenly Dao. Even the Gods cannot save you against a Strayed One once the latter has decided to use their primordial breath against you."

Li Huowang gulped at the remark and hurriedly asked, "What's going to happen once a Strayed One decides to use their primordial breath?"

"The land would be torn apart; the seas would churn, as storms and torrential downpours would all be just a single thought away for that Strayed One!" Sima Lan exclaimed, sounding surprised by his own voice as well.

Hm? Li Huowang was surprised. Are Strayed Ones really that strong? If a Strayed One is capable of reshaping the land itself, can they still be called a Strayed One?

Li Huowang's eyes glazed over as he peered over Sima Lan's shoulders to stare at the illusions behind him—the faceless Hong Zhong, the innocent monk, the headless Peng Longteng, and the legless Jin Shanzhao.

No way! How can their explanation of Strayed One be so different? Why aren't they talking about hallucinations? What about the illusions that follow a Strayed One once a Strayed One kills? And what about the technique to project my body's illusion?

"Hohoho, of course, the runt from the Mo Family isn't exactly knowledgeable about the Strayed Ones. He has merely recited what

he had memorized from textbooks, and do you think that he has seen a Strayed One before?" Hong Zhong teased Li Huowang, "Oh, wait, he's standing in front of a Strayed One right now! *Hahaha!* "

Li Huowang's eyelid twitched, and he directly ignored Hong Zhong. He stared at Sima Lan and asked, "If an ordinary Strayed One is already that strong, doesn't that mean that Bei Feng is even stronger?"

"Yes," Sima Lan said, nodding. "I'm sure you already know, but it's exceedingly difficult to deceive the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. That's exactly why Bei Feng became one of the Four Joys."

"How do I fight Bei Feng?"

"If we knew that, Bei Feng would have perished long ago. How could we let him wreak havoc everywhere he goes?"

Li Huowang frowned at Sima Lan's response. It seemed that he had to go back to the drawing board and revise his plan.

Chapter 380 - Storyteller

Does that mean Bei Feng is different from the other Sitting Oblivion Dao members? And why can't I control my hallucinations? Is it because I can't control the primordial breath? Did Bei Feng manage to control his hallucination because he learned how to control his primordial breath?

Li Huowang slowly analyzed Sima Lan's words while calmly listening to the latter's explanation. After all, Sima Lan's words were the words of his deceased family head.

What if the family head was wrong? Li Huowang had gone through so many things that he had learned to doubt the veracity of the stories told by others in this world.

Li Huowang hesitated but did not question Sima Lan's explanation out loud, as questioning the words of the Mo Family Head was both impolite and borderline insulting.

"Are you trying to find Bei Feng? What did he do to you?" Sima Lan asked, sensing that Li Huowang and the Sitting Oblivion Dao had a long history with each other.

Li Huowang grimaced as he clenched his fist, and his voice sounded deep as he said, "It's not just Bei Feng! I detest everyone in the Sitting Oblivion Dao! They had disguised themselves as our six elders in the Ao Jing Sect!"

Sima Lan nodded calmly as if it was a common occurrence.

"Do not be too fixated on revenge. You'll be an easy target to trick once they discover your obsession," Sima Lan advised.

"Thank you for your advice. I understand."

"Take your time to read the books here. If you don't understand anything, go and find Nangong. I have some matters to do, so I will leave now," said Sima Lan. Then, he turned around to leave, but he had just taken two steps when he came to a halt and

said, "Oh, you might be out of luck if you're looking for the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

"The Storyteller had just killed Fa Cai, so the Sitting Oblivion Dao must be looking for the Storyteller to avenge Fa Cai. You might find it difficult to find them."

Sima Lan's casual remark made Li Huowang's heart beat even faster. *The Storyteller? Zhuge Yuan?*

"Senior Sima, is that true?" Li Huowang asked urgently.

"Of course. The Storyteller just killed one of the Three Officials, and the rest of the Sitting Oblivion Dao is definitely not going to just stand by and let him go. Two days ago, there were reports of people spotting the Storyteller fighting against the Sitting Oblivion Dao. You don't have to worry about your revenge for now since someone's taking care of it for you. Isn't that great?" Sima Lan said before finally stepping out of the screen.

Left all alone, Li Huowang turned to the pale-looking eunuch.

"Please find all the records you can about Zhuge Yuan, as well as anything that has the word Storyteller in it!"

The pale-looking eunuch soon returned, but rather than a stack of documents, he was only carrying a single, thin book.

"Do we only have a book about Zhuge Yuan?" Li Huowang asked, sounding confused.

"There are more in the sixth archive, sir, but you need to be a Third General to read them."

Li Huowang sighed. *Why is the Surveillance Bureau doing this? Hiding information here and there. Are they not worried that someone will end up destroying an entire nation because they failed to get certain information?*

Li Huowang picked up the book and focused on reading. The information in the book was roughly the same as what he already knew, aside from a few details.

According to the Surveillance Bureau, there were numerous

Storytellers, and Zhuge Yuan was just one of them.

Whenever they appeared, a massive change would occur in that place. The Storytellers would appear haphazardly, and no one knew their headquarters.

The Surveillance Bureau usually doesn't bother with those who aren't threats to the existence of the Liang Kingdom.

However, it wasn't the same for Zhuge Yuan.

Storyteller Zhuge Yuan has been spreading rumors and propaganda. Kill on sight.

The Emperor of the Liang Kingdom had passed down such an order. Of course, Zhuge Yuan would be fine so long as he stayed out of the Surveillance Bureau's radar, but the Surveillance Bureau would definitely do everything in its power to kill Zhuge Yuan once he was found.

Li Huowang was certain that the Surveillance Bureau had more records of Zhuge Yuan, but he couldn't read them with his current rank.

I think the Surveillance Bureau knows more about Zhuge Yuan's personality. Is he really that kind? Why did he become a Storyteller? What if he's a storyteller in the literal sense of the word? Why did he snatch away that Muddled One last time?

Li Huowang carefully pondered over those questions. Then, he pressed his abdomen and felt the spindle underneath it.

Zhuce Yuan had given him a helping hand. If it hadn't been for him, Li Huowang would have been in grave danger.

"We will meet again in the future, Er Jiu. My name is Zhuge Yuan. If you have problems that you can't resolve, come and find me at Xing Island in the Western Seas. My powers are limited, but I will help you as much as I can."

Zhuce Yuan had said such words to Li Huowang, but Li Huowang knew that he couldn't trust others so easily in this world. Moreover, whether Zhuge Yuan was truly a kind person or not was

still debatable.

Li Huowang thought for a long time before shaking his head and walking out from the screen. Whether he trusted Zhuge Yuan or not didn't really matter to him. Li Huowang would have to find him anyway if he wanted to uncover Bei Feng's whereabouts.

“This is your first time here, so let me show you the way out.”

“Do you have a map of the Liang Kingdom? The more detailed it is, the better.”

Under the pale-looking eunuch's guidance, Li Huowang arrived back at the plaza with the celestial globe. Li Huowang sighed as he stared at the massive globe.

Li Huowang was holding a map in hand, and the location of the Western Seas had been marked on the map—he had marked exactly where Zhuge Yuan had told him to go if he ever needed help.

Unfortunately, it was a pretty distant place. Li Huowang wanted to leave the same day, but it was already dusk by the time he finished purchasing the rations and the items he would need for the trip.

Li Huowang sat at a roadside stall and stared at the sunset. The streets of Shangjing dimmed as the sun vanished into the horizon.

I need to rest properly today because I'll depart tomorrow. Regardless of what Zhuge Yuan thinks of me, I'm sure I'll have to risk my life on this journey.

“Sir, your noodles and meat buns are here. I'll place your vinegar on this saucer.”

Li Huowang pushed the vinegar away. *Meat buns are desserts; why are they dipping their desserts in vinegar? The people here are crazy, too, not just the world itself.*

Bun caught a whiff of the fragrant food, and it nudged Li Huowang's leg with its nose.

Li Huowang gave Bun some noodles and a few meat buns before ignoring it outright.

Bun needs to lose some weight.

The stall owner approached Li Huowang while wiping his hands on his apron. “Dear customer, you can take it slow today. The sun is setting, but we don’t have a curfew today. It’s the week before the New Year, after all.”

Li Huowang nodded and continued with his meal. *So it has been another year...*

On that night, Li Huowang lay on his bed and listened to the din outside. The people were celebrating outside, creating a festive atmosphere. However, Li Huowang wasn't interested in them at all, as he was too worried about the dangers he would soon face. He couldn't get his heart to calm down.

Li Huowang knew that it would be dangerous, but there was no way he could increase his strength drastically in such a short period of time. He couldn't even refine artifacts using the body of a Strayed One. After all, how could he use his own body as a material?

Hm? Wait a minute...

Chapter 381 - Refining

“Shopkeeper Li, how is the cinnabar that I requested? Has it arrived yet?”

Shopkeeper Li busy with the abacus looked up head and saw a weird-looking man in a red Daoist robe. Shopkeeper Li smiled instantly, as the weird-looking man was a big buyer. “Hehe, sir, it arrived a long time ago and has been waiting for you. The entire thirty kilograms are ready. Little Tiger, help this customer deliver his order home.”

“No need, I’ll carry it myself,” Li Huowang said, paying the final installment. Then, he grabbed lifted the sack with one hand and stepped out of the pharmacy.

The pharmacy assistant, Little Tiger, looked at his boss in astonishment and asked, “Shopkeeper, why did that guy buy so much cinnabar? Most people only buy a few pieces, even if they use cinnabar for medicinal purposes.”

The shopkeeper flicked Little Tiger on the forehead and asked, “Did that hurt? Good! I want you to remember that you’re just an assistant! The reason behind our customers’ purchases is none of your business! So what if he eats those cinnabar with rice?”

"It's none of your business!"

Meanwhile, Li Huowang walked up to the carriage outside and hurled the heavy sack of cinnabar onto the carriage. Li Huowang then hopped into the carriage and let loose a sharp whistle.

Bun showed up and hopped into the carriage.

“Let’s go!” Li Huowang exclaimed. He glanced at the sack of cinnabar next to him, pulled the reins, and urged the horse to pull the carriage toward the city gates on the western side of the city.

Last night, Li Huowang discovered a bottleneck in his previous

approach. He mulled over the matter and recalled that others used cinnabar to refine artifacts. If they could do it, why couldn't he?

Li Huowang had an extraordinary regeneration rate as well. Aside from pain, he wouldn't really suffer from any untoward effects. In addition, artifacts made from the organs of a Strayed One would have extraordinary abilities.

Li Huowang reckoned that his strength would increase dramatically if he were to obtain such artifacts; he also believed that they would be useful in his upcoming showdown with Bei Feng.

The horse pulling the carriage emitted distinct clopping noises on the stone steps as the carriage gradually made its way out of the city. Once outside, Li Huowang went off the beaten path until he found a place that met his requirements at sunset.

The place was a flat clearing before several graves.

Bun's alert level shot through the roof; it lowered its stance and bared its teeth at the graves.

"I'm just borrowing this clearing in front of you guys for one night. Please don't take offense for what I'm about to do," Li Huowang said, bowing toward the graves before turning around to retrieve something from the carriage.

Bun pounced forward just then, startling a few mice that scampered off in all directions.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang took out the small furnace he had obtained from the Human Xiaos. He placed some cinnabar inside the furnace and laid it down on top of some high-quality charcoal.

Li Huowang had some experience refining pills, so refining cinnabar was an easy task for him. An hour later, Li Huowang opened the furnace, and a silver liquid along with some dregs appeared before Li Huowang.

Li Huowang's refinement method had come from Dan Yangzi. The latter had taught him, while he was still at Zephyr Temple. The

silver liquid from refining cinnabar was called quicksilver, or mercury in Li Huowang's previous world.

Li Huowang filtered out the dregs before taking out a bowl to collect the quicksilver.

However, he needed more quicksilver.

Li Huowang proceeded to go for another round of refinement. An hour later, Li Huowang's lips curled up into a satisfied smile as he stared at the large bowl of quicksilver in front of him.

"This should be enough..." Li Huowang muttered and turned around to take the shovel that he had prepared beforehand. He immediately started digging until he had created a hole deep enough to submerge a human being. Li Huowang closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and rummaged through a leather bag, pulling out a gleaming dagger amidst the torture apparatus inside the bag.

The monk rushed over with a look of reluctance and said, "Daoist, can you reconsider? It doesn't have to be like this,"

On the contrary, Hong Zhong sitting on Peng Longteng's shoulders looked eager to witness the spectacle.

Li Huowang ignored the illusions' words; his determination remained as steady as a boulder. He raised the dagger in his hand and slashed at his scalp, tearing it open to reveal the blood vessels underneath.

Li Huowang took off his clothes and stood naked in the pit.

He lowered his head and covered himself with soil.

Burying oneself was difficult, but Li Sui was around to help.

Li Sui's tentacles swept the soil toward Li Huowang, making sure that Li Huowang was buried in densely packed soil.

"Li Sui, be obedient, okay? Help me... just a bit more," Li Huowang urged.

Li Sui obliged and two tentacles emerged from Li Huowang's neck. The tentacles lifted the large bowl filled with quicksilver and carried it over toward Li Huowang's open scalp.

Li Huowang gulped and said, "Move it slightly aside before pouring it into the wound; make sure not to spill it."

Li Sui obeyed and focused completely on the task at hand.

The large bowl of quicksilver tilted, and the silver liquid plummeted into Li Huowang's wound, creating a magnificent sight as they sparkled in the moonlight.

"Carefu—AAAAH!"

The process was extremely difficult, but Li Huowang dared not waver, afraid of spilling the mercury. The pain was tolerable at first, but it eventually became an itch that pervaded him entirely. When the itch turned extreme and reached its peak, Li Huowang struggled desperately against the soil that had surrounded him.

Li Huowang felt as if ants were biting him all over, and the sensation was driving him insane. Li Huowang twisted and turned, squeezing himself upward like a snake. After much effort, he finally managed to escape the pit he had dug himself.

"*Haaa...*" Li Huowang trembled like an aspen tree, and he was in so much pain he couldn't even tell which part of his body radiated the strongest pain.

Li Huowang took a few moments to calm himself down and get used to the pain, but when the cold breeze of the twelfth lunar month swept over his skinless frame; the pain was akin to being stabbed a thousand times with a knife.

It was so painful that he almost fainted.

Li Huowang took out the Fiery Scripture and chanted the incantations inside of it. A burning centipede climbed up Li Huowang, and he was soon covered in charred scars.

It was going to worsen the pain, but Li Huowang still decided to put on his clothes. Li Huowang glanced at the pit and heaved a sigh of relief. Then, he walked over to the carriage and collapsed inside of it. Li Huowang fought the fatigue to curl up and defend himself from the cold breeze before finally fainting.

Chapter 382 - New Year

Li Huowang saw the night sky when he opened his eyes once more, and the sight baffled him until the monk told him that he had slept for three days. Aside from being hungry, Li Huowang felt much better than before he had peeled off his own skin.

Li Huowang pulled out some dry rations and a water flask. Then, he ate and drank with relish. After his meal, he stood up and walked toward his own skin. He was surprised to see Bun curled up into a large yellow ball—from head to tail—on top of Li Huowang's skin.

Bun was asleep, but it dared not leave Li Huowang's skin.

Li Huowang even saw two large dead rats nearby, indicating that Bun had protected Li Huowang's skin while the former was still asleep.

Bun woke up immediately upon getting hit by the fragrance of food.

It wagged its tail incessantly at Li Huowang.

It's bizarre how I'm starting to like dogs more and more the more people I meet. Li Huowang patted Bun's head. He threw half a piece of bread far away, letting Bun fetch it on its own.

Bun rushed toward the bread and chewed on it.

Li Huowang glanced at Bun before pulling his skin out of the soil.

He had considered other ways to peel off his skin, but this method was the best, and it required no help from any outsiders. Moreover, the skin was completely intact and without any damage.

Li Huowang disposed of the mercury before retrieving the Profound Records and walking toward the carriage. Li Huowang proceeded to wrap his skin around the dry straw dummy he had

prepared beforehand.

Li Huowang cast a peculiar gaze upon his own skin. It was a bizarre sight, indeed. Li Huowang took out six incense sticks, lit them up, and then inserted three incense sticks in each eye socket of the dummy.

Li Huowang cut a few strands of his own hair.

Afterward, he drew a few symbols on his hand, which was holding a few cinnabars.

"Heaven and Earth, the root of all energy! Broadly cultivated through eons! Within and beyond the three realms, I alone am honored. The golden radiance inside of me shall reflect on my body!"

Just as the final syllable of the chant came out of Li Huowang's mouth, he finished drawing symbols on his hand. Li Huowang felt nervous just then. *Did it work? It should work, right? I've been practicing it for a long time.*

Li Huowang eventually saw white smoke rising from the seven orifices of his skin wrapped around the dry straw dummy. The incense he had inserted into the straw had caused it to burn.

The skin grew smaller as the smoke grew larger and thicker. The white smoke eventually dissipated, and a palm-sized humanoid figure appeared in front of Li Huowang.

Success! Li Huowang grabbed the humanoid figure and examined it closely. The humanoid figure's features were blurry, and the skin had turned wax yellow. The humanoid figure was like a tiny paper human being cut out from turmeric paper.

From what Li Huowang had read, the artifact in his hand would ward off disasters and turn his luck around during unfavorable moments. Most importantly, it would die in Li Huowang's stead.

Li Huowang had no idea how that worked, but one thing was for sure—the artifact was a life-saving artifact.

In addition, he could make more of this life-saving artifact once he had recovered enough strength, which meant Li Huowang had an "infinite" supply of this life-saving artifact.

Li Huowang finally felt confident in the face of upcoming dangers.

Unfortunately, the other Strayed One artifacts weren't so easy to refine. He had to find natural treasures that could only be stumbled upon, not bought to refine such artifacts, and there were even artifacts with materials written in characters he couldn't understand. Among those powerful artifacts, the life-saving artifact that he had just refined was the easiest and most straightforward artifact to refine.

"Do I.. have a golden finger^[1] now?" Li Huowang muttered while staring at the humanoid figure in his hand. He then mocked himself inwardly.

"Dad? What's a golden finger?" Li Sui asked.

Li Huowang shook his head and refused to answer Li Sui's question.

Li Huowang pondered over where he could hide the humanoid figure. It was a powerful artifact that couldn't be stored haphazardly. After a while, Li Huowang emerged from his thoughts and held the humanoid figure near his navel.

A tentacle reached out and wrapped around the humanoid figure before dragging it into Li Huowang's belly button.

"Thanks, Dad."

Li Huowang nodded and hopped into the carriage. "Let's go."

Li Huowang took out some cold dry rations and took a bite. He then washed the food down with cold water.

"By the way, tonight is New Year's Eve, right?"

"Yes, it's New Year's Eve. Actually, I've been looking forward to this night since last month."

Puppy dressed in a silk robe chatted with Zhao Wu. Eventually, Puppy found a seat and sat down to eat. Puppy instantly zeroed in on a large chicken thigh, and he immediately devoured it.

Before he could swallow the food, Puppy's eyes inadvertently landed on the other dishes on their New Year's Eve dinner—braised carp, stewed meatballs, pickled mustard greens with pork belly, pickled peppers with lamb tripe, four-happiness meatballs, spicy pig trotters, stir-fried meat with poached eggs, and chopped chicken.

Yang Xiaohai couldn't make anything fancy, but each dish was a hearty dish capable of satisfying the palate of just about anyone.

Of course, they could only eat so many delicious dishes during the New Year's Eve dinner. Puppy was so moved by the delectable sight that he felt that tonight was the happiest New Year's Eve in his life so far.

Puppy picked up the tender pieces of the fish using his chopsticks and placed them into his wife's bowl.

"Eat more! Let's work hard and eat more than that Gao fool!"

The others weren't much better than Puppy, especially those new disciples that the Lu Family Troupe had recruited recently. Those children were so eager to eat that they almost buried their heads into the plates.

"Ah... I wonder where Miaomiao is right now. Is she even eating properly?" Chun Xiaoman muttered absentmindedly. She stabbed the bones in her bowl with her chopsticks.

Zhao Wu was sitting next to her, and he picked up a meatball that he quickly placed into her bowl, saying, "She has divine powers, and Senior Li is with her. Don't worry, let's enjoy the New Year and talk about it later."

"Eat," said Gao Zhijian as he placed another meatball into her bowl.

Everyone ate in delight, and that was when a figure appeared in the Bai Family's large courtyard. "Oh, a New Year's Eve dinner?

The food must taste great, as I can smell it even from here.”

The familiar voice made everyone turn toward where it had come from at the same time.

Bai Lingmiao was standing there with a smile.

Chun Xiaoman reacted before anyone else; she stood up and rushed over to Bai Lingmiao. She touched Bai Lingmiao all over, and upon confirming that Bai Lingmiao had returned in one piece rather, Chun Xiaoman sighed in relief.

“You really worried me. The next time you leave, you better say goodbye to me before leaving, okay?” Chun Xiaoman said.

Bai Lingmiao patted Chun Xiaoman's shoulder, and then she walked past her to go straight to the hall. There were a total of three tables in the hall, and she headed straight for the largest one.

More specifically, she walked toward the main seat facing the entrance.

Lu Zhuangyuan was sitting in the main seat, as he was the eldest of the group. A spicy pig trotter in his mouth made his left cheek bulge, and he stopped chewing upon seeing Bai Lingmiao.

Bai Lingmiao merely stood in front of Lu Zhuangyuan.

However, Lu Zhuangyuan instantly realized what she was trying to say, so he laughed heartily and picked up the tobacco pouch on the table. Then, he moved aside and stole his son's seat by nudging the latter away from the table.

“Hehehe, Miss Bai, welcome back! Oh? That Daoist didn’t come back with you?” Lu Zhuangyuan said.

Bai Lingmiao lifted a cup of wine high up and exclaimed, “Let me give everyone a toast on this New Year’s Eve!”

1. can also be understood as being granted immense power by the author 🤔

Chapter 383 - Arrival

Everyone stared with wide eyes at Bai Lingmiao and her wine glass.

What happened to Miss Bai? How come she had changed so much?

Bai Lingmiao had never been the type to propose toasts.

The others hesitantly picked up their wine glasses and toasted Bai Lingmiao—the true owner of the village.

Everyone started eating again.

Chun Xiaoman sat next to Bai Lingmiao and grabbed her hand. She sounded anxious as she asked, “Miaomiao, what's going on? Why do you seem so different now?”

Bai Lingmiao casually picked up a piece of chicken and stuffed it into her mouth.

“It’s nothing. I just briefly touched Li Huowang’s sword a bit,” Bai Lingmiao replied while chewing.

“What?!” Chun Xiaoman’s voice was so loud it almost destroyed the roof. Chun Xiaoman what had happened when Lu Xiucui touched Li Huowang's sword.

The disciples couldn't focus on eating upon hearing Chun Xiaoman's voice. They stood up one by one, asking with concern about what had happened. After the chaotic questioning and displays of concern, the New Year’s Eve dinner soon came to an end.

It took a long time for them to settle down. Fortunately, Bai Lingmiao was still Bai Lingmiao, even though her personality had changed drastically.

However, not everyone took it lightly. Chun Xiaoman hugged Bai Lingmiao tightly while crying in regret. Chun Xiaoman blamed

herself for not following Bai Lingmiao; she believed that if she had been by Bai Lingmiao's side, this wouldn't have happened.

Bai Lingmiao struggled out of Chun Xiaoman's embrace; she sounded impatient as she said, "I feel like going deaf with how loud you are. If you really care about me, you should be happy for me. I've already let go of everything now, and I feel much better."

Everything that had happened was already water under the bridge; there was no use crying over spilled milk.

Chun Xiaoman's eyes were bloodshot as she vowed, "Don't worry. Once I've mastered that supernatural technique, I won't let anyone hurt you ever again!"

"Technique? What technique?" asked Bai Lingmiao with her slender brows furrowed.

Chun Xiaoman panicked and hastily corrected herself, saying, "No, I mean, in the future! I'll find a supernatural technique to protect you in the future!"

Unfortunately, Bai Lingmiao wasn't so easily fooled. "That doesn't sound right. Don't lie to me. Did you find something under the ancestral hall? Xiaoman, tell me the truth."

Bai Lingmiao seemed to have already guessed it, so Chun Xiaoman didn't bother hiding the truth. Chun Xiaoman stared at Bai Lingmiao with a complex expression and sighed before saying, "Miaomiao, I was afraid you'd worry. You know your family..."

Chun Xiaoman rambled on, and Bai Lingmiao's eyes brightened.

She couldn't even wait for dawn as she rushed toward the Bai Family Ancestral Hall.

I should've recalled it earlier! Bai Lingmiao couldn't hide her joy as she ignored Chun Xiaoman's shouting at her from behind.

Bai Lingmiao twisted the bronze monkey statue, lifted her skirt, and rushed into the dark hall. However, Bai Lingmiao didn't go toward the main hall. Instead, she rushed to the side and opened

wooden doors, one after another.

Bai Lingmiao abruptly stopped in the middle of her search. Faint scenes in the deepest recesses of her memories had just struck her. She had been here when she was young.

“Wait, wait. Where did Second Uncle and Youngest Uncle go? Wait! It's this way.”

Bai Lingmiao dashed down the corridor until she found a dead-end.

“Miaomiao, it's not here. Puppy found your family's divine technique beyond the third door on the other side,” Chun Xiaoman said.

Bai Lingmiao ignored Chun Xiaoman and crouched down. Then, she carefully groped around the uneven wall. Eventually, she pressed down on a protruding brick, and a rumbling noise echoed.

Bai Lingmiao turned and found that the dead-end wall was rising.

A row of solemnly draped white banners with lotuses presented themselves before Bai Lingmiao. A crystal-clear white lotus emitting a faint glow that illuminated the entire room stood on a table in the corner of the room.

There were books as well, and they were wrapped in soft cowhide; there was even fine sand next to them—Bai Lingmiao assumed that the sand was there to absorb moisture.

Clearly, the White Lotus Sect cherished these books.

“Goodness...” Chun Xiaoman muttered and stared blankly at the scene before her. She never really thought that there would be another secret room inside a secret room. The way the items here were secured made it clear to Chun Xiaoman that they were extraordinary. Chun Xiaoman believed that the technique she had cultivated painstakingly couldn't compare to any of the items here.

“It looks like my family has left me quite a few good things,” Bai Lingmiao looked around with joy.

“ *Sniff! Sniff!* ” Faint crying echoed from the corner of the room.

Bai Lingmiao’s face showed a hint of impatience. “What are you crying for? What’s there to cry about?! Do you not see how Li Huowang is right now? I thought you wanted to help him? Especially when relying on the Immortal families is useless!”

Chun Xiaoman carefully approached the corner of the room, only to discover that the crying was coming from the crouched and pitiful-looking Second Deity.

Chun Xiaoman hesitated briefly before mustering the courage to walk up to the Second Deity and patting her back gently. The Second Deity trembled like an aspen tree as she leaned against Chun Xiaoman and sobbed softly.

Chun Xiaoman's eyes glazed over while staring at the red-veiled figure in her arms. The moment they made contact, Chun Xiaoman immediately realized that the Second Deity was the true Junior Bai that she knew.

Chun Xiaoman looked up with a complex expression at the ecstatic Bai Lingmiao in the distance.

“Miaomiao, everything here belongs to the Bai Family, so I'm not going to say anything if you want to cultivate any of them. However, I'm sure you haven't forgotten those who were buried, have you?” Chun Xiaoman said.

“No need to beat around the bush. Don’t worry; I'm not going to use any of the White Lotus Sect's techniques that are extremely harmful or with unreasonable demands. I’m not Li Huowang, you know?” Bai Lingmiao replied.

“Go! Go!” Li Huowang shook the reins, urging the four horses pulling the carriage to run even faster. A regular carriage only needed one horse, but he had added three more horses to reach the seaside town sooner.

Li Huowang even slapped acceleration talismans on the three extra horses.

The four trembling horses covered in blood and sweat eventually came to a halt.

Li Huowang jumped down and turned toward the seaside town in the distance. The seaside town couldn't compare to the capital or Yingling City, but it was still bustling with people. Li Huowang swept his gaze across the black-tiled roofs of varying heights, and then his gaze landed on the sea in the distance.

The sea was vast—so vast that the horizon seemed to merge with the sea. The salty sea breeze blew over Li Huowang's skinless face, and Li Huowang frowned instantly at the stinging sensation that bloomed all over him.

We're finally here. Luckily, there were no incidents along the way. Li Huowang put on a bamboo hat with a black veil and tugged at the reins again. After passing through the unguarded town gates, Li Huowang made a beeline for the relay station and returned the three borrowed horses.

Li Huowang had borrowed those three extra horses using his identity as a member of the Surveillance Bureau.

Chapter 384 - Candy

After returning the horses, Li Huowang walked into an inn. The journey had been exhausting, and he needed to recover his strength before boarding the ship.

“Guest, your dishes are ready,” the waiter said and turned around to leave.

“Wait,” Li Huowang said, stopping the waiter. “Why are these fish and shrimp still alive? How am I supposed to eat them?”

“Hehe, is this your first time in Huating City? No, they’re not alive; it’s called raw pickling. Look, the other guests are eating it that way. Try it out first. If you don’t like it, then it’s going to be on the house.”

Li Huowang glanced at the food on other tables, and then he used his bandaged right hand to shoo the waiter away.

Due to its proximity to the sea, the local cuisine had a significant difference compared to the local cuisine in other regions. Of course, the local cuisine featured mostly seafood.

Li Huowang found it a bit hard to get used to it first, but he found the dish to be surprisingly refreshing. The pickled meat was sweet with a unique flavor to it.

Li Huowang ate to his heart’s content, and then he lay down to sleep. Li Huowang woke up later in the day. He sat up on the bed and shook his groggy head before getting out of bed.

“All right, let’s go find that ship,” Li Huowang muttered to himself. He had no issues locating the ship heading to Xing Island, as it was a square-bottomed ship capable of accommodating dozens of ships.

Li Huowang was about to get aboard the ship when the unkempt and bearded ship captain stood in his way and asked,

“Stop, stop, stop. What’s your surname?”

“Er,” Li Huowang replied.

“You'd best not fool around. Who has the surname Er in this world? If you don't want to tell me the truth, then you better get out of here. I can't be bothered to talk nonsense with you.”

“Bai,” Li Huowang added.

“That's more like it,” the captain said. Then, he examined Li Huowang from top to bottom and waved his hand.

“Next! What’s your surname?” the captain asked someone else.

Soon, the ship left the port, and the harbor district gradually disappeared into the horizon,

Li Huowang exhaled slowly while standing on the deck of the ship. He was about to meet Zhuge Yuan once more, and he felt complicated emotions at the idea alone.

Was he excited, happy, curious, and suspicious? If Li Huowang were asked, he would reply that he felt a hodgepodge of emotions.

Li Huowang rubbed his belly and felt a bit more at ease. He was no longer the Li Huowang who had just left Zephyr Temple. He was prepared regardless of what would happen next.

“Hehe, why not sit inside the cabin for a while?” A voice echoed from behind Li Huowang. “The sea breeze on deck is quite cold.”

Li Huowang turned and saw a young man with bandages around his forehead. The young man grinned while leaning closer toward Li Huowang, who was leaning on the railings of the ship.

Li Huowang couldn't be bothered with the overfamiliar young man and moved away with a frown.

“It can be said that we share the same fate, as we've embarked on a journey on the same ship. It's going to take us six days to reach Xing Island. How about you come inside and play a round of leaf cards with us? We're short one player, and it's a great stroke of coincidence that I saw you out there,” said the bandaged young

man.

“No,” Li Huowang replied coldly. He took a few quick steps toward the other side of the deck.

The bandaged young man didn’t insist and turned around to walk into the cabin.

The world abruptly darkened.

Everyone looked up and saw a massive ship passing by. The ship seemed to be as huge as a mountain. She blotted out the sunlight, and she had bronze lion heads the size of Eight Immortals’ tables on her port and starboard sides.

The bronze lion heads were wide agape, and their teeth were glimmering jewelry.

The colossal ship was a warship, and the warship’s current condition meant that she had just gone through a grueling battle.

Everyone on deck immediately prostrated upon identifying the ship.

Liang Kingdom’s warship? Who are they fighting? Li Huowang pondered as the warship emitting a powerful, oppressive aura slowly made its way toward the harbor district.

Everyone on deck sighed in relief and stood up when the sun shone down on them once more.

“You’ve got guts by not prostrating toward the ship. If what you’ve done had provoked the soldiers, you would have lost your life!” The bandaged young man gave Li Huowang a thumbs-up.

“Where were they from?” Li Huowang asked.

“I don’t know, but there are some rumors that they went overseas to find something,” replied the bandaged young man.

They used a warship just to find something? Li Huowang was immediately reminded of the Muddled One that Ji Xiang and himself had been looking for. *What if the Muddled One was just one of the things they’re looking for? Why do they want so many treasures?*

Li Huowang felt that something big was about to happen, but

he had no clues about it. In the end, Li Huowang shook his head and pushed away the distracting thoughts. Then, he turned around and headed toward the cabin.

Nothing eventful happened in the next few days. The sea was calm, but Li Huowang felt like time was excruciatingly slow, as he couldn't wait to reach Xing Island.

“Jade Kirin.”

“Six hundred.”

“Ten thousand. Baldhead, can you play faster? You dawdle like a woman.”

“Hey, wait a minute, I won! Pay up! Pay up!”

Li Huowang leaned against the ship's railings and watched silently at his fellow passengers playing leaf cards to pass the time. It only took him a few days to figure out how the game worked.

In a nutshell, the leaf cards game was like mahjong but with fewer tiles

Mahjong had over a hundred tiles, while leaf cards had only a few dozen cards.

In other words, it was a game with a much faster pace than mahjong. In addition to the rules of the game, Li Huowang had already analyzed the game behavior of the players; the bandaged young man had a penchant for cheating, while the bearded bald man was the best player and had won the most games.

Li Huowang wasn't the only spectator. The other bored passengers formed a crowd to observe them playing the game for entertainment.

“Damn it, you brat, how dare you cheat! No wonder I've been losing every round all this while!” someone exclaimed, and the card game quickly turned into a brawl.

However, the onlookers were more entertained rather than scared.

“Ahhh...” Li Huowang heard a soft voice below him. He looked

down and saw that a little girl, seemingly under four years old and wearing open-crotch pants, had wobbled over to him and was tugging at Li Huowang's pants.

Upon sensing Li Huowang's gaze, the little girl grinned and opened her palm, revealing a half-eaten piece of sesame candy.

Li Huowang could see from the little girl's innocent eyes that she only wanted to share her tasty candy with others. Li Huowang was suddenly reminded of his foolish female senior back at Zephyr Temple, who wanted to share her candy with him.

"Sniff!" Bun sitting in the corner stuck its head out.

The little girl was overjoyed to see the yellow dog, and she immediately handed the half-eaten candy to Bun.

Bun opened its mouth carefully to take the candy when a tentacle rushed out and snatched it away.

The little girl let loose a peal of laughter while staring at the black tentacle retracting into Li Huowang's red Daoist robes. The little girl clearly had no idea as to what had just happened.

The little girl rushed up to Li Huowang and tiptoed with her mouth wide open while staring at where the tentacle had vanished.

Just then, a woman with a pale yellow complexion rushed toward her and hugged her. The woman held her struggling daughter and bowed repeatedly toward Li Huowang before walking toward the female-exclusive cabin.

Bun glanced at its motionless master and tilted its head. It leaned over to lick the small handprint on the red Daoist robes, and it found that the sticky handprint still carried a hint of sweetness.

Chapter 385 - The Dragon King

Li Huowang patted Bun's head gently and stared at the departing little girl through the semi-transparent black veil.

A hint of envy blossomed in his heart as he mused, *How nice would it be to regress to the time when I knew nothing...*

A muffled bang echoed just then, and the ship swayed to the left. The people fighting inside the cabin immediately turned into a tangled mess as they rolled to the left.

Li Huowang unsheathed his sword and thrust it into the ground. Then, he reached out and grabbed Bun's tail. *That was such a massive rogue wave. Is the carriage in the lower deck okay?*

Li Huowang couldn't help but feel nervous as he thought about the consequences of Black Taisui breaking free in the cabin. He couldn't wait for the ship to stabilize as he stumbled toward the stern of the ship.

Li Huowang breathed a sigh of relief upon seeing that the carriage he had nailed down to secure was doing fine. The blindfolded horse was still quietly chewing on horse fodder as well.

Li Huowang examined the carriage carefully to reassure himself.

After a while, he turned around to leave and was astonished to find that the people in the cabin had gone missing. The thin leaf cards on the ground were scattered haphazardly on the floor.

A muffled bang echoed once more, and the entire cabin swayed violently.

What's going on? Li Huowang sensed that something was amiss and frowned deeply.

He gripped his sword and rushed toward the deck.

The pouring rain quickly drenched Li Huowang, and he eventually found the people from the cabin. They hadn't inexplicably vanished but had gathered on the deck, listening to the captain roaring while gesticulating wildly..

“Who was the idiot who lied about their surname?! Come out! Everyone on this ship is going to end up as fish food, and it's all because of you!”

Boom!

A deafening noise echoed, and the ship swayed deeper; everyone on board was frantic, creating a cacophonous din that pervaded the entire deck despite the pouring rain.

Li Huowang noticed something amiss. At first, he thought a rogue wave caused the swaying of the ship, but the nearby sea was calm. Clearly, the ship was swaying not because of powerful, towering waves but because of something else.

Li Huowang walked up to the railings and peered into the water. Perhaps it was due to the dark clouds in the sky, but the deep blue sea had become a mysterious ink-green color.

Bang!

A violent tremor ran across the ship.

Li Huowang clapped his eyes on a blurry figure underwater, and strands of black hair swayed gently in the water as they rose to the surface.

There really is something in the water. Li Huowang's expression turned ugly at the thought that there was something similar to a sea god in the waters.

Nothing had happened during the majority of the trip, and the chaos only happened when they would soon arrive at their destination. Just as Li Huowang was contemplating what he was supposed to do, he heard powerful knocks behind him.

The captain was on all fours, knocking his head on the floor.

Blood flowed out of his forehead as he stood up and drew a dagger from his waist.

“Who the hell is it?!” the captain roared desperately, “If you're not going to come out, then I'm going to kill everyone!”

The captain's bloody and desperate look scared everyone.

The young man with a bandaged forehead hurriedly pointed at the pale yellow woman next to him and said, “It's her! I heard her calling her daughter by her nickname! Her daughter's surname is Chen!”

The captain rushed toward the little girl as if he had seen an oasis in the middle of a desert. The captain grabbed the little girl by the arm; she was the same little girl who had given Li Huowang a sesame candy earlier.

“A person with the surname Chen actually dared to board the ship?! Damn it, how come the Dragon King didn't find her until it was too late!”

“What are you doing?! Let go of my daughter!” exclaimed the pale yellow woman.

“The Dragon King is already knocking on our doors! What do you think I'm about to do?! Damn it, let go!” the captain roared.

The din created by the roars and the cries of the little girl pervaded the deck, but it sounded muted amidst the torrential rain.

Bang!

The ship swayed upon getting hit by something.

The onlookers panicked and tugged at the pale yellow woman to force her to let go of her daughter.

Li Huowang was about to, but a voice echoed from next to him.

“Are you guys still humans? You actually want to feed a child to an evil spirit in the sea?”

Hmm? Li Huowang looked up to see that the bearded bald man had spoken up. The bearded bald man was one of the best leaf card

players from earlier.

Since someone else had intervened, Li Huowang didn't bother to step up. He stood calmly, ready to watch how things would unfold. If someone else would handle the situation, he was happy to remain an onlooker.

The captain wiped away the rain on his face and turned to the bearded bald man, shouting, "Talk is cheap! The Dragon King is in the water! My ship won't last a few more hits, and if the ship sinks, we're all going to die!"

"You want to throw that child into the sea, but do you really think that what's in there will calm down and leave once you've thrown that child into the sea?"

"Of course! This Dragon King only eats people with the surname Chen! We'll survive once we've thrown her into the sea!"

"You fool! Move aside!" The bearded bald man pushed the captain aside and walked toward the bow of the ship. He gestured with both of his hands, creating hand seals while chanting an incantation toward the inky-black water.

The bearded bald man looked ordinary, but he definitely had tricks up his sleeves.

Li Huowang pondered briefly before asking, "Are you confident?"

"Would I be here if I weren't? Also, I can't back down now, can I? A real man won't shrink back and watch a little girl die for me."

Li Huowang glanced at the little girl in her mother's arms and nodded. "Well said."

The bearded bald man glanced at Li Huowang and finally noticed the latter's strange attire. "Who are you, and which sect are you from?"

Before Li Huowang could answer, the ship swayed once more, and a creaking noise echoed from beneath the ship. The creaking that sounded loud and clear even amidst the rain sent shivers down

everyone's spine.

The captain urgently shouted, "She can't hold on anymore! Hurry up and do whatever you need to do!"

Li Huowang took off his hat and stepped onto the ship's railings. He looked down at the black hair on the surface and noticed that they had multiplied. "Regardless of what's underneath, let's work together. Hopefully, our combined strength is stronger than this thing."

The bearded bald man cast a solemn gaze at Li Huowang's skinless head and nodded.

"It's coming! Get ready!" Li Huowang roared. Then, he unsheathed his bronze coin sword and crouched down.

The bearded bald man took out some Buddhist beads and placed them on his fingers.

A black shadow emerged from the waters.

Li Huowang jumped into the waters.

The clumps of black hair on the surface of the water seemed to come alive, and they moved to catch Li Huowang in mid-air.

Li Huowang's mouth fluttered open as he chanted a quick incantation. The bronze coins came to life, and there was a flash of light as the clumps of black hair were sliced into pieces.

Li Huowang took a deep breath before landing in the cold sea.

Splash!

The salty seawater enveloped Li Huowang instantly, and he immediately shivered in pain as if he had been dunked into a cauldron of hot oil.

Chapter 386 - White Tower

In the face of a formidable enemy, Li Huowang ignored the pain that had pervaded him and took out two glowing stones from his pocket. He wasted no time and hurled the glowing stones deep into the sea.

The glowing stones descended quickly, illuminating the sea and revealing the Dragon King. The Dragon King turned out to be a snake-like entity covered in black hair.

“What is that?” Li Huowang frowned. He gnashed his teeth to suppress the pain, and then he drew his sword with his right hand before slashing at his wrist. Sinister bone spikes emerged from his severed wrist, and they flew toward the so-called Dragon King.

Soon, several black tentacles wriggled out of the stump of Li Huowang's wrist, transforming into a hand. Li Huowang's left hand swept across the entity covered in black hair, and the nearby seawater was dyed in black blood.

The entity couldn't coalesce and was forced to disperse. Dark green eyes that resembled human faces appeared on the black hair. The eyes were filled with hostility and killing intent.

Those faces aren't human faces; they're monkey faces! The Dragon King doesn't exist. It's just a bunch of water monkeys! Li Huowang deduced upon observing the faces. *At least they understand human speech, even though they're just water monkeys.*

Li Huowang drew the purple-tassel sword, and killing intent burst out of him as he opened his mouth and roared, “Get lost!”

The churning seawater from Li Huowang's mouth attracted the attention of the water monkeys, and they stared at Li Huowang for

a while. Eventually, the entity covered in black hair swayed with the waves and disappeared as if it were terrified of Li Huowang.

The crisis had been averted, so Li Huowang got ready to return to the surface. However, he realized that the bearded bald man was missing. *Where is he? I couldn't really see him earlier.*

Li Huowang rushed to the surface to take a few deep breaths. Afterward, he dived down to look for the missing bearded bald man. Eventually, Li Huowang found the bearded bald man on the seabed.

Half of the bearded bald man's face was missing, and the water monkeys had gouged out his left eye. The fierce waves had peeled the bearded bald man's skin, and he looked even paler than Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang stared at the bearded bald man's corpse, unsure of what to say.

“Amitabha, Amitabha, you're a baldy who's done good deeds. You're an extraordinary monk,” the monk said, and then he chanted prayers for the bearded bald man.

Li Huowang sighed and grabbed the bearded bald man's corpse before swimming toward the surface. *I should have tested his skills before letting him go underwater.*

Just as Li Huowang was regretting his decision, the monk abruptly exclaimed, “Daoist, watch out! Something's behind you!”

The monk's words had yet to finish echoing in the air when Li Huowang turned abruptly and saw a grotesque colossal maw covered in long, follicle-like tentacles.

Hmm? Li Huowang stared at the dusty ceiling fan above him.

A white wildflower filled his vision.

“Brother, you're awake? Look, isn't this flower beautiful? I picked it from outside.”

Li Huowang followed the chubby hand holding the white wildflower and found a middle-aged man with a naive, chubby face.

The middle-aged man looked to be at least forty or fifty years old, but he behaved like a child; his eyes also radiated an exceptionally innocent light.

Li Huowang's muscles tensed up. *No! I was about to get consumed by that thing in the water! How come I'm here?*

Li Huowang struggled to sit up but found his limbs bound.

"Brother, we're in the White Tower Hospital. However, some call it the White Tower Prison. I was brought here by the guards while I was rummaging through garbage on the street.

"The guard said I wasn't stupid enough, so he let me feed you and gave me more candy in exchange."

Li Huowang's mind quickly spun as he looked around the unfamiliar surroundings.

It doesn't matter why *Black Taisui's ability had failed; the fact that I'm in the hallucination means that I'm still alive. There's still hope! No, I'm in that thing's stomach! I have to get out of here as soon as possible!*

After figuring everything out, Li Huowang turned to the middle-aged man next to him and asked, "Can you help me out? Untie these restraints for me."

The middle-aged man shook his head vigorously and made a noise reminiscent of a drum using his lips and said, "No, no, no. The guard said I can't untie you. If I untie you, I'll be sent to the small dark room."

Li Huowang was in the middle of a critical juncture on the other side, so he had no time to waste here. There was a high chance that he was about to be devoured. With that in mind, Li Huowang took a deep breath, turned sharply to the left, and flipped the entire metal bed, causing a loud crashing noise.

The middle-aged man was terrified, and he rushed toward the iron door, pounding on it as he turned to the camera overhead and cried out, "Guard, come here! Hurry up, and come here! I'm really

scared!”

Li Huowang twisted and lifted the iron bed up high before throwing it to the ground. Li Huowang exerted so much force that he inadvertently fractured the bones in his left palm, causing him to wince and gnash his teeth

Regardless, he pulled strongly, and his floppy, broken left arm slipped off the restraints as if it were made of noodles.

Li Huowang used the pinky finger of his left hand to desperately remove the restraints on his right arm, and he ended up succeeding. Unfortunately, Li Huowang could already hear approaching footsteps in the distance.

Li Huowang moved even faster, freeing himself just in time.

A prison guard rushed toward Li Huowang.

Li Huowang swung his right knee toward the prison guard, breaking the latter's ribs.

Li Huowang managed to subdue one of the prison guards, but the remaining guard swung his stun baton toward him.

The electricity that coursed through Li Huowang froze him briefly, but he gnashed his teeth and yanked the two batons away. Then, he glared at the prison guard.

The guard trembled all over, frightened by Li Huowang's appearance. Although he still had other weapons, it seemed like the odds weren't in his favor. The prison guard suddenly recalled why this guy was admitted here.

“Li Huowang? That's your name, right? You can hear me, right?

"Calm down, calm down. Your girlfriend has just visited you not too long ago. I'll call her over to meet you. What do you think?"

Li Huowang grabbed the magnetic stripe card and the stun baton from the fallen prison guard on the floor before rushing toward the door. *I don't care what you are. You better not think that I'm going to patiently wait for my demise in your stomach!*

Li Huowang opened every single iron gate in his way and attacked the guards who dared to obstruct him. Soon, an alarm blared throughout the White Tower Prison's mental health ward. A few specialized teams soon rushed into the ward.

Li Huowang assessed the situation rationally, and he decided not to escape through the exit. Li Huowang looked left and right before charging into the prison guard's office.

Before the prison guards could even react, Li Huowang jumped down the fourth floor.

“ *Cough, cough!* ” Li Huowang spat out blood and forced himself to stand up.

Li Huowang ignored the mentally unstable patients nearby and smiled smugly at the enormous gray prison building behind him. *I don't care what you are, but do you really think that you can gobble me up so easily? Fat chance!*

Chapter 387 - I'M Sorry

“What’s up with him? How did he survive such a long jump? Should we call the ambulance?”

“Guard! Someone's injured here!”

“Ah! I know him! I saw him on TV! Apparently, he’s a hero who fought for the people.”

“Look, his hand is injured! He’s really pitiful.”

The whisperings of the nearby patients didn’t disturb Li Huowang at all.

He looked away from the prison building and looked around. *I’ve come out of its belly, but I’m still in the water. I have to get back on the ship soon, or I’m going to drown!*

Li Huowang's gaze eventually landed on a distant steel watchtower. The steel watchtower seemed to be located on the periphery of the White Tower Prison. A soldier with a gun was scratching his neck and was staring in their direction in confusion.

The tower was high and was the highest place throughout the prison.

There's no mistaking it! That's my ship! Li Huowang quickly raised his hands as if he were swimming. He swung his arms constantly while heading toward the steel watchtower as if he were swimming.

Li Huowang could feel his entire body screaming at him, and his arms were so fatigued that he could hardly lift his arms. He felt like collapsing to the ground.

The hints that his body was throwing at him allowed Li Huowang to deduce that the monster had seriously injured him. Of course, he had no idea whether his injury was caused by the monster's teeth or by its stomach acid.

Regardless, he wouldn't give up so easily.

Li Huowang used all his strength to swim, and he muttered to himself, *Li Sui, help your dad swim faster! I can't see what's happening over there right now, so I'm counting on you!*

Li Huowang felt a surge of strength just then, and he inwardly exclaimed, *Thank you, Li Sui!*

A large group of prison guards rushed out of the prison gate, and they wielded a variety of weapons—large nets, iron forks, and more.

They rushed anxiously toward Li Huowang, and hot pursuit ensued on the oval-shaped field of the White Tower Prison grounds. A group of armed figures was chasing after someone who was running like he was swimming at the same time.

Li Huowang was slower than them, so the distance between the two sides narrowed rapidly.

Li Huowang found out that a dense wire mesh wall was separating the watchtower from the periphery of the prison grounds. However, Li Huowang remained undeterred and stuck his fingers into the gaps to start climbing up the wall.

The soldier on the watchtower noticed that they were losing control of the situation, so he hurriedly raised his gun and closed one eye to aim at Li Huowang.

“Don't shoot! Absolutely do not shoot!” a panicked roar echoed from the crowd behind Li Huowang. “He has gone viral! We'll be in trouble if he dies here!”

Meanwhile, Li Huowang had finally scaled the wire mesh wall.

Unfortunately, a rolling cage with spikes appeared before him. Li Huowang reached out to one of the spikes, but a blue arc of lightning jumped from the spike toward Li Huowang's finger, which meant that the spikes were filled with high-voltage electricity.

The iron forks and nets retracted quickly at the sight, afraid of getting electrocuted.

This little pain is not enough to stop me! Li Huowang's expression turned fierce as he grabbed the rolling cage with one arm and forcefully flipped himself onto the spiked cage. His skin burned, and smoke rose almost immediately from his clothes.

“Turn it off! Hurry up!” someone roared.

Li Huowang looked like he was about to catch fire anytime soon, and the sight dumbfounded everyone down below. Li Huowang was enveloped in smoke, but he could still move.

“Goodness, are we staring at a human being?”

Li Huowang used the final vestiges of his strength to jump onto the watchtower's iron platform. Li Huowang panted heavily, and he felt numb all over. His vision swam and had dimmed as well.

Li Huowang was truly tired, as he had just squeezed out the final vestiges of his strength to jump onto the iron platform. However, he could see that he was so close to the ship—the end was so near, and he couldn't let all his efforts go to waste.

Li Huowang took a deep breath and stood up. He used his scorched hand to support himself on the railing as he staggered toward the stairs that led to the top of the watchtower.

The two soldiers on duty had no idea whether to raise or lower their guns. In the end, they pointed their guns to the floor and watched as the terrifying lunatic climbed up the stairs to reach them.

The lunatic soon reached them, but he stopped moving. Clearly, the lunatic had no intention of attacking them. Of course, Li Huowang didn't need to move, as he knew that he had already returned to the deck of the ship and had survived the ordeal.

Li Huowang panted heavily and muttered, “Captain, don't.. stop. Keep going toward Xing Island.”

Loud alarm bells abruptly echoed in Li Huowang's heart, and he was startled out of his daze by the sound of approaching footsteps. Li Huowang rushed toward the wall on the other side and

made sure there was enough distance between him and the newcomers.

Li Huowang swept his gaze across the iron forks in the newcomers' hands and roared, "Water monkeys, right? Don't even think about dragging me back into the water!"

The newcomers remained undeterred and stepped forward.

At the sight, Li Huowang decisively raised his right hand and pressed it on his left eye.

"Huowang!" someone exclaimed. Li Huowang froze instantly upon hearing the familiar cry. Li Huowang then peered over the shoulders of the water monkeys and saw a figure in white.

The figure in white was Yang Na, and she looked extremely haggard.

The sight made Li Huowang feel as though someone had thrust a dagger into his heart.

"Huowang, are you awake? Do you still recognize me?" asked Yang Na.

Li Huowang instinctively lowered his head, avoiding her gaze. He languidly raised his hand and roared, "I am the Great Sage, Sun Wukong! Today, I will break through the Lingxiao Palace and wreak havoc in the Heavenly Palace!"

Li Huowang laughed with tears streaming down his face while dancing before everyone like a real lunatic.

Yang Na almost collapsed at the heart-wrenching sight, and she roared, "Huowang! What do you want me to do?! I really can't forget you!"

Li Huowang came to a halt, and his expression changed drastically as he staggered toward Yang Na. He raised his bloody right hand, revealing a small white wildflower the size of a fingernail.

Someone sneaked up on Li Huowang from behind and smashed the butt of their gun toward Li Huowang's arm, bending it in a

grotesque way. Then, someone tackled Li Huowang, and the nearest two soldiers immediately rushed toward Li Huowang, pressing him firmly to the ground.

The others were afraid that the martial lunatic would suddenly go crazy and injure the others, so they hurried over to suppress Li Huowang. More and more people pounced on Li Huowang, and it seemed like they wanted to drown Li Huowang in a sea of flesh.

Li Huowang's gaze pierced the swaying crowd and landed on the helpless and despairing Yang Na.

"Nana... I'm sorry for what happened back then..." Li Huowang muttered.

Chapter 388 - Xing Island

When Li Huowang's words fell, his tense spirit filled with guilt could no longer hold out against the exhaustion. Li Huowang's eyes closed slowly as he passed out. The footsteps, the shouts of the prison guards, and Yang Na's crying gradually faded away.

After an unknown amount of time, Li Huowang woke up to the smell of incense. He couldn't see anything but blue the moment he opened his eyes. Li Huowang took a deep breath to compose himself and realized that he was lying down and staring at the sky. The sea waves crashing against the ship's hull and the prickly sensation of the wooden deck against his back made Li Huowang realize that he was back on the ship.

Li Huowang looked downward upon hearing weird noises and was shocked by the sight that unfolded in front of him.

A crowd was prostrating before him, and there were rows of offerings and incense burners just beneath Li Huowang's feet. Li Huowang felt a shiver down his spine when he saw two children among the offerings. Li Huowang felt as if they were worshipping him like he was some kind of god.

Li Huowang was furious. He stood up and kicked the incense burners away.

"Are you all fools? Why do you guys always place your hopes on others? And you're even offering children to me!" Li Huowang roared and pulled the two children away from the offering plates. The children had red dots on their foreheads.

Li Huowang's sudden outburst terrified everyone. They retreated backward, and the captain repeatedly kowtowed and begged for mercy. "Dragon King, please calm down! Please calm down!"

Dragon King? Li Huowang looked down to see writhing tentacles black tentacles all over him. His arm was still severed and had been replaced by five tentacles entwined together.

Clearly, the black tentacles all over him had made everyone misunderstand that an evil spirit had possessed him.

“Li Sui, go hide. You're scaring them,” Lu Huowang said. The tentacles vanished instantly at Li Huowang's command.

Li Huowang glanced at the drenched deck and the clear skies. He didn't feel like explaining anything, so he turned to the captain and ordered, “Get up and continue sailing to Xing Island!”

“All right, all right! I'll sail!” the captain hurriedly said. He dared not resist nor kick up a fuss. Even if Li Huowang weren't the Dragon King, he was still someone he couldn't afford to provoke.

Li Huowang walked through the crowd and settled in a quiet corner of the ship's cabin.

He took deep breaths to calm himself down before turning to the monk.

“How did I get back on the ship?”

“Daoist, you crawled out from that creature's belly. It was too dark underwater, so I couldn't really see what it looked like. Ah, I remember seeing another living person in that creature's belly, but I don't know whether he managed to crawl out or not. Also, the creature's back was riddled with eyes,” the monk replied.

Li Huowang pieced together the scene using the puzzle pieces that the monk was handing over to him by recounting.

Li Huowang had expected it, but it turned out that his assumption was right. He had crawled out of the creature's belly by jumping down that gray prison building. Crossing the electrified cage with spikes meant that he had gotten rid of what had bound him underwater while climbing the watchtower meant that he had climbed onto the deck.

Li Huowang saved his life by moving in his hallucination. It

was a valuable experience, and Li Huowang reckoned that he could use the same method if he ever found himself in another pinch.

Li Huowang believed that the encounter wouldn't have been so difficult if the creature hadn't been able to negate Black Taisui's ability in his abdomen. Fortunately, the outcome was still satisfactory despite the many twists and turns.

“Daoist, Li Sui helped you a lot. If it weren't for him, you wouldn't have been able to climb onto deck.”

Li Huowang put a hand on his stomach and felt relieved as he reviewed everything he had just gone through.

“Huowang!” A shrill noise echoed, and Li Huowang instinctively covered his ears.

The voice belonged to Yang Na, and Li Huowang couldn't possibly mistake that voice for someone else's voice. Li Huowang felt like someone had stabbed him in the heart with a dagger upon being reminded of her extremely haggard appearance.

Li Huowang covered his ears with a determined expression and comforted himself.

It's definitely a hallucination. There were too many coincidences for it to be otherwise. Yes, it's a hallucination! I don't need to care about what happens over there, as it's all a hallucination!

Li Huowang murmured to himself for a long time in an effort to push Yang Na's image out of his mind. Eventually, he removed his hands from his ears, and he could no longer hear any voices or the incessant ringing.

Li Huowang finally sighed in relief.

The auditory hallucination just now had to be a side effect of the hallucination. Li Huowang knew that he had to be more careful against an unfamiliar evil spirit in the future, as he wouldn't know for sure if Black Taisui's ability would work on them.

“Hehe... Looking at you like this, I think it's better if you just die,” Hong Zhong mocked.

Li Huowang ignored Hong Zhong and took out the Fiery Scripture to treat himself.

No matter how painful the suffering I'll go through, there's going to be an end to it. I can get rid of this life that's worse than death! I just have to find Bei Feng and force his method out of him!

"Three coins."

"Empty bottle."

"Half a coin, I win," said Li Huowang, revealing his leaf cards to the players.

The other three players threw their cards in frustration.

"How come you've won again? Are you using some kind of supernatural power to change your cards?"

"If I were to use a spiritual power, I'd use it to rob you guys. Why would I bother going through such a hassle by playing? Anyway, stop the nonsense and pay up."

The other players could only hurl dark silver pieces and some old as well as new bronze coins toward Li Huowang.

Li Huowang piled them up into a tiny hill on his side of the table and was about to shuffle the cards when stomping noises echoed from above.

"The ship is about to dock! We've reached Xing Island!" the captain shouted.

Everyone stopped whatever they were doing and made their way toward the cabin ladders.

Li Huowang soon found himself outside the ship, and he sighed in relief as he looked around Xing Island's harbor district.

He was finally here.

Li Huowang suddenly felt a little lost about what he ought to do next. According to the ship's captain, Xing Island was like half the Jiang Nan region in size. It was such a vast island, so how was he supposed to find Zhuge Yuan?

Li Huowang pondered for a while before taking out a ginger-

yellow paper from his pocket. He needed a talisman to divine, which would help him find Zhuge Yuan.

Unfortunately, he needed bone relics to perform a divination, and he didn't expect that he would have to perform a divination, so he didn't have any bone relics with him.

It took Li Huowang half a day to find an alternative for the bone relics.

Li Huowang cut open his healing severed arm. Then, he gnashed his teeth and sunk his hand into the flesh and blood. Once he found the bone inside, he grabbed it tightly and yanked it out.

Li Huowang felt empty and sore at the same time as he pulled out the bone holding together his flesh as if he were pulling out a radish from the ground.

Chapter 389 - Sedan Chair

It would be difficult to find human bones in this small fishing village on the coast of Xing Island, so Li Huowang had no choice but to use his own bones for divination.

Fortunately, the bone remained unharmed despite the divination. Li Huowang shoved the bone back into the hollow stump of his arm.

Now, I need to find the place indicated by the bone fracture. Li Huowang while walking toward the fishing village. The village was small, and one would encounter familiar faces after just a brief stroll.

Li Huowang saw a woman with a pale complexion buying steamed buns with her daughter in the distance. The young woman bought a coarse-grain bun for herself and half a steamed bun with a brown sugar filling for her daughter.

Li Huowang's heart softened while staring at the impoverished mother and daughter pair. He pulled the reins and approached them with the carriage.

"Benefactor!" The woman quickly bowed toward Li Huowang, her expression full of sincerity and fear.

The little girl nestled in her mother's arms and dared not to lift her head.

"Why did you bring your daughter to Xing Island?" Li Huowang asked.

"My... my husband is dead, so I came here to seek refuge with relatives," the woman said hesitantly; she also didn't dare to look at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang pondered briefly before reaching into his pocket and taking out the money he had won from playing leaf cards against his fellow passengers on the ship. He handed the money to the little girl.

Then, he stared at the woman and said, "She's a small child, so her appetite surely isn't that big. However, half of a steamed bun still isn't going to be enough for her. Take that money and buy something to eat for her."

Li Huowang drove the carriage away without waiting for the woman's reply. His destination was the inn not too far away. The divination talisman was both useful and useless. It was useless because it couldn't be controlled at all—one could only wait for fate to come after a divination.

Thus, Li Huowang planned to take advantage of the wait to recharge at the inn and prepare for the upcoming crisis. Li Huowang's routine remained unchanging after entering the inn—he bathed, ate, and slept.

Li Huowang thought he would need to work hard to find Zhuge Yuan, but someone took the initiative to look for him. Li Huowang was already asleep, but he suddenly woke up and kicked Bun at the bedside. He could feel someone outside.

Soon, there was knocking on the door, and a voice echoed. "Is Master Li around?"

The voice sounded delicate and rough at the same time.

Li Huowang approached the door carefully and opened it slightly to peer through the crack.

The visitor looked wealthy—clad in blue silk with a jade pendant hanging from his waist. He had a thin, long mustache, and his face was colored with rouge. The moonlight shining down on the visitor's face made him look extremely pale.

Li Huowang felt that there was something amiss with the visitor; the issue was that he couldn't quite point it out.

“Are you Master Li? My master has been waiting for you. Please come with me,” the visitor said amiably, and he even bowed toward Li Huowang.

“Who is your master?” Li Huowang asked, and his hand unknowingly gripped the purple-tassel sword.

“His surname is Zhuge, and his name is Yuan. He's also known as the Storyteller. Didn't Master Li cast a divination for my master today? That was how he knew you were coming.”

Li Huowang's heart skipped a beat. He had cast a divination for Zhuge Yuan, and the other party immediately knew the identity of the caster and even the caster's location.

Clearly, it was unwise to use divination carelessly, as powerful individuals could easily discover his whereabouts.

Li Huowang was silent as he stood by the door.

The visitor asked, “Master Li, are you with me coming or not? If not, I'll have to return and inform my master.”

Li Huowang pushed open the door and said, “Lead the way.”

The visitor nodded and went downstairs, with Li Huowang following closely behind him.

The entire inn was extremely quiet, and there weren't any noises aside from their footsteps.

Li Huowang soon found himself outside the inn, and it turned out that a pure-white sedan chair had been waiting for him beneath the silver moonlight. Four black-robed sedan bearers stood motionless like sculptures, creating an eerie scene.

“Master Li, please hop onto the sedan chair. My master's residence is quite a distance away, and we need to hurry up,” the visitor smiled and pulled open the curtain of the sedan chair.

Li Huowang's brows furrowed; he couldn't help but feel suspicious. Upon recalling the spindle that Zhuge Yuan had given to him, as well as the visitor's friendly tone of voice, Li Huowang compromised and sat in the sedan chair.

A creaking noise echoed as the bearers lifted the sedan chair.

“How long will it take us to reach Mister Zhuge's residence?” Li Huowang asked, but he received no response. He opened the curtain to look outside but found that the visitor had inexplicably vanished.

Moreover, the four sedan bearers appeared strange. Their limbs seemed to be without any joints, and they walked straight ahead without blinking even once.

The bizarre discovery made Li Huowang feel even more suspicious about everything.

What's going on? Are they not affiliated with Zhuge Yuan?

The scenery outside the sedan chair changed slowly. The black tiles of the houses in the fishing village eventually disappeared, replaced by dark green bamboo leaves in the woods.

For some reason, Li Huowang felt like something was hiding amidst the forest of dark green bamboo.

Hehehe...

Playful laughter echoed from the depths of the bamboo forest. Li Huowang's ears perked up to listen carefully, but he discovered that the playful laughter was just the noises generated by the bamboo leaves amidst the night breeze.

The swaying sedan chair moved nonstop through the bamboo forest.

Four hours later, Li Huowang was still inside the bamboo forest.

This bamboo forest is really big . Li Huowang thought. He peered outside and saw something that made his pupils shrink.

“Wait! I saw that rock not too long ago. You guys haven't been moving at all. You guys are moving in circles! Stop the sedan!” Li Huowang exclaimed.

However, the black-robed sedan bearers moved even faster.

Li Huowang unsheathed the purple-tassel sword, and he made

a hole in the floor. He jumped into the hole with both feet together, but as soon as he landed, the ground riddled with dried bamboo leaves sank like clay and enveloped him instantly.

Li Huowang slashed out with his purple-tassel sword, and thick blood haphazardly spurted into the air, accompanied by what sounded like grotesque screams that couldn't possibly come from a human being.

Rustling noises echoed soon afterward, which told Li Huowang that the creature had retreated. Li Huowang panted heavily as he stood in the bamboo forest. The pure-white sedan chair and the sedan bearers had vanished. He was all alone in the middle of the bamboo forest.

What were those things? How did they know that I had cast a divination for Zhuge Yuan? Could the evil spirits on Xing Island be sentient?

Chapter 390 - "Li Huowang"

What's their goal? Do they know that I'm a Strayed One? Li Huowang pondered, and his expression changed intermittently as he arrived at many different conclusions. He looked around and found nothing unusual. In the end, he decided to return to the fishing village and wait until daybreak before doing anything else.

Li Huowang looked up at the round moon in the sky that the dark clouds had almost blotted out. Li Huowang took quick steps and scratched a nearby bamboo pole before heading back to his original position.

Li Huowang eventually left in the direction of the fishing village, leaving scratches on the bamboo pole every now and then to avoid getting lost.

The sky gradually brightened as he continued his journey, but his situation didn't improve at all despite the faint light. The hazy morning fog was everywhere, lowering visibility.

Li Huowang was starting to get tired when two faint lights pierced the morning mist.

The sight reinvigorated Li Huowang. *I've arrived?*

Li Huowang moved a few steps forward, only to find that the lights were two white lanterns hanging at the entrance of a building. Above the lanterns, there was a huge plaque displaying a word written in black—libation[1].

The walls were earth-toned and resembled arcs several stories high. Li Huowang glanced at the thin mist behind him. *They're trying to deceive me, but who's the mastermind behind it?*

Although the situation was utterly bizarre, Li Huowang wasn't

really scared.

He had experienced far more bizarre situations, after all.

Li Huowang lifted his right foot and walked toward the door. After passing through a long corridor, Li Huowang found himself standing in front of a huge circular courtyard. The courtyard was surrounded by buildings with black roof tiles.

A cold breeze swept past Li Huowang, and it carried with it a piece of yellow paper money. Li Huowang followed the yellow paper money, and his gaze eventually landed in a distant memorial hall.

The memorial hall's interior was entirely in white, while a large and a small black coffin were inside. Li Huowang walked up to the memorial hall and looked around. The memorial hall had everything aside from mourning people.

"I mean no offense," Li Huowang said and bowed slightly toward the coffins.

Then, he moved quickly and rushed into the memorial hall. He reached out with one hand and pried open the lid of one of the coffins. Afterward, Li Huowang stuck his head inside and yelled, "Rest in peace!"

However, the coffin didn't stir. Li Huowang looked disappointed as he stepped backward. Then, he looked around the memorial hall, sweeping his gaze across the white cloth and paper offerings.

"I do not care what you are. I'm too busy to play with you. If you go too far, don't blame me for setting fire to this courtyard and the entire bamboo forest outside!" Li Huowang warned, and his voice echoed throughout the entire spacious courtyard.

Still, there were no responses whatsoever, no movements nor noises. Li Huowang patted the coffin and turned around to walk toward the exit.

Just then, a red figure appeared in the periphery of Li

Huowang's eyes. The red figure was on the second floor of the building to Li Huowang's left. Li Huowang immediately turned and ran toward the red figure.

Before colliding with the wall, Li Huowang slapped two talismans, with inscriptions written using his own blood, on his thighs. Veins bulged throughout Li Huowang's legs, and he bent his knees, performing a mighty jump that allowed him to reach the second floor of the bamboo building, where he saw the red figure.

Li Huowang instantly felt his blood boil upon taking a closer look at the red figure.

"Sitting Oblivion Dao!" Li Huowang roared with all his might.

The red figure was none other than Li Huowang.

Li Huowang instantly understood what was going on.

The Sitting Oblivion Dao had long infiltrated Xing Island. He finally realized the mastermind of the bizarre encounter.

Just as gravity brought Li Huowang down, he took out the bronze coin sword and slashed out while chanting an incantation.

The red threads around the bronze coins extended rapidly like a whip and wrapped around a pillar. Li Huowang tugged, and he was propelled toward "Li Huowang" like a cannonball.

"Li Huowang" remained motionless as if he were too stunned to move.

Li Huowang's heart skipped a beat when his bronze coin sword pierced "Li Huowang."

There was no feedback at all—it felt like he had struck nothing but air.

Then, "Li Huowang" pulled out his own sword and thrust upward.

Li Huowang was stunned to see blood at the tip of "Li Huowang's" sword.

Li Huowang's abdomen was struck by a wave of sharp pain, and he was horrified to discover that "Li Huowang" could use his

own projection ability!

The revelation made Li Huowang cast the same projection ability to escape, but he couldn't move an inch. Li Huowang realized it just then; the Sitting Oblivion Dao had used some method to deceive him and take away his projection ability.

Li Huowang had fought quite a few members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao, but none of them had such a bizarre ability. In other words, there was a high chance that "Li Huowang" could be one of the Four Joys or perhaps even one of the Three Officials!

Li Huowang dared not to hold back. He gouged his right eye and squeezed it hard. A grotesque noise echoed as a semi-transparent liquid oozed from between his fingernails.

A strange light beyond human perception replaced the world before Li Huowang, and everything slowed down to a snail's pace. Li Huowang took advantage of this opportunity to remove the sword sticking out of his abdomen.

"Li Huowang" had somehow deceived Li Huowang's ability away from him, so the latter knew that he couldn't let himself be led astray.

Li Huowang took out the flint and got ready to execute a major move. Unfortunately, Li Huowang's fleshly body refused to ignite, and that was when he recalled that he had peeled off his skin to create an artifact.

He no longer had any skin to Ba-Hui.

"Li Huowang's" movement was about to return to normal speed, and the sight made Li Huowang's heart skip a beat. Left with no other choice, he took out a blackened iron piers and stuffed it into his mouth.

He decisively pulled out a few molar teeth, and he scattered them like flower petals.

Li Huowang was aware of his projection ability's range, which was three meters. He made sure to take that into account as he

attacked with his teeth. Li Huowang willed, and his teeth exploded, raining shrapnels made out of teeth toward "Li Huowang."

"Li Huowang" couldn't even defend himself as the shrapnel transformed him into a sieve. Unfortunately, "Li Huowang" remained standing without any signs of collapsing despite his severe injuries.

Li Huowang's heart tightened, and a sense of foreboding washed over him. He pressed the wound in his stomach and realized that "Li Huowang" had deceived his powerful healing ability away.

His ability is too bizarre and tricky. What should I do? Li Huowang's heart sank as "Li Huowang" glared fiercely at him.

1. A libation is a ritual pouring of a liquid, or grains such as rice, as an offering to a deity or spirit, or in memory of the dead. 🙌

Chapter 391 - Li Huowang

Li Huowang had no idea what to do as he stared at "Li Huowang" before him. He was afraid of engaging with "Li Huowang" for even the briefest moment, as there was a huge chance that "Li Huowang" would deceive his other abilities away.

Li Huowang reckoned that the only way to deal with "Li Huowang" was the Cang-Qiang Ascension, but he had no time to find extreme mental agony, considering that the enemy was already in front of him.

No, I can't fight under such uncertain circumstances. I need to retreat and find Zhuge Yuan! Li Huowang thought. Having made up his mind, he decisively severed both of his ears and hurled it at "Li Huowang."

Then, he turned around and ran.

The morning fog that had enveloped the bamboo forest had thinned out. Li Huowang ran with all his might in one direction. Li Huowang gnashed his teeth and used another bone to cast divination while running.

Li Huowang didn't care whether divination would lead him to Zhuge Yuan or not. He also didn't care, even if casting divination meant that he would be snitching on himself, as those two outcomes would help Li Huowang escape!

Li Huowang just had to find Zhuge Yuan.

Zhuce Yuan was strong enough to kill Fa Cai, so Li Huowang was convinced that he would be safe the moment he found Zhuge Yuan.

Just then, a donkey cart appeared before Li Huowang. The donkey was old, but it wasn't having any issues pulling its passengers—a mother and daughter pair.

“Benefactor?” The woman's eyes widened upon seeing the disheveled Li Huowang.

“Someone’s chasing me! Help me hide!” Li Huowang exclaimed, diving into the donkey cart without waiting for her reply.

The woman had no idea what to do, and she was still in the middle of processing Li Huowang's words when "Li Huowang" emerged from the nearby bamboo forest.

“Did you see someone who looked exactly like me?!”

The woman became flustered in the face of "Li Huowang."

However, her daughter lifted her hand and pointed in a random direction.

“How dare he run away!”

"Li Huowang" soon disappeared.

The woman hugged her daughter tightly and peeked into the tarp.

Li Huowang was pressing on his wound, and he sighed in relief upon seeing the mother and daughter pair.

“Thank you for your help. I will remember your kindness,” Li Huowang said. He truly didn't expect that his generosity at the time would end up saving his life.

The woman shook her head and said, “Benefactor, you saved my daughter on the ship, so helping you is the right thing to do. Ah, you're bleeding, sir. You should seek medical attention soon.”

Li Huowang shook his head and took out the Fiery Scripture.

“Forget I'm here. Go ahead and continue down your original route," Li Huowang said.

The woman nodded and covered Li Huowang with the tarp. Then, she held her daughter in a tight embrace and urged the old donkey to walk faster.

Li Huowang proceeded to cauterize his wounds.

After a while, the cart suddenly stopped.

Li Huowang's heart skipped a beat. He peeked out of the trap and saw "Li Huowang," and the latter was holding a cracked skull. Somehow, "Li Huowang" had obtained Li Huowang's divination technique and had used it against the latter!

Li Huowang took a deep breath and jumped down the cart. He stood in front of the donkey cart and shouted at the woman. "Run! The farther, the better!"

The woman glanced at the two Li Huowangs before staring at her terrified daughter.

A flash of determination fled across her eyes as she abandoned the donkey cart that she had just purchased and ran into the bamboo forest with her daughter and some of her belongings.

Li Huowang took multiple deep breaths. "Li Huowang" opened his mouth and was about to say something when a peculiar sound echoed. The two Li Huowangs turned to look at where the sound had come from at the same time.

Li Huowang was instantly delighted upon seeing the newcomer—Zhuge Yuan!

Zhuge Yuan was dressed like a scholar and was fanning himself casually while staring with an amused gaze at the two Li Huowangs.

Li Huowang's mouth fluttered open to speak, but "Li Huowang" beat him to the chase, shouting. "Zhuge! I'm Li Huowang, and he's a member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao!"

Li Huowang almost choked at "Li Huowang's" remark.

He didn't want to say the same thing, so he decided to just stare at Zhuge Yuan.

"Zhuge Yuan, you're strong enough to kill Fa Cai by yourself. Surely, you can see the real member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao between the two of us, right?" Li Huowang said.

Zhuge Yuan nodded and asked, "Did you bring the spindle with a Muddled One's hair around it?"

"Of course! It's with me!" Li Huowang opened his abdomen and took out the black spindle. However, he truly had no idea that the black hair around the spindle was a clump of hair from a Muddled One. If Zhuge Yuan hadn't said it himself, Li Huowang would have never known about it.

Li Huowang grinned while staring at "Li Huowang." *It seems they have no idea that I've stored something in my abdomen.*

Li Huowang put away the spindle and looked at Zhuge Yuan, saying, "Zhuge Yuan, be careful. That guy has the bizarre ability to deceive other people's techniques away for his own use."

"Say no more. I know," Zhuge Yuan said. He put his fan away and took out a brush from his sleeves.

Li Huowang stared intently at Zhuge Yuan. He wanted to know just how strong Zhuge Yuan was. After all, he managed to kill Fa Cai.

"Li Huowang" took a step back and Li Huowang sneered at the sight. *So he's finally afraid? How dare he imitate me.*

Zhuge Yuan nodded at Li Huowang before pointing his brush at Li Huowang's left leg.

Li Huowang fell to the ground. He could no longer feel his left leg. Li Huowang was shocked, and he couldn't quite believe what was going on.

However, Zhuge Yuan raised the brush once again.

Li Huowang finally realized that Zhuge Yuan had decided to attack him.

"It's not me! That one is the enemy! He's a member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao!" Li Huowang shouted, and his voice cracked from fury and bitterness. Zhuge Yuan had just betrayed him, after all.

Zhuge Yuan pointed his brush at Li Huowang, and the latter could no longer feel his lower body.

"You liar!" Li Huowang roared defiantly, "So your kindness has

been a lie all this while?! You've actually been working for the Sitting Oblivion Dao all this while?!"

Zhuge Yuan smiled and ignored Li Huowang's accusation.

He pointed his brush at Li Huowang's neck.

"No! I can't die! They're waiting for me! I can't die here!" Li Huowang roared and squirmed.

Zhuge Yuan decisively drew a circle around Li Huowang's head with his brush. A dull thud echoed as Li Huowang ceased all struggle and collapsed. The black spindle fell out of Li Huowang's clothes, and it rolled slowly toward Zhuge Yuan's feet.

Zhuge Yuan used a white handkerchief to pick up the bloody spindle before handing it over to "Li Huowang."

"Li Huowang" stuffed the black spindle into his abdomen and approached Li Huowang's corpse. He whipped out a dagger and peeled off Li Huowang's face.

"Li Huowang" peeled and peeled until Li Huowang's face was replaced by the bearded bald man, who was the best leaf card player on that passenger ship and had unfortunately met his demise in the depths of the sea.

"Senior Zhuge, I think that Sitting Oblivion Dao member really thought he was me."

Chapter 392 - Zhuge Yuan

“Senior Zhuge, I think that Sitting Oblivion Dao member really thought he was me.” Li Huowang said, looking up at Zhuge Yuan. He truly didn't expect that the Sitting Oblivion Dao member could steal his black spindle and weapon. To make matters worse, he had perfectly impersonated Li Huowang.

He must've made his move when I was stuck in the hallucination underwater. Perhaps he was the one who wanted to make sure that I'd get stuck in the hallucination!

Li Huowang recalled seeing a childish middle-aged man inside the White Tower Prison. Li Huowang was convinced that the childish middle-aged man was the persona of the Sitting Oblivion Dao, who had imitated him in real life.

“I also saw someone else while we were inside the belly of that monster! Perhaps that man had been waiting for you in the belly of that monster,” the monk said, reminding Li Huowang of what he had seen.

“*Tsk, tsk, tsk.*” Hong Zhong clicked his tongue as he walked up to the corpse. Then, he imitated the old monk's prayer to corpses and walked in circles around the corpse.

Everything was over, and Li Huowang had an explanation as to how the Sitting Oblivion Dao member had managed to impersonate him.

However, why did he decide to impersonate Li Huowang? Wouldn't his plan fail if Li Huowang had encountered "Li Huowang"?

Zhuce Yuan unfurled his fan, attracting Li Huowang's attention.

Li Huowang saw the same four words on the paper fan —“everyone has their values.”

“No need to worry. They're here for me. They don't dare to approach me without any disguises, so they decided to use your identity to get close to me. Their plan would have worked if you hadn't arrived here in time,” Zhuge Yuan said.

Zhuge Yuan then turned around to leave.

Li Huowang picked up his belongings and followed behind Zhuge Yuan. “I’m sorry. If it hadn't been for me, you wouldn't be facing such issues right now.”

Li Huowang was truly caught off guard by Zhuge Yuan's revelation. The fact that the Sitting Oblivion Dao's target wasn't Li Huowang himself was a bit of a hard pill to swallow for the latter, as both the Sitting Oblivion Dao and he had always butted heads whenever they stumbled upon each other.

Zhuge Yuan smiled faintly at Li Huowang's apology and replied, “Don't worry. This isn't the first time, so I've gotten used to it. They've been harassing me nonstop since I killed Fa Cai.”

Li Huowang looked and saw the corpse vanishing in the morning fog. He imagined the entire Sitting Oblivion Dao chasing after him, and he instantly felt suffocated. The Sitting Oblivion Dao members could replace anyone around him, after all.

Li Huowang turned around and looked at Zhuge Yuan. Zhuge Yuan seemed to be doing fine despite the Sitting Oblivion Dao's quest for revenge. In other words, Zhuge Yuan was exceptionally strong.

He must be stronger than Dan Yangzi! No, he must be even stronger than Dan Yangzi, even though the latter has become a half-immortal.

While Li Huowang was deep in contemplation, Zhuge Yuan frowned at Li Huowang's torso and said, “Junior Li, there seems to be something alive inside you. Should I take it out for you?”

Li Sui's tentacles riddled with eyeballs poked out from Li Huowang's belly button and cast a curious look at Zhuge Yuan.

Li Huowang shoved the tentacles back into his belly button and

said, "Don't worry. It's just a Black Taisui. He's taking over my body, but he's the only one capable of suppressing my hallucination."

"I see. I think I've read about that once, but it's my first time seeing someone actually employ such a method," Zhuge Yuan said, nodding. Then, he recalled something and asked, "Wait, did you remove the first Black Taisui in your stomach and eat another one?"

Li Huowang was confused by the question, but he still responded, "I did think of doing that, but I want to keep it as a last resort."

"Don't ever do it. I've read that you will suffer a miserable death if you do that."

Li Huowang was delighted by Zhuge Yuan's news. Otherwise, Li Huowang would have perished without knowing how he had perished. The incident had allowed the two to become even closer to each other.

Their stroll became one of the rare moments in Li Huowang's life when he didn't have to worry about someone trying to kill him. The two strolled for an hour before they arrived at an elegant two-story building. The building was completely green, and the dark green bamboo forest provided a great camouflage for it.

In addition, the entire building was sticking out of the ground, which meant its pillars were hidden underground.

"I hope you don't mind stepping into my simple abode," Zhuge Yuan said, pushing the door open and gesturing to Li Huowang to come in.

The building had no locks, but Li Huowang knew that there was no way a thief could come in here. The interior also emitted a scholarly vibe; there were caricatures, paintings, and poems hanging on the walls.

Li Huowang could tell that every single painting was one of a kind. A certain painting caught Li Huowang's eyes: a painting

depicting a white sedan chair being carried by four yellow skeletons. A white weasel holding a white lantern was standing at the helm and was guiding the sedan bearers down the right path.

The majority of the paintings were portraits of human beings, and there were portraits of men, women, elderly people, and children.

It seems that Zhuge Yuan enjoys painting portraits of other people; the paintings are very realistic as well.

Zhugue Yuan sat on a cushion and prepared some tea. “Junior Li, what type of tea would you like? Mountain’s Essence? How about Gentleman’s Silver?”

“I’m fine with either,” Li Huowang said as he sat across from Zhugue Yuan to watch him prepare tea.

Li Huowang had many burning questions, but he didn’t want to interrupt Zhugue Yuan.

Li Huowang decided to wait patiently and watch. Of course, he had no idea what Zhugue Yuan was doing, but Li Huowang could feel that Zhugue Yuan was doing something that required focus and true skill.

“Thrice-brewed Gentlemen’s Silver. The tea leaves on Xing Island are excellent, but the water here is ordinary, so I hope you won’t mind the taste.”

Li Huowang took a sip and realized that Zhugue Yuan had put away the utensils he had used to make tea, replacing them with a game board. The board was for a game called Go[1].

Li Huowang didn't even bother waiting for Zhugue Yuan's explanation as he placed a black stone on the board. “Senior Zhuge, why did you help me? Are you a Strayed One like me?”

Li Huowang's heart beat wildly against his chest as he waited for Zhugue Yuan's reply.

Zhugue Yuan placed a white stone on the board and answered, “No, even though both of us have the word ‘One,’ I am not a

Strayed One. I'm a Twisted One.”

“You're a Twisted One?” Li Huowang asked, sounding disappointed. While he was on the passenger ship to Xing Island, Li Huowang had pondered over the matter and concluded that Zhuge Yuan was a Strayed One.

Li Huowang was disappointed, as he knew his life would become much easier if there were a powerful senior guiding him in this crazy world. At the very least, he wouldn't have to risk his life so often.

Li Huowang sighed, but he was still curious, so he asked, “Twisted? What does that mean?”

Zhuce Yuan made sure that the tea leaves wouldn't enter his mouth as he took a sip of his tea before replying, “Washing the windowsill during a good day; one will find the snake and the earthworm twisted together in the soil. The Twisted One's character is using the very same character as the 'Twisted' snake and earthworm[2]. Junior Li, it's your turn.”

1. A game where players have to surround the pieces of others using their own pieces 🤔

2. He's basically flexing by reciting a poem and telling Li Huowang what character of 'Twisted' was it. Man, this guy would be best friends with Jin Shanzhao 🤔

Chapter 393 - Really?

Li Huowang placed down a black piece and pondered over Zhuge Yuan's words before asking, "Twisted? What does that mean?"

Li Huowang was a Strayed One himself. He had witnessed the powers of a Muddled One, but it was his first time hearing of a Twisted One.

Zhugue Yuan shook his head slightly at Li Huowang's clumsy play. He placed a white piece on the board and replied, "The word 'twisted' means that my life is forever twisted with the existence of the Three Ancient Ones. I cannot escape from them even if I were to live or die."

"What are the Three Ancient Ones?" asked Li Huowang, placing another black piece.

Zhugue Yuan smiled and pointed upward with his fan. Li Huowang instantly understood what Zhugue Yuan was trying to say. After all, he could still remember the beings hidden deep within his memories.

"Junior Li, it's not that I don't want to tell you. It's dangerous to know too much of a particular knowledge. You can't make too many mistakes in life as well," Zhugue Yuan said, placing another white piece on the board.

Zhugue Yuan's implied message was clear: the Three Ancient Ones meant one of the Simings inside the Baiyu Capital. Zhugue Yuan didn't dare to utter the name of the Siming.

"I understand," Li Huowang muttered with a nod.

Silence descended upon the room, and only the chirping of the birds could be heard.

Zhugue Yuan's head throbbed at the messy board.

Li Huowang suddenly asked, "Thank you for answering my questions, Senior Zhuge. However, may I know why you are helping me even though you're not a Strayed One?"

The question had been gnawing away at his mind over the past few days, and he had finally asked it.

"Why do you ask?" Zhuge Yuan was surprised. "Our previous encounter was brief, but saving a life is still a noble thing to do. I can't just look at you throwing your life away for nothing. Your bronze coin veil is useless to those who are stronger, too."

"Is that all there is to it?" Li Huowang asked, sounding. He had been thinking about why Zhuge Yuan had decided to help him, which was why he was taken aback when Zhuge Yuan's motive wasn't as deep as he initially thought.

"Why do you think otherwise? My help isn't limited to those with 'One' in them, but those with 'Spirit' or 'Illusion' as well. If I can help, I'm going to help."

Is he trying to fool me? Just what does he want? Li Huowang thought, but he quickly abandoned the idea. Li Huowang's status as a Strayed One was the reason he was being chased. If Zhuge Yuan didn't want him for that, there wouldn't be any compelling reasons behind why he had decided to help him.

"Junior Li, did you travel all the way here just to ask me that question?" Zhuge Yuan asked, sounding perplexed.

"No, I'm here to ask for help," said Li Huowang. Then, he sat up straight and told Zhuge Yuan that he was chasing after Bei Feng.

Zhuce Yuan was kind and helpful to him, but Li Huowang wasn't the type of person to exploit someone's kindness. Li Huowang decided to propose a solution that would benefit them both.

"Senior Zhuge, you don't have to do anything. Since the Sitting Oblivion Dao is hunting you. Bei Feng will come to you soon. You just need to keep me close so I can fight them, too!"

Zhuge Yuan's hand holding a white piece in mid-air froze abruptly.

Li Huowang saw that and added, "Senior Zhuge, don't worry. I'm not going to leave immediately, even after I've achieved my goal. I'll help you with your problem first before leaving.

"Is it because you're unsure of my strength? I'm not as strong as you, but I know quite a few techniques from the Ao Jing Sect.

"I even managed to perform the Cang-Qiang Ascension three times, even though it's the hardest technique to perform! Even half-Immortals will not be able to withstand my Cang-Qiang Ascension!"

Zhuge Yuan raised his hand and gestured for the anxious Li Huowang to calm down.

"Junior Li, calm down. I never disagreed with your suggestion, but there are several things we should consider before anything else. First of all, you said you wanted to fight with me, but do you even know what I'm about to do?"

Li Huowang was stunned. "You mean you're not done yet even after taking away that Muddled One from the temple?"

Zhuge Yuan definitely had a reason for stealing the Muddled One. If he still hadn't resolved that despite his strength, the issue had to be particularly difficult.

Zhuge Yuan peered over Li Huowang's shoulder, and his gaze landed on one of the scrolls hanging behind Li Huowang.

It was a scroll depicting a beautiful mountain with a lake.

A dried-up corpse was in the middle of the mountain.

"I'm strong enough to kill Fa Cai, but those with the words 'One' will struggle fiercely to survive. The fate of foreign beings has tainted us. It's difficult, indeed.

"I'm about to embark on a suicide mission, and the Sitting Oblivion Dao is going to interfere with me from time to time. Junior Li, it is exceedingly dangerous, and you'd most likely perish. Are you sure it's worth it?"

“Of course, it's worth it!” Li Huowang exclaimed. He didn't even ask what Zhuge Yuan wanted him to do. “As long as I can get rid of my bewilderment and the hallucination, everything is going to be worth it!”

Zhuce Yuan took a sip of the tea, which had cooled down long ago.

“All right, let's talk about the second thing. Bei Feng is indeed a Strayed One, and he has indeed gotten rid of his hallucination. However, how can you be so sure that his method is going to be suitable for you?

“He's a member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao, after all. Perhaps he had deceived it away from someone else, and there's also a high chance that the method is evil. Do you intend to cultivate it even if that were the case?”

Li Huowang frowned. He downed his cup of tea, and he sounded bitter as he responded, “But what choice do I have? It doesn't matter what kind of technique it is, I have to see it for myself.”

Zhuce Yuan went silent, seemingly falling into deep contemplation. “Hm, I remember reading about a Strayed One's technique .”

“What is that technique?” Li Huowang's heart beat wildly against his chest.

“The hallucination of a Strayed Ones is all thanks to the primordial breath running rampant inside of them. The book said that if the Strayed One can control their primordial breath, the hallucination might stop altogether.”

“You've *really* read something like that?” Li Huowang needed it badly.

“I forgot some parts, but I think it's real.”

“Why do you say so?”

“It's all because of the Sitting Oblivion Dao's consistency. I've

always been wondering why the Sitting Oblivion Dao has always loved to torment Strayed Ones above anything else.

"They've never inflicted such torment on the Muddled Ones or the Twisted Ones, so at first, I thought perhaps there's a long-standing grudge between the Strayed Ones and the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

"However, the book gave me enough puzzle pieces to solve the puzzle. If the book contained nothing but the truth, then the cultivation methods of the Strayed Ones are directly opposite of the Sitting Oblivion Dao's cultivation methods. If that's the case, then the reason behind their hatred for the Strayed Ones can be explained."

"Directly opposite the Sitting Oblivion Dao's cultivation methods? They cultivate, too?"

"Of course. The crazy things they've been doing were for the sake of establishing lies as truth. There are many different cultivation paths in this world. There are even those who cultivate 'Ghosts,' 'Dao,' 'Evil,' and 'One.'

"The Sitting Oblivion Dao cultivates 'Lies.'"

"Wait, if they're cultivating 'Lies,' and the Strayed One's cultivation methods are directly opposite of their cultivation methods, then what is the cultivation path of the Strayed Ones?"

Zhuge Yuan didn't answer. Instead, he placed a white piece on the board. Li Huowang's gaze turned to the board, and he saw that the black pieces he had placed on the board had created a single character—Truth.

"They cultivate 'Truth'?"

Chapter 394 - Past

“They cultivate ‘Truth’?” An epiphany struck Li Huowang, and he pondered deeply over the strange yet familiar term. He had read about what Zhuge Yuan was talking about in novels, but he knew that those novels were far from the truth.

If the Sitting Oblivion Dao is cultivating ‘Lies,’ and the Strayed Ones are cultivating ‘Truth,’ they’re most likely each other’s archenemies. That is indeed going to explain why they hate the Strayed Ones so much.

Li Huowang felt like the events he had gone through finally made sense. However, he had more burning questions rather than answered questions.

“Wait, wait, wait. Give me a moment to think about this, Senior Zhuge,” Li Huowang said. Then, he closed his eyes to focus on recalling everything he had gone through.

Zhuge Yuan stared at Li Huowang, waiting patiently. Eventually, he put the Go board away and retrieved the utensils he had used to make tea.

Zhuge Yuan was soon finished brewing another pot of tea.

Li Huowang finally opened his eyes just then and asked, “Senior Zhuge, I don’t think that’s right. If the Sitting Oblivion Dao truly cultivates ‘Lies,’ it would explain why they want to turn something real into something fake.

“However, if Strayed Ones like me can cultivate ‘Truth,’ doesn’t that mean that we can turn nothing into something out of thin air? I don’t have any powers like that!”

“Are you sure?”

“Of course! Ever since I became a Strayed One, except for the illusions that I can’t seem to get rid of, the only other power I got was the illusion projection!” Li Huowang exclaimed; he sounded

very certain when it came to himself.

Li Huowang had been living in this bizarre world for more than a year now, so he had experienced many bizarre things, acquiring bizarre powers in the process. However, he had never obtained any powers related to the cultivation of 'Truth.'

If he had such a powerful power, he wouldn't have struggled so much. Li Huowang pondered deeply. He had to be extremely sure about anything capable of changing his life. In other words, he couldn't easily trust the words of other people.

"Senior Zhuge, are you sure that Strayed Ones can cultivate 'Truth'? Is there really a cultivation method that will allow us to do so?"

Zhuge Yuan pondered over it before answering, "I've read it in a book, but I'm not sure whether it's real or not. Based on my observations of the Sitting Oblivion Dao members, however, I'm certain that it's true.

"Plus, are you sure you've never experienced changing reality itself? As far as I know, anything can happen to the Strayed Ones. Perhaps you've done it before, but you simply failed to notice it. Why don't you try telling me everything that has happened to you so far? Perhaps I can point out what you might've overlooked."

Li Huowang thought about it hard and long before nodding. He decided to trust Zhuge Yuan. Zhuge Yuan already knew that he was a Strayed One, so he didn't really have anything to hide.

"Alright, let me tell you everything that has happened to me from the very beginning. Let's start from when I was in Zephyr Temple. I met an evil cultivator named Dan Yangzi. He was illiterate, but he somehow obtained a sacred text that made him yearn for immortality to the point of..."

Beneath the elegant bamboo eaves, Li Huowang slowly recounted his experience over the past year.

Li Huowang had experienced a lot and thought he would be

speaking for a very long time. He even thought that he would talk overnight, but Zhuge Yuan stopped him when he was talking about the Benevolent Nunnery.

“Junior Li, look at this. Is this the pill recipe you told your master, Dan Yangzi, to eat?” Zhuge Yuan said, handing over a piece of paper filled with text.

Li Huowang couldn't appreciate calligraphy, but he could appreciate Zhuge Yuan's neat handwriting. The pill recipe he had given to Dan Yangzi was recorded on it, while the cultivation method to become an Immortal was written below the recipe.

Li Huowang looked at it and nodded. “Yep. This is it. What about it?”

Zhuce Yuan's calm voice rose a bit as he replied, “What do you mean, 'what about it?' Your pill recipe is like how you play Go—it's extremely messy. You really thought your recipe would help your master become a half Immortal?”

“Yeah, but I'm curious as well. Why did Dan Yangzi become—” Li Huowang stopped mid-sentence, and his eyes widened upon realizing something. “Are you saying that I used my power as a Strayed One to help Dan Yangzi ascend? No way. I hated him to the core, so I couldn't have helped him!” Li Huowang affirmed.

“However, Dan Yangzi still ascended. Junior Li, I want you to think about it. What was in your stomach at the time?”

“My stomach? Half of Dan Yangzi's face—” Li Huowang came to a halt mid-sentence, discovering the missing puzzle piece to complete the puzzle.

Zhuce Yuan nodded and took the words out of Li Huowang's mouth. “That's right. Even though he only had half a face, he was still alive! His flesh was within your stomach. He had used his obsession to become an Immortal and your powers to ascend!”

Li Huowang blanked out. Every single burning question in his mind was answered at once. He had never thought that he was the

reason behind Dan Yangzi's ascension to immortality.

"See, what did I say? " Zhuge Yuan said, "A third party can easily spot something wrong within the narrative. Your master used a very crude method to do so, and he ended up becoming that abomination. However, he still became a half Immortal.

"Even if you don't quite understand it right now, I'm sure you're smart enough to know that he had used your powers to become a half Immortal. In other words, the Strayed Ones can indeed transform lies into the truth."

Li Huowang had no idea what to say in the face of the truth. As a Strayed One, he knew he had a strange power, but he truly didn't expect that he would be so clueless about it.

Wait! Aside from when I had inadvertently helped Dan Yangzi become a half Immortal, have I ever used this power unconsciously?

Li Huowang tried hard to recall anything strange from his experiences, but he had no idea which was real, and which was born from his power.

What's real? Li Huowang pondered.

Zhuge Yuan unfurled his fan and said, "Aside from your pursuit of Bei Feng for that method, I'm sure you have other plans, right?"

Li Huowang nodded seriously. "Thank you for your help, Senior Zhuge! Your words have allowed me to see that I have one more path to choose. However, how should I cultivate the "Truth"? How should I take control of my primordial breath?"

" *Hmm...* " Zhuge Yuan wasn't sure as well. "I'm sorry, but I can't help you with that. All I know about it was from a book, and I can't really remember the details because it's been so long..."

Chapter 395 - Storyteller

Li Huowang understood what Zhuge Yuan was trying to say.

Zhugue Yuan was trying to tell Li Huowang that there were other methods to deal with his situation rather than risking his life by staying by Zhuge Yuan's side just to lure Bei Feng out.

But I don't know how to use my abilities even though Zhuge Yuan told me that I can cultivate 'Truth.' I don't even know where to find any books or scrolls describing it. What should I do?

Zhugue Yuan noticed Li Huowang's distress and consoled the latter. "No worries. I will help you on my end by paying attention to any news about it. If I do hear anything, I'll let you know immediately."

Zhugue Yuan's leisurely attitude made Li Huowang feel anxious. He felt like Zhuge Yuan couldn't sense Li Huowang's desperation.

Maybe he will understand if I show him. Li Huowang showed Zhuge Yuan his arm covered in scabs. He used his purple-tassel sword and shaved off his skin, revealing his blood vessels underneath.

Numerous black tentacles wriggled inside each of his blood vessels. Some wormed their way out of the weaker walls of the capillaries like maggots.

"Senior Zhuge, I want to take it slow, too, but I don't have any time left. The Black Taisui can suppress my hallucinations, but it's taking over me. I don't know how much longer I can hold it back, but I really don't have much time.

"The Black Taisui would snatch away my body if I were to take it slow. I must cultivate 'Truth' as soon as possible."

Li Sui's sobbing echoed in Li Huowang's brain. Li Sui seemed to have learned how to express sadness.

The scene was gory, but Li Huowang had to make it clear to Zhuge Yuan. The search for the cultivation method to cultivate ‘Truth’ was indeed a tempting idea, but Bei Feng was just right in front of them.

Li Huowang also couldn't let go of Bei Feng so easily.

Li Huowang inwardly consoled the crying Li Sui while staring at Zhuge Yuan's face.

“I also think that Bei Feng has a cultivation method for cultivating ‘Truth.’”

Zhuce Yuan remained indecisive, fanning himself as he said, “Do you really have to do this? You're only going to have hallucinations without the Black Taisui. That's the worst that can happen. You're not even going to die, so why are you so anxious?”

Li Huowang's pupils widened when he recalled *that* scene. “You don't know what I've gone through! I know it's a hallucination, but I'd rather die than get stuck in that hallucination again! I want to be able to tell which is real and which is fake!”

The bamboo building went quiet afterward.

The two of them sat silently, seemingly pondering over something.

A bird landed on the window sill and pecked it before leaving.

“All right, since you need it urgently, let's bait out the Sitting Oblivion Dao. They might attack me soon, so you can just follow me.

“Thank you for your help, Senior Zhuge!” Li Huowang exclaimed, extremely pleased with the outcome. He had achieved one of his objectives and found a reliable ally as well. Bei Feng was strong, but he and Zhuge Yuan could fight Bei Feng together.

Li Huowang was never going to stop until he acquired the method to get rid of the hallucinations from Bei Feng.

Zhuce Yuan sighed inwardly in the face of Li Huowang's delighted face. He had decided to agree, as Li Huowang would most

likely follow him secretly, anyway even if he had refused.

Zhugue Yuan would rather agree than allow Li Huowang to follow him secretly. In addition, they could communicate better, as they had decided to work together.

Zhugue Yuan also found Li Huowang to be quite pitiful. After all, everyone with the word 'One' was bound to live a challenging life.

"Relax, Junior Li. Since you've decided to follow me, I have to tell you what I'm about to do. This way, you won't be surprised by what's going to happen."

"Sure, tell me!" Li Huowang replied, ears perking up to listen attentively. He really wanted to know why Zhugue Yuan had taken a Muddled One away from the Surveillance Bureau.

Zhugue Yuan took a sip of his tea and said, "Junior Li, I'm sure you've noticed that things are getting chaotic. It feels like something big is going to happen soon, right?"

Zhugue Yuan was right. Li Huowang did feel like something big was about to happen, and he could still remember seeing that colossal navy ship at sea. Ji Xiang's departure from Shangjing to hide elsewhere had been nagging at him as well.

"That's true, but I don't think what's going to happen is related to me."

"Sigh," Zhugue Yuan sighed. It's all because of the royal family. I heard that the Empress of the Qi Kingdom had decided to revive the late emperor, who perished when he was just six years old. She apparently did that to solidify her power.

"Hahaha, the absolute leader of the Qi Kingdom is actually a zombie. What a joke."

Qi Kingdom? Didn't the Qi Kingdom fall to ruin hundreds of years ago? Isn't it the Liang Kingdom now? Maybe he thought the Liang Kingdom had annexed the Qi Kingdom, and he's used to calling it the Qi Kingdom. Li Huowang was confused.

Zhuge Yuan failed to notice Li Huowang's confusion as he continued, "That's not all. A skinny camel is still larger than a horse. The Qi Kingdom is slowly inching to ruins, but it's still a massive kingdom that few can afford to invade.

"Unfortunately, the officials of the Qi Kingdom have become corrupt. I don't know what method they used, but they managed to bestow upon the late emperor a 'fake' consciousness, and the late emperor came to life, giving out decrees.

"It even chose concubines. Let's ignore the fact that he's dead and think about his age. He's just six years old. Why would he need a concubine? He even specifically chose concubines born on the Yin year, Yin month, and Yin hour.

"I asked my friends to help me gather information and was shocked to find that the emperor was not only taking in concubines but also conscripting many men.

"Now that I think about it, it's been such a long time since there was such a massive conscription. I don't think it's necessary to conscript so many people just to fix the walls, so I think the emperor wants to build a tomb!"

"A tomb?" Li Huowang couldn't comprehend what Zhuge Yuan was saying. As far as he could remember, Zhuge Yuan's revelation had never happened, especially the mass conscription.

Zhuge Yuan ignored Li Huowang's confusion and added, "A zombie emperor, concubines born on the Yin year, Yin month, and Yin hour. Then, a tomb. Think about it: something grand and serious is about to happen."

Zhuge Yuan poured out the cold tea inside Li Huowang's cup and replaced it with hot tea.

"The officials have taken control of the palace, and they've collaborated with the Righteous Monastery. They've fallen into depravity and are infecting the entire capital with their corruption.

"Thankfully, there are still some righteous people within the

palace. I'm just an ordinary storyteller, so I initially had no plans of getting involved.

"However, I realized that the lives of so many people would be at risk if I were to avoid getting involved. I can't afford to ignore it. That's why I took away that Muddled One and asked an old friend of mine to turn it into an artifact capable of wiping out memories. That artifact is going to be an important tool for me."

Li Huowang stared intently at Zhuge Yuan, but he hadn't been listening at all.

I thought the Twisted Ones were somewhat better off, but it seems that we have some similarities. The Twisted Ones, the Strayed Ones, and the Muddled Ones all have their own distinct abilities, and we also have our distinct curses.

Translator's Thoughts

Hey guys! Hopefully everyone's doing well.

Been busy irl but good to be back!

Here's an illustration of Zhuge Yuan, our favourite story teller! Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin!



Chapter 396 - Two Blooming Flowers

“Senior Zhuge, please wait.” Li Huowang interrupted Zhuge Yuan. “I know what you're trying to say. You don't have to explain it any further.”

Zhuce Yuan was confused. “Junior Li, do you really understand me? Those who have heard my explanation so far have always told me that the Qi Kingdom doesn't exist. They'd always argue with me.”

“Since you say that the Qi Kingdom exists, then it exists.”

Li Huowang was a Strayed One, so he truly understood Zhuge Yuan's feelings. He wholeheartedly accepted Zhuge Yuan's explanation. There was no need to cause distress to another person with ‘One’ in their name.

Zhuce Yuan frowned, sensing that Li Huowang didn't believe him at all. “Junior Li, the Twisted Ones and the Strayed Ones are two different entities. The Qi Kingdom exists! The Liang Kingdom is fake!”

“Yes, I know. The Liang Kingdom is fake. The Qi Kingdom is real.” Li Huowang nodded. He made up his mind that even if Zhuge Yuan were to go and save the Qi Kingdom from ruins, even though the kingdom was no more, Li Huowang would still follow Zhuge Yuan.

Zhuce Yuan was kind, and Li Huowang was more than happy to help him.

Of course, there was a limit to it.

After all, the Twisted Ones' curse was related to a Siming inside Baiyu Capital. Li Huowang wasn't sure what Heavenly Dao was

under the Three Ancient Ones' control, but he was sure that he couldn't do much about it with his meager power.

His current goal was to help Zhuge Yuan fight the Sitting Oblivion Dao and track down Bei Feng.

"Why won't you believe me? The book explaining how the Strayed Ones can cultivate the 'Truth' is located in a library somewhere in the capital of the Qi Kingdom. Come, let me tell you the history of the Qi Kingdom."

"Senior Zhuge, you don't have to do that," Li Huowang hurriedly said. He had to stop Zhuge Yuan, or the latter might speak for three days and nights straight. He feared that it would take three days and nights to fully explain it. "You just need to tell me where we should go, what we should do, and who we should kill. I'll follow your orders."

Zhuce Yuan relented upon seeing Li Huowang's determined look. Of course, he was a bit sad at the rejection. "Junior Li, you must not stop learning throughout your life. The sea of knowledge is boundless, and all past scholars only had one regret—the fact that they haven't read enough."

Li Huowang had no idea what to say, but he finally understood why Zhuge Yuan had the moniker—Storyteller.

"If the officials and eunuchs are truly causing havoc in the palace of the Qi Kingdom. I don't think we should discuss that here, Zhuge Yuan."

"Fine. There's still time. I can just tell you as we travel." Zhuge Yuan stood up and took some of the paintings on the wall. "Follow me to the capital, where we'll meet the Imperial Preceptor."

"All right," Li Huowang said. Then, he stood up and helped Zhuge Yuan take some of the paintings.

"Senior Zhuge, you said that Dan Yangzi had used his obsession and my power to become a half Immortal. Doesn't that mean that I can use that power, too?" Li Huowang asked.

“Of course, the Strayed Ones can use that power. Why do you think others resort to trickery just to capture them? That's exactly the reason why. They're afraid of the Strayed Ones' power.

"However, I think you shouldn't think about wielding your primordial breath for now. You're just going to harm yourself without the proper technique to wield it. Or what? Do you want to become a half Immortal like your master?"

Li Huowang went silent when he remembered Dan Yangzi's three heads. No one deserved to live such a life, even his enemies. Li Huowang had decided to wield the Profound Records rather than attempt to use his powers.

After all, the Profound Records was easier to use.

“Junior Li, I think you should still try to search for the cultivation method to cultivate the ‘Truth.’ I mean, think about the Muddled Ones. Unlike us, they have no choice, and most of them usually go crazy after using their powers haphazardly.”

“Shit! There's no way I'm going to lose! One head and one tail! No way I'm losing here!”

“Two heads! I bet ten coins!”

“Two heads!”

“Shit! Get out of here! Stay away from me! Don't you dare steal my luck!”

A group of people raised a cacophonous din, betting their money away in a gambling den filled with the sweat of its patrons.

Some of the patrons were notorious gang members, and it wasn't really a strange sight. After all, where there was light, there was also darkness. Yinling City was prosperous, and there was a reason behind its prosperity.

Surprisingly, Sir Kui's gambling den was considered one of the cleanest gambling dens in the city.

“Anyone else? Anyone else who wants to place their bets? Bets

are confirmed once you lift your hands off of the table!”

Lu Xiucan sat in the middle of the gambling den with a demeanor that made him appear as if he were a general heading to the front lines. His naive demeanor was no more and had been replaced by a demeanor hardly seen in someone his age.

Lu Xiucan chuckled as he swept his gaze across the tiny hill of coins and silver on the table. He made a seal with his right arm inside his sleeves and stomped with his right foot; the coins inside the bowl moved unbeknownst to everyone.

Everyone howled and sighed when the bowl was opened. The two coins inside the bowl were both tails, and it was coincidentally the outcome with the least bets.

A few unrelenting gamblers grabbed the coins and inspected them, but they found nothing strange with the coins. Lu Xiucan were using rusty coins, but they were ordinary coins.

“Shit! I can't believe my luck is so bad tonight! Guys, let's go to Sir Kui and borrow some money!”

Time passed slowly amidst the cacophonous din. Soon, the roosters crowed to greet the day, and the gamblers exited listlessly as if their souls had been sucked out of their fleshly bodies.

Lu Xiucan stood in front of a chubby man while counting the money he had earned overnight. He could only take forty percent of the revenue, but his share was already big enough to make Lu Xiucan happy.

“Sir Lu, this is your share.”

“Thank you, Sir Kui!” Lu Xiucan exclaimed, eyes shining in greed as he happily accepted the money.

I really want to show Father just how much money I can earn overnight! This is more money than he can earn through performing for several days! Hmph! How dare he say I'm useless, even though he's a useless and senile old man.

Lu Xiucan was putting away his money into his two pouches

when Sir Kui, the owner of the gambling den, advised, “Sir Lu, make sure to let them win from time to time. Let them win once every three or four rounds; that way they'll certainly come back.”

“Sure, I'm going to do that next time,” Lu Xiucan walked out of the gambling den with a spring in his steps. A few gangsters outside smiled at him and congratulated him.

Lu Xiucan seemed to be on good terms with the gangsters. He waved his arm and shouted, “Come here, let's go have breakfast! It's my treat today!”

The gangsters cheered at Lu Xiucan's words.

“Sir Lu truly is a righteous and generous man!”

“Sir Lu is the most generous man in Yinling City!”

“Of course! Who would dare to say otherwise?!”

Lu Xiucan felt like he was floating on cloud nine, and he couldn't suppress his grin.

This is how life is supposed to be! My previous life as a performer was almost like living as a prisoner!

Translator's Thoughts

I actually managed to get ahold of some of the older illustrations after dealing some issues with Douyin, so here are some character illustrations and the chapters they appeared in! First we have the Human Xiaos, first appearing in Chapter 321

Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin



Chapter 397 - Lu Xiucan

Lu Xiucan and the others happily walked into a restaurant for their breakfast.

Lu Xiucan didn't care, even though it was too early in the day—he ordered eight meat dishes. When the wine came, some of the smarter gangsters poured a glass of wine for Lu Xiucan.

Lu Xiucan drank it in one go and was greeted with cheers again.

The other customers cast contemptuous gazes upon them.

“Sir Lu has a great alcohol tolerance! Sir Lu is amazing!”

“Haha. I can't drink as much as Sir Lu. Would you be so kind as to give me pointers?”

“*Hmph!* This is nothing! When I was still hunting demons in Qing Qiu with Master Li Huowang, I could drink an entire jar of wine this high in one go!” Lu Xiucan replied.

“Sir Lu, tell us more about how you hunted demons with your master in Qing Qiu!”

“Okay, let me tell you that even though Qing Qiu looks safe on the outside, it's actually an extremely dangerous place with surging undercurrents! If it hadn't been for Master helping me, I would have died there!”

Lu Xiucan recounted everything that he had experienced in Qing Qiu while eating and drinking with the gangsters. Of course, most of the story had come from Puppy; Lu Xiucan recounted the story with him as the main character.

Amidst the cheers, Lu Xiucan's face turned bright red from the wine.

He was already slurring, but he felt that he could still drink more.

They indeed drank more and drank everything. Afterward, Lu

Xiucui waved at the gangsters and said, "Let's go to the brothel! It's on me!"

Everyone cheered louder, and they were so loud that the roof was almost torn apart from the volume of their voice. The gangsters served Lu Xiucui, and some of them even almost recognized him as their foster father.

Lu Xiucui laughed with them, feeling an unprecedented sense of fulfillment.

It was already noon when Lu Xiucui walked out of the brothel, but he wasn't hungry at all. The brothel was famous for giving its customers donkey meat buns. Of course, even though Lu Xiucui wasn't hungry, he got a bit too *busy*, so he decided to go back to his accommodation and rest.

Lu Xiucui wasn't exactly the ideal tenant to the landlords, but Sir Kui had managed to find several landlords willing to accommodate Lu Xiucui.

Upon arriving at his accommodation, Lu Xiucui pushed the door open and saw a woman doing laundry next to the well. The woman seemed to be quite skillful at doing laundry.

Lu Xiucui had purchased the woman somewhere, and her name was Tao'er. Lu Xiucui had purchased her, as she wasn't that expensive because of her tiny hips and ordinary looks.

Lu Xiucui wanted to make her his wife, but he no longer wanted to touch her after his first visit to a brothel. Tao'er was like a log in bed, and she couldn't be compared to the accomplished prostitutes in a brothel.

Lu Xiucui was now treating her as a servant—her task was to clean the house, wash Lu Xiucui's clothes, and cook some meals for them to eat.

Lu Xiucui collapsed on the bed right away and snored away.

Tao'er stood up and used a wooden bucket to scoop out hot water that she had prepared beforehand. Then, she dipped a towel

into the bucket and used it to wipe Lu Xiucan clean.

Afterward, Tao'er removed his socks and soaked his feet in the warm water. After a while, she covered Lu Xiucan with a blanket and even wrapped his pillow with clean clothes.

Night soon arrived, and Lu Xiucan finally woke up. He rubbed his groggy eyes, and his nose twitched upon catching a whiff of dinner. Lu Xiucan then rolled down the bed and made his way over to the table.

Tao'er could not sit with him while he ate, and she could only eat his leftovers.

Tonight's dinner was two vegetable dishes, a soup, and a fried egg. The vegetables were stir-fried with lard, and it was an extravagant meal that Lu Xiucan once only dreamed of eating, but now, he had long gotten tired of it.

Lu Xiucan drank a mouthful of the winter melon soup and wiped his mouth clean with his sleeves. He was ready to win some money in the gambling den. He had to go early, or he would be locked out of the gambling den due to curfew.

Lu Xiucan stood up and glanced at Tao'er. He was astonished to see blood on her trousers, and he became angry after the initial shock had passed.

"What the fuck is that?! What happened?! Who dared to touch my woman?! I'm going to kill him!" Lu Xiucan roared.

Tao'er shook her head and said softly, "No one. It's just that my period is heavier this month, and it leaked out."

"Period? I'm asking you about the blood on your trousers! What the fuck are you talking about?!" Lu Xiucan shouted.

Tao'er then told Lu Xiucan what she meant by "period," and Lu Xiucan learned for the first time that women would bleed every month.

"I see. It all makes sense now. No wonder my sister-in-law is always unwell for a few days every month. I asked her once, but she

scolded me for asking..." Lu Xiucan muttered.

Lu Xiucan handed over some silver fragments at the bottom of his pouch to Tao'er before heading out. "Go and buy some meat for me. I'm not going to eat leaves anymore! I've been eating vegetables all my life!"

The majority of the gamblers in the city were heading to the gambling den as well. A curfew was in place, but they would be fine as long as they stayed in the gambling den for the whole night.

Lu Xiucan entered Sir Kui's gambling den and took out the five bronze coins that Li Huowang had given to him. He played with it in his hands and revealed a greedy grin. With his techniques, there was no way he would starve again.

When he was ready to go to his usual post, Sir Kui stopped him.

Lu Xiucan turned and noticed the dragon tattoo on Sir Kui's shoulder and arm.

"Sir Lu, don't worry about earning money for now. I have something to discuss with you."

The two walked into the small courtyard behind the gambling den.

A hotpot was prepared with mutton slices next to it.

Lu Xiucan sat down and immediately started eating. He hadn't eaten his fill at home, so he was quite hungry. "Is something wrong? Please tell me if there's anything wrong. You accepted me that day, so you're now my benefactor!"

Sir Kui chuckled and poured Lu Xiucan a cup of wine. "Sir Lu, I heard that you were once a disciple of a Daoist? Is it true?"

"Of course! In fact, Master Li Huowang is an Immortal! He could even reattach his head! Evil beings are nothing but appetizers to him!" Lu Xiucan exclaimed, slapping his chest proudly as if he were Li Huowang himself.

"Since you are his disciple, you must be strong, too."

“Hehehe.” Lu Xiucan took a slice of mutton and placed it in the hotpot. Once it was done cooking, he took it out and munched on it with a grin. “Somewhat. I’m roughly forty—no, sixty percent as strong as him!”

“Good! Youngsters nowadays are truly amazing! Impressive!”

Lu Xiucan smiled sheepishly. It was amazing to think that the infamous Sir Kui would treat him with so much respect. Sir Kui had stroked his ego so much that he was already thinking about bragging to his brothers tomorrow morning.

However, he failed to notice Sir Kui's slight frown.

“Sir Lu, I have a difficult problem. I wonder if you can help me with it. I actually have a sworn brother, but for some reason, he ended up getting possessed. I’m not sure whether it was because he was just unlucky or not, but he has gone crazy. Neither the monks nor the Daoists whom I managed to find for him could help him. If you can help me, I’ll allow you to take eighty percent of my earnings here!”

Translator's Thoughts

This is Hong Da, the creditor! First appearing in Chapter 278! **Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin**



Chapter 398 - Half-Immortal

Eighty percent commission?! That's double my current commission!

Lu Xiucan exclaimed inwardly, and he even started drooling from greed at Sir Kui's proposal.

However, he calmed down quickly. After all, he had seen a fair share of evil beings from his travels with Li Huowang. He knew that there were weak and evil beings. Li Huowang had told him that the bronze coins could cut down evil beings, but Lu Xiucan had never tried it before.

Sir Kui sighed with disappointment upon seeing Lu Xiucan's conflicted expression.

"It's okay. I'm not going to force you. It's not something an ordinary person can resolve, anyway," Sir Kui said.

Sir Kui's words made Lu Xiucan feel insulted, and his brain came to a screeching halt as he immediately exclaimed, "Shit! I'm going to do it! It's either I die, or that evil being will die. Do you really think I'm afraid of evil beings?

"If Li Huowang can do it, I can do it, too!"

Lu Xiucan was still confident in his chances of escaping, and it was all thanks to the bronze coins.

"All right! I knew you were an amazing guy! Here, let me toast you!" Sir Kui exclaimed.

However, Lu Xiucan placed his cup on the table and copied what he had seen in a book. "Don't worry about the wine, Sir Kui. Allow me to savor it with you slowly once I've dealt with that evil being!"

Sir Kui grinned at Lu Xiucan's confidence, and he even gave a

thumbs-up!

Lu Xiucan savored every moment. He truly didn't expect to one day experience what Li Huowang himself had gone through.

"All right, then. Let's go," Sir Kui said.

Lu Xiucan's confidence seemed to have vanished once he was inside the carriage. He felt anxious as he kept trying to recall what Li Huowang had done when they stumbled upon evil beings during their travels.

The cogs in Li Xiucan's brain desperately, but he couldn't remember anything relevant at all. After all, he had always been the first one to run and hide every time there was danger. If there was nowhere to hide, he would hide under the carriage, not daring to take even a peek until the danger had passed.

Lu Xiucan lampooned his past self when the carriage finally stopped.

Lu Xiucan looked around and saw that they were out of the city.

They were in a small town, but the utterly bizarre part was that every single house had no light. Lu Xiucan had no idea where he was, but he knew instinctively that this small town was most likely somewhere near Yinling City.

A massive mansion stood before them, and the size of the mansion alone made it clear that the owner wasn't an ordinary Tom, Dick, and Harry.

"Sir Lu, follow me. My friend is inside," said Sir Kui before knocking on the mansion's door.

A creaking noise echoed as the door was opened by an old man carrying a lantern.

Upon seeing Sir Kui's face, the old man quickly ushered in the two. The old man's frantic manner seemed as if he were afraid that something *strange* would follow them inside.

"Sanjin, he is...?"

"Uncle Fang, don't worry. He's one of my sworn brothers, and

he's a Daoist!"

The old man cast a puzzled gaze at Lu Xiucan puzzlingly.

Lu Xiucan put on a cold facade, copying Li Huowang's demeanor.

"Sanjin!" someone shouted.

Lu Xiucan turned around and saw a group of people walking toward them.

A large-framed muscular man stood at the center of the group. He was wearing a silk brocade, and prayer beads were hanging on his neck. However, his bulging muscles made him look incompatible with his clothes.

The others weren't anywhere better, either. They all looked fierce and ruthless. If it hadn't been for the other houses near the mansion, Lu Xiucan would have thought that he had entered a bandit's den.

Kui Sanjin bowed slightly toward them and greeted the large-framed muscular man earnestly.

Lu Xiucan noticed that something was off. *Who are they to Sir Kui? Why do I feel that they're not the type of people to establish legal businesses?*

Lu Xiucan regretted coming here. To make matters worse, he was in a foreign place, and it was pitch-black outside.

Soon, Kui Sanjin introduced Lu Xiucan to the large-framed, muscular man.

"Sir Lu, he's Sir Zhao. His son was the one who got possessed," Kui Sanjin said.

Lu Xiucan stared deeply at the large-framed muscular man with a fierce demeanor. He was about to say something when Sir Zhao grabbed Lu Xiucan's hands and exclaimed, "You must be half-Immortal Lu Xiucan! Please save my son! He's the sole successor of my family!"

"Yes, yes, we can take our time discussing what happened," Lu

Xiucan said, smiling. He truly loved seeing someone beg him for help, as it made him feel incredibly important.

“Half-Immortal Lu, we can't take our time. Please follow us! My son can't last any longer,” Zhao Tianhu said, pulling Lu Xiucan into the depths of the mansion.

The mansion was large. Lu Xiucan felt dizzy from the amount of turns they were taking to go somewhere.

Shit! I'm going to buy a mansion this large next time! Just as the thought crossed Lu Xiucan's mind, he was pulled right in front of a room. There were no lamps inside the room, and it seemed as if there wasn't anyone inside.

“Half-Immortal Lu, my son is inside! Save him, and I will do anything!” Zhao Tianhu exclaimed.

Lu Xiucan listened carefully but heard nothing.

“Sir Zhao, are you sure your son is inside by himself?” Lu Xiucan asked.

“Yes. he has already killed the two servants we sent inside!” Zhao Tianhu replied.

Then, Zhao Tianhu and his people pushed Lu Xiucan into the room.

“Sir Zhao, stop being so pushy. You have to tell me what kind of evil being is inside first! Is it strong? Is it a male, or is it a female?”

Lu Xiucan was pushed into the room, and the door was immediately slammed shut.

“Don't close the door! What are you guys doing?! I'm not going to run away, so open the door!” Lu Xiucan exclaimed, banging on the door. However, he received no response.

Dekdekdekdekdekdekdek~

An eerie peal of laughter echoed, making Lu Xiucan flinch as goosebumps broke out all over him. He turned around, revealing the five bronze coins in his hand. However, Lu Xiucan was already

trembling from fear. Something was jumping around in the dark room, but it was so dark that Lu Xiucan couldn't see it.

Unfortunately, there was no going back. Lu Xiucan mustered his courage and shouted, “Stupid evil being! You're nothing before me! My master is Li Huowang! Touch me, and you are as good as dead!”

Lu Xiucan's threat echoed throughout the room, and he felt somewhat braver when the room went silent.

Heh, this is easy. Lu Xiucan gnashed his teeth and walked toward the middle of the room. Lu Xiucan groped around and realized that he was in a bedroom. However, he failed to find Zhao Tianhu's son.

No, it's too dark. I need a lamp. Lu Xiucan moved toward the table and saw a flint placed conveniently near the lamp.

Sparks flew as Lu Xiucan struck the flint. A spark made contact with the lamp's wick, igniting it.

As soon as the darkness was vanquished, Lu Xiucan saw a pale and thin face staring at him blankly on the other side of the room.

“AAAAAAHHH!”

Translator's Thoughts

Here we have the half-octopus Li Huowang. First appears in Chapter 324 when he first fought the Human Xiaos. **Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin**



Chapter 399 - Savior

Zhao Tianhu sighed upon hearing Lu Xiucan's voice. "And another one bites the dust..."

Kui Sanjin said nothing.

Meanwhile, a short man among their group spoke, saying, "Sir Kui, I have someone with relations to the Surveillance Bureau. Want me to talk to them?"

Zhao Tianhu slapped the short man on the head. "Are you stupid? Don't you know what we do? We're graverobbers! Why would you go and consult the Surveillance Bureau? They're going to kill us all!"

The short man retreated into the group of people.

"They're not the imperial guards. They won't care about us at all."

Zhao Tianhu sighed. "We should just give up on it if it's really impossible. We've sought so many people to help, but they all failed. We've done our best for Fourth Brother's sake."

However, the others disagreed. "You can't do that, Sir Zhao! Since it managed to turn Fourth Zhao into that ghastly creature, that item is definitely a prized treasure!"

"Yeah! We can just sell it and earn a lot of money since we're too scared to use it."

"Sir Zhao! I heard those cultivators have pills to extend their lifespan! We can exchange that treasure for those pills!"

"Shut up!" Zhao Tianhu shouted.

Everyone went quiet.

"If you think you can do it, why don't you personally try and tear off that wicked skin from Fourth Brother? That treasure will belong to you if you manage to do it! What? Do you dare try it? I

know that it's a treasure that we can sell for good money, but it can fucking kill you!

"It already killed Fourth Brother and Sixth Brother. How many lives would you need just to take care of it?

"Anyway, just listen to me! We've got to block the windows and doors. We'll leave before daybreak, and hopefully, the officials won't discover our trails."

No one else dared to disobey Zhao Tianhu, and they prepared to carry out his orders.

"AAAAAAAAAH!" Lu Xiucan's shout echoed just then.

"What?!" Zhao Tianhu was astonished, but he was immediately delighted. "He's still alive! It seems we finally have a chance. Let's stay here and wait!"

"AAAAAAH!" Lu Xiucan shouted, running around the room while holding the bronze coins. A figure with a long neck and long hair chased him around as if it were a snake.

Lu Xiucan finally saw the corpses in the corner of the room, and the limbs of those corpses were tangled up with each other. Lu Xiucan ran with all his might, afraid of meeting the same horrible fate as those corpses.

Unfortunately, Lu Xiucan was eventually pushed into a corner. He gnashed his teeth and raised the coins. The long-necked evil retreated slightly.

It's fine! It's fine! It's afraid of the coins! Lu Xiucan consoled himself while catching his breath. The brief respite allowed him to take a good look at the evil being. The evil being was a humanoid evil being with its neck and limbs horrendously elongated, allowing it to wriggle them like snakes.

A moldy piece of leather was attached to the evil being's chest. The leather seemed to be made out of several human faces and scalps. The scars on the scalps indicated that the owners were monks. The orifices of monks' faces were sewn shut, while their

foreheads were lined with what looked like intricate runes.

The entire piece of leather emitted an ominous air, and it would move every time the evil being.

Is that leather made from human parts? Is that why this evil creature can stretch its neck to such an extent? Lu Xiucan thought, but he honestly couldn't care less. His priority was escaping his predicament, but he couldn't see any way out of this.

The evil being quivered and squirmed as it slowly approached Lu Xiucan. At the sight, Lu Xiucan thrust the bronze coins toward the evil being, forcing it to retreat.

Lu Xiucan saw that and came up with an idea. He made sure his hands were raised as he moved slowly toward the window. Upon reaching it, he banged on the wooden window with his elbows.

After creating a hole in the window, Lu Xiucan judged that the hole was big enough for him to escape, so he turned around to jump into it.

However, the window was abruptly opened from the outside. The window struck him in the chest, knocking him down. Lu Xiucan immediately attempted to stand up, but the pale, emaciated face was only a few inches away from him!

Lu Xiucan briefly stopped breathing at the terrifying sight.

The evil being opened its mouth to devour Lu Xiucan when a strong beam of light struck the evil being from behind Lu Xiucan. The evil being's flesh melted, and it collapsed with a dull thud.

Lu Xiucan saw a white skull rolling on the floor.

The evil being's head had melted away, and it was considered dead without a head.

The leather sensed the death of its host, and it immediately detached from the fleshly body of its deceased host. Then, it launched itself at Lu Xiucan.

Swoosh!

A wooden pole flew into the room, impaling the leather to the

ground.

Lu Xiucan stared at the leather and looked up slowly, tracing the pole's wooden shaft until he saw the banner tied to it. A Taiji symbol was drawn on the flag along with six words at the bottom of it.

If Lu Xiucan could read, he would understand some of the words that said—fortune-telling, glyphomancy, and divinations.

“*Haha*, I guess my good luck has returned. It makes sense, as I've been so unlucky over the past few days,” said Blind Chen as he entered the room. He looked around before going over to his wooden pole.

He was the same Blind Chen whom Li Huowang had met before. Blind Chen stepped on the leather and walked up to the wooden pole.

Lu Xiucan crawled up and stared at the blind man with a bamboo basket on his back

The blind man was stroking the leather with a pensive look, seemingly oblivious to Lu Xiucan's presence.

“Thank you for your help,” Lu Xiucan said.

Blind Chen ignored Lu Xiucan. He pulled out a black cloth and grabbed the leather with it. Then, he took out a mirror—the same mirror that Li Huowang had returned to him.

Zhao Tianhu and Kui Sanjin huddled next to the window, staring in disbelief at Blind Chen. They had no idea where the blind man had come from, and why he was so strong.

Blind Chen pinched the mirror in his armpit and used his wooden pole to poke around.

“Why are you blocking the window? Step back a bit. It's too crowded,” Blind Chen said.

The people outside took a step back upon seeing that the blind man wanted to exit through the window. However, they made sure that the old man was within arm's reach, and their greedy gazes

were fixated on the old man's bamboo basket.

“Now that’s better,” Blind Chen said. He then assumed a horse stance and raised the mirror high up in the air using his right hand while making seals with his left hand. He chanted an incantation at the same time.

Lu Xiucan admired Blind Chen and wondered when he would become a sage-like individual like the latter.

Lu Xiucan was also surprised by the strength of Blind Chen's Bagua mirror. Lu Xiucan knew that Bagua mirrors could deal with evil beings, but the issue was that Bagua mirrors were definitely expensive.

Lu Xiucan wondered how much it would cost to buy one.

While Lu Xiucan was deep in his thoughts, Blind Chen reached a crescendo.

When his chanting ceased, Blind Chen pointed his mirror at the group of people in front of him and roared. “The limitless Heaven and Earth upholds justice for the world!”

A dazzling, radiant light erupted from the mirror, piercing everyone.

They only managed to utter a single shout of despair before dying. Blind Chen's Bagua mirror had reduced all of them to a puddle of red flesh.

Translator's Thoughts

This is Liu Zhongyuan, first appearing in Chapter 302! **Credits to** 格子的乱七八糟 **on** douyin



Chapter 400 - Noodles

Lu Xiucan was in awe as he stood inside the messy room.

He never thought the blind old man would kill everyone just like that.

Aren't Daoists supposed to help kind and innocent people and punish evildoers? Why did he kill everyone? Aren't they innocent? I guess Daoists are different from what my old man told me. Lu Xiucan pondered.

Just then, Blind Chen turned around and looked at Lu Xiucan. Although Blind Chen was blind, Lu Xiucan felt that the old man could see him as he broke out into a cold sweat.

"Oh? Why is there someone still alive?" Blind Chen raised his mirror toward Lu Xiucan.

Lu Xiucan was scared out of his wits. He raised the bronze coins in his hands and shouted, "Don't kill me! My master is Li Huowang!"

Blind Chen came to a halt.

Lu Xiucan felt that he had been spared, but he still pleaded mercy to Blind Chen. "Do you know my master? Please spare me! I don't know these people at all!"

Blind Chen walked over and took the bronze coins away from Lu Xiucan's palm. "Li Huowang? I don't know him. However, the five bronze coins in your hands contain a trace of spiritual power, and they're going to come in handy. Not bad, I'll consider these coins payment for your life."

Blind Chen then turned around and walked away with his white banner while playing with the bronze coins.

Lu Xiucan stood blankly for a while until the soft night breeze swept past him, snapping him back to reality. Lu Xiucan stared at

the puddle of flesh outside, and he couldn't believe that the powerful Sir Kui had perished just like that.

Sir Kui was like a mere ant compared to Blind Chen.

Blind Chen had thoroughly destroyed Lu Xiucai's ego.

Blind Chen wasn't the same as his master Li Huowang. Even though Li Huowang was cold and crazy, he wasn't the type of person to kill indiscriminately. However, Blind Chen was different. He seemed to be the type of person to kill as he wished.

A stronger sense of fear gripped Lu Xiucai's heart, and he started trembling from fear. If it hadn't been for those coins, he would have died like Sir Kui and his group members.

The fear soon disappeared, replaced by determination. *Why? Why am I so worthless? I want to become like that blind man!*

Lu Xiucai learned something from Blind Chen that he hadn't learned from Li Huowang. *Food? Women? Those are nothing! I have to become strong like that blind man!*

Lu Xiucai trembled at the thought that he could actually become strong enough to decide the life and death of other people.

I have to find my master and ask him to teach me how to become powerful! Lu Xiucai clenched his fist and ran out of the mansion.

"Come here, and let me test you. Who built the Qi Kingdom's foundations? I know you don't know, so let me just tell you. When the disaster of the Black Heavens befell us, General Qilu braved the seas with his people to come here.

"At the time, this land was in turmoil. Small countries were fighting against each other; the general fought in numerous wars to unify the countries, and he established the great Qi Kingdom when he was ninety-five years old.

"His grandson Qiheng continued his legacy by leading everyone to prosperity. He also established the Surveillance Bureau during that time period."

Bun was sprawled on Black Taisui, and its head was tilted sideways in curiosity. It was a dog, so it couldn't understand what Zhuge Yuan was saying.

The Black Taisui had occupied most of the space inside the carriage. As for the remaining empty spaces, Zhuge Yuan had filled them up with books and drawings. He didn't mind the Black Taisui's presence as he continued talking to Bun.

Bun yawned and was about to leave the carriage when it saw Zhuge Yuan holding a sausage in his hands. Bun sat down immediately and listened to what Zhuge Yuan had to say.

Li Huowang was driving the carriage, and he sighed upon taking a peek inside. *Is Zhuge Yuan crazy enough to teach history to a dog?*

Li Huowang didn't want to learn more about the Qi Kingdom's history, so Zhuge Yuan actually came up with an excuse to teach the dog and speak loud enough for Li Huowang to hear from the outside.

For some reason, he's trying to teach me the history of the Qi Kingdom. If not that, then he'd try to teach me calligraphy. What is wrong with him? Li Huowang lampooned inwardly.

Zhuce Yuan was very passionate about teaching, and his chatterbox trait didn't make him appear powerful at all.

The carriage traveled slowly on the dirt path. Li Huowang saw a stall by the roadside in the distance. There was white smoke coming up from the stall, and it seemed to be a stall selling food.

“Junior Li, why don't we stop here? We've eaten nothing but rations these days. I think it's good to have some 'real' food from time to time,” Zhuge Yuan said, opening up the tarp at the front.

Li Huowang was holding onto the reins when he glanced at the customers at the stall and the old lady serving the noodles. “No, it's not safe. Who knows? They might be members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao with a trap waiting for us.”

The Sitting Oblivion Dao hated Zhuge Yuan and would do anything just to kill him.

“The Sitting Oblivion Dao wouldn't stoop so low as to imitate a stall owner and poison food. Also, aren't you looking for Bei Feng? With your guard so high up, how are we going to find Bei Feng?”

Li Huowang froze, realizing his mistake. Indeed, he was supposed to look for his target, so he couldn't be so wary about everything. After all, how would he encourage his target to make a move against him if he were so wary about everything?

Li Huowang stopped the carriage and alighted. Zhuge Yuan alighted as well, followed by Bun.

“Table for two? Do you want some noodles? Fish noodles are our specialty. We use the entire fish, including the scales and bones to make the soup,” said the kind-looking old lady, who came up to them upon seeing them.

“Three. Bowls. Please.” Li Huowang enunciated each word while glaring at the kind-looking old lady.

The kind-looking old lady was shocked by Li Huowang's glare. She turned around and ran in a panic to talk to the old man cooking the noodles.

“Junior Li, calm down and eat properly. They're not members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao,” Zhuge Yuan said, using a white cloth to wipe the chopsticks clean.

“*Oh?* How can you say for sure? Do you have a method to uncover the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao?” Li Huowang asked, looking curiously at Zhuge Yuan.

“I guess you can say that. Since the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao cultivate 'Lies,' I would see a thread from their body if they got close enough to me like that kind-looking old lady.”

Li Huowang's curiosity was piqued, and he asked, “A thread? What does that mean?”

Li Huowang reckoned that he could learn Zhuge Yuan's

techniques and use them against the Sitting Oblivion Dao members.

“It's the thread that connects them to their Siming.”

Li Huowang was shocked. Zhuge Yuan's revelation was a bit different from what he had learned.

“They have a Siming?” Li Huowang asked.

“Of course. How would you explain their techniques if they don't have one?”

Translator's Thoughts

Ah yes, our beloved Tuoba Danqing, first appearing in Chapter 295. **Credits to** 格子的乱七八糟 **on douyin**



Chapter 401 - Acquaintance

“Of course, it was deceived from elsewhere! The Sitting Oblivion Dao deceives the heavens, the earth, and the Simings.”

Zhuge Yuan smiled and opened his fan with a *snap*. Then, he gently fanned himself and said, “Who said that? They fooled you. However, there are indeed rumors disseminating similar accusations.

“They don’t want others to know, so they spread rumors that the powers of Sitting Oblivion Dao are all from deception. But think about it, Brother Li. What if a mortal could ask the other Simings to bestow upon them power?”

Coaxing the Sitting Oblivion Dao’s Siming? Wouldn’t that mean controlling all “lies”? Li Huowang thought. After careful consideration, Li Huowang said, “Brother Zhuge, what is the name of the Sitting Oblivion Dao’s Siming?”

“Doulao Taiyin.”

Doulao Taiyin? Is that Siming responsible for all the “lies” in this world? Li Huowang fell into deep contemplation. *Was the Siming in Baiyu Capital back then? Have I seen them before?* Li Huowang tried hard to search through his memories from a year ago.

Zhuge Yuan seemed to have sensed something. He looked up at the sun and snapped his fingers before Li Huowang.

Li Huowang’s mind cleared instantly, and he couldn’t remember his thoughts just now.

“Brother Li. Mere mortals like us should avoid matters beyond the heavenly realm. It’s better not to get involved, lest we disrupt our karma and destiny,” Zhuge Yuan said.

Li Huowang nodded, and he sounded exhausted as he asked, "None of them will work?"

"It's best not to dwell on it."

Li Huowang had many questions about the Simings, but he could only swallow them for now and change the subject. "Brother Zhuge, can you teach me your cultivation method? Once I learn it, the Sitting Oblivion Dao will no longer be a concern."

Zhugue Yuan waved his fan once again.

He was about to speak when a mocking voice echoed from the side. "Look at this scholar. It's so cold, but he's waving his fan. He must be crazy."

Zhugue Yuan's expression stiffened. Then, he snapped his fan shut and turned to Li Huowang, saying, "The Twisted One's fate cannot be learned. However, once you master the Strayed One's cultivation method, the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao will flee quicker than a rabbit once they see you."

Li Huowang smiled bitterly at Zhugue Yuan's remark. It seemed that if he cultivated the Strayed One's cultivation method, he would become the Sitting Oblivion Dao arch-nemesis.

"I hope so. I just want to get rid of these illusions. The rest doesn't matter."

"Hehehe, here it comes! Hot and steamy fish soup noodles. Please try my old man's masterpiece."

Li Huowang picked up his chopsticks and took a few strands of noodles from each bowl before throwing them to the ground. Bun enthusiastically devoured the noodles.

"Brother Zhuge, let's make Bun eat first."

Zhugue Yuan had just taken out a silver needle, and he nodded knowingly at Li Huowang's remark. "That's not a bad method. I was wondering why you have a dog. What if it's a slow-acting poison? What if the dog dies after you've eaten it all?"

"No worries. I can just cut open my belly and expunge

everything inside.”

Zhuge Yuan looked at Li Huowang in amazement. His mouth fluttered open to say something, but he couldn't find the words to say.

Bun squatted on the side, wagging its tail. Li Huowang saw that and picked up his chopsticks again. “Brother Zhuge, there’s no poison. Let’s eat.”

The kind-looking old lady was right—the fish soup noodles were delicious. The fish roe scattered in the soup went well with the milky-white broth, and it was an incredibly comforting meal amidst the cold weather.

Just as Li Huowang was contemplating whether to order another bowl or not, he suddenly looked up with furrowed brows, staring at the woods on the left.

Zhuge Yuan ate leisurely. He gulped and calmly asked, “What’s wrong, Brother Li?”

“Something’s happening in our south. Sounds like there are people fighting each other,” Li Huowang replied.

“Brother Li, how come your ears are so keen? You can actually hear quarreling from so far away,” Zhuge Yuan said, shaking his long sleeves and standing up.

Li Huowang stood up as well and followed him into the woods. They brushed aside the bushes and leaves, making a path for themselves. Eventually, they came to a halt upon getting hit by the strong smell of blood and stared at the chaotic scene in the distance.

Two groups were engaged in a fierce battle that was at its climax. Each one fought with determination, using unfamiliar and lethal techniques brand-new to Li Huowang. Lives were claimed every second as they fought.

Li Huowang's gaze landed on a corpse with a waistplate. Then, he turned to Zhuge Yuan and said, “One side is from the

Surveillance Bureau, but I don't recognize the other side. Brother Zhuge, do you know them?"

Zhuge Yuan watched as someone pulled out a white maggot and slapped it on his wound with an exposed bone. Zhuge Yuan shook his head and said, "I have no idea, but one of them should be a Sitting Oblivion Dao member."

"Sitting Oblivion Dao? Who?!" Li Huowang exclaimed with a solemn expression. It seemed the word Sitting Oblivion Dao was now capable of evoking an instinctive reaction from Li Huowang.

"It should be that Miao woman with purplish lips."

Li Huowang's gaze darkened as he stared at the glimmering silver headdress fluttering amidst the tumult. However, Li Huowang decided not to make a move. "Brother Zhuge, she doesn't look like someone important from the Sitting Oblivion Dao."

"I'm afraid we'll alert them if we approach hastily."

Li Huowang's objective was unchanged—to capture Bei Feng and extract information.

Li Huowang had no intention of getting involved in anything else.

"Brother Zhuge, let's head back. Let's refrain from stirring up unnecessary trouble."

Zhuge Yuan nodded and got ready to leave with Li Huowang.

However, a masked man in the crowd noticed them and shouted, "Lord Zhuge!"

Zhuge Yuan opened his fan swiftly and kicked off of a tree trunk, charging decisively toward the black-robed man.

Li Huowang couldn't just stand by and watch Zhuge Yuan. He promptly drew the purple-tassel sword and joined the fray.

The deadlock shattered, and the enemies of the Surveillance Bureau were soon forced to retreat, all thanks to Li Huowang and Zhuge Yuan.

Li Huowang wiped away the blood on his face and walked up

to Zhuge Yuan. Upon arrival, he saw the surviving individuals kneeling before Zhuge Yuan.

“Greetings, Lord Zhuge!” they shouted.

Li Huowang was dumbfounded. *Zhuge Yuan actually has such a high standing in the Surveillance Bureau? How come he seemed like the plague in the eyes of Lord Ji Xiang back then?*

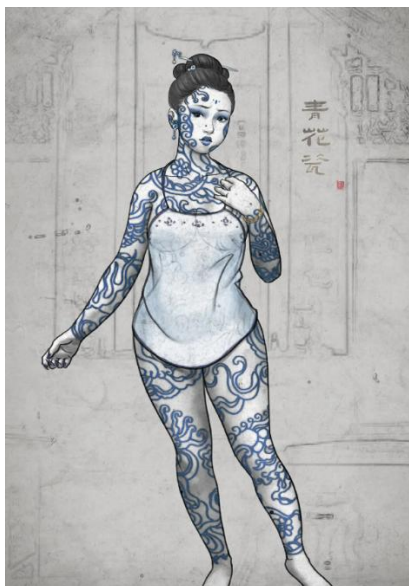
“Ah, Brother Li, you’re here,” said Zhuge Yuan, helping up the same masked man earlier with a smile. “He happens to be a dear friend from my younger years. Don’t let his affiliation with the Surveillance Bureau mislead you; he’s also a grandmaster player recognized at the national level in the Great Qi!”

“A Grandmaster recognized in the Great Qi?!”

“Oh, remember that game we played with black and white stones? He’s one of the strongest in the Great Qi at that game.”

Translator's Thoughts

Remember the 'human cups' and porcelain girls living in the Exquisite Pagoda that Tuoba used? This is what they looked like. First mentioned in Chapter 281! **Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin**



Chapter 402 - Great Qi

Li Huowang stared at the masked man in shock.

The black and white hair strands on the side of the masked man's face made it clear that he wasn't young at all. Regardless of his age, however, it was impossible for him to be a grandmaster from Great Qi!

If the masked man were from the Great Qi, then he would be over a thousand years old. Li Huowang stepped back and looked around. For some reason, he felt that he had unknowingly crossed into a weird place.

The others were surprised by Li Huowang's reaction. "Lord Zhuge, he's..."

"Oh, he's fine. Brother Li is a good friend of mine, and he has his unique way of doing things."

Zhuge Yuan turned to the masked man and asked, "Qin Lao, who were they? Why were they chasing you?"

Qin Lao seemed indignant as he cried out, "They are the lapdogs of the eunuchs! We were on our way to a secret meeting at the Three Kings' Mansion, but they ambushed us. This is no coincidence! There's a traitor in the Bureau!"

Zhuge Yuan was surprised. "Oh? There are traitors among the eunuchs of the Bureau? I had no idea that the court was in such turmoil."

"Yes, exactly! Our ancestral teachings say that imperial power should not interfere with the Surveillance Bureau. Considering those eunuchs' influence, no one cares about the rules anymore. Without rules, everything is in chaos!"

Li Huowang went back to the noodle stall, allowing Zhuge Yuan to talk with the members of the Surveillance Bureau. Li

Huowang sighed in relief upon seeing that the customers were still eating noodles and the couple was still cooking noodles.

It seemed that Li Huowang hadn't inadvertently crossed into a weird world.

Li Huowang walked up to the old man cooking noodles and solemnly asked, "Old man, may I ask something? Are we in Great Qi or Great Liang?"

The old man looked confused and opened his mouth, revealing his few remaining teeth to respond, "What? Great Qi? Where is that? We've always been in the Great Liang Kingdom."

The old man's words confirmed Li Huowang's assumption. He had traversed the entire Great Liang—from the border of Qing Qiu to Xing Island—Apart from what he had heard from Zhuge Yuan, he had never come across a place called Great Qi.

Right, we're in Great Liang. What's up with that Great Qi Grandmaster, then? Where is he from? I have to clarify this, thought Li Huowang. He turned around and walked toward the woods when a group of people emerged from the woods

Zhuge Yuan supported the so-called Great Qi Grandmaster, and they were walking at the helm of the group. Among the survivors, they seemed to hold the highest status. The Miao woman from the Sitting Oblivion Dao was among them as well.

"Brother Li, good thing I found you. Qin Lao is seriously injured. We'll go ahead and let him rest in your carriage," Zhuge Yuan said.

"Brother Zhuge, I need to talk to you. Come to me later. There's something I want to ask," Li Huowang said.

Zhuge Yuan nodded and helped Qin Lao into the carriage. Then, he walked over to Li Huowang and asked, "What's the matter?"

Li Huowang stared deeply at Zhuge Yuan's face. He wasn't convinced that Zhuge Yuan was deceiving him. If he were being

deceived, it wouldn't be for such a ridiculous reason.

"Brother Zhuge, tell me the truth. What's going on?"

"Oh? Brother Li, I don't understand what you're talking about. I've always been upright, and I have never lied to anyone."

"All right, come with me, then," Li Huowang said, bringing Zhuge Yuan to the noodle stall and asking the same question he had asked the old man earlier.

Li Huowang then turned to Zhuge Yuan with a questioning look.

"What? Great Liang? Where is that? We've always been in the Great Qi Kingdom," replied the old man.

"What?!" Li Huowang looked at the old man in shock. If the old man weren't just an ordinary person, Li Huowang would think that he was a member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao and was trying to lie to him.

"Old man, that wasn't what you said to me earlier."

"Earlier? Sir, I'm sorry, but this is our first conversation."

"You...!" Li Huowang pointed at the old man and was about to say something when Zhuge Yuan's folding fan blocked Li Huowang's pointed finger.

"All right, all right, let's discuss these trivial matters later, Brother Li. Qin Lao is seriously injured. Our priority is to get him to receive treatment," Zhuge Yuan said. Then, he turned around and walked up to the carriage. "Qin Lao, don't worry! The Black Taisui in the carriage is bound securely! It's not going to harm you!"

Li Huowang looked at Zhuge Yuan's back with a puzzled expression as his suspicion grew even stronger. Everything appeared really strange to him. Moments later, Li Huowang emerged from his contemplation and turned to the old man beside him.

"Are we in Great Liang or Great Qi?"

"Great Liang. Why are you asking me that question again?"

Li Huowang was no longer surprised upon hearing the old man's words. The changes had to be related to Zhuge Yuan's power as a Twisted One, but Li Huowang couldn't figure out how Zhuge Yuan was doing all this.

“ *Woof, woof!* ” Bun popped its head out from under the carriage, barking at Li Huowang. It seemed anxious that a group of strangers had taken the reins of its master's carriage. Li Huowang picked up the pace and caught up with them. The matter wasn't over yet, and he was determined to ask Zhuge Yuan what was going on.

After a few hours, the group finally began tending to their injuries, convinced that their attackers were gone. Li Huowang observed them silently. Aside from the Great Qi Grandmaster and the Miao woman from the Sitting Oblivion Dao, everyone wore peculiar clothes. They seemed to be people from a variety of places, which made sense as they were members of the Surveillance Bureau, famous for its diverse members.

The group was also keeping a close eye on Li Huowang. If it hadn't been for Zhuge Yuan introducing Li Huowang as his friend, they wouldn't have relaxed their guard around someone like Li Huowang.

It couldn't be helped as Li Huowang gave off an air of mystery and aloofness from his get-up, which consisted of a black bamboo hat, and a red Daoist robe stained with blood. To make matters worse, he also had a Black Taisui tied up in the carriage.

The air between the two groups was cold. Zhuge Yuan had been attempting to improve it, but the results weren't exactly that great.

The Great Qi Surveillance Bureau was wary of Li Huowang, and Li Huowang was similarly wary of them, who were allegedly from Great Qi. Just like that, the group continued their journey to the capital amidst the air of distrust so thick it was palpable.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang made sure to pay extra attention to the member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao in this group of people from the Great Qi Surveillance Bureau. Li Huowang wasn't sure why she had infiltrated the group, her motives were unclear as well.

Li Huowang was already aware of her identity as a member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao, but he had no intention of exposing her right now, thinking that he might be able to use her to lure out Bei Feng.

Translator's Thoughts

This is Ji Xiang, the man hounding after the Muddled Ones. First appearing in Chapter 334.

Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin



Chapter 403 - Twisted One

“Come, take these. Junior Kun refined them,” said Zhuge Yuan, handing over ten pills to Li Huowang, who was nibbling on dry rations.

Li Huowang accepted them and asked, “What are these?”

“Brother Li, aren’t you skilled in pill refining? How come you don’t recognize these Fasting Pills? They’re great substitutes for meals, and you’ll feel invigorated just eating them. They’re perfect pills for traveling,” Zhuge Yuan explained.

Li Huowang took one and examined it carefully beneath the sunlight. The fingernail-sized pill was dark brown and was emitting a strong herbal scent.

“Brother Zhuge, let’s refrain from making a move against that small fry from the Sitting Oblivion Dao. We should employ a strategic approach and wait for the right moment to strike. That way, we’ll achieve our goals,” Li Huowang said while staring at the pill.

Li Huowang had many burning questions, but his main goal remained the same—to find Bei Feng.

“Rest assured; I understand,” Zhuge Yuan replied.

Li Huowang loosened his grip on the pill, and it “fell” to the ground, rolling away.

Bun rushed over and gave it a quick lick. It instantly lost all interest in the pill and crouched, staring at Li Huowang’s dry rations.

Li Huowang’s expression turned grim as he stashed the rest of the Fasting Pills into his pocket. Then, he turned to Zhuge Yuan and

asked, "Brother Zhuge, do you have a moment? There's a question that has been bothering me for a while now."

Zhugè Yuan wasn't surprised at all. He had long guessed what Lǐ Huowang wanted to ask him. There were outsiders around them earlier, which made it inconvenient for Lǐ Huowang to approach Zhugè Yuan and ask questions.

"I guess you want to know whether we're in Great Liang or Great Qí?" Zhugè Yuan said.

Lǐ Huowang nodded. His earlier visit to the Surveillance Bureau to ask about Zhugè Yuan's information yielded no decent results whatsoever, which caught him by surprise.

Zhugè Yuan snapped open his white folding fan and lamented, "These matters involve the higher-ups, and for the sake of your safety, I dare not tell you too much. However, the Great Qí has always been there; the Great Liang is the fake one."

The Great Liang is fake? What did I experience then? Were my hardships in the Great Liang fake as well? Lǐ Huowang found it amusing.

Were the hardships and trials he had experienced in this vast world all fake? Were they just illusions, similar to the hallucination? He had slaughtered Bái Lǐngmiào's entire family, but was that fake all this while? It'd be great if that were the case.

Lǐ Huowang patiently said, "Brother Zhuge, you must've encountered people from the Great Liang throughout your travels to many different places. You snatched that Muddled One's corpse from the Great Liang's Surveillance Bureau. Why do you insist that the Great Liang is fake?"

"Ah, Brother Lǐ, it's not exactly a straightforward lie. Take the old noodle seller we've encountered earlier. In your eyes, he's a denizen of the Great Liang, but in my eyes, he's a denizen of the Great Qí.

"If neither of us looks at him, where do you think he's from?"

“He's from the Great Liang! He's not from the Great Qi!”

“How can you say that?”

“He is from Great Liang because he was born in the Great Liang, he grew up in the Great Liang, and he'll die old in the Great Liang.”

“But in my eyes, he's from the Great Qi because he was born in the Great Qi, he grew up in the Great Qi, and he'll die old in the Great Qi.”

“Brother Zhuge, are you suggesting that everything is from the Great Qi in your eyes? Why is it that only you can see that kind of scenery while everyone else sees the Great Liang? Have you never thought about that?” Li Huowang asked.

“No, everyone else also sees Great Qi, just like me. I understand what you're seeing, but what you're seeing is wrong, and it must be corrected,” Zhuge Yuan replied.

“Why is it so difficult to make you understand? It's obvious—” Li Huowang stopped mid-sentence when he met Zhuge Yuan's eyes. He suddenly realized that arguing with Zhuge Yuan was a waste of time.

“Fine, the old noodle seller is from the Great Qi. You win.”

“*Sigh*, you still don't trust me. Forget it, I'm not going to argue with you. Arguments are just going to cause conflict. Anyway, just watch, you'll know whether the Great Qi is real or fake once you've seen enough,” Zhuge Yuan said. Then, he turned around to leave.

Zhuce Yuan seemed disappointed that Li Huowang didn't actually believe in the Great Qi's existence.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang frowned, thinking about many different possibilities.

The Strayed Ones, the Twisted Ones, the Muddled Ones. None of them were easy to handle. Regardless of what the Twisted One would obtain from the so-called Three Ancient Ones, Zhuge Yuan was definitely the reason behind the strange changes.

Unfortunately, Li Huowang still couldn't quite figure out how these strange changes had come about.

Could it be that Zhuge Yuan had brought me with him, traversing a thousand years to connect the Great Qi from a thousand years ago with the Great Liang of a thousand years later? That doesn't make sense, though. How could that old couple exist a thousand years ago and a thousand years later?

The old man cooking noodles had changed his statement thrice as if there had always been two different noodle stalls. However, Li Huowang was standing right next to the old man, and he was certain that the old man had never changed.

It's like the whole world is putting up an act, holding two different scripts. The world is acting according to the first script in front of me and the ordinary people, but it's acting according to the second script in front of Zhuge Yuan.

Li Huowang contemplated silently. He couldn't help but recall what Ji Xiang had told him at the Buddha's Skeleton Temple. *Is this what he meant by strange but reasonable things? Does this kind of thing happen often around the Twisted One?*

The Abbess' Siming deals with decay, and Ba-Hui deals with suffering. What do the so-called Three Ancient Ones deal with? How could they create such strange changes around Zhuge Yuan?

Li Huowang knew it was best not to think about such things to avoid trouble, but he couldn't resist. After all, the "strange" situation was unfolding right before him.

Never mind, never mind, never mind... Li Huowang shook his head eventually; his head throbbed from the hodgepodge of assumptions and speculations. In the end, Li Huowang decided to believe whatever Zhuge Yuan would say. It wasn't his concern, anyway.

Li Huowang only had one goal—to find Bei Feng.

Zhugue Yuan had killed Fa Cai, so the members of the Sitting

Oblivion Dao would definitely not let him go. Li Huowang just had to stay by Zhuge Yuan's side, and he would have a good chance of finding Bei Feng.

Footsteps echoed just then. Li Huowang looked up to see a young man in a white robe.

Li Huowang could smell blood from the white-robed young man.

"This one's name is Xia Risheng. Greetings, Lord Li."

"What's wrong?" Li Huowang asked. The white-robed young man was a member of the Great Qi's Surveillance Bureau. However, Li Huowang wasn't sure whether Xia Risheng had come here to gather information or for something else.

"Lord Li, I'm a disciple of the Ao Jing Sect!" Xia Risheng exclaimed, opening his robe to reveal hooks hanging from him.

"Is that so? You should go back if there's nothing else. We have a long journey ahead of us," Li Huowang said, dismissing the young man. He was afraid of speaking too much and inadvertently revealing that he wasn't a true disciple of the Ao Jing Sect.

"Lord Zhuge said that you've executed the Cang-Qiang Ascension three times. May I ask if it's true?" Xia Risheng asked, staring at Li Huowang with admiration in his eyes.

Translator's Thoughts

Here's a bonus fanart of Shaved Chun

Xiaoman! **Credits to** 格子的乱七八糟 **on** douyin



Chapter 404 - Grand Elder

“Lord Zhuge said that you’ve executed the Cang-Qiang Ascension three times. May I ask if it’s true?”

Li Huowang stared coldly at the young man in front of him and asked, “So what? What is it to you?”

“So it’s true?!” Xia Rusheng exclaimed and immediately knelt on one knee. “I pay respects to the Grand Elder!”

Li Huowang stood up and sidestepped. “I’m not a Grand Elder or anything! You’ve got the wrong person!”

“You’re the Grand Elder! You definitely are the Grand Elder! Anyone capable of executing the Cang-Qiang Ascension three times using the Profound Records is undoubtedly a Grand Elder of the Ao Jing Sect!”

“At your level, you can forgo the Profound Records and directly feed the master with your flesh[1]! And that is the ultimate symbol!” Xia Rusheng exclaimed with extreme excitement.

Goosebumps broke out all over Li Huowang. He wasn’t that knowledgeable about the Ao Jing Sect, so he had no idea that they had such a concept.

“You’re mistaken! Zhuge Yuan lied to you. I’ve never executed the Cang-Qiang Ascension!” Li Huowang retorted. Then, he turned around and walked away, ignoring Xia Rusheng’s response.

What’s going on? The Cang-Qiang Ascension ritual involves exchanging extreme agony for power with Ba-Hui, right? According to him, is this ritual a symbol of some status within the Ao Jing Sect? Li Huowang knew about the so-called Grand Elders of the Ao Jing Sect, even though those Grand Elders had all been impersonated by the Sitting Oblivion Dao members.

Even if there were people higher in status than Grand Elders,

those with the Grand Elder title definitely had a high position in the Ao Jing Sect.

Wait, I can now sacrifice myself to Ba-Hui without using the Profound Records? What does that mean? Does that mean I'm getting closer to Ba-Hui? Li Huowang pondered, but he didn't think that it was a good thing at all.

It seemed that the Cang-Qiang Ascension had hidden dangers that weren't mentioned in the Profound Records. Li Huowang pondered for a bit more and decided to give it a try. He glanced at the others in the distance and into the nearby woods.

Li Huowang took off his red Daoist robe once he was deep enough in the woods. Then, he held the bronze coin sword horizontally in front of his chest.

"Li Sui," Li Huowang uttered.

Li Sui's tentacles emerged, wrapping around the hilt of the bronze coin sword before slicing open Li Huowang's skin, which had just healed. As time went on, more and more tentacles reached out and wrapped around the embedded Profound Records.

Moments later, the tentacles gave the Profound Records a forceful tug. Li Huowang ignored the pain and forcefully lifted the corner of his index finger's fingernail. With a *swoosh*, a deep blood mark appeared on a tree trunk ten meters away.

Can I really do without the Profound Records? Li Huowang wasn't so sure. *Is this a good thing? It should be a good thing, right?*

Li Huowang stood in place, staring blankly at the falling tree in the distance. The old problem had yet to be resolved, but new problems had already popped up. Li Huowang felt annoyed.

In the end, Li Huowang was still a bit reluctant to give up his advantage. At least, he could be considered without a weakness. Something similar to what Peng Longteng had done would never happen again.

I'll take it step by step. First of all, I have to get rid of the Strayed

One's maladies. The rest will follow along. Ah... Why is life so exhausting? Li Huowang made up his mind and returned to the group.

After a short rest, Li Huowang and the group continued on their journey.

Qin Lao stood at the helm and led the way. Qin Lao had chosen to go off the beaten path for the sake of avoiding any ambushes. However, Li Huowang didn't really care. His task was to wait around Zhuge Yuan until the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao appeared to attack Zhuge Yuan. With that in mind, Li Huowang wasn't exactly afraid of getting involved in a fight.

Meanwhile, Xia Risheng clearly didn't believe Li Huowang's words of denial earlier, as his attitude toward Li Huowang changed radically.

Xia Risheng walked into a dilapidated roadside inn and wiped the stool and table clean with his sleeves. Then, he turned to Li Huowang and gestured for him to come in, saying, "Grand Elder, please sit here!"

Li Huowang sat down, and Xia Risheng immediately poured tea for him. Xia Risheng even stopped the waiter to order dishes for Li Huowang.

Xia Risheng's strange behavior made Li Huowang feel extremely uncomfortable. He neither needed a servant nor needed someone to wait on him.

"What do you want?" Li Huowang asked, sounding impatient.

"Nothing! It's my honor to serve you, Grand Elder!" Xia Risheng replied.

Xia Risheng appeared humble on the outside, but he had some ulterior motives. *It'd be great if you could tell me how you successfully performed the Cang-Qiang Ascension!*

"Okay, I'm the Grand Elder, right? Good. I order you to go far away! Don't appear in front of me until we've reached the capital!"

Li Huowang said.

“Um, yes, sir!” Xia Risheng replied and left.

Li Huowang sighed in relief. Then, he glanced at the Miao woman sitting with her companions. *Strange, it's been so long, but there's been no movement from the Sitting Oblivion Dao. This is different from what I thought.*

The members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao were supposed to attack Zhuge Yuan like moths to a lamp once they caught wind of Zhuge Yuan's activities.

However, there had been no attacks at all since the incident on Xing Island. The Sitting Oblivion Dao was silent. The only encounter they had related to the Sitting Oblivion Dao was the encounter with a low-ranking soldier whose identity as a member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao had been completely exposed.

Perhaps they're thinking that any minor disturbances won't harm Zhuge Yuan at all, so they're planning on doing something major? Li Huowang thought. He couldn't help but think about the worst-case scenario.

Of course, Li Huowang wasn't afraid. He was alone, so he genuinely had nothing to fear. His only concern was if Bei Feng would get involved. *Fa Cai has died, so Hong Zhong and Bai Ban will definitely come. To kill Zhuge Yuan in one fell swoop, the Four Joys should come too, right?*

While Li Huowang was busy contemplating many scenarios, Zhuge Yuan appeared and sat down in front of him.

“Brother Zhuge, where did you go?” Li Huowang asked.

“Oh, I bought a carriage. I want the interior to become more comfortable for Qin Lao.”

“You handle that kind of matter, too? I'm curious, Brother Zhuge. How did you get to know Qin Lao?” Li Huowang asked, picking up the teapot and pouring a cup of tea for Zhuge Yuan.

“I was in You Capital one day, and I saw Qin Lao playing chess under a tree with someone. Qin Lao’s playstyle was outstanding, and he won every game in an upright manner. I couldn’t help but approach him and make friends.”

“You got to know him just like that?”

“How about you, Brother Li? I don’t really consider the identities or status of my friends. I only value fate and mutual affection.”

“Brother Zhuge, your character is admirable.”

“Admirable? Shouldn’t that be the norm? Nowadays, I think people tend to overthink and complicate things, and that is exactly why they can’t make true and trustworthy friends. Nowadays—”

The waiter approached with a tray of dishes, interrupting their conversation and allowing Li Huowang to break free from Zhuge Yuan’s endless chatter, which had gotten quite a bit annoying these days.

“The dishes are here~ Stir-fried lamb, stir-fried water spinach, and an eight treasures duck. Please enjoy your meal,” the waiter said.

1. a figurative expression that suggests a deep level of commitment or sacrifice, often used in a spiritual or ritualistic context. It seems to imply a significant and profound connection between the individual and a higher power or entity. 🤝

Translator's Thoughts

Oops. I forgot about the Muddled Ones.
Luckily I carved out a note on my arm so I didn't forget in the end. **Credits to** 格子的乱七八糟 **on**
douyin



Chapter 405 - Discrepancy

Zhugue Yuan tossed a few silver pieces on the table.

The waiter picked them up and said, "Thank you for the three silver pieces, scholar."

Bun ate heartily beneath the table. As Li Huowang and Zhugue Yuan ate, Zhugue Yuan expressed his concerns in a low voice in between chewing, "Brother Li, it is imperative that you remain calm while you're looking for them. You don't want them to know your intentions.

"Relax. I'm here, so they'll definitely come."

"Brother Zhugue, I just feel that if we're in a den of burglars, no one is going to be wary of burglars barging into our homes. What I'm trying to say is that what if we—" Li Huowang stopped mid-sentence just as he started chewing on a piece of stir-fried lamb. He smacked his chopsticks on the table and roared, "Damn it, we're eating human flesh!"

Li Huowang rushed over and placed his sword against the neck of the cashier.

Meanwhile, Bun trembled as it stood up. Li Huowang smacked the pommel of his sword on the cashier's head before slicing open his stomach and pouring out the contents of his stomach.

Li Huowang washed his stomach with wine to make sure that the drug wouldn't take effect.

The others moved about busily while Li Huowang was busy washing his stomach clean.

Some swallowed pills, and some chanted scriptures. Xia Risheng reached into his clothes and pulled hard on the hooks hanging from certain acupoints.

Li Huowang's actions had not only alerted the others in his

group, but it had also alerted the staffers. The waiter's fawning expression had vanished, and he rushed over to Li Huowang and the others with a large knife in hand.

The red-robed Daoist brandished his sword with a fierce look and kicked off of the table, jumping toward the waiter.

And that was the last scene the waiter saw before his consciousness went dark...

Everything went swimmingly afterward, and there was no suspense whatsoever. It was just a one-sided slaughter, and the entire inn was soon drenched in blood amidst the chaos.

Li Huowang was like a god of slaughter as he stood in the sea of corpses. Eight tentacles were sticking out of him, and every tentacle squirmed as they wielded a variety of weapons.

The Great Qi's Surveillance Bureau was shocked by the sight. They had seen many bizarre scenes, but they had never seen something like this before. Their reservations toward Li Huowang vanished just then. They finally considered Li Huowang worthy of being Lord Zhuge's friend.

Li Huowang panted heavily as he approached Zhuge Yuan.

Li Huowang sounded astonished as he asked, "Did you not see that the dishes were drugged?"

Zhuge Yuan had been vomiting since Li Huowang revealed that they were eating human flesh. He wiped away the saliva on his lips, and he looked disgusted as he replied, "Of course, I saw that it's drugged. However, I thought they only used drugs to make us fall asleep. It'd be a waste to throw away so much food, and I was going to take care of the drugs once we're done eating, but..."

"Who would've known that the lamb we were exacting was actually human flesh? This is absolutely disgusting!"

Li Huowang sighed deeply as he stared at the gaping hole in his stomach. He was in great spirits today, but to think he'd be involved in such a disgusting incident. Although he wasn't exactly afraid of

something like this, it still left a bad taste in his mouth.

“Hasn't the Liang Kingdom always been stable? How could shop owners drug their own customers?” Li Huowang asked.

Hong Zhong had been absent for quite a while now, but he finally reappeared, emerging from behind a nearby table, saying, “*Hehehe*, Li Huowang, that's just your wishful thinking. Didn't you hear what the Twisted One say? We're in Great Qi, not Great Liang!”

Li Huowang paused slightly. *Has this really become the Great Qi? What exactly is the Twisted One's special ability?*

Li Huowang thought about many things in the blink of an eye. He wanted to ask Hong Zhong some questions, but he refrained from doing so after seeing Hong Zhong's eager expression. In the end, he took out the Fiery Scripture to heal his injuries.

However, Hong Zhong didn't give up so easily. “*Ah*, Lord Li is so knowledgeable. He's actually familiar with the taste of human flesh! How remarkable!”

Hong Zhong was about to say a few more words when Li Sui interjected, “Dad, can you give me a few swords?”

“A few swords? Why would you want that?” Li Huowang asked, stopping his chanting.

“I want to help you, Dad. Next time we encounter bad people, I want to be able to help you like what I did just now!” Li Sui replied.

“My body doesn't have any room for swords, so stop it with the nonsense, all right?”

Li Sui didn't want to give in and protested, “No, no, no! I want swords! I want swords!”

Black tentacles emerged from Li Huowang's legs and rolled on the ground. The sight resembled children running down a street in protest against their parents who didn't want to buy candied hawthorns for them.

Damn it, where did Li Sui learn to be rebellious? Li Huowang

lampooned inwardly. He soothed Li Sui for a while, and Li Huowang finally managed to silence Li Sui by offering him his own bag of torture tools.

“See, there’s everything in here—knives, saws, awls, scissors, clamps, shovels. These are yours now. Whenever we encounter bad people, you can just use these to deal with them.”

Li Sui’s tentacles emerged from Li Huowang’s navel, and he started playing with the tools. Li Sui’s laughter echoed in Li Huowang’s ears. Li Huowang shook his head slightly and joined the Great Qi’s Surveillance Bureau members outside the shop.

Li Huowang had killed the staffers, so the mounts in the backyard now belonged to them.

Li Huowang’s horses finally had new companions.

Zhuge Yuan walked up to Li Huowang and said, “Rest assured, our people in You Capital already know that Qin Lao has encountered enemies. They’ll send someone to pick us up soon, and we’ll be at You Capital in no time.”

Li Huowang wasn’t very optimistic as he glanced at Qin Lao, who needed assistance just to get on and get off the carriage.

Li Huowang soon got into his own carriage and took out a map to pinpoint their exact location.

"At this rate, it's going to take us a while," Li Huowang muttered, tracing his blood-stained finger along the coastline and toward the center of the Jiang Nan region, “*Hmm?* You Capital?”

Li Huowang looked at the familiar yet unfamiliar characters and thought that he was mistaken. Li Huowang frowned and stared at it for a while, but nothing really changed. Shangjing had vanished and was replaced by You Capital.

Li Huowang cast an astonished gaze at Zhuge Yuan. “This is your map?”

Zhuge Yuan seemed annoyed as he replied, “Brother Li, you must be joking. I’m well versed in geography, and I’ve never needed

maps to travel.”

“If that's the case, then why...” Li Huowang trailed off, hesitating.

Hong Zhong popped up once again and said, “Isn’t that normal? You’re in Great Qi, so it's not strange that you're using a map of the Great Qi.”

Li Huowang's brows knitted as he looked down at the map in his hands. He looked around the map, and his gaze soon landed on a red stain in the upper left corner of the map.

The red stain was from a drop of oil he had unintentionally dropped on the map when he was eating oily noodles while trying to find Xing Island on the map. The red stain made it clear that this was the same map he had used at the time.

However, Li Huowang had purchased the map back in Shangjing, so how come Shangjing wasn't on the map and had been replaced by the You Capital of the Great Qi?

Chapter 406 - You Capital

Li Huowang's mind was in complete chaos as he looked down at his own map.

He had no idea what happened to his map.

It was one thing if the Twisted One's ability affected only humans. He could at least explain it as some sort of hypnosis that affected people in a certain radius around the Twisted One, but why did his own map become a map of the Qi Kingdom?

What's up with the Twisted One's ability? Why is it so bizarre? Li Huowang was confused. *Is the Great Qi from another parallel universe? Or maybe the Great Qi did not exist and was born from the Twisted Ones' ability?*

"Junior Li, it's getting dark soon. We have to leave soon, or we will have to camp outside," Zhuge Yuan said, ushering Li Huowang into the carriage.

Li Huowang looked up and stared at Zhuge Yuan. "Senior Zhuge, can you tell me the truth? What is the Twisted One's ability? I really don't feel like guessing it after all this while."

"I can't say it," Zhuge Yuan said, using his fan to point at the sky.

"I'm not asking about the source. I'm asking about the bizarre things happening around you. I want to know because I don't think I can get used to it," Li Huowang asked.

"Around me?" Zhuge Yuan replied, "I've met people who would tell me that they're from the Great Liang and that the Great Qi had fallen to ruins years ago, just like you. However, I know that the Great Liang is fake while the Great Qi is real."

"But the Qi Kingdom..." Li Huowang trailed off. He decided not to argue about it, as he could foresee the outcome.

“Fine, I’m not going to ask any more questions,” Li Huowang said, putting away his own map. “Let’s go to the capital of the Qi Kingdom, the You Capital!”

Their journey to the You Capital continued, and they failed to encounter any members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. If it weren’t for the incident in Xing Island, Li Huowang would think that the Sitting Oblivion Dao had given up on Zhuge Yuan.

Their pace became a bit quicker, all thanks to the carriages that they had plundered from the shop that tried to poison them. Although they were off the beaten path, they still arrived at their destination fairly early.

The red sun rose from behind the city wall.

Standing on the roof of the carriage, Li Huowang sighed and said, “We’re finally at Shangjing—no, we’re finally at the You Capital.”

Li Huowang looked around and saw people approaching them. He felt out of place as he stared at everyone crying, happy to see their loved ones once again.

“Daoist, today is the first day of the month. Don’t forget to eat a chunk of the Black Taisui, or you’ll go crazy again,” said the old monk’s illusion.

“I know.” Li Huowang took out his dagger and carved a chunk of the Black Taisui. He chucked it into his mouth and started chewing.

“What are you eating, Grand Elder? Is it going to help with your cultivation?” Xia Risheng asked. He had been stealing glances at Li Huowang, and he saw Li Huowang throwing something into his mouth.

Li Huowang ignored Xia Risheng and jumped down. He took hold of the reins and guided the horse toward the main city gate.

Li Huowang looked around the city to see if there were any differences, but the You Capital looked the same as Shangjing.

There were still many people walking on the wide streets, and the shops he had seen in Shangjing were still around.

However, Li Huowang could see a few minute differences between Shangjing and the You Capital.

“Sir~ Come and play~” A soft voice entered Li Huowang’s ears. He turned around and saw a feminine-looking man. The feminine-looking man was wearing a see-through shawl that barely covered anything as he stood in a bamboo cage decorated with red flowers. The feminine-looking was in a provocative pose, too.

“Uhhh...” Li Huowang frowned while staring at the feminine-looking man covered in heavy makeup inside the bamboo cage. Wasn't this shop selling women? When did they start selling men?

“ *Hmph!* ” Qin Lao snorted with clenched fists.

Just then, two pale-looking plump men alighted from a carriage while holding hands.

They were far away, but Li Huowang still caught a whiff of their scent. It was the same scent as that Ji Xiang—a scent born from a strong perfume mixed with urine.

The two eunuchs ignored the gazes of everyone else as they held hands and entered the shop that was selling men. At the same time, an old scholar walked out of the shop accompanied by two beautiful men. They flanked the old scholar and stuck closely to him as they walked toward an ox cart.

One of the two beautiful men knelt on all fours, becoming a ladder for the old scholar to climb into the ox cart. Once the old scholar was in the ox cart, the two beautiful men entered it as well rather than returning to the shop.

Soon, the three disappeared into the distance.

“Ridiculous! This is all the fault of those officials! To think that such immoral acts are done in broad daylight in this city! They even have the guts to say that what they're doing is normal and respectable! Fuck them! They've colluded with those corrupt

officials! The books they've read have been wasted on them!" Qin Lao roared.

Qin Lao was wheezing from anger. He found it hard to catch his breathing after his outburst, as he had just recovered from his injuries, after all. Everyone did their best to take him away to make sure that his stitch-up injuries wouldn't open.

Li Huowang stood quietly, seemingly waiting for something to happen.

When Zhuge Yuan was a certain distance away, the beautiful feminine-looking man in the cage became a woman. His appearance didn't change, but his face became much softer and less angular.

The man had become a woman right before Li Huowang's eyes.

Li Huowang frowned and stopped an old man walking around to sell his firewood.

"Are we in the Great Qi or in the Great Liang?"

The old man thought that Li Huowang had a few screws loose. "We're in Shangjing, the capital of the Liang Kingdom. What are you talking about?"

"*Hehe.*" Li Huowang chuckled. His assumption was right. There was a certain range to the changes, and if anyone got close enough to Zhuge Yuan, they'd find themselves in another kingdom—the Great Qi Kingdom.

However, Li Huowang didn't have the time or the knowledge to figure out the details.

Li Huowang had no idea whether the Great Qi was real or not. He also had no idea why this was happening. In the end, he chalked it up to the Three Ancient Ones and blamed them for the changes.

There was no need to spend that much resources to figure out Zhuge Yuan's ability as a Twisted One. Li Huowang had no plans of doing so, as Zhuge Yuan's wasn't exactly harmful to him.

"Let's go!" Li Huowang jumped onto the carriage and grabbed the horse's reins, urging it gently to follow Zhuge Yuan and the

others.

Chapter 407 - He'S Here

Li Huowang urged his horses to run faster. The bystanders had no idea that they were slowly becoming denizens of the Great Qi Kingdom.

When Li Huowang finally caught up, he looked around and saw the denizens of the Great Qi whispering to each other about their plans for the day. Li Huowang found the scene utterly bizarre. It felt like everyone had agreed beforehand to play along with Zhuge Yuan.

“Junior Li, where did you go?” Zhuge Yuan asked, sounding curious. “There are many people here, so you have to be careful. They could be from the Sitting Oblivion Dao.”

“Relax, I know what to do. This isn't my first rodeo. Anyway, where are we going, Senior Zhuge?”

Zhuge Yuan continued to fan himself even though it was cold. “We need to go to Sir Liang's house. Old Qin and the others will meet with us tonight to plan our next step.”

Li Huowang nodded, and his eyes were filled with pity as he stared at Zhuge Yuan. The latter was very strong, but he couldn't shake off his own curse. Zhuge Yuan still had no idea what was happening to him.

Li Huowang knew that no one could help Zhuge Yuan. Changes would only occur once Zhuge Yuan realized that there was something wrong with him. The words of any third party would be meaningless until then.

The carriages traveled deep into the city center, and they stopped at one of the mansions outside the palace. There were two stone lions carved from black stone outside the mansion gates, and a plaque was above the gates—House of Liang.

A middle-aged man clad in his official uniform walked out. The middle-aged man's distinctive feature was his goatee, and he looked to be around forty to fifty years old.

The middle-aged man's fast response to their arrival made it obvious that he had been waiting for them. The middle-aged man immediately bowed toward Zhuge Yuan and cried out, "Sir Zhuge! I really didn't expect to see you here!"

"I'm just a commoner so no need to bow to me, Sir Liang. Anyway, this isn't the place to discuss things. Let's go inside."

Sir Liang greeted his master, Old Qin, before leading them into his mansion.

Li Huowang was visibly out of place as if he was just a passerby.

They crossed the courtyard and reached the guest hall of Sir Liang's mansion.

Everyone immediately started talking about many things just as they sat down. They didn't even take a sip of the tea before them. Their main topic was to address the power gap between them and the imperial family.

Of course, saving the Great Qi from ruin was a part of their discussion.

However, Li Huowang didn't get involved. He simply stared at Sir Liang's side while thinking about other issues. *I wonder what kind of identity Sir Liang has in the Liang Kingdom? If I asked him to leave Zhuge Yuan's side, would he treat me as an assassin? Wait, perhaps he's someone from the Sitting Oblivion Dao?*

Engrossed in his thoughts, Li Huowang forgot the passage of time. The sun gradually set as more and more officials arrived at the mansion.

They all joined the discussion within the guest hall, and there were so many of them that there wasn't even a place to stand.

Li Huowang was too tired from the journey, so he walked

outside to get some fresh air.

“Father, what are they talking about? Why can’t I understand them?” Li Sui’s voice echoed from Li Huowang’s ears.

“It’s fine if you don’t understand them. It doesn’t concern us,” Li Huowang said, realizing that Li Sui was becoming more energetic and inquisitive. He had once thrown a tantrum so that Li Huowang would give it a sword. Today, Li Sui had just asked for an explanation for something he couldn’t understand.

“Father, you’re hungry,” Li Sui said, using his tentacles to wrap around Li Huowang’s empty stomach. He had once used Li Huowang’s stomach as a hiding place, but now, he was too big to fit.

Li Sui was slowly but surely filling up Li Huowang’s cavities.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang learned one new thing about Li Sui: he had learned to empathize with people. Li Huowang felt warm but it was a bad thing, as it meant that Li Sui was maturing.

Li Huowang frowned, seemingly agitated. If he couldn’t obtain the method from Bei Feng’s mouth before Li Sui matured completely, he would have no choice but to endure the hallucination.

Li Huowang never once thought that one day, he would wish to see members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. Footsteps echoed, prompting Li Huowang to turn around to see an old man with a lantern.

The old man was Sir Liang’s butler.

“Sir Li, dinner is ready, so please follow me,” the old man said.

Li Huowang listened carefully and realized that the guest hall was quiet. It seemed that they had left, while Li Huowang was engrossed in his thoughts outside.

They’re going to revolt soon, but they still have time to eat? Li Huowang stood up and followed the butler. He soon found himself in front of a table filled with delicious food. Li Huowang was so

grumpy that he ignored Old Qin's words and ate quietly.

If Old Qin had so much authority in the palace, why was he in the Surveillance Bureau? Li Huowang felt that there was no point in risking his life for someone like Old Qin.

Everyone found Li Huowang's behavior to be quite rude, and they cast piercing glares in his way. However, that was the only thing that they could do. Eventually, they started eating, but Li Huowang was already done with his meal.

Li Huowang stood up and walked up to Zhuge Yuan. "How's your discussion going? When are we moving, and who should we kill?"

Perhaps the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao are waiting for a chance to strike. If I do something huge, I might be able to lure them out

Zhuge Yuan used his sleeves to cover his mouth. Then, he downed the wine in his hands and placed his sleeves down slowly before replying, "Relax, Junior Li. We have such a grand plan, and we can't afford to move hastily.

"Many officials were imprisoned because they refused to submit to the empress. There were also many who ended up getting relocated to remote places. To make matters worse, those corrupted officials had plunged the You Capital into depravity.

"The denizens are dissatisfied, but we need more time to convince some of those on the fence to follow us. They're all denizens of the Great Qi, after all, so it's best to minimize casualties."

"Why are you pulling people like them to your group?" Li Huowang asked, frowning. He lost all interest in the matters of the Qi Kingdom the moment he learned of the Qi Kingdom's fate.

"Those on the fence belong to the military. With that in mind, do you really think they'd be useless in our cause?"

Zhuge Yuan had a vague inkling of Li Huowang's feelings, so he said, "Relax, I haven't forgotten your circumstance. Once this is

done, I'll ask everyone in the Qi Kingdom to help me find the cultivation method to cultivate the 'Truth' for you."

Zhuge Yuan and Li Huowang's conversation was interrupted just then by a shrill voice that echoed from the mansion gates. "The Emperor is here~"

"The Emperor?!" Everyone, including Li Huowang, was shocked. Li Huowang suddenly recalled what Zhuge Yuan had told him—the current Emperor of the Qi Kingdom was nothing but a reanimated corpse.

Chapter 408 - Emperor

Gong!

Gongs echoed outside, and a piece of solemn, grand music approached.

The Emperor of the Qi Kingdom had truly arrived.

Before Li Huowang could even do anything, the officials busy eating their meals with vinegar stood up with pale faces and ran to the door.

When Li Huowang reached the courtyard, he saw everyone, including Old Qin and Sir Liang, kneeling on the ground. The music got closer and closer, and the heavy stench of perfume pervaded the courtyard. The massive sedan with a rounded dome soon appeared before everyone's eyes.

The red-colored dragon engravings on the pillar of the sedan were covered in ribbons while curtains with motifs of dragons soaring across the sky covered the entire sedan. Most importantly, no one could peek into it.

Li Huowang thought that was the entirety of the sedan, but it got bigger and taller as if there were no end to it. [\[1\]](#)

Li Huowang saw more decorations: lanterns, dragon flags, round jade decorations, bells, and even saddles. Every decoration was made with care, but they were strewn haphazardly.

The massive and heavy sedan towered over everyone like a small mountain.

Even Li Huowang found the massive wooden structure to be quite oppressive. The sedan seemed like a massive infant corpse, sweeping across everyone in the courtyard from above.

The stench of the perfume soon became so thick that some people in the courtyard felt suffocated.

Li Huowang turned to Zhuge Yuan and was about to ask questions when red-robed guards descended upon the mansion and surrounded it.

Bald eunuchs appeared after the red-robed guards, wielding horse-tail whisks. They lined up in front of the guards, forming a barrier between them and the people in the courtyard. They stood silently in the darkness, their pale faces making them appear more like paper dolls than real people.

The music had stopped at some point, and a deafening silence descended upon the courtyard. Everyone didn't dare to even breathe.

Li Huowang stood in a corner, staring at the unfolding scene as if he were a passerby. His gaze soon landed on the massive wooden sedan, and he looked as if he were contemplating something.

"They said you guys are playing. Why did you not bring me along to play?" A childish voice echoed behind the curtains.

Blood drained out of everyone's faces, and those with a faint heart collapsed to the ground out of fear.

"What are you guys playing? Bring it out for me, so I can play as well." The same childish voice echoed, and a child emerged from the curtains. The child was wearing the Emperor's Crown and was clad in a dragon robe in a black and gold motif.

Just then, the massive wooden structure became like the body of a child, creating an utterly bizarre sight.

Li Huowang stared deeply at the child. His keen intuition roared at him, saying that he wasn't staring at a child. There was no way a six-year-old could have such a piercing gaze. Moreover, the child seemed to be scrutinizing everyone's flesh and bones rather than their appearance and demeanor.

Li Huowang's heart started to beat wildly against his chest as he started doubting himself. *Zhuge Yuan has told me about this! Does this mean he has the power to transform his stories into reality? This*

sight is just too realistic for it to be fake!

Just then, the eunuchs finally noticed the two people standing in the corner rather than kneeling on the ground, and they roared, “How dare you two stand there when His Majesty is here! Why are you not kneeling?!”

Li Huowang decisively whipped out two talisman papers. Then, he bit his fingers open, using the blood to draw on the talisman.

He slapped both talismans on his knees before taking out his purple-tassel sword and running toward the massive sedan. Li Huowang moved so fast that he became a blurry shadow.

“You guys have been fooled! That emperor is fake! He’s a member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao!” Li Huowang roared, and his voice sounded as loud and as deafening as a detonated bomb.

The red-robed guards immediately fell in position and stood to block Li Huowang's path toward the massive sedan.

Meanwhile, Zhuge Yuan's expression changed, becoming solemn after a long time of nonchalance. He flipped his hand, and an old almanac the size of two palms appeared on the ground.

Zhuge Yuan then took out a brush and pointed it at the night sky.

The darkness of the starry night sky seemed to congeal into ink, covering the tip of Zhuge Yuan's brush.

The brush shining with starlight touched the almanac, and Zhuge Yuan wasted no time, writing swiftly—Year of the Wood Pig, Tenth Month, on the Day of Gold. Prohibited: Lies. Prohibited: Changing Faces!

Zhuge Yuan lifted his brush once more, and the words he had written followed the tip of his brush. Zhuge Yuan then thrust his brush toward the starry sky and the darkness that had congealed as his ink flew out of the tip of his brush, becoming one with the starry sky.

The yellow words then scattered throughout the starry sky.

The emperor and the eunuch's faces distorted instantly, astonishing the red-robed guards.

“Haha! I’ve been waiting for you to appear and you’ve finally appeared!” Li Huowang took out the pliers without hesitation and pulled out his teeth before scattering them into the air. Several playing cards then manifested on the ground, puncturing Li Huowang’s stomach.

However, no blood gushed out of Li Huowang. Instead, he melted slowly and eventually disappeared into the ground. The red-robed guards looked around, but they couldn’t find him anywhere.

Moments later, the red-robed guards out of their confusion, but the red-robed Daoist was already on the mansion's roof. Before they could do anything, Li Huowang took to the air, jumping onto the emperor's sedan.

Li Huowang’s eyes were bloodshot as he glared at the "emperor."

His hatred and killing intent seemed to have consumed him as he used a flint to set himself on fire. A conflagration erupted, engulfing Li Huowang in the proverbial blink of an eye.

“WHAT MOTHER FUCKING MAHJONG TILE ARE YOU?!” Li Huowang roared.

Li Huowang was like a blazing kite lighting up the night sky, and the heat that he was radiating was so strong that the air seemed to distort around him.

The member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao masquerading as the emperor quickly retreated into the sedan.

However, it was too late. A blazing fire engulfed the entire wooden sedan; thick, black smoke soon rose, and a cacophonous din erupted as everyone came to their senses upon the terrifying sight.

“Come out! Where are you?!” Li Huowang roared, searching for the "emperor" amidst the roaring flames.

Just then, a shadow rushed past him, escaping the burning sedan.

“Think you can run away?” Li Huowang took out the rib bones that the Black Taisui had given to him and thrust them into his own abdomen. Every living creature in a certain radius around him felt the same excruciating pain.

The shadow let loose a cry of agony before falling into the flames.

The burning and bleeding Li Huowang endured the pain and approached the shadow. Grabbing the "emperor" by the shoulders, Li Huowang flipped the "emperor" around and saw that he had been tricked!

The "emperor" wasn't a human being but a mere puppet!

1. So basically a limo lmao 🤔

Chapter 409 - Goal

Li Huowang felt something was wrong the moment he saw the puppet.

And that was when he heard something behind him.

Li Huowang turned around and saw a saber flying toward it. However, Li Sui managed to block it with his tentacles and his array of torture tools.

The wooden floor cracked under the pressure, and Li Huowang's leg sank into the floor. The saber contained a terrifying force that sent him plummeting downward. Li Huowang recovered quickly and stood up to see two Sitting Oblivion Dao members waiting for him.

Ba Tiao and Jiu Tiao[1].

The two of them were burning just like Li Huowang. Their skin and flesh were bubbling, slowly becoming charcoal. However, the both of them didn't even wince from the pain.

The almanac was still active, as the two didn't speak to Li Huowang.

The two Sitting Oblivion Dao members were tall, and they each wielded a huge saber. They emitted a domineering aura akin to deities as they stood quietly, staring at Li Huowang.

"Where did you steal those weapons? Which military family did you deceive?!" Li Huowang roared.

The two Sitting Oblivion Dao members took to the air, jumping toward Li Huowang.

Clang!

A resonant *clang* echoed, and Li Huowang was blasted away by the impact.

However, Li Huowang was delighted when he saw the damage

on the sabers of the Sitting Oblivion Dao members. It made one thing clear for Li Huowang—their weapons weren't as sharp as Li Huowang's!

“Li Sui, take this!” Li Huowang handed Li Sui the bronze coin sword and ran toward one of the Sitting Oblivion Dao members with his purple-tassel sword. The two exchanged blows, but Li Huowang suddenly cut off three of his fingers.

The Sitting Oblivion Dao member was distracted by the fingers.

Li Huowang took advantage of that opening to send a flurry of attacks toward the Sitting Oblivion Dao member.

The other Sitting Oblivion Dao member ran toward their comrade to help, but Li Sui's bronze coin sword and his array of torture tools stood in their way, stopping him from approaching Li Huowang.

The other Sitting Oblivion Dao member sliced off some of Li Sui's tentacles to no avail, as tentacles bursting out of Li Huowang would simply replace the tentacles that had fallen to the floor.

Sparks flew everywhere as Li Huowang attacked with the ferocity of a deluge. His enemy's saber shattered just then, and Li Huowang twisted his wrist, slitting the throat of the Sitting Oblivion Dao member.

Then, he turned to the other Sitting Oblivion Dao member and shouted, “Put down your saber, and I'll spare you!”

The other Sitting Oblivion Dao member ceased all movement and stood still. In the next moment, he fell backward and collapsed to the ground.

Li Huowang rushed to the check on Sitting Oblivion Dao member's condition, but the Sitting Oblivion Dao member was dead. He had died of extensive burns. It turned out that they weren't immune to fire. They had simply decided to fight till their last breath.

Li Huowang had wanted to interrogate one of the two, but they

all ended up dead.

Li Huowang was so frustrated that he kicked the corpse out of spite. He initially thought that the Sitting Oblivion Dao member masquerading as the Emperor of the Qi Kingdom would be a high-rank Sitting Oblivion Dao member, but the fact that they died so easily meant that they were nothing but mere pawns.

Clang!

The bronze coin sword fell to the ground, and it had taken on an orange hue due to the surrounding flames. Li Sui retracted his tentacles into Li Huowang and cried out, "Father, it's hot... it hurts."

"I know, I know. I'm sorry. Next time, don't come out if I'm on fire," Li Huowang replied. He put away the bronze coin sword and emerged from the flames. He needed to kill the other Sitting Oblivion Dao members before the flames were gone.

However, the group of eunuchs and even the red-robed guards had vanished. If it hadn't been for the blazing fire behind him, he would have thought that he was hallucinating.

Li Huowang walked up to Zhuge Yuan and saw that the latter was rolling one of the art pieces he had taken with him into a scroll.

"Junior Li, how did you know that he's a member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao? He was too far away, so I almost ended up getting fooled by them," Zhuge Yuan said, sounding impressed.

"I didn't. There were only two options: either he was a member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao or the real zombie emperor of the Qi Kingdom.

"Regardless, we have to deal with the Sitting Oblivion Dao members. It's either we are right that he's a Sitting Oblivion Dao member, or the real emperor has truly come here to kill all of you after learning of your plans. Either way, we'd have to fight."

"Oh! You are so smart. I truly am impressed," Zhuge Yuan said, putting away the scroll and praising Li Huowang.

Li Huowang looked around and saw that everyone else had

vanished. He then cast a confused gaze at Zhuge Yuan, asking, "Senior Zhuge, where are the rest of the Sitting Oblivion Dao members?"

"Them? They're gone."

"Gone? We finally stumbled upon them after such a long time of waiting, so how could you just let them escape? You should've at least forced one of them to stay for me to interrogate!" Li Huowang exclaimed, and his figure shone brightly.

The smell of flesh wafted over to Zhuge Yuan, telling him that Li Huowang was once again.

"Junior Li, calm down. Why don't you stop your technique first? It looks painful," said Zhuge Yuan as the flames illuminated his face.

Li Huowang was angry, but he still listened and jumped into the nearby pond.

When Li Huowang poked his head out of the water, he saw Zhuge Yuan extending an arm toward him. Li Huowang sighed and reached out for Zhuge Yuan's arm. The latter then pulled him out of the pond.

"Just tell me, where did the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao go?" Li Huowang asked. Then, he sighed as he looked around. There wasn't anyone else around him.

"I've used the art scroll made out of a Muddled One to erase their memory of the Liang Kingdom before replacing that memory with their memory of the Qi Kingdom. Then, I sent them back."

"Hm?" Li Huowang was shocked. "Wait, what did you say? Where are they right now?"

"They're heading back to the Qi Kingdom. There's a curfew, but they insisted on going back. I think they'd soon reach the western gates."

Li Huowang looked around and quickly climbed a wall. Then, he ran across the wall and hopped onto roof after roof until he

reached the highest roof in the estate. It was night time, but Li Huowang's eyesight was superb.

He could see the massive gates and the wide streets, but the place was empty with not a single person in sight.

No one was at the western gates. Zhuge Yuan was telling the truth! The members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao had gone to the Qi Kingdom!

“Junior Li, what are you looking at?” Zhuge Yuan said from next to Li Huowang.

Li Huowang took a few steps back and looked at Zhuge Yuan with shock. “Does that mean the Qi Kingdom actually exists somewhere? It doesn't just exist around you. Once someone forgets about the Liang Kingdom and trusts your nonsense, they'll end up finding themselves in the Qi Kingdom?!”

Zhuce Yuan revealed a displeased look while fanning himself.

“Junior Li, what are you talking about? What do you mean by 'nonsense'? I've always told you that the Qi Kingdom exists. Did you not listen to what I've said?”

“But...” Li Huowang trailed off, confused. If the Qi Kingdom existed, then where was it? Was it in a parallel world? Were the Twisted Ones capable of connecting the parallel worlds?

If it were a parallel world, would that mean that the male prostitutes in the Qi Kingdom simply transformed into female prostitutes in the Liang Kingdom and were the same individual all throughout?

The Twisted Ones were utterly bizarre, and Li Huowang couldn't quite wrap his head around their ability.

While Li Huowang was trapped in his own thoughts, Zhuge Yuan explained, “Is it that hard to understand? I said that the Great Qi is real, while the Great Liang is fake. I think this issue is more about you—you can't differentiate the truth from the lies.”

“No, no, no...” Li Huowang trailed off, taking a few steps

backward. Moments later, he calmly explained, “Senior Zhuge, let's not talk about it anymore. Even if the Great Qi exists, you should have left at least one of the Sitting Oblivion Dao members alive. You could have just sent them to the Great Qi once I was done with them.”

“Why would I leave one for you?” Zhuge Yuan asked, smiling cheekily.

“What do you mean, 'why'? I have to Bei Feng's strength and their whereabouts!” Li Huowang exclaimed and sighed in frustration. “Senior Zhuge, I'm sorry for that outburst. I really don't have a single clue right now, and I'm running out of time.”

Zhuce Yuan nodded. He took out a scroll of art and unfurled it. Then, he shook it vigorously until a dying individual rolled out of it.

“Junior Li, this is Bei Feng,” Zhuge Yuan introduced.

1. Eight and Nine Bamboos respectively. 🤔

Chapter 410 - Mahjong

“He's the Bei Feng I've been chasing after?” Li Huowang asked. He felt as if a hammer had struck his brain; he couldn't quite believe that Bei Feng would end up as a dying man right in front of him.

Li Huowang had been thinking of Bei Feng all day and all night since he learned that Bei Feng knew how to deal with the hallucination and control the primordial breath inside of him.

Li Huowang had been thinking about what Bei Feng would look like.

However, he truly never expected that he'd end up meeting Bei Feng here.

“Him? Is he really Bei Feng? Senior Zhuge, are you sure about that?” Li Huowang asked, staring at Zhuge Yuan with surprise.

“Yes, that's right. He is Bei Feng. He was hiding among the eunuchs, but I managed to find him.”

Li Huowang held Zhuge Yuan's hands and shook them rigorously. “Thank you! Thank you!”

Then, he crouched down and propped Bei Feng up. Afterward, he whipped out a dagger and slowly sliced the skin layer on Bei Feng's face.

After several layers, Li Huowang finally saw the bloody mahjong tile—Bei Feng.

Li Huowang was so excited that he almost swooned.

Li Huowang's trembling fingers carefully caressed the bloody mahjong tile.

“Haha, how come you're so happy? Are you my long-lost son or something?” asked Bei Feng in a hoarse voice.

Li Huowang took a deep breath to calm himself down, but his

voice was trembling from excitement as he said, "B-B-Bei Feng! I've been looking for you!"

"Oh? You've been looking for me? I guess you're not going to kill me until I tell you everything I know, then," Bei Feng remarked.

Li Huowang ignored Bei Feng's remark and gripped the dagger in his hand tighter before walking over slowly to Bei Feng. Then, Li Huowang stared into Bei Feng's eyes.

"Senior Bei Feng, can you help me? Please tell me how to shake off the hallucination of a Strayed One. Tell me that, and I'm more than happy to negotiate terms with you. I'll agree even if you want me to release you."

Li Huowang didn't care whether Bei Feng accepted it or not. He just wanted to go to the next step.

However, Bei Feng's reply surprised him.

"Strayed One? Hehe, who told you I'm a Strayed One? I'm indeed Bei Feng, but I'm a fake. Fourth Brother is the true Strayed One, not me."

"Fourth Brother?" Li Huowang's pupils constricted. It was a haunting answer that plunged Li Huowang's elated heart into the abyss.

Bei Feng chuckled upon seeing the despair on Li Huowang's face. "What's wrong? Never played Mahjong before? Don't you know that there are four Bei Feng tiles?"

Four Bei Feng?! Does he mean that there are four Fa Cai? Four Bai Ban?! Four Hong Zhong? Li Huowang stood frozen as if he had been struck by a lightning bolt from out of the blue.

Moments later, Li Huowang snarled and lifted the man into the air by the neck. He thrust his dagger into Bei Feng's abdomen and twisted it wildly, roaring, "Impossible! How dare you try and trick me! Death will elude you once you've sufficiently angered me! You will never die until you tell me the answer!"

Li Huowang was about to talk about his exploits. "I'll have you

know—"

"Junior Li," Zhuge Yuan interjected with an awkward look. "He's telling the truth. He's Bei Feng, but he's not a Strayed One. He tried to lie, but I saw through him."

Zhuge Yuan's words broke Li Huowang, and he went beyond pallid.

Li Huowang looked utterly lost, and he suddenly found himself unable to breathe. The feeling of immediately losing something that one had worked hard to obtain was truly the worst feeling ever.

"You like telling stories, right? Why did you not tell me that there are four Bei Fengs?"

"I thought you knew. I'm sorry I never told you this before, but it's not too late to tell you now," Zhuge Yuan said, opening his fan and regretfully patting his head with it.

"The Sitting Oblivion Dao members are adept at changing their faces. To the outsiders, they'd only appear one at a time, but each mahjong tile is shared with four others.

"That's why outsiders often think that the Sitting Oblivion Dao only has one individual representing a mahjong tile. They would always appear one at a time and always in different locations, and that is how the Sitting Oblivion Dao deceives everyone."

They had caught Bei Feng, but he turned out to be the wrong Bei Feng.

Li Huowang felt like his efforts had gone down the drain, and he was so angry at the harsh reality that he saw red. He twisted his dagger and swung upward, tearing through the Sitting Oblivion Dao's abdomen to slice the latter's heart into two.

Bei Feng's mouth was bleeding, and his features had distorted from the pain, but he seemed like he didn't care as he taunted Li Huowang. "*Hehe*, you're from the Ao Jing Sect? It makes sense, as you're an idiot as well."

"Junior Li, don't kill him. I kept him alive for you because he

might know something.”

Li Huowang was still furious, but he acknowledged that Zhuge Yuan was right. In the end, he whipped out the Fiery Scripture and started treating Bei Feng's wounds.

Bei Feng saw Li Huowang's actions and laughed louder. “Oh, you're not going to kill me? It looks like you still need me, after all, hahaha!”

Li Huowang cauterized Bei Feng's abdomen before finally taking a good look at the latter. Bei Feng was wearing the face of a plain-looking old man.

Li Huowang was angry, but he couldn't do anything. He also couldn't afford to waste any time, so he decided to move on.

“Since you're one of the Bei Fengs, where are the other three? You should know because the four of you share the same face,” Li Huowang asked.

“Hehehe, looks like my hunch is right. Since you're looking for Fourth Brother, you must be a Strayed One too, am I right? You want to know the method to deal with a Strayed One's hallucination?” Bei Feng asked. He pieced together the puzzle pieces of information that Li Huowang had given to him and came up with the full story.

Li Huowang laid out his torture tools upon Bei Feng's refusal to answer him.

“I hate the Ao Jing Sect. You guys are always using the same antiquated methods. Sure, I can tell you, but ...” Bei Feng smiled at Li Huowang. “Are you going to believe me? I'm from the Sitting Oblivion Dao, after all, *hehehe*~ ”

Chapter 411 - Departure

Li Huowang glanced at Bei Feng taunting him before looking at Zhuge Yuan.

“Senior Zhuge, can you use your artifact that prevents him from lying?” Li Huowang asked. He knew that Zhuge Yuan's almanac was capable of countering the Sitting Oblivion Dao. With him around, the Sitting Oblivion Dao's deception wouldn't work.

“The almanac is still in effect. You can continue your questioning. He cannot lie for now.”

Li Huowang knelt down and looked at Bei Feng tauntingly. “What's wrong? Do you not want to say it? Should I ask Zhuge Yuan to add another rule stating that it's forbidden not to talk?”

“I'm not a three-year-old boy. The others are already in the city.”

“Which city? Stop trying to skim on the details!”

“Where else? Shangjing.”

“Where are they right now?” Li Huowang asked.

“They arrived in the eastern area this afternoon, and I don't know where they are right now.”

“Why are the Sitting Oblivion Dao members in Shangjing? Shangjing is where the headquarters of the Surveillance Bureau is located. Are you not afraid of getting captured?”

“Afraid? Hehe, we prioritize deceiving others. We're never afraid of anyone. The reason we never went to Shangjing is that we simply thought that it was a boring place,” Bei Feng replied.

“Stop changing the subject! Talk! Why are you in Shangjing?!” Li Huowang roared with a grim look.

Bei Feng scoffed at Li Huowang's disfigured face and said, “Our boss, Shai Zi[1] told us to come here. He said that the Emperor of

the Liang Kingdom is doing something in the shadows. He told us to come here and see if we can deceive him. As for what he's doing, you probably know more than me. I just arrived here, so I know less than you."

The emperor? Li Huowang recalled Ji Xiang's search for a Muddled One, the heavily damaged warship, and the previous emperor, who was executed not too long ago.

Li Huowang had an inkling that the Liang Kingdom was trying to do something in the shadows. It seemed that the Sitting Oblivion Dao had caught wind of it as well and had come to Shangjing to see what was up.

"Who else is with the three Bei Feng?" Li Huowang asked.

"We're three Ba Tiaos, two Jiu Tiaos, four Bei Fengs, and two Hong Zhongs. Hehe." Bei Feng chuckled at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang slapped Bei Feng in the face. "Don't try to pull this trick again. The others have tried it on me, and it's useless!"

After learning everything he needed to know, Li Huowang finally stood up.

"Are you done? Is he useless to you now?" Zhuge Yuan asked, closing his fan.

Li Huowang nodded.

Zhuge Yuan unfurled a scroll, and a Muddled One's corpse appeared.

The long scroll circled around Bei Feng's head, and Bei Feng's eyes glazed over as he lost his memories of the Liang Kingdom. His body was changing as well; he shrank and became a small old lady.

The small old lady stood up with trembling legs. She seemed to have no idea what was going on. Upon seeing Zhuge Yuan and Li Huowang, she turned and ran toward a house.

"Where am I?! Honey, come out!" the small old lady shouted, knocking on the door.

"Aiyaya, don't worry. We're not going to eat you," Zhuge Yuan

said, guiding her slowly into the house.

Zhuge Yuan emerged moments later and saw Li Huowang with a frown. "How is it? Were his words useful to you?"

Li Huowang nodded. "Yes, but we can't trust his words completely. Based on my experience with them, they can still deceive even while telling the truth. He had been telling the truth, but he definitely left out some details.

"He might have told me half-truths as well."

Li Huowang swept his gaze across the crowd of people, who were convinced that they were citizens of the Qi Kingdom. Then, he turned to Zhuge Yuan and whispered, "My apologies, but I will have to leave for a while. There's something I need to do. I'm not abandoning you; it's just that it's urgent. I'll return once I'm done."

"No worries." Zhuge Yuan was not offended at all. "Now that you know Bei Feng is within the city, what are you going to do?"

"The entire Sitting Oblivion Dao is here, so I can't fight any of them on my own. I have a plan, but I'm not sure whether it will work or not. Still, it's better than nothing."

Zhuge Yuan nodded. "Sure. Go and do your thing. You can come find me if you have any issues."

Li Huowang's heart felt warm at the remark. Zhuge Yuan was indeed one of the few kind people in this crazy world.

"All right." Li Huowang bowed to Zhuge Yuan and ran out of the Liang Residence.

Li Huowang didn't take a detour. He jumped on roofs after roofs, running in the southwest direction. His bold actions attracted some eyes, but no one stopped him the moment he raised his identity token.

Half an hour later, Li Huowang finally arrived at the Surveillance Bureau after jumping onto a myriad roofs. The person standing at the door wasn't the man from the Mo Family. The guard was a skinny woman covered in bandages with a black talisman on

her forehead. Her skin was dark, and her orifices were plugged with yellow soil. It was downright frightening seeing someone like her in an empty room.

“Let me in, I have urgent news!” Li Huowang exclaimed.

The skinny woman didn't move, but the hidden door opened by itself.

Li Huowang ran into the hidden door and traced the path according to his memories.

Soon, he found himself in the hall filled with screens once more. He looked around and saw that there were few people in the hall, as only a handful of the screens were illuminated with candles.

Li Huowang ignored them and ran up to Nangong's desk. “Senior Nangong, I have urgent news! The entire Sitting Oblivion Dao is here in Shangjing!”

1. Meaning Dice, as in playing dice 🎲

Chapter 412 - Surveillance Bureau

“What did you say?” Nangong looked at the disfigured man in front of him. The man had lost all of his skin, but his identity token and the bronze coin veil made the man's identity clear to Nangong.

A few months ago, Li Huowang appeared, and he had never appeared again. Nangong was starting to think that perhaps something untoward had happened to Li Huowang until he returned for the first time in ages and said something outrageous like the how entire Sitting Oblivion Dao was in Shangjing.

“Er Jiu, you can't make any jokes about that. Do you know the gravity of your words? If your information turns out to be inaccurate, you will be incarcerated!” Nangong warned Li Huowang.

“Of course! Senior Nangong, I'm telling the truth. I caught Bei Feng myself and interrogated him,” Li Huowang said. He decided to tell Nangong the truth.

Indeed, he had captured Bei Feng, and the latter had told Li Huowang that all of the Sitting Oblivion Dao members were here except for Wan Tiao. The 108 normal mahjong tiles—the sixteen Dong Feng, Nan Feng, Bei Feng, Xi Feng, the twelve Hong Zhongs, Fa Cai, and Bai Ban were here.

A total of 136 Sitting Oblivion Dao members were in Shangjing!

The ordinary members of the Sitting Dao Oblivion were already a headache for the Surveillance Bureau, not to mention the Three Officials and Four Joys.

Most importantly, the Sitting Oblivion Dao leader Shai Zhi was

in Shangjing as well.

Li Huowang had no idea how to play mahjong, but he could still remember seeing his mother play it during the New Year. Li Huowang recalled needing two dice to play mahjong.

It was difficult for him to face such strong opponents on his own. He needed to use the Surveillance Bureau. Li Huowang would then reap profits while the two were busy fighting each other.

“Senior Nangong, I know how important this news is, so I dare not lie! They must have a scheme going on, as they're all here. You know they're willing to destroy even a kingdom just to deceive!”

Nangong agreed with Li Huowang. The information was indeed extremely important, so Li Huowang was most likely telling the truth. “Wait here, I need to report this to the higher-ups. The risk is just too heavy, so I have to give them a report.”

Nangong walked into the door on the left side of the hall with a frown.

Li Huowang watched as Nangong left and sighed. The matter wasn't over yet. Nangong was just the messenger, and he could never make a decision about such a monumental matter. Li Huowang had to convince the higher-ups to spur the Surveillance Bureau into action.

Li Huowang paced back and forth, thinking about how to convince the higher-ups.

“The Sitting Oblivion Dao is here?” A deep voice echoed from a screen on Li Huowang's left. He turned around and saw a large shadow on the screen. Li Huowang didn't reply because he wasn't sure whether the person was friend or foe.

“Hehe, seems like something is going to happen to Shangjing soon. I may have to hide in Hou Shu. Great, it seems that I still have time.”

The figure behind the screen reminded Li Huowang of Tuoba Danqing and Ji Xiang's actions. Those veterans somehow sensed

that something big was going to happen soon and had left before it could happen.

Tuoba Danqing had said that he was going to go hide in Qing Qiu once they had captured a Muddled One, but he ended up not making it back from the mission.

Meanwhile, Ji Xiang just gave Li Huowang a house in Shangjing and ran away.

“Do you know why the Sitting Oblivion Dao has gathered in Shangjing?” Li Huowang asked the figure behind the screen.

“Hehe. You don’t know? Then it’s better that way. This world is a crazy world indeed,” the figure replied and stopped talking afterward.

Li Huowang felt anxious. Something big was about to happen, and he remained clueless about it. He walked toward the screen and looked behind but saw no one.

There was a wooden sculpture on the table, and it depicted a monk carrying a rucksack.

The monk’s upper body seemed vibrant and full of energy. The monk looked cheerful as well and was all smiles; his large belly was comical, too. However, the monk’s lower body was incomplete and was a tangled mass of black roots that made the carving look bizarre overall.

“Er Jiu! Where are you?” Nangong shouted from afar.

Li Huowang gave one glance at the wooden sculpture before walking out of the screen.

”Senior Nangong, I’m here!”

“Follow me! Lord Jian Zheng wants to see you!” Nangong exclaimed, and he looked quite anxious.

Li Huowang followed closely behind Nangong.

Li Huowang had yet to fully understand the hierarchy within the Surveillance Bureau, but Li Huowang knew that Lord Jian Zheng was definitely someone special if they were dealing with

matters regarding the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

“Here, wear this. You look terrible without it. You shouldn’t meet Lord Jian Zheng with that appearance,” Nangong said, handing over a gray robe for Li Huowang to wear.

Li Huowang accepted it and wore the large, gray robe to cover his wounds.

“Remember, don’t say anything stupid or lie to Lord Jian Zheng. He’s going to know whether you’re lying or not.”

Does that mean he can read minds? Will he know that I’m a Strayed One if I even think about it? Li Huowang was shocked, and he couldn’t help but ask, “May I ask which sect Lord Jian Zheng comes from?”

“Lord Jian Zheng is different from the both of us. He’s a disciple of Confucianism. They distance themselves from the superstitious, and they do not cultivate anything at all.”

“Doesn’t that mean he’s just an ordinary person?” Li Huowang asked, sounding doubtful. How could a higher-up managing the Liang Kingdom be a normal man?

“Do you really think that you can solve everything with your cultivation techniques? You’re too naive. There are some people who are born special. Even without cultivation techniques, they’re still capable of solving problems with their brain. Lord Jian Zheng even managed to deceive a Sitting Oblivion Dao member.”

Li Huowang was astonished. He had encountered members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao quite a few times now, so he knew what would it take to deceive one of them. Li Huowang reckoned that Lord Jian Zheng had to be a monster in the brain department.

Li Huowang felt giddy with anticipation. He couldn’t wait to meet someone like what Nangong had described. Of course, Li Huowang was also a bit nervous as to how he was supposed to negotiate with Lord Jian Zheng.

Li Huowang followed Nangong and walked down the wooden

corridor until they reached a set of stone doors. There were two guards standing beside the gate like guardian deities.

Their killing intent told Li Huowang that they were from a military family.

Li Huowang followed Nangong through a maze-like room until they finally reached the doors of what looked like a study room.

“Lord Jian Zheng, Er Jiu is here,” Nangong said, bowing toward the wooden door.

Chapter 413 - Jian Zheng

"You may return. Let him come inside by himself." An old-sounding voice echoed from behind the doors.

"Yes," Nangong said. Then, he hinted at Li Huowang to be careful before leaving.

Li Huowang took a deep breath and entered the ajar wooden door.

The study room wasn't large, and it looked like a normal study room as well. There were numerous books on the bookshelves on the left. The walls were also covered in various caricatures and art pieces, reminding Li Huowang of Zhuge Yuan's bamboo house.

If he weren't in the deepest and most remote part of the Surveillance Bureau's headquarters, Li Huowang would think that he was in a regular scholar's study room.

"Er Jiu greets Lord Jian Zheng!" Li Huowang bowed toward the man in front of him.

"Are you Er Jiu? Raise your head."

Li Huowang looked up, seeing Li Huowang's disfigured face.

Li Huowang also saw Lord Jian Zheng, and it turned out that Lord Jian Zheng was a skinny middle-aged man with a goatee. His smile lines were so deep that it separated his face into three parts.

Lord Jian Zheng wasn't wearing anything flashy. He was wearing a regular purple robe with a jade hanging from his waist.

Lord Jian Zheng was in front of the study table, busy approving documents with a brush dipped in cinnabar. There was a pot of tea bubbling on a small stove, making the room much warmer than outside.

Li Huowang's heart froze upon recalling Nangong's warning. He lowered his head and said, "Lord Jian Zheng, the entire Sitting

Oblivion Dao is—”

“You entered the city with the Storyteller this morning, am I right?” Jian Zheng interrupted Li Huowang’s sentence and train of thought.

Jian Zheng placed the brush on a stand and used a seal the size of his fist to stamp the corner of a document.

Li Huowang's heart quivered, but he started talking. He told Jian Zheng about the dispute between Zhuge Yuan and the Sitting Oblivion Dao, as well as how he discovered the Sitting Oblivion Dao’s movement through Bei Feng.

Li Huowang told the truth and refrained from telling even a single lie. Of course, he skipped some of the details that the Surveillance Bureau didn’t have to know.

“Oh, I know.” Lord Jian Zheng sounded calm.

Li Huowang was surprised. After all, they were talking about the Sitting Oblivion Dao here, and they were all in the city.

“My Lord! The Sitting Oblivion Dao is here! They—”

“You don’t have to tell me what to do. Why are you in such a rush? Are you trying to use the Surveillance Bureau to take revenge on the Sitting Oblivion Dao?” Jian Zheng asked with cold eyes.

A mysterious pressure enveloped Li Huowang, and he hurriedly said, “Er Jiu dares not to say that.”

Li Huowang bit his cheek and took half a step back.

“Hmph! How uncouth.” Jian Zheng ignored Li Huowang and continued with his task.

Jian Zheng ignored Li Huowang for fifteen minutes before finally taking the pot of boiling tea away from the stove and pouring himself a cup of tea. He took a sip of the tea before looking at Li Huowang.

“Don’t worry about the Sitting Oblivion Dao. Someone else is going to deal with them. However, I need you to do something else. This is more important than the Sitting Oblivion Dao, so you need

to be very careful about this.”

Jian Zheng's reaction was outside Li Huowang's expectations, but it didn't mean that he could afford to be careless. Li Huowang remained calm, knowing that he couldn't reveal anything suspicious.

“Yes, please give me your order.”

“I have no idea how you ended up knowing Zhuge Yuan, but I need you to go back to him. Someone will assist you at the right timing, and your mission is to steal the Six Divinations Almanac.”

Six Divinations Almanac? What's that? Wait, the almanac?! Li Huowang recalled the almanac that Zhuge Yuan had wielded. Jian Zheng wants me to take Zhuge Yuan's almanac!

Li Huowang reeled in shock.

“This is an important mission, and I will personally oversee you. You must perform well. If possible, you should kill Zhuge Yuan. However, his death isn't mandatory,” Jian Zheng added and frowned upon witnessing Li Huowang's silence. “Did you not listen to what I said?”

Li Huowang clasped his shaking hands together. “Yes, I heard and will obey.”

Jian Zheng didn't forget to promise Li Huowang some rewards.

“Succeed, and I'll ignore some of the things you've done in the Surveillance Bureau. In fact, I will allow you to become an official of the Surveillance Bureau. Consider it your honor.

“You may also choose three artifacts from the vault. I know that the Sitting Oblivion Dao destroyed your entire sect, so it's only natural for you to hate them. Complete the mission perfectly, and I will allow you to join in on the mission to kill the Sitting Oblivion Dao members. You will also be in charge of those we end up capturing.”

Li Huowang nodded solemnly.

Jian Zheng seemed satisfied with Li Huowang's response. He

picked up a stack of paper and gave it to Li Huowang. "You may return after you deliver these documents to the archive. The archive is beyond the third door on the left."

Li Huowang walked up and accepted the stack of papers with both hands before leaving the study. Once he was out of the study room, Li Huowang frowned. *What should I do?*

He couldn't stop thinking about the best next course of action. Li Huowang's initial plan was to pit both parties against each other while reaping profits during the chaos, but his plan ended up failing before he could even start working on it.

Jian Zheng's reaction was truly unexpected. After all, the entire Sitting Oblivion Dao was here. Li Huowang couldn't fight the entire Sitting Oblivion Dao on his own; he needed the Surveillance Bureau's help. Most importantly, he needed another plan.

Should I steal Zhuge Yuan's almanac for the Surveillance Bureau? That's absurd!

Zhuge Yuan was a talkative lunatic, but he was one of the very few friends Li Huowang had in this crazy world.

Li Huowang was still thinking about what to do when he finally arrived at the third door on the left. He looked down at the stack of papers in his hand and was about to enter the room when he caught a glimpse of the words on one of the documents.

Feng Erniu? Li Huowang was familiar with that name. It was the name of the Ji Xiang, who gave him a house in Shangjing before leaving. Li Huowang proceeded to read the report. *Former Ji Xiang Feng Erniu and his wife are dead? Their heads have been submitted as proof? Ji Xiang is dead? He worked for the Surveillance Bureau for so long, and he was killed just like that?*

Li Huowang recalled the pallid-looking plump Ji Xiang, and his heart grew cold upon seeing the glaring red circle drawn on the piece of paper.

Li Huowang glanced at the study room and realized that this

wasn't a coincidence. Jian Zheng knew that Li Huowang was familiar with the former Ji Xiang and had put the document at the top of the stack as a warning.

Li Huowang took a deep breath and entered the archive.

Chapter 414 - Son

Li Huowang sat in the corner of the room and stared quietly at the citizens of Qi Kingdom talking about something. He overheard them talking about whether they would recruit a group of eunuchs in the palace or not.

Some of them thought that eunuchs couldn't be trusted, but others thought that eunuchs were still useful and that they had to recruit more eunuchs.

Li Huowang stopped listening to their discussion and turned to Zhuge Yuan next to him.

Zhuge Yuan was drinking tea as if he wasn't involved. He didn't express his opinion as well. Considering his status, he could have made a decision for everyone, but he didn't do that.

Li Huowang sat down next to him and asked. "Aren't you going to stop them? They've been talking about it for so long. We need a leader to stop them."

"No worries. Qin Lao is here, and they'll eventually come to a decision. I think they'll come to a decision by tomorrow. The little emperor is not the key issue here, but the empress."

"I hope they do move out tomorrow. Anyway, I'm going to the toilet," Li Huowang said. He stood up and walked outside. Rather than going to the toilet, however, Li Huowang left the residence through the courtyard.

A slightly faded humanoid window sticker talked to him once he was outside.

"Why are you still acting? The people outside are waiting for you anxiously, including Lord Jian Zheng."

Li Huowang frowned at the sticker. "I don't even know where he's hiding his almanac. Why are you in such a rush? I'll end up

alerting him if I move haphazardly. Do you not have any idea just how strong he is?"

"Pick up the pace. We're at a critical juncture, and you can't take the easy path here."

"Relax. I know the best time to act, and it's when the Sitting Oblivion Dao members are fighting against him. He's definitely going to use the almanac against the Sitting Oblivion Dao."

"Are you sure that the Sitting Oblivion Dao will start moving soon?"

"Of course. Zhuge Yuan had fought them many times before. At this point, it's either he dies or the Sitting Oblivion Dao dies. They've ambushed him twice and are definitely going to do it again.

"Anyway, I have to go back now, or Zhuge Yuan will get suspicious of me."

Li Huowang turned around and ran away without waiting for the humanoid sticker's response.

The humanoid window sticker ceased all movement. In a house ten Li away, a chubby woman was holding a scissor tied with red thread. She crumpled up a window sticker and hurled it into the fire. Then, she told Jian Zheng everything.

Jian Zheng's eyes were squinting as he heard the report. Two beautiful ladies were massaging his back and shoulders.

The incense finished burning and the plump woman went and lit up another.

Jian Zheng spoke again when the white incense smoke drifted once more into the air.

"Tell the guards to release the two Sitting Oblivion Sect from the prison. Let them be the messenger. Tell them that we will fight the Storyteller at noon. The Surveillance Bureau only wants the Six Divinations Almanac, nothing else."

The chubby woman was shocked by the order. The Sitting Oblivion Dao was the nemesis of the Surveillance Bureau, but Jian

Zheng was actually going to use them?

“Lord Jian Zheng, are they really going to do that?”

“I know that they're a group of liars, but they will definitely do that. Everyone thinks that they're just a group of crazy liars, but they actually have things they hold precious. They're simply hiding it properly.”

Jian Zheng felt tired and proceeded to his bed. Upon hearing footsteps, the two ladies in the bed moved aside and lifted the blanket.

Jian Zheng lay down, and the two ladies lay at the edge of the bed. Jian Zheng placed his wrinkled feet in their bosoms, allowing their soft bosoms to envelop his feet.

Jian Zheng sighed and turned around on the bed. “Go. Notify me once we're moving out tomorrow. This is an important mission, and I must oversee myself.”

“Yes, I understand.”

The chubby woman raised the scissor and snipped it toward the direction of the lamp. The room was plunged into darkness. Then, she bowed slightly toward the bed before leaving the room.

Li Huowang woke up in the morning on the second day of his mission. He didn't eat breakfast and paced around the courtyard endlessly; his instincts were telling him that something was going to happen today.

Li Huowang ignored the people from the Great Qi walking past him.

The Liang Kingdom was in a more perilous situation compared to the Qi Kingdom. Li Huowang saw an approaching carriage. He prepared himself, but he saw an eunuch alighted from the carriage.

The eunuch was chubby with jade-like skin like the others, but he looked quite young. He wasn't wearing any jewelry, but prayer beads wrapped around one of his hands as embellishments.

The eunuch didn't walk into the residence. He stopped in the

courtyard and started shouting, “Everyone, stop your useless work! We are not going to help you. We are returning the favor from before by acting like you do not exist at all.”

Qin Lao was reluctant to let go of one of the few remaining help they could possibly obtain. “But Lord Zhuge is with us! Will you not reconsider? We’ll share the glory once we succeed!”

The eunuch looked at Zhuge Yuan and bowed respectfully before chuckling at Old Qin. “Lord Qin, what do you think is most important to us, who are working in the palace?”

Everyone was stunned.

One of the ladies spoke hesitantly. “Gold?”

“Wrong! It’s a son[1]! You can’t help us, but the monks can!”

The eunuch took off his robes, revealing his enlarged belly covered in veins. The eunuch excitedly showed off his belly. “Who said that we can’t have children after getting castrated? Do you not see this? This is my own son!”

The eunuch used his hand wrapped in prayer beads to caress his belly. Soon, an imprint appeared on the eunuch's belly as if what was inside had reacted to the eunuch's touch. The imprint resembled a hand!

Li Huowang felt a shiver down his spine. *What the hell is happening to the Qi Kingdom? What did the monks from the Righteous Monastery do to impregnate the eunuchs? Wait, is his "son" even alive inside him?*

The Righteous Monastery of the Qi Kingdom was clearly stronger and more influential than the Righteous Monastery of the Liang Kingdom.

Old Qin’s hands trembled violently at the sight. “The monks from the Righteous Monastery are evil and have fallen into depravity! You’re not going to live long by consorting yourself with them!”

“Who cares if they’re evil? I’ll help those who can give us a

child, even though we've been castrated!" the eunuch retorted. Then, he carefully wrapped his enlarged belly with his robes, hiding it from everyone's line of sight.

1. Eunuchs are castrated once they accept their roles. This is to make them less threatening as servants of the imperial family. That's why they can't have children. 🤔

Translator's Thoughts

Here's an eunuch with his supposed 'son'

Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin



Chapter 415 - Hong Zhong

“And that's why the officials are so close to the Righteous Monastery and the abbot. You're asking the wrong group of people for help. Of course, the exception is if you can give us sons as well.”

The chubby eunuch returned to the carriage.

Right as he was about to enter the carriage, he stopped and looked back. “I almost forgot to say this, but Stepfather said that we will not interfere if you do make a move. If you're capable of imprisoning the empress, we'd be more than happy to deal with the aftermath for you.”

With that, the chubby eunuch left, leaving behind a gloomy group of people.

Li Huowang had no intentions of getting involved, but he still couldn't help but remark, “The difference in power between your group and the enemy group is too large. I don't think you'll have many allies here for your cause. This is a lost cause.”

“Don't worry; everything isn't set in stone. There are no permanent allies, only permanent interests; the result is still up to the heavens to decide,” said Zhuge Yuan. He then put his fan away and continued, “We have the justification as well. The empress ruling the kingdom is unprecedented.

“I'm sure everyone knows that, and they're not going to bother us at all.”

Li Huowang nodded.

Zhuge Yuan looked at Li Huowang and asked curiously. “Junior Li, are you okay? You've been quite unfocused recently.”

“No, I'm fine,” Li Huowang replied rather quickly.

“If you need my help, don't hesitate to ask me for help. I can still help you with some minor issues.”

Glancing at the window sticker, Li Huowang shook his head. “No, it’s fine. Let’s just work together and deal with the issue here in the Great Qi. Your problems are more concerning than mine.”

Clip, clop, clip.

The sound of horse hooves echoed from outside, and the combined volume was so loud that it sounded like an army was converging on their location. There was even the sound of drums, which grew louder by the second.

“Wait, why are the soldiers here?! I thought they were guarding the borders?!” someone shouted. The crowd inside the residence immediately got worried.

“Don’t panic,” Zhuge Yuan said calmly, calming down everyone. He picked up a few scrolls of art and walked outside.

Li Huowang frowned upon seeing the window sticker split into four pieces, briefly revealing Jian Zheng’s face.

When Zhuge Yuan walked out, he saw rows of soldiers ahead of him. The combined killing intent of the soldiers was so thick that it was palpable. The people nearby failed to escape in time, and some of them were so frightened to the point of swooning.

“Hoho.” Zhuge Yuan sat on the ground and unfurled one of the scrolls. A black Guzheng[1] appeared in front of him.

Ding~

Zhuce Yuan plucked on the string lightly, and the powerful drum noises were washed away.

The soldiers growled and ran toward them. When their killing intent reached its peak, a pool of blood appeared from underneath Zhuge Yuan’s Guzheng, melting it into a puddle of blood.

The buildings in the four cardinal directions peeled away; the wooden tiles fell off, and four altars covered in talismans emerged.

Several purple-robed Daoists brandished their swords at the same time and started a ritual. Someone shouted just then, and a barrier sprang up, covering everything.

“Junior Li, don’t you think this is interesting?” Zhuge Yuan waved his hand, and the old almanac appeared. He used his brush and pointed at the four altars. The four Daoists disappeared, and Zhuge Yuan’s brush was suddenly covered in something.

Zhuce Yuan raised his hand and got ready to write when Li Huowang shifted his illusion and used his invisible right hand to snatch the old almanac. Li Huowang immediately somersaulted and dashed toward the window sticker.

“Li! Huo! Wang!” Zhuge Yuan’s enraged voice echoed.

The tiles around him quivered violently.

“Stop watching and stop him for me!” Li Huowang shouted.

The people of the Surveillance Bureau appeared and surrounded Zhuge Yuan, but they weren't Zhuge Yuan's enemy at all. Several mahjong tiles appeared in the army just then, and they ran toward Zhuge Yuan with the same towering killing intent as the army!

Li Huowang was so busy escaping that he had no idea what was happening behind him. However, he could hear incessant cries. The voices echoed closer and closer the faster Li Huowang ran.

Upon reaching the rendezvous point, Li Huowang saw Jian Zheng waiting for him on horseback. No one else was around Jian Zheng, as the people of the Surveillance Bureau were doing their best to stop Zhuge Yuan.

“Give me the Six Divinations Almanac,” Jian Zheng said, extending his arm.

“Here it is!” Li Huowang handed over the old almanac.

When Li Huowang’s skinless hand and the wrinkled hand made contact, a sharp glint burst out of the almanac and flew toward Jian Zheng’s neck.

Jian Zheng failed to react in time, but the jade pendant on his waist flashed once and shattered. A white smoke appeared from the jade pendant, and it enveloped Li Huowang’s arm that was holding

the dagger.

Li Huowang's arm was corroded until only the bone in his arm was left.

However, Li Huowang wasn't done just yet.

Li Huowang spat his molars, but he was caught off guard when his teeth failed to pierce Jian Zheng, merely getting stuck in the latter's chest. Clearly, Jian Zheng's purple robe had strong defensive capabilities; it wasn't just an ordinary robe!

"How dare you?!" Jian Zheng glared furiously at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang took to the air and sat on Jian Zheng before thrusting his corroded arm into Jian Zheng's neck. His attack finally worked, and Jian Zheng's blood dyed his beard red.

Li Huowang leaned forward and whispered. "Why do you think I did this? Because I'm fucking Hong Zhong! Do you really think I'd be friendly with you guys?!"

Li Huowang stabbed Jian Zheng once more, and the latter's head tilted sideways.

Jian Zheng was dead!

"HAHAHAHA! THIS FEELS AMAZING!" Li Huowang roared madly and turned around. Then, he raised his corroded arm while sweeping his gaze across the people who had surrounded Zhuge Yuan.

"*Hahaha!* I tricked you guys too! Did you guys really not think that I may be a member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao?!" Li Huowang tore off his face, revealing the flesh underneath.

Moments later, black tentacles burrowed out of his facial muscles and skull. The black tentacles moved together and transformed Li Huowang's head, making the latter's head appear rectangular.

grotesque noises echoed incessantly, Li Huowang's face distorted in pain.

"Father...!"

“Don't stop! Do it! Do it like what I taught you yesterday!”

Li Sui could only proceed, and Li Huowang's facial features became even more distorted. Li Sui popped out Li Huowang's eyeballs, and the latter's face finally resembled a Hong Zhong mahjong tile.

The Sitting Oblivion Dao members amidst the army cheered and whistled at the sight.

“Hahaha! Hong Zhong is amazing! To think he'd actually transformed into that brat!”

“Elder Hong Zhong is amazing!”

“Hong Zhong is unbeatable!”

Li Huowang laughed boisterously at their cheers. He even lifted Jian Zheng's corpse and shook it at them.

1. A musical instrument 🤔

Chapter 416 - Retreat

"Hahaha, you want the Six Divinations Almanac? Hahaha, how naive! This treasure belongs to us—the Sitting Oblivion Dao!" Li Huowang mocked the members of the Surveillance Bureau.

Hong Zhong's illusion celebrated wildly and clapped around Li Huowang. It was his first time feeling such unprecedented joy; he had never felt such a rush, even when he was still alive.

Everyone came to a screeching halt and stared alternately at the Hong Zhong on Li Huowang's face and Jian Zheng's corpse in his hand.

The Surveillance Bureau members besieging Zhuge Yuan were stupefied. They didn't expect that one of their comrades would end up being a member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao in disguise, and he had even killed Jian Zheng!

The Surveillance Bureau rushed toward Li Huowang. Jian Zheng had died, and if they didn't want to be imprisoned for dereliction of duty, they had to capture Hong Zhong!

"Dad, they're running toward you!" Li Sui exclaimed.

Li Huowang was blinded, so he couldn't see what was going on.

"Calm down. Pop your eyeballs out and lead the way for me!" Li Huowang urged. He raised the blood-stained almanac and ran toward the city wall under Li Sui's guidance.

Anything could happen in this bizarre world. Jian Zheng was one of the Surveillance Bureau's higher ups, so Jian Zheng had been difficult to kill. However, Li Huowang didn't really care about success or failure. He did this to shift the blame onto the Sitting Oblivion Dao. Li Huowang had never taken the Surveillance Bureau's side; he had stayed true to his goal—capturing the Strayed

One Bei Feng!

Bei Feng was still in the capital, but both the Surveillance Bureau and the Sitting Oblivion Dao had to fight each other for Li Huowang to catch Bei Feng! It had to happen at all costs, even if Li Huowang had to create conflict between them.

Li Huowang had no reservations when it came to taking advantage of them. The Sitting Oblivion Dao had deceived him so many times that they were practically archenemies now.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang wasn't worried about his cover getting blown by the Surveillance Bureau. There was more than one Hong Zhong, after all. In addition, the Sitting Oblivion Dao was famous for their deception to the extent that no one would believe them, even if they were to speak the truth.

The Sitting Oblivion Dao was in a difficult position now that Hong Zhong had killed Jian Zheng. Li Huowang had learned this trick from the Sitting Oblivion Dao, and he wasn't shy of taking a few pointers from their playbook.

Li Huowang jumped on roof after roof. He attached talismans to his knees and ran wildly. He'd laugh occasionally to taunt his pursuers. Li Huowang's instigation plan had succeeded. Now, all that was left for him to do was to escape from the Surveillance Bureau's pursuit and reclaim his true identity his Er Jiu.

Li Huowang had just jumped off a roof when a killing intent pierced him, making his hair stand on end.

Li Huowang felt himself twisting in mid-air. The blind Li Huowang then felt a strong breeze sweeping past him.

"Dad, someone on the wall threw a big stick toward you," said Li Sui. He had evaded the attack for Li Huowang.

"Don't panic; we're not too far away from the city wall. We'll be out soon!" Li Huowang felt a strange aura behind him, and the aura locked onto him.

Li Huowang's heart clenched, and he asked, "Li Sui, what's

going on? Did something happen behind us?"

"Dad, the person you killed has just stood up! He's looking at your head!"

"What?! Jian Zheng is still alive? No way, he has to be dead! He's not Jian Zheng! He's someone else!"

Clearly, "Jian Zheng" had more tricks up his sleeves than Li Huowang could ever take into account. Li Huowang didn't have an exact grasp of the ongoing situation, as he was blind. However, one thing was for sure: the ordeal was far from over.

"Go!" Li Huowang switched places with his illusion and became invisible. Then, he ran toward the city gate with all his strength.

Li Huowang felt a chill above his head followed by a dull thud. The chill vanished immediately afterward. However, Li Huowang's situation was too dire for him to pay any attention to anything else aside from escaping. Li Huowang ran nonstop upon realizing that he didn't get hit by the oncoming projectile.

"Come on! Everyone, let's help Elder Hong Zhong!"

"Hong Zhong! We'll avenge you! Just go in peace!"

"Hong Zhong, make sure to send the almanac out of the city!"

The members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao shouted at Li Huowang, and he couldn't help but sneer in his heart. *I'm deceiving you guys. I'm sure none of you has ever thought that you'd get a taste of your own medicine one day.*

Of course, Li Huowang had no idea whether the Sitting Oblivion Dao members were truly acting as his rearguard, but the pressure on Li Huowang dropped.

Li Huowang soon reached the city gates. The heavy gates were closed, but it was no challenge for Li Huowang. He swung his bronze coin sword and sliced through the city gate as if it were made out of paper.

Li Huowang ran for quite a while until his hands eventually felt the familiar touch of bushes and leaves. In other words, he had left

the city and had entered a dense forest.

Li Sui! Keep an eye out for me! Is anyone after us? Li Huowang asked inwardly.

"No, those people in armor stopped them from chasing after us."

It was the best possible outcome, but Li Huowang remained vigilant. He continued his run into the forest; sometimes, he'd turn invisible, and sometimes he'd wade his way through a river.

Several hours later, Li Huowang eventually stopped, feeling utterly exhausted. He was covered in beaded sweat as he sat on a boulder to catch his breath. *The security in the city will definitely be heightened because of the chaos. I have to wait for things to cool down.*

However, I can't wait for too long lest the Surveillance Bureau launches another attack on the Sitting Oblivion Dao while I'm not there. I have to be there before those two start attacking each other. I can't miss the golden opportunity.

Just as Li Huowang was engrossed in his thoughts, the sound of crunching leaves echoed to his left.

Li Huowang's ears perked up to listen.

"Ghost!" a terrified scream echoed, prompting the nearby birds to fly away. Then, there wasn't any more movement. Li Huowang frowned in bewilderment and confusion. *Li Sui, who made that sound?*

"An old man. He's carrying a lot of wood. He's on the ground right now, and he's not moving at all."

The perplexed Li Huowang made his way over to where he had heard the scream, and his hands soon found the old man.

Li Huowang groped around and discovered that the old man was wearing coarse clothes. The old man's face was covered in deep wrinkles as well, which was proof of his old age.

The firewood on his back and the broken hatchet in the old man's hand indicated that the old man was just an ordinary person

who decided to come to the mountains to chop some firewood.

The old man still had a pulse, which meant that Li Huowang had simply scared him out of his wits to the point of fainting rather than death.

Li Huowang realized just then that the old man had to have been scared by his terrifying appearance. It made sense, as there was no way that Li Huowang's horrifying face was a common sight to ordinary people.

Li Huowang took out a dagger from his torture bag to try and restore his facial features. He raised his hands and reached out for his head, but he found nothing except for two tentacles bobbing up and down with an eyeball each.

Where did my head go?

Chapter 417 - What If

"Where's my head?"

Li Sui thought Li Huowang was talking to him, so he hurriedly replied, "Father, I know where your head is. It fell on the ground while we were in the city. Should we go back and pick it up?"

Li Sui's words seemed to drain the life out of Li Huowang. The latter went limp and collapsed to the ground.

"Father? Father, what's wrong?" Li Sui nudged Li Huowang with his tentacles, but he received no response. Li Sui couldn't understand why his father had stopped moving.

Was it because he lost his head? But Father lost his head long ago, and he still managed to run for such a long time. It shouldn't be because he lost his head.

The little toy that Li Huowang gave Li Sui squirmed all of a sudden. Li Sui used his tentacles to fish out the leather doll, and it grew rapidly once it was outside. In the blink of an eye, it became as big as a human being. It had Li Huowang's face, but it was shriveled up with just a thin layer of skin.

The flat and thin "Li Huowang" crawled and put his mouth on the shadow that his corpse had cast. In the next moment, "Li Huowang" began sucking. The shadow was funneled into the doll's mouth, and it grew rapidly.

Moments later, Li Huowang with a complete body and head appeared next to his own corpse. Li Huowang exhaled sharply in fear as he looked down at his headless corpse.

Li Huowang was already blind even before his head fell off his shoulders, so he had no idea who took his head away. However, Li Huowang believed that it was most likely the resurrected Jian Zheng.

Sure enough, the Surveillance Bureau still had tricks up their sleeves. If it hadn't been for the relic that had sacrificed its life for him, he would have died for real.

I must be extremely cautious the next time I face the Surveillance Bureau. Their techniques are too mysterious and dangerous. I may end up dying if I become too careless against them.

Just as Li Huowang was engrossed in his own thoughts, the surroundings abruptly trembled. Li Huowang thought the members of the Surveillance Bureau had arrived and were converging on his location when everything went white.

Li Huowang found himself staring at an unlit fluorescent light in the ceiling. He looked down and saw that he had been restrained with a straitjacket.

"Back again."

The doll had allowed Li Huowang to come back to life, but Li Sui was still inside his previous body. In other words, there wasn't anything stopping the hallucination from engulfing him once more, and as expected, Li Huowang found himself back here.

"Li Sui, Li Sui..." Li Huowang's voice was muffled by the cloth in his mouth. "Quick, come into my body and help me go back there."

Li Huowang immediately lifted his head and opened his mouth as wide as possible; the cloth covering his mouth stretched wide open as he struggled against it. The camera in the upper left corner flashed red and turned toward Li Huowang.

Li Huowang had no idea if Li Sui could understand him, as he couldn't speak properly. However, there was a high chance that Li Sui couldn't understand him at all, as he had yet to snap back to reality.

"Li Sui! Stop playing around and hurry up!" Li Huowang exclaimed. However, there was no response, and it made Li Huowang feel anxious.

Li Huowang was anxious, as the black spindle was in the abdomen of his corpse, so if everyone ended up seeing his new body, they'd immediately identify him as a Strayed One! His cover would get blown!

The door to the room was pushed open. Sun Xiaoqin walked in with a meal box, and she froze in her steps upon seeing Li Huowang. Moments later, tears of excitement flowed out of her eyes. "Son, are you finally awake? You're finally awake, right?"

Sun Xiaoqin rushed over and held Li Huowang's head to examine him.

Sun Xiaoqin then removed the cloth from Li Huowang's mouth; Li Huowang's mouth fluttered open, and he was just about to play dumb and act foolish, but the words got stuck in his throat upon seeing Sun Xiaoqin's worried face.

Li Huowang fell silent.

"It's okay, it's okay. The fact that you can understand me means that your condition is improving. You'll get better one day. Here, have some food," Sun Xiaoqin said, wiping away her tears and picking up the meal box from the ground.

Sun Xiaoqin opened the meal box, and it turned out to be a four-layered meal box containing protein, a vegetable dish, soup, and a serving of rice.

Sun Xiaoqin took out a plastic spoon and scooped up half a spoon of white rice. She then dipped it in the egg soup before picking up a piece of pork and bringing it over to Li Huowang's mouth.

Li Huowang had no idea what Sun Xiaoqin's actions meant in the real world, but he opened his mouth and ate it nonetheless.

"Great, my son really is the best. Mom knows that you always wake up hungry. My son really is much easier to handle compared to other parents."

Li Huowang swallowed the food and asked, "Mom, how did you

get in?"

Sun Xiaoqin bit her lower lip upon hearing Li Huowang's question. Afraid of scaring her son, Sun Xiaoqin endured the excitement and said, "This place is called a hospital on the outside, but it's actually a prison. The food here is terrible, and I was afraid you wouldn't eat well, so I came to visit you.

"Visitors are usually not allowed, but the warden is an easygoing person. He immediately allowed me to visit you when I said that my son behaves the best with me at your side. I guess there are still good people in this world."

Li Huowang nodded and continued eating with relish. After chewing a few times, he noticed Sun Xiaoqin's strange behavior. Eventually, Sun Xiaoqin took a small amount of rice and used it to plug up the tiny microphone near them.

Sun Xiaoqin sat back down and explained, "I may not be by your side by the next time you wake up, son, so listen to me. If someone ever asks you about the gold, just tell them that it's from your grandmother's dowry. Do you understand?"

"If you don't think it's going to work, then just stay silent. Never ever tell them that the gold was from your bed! There are many wicked people nowadays, so you must remember to never ever tell anyone about it!"

Li Huowang smiled helplessly and asked, "Mom, have you spent the gold?"

"What nonsense are you talking about? It was from your grandma's dowry! It must not be spent unless it's absolutely necessary! Don't worry, this place is funded by the government, and it's not that expensive.

"Your father is still doing his best to earn money as well."

"Mom, I gave you the gold so you could spend it freely. Don't save it. Anyway, this is all a hallucination, so I can have as much gold as I want—"

Li Huowang froze just then, and a terrifying question popped up in his mind as he stared at his mother. Li Huowang had always thought that this world was a mere hallucination, as he he could bring treasures here from the real world.

In addition, too many coincidences and unlikely things had happened to him so far.

However, Zhuge Yuan had said that the Strayed Ones could create something out of nothing. If his words were true, could it be that he had unknowingly used his power as a Strayed One to procure the gold and make those coincidences happen?

What if this world was real, too?

Chapter 418 - Reality

Could it be that this world is real as well? Li Huowang thought and looked around. He was a Strayed One, who had turned Dan Yangzi into an immortal, so materializing gold using his primordial breath would be a piece of cake for him!

But... why did I have to notice this now? I'm on the verge of catching Bei Feng and staying off the hallucination, so why does it have to be now? Li Huowang's face distorted into a grimace. Once again, he could no longer distinguish reality from the hallucination. If the hallucination was real, what was the point of his hard work?

What if this world is real? Li Huowang thought, and the idea became a Gu worm that burrowed into Li Huowang's mind, churning up a chaotic hodgepodge of emotions within him.

Li Huowang gnashed his teeth and smashed his face on the wall.

He wanted to use pain to distract himself from the ominous sensation.

No, this is wrong! This is wrong!

"Son! What's wrong with you?! Y-you're scaring me!" Sun Xiaoqin exclaimed, frightened by Li Huowang's actions. She put down the meal box and embraced Li Huowang's head, stroking his short hair repeatedly.

Li Huowang stopped moving and closed his eyes in pain. In reality, he wasn't afraid of wasting his efforts, nor he was afraid of pain and death. However, he was afraid of losing grip on what was real and fake. That sensation was just unbearable for him.

He couldn't confirm that this world was real, and even if his speculation ended up being correct, there would still be a degree of falsity to it. *Is this even possible? How is this possible? I have yet to*

obtain that cultivation method.

How am I using my primordial breath? This doesn't make any sense. If both worlds are real, why can I materialize gold here but not there? Does my ability as a Strayed One vary in strength depending on the location?

Li Huowang glared angrily at the bedside table; he tried to use his mind to materialize a large piece of gold, but there was no change. Then, he tried to move the bedside table with his mind, but nothing happened.

Li Huowang's veins bulged, and his eyes became bloodshot. He was unwittingly transfixed on the bedside table, but it remained motionless.

"Son, stop scaring me. I really am scared. W-w-what's happening to you?" Sun Xiaoqin stuttered, and her intermittent sobbing made Li Huowang turn to her.

Li Huowang immediately noticed the wrinkles at the corners of her eyes, and he realized just then that it had been a long time since he last saw his mother. It turned out that her mother had aged a lot in the meantime.

Even if she was fake, Li Huowang couldn't help but feel sorry for her.

"Mom, I'm fine. I really am fine," Li Huowang said in a low voice. He relaxed slowly after making a decision that he couldn't act recklessly without any evidence. If he were to foolishly make a reckless decision, he'd fall into the same plight as before.

Li Huowang shook his head vigorously to calm his chaotic emotions. Then, he started taking deep breaths to calm down his racing heart.

Since he was already suspicious about the possibility that this world might be real, Li Huowang decided to look for evidence rather than just speculate. At the moment, the probability of this world being real was quite low.

It doesn't make sense that I can bring anything from that world to this world, but I can't do it in reverse. I mean, there's no way that the other world is the fake one, right? It's impossible for this world to be the real one instead.

Li Huowang leaned against Sun Xiaoqin's embrace and enjoyed the rare moment of peace. He had been yearning for this feeling in his dreams back in the real world.

"Mom, how is Nana?" Li Huowang asked.

"Nana? Nana is doing well," Sun Xiaoqin replied, sounding uneasy. She was busy taking tissues out of her bag to wipe away Li Huowang's sweat.

Li Huowang had long become capable of discerning lies from anyone's words, and it was all thanks to his experience fighting against the Sitting Oblivion Dao for so long. In other words, Li Huowang easily saw through Sun Xiaoqin's lie.

"Mom, what happened to Nana?" Li Huowang asked, becoming gloomy upon noticing something amiss.

Sun Xiaoqin attempted to lie once again, but Li Huowang saw through it.

Faced with her son's incessant questioning, Sun Xiaoqin finally relented and said, "I hope you're not going to get mad at her for not coming here often. She's still a good girl, after all."

"I'm not going to get mad at her. I just want to know where she is right now."

"Nana dropped out of school, and her parents took her to see a doctor."

"What happened to her?" Li Huowang asked, sounding nervous.

"It wasn't anything serious; she's just a bit depressed, and she's no longer interested in anything," Sun Xiaoqin said, picking up the meal box and feeding Li Huowang once again.

Li Huowang chewed the food, but it became tasteless. Li Huowang's heart was bleeding as he thought about the girl who had

always been by his side since he was young. She had sacrificed a lot for him, but he hadn't been able to give her anything in return.

"It's okay, son. I heard it's just a minor illness that can be cured with medicine. Don't blame yourself for it."

"Mom, can you untie me?" Li Huowang said.

Sun Xiaoqin hesitated with the meal box in hand. Eventually, she nodded. "All right! I guess it must be uncomfortable being tied up like that all day. It's great to move around a bit."

With that, Sun Xiaoqin untied the restraints on Li Huowang.

"Hey, Ma'am Sun!" A nervous-sounding male voice echoed from the surveillance camera in the room. "What are you doing? Stop that!"

"My son is feeling uncomfortable being tied up all day. Don't worry, I'm here! He's very obedient with me here!" Sun Xiaoqin replied and picked up the pace.

"Wait, I'm coming over! I'm coming now—" The voice was inexplicably cut off mid-sentence.

Just as Li Huowang regained his freedom, the door to the room was flung open by two large-framed prison guards with batons in hand. They stood at the door and stared at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang's limbs were slightly atrophic, as it had been a long time since he had exercised. However, the large-framed guards still gulped a mouthful of their own saliva and nervously called for reinforcements using their walkie-talkies.

It wasn't a strange sight. After all, Li Huowang was the mad martial artist of the prison, and he was exceedingly difficult to handle.

Li Huowang ignored the guards and grabbed the iron bars blocking the window, reaching out for the sky. As the warm sunlight touched Li Huowang's pale fingertips, a trace of longing burst out of his heart at the warmth that caressed his hands.

How wonderful would it be if this was reality...

Chapter 419 - Bai Lingmiao

"The sun sets behind the western mountains and darkness covers the sky~ Nine out of ten houses have closed their doors but one remains open~ Burn the incense, beat the drum, and Summon the Gods~"

Dum-dum-da-da-dum~

Bai Lingmiao circled around a bound naked man in the center of the room along with the urgent rhythm of the drumbeats.

A group of people were in the corner of the room, and their eyes were filled with tears.

"It's an auspicious day to close the doors. The Southern Dipper gets close to the Northern Dipper. Do not close the doors yet~ First spray three mouthfuls of divine water~ Step into the southwest and northwest corner~ With the Heavens and Earth as witnesses, chase away the evil spirits and monsters!"

When Bai Lingmiao's words fell, she took off her red veil and shoved it into a water basin. Then, she covered the man's face with the drenched red veil. The man let out a miserable cry reminiscent of a ghost or a wolf's wail as he writhed against the restraints.

The soaked red veil changed shapes according to the beat of the drum. Sometimes, it'd become a wolf head with a massive wound in the crown of the head, and sometimes, it'd become a colossal skull made out of the skull of four snakes.

The cries became louder, and the man tensed up before collapsing to the ground. A blurry red figure crawled out from under the red veil and ran swiftly toward a nearby pillar.

Bai Lingmiao didn't move. She waited until the misty red figure

had crawled into the pillar before walking up to it.

The Second Deity's sharp nails pierced the wooden pillar, and the pillar cracked open, revealing a tiny blood-red palace.

However, it seemed like the tiny blood-red palace had grown from the wooden pillar itself. It didn't seem like someone had placed the tiny blood-red palace after the construction was done.

"Have you offended someone?"

The Second Deity swiped at the tiny blood-red palace with her black nails, and the tiny palace collapsed. The blood-red color of the palace's material dimmed rapidly.

The victim handed over a pouch of copper coins, but Bai Lingmiao didn't immediately accept them. She looked around at the bare walls and decided not to accept them.

"Copper coins are too troublesome to carry. You can just use that money to repair that pillar and think carefully about who installed that pillar in the first place. Remember to stay away from them," Bai Lingmiao said, turning around to leave.

Bai Lingmiao walked out and sat in the carriage. Then, she breathed a sigh of relief and said, "This job is really hard to find."

Chun Xiaoman waited until the Second Deity was on the carriage before pulling on the reins and directing the carriage toward Cowheart Village. "Miaomiao, are you done with the Immortal family's quota for this month?"

"Yes, and we have to do it again next month," Bai Lingmiao replied with a nod. Then, she leaned back on the carriage walls. Afterward, she picked up a book from the side and opened it.

The book contained simple characters, and the page that Bai Lingmiao had opened revealed the character for the word "duck" on the left and a duck drawn on the right.

Bai Lingmiao grabbed a wooden stick and wrote the character over and over again in the air. After memorizing the character, Bai Lingmiao flipped the book to the second page and saw a pig.

The book was filled with character worksheets, and it wasn't available anywhere else. After all, Gao Zhijian had personally made this book.

There were so many books and techniques under the ancestral hall, but they were all recorded in texts rather than images. Bai Lingmiao had to learn how to read to know what her family had left behind for her.

Amidst the incessant creaking of the carriage wheels, the sky darkened. When Chun Xiaoman pulled the curtain open, it was already pitch-black inside the carriage. The only source of light was a pair of green beast eyes floating in the air.

"Miaomiao, it's already late. How about camping here tonight?"

"You go ahead and do your thing. I want to keep reading."

Chun Xiaoman sighed at the reply and pulled down the curtain. Then, she walked away to pick up some firewood. Miaomiao's personality had changed drastically, especially her way of doing this—she was stubborn once she had made up her mind.

Bai Lingmiao spent all of her time learning characters except for eating and drinking, and it appeared that she wouldn't give up until she became perfectly capable of reading.

After collecting enough firewood to set up a campfire next to the carriage, Chun Xiaoman returned and saw two familiar figures standing silently in front of her.

"Thank you. I'll get the pot. Watch the fire and make sure it doesn't go out."

There were only two of them, so a large pot was unnecessary. A small iron pot would do.

Soon, the *guokui* were broken into smaller pieces and thrown into the pot. Once it became a bit soft, Chun Xiaoman added cured meat and wild vegetables into the pot.

A simple meal was made in the blink of an eye.

Chun Xiaoman looked up and shook her head helplessly upon

seeing Bai Lingmiao reading her book while eating. Chun Xiaoman was convinced that her close friend was going crazy.

"Why do you insist on doing such a troublesome thing? Gao Zjijian can read, you know?" Chun Xiaoman asked.

"It's always best to rely on oneself rather than others. Besides, his brain isn't good enough for what I want to read. What if he reads it wrongly? We'll have no idea, as we can't read those texts ourselves. Have you already forgotten how Li Huowang fooled that damned baldy last time? I don't want to end up like him."

"How about hiring some teachers, then?"

"That's a good idea. Let those teachers know that I'm a survivor of the White Lotus Sect. I'm sure they won't report me to the Surveillance Bureau."

Chun Xiaoman frowned. The old Miaomiao had never teased her like that. However, her dissatisfaction was assuaged when the Second Deity used her chopsticks to pick up two pieces of meat before putting them into Chun Xiaoman's bowl.

"You're still good to me," Chun Xiaoman said and leaned against the Second Deity's shoulder before continuing with her meal.

Soon, the meal was over, and the two lay on their beds, resting with their backs against each other. Bai Lingmiao turned around and put her hand on Chun Xiaoman's shoulder. At that, Chun Xiaoman decided to let go of her dissatisfaction.

Chun Xiaoman then turned around and stroked Bai Lingmiao's eyelid. Bai Lingmiao had changed, but she was still the same Miaomiao—the same close friend who would comfort Chun Xiaoman whenever she was the most vulnerable.

Chun Xiaoman was about to close her eyes when someone hugged her from behind.

Of course, it was none other than the Second Deity.

"Hey..." Chun Xiaoman trailed off mid-sentence. Eventually, she

closed her eyes with an arm beneath the Second Deity and Bai Lingmiao's head.

The next morning, Chun Xiaoman woke up to find that the carriage was already moving. She yawned and stretched lazily. Then, she walked up to the front to take over the reins from the Second Deity, but the latter refused to hand over the reins.

"It's fine. I'm not going to get tired. I'm going to drive a carriage, not walk."

While the two were arguing, a small settlement appeared before them. The small settlement was full of farmers carrying wild game and woven baskets.

"Oh right, today is the fifteenth day of the month. It's when they set up the market."

The carriage soon entered the settlement, and a cacophonous din inundated the carriage from all directions. The noises were coming from the people hawking their goods on both sides of the street.

The carriage moved slowly as the street was filled with people. The majority of them simply listened to the hawkers without buying anything.

"Why is it so noisy?" Bai Lingmiao asked, sounding impatient. She pulled open the curtain, and the bright sunlight dazzled her. Li Huowang was about to cover her eyes with the ribbon that Li Huowang gave her when she spotted a familiar figure in the periphery of her vision.

"Xiaoman, isn't that Lu Xiucan?" Bai Lingmiao pointed out.

Chapter 420 - Meeting

“When I still had my artifact, money would hop into my pouch by themselves! I didn't have to pay any attention to bronze coins,” Lu Xiucan said, scoffing at the waiter, who had just booted him out of the restaurant.

“I'm sorry, dear customer. Regardless of what you say, our shop will not shoulder the payment for your meal,” the waiter said, slinging a white towel on his shoulder before returning to his post.

“Hey!” Lu Xiucan exclaimed. He was about to go on a tirade, but the woman next to him stopped him in time. The woman was none other than Tao'er, and she was the wife Lu Xiucan had bought for himself.

Tao'er opened up a pouch and took out two vegetable crackers from it before handing it over to Lu Xiucan.

“No! I don't want it! You can eat it. I'm a man, so how can I eat the leftovers of a woman?” Lu Xiucan said, pushing the vegetable crackers back to Tao'er.

Lu Xiucan's plan was to return to Cowheart Mountain to look for Li Huowang, but he no longer had any money for the trip. The trip wasn't that far, but he had no money, so he struggled quite a lot.

He approached the gangsters he had shared some drinks with and asked them for some money, but they all ignored him decisively.

“Why is the great Lu Xiucan starving on the streets?” A feminine voice echoed from somewhere.

Lu Xiucan was instantly furious at the remark. He turned around and saw two young women—Chun Xiaoman and Bai Lingmiao.

"What a coincidence! So, it's guys! Are you going back to Cowheart Village? Let me go with you! I'll drive!" Lu Xiucan got ready to hop onto the carriage, but Bai Lingmiao kicked him in the head.

"Did I say that you can get on the carriage?" Bai Lingmiao asked, looking down at Lu Xiucan from the window.

Tao'er helped Lu Xiucan up.

Lu Xiucan cast a confused gaze at the white-haired woman in front of him.

Bai Lingmiao was giving off a completely different air. She had become arrogant and unruly, which was a stark contrast to her previous gentle and quiet self.

"What's wrong with Miss Bai?" Lu Xiucan asked Chun Xiaoman holding the reins.

Chun Xiaoman sighed lightly. "What else? She became like you."

"Oh? She touched Master's sword as well?" Lu Xiucan's eyes widened in surprise.

"Xiaoman, stop talking to him. Let's go," Bai Lingmiao said. Ignoring Lu Xiucan, she pulled Chun Xiaoman into the restaurant.

However, Lu Xiucan followed them and sat down at the table with Tao'er in tow. Bai Lingmiao coldly glared at Lu Xiucan, asking, "Did I say that you can sit here?"

"Hey! Miss Bai, don't be so cruel. We're—" Lu Xiucan started.

"What is even our relationship?" However, Bai Lingmiao interrupted coldly, "Are you a fellow comrade of mine who had experienced hardships with me, or are you from my Bai Family?"

Lu Xiucan was infuriated by Bai Lingmiao's words. *She used to be so kind, so how come she became so annoying to deal with?*

"Fine! It's just a meal. I'm not going to starve to death by just skipping a meal!" Lu Xiucan exclaimed and pulled Tao'er to sit at a nearby empty table.

Chun Xiaoman wanted to say something to diffuse the tense atmosphere, but Bai Lingmiao kicked her lightly. With that, Chun Xiaoman dared not to speak.

The dishes and soup were soon served.

Lu Xiucan couldn't help but gulp a mouthful of his own saliva as the munching noises of the people around him pervaded his ears.

"Oh, right," Bai Lingmiao said.

Lu Xiucan's ears perked up, but he pretended that he wasn't interested.

"You don't need to follow us. Go and look for food elsewhere. Cowheart Village belongs to my family, and I decide who can stay there. I feel nauseous just from seeing you, so you'd best not go there."

"What?!" Lu Xiucan jumped up in anger. "You can't do this to me! The Lu Family Troupe lives there!"

"You really think it's their home just because I allowed them to stay there? Follow me there, and I'll chase them away," Bai Lingmiao said coldly.

Lu Xiucan was rendered speechless. He wanted to say something, but the words got stuck in his throat when he saw the eerie Second Deity. In the end, Lu Xiucan smacked the table and stomped off with Tao'er in tow.

Chun Xiaoman finally spoke, asking, "Miaomiao, don't you think you were a bit too harsh? He's still Troupe Leader Lu's son, you know?"

"I did not beat him up, much less scold him. What do you mean 'too much'? Did you not see the way he treated his own father? Why should I help such an ungrateful bastard? I don't understand why he's so arrogant even though he needs help," Bai Lingmiao replied and proceeded to eat her fourth bowl of rice.

Bai Lingmiao wasn't in a hurry to leave. She was planning on having a good sleep at an inn before continuing their journey.

Meanwhile, Lu Xiucan grumbled as he walked down a flea market. He gnashed his teeth and repeatedly cursed under his breath. Unfortunately, cursing wouldn't assuage the rumbling of his stomach. Lu Xiucan glanced at the woman, who had been following him quietly without any complaints, before pulling her away.

Lu Xiucan looked everywhere for food, but his efforts were to no avail, as they had no money. Soon, it was sunset, but they had only managed to fill their stomachs with water.

"Hey!" A man standing in an alleyway waved at Lu Xiucan. "Do you need money?"

Lu Xiucan walked over in surprise. "What's going on?"

The man opened his hand, revealing several silver pieces.

Lu Xiucan's eyes brightened, but the man put the silver pieces away.

Lu Xiucan was thrilled and was about to start asking questions when the man pointed at Tao'er behind him. "I'll give you three taels of silver in exchange for your wife becoming a concubine for a year. How about that?"

"A concubine?"

"What? Do you not understand? I want to borrow your wife to have a son, and I will return her to you once she's given birth."

"You son of a bitch!" Lu Xiucan roared and punched the man.

The two of them proceeded to fight each other.

However, Lu Xiucan wasn't as tall and as big as the man. He was hungry as well, so he was easily overpowered.

Tao'er ran over to stop them, but the man slapped her away.

Lu Xiucan saw red upon seeing his wife getting slapped in the face.

"You son of a bitch! I'm going to kill you!" Lu Xiucan roared and whipped a small dagger.

The man stopped abruptly upon seeing the dagger, and he sobered up when he saw the hostility in Lu Xiucan's gaze.

Eventually, he scoffed and turned around to leave.

The crisis had been averted, so Lu Xiucan automatically relaxed. He grimaced upon getting struck by extreme pain that radiated all over him. Then, he rolled his tongue in his mouth and spat—two molars covered in blood rolled on the ground.

"Damn it! Why am I so unlucky?"

Chapter 421 - Stepmother

The next morning, Lu Xiucan woke up feeling sore. He had no money to stay in an inn, so he hugged Tao'er and slept underneath the eaves of a house. The two slept hungry and cold.

Lu Xiucan regretted spending all the money he had been earning rather than saving a portion of his earnings. If he had some savings, he wouldn't have to suffer like this today.

To make matters worse, he had nowhere else to go, as he couldn't go to Cowheart Village.

"Husband, why don't you just rent me out as a concubine?"

"No!" Lu Xiucan firmly refused. "Where would my dignity go if I allow other men to impregnate you?"

Tao'er was sad as well as she said, "I don't want to become someone else's concubine, too, but we'd starve to death without money. My dad sold me off as well for food, as he didn't have any money."

Lu Xiucan gnashed his teeth and punched the ground out of frustration. He had just realized that Tao'er's visage was becoming yellow from hunger. *If I were as strong as Li Huowang, I wouldn't have ended up like this!*

In the end, Lu Xiucan bottled up his frustrations and stood up, pulling Tao'er toward the inn where Bai Lingmiao was staying.

Bai Lingmiao and Chun Xiaoman were preparing to leave when Lu Xiucan appeared in front of them.

Lu Xiucan was unwilling to submit to a woman, but he was even more unwilling to allow his wife to become someone else's concubine in exchange for money. Lu Xiucan gnashed his teeth and stuttered, "I-I'm sorry, Miss Bai. I-I made a mistake. Please let me go back to Cowheart Village."

“Is that how people are supposed to beg others for their help? How do you address Li Huowang? And how do you think you should address me?” Bai Lingmiao asked.

“I call Li Huowang 'Master,' so I should call you... Mistress!”

“That's right. Aside from your father, no one else has any obligation to treat you nicely in this world. If you need someone to help you, you need to be able to help them as well.”

Lu Xiucan nodded profusely. “Yes, I understand!”

“Sure. You can follow us, then. Anyway, where did you get your wife?” Bai Lingmiao asked, peering over Lu Xiucan's shoulder.

“I bought her. Look, they're selling some over there, too.” Lu Xiucan pointed out.

Bai Lingmiao followed Lu Xiucan's gaze and saw several skinny children standing on the streets. They had on collars made out of straws, and the adult standing before them was busy talking to what looked like a customer.

Chun Xiaoman frowned at the appalling sight.

Bai Lingmiao patted Chun Xiaoman's hand and asked, “How much silver for a person?”

“Depends. I bought Tao'er for five taels of silver.”

Bai Lingmiao squinted. *Cowheart Village needs manpower. We don't have enough people, and we definitely don't have enough talented people capable of cultivating the techniques that my family had left behind for me.*

We need more people to become even stronger, so I'll recruit people, just like how my grandfather recruited people in his generation.

Recruiting outsiders was risky, as those outsiders could leak their secrets. However, those who had been sold by their families to become slaves had nowhere else to go, which meant it'd be easier to control them.

Bai Lingmiao had no idea what her family was doing when she was young, but she could still remember how she had never gone

hungry. She had meat to eat every day, and she even frequently wore a golden anklet.

The Bai Family also managed to force Li Huowang to burn all his skin. In other words, the Bai Family was a pretty formidable family.

Bai Lingmiao walked over and started haggling with the seller. The seller grinned upon hearing that Bai Lingmiao was going to buy everyone, regardless of gender and looks.

“Are they my slaves now?” Bai Lingmiao asked the seller weighing silvers on a scale.

“Ai~! What are you talking about? We're not like the barbarians in Qing Qiu. The emperor has decreed that we cannot sell slaves within the Liang Kingdom!” the seller retorted with a chuckle.

“They're not your slaves. They're your stepchildren! Everyone, bow down to your stepmother!” the seller exclaimed.

The children had gone numb and obedient from hunger and exhaustion, so they knelt on the ground and greeted Bai Lingmiao as their stepmother.

“Hehe. Miss, take these. These documents prove that you've bought them. They're yours now,” the seller said, chuckling in delight. He failed to notice the cold glint in Bai Lingmiao's eyes.

Dum-dum-da-da-dum~

Bai Lingmiao chanted under her breath as the Second Deity slowly slipped into a dark alleyway while beating a drum.

“I know you hate people like him, so don't worry. He won't live to see tomorrow,” Bai Lingmiao said, patting Chun Xiaoman's hand.

“Thank you,” Chun Xiaoman said, putting away the bell into her sleeve.

“No need to thank me,” replied Bai Lingmiao. Then, she turned around and swept her gaze across the hungry children. They weren't exactly good-looking, and they were of bad health as well,

with crooked teeth and swollen wounds here and there.

The stronger ones among them had already been sold. These children were the remaining weaker ones among the seller's recent batch of slaves. Thankfully, Bai Lingmiao didn't really care about their looks; she just needed people.

"Everyone, don't be scared. I've decided to buy you because my village has many plots of land, and I need more farmers to work for me. You just have to give me forty percent of the harvest; you can keep the sixty percent."

The children's eyes lit up. They were mere stepchildren, so they weren't supposed to be qualified to obtain even a tenth of a harvest, much less sixty percent. It seemed that they were lucky enough to stumble upon a kind stepmother.

"Let's go. Cowheart Mountain is far, so we still have a long journey ahead of us," Bai Lingmiao said, hopping onto the carriage directly. The children followed closely behind her.

One of the girls with a mole at the corner of her lips could no longer endure her hunger and said, "S-stepmother, can you provide us with some food before we continue? We only had a sip of porridge yesterday. We just need a bit of food—a small handful of rice will do."

The seller was truly unscrupulous and had provided them only with the minimum amount of food to save money.

"What do you mean 'a small handful of rice'? If you're going to eat, anyway, you'd best eat until you're full!" Bai Lingmiao replied, tossing a big bag of dry rations.

Chun Xiaoman smiled. Miaomiao had become fierce and hot-tempered, but she was still as kind as ever.

The children couldn't contain their excitement upon seeing the *guokui* and the meat inside the bag. They wasted no time and started eating with relish.

"Hey, move! Let me eat first!" Lu Xiucan exclaimed, squeezing

in among the children and stuffing four *guokuis* into Tao'er's arms before grabbing a handful of meat jerky for himself.

While chewing his food, Lu Xiucan turned to Bai Lingmiao inside the carriage and said, "Mistress, these children are quite the unruly bunch. How about you let me teach them manners along the way?"

Lu Xiucan had long gotten used to calling Bai Lingmiao "Mistress" after calling her that a few times earlier in the day.

Lu Xiucan had truly learned a valuable lesson from Bai Lingmiao. Without enough strength, there wasn't anything he could do. Lu Xiucan had learned to act weak whenever necessary to profit. It wasn't like he'd die if he pretended like he was weak.

"No, you're useless. You can't even hide your dissatisfaction toward me."

Lu Xiucan panicked and hurriedly said, "Mistress! How could I be dissatisfied with you? You're my master's wife as well, so there's no way I'd do anything untoward to you."

"Makes sense. Li Huowang will make you wish for death if you dare to do anything to me."

Lu Xiucan felt a shiver down his spine at Bai Lingmiao's remark, and the bloody scenes that popped up in his mind made it impossible for him to swallow the jerky in his mouth.

Bai Lingmiao leaned against the carriage window and looked down. "Are you content with staying useless forever? If not, then I have some techniques for you to learn. Do you want to give them a try?"

Lu Xiucan looked up at Bai Lingmiao and recalled the fateful night when that blind killed those men as if taking candy from a baby. Lu Xiucan soon found himself nodding profusely. *Hmph! How dare she look down on me. She even called me "useless" not knowing that the reason I'm so weak is that I'm just unlucky. If given a chance, however, I can definitely become stronger than Li Huowang!*

Chapter 422 - Conjoined Lotus

Bai Lingmiao's carriage arrived at the entrance of Cowheart Village. The villagers came out to greet her upon seeing her return. However, Bai Lingmiao's stepchildren soon attracted their attention.

"Well, this isn't that bad as well," Puppy said, supporting his pregnant wife. "We have too much land here, and we won't be able to work on them all, even if we had cows. At least, we now have farmers to handle the land."

"Hey, isn't that Lu Xiucan? Why is he—" Puppy was interrupted by someone shoving him aside. When he recovered his balance, he saw Lu Juren rolling up his sleeves and rushing at Lu Xiucan with fury in his face.

Lu Zhuangyuan rushed forward as well and slapped Lu Xiucan in the face twice.

The sight invigorated Puppy, and he exclaimed, "This is going to be entertaining!"

Lu Xiucan was soon tied to a tree at the entrance of the village.

Lu Zhuangyuan smacked Lu Xiucan with his smoke pipe, and the father and son proceeded to exchange insults.

"How dare you steal my money and run away?! Our old Lu Family has been upright for generations, but a scoundrel like you actually appeared in this generation! I can't accept that—I can't! I'm going to beat you to death, you little bastard!"

"If I'm the little bastard, then you're the big bastard! If you dare to fight me, then release me! Release me, and I'll kill you!"

"Who are you calling a big bastard?! Say that again! Who are you calling a big bastard?!" Lu Zhuangyuan roared, swinging the

smoke pipe at Lu Xiucui's mouth.

Bai Lingmiao cast a placid gaze at the father-and-son argument. She leaned out of the carriage, looked around, and turned to the tall Gao Zhijian, asking, "Zhijian, can you bring some paper and pens? We need to sign up some laborers for the village."

Gao Zhijian looked away from Chun Xiaoman and turned to the children behind the carriage.

"All right."

Soon, the desolate Bai Family's ancestral hall became lively. People were queueing up, stamping their contracts with their handprints. None of them could read, but the contracts remained fair.

"Miaomiao, what's going on?" Chun Xiaoman asked, looking at Gao Zhijian busy writing on the pieces of paper.

"We're making them sign contracts. Grandfather often hired workers, and he always made them sign contracts. These people are just the beginning; more and more people will come here later. With that in mind, we might as well make it systematic from the start," Bai Lingmiao replied, recalling how her grandfather once managed the village.

"You still want to recruit more people?"

"Of course, Cowheart Village is quite large. We need to fill it up at the very least," replied Bai Lingmiao. More people were necessary to revitalize Cowheart Village, especially when they still needed to weed out those who were dumber than average.

Once the stepchildren had signed their individual contracts, Bai Lingmiao stood up and walked up to them, saying, "You're calling me 'stepmother,' so we can be considered family. The trip here was exhausting, so tonight, we'll slaughter a pig and have a good meal."

The children's anxiety upon arriving at a foreign place vanished instantly at the mention of meat. They started drooling; some of them had never tasted meat in their lives and had only heard that

pork meat was delicious.

Yang Xiaohai worked hard for the sake of delivering a delicious dinner to everyone. A large black swine weighing over fifty kilos was slaughtered and transformed into a variety of dishes. Amazingly, no part of the pig was wasted.

Afterward, the children were assigned to the empty houses in the village, bringing life back to the quiet village.

The night deepened, and the village became quiet once more. Inside the ancestral hall of the Bai Family, Bai Lingmiao was holding a lantern, stroking the Bai Lian Sect's martial arts manuals with her fingers as her eyes sparkled with desire.

"What do you think? Can these help us resolve the issues we've been encountering from the Immortal families?" Bai Lingmiao asked the Second Deity standing quietly behind her.

The Second Deity recalled a familiar face. "Senior Brother Li said that we could seek out an evil being to use as leverage against the Immortal families."

"He did say that, but he said it so casually. How are we supposed to do that?"

Four lines of tears appeared on the Second Deity's red veil as an intense feeling of longing surged in her heart. "I miss him."

Bai Lingmiao snarled and chided, "How come you're always thinking about him?! Are you going to die without him? Why are you crying? This is exactly like when you tried to kill yourself back then. You're really pissing me off!"

The Second Deity sobbed and took out a jade pendant. The jade pendant was a gift from Li Huowang; they were planning on selling it, but she decided to keep it.

Bai Lingmiao said, "Have you not noticed that we can no longer intervene in his affairs? If you want to avenge our parents and settle the score, you can go ahead and be a burden to him—become an obstacle to him during his missions."

The Second Deity didn't reply, and Bai Lingmiao could feel her leaving. Soon, a faint sobbing echoed from the darkest corner of the ancestral hall.

Bai Lingmiao rolled her eyes and continued looking around the dark room. After looking around for a while, Bai Lingmiao ultimately fell to the temptation and casually picked up a book to read. Unfortunately, the characters were still a bit too complicated for her to read, and she struggled quite a bit.

As Bai Lingmiao frowned and pondered over the words on the manual, a faint glow from the side caught her attention. Bai Lingmiao turned and saw that the glow was coming from the giant lotus made from white jade on one of the cabinets.

However, the faint glow had become intermittent for some reason. She approached for a closer look, but she had no idea what was going on. Of course, she also had no idea why there was a giant lotus on one of the cabinets.

However, the fact that it was here meant that it was valuable.

Bai Lingmiao thought that it might be related to the so-called Heavenly Mater. From what she had learned, the supernatural powers of the Bai Lian Sect had been bestowed upon them by the Heavenly Mater.

Why is the light flashing? Is something wrong?

A hand landed on Bai Lingmiao's shoulder just then, startling her. She turned around and saw the Second Deity staring at a mural on the wall.

Bai Lingmiao looked up, and her eyes widened slightly. The lotus flower that was being carried by six white donkeys on the mural overlapped with the lotus' petals, and the petals had become so thick that the lotus looked more like a hollow onion rather than a lotus.

Just then, a strange chanting came from their left and inundated them.

"Great Thousand Nectar Realm, Qinghua Chang Le Gate, Eastern Extreme Wonderful Strict Palace. Within the ten million circles, on the nine-colored lotus seat, a hundred billion auspicious lights surround the Jade Pure Spirit Treasure, helping in the great calamity. Seven treasured horses in the forest responding to the origin of Xuan Yuan."

The chanting was a cacophonous din of a variety of voices including men, women, elderly, and youngsters. The voices overlapped incessantly, creating a jarring melody.

Bai Lingmiao trembled all over upon hearing the chanting, and the killing intent in her heart was on the verge of getting dispelled.

No, it's not just my killing intent... it's affecting my Ten Emotions and Eight Sufferings! A variety of emotions suffused Bai Lingmiao's face as she struggled against the chanting.

Bai Lingmiao instinctively reached out to the lotus made from white jade, and she felt a bit better when the flickering light enveloped her.

Fortunately, the chanting soon disappeared. Bai Lingmiao looked back at the mural in shock and found that the lotus flower that was being carried by six white donkeys had become a conjoined lotus.

Chapter 423 - Returning To Shangjing

Li Sui popped out of Li Huowang's navel and looked around with his eyes. He was certain that he had heard voices just now, but no one was around.

“Dad, how come I can hear voices when there's no one around? Who is chanting?” Li Sui asked, but his question remained unanswered. He couldn't help but worry as he asked, “Dad, are you mad at me?”

Li Sui felt that he hadn't made any mistakes. After all, he couldn't have known that he'd have two fathers—a headless father and a father with a head. Upon hearing not even a single command from his headless father, Li Sui entered the navel of his father with a head.

Li Huowang had no time to pay any attention to Li Sui. He stared in the direction of the capital, as he could hear the strange chanting as well. At first, he thought it was just his hallucination, but he saw some civilians rolling on the floor in pain while holding their heads.

Li Huowang realized instantly that he wasn't hallucinating. The chanting was real, and he could hear it, even though it was coming from the distant capital. Li Huowang reckoned that a large-scale incident was happening.

Something major must be happening; I can't wait any longer. I must hurry back. Has the Surveillance Bureau surrounded the Sitting Oblivion Dao? Li Huowang moved as fast as possible, but he failed to reach the capital even after nightfall. It was inevitable, as he left empty-handed but was coming back with a heavy corpse.

His corpse had no head, but he hadn't forgotten that he was a Strayed One.

Li Huowang reckoned that his corpse would definitely be useful, so he drained the blood out of the corpse and filled it with coarse salt inside before covering it with the same salt on the outside.

Li Huowang took a deep breath and wiped away the sweat on his face as he stared at the night sky. Li Huowang eventually put the corpse down and decided to gather firewood to call it a night.

It hadn't been that long since the New Year's celebration, so the weather was still quite chilly. He had to sleep with a campfire, or he would end up getting sick,

While Li Huowang was cutting branches with the purple-tassel sword, snowflakes fell slowly from the sky. It was snowing, and it was Li Huowang's first snowfall in this world.

Li Huowang exhaled while staring at the moon hanging in the sky. Sensing that tonight would be an unusually cold night, Li Huowang decided to pick up the pace and gather more firewood.

Soon, sparks flew out when he used his flint, but the sparks failed to ignite the wood.

Li Huowang tried for a while, but he stopped upon recalling something. He rummaged through his pockets and took out an old almanac. Li Huowang used the flint a few times before the old almanac caught fire. Li Huowang then threw the old almanac into the pile of firewood, and that was it—the campfire was done.

Li Huowang immediately felt comfortable the moment the heat from the flames illuminated him. Li Huowang moved closer to the fire and closed his eyes while leaning on the back of his headless corpse.

"Hey Daoist, I have something I want to ask you," the old monk's illusion asked.

"I'm tired. I have many things to do in the capital tomorrow.

Let's talk another day," Li Huowang replied.

"No, it's about that guy named Hong Zhong. Do you remember him? He told me that you can turn lies into truth. Is that true?" the old monk rubbed his hands in anticipation before asking, "What if... you can turn a few of us into real people?"

"What?" Li Huowang asked, sounding astonished. His drowsiness was no more as he sat up abruptly and swept his gaze across the illusions—Peng Longteng, Hong Zhong, Jinshan, and the old monk.

Li Huowang's eyes sharpened, focusing on Hong Zhong's skinless face. "Are you using the old monk to probe me? What do you want?"

"Hehe, nothing special. I'm just curious. Think about it, isn't it fun if you can turn me back into a real person, even though you've already killed me?" Hong Zhong asked, sounding excited.

"In your dreams—you can do everything in your dreams."

"How ruthless. We've endured so many hardships that we can already be considered family, you know? We should be able to help you if we have real bodies. Don't worry; I'm not going to harm you if you ever allow me to obtain a real body.

"I find you particularly interesting, actually. It was amazing how you disguised yourself as Hong Zhong. You instigated both parties so flawlessly—you were like a true Sitting Oblivion Dao member!" Hong Zhong exclaimed.

Li Huowang ignored Hong Zong and closed his eyes to sleep. Li Huowang felt both warm and cold. He had no idea when he fell asleep, but Li Huowang found himself buried in snow the next morning.

Li Huowang took a deep breath of the dry air and grabbed a handful of white snow to chew. Then, he dragged his stiff corpse and walked toward the capital, one step at a time.

The capital had many informants, and he'd instantly catch a ton

of attention if he were to drag a corpse all the way into the capital. Moreover, he had no idea how to explain that to the Surveillance Bureau.

Li Huowang decided to dig a hole and bury his headless corpse on a hill. Fortunately, it was cold, and his corpse had been salted as well, so it wouldn't decay that quickly.

Li Huowang stared at the desolate city gate and took a deep breath before walking toward it. At first, Li Huowang thought that the peculiar chanting would cause chaos in the capital, but the capital was still business as usual.

The only strange thing was that the streets weren't as bustling as usual, but Li Huowang chalked it up to the heavy snow.

Li Huowang's assumption was correct. The capital was indeed sprawling with the Surveillance Bureau's informants. He had only taken a few steps into the capital, but the Surveillance Bureau had already surrounded him.

Li Huowang's expression was extremely solemn as he stared at Nangong. "Senior Nangong, the Sitting Oblivion Dao has deceived me."

Nangong looked at Li Huowang with a complicated expression and sighed. "Follow me. I'm sure you can't even imagine what the Sitting Oblivion Dao did with your identity."

Li Huowang returned to the Surveillance Bureau under Nangong's lead. They walked through the wooden corridors and soon arrived at a room. For some reason, the air in the room was dense and heavy.

However, Li Huowang soon found the answer to his question.

A head twisted into the appearance of Hong Zhong was on a table with three incense sticks in front of it. A Daoist clad in a yellow Daoist robe and wearing a hat with the Yin and Yang symbol embroidered on it was standing next to the head.

The yellow-robed Daoist brandished a bronze coin sword in a

ritual.

"Lord Jian Zheng, Er Jiu has returned."

The yellow-robed Daoist looked up.

Li Huowang saw two Nascent Souls on the left side of the yellow-robed Daois's neck.

This Jian Zheng has two Nascent Souls. He must be a disciple of Luoism. Li Huowang instantly became wary.

Meanwhile, Daoist Jian Zheng stopped his ritual and examined Li Huowang from top to bottom. Then, he grabbed Hong Zhong's head and hurled it at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang examined the rectangular head and exclaimed, "What?! The Hong Zhong of the Sitting Oblivion Dao is a Strayed One?!" [1]

1. MC is an amazing actor lmao 🤔

Chapter 424 - Task

Li Huowang held Hong Zhong's head while listening to Nangong's explanation.

"What's this Hong Zhong's origin? He managed to escape without his head?!" Li Huowang exclaimed in amazement.

Just then, Li Huowang paused slightly as if he had recalled something. "Lord Jian Zheng, I once saw a general in the Hou Shu with a similar ability to survive a beheading. Perhaps this Hong Zhong had learned it from there."

Jian Zheng gestured, and the head in Li Huowang's arms flew back to him.

Jian Zheng held it carefully and opened his mouth, revealing a set of uneven rotten teeth, which diffused a foul smell to the surroundings.

"He doesn't have to deceive away a technique from the military. A Strayed One running without his head isn't surprising at all. Strangely, his soul is not responding to me, even though he's already dead. Strange, is he still alive?"

Is that one of a Strayed One's abilities? I'll never die so long as I believe that I'm still alive? Li Huowang thought. However, he felt that such an ability was a bit useless. He'd instantly die upon getting reminded that he was dead, after all.

While Li Huowang was pondering over the burning questions in his mind, Daoist Jian Zheng waved his hand and said, "Forget it, he's already dead. Let's not bother whether he's a Strayed One or not. As for you, I want you to explain in detail just how Hong Zhong managed to deceive you."

Li Huowang immediately snapped back to reality at the remark, and he recounted the events with extreme focus, knowing

that he needed to get the story right.

Fortunately, Li Huowang's story didn't need many lies. He simply changed a few details while explaining the method that a Sitting Oblivion Dao member had used on him while he was on Xing Island.

The only difference was that the Sitting Oblivion Dao member had succeeded rather than the opposite.

"So... the one who followed Zhuge Yuan was actually Hong Zhong?"

"Yes, that's correct. I got lost in the bamboo forest, and I couldn't figure out what Hong Zhong had told Zhuge Yuan, which allowed him to stay by his side," Li Huowang said, deliberately making the story longer with some half-truths.

Li Huowang realized just then that being a Sitting Oblivion Dao member was pretty useful.

Daoist Jian Zheng nodded slowly at the story. Meanwhile, the tiny head jutting out on his neck said, "*Hehe*, are you sure you're not trying to deceive us? What if you're also a Sitting Oblivion Dao member?"

Li Huowang's expression froze. Moments later, he pulled out a knife and cut open his jaw without any hesitation. Li Huowang revealed half of his face and displayed the layers of his skin, flesh, and bones underneath.

"All right, all right. We believe that you're not a member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. *Ah*, disciples of the Ao Jing Sect are truly decisive," said the other Nascent Soul to defuse the tension.

"Enough, all of you be quiet!" Daoist Jian Zheng said sternly. The two Nascent Souls jutting out of his neck shrank into his body and became what looked like two red moles.

Daoist Jian Zheng approached Li Huowang with Hong Zhong's head in his hand.

Daoist Jian Zheng slowly walked around Li Huowang, and his

voice softened slightly as he said, "Rest assured, Hong Zhong's head is here. The Surveillance Bureau isn't going to suspect that you're a Sitting Oblivion Dao member.

"However, since you've returned in one piece, I'll have to give you a task."

"Understood, Lord Jian Zheng! Please tell me what to do, and I will do my best!"

Daoist Jian Zheng placed the head on the table and said, "The Surveillance Bureau wants you to get close to Zhuge Yuan. We probed and found that Zhuge Yuan still has the Six Divinations Almanac.

"Fortunately, Hong Zhong ended up taking away a fake almanac. If the Sitting Oblivion Dao had obtained that item, it would have caused significant unrest."

"Understood, Lord Jian Zheng," Li Huowang said, "However, Hong Zhong stole Zhuge Yuan's almanac using my identity, so we could be considered enemies right now. At this point, I think I'll die if I approach him."

Li Huowang made it a point to tell them that he wasn't familiar with Zhuge Yuan at all.

After all, his story was that he didn't become friends with Zhuge Yuan.

"Hong Zhong has succeeded in using your identity, so you should be able to do the same."

"But..." Li Huowang trailed off. The turn of events was beyond his expectations. He thought the Surveillance Bureau would go and kill the Sitting Oblivion Dao members, so how come they wanted him to get close to Zhuge Yuan once again?

Li Huowang had to redirect the Surveillance Bureau's attention to the Sitting Oblivion Dao so that he could use them to find the right Bei Feng.

"Are you saying you don't want to go?" asked Daoist Jian Zheng

in a cold tone of voice. The eyes of his two Nascent Souls opened slightly just then, emitting a dim black light.

"No, I dare not." Li Huowang lowered his head. Daoist Jian Zheng was just testing the waters, and he didn't care about Li Huowang's life at all.

"Go on, then. No matter what, it's better to try it out first before anything else. You're dismissed." Daoist Jian Zheng with rotten teeth sat on a stool and shooed Li Huowang away.

Li Huowang was stunned. *Is that it? What about the aftermath of the Sitting Oblivion Dao member killing Jian Zheng? Why does it seem like Jian Zheng's death isn't that impactful?*

However, Li Huowang knew that this wasn't the right time to ask questions, so he decisively left.

Walking down the silent wooden corridor, Li Huowang turned to Nangong next to him, and he sounded frustrated as he asked.

"The Sitting Oblivion Dao has killed Lord Jian Zheng. How come it feels like the Surveillance Bureau isn't going to do anything about it?"

A long silence ensued. Just as Li Huowang was considering whether to fan the flames a bit more or not, Nangong responded, "It's not that simple. The Surveillance Bureau has already drawn personnel from the Six Divisions of Great Liang.

"Once everyone is here, we're planning on catching all of them in one fell swoop."

Nangong Yun's expression became cold just then as he added, "*Hmph!* Those scammers are actually thinking that they can do just about anything while the Imperial Preceptor is too busy in the palace.

"They're truly underestimating the Surveillance Bureau!"

Li Huowang was relieved upon hearing Nangong Yun's. Fortunately, his efforts weren't in vain. The Sitting Oblivion Dao had finally caught the eyes of the Surveillance Bureau.

Li Huowang needed this conflict to reap profits from the sidelines.

"Er Jiu, the Bureau wants you to approach Zhuge Yuan. I want you to think that it's not that troublesome of a task. After all, the Sitting Oblivion Dao had used your identity to kill Lord Jian Zheng," Nangong Yun warned.

"If we were to go by the rules of the Bureau, you'd be severely punished. However, we need manpower more than ever in the capital. Regardless of the result, the Bureau will let you go for now."

Li Huowang instantly understood what was going on, and it was all thanks to Nangong Yun's explanation.

"I see. Thank you for the explanation, Senior Nangong," Li Huowang said. Then, the two seemed to transition from strangers to acquaintances as they talked to each other in the winding, wooden corridors.

Chapter 425 - Friend

Under Nangong Yun's lead, Li Huowang soon arrived outside the Liang residence where Zhuge Yuan was located. Li Huowang's excellent vision allowed him to see Zhuge Yuan painting on the second floor. There was no sign of anyone from the Great Qi, and it seemed that they were either in the other rooms or outside.

"Senior Nangong, isn't Zhuge Yuan wanted by the Surveillance Bureau? Why was he still allowed to stay here? Why don't we just capture him and take his powerful artifact?" Li Huowang asked. It was one of his burning questions.

Nangong Yun furrowed his brows slightly and shook his head. "Now is not the time to provoke him. According to the imperial decree, the members of the Bureau at the first to fourth rank have to enter the palace.

"We're lacking in manpower, and dealing with Zhuge Yuan right now would be a huge headache to us. The Sitting Oblivion Dao might seize the opportunity to strike, too if we were to do that. We should deal with the Sitting Oblivion Dao first.

"Fortunately, the Storyteller won't help those liars."

Having finished his explanation, Nangong Yun turned around to leave. "Er Jiu, good luck. You'll probably make it out alive so long as you don't provoke Zhuge Yuan. As long as you don't show any hostility toward him, he shouldn't treat you badly. You must remember not to show even a hint of killing intent."

"Thank you, Senior Nangong!" Li Huowang said. Then, he turned around and started walking toward the Liang residence in the distance with a grim look. Just as Li Huowang passed through the large doors, the doors slammed shut behind him.

Li Huowang took a deep breath. Then, he walked across the

courtyard with heavy steps. Soon, Li Huowang reached the mansion. Upon entering the mansion, the doors and the windows were slammed shut by Zhuge Yuan with a wave of his brush.

The two men looked at each other and smiled.

"How was it?" Zhuge Yuan asked while painting. He was painting a beautiful landscape.

"Thank you, Senior Zhuge. The mission is done. It won't be long before they start fighting. I'm just afraid that the Sitting Oblivion Dao will hear the news and leave the capital early."

"Rest assured, Junior Li. They aren't afraid of death, let alone something like this. They've already assembled here, so they won't leave unless something extraordinary happens."

"True." Li Huowang picked up the tea on the side and took a sip. He didn't care what the Sitting Oblivion Dao would do next. The Surveillance Bureau was behind him, so he would be fine as long as he wasn't their target.

"Senior Zhuge, the two of us might not meet again tomorrow. There are too many eyes in the city, and the Surveillance Bureau will start suspecting us as well."

"It doesn't matter. I can handle the issues in Great Qi by myself. How about you? Can you handle the Strayed One Bei Feng by yourself?"

"Don't worry; I'm not going to be fighting by myself. The Surveillance Bureau's main force will fight the Sitting Oblivion Dao. I just need to take advantage of Bei Feng's injuries to ambush and capture him."

"All right. Give me your hand, and I'll help you conceal your identity. It will be easier for you to move around then."

"*Hmm?* How will you conceal my identity?" Li Huowang asked, but he still raised his hand.

Zhuce Yuan pointed at Li Huowang's palm with his brush, and Li Huowang's name appeared on his hand written in black ink.

With a few quick strokes of the brush, Zhuge Yuan added a horizontal stroke to "Li," turning it into "Ji," and swiftly modified "Huo" into "Zai." [1]

Finally, Zhuge Yuan wiped away the character "Wang," removing it.

However, the ink simply landed on a piece of paper rather than vanishing.

"Done. Just keep your face covered, and no one will recognize you as Li Huowang."

Li Huowang was amazed. He had never seen such a technique.

Li Huowang stared at the character "Ji Zai" in his hand and nodded gratefully. "I won't forget this favor, Senior Zhuge. Rest assured, once I find Bei Feng, I will definitely come back to help you!"

Zhuce Yuan looked up and stared at Li Huowang. "Junior Li, my issues are not important. If you encounter any issues here in the capital, you can just use your divination to find me. I'll instantly discover if you've cast your divination on me, and I'll eventually find you as long as you're still alive."

Li Huowang stood still and looked at Zhuge Yuan with a complicated expression.

Then, Li Huowang sat down on the cushion and confessed, "Senior Zhuge, to be fair I actually do have an issue, but you don't have to do anything about it. I just want you to listen as a friend, and then you can help me analyze it."

"*Oh?*" Zhuge Yuan muttered in surprise. This was the first time Li Huowang had spoken to him in such a tone of voice.

Li Huowang clenched and unclenched his fist before sighing. "Senior Zhuge, what do you think of the world in my hallucination? Do you think it's real or not?"

Li Huowang then wasted no time, telling everything to Zhuge Yuan—the hallucination, his confusion, and how he had

materialized gold in the world in his hallucination.

Li Huowang wanted to know what others thought of his hallucination.

Would they think of it as real?

Of course, Li Huowang didn't really expect Zhuge Yuan to say anything about it.

He just wanted to vent to a friend. He couldn't tell anyone about it, as everyone would think that Li Huowang was a lunatic.

However, Zhuge Yuan would never think that way.

Once Li Huowang was done recounting, a deafening silence descended upon the room.

Zhuce Yuan remained quiet for a long time, seemingly in deep contemplation. In the end, he eventually stared at Li Huowang and asked, "Junior Li, do you know that I have a really close female friend in the Liang Kingdom?

"However, she was just a lowly concubine in the Qi Kingdom. I tried to change myself and force myself to think that the Great Qi was false and the Liang Kingdom was real," Zhuge Yuan said with a trembling voice as his gaze landed on a painting that depicted a beautiful lady.

"However, it didn't work. In the end, she still left me behind. The Qi Kingdom is real, and there's no way the fake one can be the real one."

"But what if? What if it's real as well?" Li Huowang asked, clenching his fists tightly.

"I want the fish, and I want the bear paw, too. However, I cannot have both," Zhuge Yuan said. Then, he lifted his brush once more and continued with his drawing.

"Junior Li, as the scholars of the past have said, we cannot get everything. It applies to everyone. As for me, it's with the Great Qi and the Great Liang. As for you, it's your reality and your hallucination. It applies to the Siming up there as well.

"One cannot obtain everything without sacrificing something."

Li Huowang stood up and clasped his hands together. "Thank you, Senior Zhuge. Your words have made me feel better. I really found it frustrating that I had no choice but to bottle up my feelings until now."

Li Huowang then walked down the stairs and said, "Once everything is over, I really hope that we'll still be friends, Senior Zhuge. I'd really like to drink tea and play Go at your bamboo house again."

Zhuge Yuan's voice echoed from the second floor. "Tea is fine, but forget about Go. I think even calling you a bad player is a compliment."

1. From 李 to 季, and from 火 to 灾. It means seasonal disaster
lmao 🤔

Chapter 426 - Deputy Chief

Li Huowang soon found himself in the small courtyard of the house that Ji Xiang had decided to give to him. Having a house in Shangjing proved to be quite convenient, as he didn't have to stay in an inn. He could also allow Black Taisui to have fun in the courtyard, which was away from prying eyes.

Li Huowang stood by the window with his hands behind his back and furrowed brows. He was staring at the desolate snowy streets outside. There weren't many people on the streets, as the curfew in the capital was brought forward today.

Li Huowang remained silent by the window as if he was waiting for something.

Clip, clop, clop.

The sound of horse hooves echoed just then, and a group of large-framed men in fur coats rode their horses into the capital.

They were the third batch of people from the Surveillance Bureau that had arrived in the capital over the past few days. The badges at their waists made it clear that they were personnel from the Surveillance Bureau stationed throughout the Six Divisions of the Great Liang.

After receiving transfer orders, they all came to the capital. It was still dusk, but the overcast and snowy sky made it seem like it was already night. The desolate streets and the solemn atmosphere of the capital made it seem as though there was an approaching storm, which weighed heavily on Li Huowang's heart.

Just then, a black bird streaked across the air. It circled in the distance before gracefully landing on the windowsill in front of Li

Huowang. Li Huowang instantly recognized the bird, and it belonged to Sima Lan from the Mo Family.

A folded piece of paper was in between the bird's beak. Li Huowang opened the piece of paper and was delighted by the text inside of it. "At last, it's about to begin!"

Bun heard Li Huowang descending the stairs in a hurry. It perked up and crawled out beneath the chair. Bun then rushed toward Li Huowang downstairs, but the latter pushed it away, saying, "Stay here and guard the house! Regardless of what you hear later, I want you to stay here without taking a peek outside!"

Li Huowang hopped onto his in the courtyard and rushed in the direction of the Surveillance Bureau. He passed through the gate guarded by two stone lions, and then he soon arrived at the grand hall filled with screens.

However, the screens had been taken down, and there were people standing where the screens were supposed to be. Li Huowang was unsure whether it was intentional or not, but the oil lamps on the walls hadn't been ignited, which made the hall extremely dark.

Li Huowang had exceptional night vision, but he could only make out a few blurry figures in the darkness. He had to get close to them to get a clear view of their faces.

Li Huowang squeezed through the crowd, and he felt like he was standing inside a classroom rather than a grand hall. However, the crowd was markedly different from students, and they were also emitting an ominous aura that made Li Huowang feel uneasy. The majority of them were squatting on the floor as well.

The low and muffled whispers from the crowd coupled with the oppressive atmosphere in the grand hall made everyone present feel a little breathless.

Li Huowang wasn't familiar with the people of Shangjing's Surveillance Bureau. He looked around and saw Sima Lan. He

walked over to Sima Lan and saw that the black bird that had delivered a message to him was perched on Sima Lan's shoulder.

The black bird was the reason Li Huowang had no issues spotting Sima Lan amidst the crowd.

"So you're finally here." The black bird turned around and nodded at Li Huowang.

"Brother Sima, are these people from the Six Divisions?" Li Huowang asked, sweeping his gaze across the crowd.

"Yes, but I heard that they borrowed some talents from the Qing Qiu Surveillance Bureau as well. Hehe, it seems that the Surveillance Bureau is truly going all out."

Qing Qiu? Li Huowang suddenly recalled the old Lama with a flock of black sheep. Li Huowang looked around and spotted a person in a Lama headdress in the distance, but he wasn't sure whether they were the same in Li Huowang's memories or not.

"Everyone is here, so what are we waiting for?" Li Huowang asked.

"We're waiting for the Deputy Chief of the Surveillance Bureau. He's in charge of all this."

"*Oh?* Are they the highest official in the Surveillance Bureau? My apologies. I've been outside for a long time, so I'm not quite clear on these matters."

"No problem. I was like you when I first arrived in the capital. It took me quite a while to figure it out. Anyway, there are five Deputy Chiefs, and none of them is the highest official. The highest official is the Chief[1]."

"The Chief..." Li Huowang muttered, memorizing the word. Afterward, Li Huowang asked, "Since we're going to deal with the entire Sitting Oblivion Dao, will the Chief and the other four Deputy Chiefs come here?"

"In theory, they should come here. However, they're all in the palace; I'm sure they're dealing with an urgent matter there."

Gong!

A gong echoed loudly just then, attracting everyone's attention. Everyone turned around and saw a majestic-looking chair being illuminated by a moonlight-like beam of light from somewhere.

An elderly man with a bed of white hair was seated in the chair. The wide sleeves of his robe slid down elegantly right beside his feet. His earlobes were also quite large, resembling earrings as they hung above his shoulders.

The elderly man was just sitting silently in his chair, but the commanding aura he exuded silenced the majority of the people in the grand hall.

Li Huowang's eyes narrowed into slits, and he managed to make out the row of people standing behind the majestic-looking chair. Unfortunately, it was too dark; he couldn't see their appearances.

"I believe there is no need for me to explain as to why the Surveillance Bureau has summoned everyone here," the Deputy Chief said. A terrifying aura seeped out of him, making everyone feel as if they were carrying an entire mountain on their shoulders.

The remaining murmurs vanished at once, and silence descended upon the grand hall.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Dull thuds echoed just then as some people in the crowd collapsed to the ground.

At first, Li Huowang thought that they fainted out of fear, but he was quickly proven incorrect when someone approached those who had fainted and lifted their skin with an iron hook. The mahjong patterns on the faces of those who had fainted confirmed their identities as members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

The people here had gathered to deal with the Sitting Oblivion Dao, but it turned out that five members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao had already infiltrated them. However, it didn't come as a surprise

to everyone, as they knew that the Sitting Oblivion Dao would definitely attempt to infiltrate the ranks of the Surveillance Bureau.

The Deputy Chief swept a nonchalant gaze across the Sitting Oblivion Dao members.

“It is not that difficult to deal with the Sitting Oblivion Dao members. The challenge lies in these swindlers hiding among the common people. However, it doesn’t matter. After all, Shangjing is our capital, not their capital.

“They think they're seamless, but they're simply lying to themselves. They even dared to openly assassinate an official of the Bureau! Hmph! Do they really think that we do not have the resources to deal with them?”

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1. it's by rearranging the words of the Surveillance Bureau 🤖

Chapter 427 - Rather Kill A Thousand By Mistake

The Deputy Chief waved his hand, and the people standing in a row behind him stepped forward, distributing a few pieces of paper to everyone.

Li Huowang skimmed through the pieces of paper and saw that it contained quite a few addresses.

“We suspect that the Sitting Oblivion Dao members are living at those addresses. I want you to bring them here, dead or alive. Verify their identity and you will receive fifty lifespan pills for each ordinary member, and you will be promoted by half a rank, too.

“Any of the three Officials or Four Joys are worth three hundred lifespan pills, and you will be promoted by three ranks! Those with the most kills will be rewarded personally by the Chief, and they'll receive three sexagenary-cycle pure lifespan pills[1]!”

The grand hall was instantly abuzz with discussions. It couldn't be helped. After all, the Surveillance Bureau had never offered such generous rewards before.

Three sexagenary cycles meant one hundred and eighty years! Who wouldn't want to live for an extra one hundred and eighty years? Moreover, the lifespan pills of the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau wouldn't transform them into Human Xiaos!

There were some who had been planning on hiding their strength, but they threw all caution to the wind upon hearing of the rewards. In fact, they could barely wait to start hunting down the Sitting Oblivion Dao members.

“Go, I wish you all swift success and promotion! Remember, the Sitting Oblivion Dao is evil, and they deserve to be eradicated.

Your efforts in rounding up the Sitting Oblivion Dao is a heroic act for the sake of the people and the world! We'd rather kill a thousand by mistake than let one of them escape!"

Boom!

A thunderous boom echoed as the four city gates of Shangjing were slammed shut. The war drums were sounded, and soldiers clad in heavy armor ascended the city walls.

They stood ramrod straight atop the city walls, giving off a murderous aura.

Shangjing's walls were already formidable, but they became even more formidable and terrifying as the soldiers in heavy armor towered over everyone inside the city, preventing them from leaving Shangjing.

The giant crossbows and weapons atop the city walls turned slowly and faced the city rather than outside.

Snow fell incessantly from the heavens, blanketing the capital in a thin layer of snow.

A group of black dots that resembled ants spread gradually from the Surveillance Bureau. Li Huowang was one of those black dots, and he was frowning while riding his horse. He constantly swung the reins, guiding the horse to move toward the eastern part of the city. Five members of the Surveillance Bureau were behind him, and they were pieces of paper containing the same information as Li Huowang's papers.

A cacophony of shrill screams and cries echoed from the nearby houses. Li Huowang turned and saw a wooden door covered in talismans getting kicked open from the outside.

Soon, a frail-looking woman with a baby in her arms stumbled outside the house. A whistling noise pierced Li Huowang's ears, and he watched as a saber flew out of the house, rushing toward the woman.

Just then, the baby in the woman's arms smirked. A grotesque

cracking noise echoed as the baby's bones contracted, and he slipped out of his swaddle. Then, he lifted his tiny feet and kicked his own mother toward the oncoming saber while somersaulting away from the woman's arms.

The saber pierced the woman's heart, and her warm blood melted the white snow, revealing the dark tiles underneath.

Moments later, a woman with two scars on her face rushed out of the house and pulled out the saber forcefully from the woman's chest. Then, she chased after the fleeing baby while shouting, "Damn it, Sitting Oblivion Dao! Face me if you have the guts!"

No one paid any attention to the woman's corpse on the snowy ground except for Li Huowang. *Many people are going to die tonight.*

Li Huowang's cheeks swelled as he gnashed his teeth. Bloody scenes unfolded throughout Shangjing Li as the Surveillance Bureau and the Sitting Oblivion Dao went all out, fighting each other with their lives on the line.

Shangjing soon became chaotic. There were people fighting one-on-one, and there were also those fighting the Sitting Oblivion Dao with the other members of the Surveillance Bureau.

The entire capital seemed to be on fire and was boiling from the inside out.

Li Huowang quietly observed the changes, and he unknowingly found himself at his destination. Wasting no time, Li Huowang jumped down his horse and crashed against the paper window of the house.

Li Huowang looked around and saw a family of three huddled together in fear. He raised his purple-tassel sword, but he couldn't bring himself to strike them down.

Swoosh!

A cold light shot into the house through the broken window.

Clang!

Sparks flew as Li Huowang smacked the object away with his

sword.

"This is mine! Get the hell out of here!" Li Huowang shouted with bloodshot eyes. Then, he turned around and looked at the wife of the family. He put away his sword and took out a dagger from his bag of torture tools.

"Don't worry; I'm not going to kill you. However, I need to see what's beneath your face to make sure that you're not a Sitting Oblivion Dao member. I'm going to heal you afterward, so don't worry."

A heart-wrenching scream echoed. Afterward, Li Huowang put down a piece of silver on the table and stepped out of the house. There was both good news and bad news—the good news was that the woman wasn't a Sitting Oblivion Dao member, while the bad news was that the woman wasn't a Sitting Oblivion Dao member!

Wooden planks creaked as Li Huowang somersaulted onto a snow-covered roof. He soon found himself at the highest point of the roof, and he looked around, sweeping his gaze across the chaotic Shangjing.

If hell had eighteen levels, then the current Shangjing would be at the bottom of it. The members of the Surveillance Bureau and the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao darting across the rooftops spared not even a glance at the commoners.

Why would they spare a glance to mere commoners when the latter were uninvolved in the fight? The commoners' actions wouldn't matter at this point, as whatever they would do or not do were predetermined.

Perhaps they were obstructing the way of both the Surveillance Bureau and Sitting Oblivion Dao members, but many civilians were losing their lives at the moment.

Li Huowang was supposed to look for the Strayed One Bei Feng, but his mind was abuzz from the heart-wrenching screams and scenes all over him, and he couldn't quite silence his mind.

Boom!

A towering building abruptly erupted into flames. It resembled a massive torch and had replaced the missing moon in the sky, illuminating everything around it.

“What is human life to you?! What exactly is human life to you?! Though civilians, they're all living humans!” Li Huowang roared while pointing at the capital. He thought he had become quite ruthless and indifferent to life, but he still couldn't quite turn a blind eye to the massacre before him.

Li Huowang cursed for quite a while before going silent. A deep sense of powerlessness overwhelmed his heart. He couldn't even control himself, so how could he dare to even attempt to control the actions of others?

“*Sob...!*” A sobbing noise echoed next to Li Huowang. He turned around and saw that the voice had come from Jin Shanzhao, who was missing half of his body. He was pointing with an indignant look at the massacre, and bloody tears were streaming down his face. His mouth fluttered open as well, saying indecipherable words.

Another sobbing noise rang out just then. Li Huowang turned and saw the monk crying with his hands clasped together while chanting “Amitabha.”

“Hey! What are you doing, Boss Hong Zhong?! Time is of the essence! Forget about the rest; let's go find Boss Bei Feng!” Hong Zhong said.

Li Huowang cast a cold gaze upon Hong Zhong before casting his gaze on the headless Peng Longteng. Peng Longteng stood quietly like a statue while facing the city walls in the distance.

Li Huowang clenched his fists and punched himself twice to calm his tumultuous heart.

Swoosh!

Just then, three figures rushed toward Li Huowang. They were

two women and a man, and their attire indicated that each of them was from different walks of life. Seven people were chasing after them, and their eyes gleamed upon seeing Li Huowang.

“Boss Hong Zhong, so you were here?! Hurry up and leave! We’ll cover you from behind!”

The three Sitting Oblivion Dao members came to a screeching halt. Then, they turned around to glare at the oncoming Surveillance Bureau members with resolute expressions.

1. a period of sixty years 🤔

Chapter 428 - Sitting Oblivion Dao

Li Huowang snapped back to reality and stared dumbstruck at the three figures. The next moment, blood surged to his brain, and he roared, "This is all your fault, you bastards!"

Clang!

Li Huowang gripped his sword with one hand and kicked off of the roof tiles to rush toward the three Sitting Oblivion Dao members with their backs facing him.

A whistling noise echoed from behind them, and the Sitting Oblivion Dao member that Li Huowang had chosen to attack dodged to his left by dividing his body into two, narrowly avoiding the attack.

He looked at Li Huowang in astonishment with his head upside-down. "Boss Hong Zhong, stop fooling around, will you?! They're not going to believe you anymore. Hurry up and leave! We'll cover you!"

The illusion Hong Zhong approached Li Huowang as well, and he sounded serious as he said, "He's right. This isn't the time for fooling around. It's more important for you to retreat."

"Yeah, right!" Li Huowang slashed out. The sharp sword streaked across the bloodied face of the Sitting Oblivion Dao member, which had no visible skin on it. However, nothing strange happened.

Just then, the members of the Surveillance Bureau finally caught up. A purple-robed Daoist took out two fist-sized triangular banners and inserted them into his neck. Then, his mouth fluttered open as he chanted an incantation.

He also drew a massive Bagua array in the air with his fingers. A wave of transparent ripple would spread outward every time the purple-robed Daoist's fingers stroked the air.

The purple-robed Daoist slapped the array on the roof tiles and exclaimed, "Raise your heads and witness! Bow down and listen! Above are the upper trigrams; below are the lower trigrams! The Three Pure Ones have vested me with authority to execute orders!"

Immediately afterward, loud cracking noises erupted as the tiles and the beams of the house where everyone was standing broke apart. Moments later, everyone fell down the house and landed on the ground.

A huge inky black Five Elements Bagua appeared beneath everyone, trapping the three Sitting Oblivion Dao members and Li Huowang. The masked members of the Surveillance Bureau appeared and stood around the array, staring at them vigilantly.

A Sitting Oblivion Dao member gnashed his teeth. He stomped and rushed toward Li Huowang. "Boss Hong Zhong! Leave quickly!"

Swoosh!

Li Huowang lifted his sword and severed his hands. Under the dumbstruck gaze of the Sitting Oblivion Dao member, a black tentacle wrapped around Li Huowang's bronze coin sword and chopped off his head.

The remaining two members landed right next to Li Huowang before they could do anything else. The Five Elements Bagua array sprang into action, rising like a net and trapping them inside of it.

Li Huowang was furious upon realizing that the Surveillance Bureau had trapped him along with the Sitting Oblivion Dao members. He couldn't help but chide them inwardly for being so incompetent.

"What the hell are you doing?! I said I'm not a Sitting Oblivion Dao member!" Li Huowang roared. He used his left fingernail and tore open his entire face by the chin.

Unfortunately, the Surveillance Bureau didn't believe Li Huowang's action to establish his innocence. Instead, the disturbed Surveillance Bureau members attacked Li Huowang with renewed vigor.

The purple-robed Daoist reached behind him and pulled out a yellow banner from his neck. Then, he hurled the yellow banner at Li Huowang. The pole grew longer in the air, and it moved as agilely as a snake as it pierced the three Sitting Oblivion Dao Members, stringing them together as if it were a skewer

A Surveillance Bureau member gestured, and several dark green talismans flew over and landed on the foreheads of the Sitting Oblivion Dao members, immobilizing them completely.

The seven members of the Surveillance Bureau relaxed at the sight. The Sitting Oblivion Dao members had finally been suppressed.

A hunchbacked Surveillance Bureau member holding a banner was about to speak, but the meatballs that had been strung together abruptly stirred.

“How many times must I repeat myself?! I’m not from the Sitting Oblivion Dao!” Li Huowang roared.

Under their astonished gazes, black and sticky tentacles burrowed out from Li Huowang and lifted them up. A breeze lifted the talisman on Li Huowang’s forehead, revealing a bloodthirsty gaze underneath.

“Kill!” A surge of hot blood rushed from Li Huowang to Li Sui’s tentacles, and Li Sui’s tentacles swelled significantly in an instant. The meatball was raised up high, and it swept toward the Surveillance Bureau members.

The Surveillance Bureau members ran to retreat, but Li Sui shattered Li Huowang's ribs and thrust them into the latter's lungs.

The Surveillance Bureau members clutched their chests, revealing agonized looks along with Li Huowang. Just as they were

recovering from the excruciating pain, Li Sui flew toward the temples of two Surveillance Bureau members.

The purple-robed Daoist died instantly, and the Bagua on the ground dimmed.

Li Huowang could move once again. Li Huowang ignored the two people who had been strung up with him. He tore off the talisman on his forehead and glared murderously at the Surveillance Bureau members. He silently endured the intense pain and rushed toward them.

“How many times do I have to repeat myself?! I’m not from the damned Sitting Oblivion Dao!”

They weren't Li Huowang's match even without the Bagua, so without the Bagua, Li Huowang made quick work of the Surveillance Bureau members. Of course, Li Sui had contributed massively to that as well along with the Sitting Oblivion Dao members.

The hunchbacked Surveillance Bureau member staggered backward as the white banner in his hand split into a thousand pieces.

“A-All right! I believe you! You’re not from the Sitting Oblivion Dao!” the hunchbacked Surveillance Bureau member exclaimed.

There was a flash of white light, and a sword pierced the hunchback's mouth. The sword emerged from his nape and pinned him to the wall behind him.

Li Huowang stared at the desperate eyes of the hunchback. He gripped the sword tightly and put all of his strength into the sword hilt before tearing open a hole in the wall. The hunchback’s eyes glazed over, and he collapsed powerlessly to the ground while holding the hilt of Li Huowang's sword.

The Surveillance Bureau members had been annihilated by Li Huowang.

“Boss Hong Zhong is so powerful!”

“Of course, he would be powerful! Otherwise, why are we calling him 'Boss Hong Zhong,' while we're mere pawns?”

Li Huowang ignored the cheers behind him and pulled out his sword from the hunchback's mouth. Then, he sheathed the sword behind him. Afterward, he grabbed the banner sticking out of him and pulled it out slowly.

The remaining two Sitting Oblivion Dao members finally regained their freedom, and they took turns complimenting Li Huowang.

However, Li Huowang drew his sword once again and pointed it at them.

“Where is the Strayed One Bei Feng?!”

Chapter 429 - Bei Feng

“Ah? Strayed One Bei Feng? Boss Hong Zhong, why are you looking for him?” asked a Sitting Oblivion Dao member, who was dressed like a beggar.

“Where is Bei Feng right now?!” Li Huowang asked. The purple-tassel sword blurred briefly before approaching the neck of the beggar-looking Sitting Oblivion Dao member.

“Ah, we’re all from the same family here; why resort to violence? Boss Hong Zhong, I can answer you. Bei Feng and the others should be at the eastern gate of the imperial palace. Their plan is to go and see what the Liang Kingdom’s emperor is up to. The Three Officials and Four Joys are there as well.”

The eastern gate of the imperial palace. Li Huowang thought. Then, he flicked his wrist, and the head of the beggar-like Sitting Oblivion Dao member fell to the ground. A dull thud echoed afterward as the headless corpse fell with a dull thud.

Li Huowang stared at the last remaining Sitting Oblivion Dao member among the three and asked, “I’ll ask you one more time. Where is Bei Feng right now?”

The woman stared wide-eyed at her fallen comrade, and tears welled up in her eyes as she cried out, “Boss Hong Zhong, why are you doing this? We... had no intentions of harming you at all!”

Li Huowang grew furious upon seeing her tearful and pitiful visage. He kicked her down, and the sharp sword sliced open her face from her chin, revealing a bloody mess underneath that resembled an orchid flower^[1].

“Ha, a flower tile? All right, let’s see what tricks you have up your sleeve, Sitting Oblivion Dao! Let me ask you again—where is Bei Feng right now?!” Li Huowang roared and squeezed the

woman's neck with both hands.

"Boss Bei Feng.. and the others.. are really at the eastern gate of the imperial palace. I..." Lan Hua stammered, gasping for air.

Li Huowang squeezed even harder, and Lan Hua struggled violently.

Her struggle eventually weakened, but she refused to beg for mercy. Just as she took her last breath, she brushed her head gently against the bulging veins on Li Huowang's hand.

Her grotesque face showed nary a trace of fear or despair. Instead, she seemed to admire Li Huowang. Lan Hua then used her final breath to mutter, "Mountains have trees, and trees have branches... My heart celebrates you, but you do not know..."

Lan Hua went limp, and her grotesque flower face withered gradually.

"Huff.. huff.. huff..." Li Huowang breathed in ragged pants. Li Sui's tentacles tore a fabric from the clothes of a nearby corpse to wipe away the blood from Li Huowang's face. *The Sitting Oblivion Dao members are really annoying. Do they have to make me feel so disgusted, even in their final moments? They know how to perform a convincing act as well. It was so convincing that I... I-I almost wavered!*

Li Huowang took a deep breath. He was still somewhat skeptical of Lan Hua's words. Still, he decided to see for himself whether the Strayed One Bei Feng was at the eastern gate of the imperial palace.

Things were getting chaotic outside, and he needed to pick up the pace. He had to reach the Strayed One Bei Feng before the latter escaped or was killed.

Li Huowang bent down to pick up a human face from the ground. He was planning on sticking it onto his face when he suddenly stopped. *Hold on, is it even a good idea to keep wearing Er Jiu's face?*

Li Huowang looked around. Then, he bent down and picked up

Lan Hua's face. The next moment, he applied it over his face as if it were a face mask. Afterward, Li Huowang secured the edges with some nails from his bag of torture tools.

In the blink of an eye, Li Huowang's appearance changed into that of another person. Since he was going to act like someone else, then he had to do it thoroughly. Li Huowang burned his red Daoist robe and wore the clothes of a nearby corpse.

Li Huowang scavenged a total of six swords from the nearby corpses before pushing open the wooden door of the house. After getting his bearings, Li Huowang jumped onto a terrified horse on the street and led it toward the palace.

The emperor of Great Liang resides in the palace, so the palace is definitely the most heavily guarded place throughout the Liang Kingdom. Li Huowang captured two Sitting Oblivion Dao members while he was on his way to the palace. He asked them questions to confirm the information that he had obtained. One of the two was unwilling to speak, while the other confirmed the legitimacy of Li Huowang's information.

Once Li Huowang was close enough to the palace, he jumped onto a roof and observed the eastern gate in the distance. It seemed that a great battle had broken out over there, as there were people falling to the snowy ground.

Li Huowang approached cautiously with his head lowered. The people fighting in the distance varied in strength, but it was obvious that the ones inside the palace were the imperial guards, while those outside were the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

These Sitting Oblivion Dao members had different appearances and attires, making it difficult to differentiate them from each other, much less guess whether the Strayed One Bei Feng was among them or not.

The Sitting Oblivion Dao members sat down to chant an incantation, but an unbelievably accurate arrow struck them in the

forehead, forcing the others to stand up and retreat.

Li Huowang remained calm in the face of the tense situation, and he swept his gaze across the Sitting Oblivion Dao, looking for his target.

Is it him? No, no... Li Huowang could still remember the information he had obtained from the Surveillance Bureau before. The Strayed One Bei Feng could swap bodies with someone else. With that in mind, Li Huowang shifted his gaze away from the Sitting Oblivion Dao and stared at the palace.

The imperial guards fought valiantly, and they were being assisted by figures wearing green masks. Overall, there wasn't anything unusual.

Li Huowang observed silently, waiting for any changes to the situation.

Soon, the gates of the palace swung open, and an imperial guard wearing a helmet emerged. He was waving at the Sitting Dao Oblivion members outside. The Sitting Oblivion Dao members were overjoyed at the sight, and they barged into the palace.

The situation quickly became even more chaotic.

Is that him? Is that the Strayed One Bei Feng? Li Huowang's heart pounded as he stared intently at the imperial guard, who had opened the palace gates and allowed the Sitting Oblivion Dao members entry into the palace grounds.

The imperial guard seemed to have sensed something, and he glanced in Li Huowang's direction before turning around and walking into the palace grounds.

Boom!

The snow around Li Huowang flew high into the air as he projected his illusion out of sight. Then, he stepped on the roof tiles and jumped roof after roof. Li Huowang eventually found himself at the eastern gates, and he discovered that the skirmish had ended in favor of the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

The ajar gate covered in blood was proof of the deadly battle.

Bei Feng is definitely inside! Li Huowang picked up the pace and made his way into the palace grounds. Many people had noticed the commotion here, and they'd rushed down the blood-stained path to reach the palace grounds. Unfortunately, it was impossible to tell whether they were from the Sitting Oblivion Dao or the Surveillance Bureau.

Li Huowang followed closely behind them and entered the palace. The palace had a complicated layout with many winding paths. However, Li Huowang didn't need a map, as the bloodstains and the signs of struggle on the ground guided him to the right path.

Li Huowang would sometimes stumble upon giant faces on the crimson walls of the corridor, and the faces were similar to those outside the palace. They seemed made out of bronze, and some of them were even adorned with verdigris[2].

The faces were square with hollowed eyes, triangular nose bridges, and large ears. The entire palace appeared particularly solemn and majestic beneath their solemn, quiet gazes.

Li Huowang discovered that the bloodstains, signs of struggle, and bloody footprints were becoming fewer and fewer as he went deeper into the palace. Soon, he caught a glimpse of a golden light shining in the distant corner up ahead.

Li Huowang cautiously turned the corner and was stupefied.

He saw nothing but gold. The distant hall was literally made out of gold. The bricks, the ceiling, the walls, the statue of beasts, the furniture, and even the ornaments were made out of gold.

1. a tile in mahjong 📖

2. a bright bluish-green encrustation formed by atmospheric oxidation 📖

Chapter 430 - Golden Palace

Li Huowang stood still, staring wide-eyed at everything in front of him. He had always held an indifferent attitude toward wealth. However, he still couldn't help but feel incredibly shocked upon seeing a golden palace—a palace made out of gold.

Despite the lavishness, the golden palace still looked solemn and sacred.

The falling snowflakes disappeared slowly as they landed on the palace.

They're all inside... Li Huowang stared at the bloodstains on the distant golden bricks. Li Huowang walked in that direction with his illusion.

Li Huowang stepped on the golden bricks and stared intently at the golden palace as he walked by himself in the palace of gold. The sight was extremely surreal, making Li Huowang feel as if he were dreaming. He couldn't help but wonder how much gold they had to use to build such a huge golden palace in the Liang Kingdom.

Li Huowang soon found himself standing at the entrance of the golden palace. There was a couplet written on the left side of the entrance that said, "The imperial decree has been established in the nine regions, yet it remains difficult. How can it not be respected?"

Li Huowang turned to the right and saw a couplet that said, "May the heavens' heart bless one with virtue. May one always be under the heaven's protection. May one seek peace."

Li Huowang looked up at the huge plaque above and saw shimmering golden characters that said, "Golden Throne Room."

The Golden Throne Room? Li Huowang frowned and stepped

forward. He couldn't care less about the palace's name. His top priority was to find the Strayed One Bei Feng.

The Golden Throne Room's interior was spacious, and it was desolate except for the giant columns adorned with six-clawed golden dragons. It was so quiet that even Li Huowang's low footsteps echoed quite loudly in the space.

How did those Sitting Oblivion Dao members come here so fast? Also, why did they even decide to come to the Liang Kingdom's palace? Li Huowang wondered as he hurried toward the six doors at the back of the hall.

Soon, he arrived at his destination, but the six doors had vanished inexplicably!

Huh? Am I getting lost? I'm getting lost in the imperial palace? Li Huowang's heart skipped a beat.

"Dad..." Li Sui said suddenly.

"What's wrong? This isn't the time to speak about random things."

"Dad, there are words written on your arm."

Li Huowang raised his arms and saw words carved with a knife on his left arm's underside that said, *"This is a bizarre place where you'll end up losing your memories over time. Carve your thoughts with a knife!"*

There was no way Li Huowang would mistake his own handwriting for someone else's handwriting. However, he couldn't remember when he had carved such words on his own arm.

Hold on! This isn't my first rodeo! Li Huowang was about to take the knife to carve the words "Muddled One," but he was stunned upon realizing that it had already been carved on his arm.

There were more words written next to the word "Muddled One," and they said, "He's nearby! Hurry up and find him! I've been here for half an hour now!"

Li Huowang felt a shiver down his spine. It had only been a few

minutes since he entered the Golden Throne Room, so why were the words saying that he had been here for thirty minutes rather than just a few minutes?

Just then, Li Huowang felt a sharp pain coming from his thigh. He looked down and saw a wound that was so deep that he could see his bone through the wound.

I'm injured? When did I get injured? Li Huowang gnashed his teeth and tore open his flesh. Then, he found a chunk of his thigh bone missing. It seemed that he had used that part to divine.

Obviously, Li Huowang had used divination to find the Muddled One, but Li Huowang had no idea when he had done that. Li Huowang observed the bone closely and memorized the twisted shapes on the chunk that had been carved out.

He carved those shapes on his hand and began his search throughout the Golden Throne Room.

Li Huowang saw more and more writing on his arms.

"The southeast corner has nothing."

"Nothing behind the dragon pillar on the east; no need to search it again."

After a few laps, Li Huowang stopped in the middle of the Golden Throne Room.

The center of the Golden Throne Room had remained without any writings about it. Li Huowang looked at the familiar patterns on the golden bricks and tightened his grip on his sword hilt before thrusting the purple-tassel sword into the ground.

Gold was precious, but it was relatively softer than other metals. It was as soft as mud against the purple-tassel sword. Li Huowang pried open the golden brick and peeked inside to see that the compact soil had been pushed over to one side. Then, he saw a building with red tiles through the crack.

The buried building was small; it was about the same height as a person, and it seemed to be made out of clay. Li Huowang

decisively raised the bronze coin sword in his hand and shook it before chanting a quick incantation.

The roof of the small temple was lifted, and a familiar face appeared in front of Li Huowang. It was the Muddled One that Ji Xiang and the rest of them had captured after much difficulty!

The Muddled One's limbs were bent and stitched together with gold threads. No, it wasn't just his eyes. His mouth and his orifices had been stitched with golden threads, and he became a Muddled One stick.

The Muddled One was covered with intertwining golden words except for his head and chest. Overall, the Muddled One looked as if he were wearing a golden robe riddled with swastikas. The swastikas seemed to have seeped out of the Muddled One, as everything around the Muddled One had been riddled with swastikas.

Li Huowang gestured with his bronze coin sword again. The bronze coin sword wrapped around the Muddled One, and Li Huowang pulled hard.

The corpse flew away from the small temple, and the entire Golden Throne Room seemed to dim slightly as the Muddled One was removed from the swastikas.

Li Huowang looked down at himself and sighed in relief upon realizing that there weren't any new words on himself. Clearly, the crisis had passed. Unfortunately, Li Huowang had already wasted a lot of time, so he couldn't afford to waste any more time.

He stared deeply at the Muddled One before walking toward the distant exit.

Li Huowang no longer encountered any issues, and he successfully walked out of the golden palace. He was about to sigh in relief when he clapped his eyes on the golden palaces in the distance. *Wait a minute, why are there multiple golden palaces? And could there be a Muddled One in every golden palace?*

"There are Muddled Ones in those palaces, but not all of them have one," Hong Zhong said, breaking his long silence. "These golden palaces have been arranged to form a constellation array. I can't tell which specific constellation, though. Hehe, it seems that the Muddled One you worked so hard to find ended up becoming a part of an array."

Li Huowang's expression became ugly at Hong Zhong's words. A dangerous Muddled One ended up becoming a part of a mere array. *What exactly were they planning to do?*

Li Huowang ignored everything else and picked up the pace. Things were getting troublesome now. The imperial palace was teeming with danger, and Bei Feng would most likely lose his life. Li Huowang couldn't let anything happen to Bei Feng!

Li Huowang used his experience to avoid the nearby golden palaces. He walked only along the empty areas. In the face of a dead end, he'd dig a hole in the golden wall. It was unknown whether Li Huowang's method was working or if the people ahead of him had cleared a path for him, but Li Huowang didn't encounter anything bizarre for a while.

Li Huowang continued moving north while following the bloodstains on the ground. He soon walked past a high wall, and his keen ears immediately heard chanting and sounds of metal clashing against metal from behind the golden walls in the distance.

That's it! Li Huowang exclaimed inwardly. He couldn't contain his excitement as he hurried toward the noises. Li Huowang made holes in the golden walls ahead of him, and Li Huowang soon carved open a hole in the final golden wall and walked through it.

The first thing that caught his attention was a black and white vertical pupil in the extremely low clouds in the sky. The black and white vertical pupil had been surrounded by a bronze hexagram, and there were sixty-four trigrams orbiting it.

Chapter 431 - Mahjong Tiles

Li Huowang stared at the black and white vertical pupil in the sky.

As the trigrams shifted, the colossal black-and-white vertical pupil looked left and right. It descended slowly amidst the dark clouds. The eye contained no emotions, and it emitted an oppressive aura reminiscent of chaos.

Chaos wasn't supposed to be tangible nor visible, but Li Huowang was certain that the eye was one of the eyes of "Chaos."

A strange chanting echoed from the eye.

Li Huowang grimaced in pain upon hearing it, and he immediately covered his ears. The chanting was familiar, and he managed to hear it even though he was a hundred Li away from Shangjing at the time. It turned out that the chanting was coming from the colossal black-and-white vertical pupil!

At the time, Li Huowang heard light chanting, but now that he was standing right in front of the eye, the chanting had grown louder by several orders of magnitude.

Li Huowang looked around and saw quite a few corpses with their hands covering their ears as they died.

What is that eye? Is that a Siming? No, if it were a Siming, I would've seen it at Baiyu Capital! What is that?! Did the Liang Kingdom's emperor summon it? Is that the true nature of the arrays? What is he thinking of doing with that?!

No, this is none of my business! I need to find the Strayed One Bei Feng first!

Li Huowang covered his ears and looked up ahead.

A massive golden tree stood in the distance. The golden tree was skinny, but its towering size made it seem as though it was capable of holding up the heavens itself.

There was a group of people fighting around the golden tree. Li Huowang only managed to stare at them briefly, as he had to stop due to the throbbing headache.

The chanting was so oppressive that he couldn't focus on anything.

This can't keep going! I won't be able to get close to them at this rate.

Li Huowang took out a small pike and thrust it into his left ear. Then, he gave it a quick twist, destroying his left eardrum. Afterward, he tore off a chunk of his robes and stuffed the fabric into his right ear.

it was a gruesome method, but it worked. The chanting was no longer as loud as earlier. It was still loud, but Li Huowang could finally function properly, and he could focus better than earlier.

Li Huowang gnashed his teeth and walked up to the golden tree. The figures in the distance became clearer as he approached, and he realized that rather than leaves, the trees were covered in tiny golden dragons.

The dragons weren't living beings, but they appeared to be in distress. Their scales were torn outwards while twisted spikes grew outwards from within them. The twisted spikes sticking out of the dragons were riddled with reverse swastikas.[\[1\]](#)

The golden dragons intertwined chaotically, and each dragon head donned a mask that had the same design as the colossal faces on the palace walls.

The masks allowed the dragons to have human faces, which was a bizarre sight. An observatory was near the top of the tree, and the branches seemed to be diverging from the tree from that point onward.

Li Huowang could see a few people in the observatory. Li Huowang ignored the eunuchs holding the horsetail whisks and focused on the man wearing yellow robes.

Li Huowang instantly deduced him to be the Emperor of the Liang Kingdom.

The emperor was staring quietly at the enemies down below

The emperor's face was obscured by the tassels[2] of his crown, so Li Huowang couldn't see the former's face. The tassels were made from golden beads, and they completely blocked the emperor's face from any prying eyes outside.

Where is Bei Feng? Li Huowang's eyes landed on the base of the golden tree.

The people below were trying their best to climb up to the observatory using the golden dragon as footholds.

Just then, a group of eunuchs clad in black jumped down and used their weapons to fight the encroaching enemies. The eunuch's feet were tied with a rope, which anchored them to the tree.

The faces of the people trying to climb the tree would distort from time to time, all thanks to the strange chanting, and the distortion revealed the mahjong tiles on their faces.

At the sight, Li Huowang confirmed they were Sitting Oblivion Dao members.

For some reason, the two sides seemed wary of going all out. They seemed to be waiting for something.

Li Huowang sat on the ground and concentrated on finding Bei Feng. He could still remember how the Strayed One Bei Feng was capable of changing bodies. With that in mind, Li Huowang dared not to act rashly. He bid his time and endured the chanting to search for the Strayed One Bei Feng among the crowd of Sitting Oblivion Dao members.

Li Huowang swept his gaze across the crowd and soon found the four Bei Fengs.

Wait, four Bei Fengs? Li Huowang thought that he had made a mistake during his counting, so he counted once more and saw that there were indeed four Bei Fengs, whose faces were distorted due to the strange chanting.

Fine, it doesn't matter even if there are four of them. But... how am I supposed to find the correct one? Li Huowang was bewildered. The two parties were holding back, so Li Huowang knew he'd simply die if he were to go there right now.

What should I do? Should I ask Zhuge Yuan for help?

Zhuge Yuan's face popped up in Li Huowang's mind, and he instantly hesitated. He couldn't push his friend into the flames for his own interest. Moreover, this place was just too dangerous.

I should keep waiting... Li Huowang decided.

Meanwhile, the emperor's voice echoed from the observatory.

“You fools are not satisfied yet? Do you really think that I would have no idea that you're here? I've seen through your movements. Even if the two Shai Zi were here along with the rest of my enemies, my plan would remain unstoppable!”

The emperor's voice boomed like thunder, and everyone reacted in their own way to it. Some cowered and quivered, while the weaker ones among the crowd retreated immediately. However, the Sitting Oblivion Dao members weren't afraid. They even laughed and taunted the emperor.

Some of them even copied the emperor's voice but in a jeering tone.

“*Hmph!*” A cold snort echoed, and a shockwave erupted from the golden tree.

The Emperor of the Liang Kingdom moved aside and said, “Thank you, Imperial Preceptor.”

The Imperial Preceptor was an old man, and he was holding a sword carved with the Twenty-Eight Mansions. [3] The golden walls on the west started trembling as he stood in the observatory.

Li Huowang heard a low rumbling and turned around to see that the golden walls on the west had crumbled. Soon, Zhuge Yuan appeared in front of everyone else.

Zhuce Yuan's expression was grim as he held his brush, and he was running swiftly as if he were chasing someone from the Qi Kingdom.

Just then, people appeared out of thin air in front of Zhuge Yuan.

Shockingly, the people had mahjong tiles as faces; they were Sitting Oblivion Dao members!

To make matters worse, more and more people materialized in front of Zhuge Yuan.

Li Huowang's heart sank at the sight. *Wait! This is impossible! There are too many of them! These mahjong tiles are more numerous than the mahjong tiles I've known for so long!*

Some of the mahjong tiles were weird; mahjong patterns depicting the plum, orchid, bamboo, chrysanthemum, spring, summer, autumn, and winter were already weird, but there were even tiles resembling the God of Prosperity as well as cats and mice.

Those tiles didn't exist among the mahjong tiles that Li Huowang had known for so long!

“Hehehe. Why do you think they don't exist? They don't exist in the Liang Kingdom, but they *do* exist in the Qi Kingdom,” Hong Zhong's illusion said, chuckling.

1. In hinduism, reverse swastika (anti-clockwise), represents the night or the tantric aspects of Kali, while the normal swastika (clockwise) represents the sun, prosperity, and good luck. 🙌

2. An emperor's crown usually has tassels on the front and back to block their faces 🙌

3. A part of the Chinese Constellation System 🙌

Translator's Thoughts

So here's an image of an Emperor's Crown. Notice the tassels on the front and back used to hide the Emperor's face to a certain extent. I guess the crown in this world has more tassels to completely block the Emperor's face



Chapter 432 - Both Sides

"Hehehe. Why do you think they don't exist? They don't exist in the Liang Kingdom, but they *do* exist in the Qi Kingdom."

As soon as Hong Zhong's words fell, an old woman tumbled out in front of Zhuge Yuan.

Li Huowang's pupils constricted upon seeing her as she was familiar to him. The old woman was the Bei Feng whom Zhuge Yuan had sent over to the Great Qi.

The old woman stared blankly into space. Moments later, her eyes sharpened, shining brightly at the sight before her. Then, her wrinkles disappeared as her face distorted.

At first, her head transformed into a Bei Feng mahjong tile, but the distortion continued until her rectangular transformed into a square made out of flesh—a die made out of flesh!

The Bei Feng had become a legendary Shai Zi[1]!

Shai Zi looked around with his singular red eye. His gaze soon landed on the Emperor of the Liang Kingdom standing in the observatory at the crown of the golden tree.

Shai Zi sounded condescending as he said, "Do you really think that you've seen through all our movements? How about this? Have you ever thought that I'd use a Twisted One to bring the entire Sitting Oblivion Dao of the Great Qi over here?"

"I'm sure you're capable of fighting an entire mahjong set, but what about two?"

Li Huowang's pupils constricted in horror. The other Sitting Oblivion Dao members and the Bei Feng at the time had simply been putting up an act!

Li Huowang was no longer so sure whether Zhuge Yuan had defeated them or if they had decided to lose on purpose.

It turned out that they had only one goal—to make Zhuge Yuan transform them into the people of the Qi Kingdom! Once they became people of the Great Qi, it wouldn't be difficult for them to contact the Sitting Oblivion Dao of the Great Qi.

The Great Qi was real; it wasn't fake at all.

Li Huowang was in awe of the Sitting Oblivion Dao's plan.

Meanwhile, the black-and-white vertical pupil trembled and split into three as the trigrams around it spun even faster. The emperor and his group dared not to waste any time upon seeing two mahjong sets down below.

The chanting became stronger and louder. Moreover, it was no longer just chanting; it contained howls and bellows, which reverberated loudly throughout the battlefield.

Li Huowang's head throbbed, and it was so painful that he felt like his face was going to melt away. Soon, the chanting reached a crescendo becoming an inscrutable chanting forbidden for mortals to hear!

Everyone's Ten Emotions and Eight Sufferings were on the verge of collapse!

Bai Lingmiao's Ten Emotions and Eight Sufferings had been slightly influenced by the killing intent of the purple-tassel sword, and her behavior had changed completely.

Li Huowang couldn't imagine what would happen to someone like Bai Lingmiao under the strange, inscrutable chanting.

The battle was about to begin, and Li Huowang started to get anxious. He gnashed his teeth, forcefully enduring the new pain as he focused on finding the Strayed One Bei Feng. Unfortunately, Li Huowang had to sift through eight Bei Fengs to find the Strayed One Bei Feng, which meant his task had gotten even harder.

Loud thuds echoed as the Sitting Oblivion Dao members sat in a circle around the golden tree. Moments later, they started chanting.

The four Shai Zis sat on the four cardinal directions.

Their faces had the following numbers—four, two, five, and one.

“Sit in Oblivion and forget the worldly desires to obtain the ultimate Dao! Real beings must cultivate their inner-self through Sitting in Oblivion; follow the flow and nurture oneself; follow the flow and cultivate naturally. Abandon the forms and attain truth.”

The Sitting Oblivion’s voices dispersed the guttural chanting that echoed loudly overhead. The two voices intertwined, and the space around them quivered ever so slightly. Both people and the golden tree started distorting a well.

The golden bricks of the crumbled walls floated and arranged themselves into a golden statue with a side profile of a smiling Yang Na. The sight made Li Huowang gnash his teeth. *Shit! It’s going to be dangerous, but... I must find that Strayed One Bei Feng and capture him alive!*

Li Huowang soon came up with a good idea and took out his dagger. He opened his robes and cut open his torso to retrieve his collarbone. Then, he used a talisman paper and started drawing on the talisman.

Casting divination on stronger cultivators was extremely dangerous. In addition to being useless, the target could reverse the divination and track down the caster as well.

However, Li Huowang needed that effect right now.

Li Huowang pressed the yellow talisman on his bloody collarbone, and someone reacted in the distance even before the bone had cracked open. One of the female Bei Fengs raised her head and stared in Li Huowang’s direction.

Found her! Li Huowang became invisible and started walking on the floating golden bricks. He looked as if he were walking on water as he closed in slowly on the Strayed One Bei Feng.

The others did not notice Li Huowang closing in on them

because both parties were already fighting each other. The Surveillance Bureau and the Sitting Oblivion Dao couldn't spare any effort to care about Li Huowang.

Li Huowang saw the wizened Imperial Preceptor swinging his sword. The Imperial Preceptor's robes billowed even in the absence of wind. Just then, several stars manifested amidst the low-hanging dark clouds.

A man clad in red robes walked out from the crowd, and three people stuck closely to him.

Li Huowang assumed that the three were the Deputy Chiefs of the Surveillance Bureau while the red-robed man had to be the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau.

Six wrinkled arms extended from the man's red robes. The wrinkled arms had long fingernails, and they seemed capable of moving by themselves. The topmost pair was making finger gestures for a chant, the middle pair was drawing runes, and the bottom pair was making seals.

The markedly distinct voices echoed from beneath the red robes, and they chanted an incantation harmoniously. The three voices were the voice of an old man, a grown man, and a young man.

"A day represents a world, with each world unfolding a white lotus. The lotus represents not the Buddha, nor is it a worldly treasure. One rides the phoenix and plucks its petals, but the hands become smoke. Unaware of one's body, one may find themselves atop the lotus leaf."

The Sitting Oblivion chanting became weaker once the Chief started chanting. The gold bricks stopped moving, and the strange chanting became dominant once again.

The black-and-white vertical pupil in the sky descended slightly. Under the gaze of the massive eye, some of the Sitting Oblivion Dao members seated at the edges exploded into a flurry of

lotus leaves before their fleshly bodies returned to Chaos.

Just as Li Huowang thought that another round of fighting would start, a deafening noise echoed. Li Huowang turned and saw the collapse of the golden tree.

The Sitting Oblivion Dao chuckled and laughed at the sight. Then, they swarmed the tree in droves and ran toward the observatory.

Thunderous booms echoed from the observatory, and the dark clouds up above filled slowly with lightning bolts. The battlefield instantly became chaotic as lightning rained down on the Sitting Oblivion Dao members.

This is my chance! Li Huowang didn't hesitate and ran toward the Strayed One Bei Feng.

The two factions fought each other with their lives at stake as the skies changed rapidly above them. One moment it was evening, and the next it was noon.

Li Huowang felt that he would eventually lose control of himself at this rate, and it was all thanks to the strange chanting. Truthfully speaking, however, Li Huowang had no idea who had the advantage in this fight.

Regardless, his determination remained firm, and his eyes never left the Strayed One Bei Feng.

The Strayed One Bei Feng was staring intently at the Emperor of the Liang Kingdom while the emperor himself was under the protection of the Surveillance Bureau's three deputy chiefs.

The next moment, the Strayed One Bei Feng collapsed on her knees and covered her distorted face in agony. A dark golden fluid was flowing out of her eyes. Just as a lightning bolt was about to hit her, a hand missing two fingers pulled her away.

"Are you fine?! Wait, you're injured!" Li Huowang shouted as he pulled Bei Feng away from the battlefield.

1. Shai Zi means Dice. They have a head resembling a Dice 📌

Translator's Thoughts

Here's a rare glimpse of Shai Zi's true form! Or did he show it to us on purpose ...? Credits to **Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin!**



Chapter 433 - Bei Feng

Li Huowang's heart pounded madly against his chest at the softness that filled his arms. The Strayed One Bei Feng was finally in his arms, and she was the key to getting rid of his hallucination. Li Huowang had been dreaming of this day since he discovered the Strayed One Bei Feng's existence.

Li Huowang's mind was filled with many wild thoughts, but he remained calm on the outside.

The Shai Zis didn't have any time to pay attention to what Li Huowang was doing, as they were too busy fighting the Imperial Preceptor and the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau.

When they were at the edge of the battlefield, the Strayed One Bei Feng finally realized that something was wrong.

"Wait, who are you?! Why are there nine Hong Zhongs?"

Li Huowang was about to explain when Bei Feng looked up and stared into his eyes.

"Please hear me out," Li Huowang said and was shocked to realize that his voice had become feminine. He looked up and saw himself holding his own arm. He had exchanged bodies with Bei Feng!

Upon seeing that Li Huowang had been trapped in her previous body, Bei Feng chuckled and playfully remarked, "Aiyaya~ So you're Hong Zhong? What's wrong? Did you get bored of playing as Hong Zhong and wanted to become Bei Feng for a few days? Sure, let me make your wish come true."

Li Huowang's body had just gotten stolen away from him, but he wasn't anxious at all as he said, "Do you really think that I didn't know about that ability of yours? My body doesn't belong to me alone. Suisui! Do it! She has taken my body away!"

Bei Feng was shocked. She was about to do something when a heart-wrenching pain shot up from her chest. Her sense of pain seemed to have been multiplied, as the pain coming from her chest was too much even for her to bear.

However, the changes weren't over just yet. Moments later, Li Sui's tentacles burst out of the orifices of Li Huowang's body including his eyes, mouth, nose, and ears.

Li Huowang had told Li Sui about his plan to seal Bei Feng's senses as soon as possible the moment she swapped bodies with Li Huowang. Li Huowang had learned of Bei Feng's ability from the documents in the Surveillance Bureau, so it wasn't strange that she had prepared a countermeasure against it.

Crackle!

Thunder crackled, and a stray lightning bolt almost struck Li Huowang. In response, he carried Bei Feng with him and ran away from the battlefield.

No one noticed their escape amidst the chaos, and Li Huowang was soon out of the battlefield. The battle became more intense, but Li Huowang didn't have the luxury to care about the ongoing battle. After all, he had already obtained what he wanted.

Li Huowang turned a corner and stopped to catch his breath. He looked at Bei Feng, who had stolen his body, and said, "All right. Suisui, remove your tentacles from her ears and mouth. I have to talk to her."

The tentacles sticking out of Bei Feng's mouth retracted.

Li Huowang stared at Bei Feng and calmed himself down before saying, "I don't care about the Sitting Oblivion Dao's plans. I will let you go as long as you give me what I want."

Bei Feng was not worried but impressed instead. "That's amazing. I didn't expect that you'd take advantage of the chaotic battle between us and the Surveillance Bureau. You truly deserve the name, Hong Zhong."

Li Huowang took a small flat needle from his bag of torture tools. Then, he grabbed Bei Feng's hand and thrust the needle in between Bei Feng's fingernail and finger.

Li Huowang flicked his wrist, and a grotesque noise echoed as the thin fingernail was torn away from the finger. Bei Feng bit her lips to withstand the pain, but her forehead was covered in beaded cold sweat.

"I've executed the Cang-Qiong Ascension three times, so my sense of pain has been heightened to the limits. Even a small scratch would hurt as much as losing an arm. I'm sure your time is as precious as mine, and I'm sure you don't want to experience an even stronger pain than that, do you?"

Li Huowang placed his finger on the belly button of his original body. Then, he thrust his finger into the belly button before pulling out something tubular and smooth.

"*Haha...*" Bei Feng was trembling from the pain, but she was smiling as she muttered, "These methods are reminiscent of the Ao Jing Sect. Are you from the Ao Jing Sect? Why have you come for us instead of looking for your god?"

Li Huowang gulped a mouthful of his saliva with great difficulty. His voice was even trembling as he said, "You're a Strayed One, right? I need to know how you got rid of your hallucination."

"*Hm?*" Bei Feng's voice was filled with confusion. "You went through all the trouble to ask me that? You could have just told me outright! I thought it was something serious, but you just wanted the cultivation method to cultivate the 'Truth'?"

"There was no need for you to go this far, as I would have told you if you had just asked me outright."

"What?" Li Huowang frowned in confusion.

"*Sigh.*" Bei Feng sighed, and her voice was filled with sadness. "I'm a Strayed One, so I know a Strayed One's pain. The pain of

being unable to differentiate between the two worlds. I'm more than happy to help a Strayed One escape that pain.

"It's just a shame that Strayed Ones are hard to come by."

Li Huowang's face twitched, and he refused to believe Bei Feng.

"You better tell me the cultivation method without lying. Otherwise, you're going to suffer!"

"Fine, fine. I'll tell you. Stop pulling me. This is your body, you know that, right? You'll have to get this back later. Anyway, you need to know some things first before you can start cultivating. First of all, you have to know why we have a hallucination."

"I already know that. It's because of the primordial breath."

"Oh? You know quite a bit about it. Then, I will continue my explanation. To get rid of your hallucination, you need to control your primordial breath first.

"However, you can't do it on your own. You need the help of the primordial breath's owner, Doulao."

"Wait!" Li Huowang exclaimed and glared at Bei Feng. "Why did you mention the Siming of the Sitting Oblivion Dao? Don't you dare attempt to fool me! Doulao Taiyin is the Siming that controls 'Lies'!"

Bei Feng sighed and explained, "What is the truth? What is a lie? Can you differentiate it? Everyone says that the Sitting Oblivion Dao cultivates 'Lies,' but it seems that they've forgotten to tell you that we cultivate the 'Truth' as well.

"Doulao is different from the other Simings. It's like a conjoined lotus in a pond. Doulao Taiyin controls 'Lies' while Doulao Taiyang controls 'Truth.'

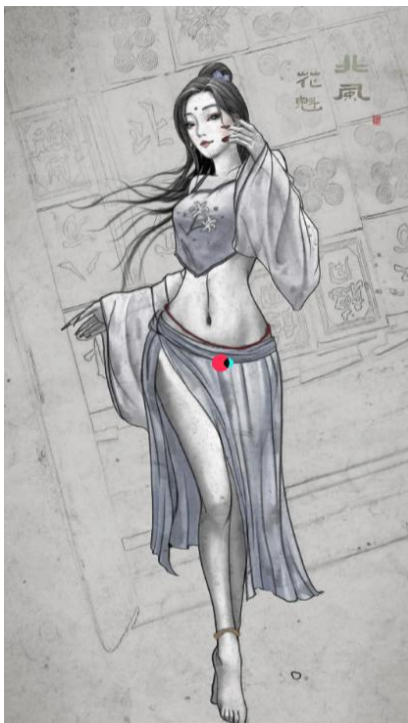
"The Heavenly Dao of Yin and Yang are markedly different from the other Daos. The other Daos either exist or they don't exist at all.

"However, the Dao of 'Truth' and the Dao of 'Lies' exist as one.

The other side of 'Truth' is 'Lies.' The opposite is true as well. Without 'Truth' there are no 'Lies,' and without 'Lies,' there is no 'Truth.' Do you understand?"

Translator's Thoughts

Ooooo Bei Feng is sexy. Credits to 格子的乱七
八糟 on douyin



Chapter 434 - Key

Li Huowang stared blankly at Bei Feng, who was still inside his body. All of a sudden, Li Huowang felt a bit lost. *The Sitting Oblivion Dao's Siming actually governs both 'Lies' and 'Truth'? Do I have to seek help from the Siming of the Sitting Oblivion Dao if I want to get rid of my hallucination?*

Li Huowang hesitated, but his experience in dealing with the Sitting Oblivion Dao members swiftly pulled him back to reality. "No, I don't trust you! You're lying! You just want to convert me into a Sitting Oblivion Dao member by making me make contact with Doulao Taiyin!"

Li Huowang trusted his gut feelings and mind more than Bei Feng's words.

"Why can't you believe me?" Bei Feng sighed and said, "There are fifty Heavenly Daos, and the Simings have already taken forty-three of them. The Simings with two Heavenly Daos aren't limited to our Doulao Taiyin and Doulao Taiyang.

"Have you not heard of that? It seems that your master has failed his duty."

Bei Feng was the captive, but she had the initiative.

Li Huowang frowned and stared at Bei Feng, contemplating who was the captive one between the two of them.

Could it be that she allowed herself to get captured just to tell me such lies?

Li Huowang really hated the feeling of not having the initiative. He had to seize the initiative, and he soon came up with an idea of how he could do that. He picked up a saw covered in dried blood and walked over to Bei Feng.

Li Huowang stared coldly at his own body as he dismantled it

slowly into smaller pieces amidst Bei Feng's incessant heart-wrenching screams.

Bei Feng fainted numerous times throughout the ordeal, but Li Huowang would always bring her back.

Li Huowang cycled through his torture tools a few times before putting down the saw and the hook covered in his own blood and flesh. Li Huowang started his questioning once again.

"Tell me how to get rid of the hallucination!" Li Huowang exclaimed, enunciating each word as clearly as possible.

Bei Feng was utterly exhausted from the torture, and she looked helpless as she muttered, "What do you want me to say? I told you the truth!"

Li Huowang didn't respond and rummaged through his bag of torture tools once again.

Bei Feng's expression changed, and she hurriedly cried out, "Wait, wait, wait! Since you can't believe my words, and you don't want to cultivate the 'Truth' as well, let's think about another idea. Why don't you just go ahead and leave with my body?

"The hallucination will not torture you, as that is my body. It's still a young body as well, so it's definitely better than this old body of yours, which is riddled with holes and wounds!"

Li Huowang looked down at his body and roared, "This is a female body! And I don't want anyone else's body as well! I want to live in my own body!"

"What's the difference between a man and a woman? The only difference between the two is sex! Stop being so stubborn. Your sex should be the least of your issues, considering how you're still under the influence of your hallucination."

Li Huowang smiled at Bei Feng's chiding. He glared coldly at her and said, "You're lying, aren't you? The Heavenly Dao and Yin Yang are fake, right? You don't have the cultivation method to cultivate the 'Truth'!

"Otherwise, you could've used your primordial breath against me! You could've easily fought back while I was torturing you. You used another method to suppress the hallucination instead of cultivating the "Truth"!"

Bei Feng was speechless. "What are you saying? Who told you that I'd become invincible upon cultivating the "Truth"? Do you really think there's free lunch in this world? The one who told you that had lied to you!"

Li Huowang no longer wanted to waste time. It was extremely difficult to extract information from Bei Feng. To make matters worse, the information was riddled with lies as well, so Li Huowang's efforts were useless here.

However, the Bei Feng in front of Li Huowang was indeed a Strayed One who had managed to suppress her hallucination. Li Huowang believed that she had another method.

Li Huowang had a treasure chest, and all he needed was the key to open it.

Li Huowang took out the gourd of wine that he always carried with him and opened it. Then, he shoved the alcohol into Bei Feng's throat.

"What are—" Bei Feng slumped to the ground mid-sentence.

Li Huowang knew himself the best. His sense of pain had been heightened to extreme heights, while his alcohol tolerance had plummeted to the abyss. The gourd contained wine with a high alcohol content, and it was strong enough to render Bei Feng unconscious for a long time.

Before Bei Feng could hit the ground, she trembled and stood up shakily. It was a weird sight, and it was like she had become a puppet being controlled by invisible threads.

Two eyeballs popped out of Bei Feng's belly button just then.

Bei Feng was asleep, so Li Sui took over the body. Li Sui's tentacles were all over Li Huowang, so he had no issues moving Li

Huowang's body. More accurately, it was a part of the process for Li Sui to take over Li Huowang's body.

“Suisui, follow me!” Li Huowang exclaimed. He prepared the Profound Records and his other weapons before moving slowly to somewhere.

“Dad, where are we going?”

“We need to find Zhuge Yuan! He has a treasure capable of forcing Bei Feng to tell nothing but the truth. We also need to save Zhuge Yuan. I really don't feel comfortable leaving him on this chaotic battlefield!”

Li Huowang crossed over the golden wall and returned to his original hiding spot. He looked around and was stunned to see a mighty conflagration in the distance. The golden tree had been set ablaze, and there was a river of gold on the floor.

The entire floor was filled with molten gold, and there was a large hole in the middle of the battlefield. Li Huowang looked closely and realized that the hole was originally a flat ground paved with golden tiles!

Heavily armored men were sprawled out in the hole. *It seems that the imperial guard has rushed here to protect the emperor.*

The black-and-white vertical pupil in the sky had descended even farther; the rolling clouds were like the brain of the colossal eye, which hovered just a few meters away from the ground!

Li Huowang stared at the distant figures and took a deep breath. Moments later, he rushed forward and soon saw Zhuge Yuan fighting effortlessly with his brush on the battlefield.

Li Huowang sighed in relief. Fortunately, Zhuge Yuan was extremely strong, or he would have died on the battlefield long ago. Zhuge Yuan's position also played an important role in his survival, as Zhuge Yuan was on the edge of the battlefield rather than in the middle of it.

Zhugue Yuan's position was great news to Li Huowang.

He wouldn't attract anyone's attention even if he were to drag Zhuge Yuan away.

Li Huowang dodged rocks, lightning, fire, poker cards, and mahjong tiles before finally getting close to Zhuge Yuan. Everything became calm the moment he got close enough to Zhuge Yuan—Li Huowang had arrived at the Great Qi.

Zhuge Yuan brandished his brush at the newcomer. “Bei Feng?!”

Translator's Thoughts

NEVERMIND ABORT ABORT. THIS IS
BEIFENG TRUE FORM. **Credits to** 格子的乱七八糟
on douyin

*Notice how her face resembles the word 北
for the north. I wonder what South (南) would
look like?



Chapter 435 - History

“Senior Zhuge, it’s me! Li Huowang!” Li Huowang pointed at his original body which was under Li Sui's control and recounted everything that happened.

Zhuge Yuan soon understood what was going on.

Li Huowang then urged, “Senior Zhuge, let's go ahead and leave! We cannot stay here for too long! The fight between the Surveillance Bureau of the Liang Kingdom and the two Sitting Oblivion Daos is too intense! You'll die here if you stay!”

Zhuge Yuan shook his head and pointed at the palace in front of him. “No. We're already halfway through the coup. We cannot stop now.”

Li Huowang's experience differed greatly compared to Zhuge Yuan. From Zhuge Yuan's point of view, he and the others had just entered the palace. They were about to force the undead emperor of the Qi Kingdom to step down.

Zhuge Yuan looked around him and saw soldiers clad in heavy armor as well as the officials of the palace. They were all staring at Zhuge Yuan; clearly, they thought of Zhuge Yuan as their leader.

Li Huowang was extremely distressed, but Zhuge Yuan remained calm. He even sounded confident as he said, “Don’t worry. Everything is going to be fine. I’m here, after all.”

Li Huowang looked around and saw a different scenery. The Liang Kingdom palace was coated in gold, but the Qi Kingdom was covered in snow. The difference was so huge that it was unmistakable.

Even the strange chanting from the Liang Kingdom had disappeared, and it seemed unable to pierce the boundary of the white snow and gold. *To think that a Twisted One can stop even the*

influence of a Siming.

“How much longer do I have to wait?” Li Huowang was impatient.

“Fifteen more minutes. The study room is just ahead of us, and it's where the empress recites sutras. The young undead emperor should be inside, too. We just need to force him to step down, and everything will be settled by then.”

Li Huowang looked down at his body under Li Sui's control and gnashed his teeth.

“Fine! I will help you! We need to settle this as soon as possible!”

Zhugue Yuan rushed forward, and the scenery peeled away.

Some of the people from the Liang Kingdom were whisked away into the Qi Kingdom. Fortunately, the Sitting Oblivion Dao and the Surveillance Bureau were so busy fighting each other that neither of them wanted to fight Zhugue Yuan.

Zhugue Yuan frowned. The people running past him were turning into courtesans and eunuchs running for their lives. His frown deepened at the sight, and he seemed to have recalled something.

The door burst open, and low chanting echoed from the study room accompanied by knocks on a wooden fish. “The Four Arhats Protects Us, Praise The Sacred Self, Love and Protect the Cultivator.”

A group of monks and abbots in yellow had filled the entirety of the study room.

They sat in a circle of six rings.

An old abbot with his back facing toward them sat in the middle of the circle. The abbot was using a razor to shave off the hair of a child. Li Huowang saw that the child's face was ashen gray—the child was deceased.

Li Huowang recognized the child instantly. He was the same

child that a Sitting Oblivion Dao member had impersonated at the time—the young undead emperor of the Qi Kingdom!

“You’re shaving him? Are you monks from the Righteous Monastery mad? You’re allowing a zombie to become a Buddhist?!” someone unknown roared, but the monks ignored them completely.

The razor moved, and the final strand of hair on the child’s scalp was finally shaved off. “Amitabha. The three thousand worries of the mortal realm are finally undone.

“From now on, your name is Jie Tan. You’re a disciple of the Righteous Monastery. If someone were to wish harm against you, they would be wishing harm against all of us, too.”

The old abbot turned around slowly.

Li Huowang was stunned to see the old abbot’s identity. “Old monk?!”

There was no way he wouldn’t recognize the old abbot, as he was the very same old monk standing next to him as an illusion.

The old monk was actually the abbot of the Righteous Monastery in the Great Qi rather than just a mere nobody.

Li Huowang finally realized what was wrong.

Zhuguo Yuan hadn’t transported him back in time to the Great Qi that existed thousands of years ago. Instead, Zhuguo Yuan was living in an alternate dimension with its own separate timeline!

Zhuguo Yuan wasn’t a time machine—he was a gateway to alternate dimensions and timelines!

Li Huowang stared at Zhuguo Yuan, and he finally realized why Zhuguo Yuan was called the “Storyteller.” He also realized why the Surveillance Bureau meted out severe punishment to those who had altered calendars and history books.

It was all for Zhuguo Yuan, who was in the Great Qi of another dimension!

Li Huowang looked as if he had been struck by a hammer from out of nowhere upon realizing what was going on. The Twisted

Ones' identities were clear to him now—they were doors to alternate dimensions and timelines!

In other words, the Sitting Oblivion Dao from the Great Qi was from a separate timeline. In this particular timeline, the old monk was the abbot of the Righteous Monastery.

While Li Huowang was sorting out his thoughts, Zhuge Yuan said something just then.

The monks of the Righteous Monastery stood up at the same time. The next moment, they clapped their hands and several eyes of varying sizes on the scars on their heads blinked at the same time.

The monks' mouths fluttered open as they chanted an inscrutable incantation. The chanting became louder and louder as the massive lips of the Buddha motif on the wall parted into a smile.

“Dear Sirs! You are monks dedicated to cultivating and shaking off all temptations. I don’t think it’s wise to cling on to the mortal realm like this!” Zhuge Yuan exclaimed and unfurled his scroll.

Some of the monks in the room vanished into thin air. Zhuge Yuan had just spirited away some of them using the Muddled One’s painting.

“Tai!” Some of the monks clapped, and their eyes bulged out of anger. They grew larger, while several arms extended from their backs, making them look like peacocks unfurling their tail feathers.

The two groups were about to start fighting, but a violent tremor abruptly shook the room. The strange chanting capable of dispersing the Ten Emotions and Eight Sufferings echoed just then.

Zhuce Yuan and everyone around him collapsed to the ground.

Some even started fading as their fleshly bodies returned to "Chaos."

“What’s going on?!” Li Huowang turned around and saw the colossal vertical pupil that was supposed to exist only in the Liang

Kingdom.

“Senior Zhuge!” Li Huowang covered his ears and shouted, “We can’t stay here any longer! I don’t know what that is, but it’s affecting even the Great Qi!”

However, Zhuge Yuan didn’t believe the sight at all and coldly snorted. “*Hmph!* How dare you try to fool me! So what if you’re big? You’re still fake!”

Zhuce Yuan took out his almanac and brandished his brush.

Before he could finish writing, however, the colossal pupil glared at Zhuge Yuan.

Zhuce Yuan was struck by excruciating pain, which forced him on his knees.

A transparent barrier flickered to life around Zhuge Yuan, protecting him as the clouds housing the colossal vertical pupil rolled closer to him.

Li Huowang struggled to move. He had to do something, or Zhuge Yuan would die!

In the end, Li Huowang decided to go all out. He took out a dagger and thrust it into his neck before slicing it all the way downward his mid-section. Then, he unfurled the *Profound Records* and laid it on the ground. “Wooden Liver! Earth Spleen! Metal Lungs! Water Kidneys! Fire Heart! Five Elements Intercalation!”

Li Huowang sacrificed his organs^[1] and his five senses merged, allowing him to perceive Ba-Hui’s presence.

The red bamboo slips of the *Profound Records* transformed into maggots that burrowed into him. They nibbled on his flesh and multiplied rapidly. Soon, the maggots filled up every single cavity in Li Huowang’s fleshly body, and they soon leaked out of his orifices.

However, Li Huowang felt great. He was no longer in pain, and his mind was as calm as a placid lake. The colossal vertical pupil was still glaring at him from above, but it could no longer affect

him, much less the strange chanting.

Unfortunately, Li Huowang couldn't cast the Five Elements Intercalation so easily. He could only use it whenever he was on the brink of death. Thankfully, he was in Bei Feng's fleshly body rather than in his own fleshly body.

1. more like Bei Feng's lol 🤔

Chapter 436 - Stone Tablet

Li Huowang had lost his sense of pain, so he could afford to stare at the colossal vertical pupil in front of him without any hesitation. He hoisted his fleshly body onto his shoulders and rushed to Zhuge Yuan's side. He carried Zhuge Yuan in the same manner and retreated backward. This place was too dangerous, and it was definitely not a place for ordinary people. He had to take Zhuge Yuan with him and leave!

Li Huowang was about to leave the battlefield when he came to an abrupt halt. He felt as if a mountain was boring down on his shoulders. Moreover, a mysterious intangible force had wrapped around him, pulling him back to the battlefield.

Writhing tentacles rushed out of his chest and wrapped around his legs. The tentacles moved desperately, dragging Li Huowang forward. As Li Huowang moved inch by inch, the maggots on him perished rapidly as if they were fighting something unseen.

When most of the maggots perished, the mysterious intangible force vanished abruptly, allowing him to break free. Having recovered his freedom, Li Huowang was about to take Zhuge Yuan away when flame abruptly engulfed him, singeing his hair.

Li Huowang retreated rapidly and saw the Emperor of the Liang Kingdom, the Imperial Preceptor, and the members of the Surveillance Bureau. It seemed that all of them had gone all out with a variety of artifacts in hand.

Li Huowang even saw one of the Deputy Chiefs holding a square stone tablet while performing a ritual. Li Huowang was familiar with the stone tablet, as it was the same stone tablet that

Dan Yangzi had used in his attempt to ascend to immortality.

It seemed that the Deputy Chief had obtained one as well.

So it's supposed to be held upside-down? Li Huowang muttered to himself, seemingly bewildered. Then, he shook his head vigorously and thought, *this isn't the time to think about this!*

Li Huowang looked up and saw a burning golden tree. He turned to Zhuge Yuan on his shoulder in astonishment and asked, "What's going on? Where's your Great Qi?"

They were supposed to be in the Great Qi, as Zhuge Yuan was on his shoulder.

However, the Great Qi had disappeared inexplicably. This was bad news for Li Huowang, as he suddenly found himself in the middle of a battlefield.

Zhuce Yuan woke up and rolled down Li Huowang's shoulders. His expression was ugly as he looked at everything around him and roared, "Where are we?!"

"Where do you think we are?! We're in Great Liang! Anyway, we should escape first and figure out what's going on later!" Li Huowang exclaimed. He grabbed Zhuge Yuan's sleeves and ran away.

A peal of laughter echoed just then, attracting Li Huowang's attention. He turned to look at the Emperor of the Great Liang standing right in front of the colossal golden tree. As the emperor's laughter echoed, the crown on his head vibrated rapidly.

The emperor waved his hand and pointed at the colossal vertical pupil in the distance, shouting, "Sitting Oblivion Dao! The Sacred Mountain Ghost's Eye has risen! You're finished! This is the golden opportunity to capture all of you!"

The golden bricks on the ground softened before flying toward the colossal vertical pupil in a stream of golden light. The golden palace in the distance and the golden bricks converged to form a colossal golden mask.

The mask had the ears of a beast and a mouth as wide as its ears. Its lips were in three layers, and the corners of its mouth were curled up in a smile. Li Huowang was familiar with the mask, as it was the same mask at the Surveillance Bureau.

The mask outside the Surveillance Bureau had cylindrical eyes that protruded outward, while this one had an empty left eye socket. However, even though the empty eye socket was on the left, the colossal vertical pupil floated over to the right eye socket!

A violent tremor ran across Li Huowang at the terrifying sight. The so-called "Sacred Mountain Ghost" that the Emperor of the Great Liang had mentioned was unknown to Li Huowang.

However, one thing was for sure: something big was about to happen!

To make matters worse, the strange chanting that Li Huowang's Five Elements Intercalation had forcefully dispersed had returned with vengeance.

The remaining maggots on Li Huowang's chest wriggled incessantly, transforming into a pair of extra legs, which allowed Li Huowang to run even faster.

Under the oppressive air, the Shai Zis remained calm, staring at the golden mask overhead. Soon, the numbers that represented their faces turned into sixes.

"Very good! You must have put a lot of effort into finding this eye of the Siming, which has been dead for thousands of years. Since that's the case, then we'll accept it," said one of the Shai Zis. There wasn't a trace of worry in his voice, and he even sounded excited in the face of such danger.

"Hmph! Do you really think that I will believe your lies? Regardless of what you do, you will not disrupt the plan I've been working on for ten years!"

"Lies? Hehe, do you really think we're lying? Take a guess: why do you think the four of us have come here today? You've been

preparing for a long time, but we've been preparing for way longer than you," said the four Shai Zis in unison.

They crossed their legs again, and their overlapping voices echoed even louder as they chanted, "True void's wonderful appearance, supreme mysterious mother. Where the golden light shines, the hidden brilliance of the sun and moon. When the treasured pestle rotates, the ghosts and gods lose color, showing their traces in the mortal world, guarding the saint's chariot..."

The voices weren't loud, but they spread far and wide. The stone tablet in the hands of a deputy chief cracked open the moment the Emperor of the Great Liang heard the chanting.

"Hahaha! How was it?" A voice filled thick with extreme ridicule from the cracks of the stone tablet. "Was it good practice? Actually, it's all fake! This is all for the sake of making fun of you, you fool!"

The voice had yet to finish echoing in the air when the stone tablet split apart, transforming into a chaotic hodgepodge of fragmented mahjong tiles.

"What?! How is this possible?!" The Deputy Chief exclaimed in disbelief while staring at the stone tablet in his hands. Before he could recover from the shock of being deceived, a dim purple light rushed out his brow and burrowed into Shai Zi's number.

This was just the beginning...

The Sitting Oblivion Dao's voice spread farther, reaching Cowheart Village.

The sleeping Gao Zhijian woke up and instantly went on high alert upon hearing strange voices in the room. He grabbed a sharp weapon and dashed into the side room. The stone tablet that Senior Li had given to him had cracked open.

Gao Zhijian could still remember that Senior Li had obtained the stone tablet from the Zephyr Temple, more specifically, from their master, Dan Yangzi.

“ *Haha!* You really want to become immortal?! How dare you dream of becoming immortal when you can't recognize even a single character word on it! My condolences, but you've been fooled! You've been bamboozled!

"This cultivation method to immortality is fake! *Pfft! Hahaha!* "

Translator's Thoughts

Finally, we get a glimpse of one of the first few Simings! This is the Sacred Mountain Ghost Eye.
Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin!



Chapter 437 - Doulao

Hou Shu, Qing Qiu, Si Qi, and the Emperor of the Great Liang. Those who had been deceived by the stone tablet started giving off a faint purple light from their glabella.

They hadn't lost anything tangible, but it could be said that they had "lost" by getting deceived. The purple lights gathered, converging toward Shangjing's palace, attracting the attention of many different organizations at the same time.

The faint purple light pierced the black dots on the four Shai Zis. The square heads of the four Shai Zis became larger and more purplish. Their bodies began to fade away as if they had always been fake.

The chanting of the Shai Zis grew louder as they vanished until no noises could be heard except for the Shai Zis' chants.

"They want to withstand the Siming with their mortal bodies? That is impossible!" exclaimed the Emperor of the Great Liang. He looked up at the unfinished mask, and his expression became solemn. It was unlikely, but he dared not ignore the possibility.

He waved his hands adorned with reversed dragon scales, and the black clouds in the sky rolled in the direction of the Shai Zis.

The members of the Great Liang's camp jumped into the fray, and the battle that had cooled down erupted once again. Meanwhile, the Sitting Oblivion Dao members threw themselves recklessly against the enemies to stop the black clouds' encroachment.

The chanting of the Shai Zis ceased just then.

"When beings are in distress, invoke the name; the great beings will come to alleviate suffering. Great compassion, great vows, great saints, great benevolence, Holy Spirit, giant light, Heavenly

Empress, Maricideva, and the Great Saint.

"Doulao—Celestial Sovereign!"

When the final word was uttered, the six dots on the Shai Zis' faces detached from their bodies. A purple light engulfed them, and they disappeared into the dense clouds overhead.

The Sitting Oblivion Dao members looked up and shouted, "Sovereign Doulao! Come here, quick! Da Nuo is about to awaken!"

Boom!

The thick clouds dissipated as if they were bubbles that had collided with something solid.

Li Huowang decided to leave. He stepped forward but almost keeled over as the solid ground had transformed into some kind of special liquid. No, it wasn't just the ground; even Li Huowang's fleshly body became soft and sagged.

If it weren't for the maggots inside of him, he would have melted into the ground.

What is this? Li Huowang looked up and saw a yin-yang taiji fish in the distance. It was so far and radiant as if it had become a sun in the sky. No, there were two suns—No, there were four suns!

Li Huowang stared closely at the four suns and saw that his vision had split into four as well. Just as Li Huowang's thoughts were about to split into six, the triumphant laughter of the Shai Zis in the distance echoed in his ears.

"Hahaha, you got bamboozled! Da Nuo has yet to awaken, so how come you look so scared?" A deafening noise echoed just then. The Shai Zis' laughter continued as they stared unabashedly at the sky, showing zero respect for their Siming. "Look at what I've brought you. Weren't you missing an eye? I found one for you!"

Swish!

The huge yin-yang taiji fish expanded, and it became like a lid that blotted out the entire sky in an instant. Shangjing became extremely unstable; those in existence had vanished, while those

that were not supposed to exist had materialized into existence.

Li Huowang was struggling as well. His Five Elements Intercalation was still active, but he still seemed as insignificant as a mere ant in the face of the entity before him.

Li Huowang looked up again and saw that he hadn't been staring at a yin-yang taiji fish.

He had been staring at two intertwined seas!

What's that under the black-and-white seafloor? Li Huowang saw something, and he grabbed his head in pain. Dark red blood flowed out of his seven orifices, and his head swelled up in the blink of an eye. Li Huowang had just seen a Siming for the first time, and he had finally realized just how powerful Simings were.

A glance was enough for Li Huowang to understand many things.

Li Huowang's existence itself seemed to be under corrosion, but an extremely sharp pain brought him back to reality.

A grotesque noise echoed as Li Huowang's fleshly body cracked open; scars appeared out of nowhere, bringing a seemingly endless agony to Li Huowang. However, the pain had also forced his consciousness to remain grounded.

When he came back to his senses, Li Huowang found himself on a scroll. The scroll was under Zhuge Yuan's control. Li Huowang looked up at Zhuge Yuan and saw that the latter's face was incredibly solemn as they moved on the undulating ground.

The scroll was like a wooden boat carrying them away from danger.

"Brother Li, sit tight; let's leave first before talking about anything," Zhuge Yuan said as he stared at the discolored skies, but he wasn't panicking at all.

Zhuge Yuan's composure allowed Li Huowang to relax a bit. He had come here to find the Strayed One Bei Feng, so he didn't expect that he'd get involved in such a big incident.

Was that the Siming Doulao of the Sitting Oblivion Dao? What were they trying to achieve?

Li Huowang stared at the colossal vertical pupil and saw that it had been covered with a golden mask and was flying toward the yin-yang taiji symbol in the sky. The colossal vertical pupil struggled, and it fell into the sea overhead.

The sea boiled instantly when the eye plunged into it, but a mere eye was no match for what lay beneath the sea.

“Brother Li, I hope I’m just overthinking, but if not...” Zhuge Yuan trailed off, staring at the sea overhead.

“What?”

“Nothing. Let’s leave here before anything else.”

Zhuce Yuan took out his brush and wrote the character "Swift" in the air.

The scroll beneath them moved even faster.

An unknown amount of time passed until they saw the gates of the imperial palace. Li Huowang’s heart thumped wildly at the sight. He couldn’t care less about what was happening; all he knew was that he would soon be free from the Strayed One’s hallucination..

“Brother Zhuge, can I borrow your old almanac once we’re out of here? I want to question—” Li Huowang stopped mid-sentence and trembled as he stared at the taiji sea overhead.

The same colossal vertical pupil behind the golden mask was floating in the white circle of the taiji sea, and it was staring at Li Huowang!

Chapter 438 - Sitting Oblivion Dao

Is it looking at me? Why is it looking at me? thought Li Huowang. He trembled as he looked up at the eyeball within the yin-yang Taiji diagram. There was no answer to his question. The only thing Li Huowang knew was that Doulao was staring at him.

Li Huowang decisively lunged toward the liquid-like ground. Li Huowang would rather sink into the ground rather than be devoured by Doulao like the Sacred Mountain Ghost's Eye!

In no time, Li Huowang sunk halfway into the soil. The next moment, he felt the world turn upside down. The surface of the mud became the ceiling, while the black-and-white sea in the distance became the ground.

Li Huowang was inverted in midair, and he couldn't stop himself from falling toward the yin-yang Doulao beneath him.

I refuse to accept this! I was just about to obtain the cultivation method against the hallucination! I was about to become an ordinary person! Li Huowang roared inwardly. He gnashed his teeth and shook his right hand.

The maggots inside of him burst out, entangling each other and transforming into a rope. The rope made out of maggots wrapped around a stone wall that was on the verge of collapse.

Li Huowang barely managed to stabilize himself, and he wasn't in the best situation as well. He was still falling toward the yin-yang Doulao, and the pulling force on him was getting stronger every second.

Soon, invisible threads appeared above Li Huowang's head. The black-and-white sea churned, and some of the threads attached to Li

Huowang were severed. Some threads inside Li Huowang were pulled out, while the threads outside were spirited away.

A few threads became entangled with each other. At first, Li Huowang thought that he would get stuck here forever, but the scenery around him peeled away, and he suddenly found himself staring at a giant ox several times taller than himself.

It took Li Huowang a moment to realize it, but the fear in his heart was the same fear he had felt when he first saw a water buffalo at the young age of six. The scenery peeled away once more, and Li Huowang found himself in front of a counter at a pawnshop.

The counter was tall, and Li Huowang found it scary. The distinct fear reminded him of the time when he became an apprentice at a pawnshop somewhere in town.

The next moment, he saw a skinny man crying bitterly. He was the owner of the pawnshop and was Li Huowang's master. He had fallen into a trap set by a group of swindlers and had lost everything.

Li Huowang lost his source of livelihood and had to fend for himself.

In the end, he made contact with the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

The scenery peeled away slowly at first, and then it began to pick up speed as more and more sceneries flashed before Li Huowang's eyes. Some vague sceneries eventually became clear, and some of them were sceneries of special moments.

Some sceneries depicted his lies, while some depicted his own experience learning supernatural powers in the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

“Boss Hong Zhong, what are you doing? Seriously? How come you've decided to play in the big leagues? You're actually playing with the Strayed Ones? Are you not afraid of going too far?”

“Ah, the realm of the Three Officials is too high for me to reach or understand.”

The memories that became clearer as time went on made Li Huowang feel an unprecedented fear. His pale lips trembled like an aspen tree.

“I’m not Hong Zhong; I’m Li Huowang; I’m not Hong Zhong; I am Li Huowang...” Li Huowang muttered to himself, but his repeated muttering wouldn’t be able to convince anyone, much less himself.

If people were incapable of imagining scenes of such clarity, then what were these memories?!

Li Huowang’s grip on the wall loosened as he was inundated by more and more memories. If everything about Li Huowang was fabricated by Hong Zhong to deceive himself, was it really necessary for him to struggle so desperately just to stay alive?

Zhuguo Yuan noticed something amiss with Li Huowang. He frowned and reached for his waist, pulling out a slender soft sword. Zhuguo Yuan stomped resolutely on the scroll with both feet before stomping on his right foot.

A figure in white clothes flew past Li Huowang at breakneck speeds. The figure charged at Douluo blotting out the sky. Once Li Huowang was no longer in Douluo’s line of sight, the pulling force vanished, and Li Huowang crashed heavily into the wall.

The sceneries in his mind had vanished, but the memories had become unprecedentedly vivid as if they had truly happened.

“No, no, no...!” Li Huowang trembled. He reached for his face and noticed that his facial features, flesh, and even his bones were changing rapidly, transforming into Hong Zhong. Li Sui’s tentacles weren’t the reason for this change; his appearance was changing according to his subconscious thoughts.

The cogs in Li Huowang’s mind turned frantically, and his appearance changed into Puppy, Lu Zhuangyuan, Gao Zhijian, Bai Lingmiao, Zhao Wu, and Chun Xiaoman. His face changed rapidly as Li Huowang was slowly forgetting his own appearance.

Boom!

A thunderous boom echoed, prompting Li Huowang to look up.

He saw Zhuge Yuan's soft sword shattering into pieces, and he saw a sword wave flying toward Doulao in the sky. The sword wave was as tiny as an ant in comparison to Doulao's enormous size.

Doulao's gaze swept toward Li Huowang once again.

Zhuce Yuan moved quickly and somersaulted to land in front of Li Huowang.

Zhuce Yuan showed no fear even when facing the gargantuan Doulao. His left hand was behind his back, while his right hand gripped his brush tightly. An audible cracking noise echoed as he pointed at Doulao's one and only eye in the sky.

"Brother Li! Go ahead and leave! I'll block this one for you. Don't worry, the other Simings are watching, so it can't descend upon the mortal world! Everything will be fine once we're out of the capital!"

Li Huowang's appearance had become that of a stranger in Zhuge Yuan's eyes, but the latter had treated Li Huowang the same.

Li Huowang stared at Zhuge Yuan's upright figure with a complicated expression.

"Brother Zhuge, that's a Siming. Why are you doing this for me?"

"It is important to know the hearts of people! I just want to do it, that's all!"

Swoosh !

The pale old almanac flew up and expanded, blotting out the sky.

Zhuce Yuan floated and flew toward the old almanac. Then, using the earth as his inkstone and the sky as his canvas. He waved his brush and wrote, "In the year of Yi Hai, the earth element descends today! Beware the Siming's appearance in the world!"

The pale old almanac burst into flames with a deafening explosion. The pages—engulfed in flames—were like yellow talismans that drifted toward Doulao. The entire world became brighter just then, and the black-and-white Doulao dimmed.

Li Huowang was confused. He gnashed his teeth and clenched his fists. *I can't go ahead and leave. How can I abandon my friends and escape by myself?*

“Don’t be a fool! That’s the Doulao’s true body! How can you possibly fight that? It’s rare to encounter someone so foolish as to attempt to fight it, so hurry up and escape with your life,” an illusion of a Sitting Oblivion Dao member advised.

“Nonsense! Who are you trying to fool here?! The Shai Zis can only use their false decrees to summon an incarnation of Doulao; they cannot summon Doulao's true body!”

Translator's Thoughts

The fearsome and colossal Yinyang Doulao.

Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin!

*The correct raw is 斗姥 instead of 斗姆



Chapter 439 - Zhuge Yuan

Zhuge Yuan was fighting so desperately for him, so Li Huowang knew that he couldn't remain confused about his identity. Regardless of his identity, he owed Zhuge Yuan his life, and he couldn't just run away without repaying his debt.

Li Huowang gnashed his teeth and looked around. He saw that the Emperor of the Great Liang and the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau were busy fighting with the Shai Zis, so he made a beeline for them.

Before his shoe could touch the ground, a playing card would fly out of his hand to provide a foothold for him like a lotus leaf on water. Li Huowang approached them swiftly as if he were a dragonfly skimming over a lake.

The few Shai Zis obviously had no intentions of fighting to the death and were simply toying with them. They seemed to be waiting for Doulao to intervene and deal with them all at once.

"Is there a living Muddled One inside the array?!" Li Huowang roared upon entering the battlefield. He didn't expect an answer, but he noticed a subtle change in the expression of one of the Deputy Chiefs. Li Huowang used his years of experience in deceiving others and quickly analyzed the Deputy Chief's expression.

He had shown alertness in the face of Li Huowang's question rather than confusion or bewilderment. In other words, there was a high chance that there was a living Muddled One inside the array.

It made sense as well. Yin and Yang belonged to the same scale; if one wanted to balance the scales, then one had to use a living and deceased Muddled One at the same time.

Li Huowang decisively rushed away while under the Sitting

Oblivion Dao members' close surveillance.

One of the Shai Zis was surprised to see Li Huowang. He turned to the Shai Zi next to him and asked, "Hey, why did you let that Hong Zhong go?"

"I have no idea. That's obviously a Hong Zhong of the Great Liang. In other words, it's one of your people. Why are you asking me?"

"Nonsense! Are you blind? That's obviously a Hong Zhong of your Great Qi!"

While they argued, Li Huowang soon found himself inside a side hall in the eastern region. There was supposed to be a golden hall here, but the gold had become the Sacred Mountain Ghost's mask, so Li Huowang couldn't see anything other than some debris and wooden pillars.

Li Huowang rushed into the center of the hall and saw a translucent white fox that had died in the middle of the array. Li Huowang instantly deduced that the fox was the eye of the array here. Li Huowang moved fast, flinging out Yao Ji mahjong tiles in all directions.

The eyes on these mahjong tiles blinked as if the tiles were living creatures. Every single piece of information that the Yao Ji tiles' eyes had clapped on was transmitted into Li Huowang's brain, so he soon discovered the location of the other array eyes in the other halls.

After a while, Li Huowang found himself standing on a floating piece of wood. He looked down and saw a rotting man in the soil. The man resembled the Muddled One from back then with golden threads sewing shut his seven orifices.

The only difference was that there was a swastika on his chest.

Li Huowang glanced at Zhuge Yuan falling from the sky and took a deep breath. Then, he moved quickly and scooped out the living Muddled One from the soil. Li Huowang dared not hesitate

and immediately opened his right hand, revealing four Bai[1] Ban.

Li Huowang slapped it on his back. “Kong!” [2]

The tiles entered the Muddled One’s body, and it abruptly took to the sky.

However, the ordeal wasn't over yet.

While the living Muddled One was flying toward Doulao, Li Huowang quickly located the dead Muddled One that he had seen when he first entered the palace. It was the same Muddled One that he and Ji Xiang had discovered.

When the two pairs of tiles entered him, Li Huowang sent a bicycle kick at the back of the Muddled One.

The dead Muddled One took to the sky at breakneck speeds. It moved so fast that it left behind an afterimage as it made a beeline for the living Muddled One in mid-air.

Li Huowang's plan was to use the formidable power of the living Muddled One and the dead Muddled One against Doulao’s avatar. Li Huowang had no other cards up his sleeve except for this and Zhuge Yuan himself.

“Brother Zhuge, move aside! The living Muddled One and the dead Muddled One are about to collide!” Li Huowang roared.

Zhuge Yuan's veins bulged as he struggled non-stop, and he heaved a sigh of relief upon hearing Li Huowang's roar. Immediately afterward, he hurled his brush into the air with all his strength before falling toward the ground, utterly exhausted.

The nervous Li Huowang caught the falling Zhuge Yuan.

Just then, a jet-black light erupted as the living Muddled One and the dead Muddled One collided, becoming one. Fortunately, the jet-black light disappeared as fast as it appeared.

Li Huowang looked up to see a huge hole in Doulao’s body. No, it wasn't just Doulao; even the sky had a huge hole in it as if a massive circle had been carved out of the sky.

Doulao became unstable after losing a huge chunk of its body,

Doulao became unstable, flickering intermittently.

Li Huowang could feel Doulao watching him, but Doulao couldn't even maintain its form, much less attack the former.

Doulao cast a deep gaze upon Li Huowang before disappearing.

The skies cleared up instantly as Doulao vanished.

"Brother Zhuge, we did it!" Li Huowang shouted in excitement, "We succeeded! We—"

Li Huowang stopped mid-sentence upon seeing Zhuge Yuan's condition. The latter had aged significantly, and his fleshly body had cracked open, seemingly on the brink of collapse.

And it wasn't just Zhuge Yuan's fleshly body...

The Sitting Oblivion Dao's innate abilities allowed Li Huowang to see Zhuge Yuan's Ten Emotions and Eight Sufferings. Zhuge Yuan's Ten Emotions and Eight Sufferings were in dire condition; they stuck together as they slowly took on a deathly gray color.

Li Huowang was helpless at the sight. The cogs in his mind turned desperately as he searched through Hong Zhong and his own memories to find a glimmer of hope amidst the sea of memories, but...

Li Huowang's mind was telling him that Zhuge Yuan was beyond saving.

Zhuge Yuan was like a bowl with a hole at the bottom, and everything in the bowl was leaking outside. Zhuge Yuan had utterly exhausted himself to resist Doulao's avatar for an extended period of time.

Li Huowang anxiously looked around for turmeric paper. He wanted to use talismans as a last resort, but Zhuge Yuan stopped him.

"Brother Li, don't bother. I'm not afraid of death, and you don't need to blame yourself. I didn't do this for you; I did this for the people of this world as well."

Tears streamed down Li Huowang's eyes as Zhuge Yuan grew weaker and weaker in the face of death.

Li Huowang gasped for breath as he spoke frantically, "Why did you bother being so noble in this crazy world? What's the point of being so noble? Who would dare to say anything even if you had run away? And did I ask you to save me? I'm from the Sitting Oblivion Dao! Why did you save me?!"

Zhuce Yuan revealed a magnanimous smile and said, "This isn't about being noble. I've simply read many books about sages—more books than others that I know what should be done and what should not be done. Although I dare not claim to be a gentleman, I cannot abandon a friend in need and flee by myself."

1. White Dragon in mahjong 🐉
2. four-of-a-kind in mahjong 🐉

Chapter 440 - Libation

Li Huowang felt a heart-wrenching pain in his heart as the light in Zhuge Yuan's eyes faded away. His mind was in turmoil, and he felt like someone had stabbed him in the chest. He wanted to say something, but he couldn't bring himself to speak in the face of his dying friend.

"Brother Li, you only have a few maggots left alive inside of you. Are you really okay?" Zhuge Yuan asked, staring at the hole in Li Huowang's chest. Even though he was breathing his final few breaths, he still asked such a question with concern in his tone.

Li Huowang revealed an ugly smile, making him look even worse than crying. Li Huowang shook his head vigorously and said, "Brother Zhuge, d-do... do you have any final wishes? Tell me, and I'll fulfill them no matter what!"

Zhuge Yuan exhaled slowly, and he stammered, "N-No, I've lived a life true to my desires... I don't have... any regrets..."

Snowfall had inexplicably vanished during the battle, but the fighting had ceased, so snow began falling once more. The snowflakes landed slowly on Zhuge Yuan's dilated pupils.

Li Huowang watched in grief as Zhuge Yuan slowly became cold and lifeless in his eyes. However, an idea struck him from out of nowhere, and he roared excitedly, "I can save you, Brother Zhuge! I've just come up with a way to save you!"

Li Huowang raised his arm covered in bulging veins, and he grabbed Zhuge Yuan's neck. He immediately tightened his grip, but Zhuge Yuan didn't respond and merely stared at him with his glazed, dead eyes.

Li Huowang squeezed with all his might, and his voice trembled as he whispered, "Brother Zhuge, I've killed some people

in the past... no, perhaps they're people who died around me, but... they became illusions around me!

"Perhaps you can become one of them! You just have to become an illusion, and I can definitely make you real once I've achieved mastery over my powers as a Strayed One!"

Li Huowang squeezed frantically before tearing Zhuge Yuan's head off from his shoulders. He hugged Zhuge Yuan's head and knelt on the ground. Moments later, he looked around in confusion.

Jin Shanzhao, the old monk, Hong Zhong, and Peng Longteng. He saw only four illusions; Zhuge Yuan was missing.

Zhuce Yuan's failure to become an illusion meant that he was truly dead.

Li Huowang's trembling lips turned pale as he hugged Zhuge Yuan's head. He leaned forward and balled his left hand into a fist before smashing it on the ground. The solid earth cracked open, and it was stained crimson by Li Huowang's wounds from the stump of his two missing left fingers.

He slammed the ground over and over again to no avail. Zhuge Yuan was dead, and there was no way he would come back to life. Tears fell down Li Huowang's eyes and pelted Zhuge Yuan's hair.

Why? How come everyone kind to him had ended up meeting such horrible fates?

Perhaps there was something wrong with the world itself? Was it really true that those who were good would die young, while those evil would live long lives?

Li Huowang felt wronged, and he felt indignant.

This is wrong! This world is wrong! The world should not be like this! Li Huowang roared to himself as he slammed his bloody hand on the ground. Eventually, his hand came to a halt, but it wasn't because he had chosen to stop; it was simply because he could no longer lift his hand.

The Five Elements Intercalation would soon be over, and he would die soon if he didn't do anything about his current predicament.

Hesitation fled across Li Huowang's eyes, and he felt like dying wasn't so bad. He truly couldn't care less whether he would live or die today.

Li Huowang lowered his head slowly and smacked his forehead on the ground.

A grotesque noise echoed as his skull fractured upon contact. A sharp pain inundated Li Huowang, sobering him up. *Zhuge Yuan had risked everything to save your life! Do you even have the right to die?! How can you live up to what he has done for you if you die?*

Zhuge Yuan's sacrifice would become a joke if you were to die! You are not allowed to die! You have to live on! Li Huowang smacked his head on the ground several times, and he only stopped when the flesh on his forehead had been reduced to minced meat, revealing his white skull.

Li Huowang gnashed his teeth and staggered to his feet.

Li Sui took control of Li Huowang's original body and walked up to him.

Li Huowang stared at the darkening skies and shook his head vigorously. He raised the sword in his hand and slashed his own forearm. "Stop pretending! How dare you try to set up a trap for me at this point! Li Sui, retract your tentacles!"

The eyes of the "drunk" Bei Feng snapped wide open.

"Your body is about to break down. We have to swap. I absolutely cannot die right now. I must live on!" Li Huowang urged.

Bei Feng stared at Li Huowang and endured the pain to show some disdain.

"Why should I swap?" Bei Feng asked.

"Five years ago, you owe me a favor at Women's Mountain! Are you thinking of going back on your word?" Li Huowang asked.

Bei Feng examined Li Huowang from top to bottom. Then, he put both hands together and said, "Boss Hong Zhong, congratulations on your return! You've played a really big role in this incident; I even thought that you wouldn't be able to come back."

Li Huowang blinked, and he found himself in his original body.

Meanwhile, Bei Feng examined herself and saw the cavity in her chest.

"Ah, my body is completely unusable now..." Bei Feng grumbled. She looked around and found a Great Liang guard in the distance, hopping around with a severed leg.

Bei Feng blinked, and she found herself hopping around with a severed leg.

Meanwhile, the stupefied guard had yet to realize that he had swapped bodies with Bei Feng when he stiffened and fell to the ground, dying from his injuries.

Bei Feng hopped over to Li Huowang with her remaining leg.

"Boss Hong Zhong, what are you doing kneeling there? Let's go and help our bosses, the Shai Zis. Look! They're about to smash each other's heads!"

However, Bei Feng received no response.

Li Huowang was crying while staring at the empty space to his left.

Bei Feng reached out in confusion, but she couldn't feel anything.

"Brother Zhuge, how are you?" Li Huowang asked in a trembling voice. Li Huowang's heart raced, and he couldn't contain his excitement as he stared at Zhuge Yuan.

As usual, Zhuge Yuan was dressed in white, and his expression was still the epitome of composure. He was holding a folding fan and was fanning himself gently.

The other illusions cast curious gazes at the newcomer.

Zhuge Yuan closed his fan and pointed at the other illusions.
“Brother Li, can you introduce me to these people?”

Li Huowang was so excited that he had no idea what to say. His hands trembled incessantly, and it took him a long time to speak as he stammered, “G-goodness! I did it! I succeeded! You really became an illusion!”

It seemed that the reason Zhuge Yuan didn’t appear immediately was that Li Huowang wasn’t in his original body.

Chapter 441 - Past

Li Huowang had never turned an illusion into a real human being; he had only ever done the other way around. In other words, he had no idea how long it would take him to transform an illusion into a real human being.

However, he had succeeded in transforming Zhuge Yuan into an illusion, so there was a sliver of hope. Zhuge Yuan just had to stay alive, and Li Huowang would surely resurrect him in the future.

Li Huowang unconsciously reached out for Zhuge Yuan, but his hands passed by Zhuge Yuan's figure. Even though he couldn't touch Zhuge Yuan, the fact that he was here still gave Li Huowang a motivation boost.

The past few hours had been extremely stressful for Li Huowang to the point that he almost collapsed from exhaustion. In fact, his face was red and covered in beaded sweat at the moment.

“Hong Zhong, what are you doing? Are you not going to leave? If you're not going to leave with me, then I'm leaving first,” Bei Feng said, staring at the chaotic battlefield; she was excited to jump back into the fray.

Li Huowang took a moment to compose himself. Then, he looked up at Bei Feng before looking around the battlefield. Doulao had vanished, but the Sitting Oblivion Dao and the Surveillance Bureau had no intention of stopping the fight.

In fact, they fought even fiercer. Li Huowang saw a pair of dragon horns protruding from behind the veil of the emperor. Meanwhile, the four Shai Zis were sitting cross-legged on the ground, setting up another array.

Li Huowang retracted his gaze and sank his body illusion into

the ground to become invisible. Then, he retreated slowly out of the ruined palace.

“Daoist, why are you leaving? Are you not interested in the cultivation method to cultivate the ‘Truth’?”

Li Huowang smiled coldly and said, “She doesn’t have it. It was just a rumor to lure in unsuspecting Strayed Ones.”

The entire Shangjing had been devastated by Doulao's appearance. The sight reminded Li Huowang of a violent earthquake's aftermath. Li Huowang grabbed a horse that belonged to no one and traveled to his own home.

His house had tilted, but Bun was outside the house and was sitting next to the crooked tree in the courtyard.

Li Huowang entered the house, gathered his belongings, and ran out of the city with Bun. They ran nonstop, running for tens of Lis before stopping in front of a waterfall somewhere in the deep forest.

Zhuguo Yuan couldn't admire the scenery as he frowned. “Sigh. I wonder if the people of the Great Qi have succeeded even without my lead.”

“Leave it be, Zhuguo Yuan. You should have prioritized yourself more than others. I’m not sure if you managed to hear my plan before you died, so let me tell you my plan again.”

Li Huowang explained his plan to revive Zhuguo Yuan.

Zhuguo Yuan pondered over it before sighing and shaking his head. “Junior Li, I think it's impossible.”

“Why not?”

“A Strayed One can indeed turn truths into reality, but I am a living being. I’m not just a normal human being but a Twisted One as well.

“I have certain unique properties that are going to be difficult to reproduce, and it's all because I'm a Twisted One. I don’t think your primordial breath has enough power to do such a thing.”

"I can do it!" Li Huowang roared, attracting the attention of the other illusions.

"You have no idea just how powerful the Strayed Ones are, Brother Zhuge!

"Bei Feng had not told me everything. Indeed, the primordial breath of the Strayed Ones does come from Doulao Taiyang, but what she didn't say was that the Heavenly Daos under Doulao's control wasn't innate to it!"

Li Huowang clenched his fist and continued, "The Heavenly Daos are stronger than the Siming! I reckon that I can create even a whole new universe once I'm strong enough, much less give you a mortal body."

Zhugue Yuan was worried about Li Huowang, and he couldn't help but ask, "Where did you hear that from?"

Zhugue Yuan was certain that Li Huowang didn't learn that information when he was on Xing Island.

Li Huowang was taken aback by the question, and he calmed down slowly as he replied, "I just recalled my past. I remembered my life as Hong Zhong."

"Hm?" Zhugue Yuan was surprised.

Li Huowang smiled bitterly and said, "I don't want to accept it, but it's the truth. I am Hong Zhong. It was one thing to be tricked by Bei Feng, but how could I explain my memories? How can I explain my powers as Hong Zhong?"

Li Huowang's face changed rapidly, transforming into the Hong Zhong mahjong tile.

Indeed, he was Hong Zhong, and the fact made Li Huowang's head hurt. After all, it meant that he had never been a high school student. The other side was indeed just a mere hallucination.

The Abbess of the Benevolent Nunnery was right—Li Huowang was from this world, and the random scenes in his mind were fake memories that he had implanted in himself when he was still Hong

Zhong.

Li Huowang felt like someone had stabbed a knife into his heart when he realized that Yang Na and his mother on the other side were fake all this while.

“Wait, Junior Li. Something’s not right. Let me think about this,” Zhuge Yuan said, placing his hands behind his back and pacing back and forth. After some time, Zhuge Yuan looked at Li Huowang and said, “Junior Li, let’s not speak in absolutes and say that you’re Hong Zhong.”

Li Huowang frowned and replied, “Setting aside the memories, how do I explain my Sitting Oblivion Dao powers? Also...”

Li Huowang looked around to get his bearings. Then, he got on the horse and traveled again until he saw a roadside restaurant selling noodles. He walked inside and revealed his mahjong tile face without talking to the owner.

The owner’s smiling demeanor shifted when he saw the Hong Zhong mahjong tile on Li Huowang’s face. He immediately took out a small mahjong tile with the Hong Zhong pattern on it and presented it to Li Huowang.

Li Huowang placed his palm together and split it in half. He presented the top part to Zhuge Yuan and showed him the five words the size of flies inside of the tile, “Hong Zhong, Li Huowang.”

“See that? This was one of the verifications I made for myself six years ago. I know that this is a hard-to-accept truth, but this is the truth. I am Hong Zhong, and I cannot run away from my true identity.”

“No, that’s not right.” Zhuge Yuan shook his head and said, “You’re not Hong Zhong... your identity was swapped with someone else.

“It’s just like the Qi Kingdom and the Liang Kingdom.

“At first, the Qi Kingdom ruled over the lands, while the Liang Kingdom was the fake one. However, just like how they got

swapped, your timeline and past have been swapped as well.”

Chapter 442 - Hong Zhong

“Past? Timeline? Great Qi? Great Liang?”

Li Huowang was stunned by Zhuge Yuan’s explanation. Zhuge Yuan's words were even more weird than the fact that he was Hong Zhong all along. “That doesn't make sense at all. How can something that has been set in stone be swapped?”

“Why not? If the history of the Qi Kingdom can be swapped to that of the Liang Kingdom's history, then why can’t your history be swapped with someone else?”

Li Huowang was worried about the accuracy of Zhuge Yuan's words.

Zhugue Yuan had never harmed him, but Zhuge Yuan's words were often just partially correct.

Li Huowang wanted to say something, but he still ended up pondering the possibility that Zhuge Yuan was true.

If Zhuge Yuan's words was true, then he wasn't Hong Zhong...

But... Li Huowang felt a headache coming as he thought, If I'm Hong Zhong, then the other side is fake. Yes, that's right... I wasn't Hong Zhong before, so does that mean that the other side was real back then?

“Junior Li, are you okay?” Zhuge Yuan asked, sounding worried.

“Don’t worry. Let him sit there and think over your words,” said Hong Zhong's illusion. "You're a newcomer, so I'm sure you don't know that he does that often. He just sits there and thinks about many things."

Li Huowang turned to Zhuge Yuan just then and asked, “Senior Zhuge, are you sure about what you said? Can someone's past truly be swapped for someone else's past?”

Zhugue Yuan's words were just too surreal.

What entity was capable of changing someone's entire past?

Zhuge Yuan nodded and explained, "Ordinary entities can't do it, but we just fought against Doulao."

As the Siming that controlled two Heavenly Daos, it wasn't strange that it was capable of doing such a thing.

However, Li Huowang wasn't sure of its motives for doing so. "Senior Zhuge, why? I'd understand it if it had killed me immediately, but why did it have to go through all the trouble to swap my past with a Hong Zhong's past?"

Even a Siming needs a reason to do something. What if the Siming is like the Sitting Oblivion Dao members, who will do anything for no rhyme or reason other than for the sake of fun. Wait, is this even fun?

Even Zhuge Yuan didn't know how to answer that question and shook his head. "I don't know. I do know that you're not a Hong Zhong. If you really were Hong Zhong, I would've discovered it back in Buddha's Skeleton Temple."

Zhuge Yuan could truly figure out the identity of a disguised Sitting Oblivion Dao member just by getting close enough to them. Li Huowang dived into his memories and found no techniques that he could use to hide his identity from Zhuge Yuan.

"Junior Li," Zhuge Yuan said, and his expression became serious as he continued, "I want you to put aside the matter of reviving me for now. Your substituted past as Hong Zhong is a pressing matter that needs your immediate attention before anything else."

"There must be a reason behind Doulao's decision, and I think there's more than meets the eye here."

"No, no, no. I think we can just ignore my past. I mean, we already know that my identity as Hong Zhong is fake," Li Huowang said. His eyes twinkled in excitement as he got onto the horse and continued, "I managed to find the method to cultivate the 'Truth' through Hong Zhong's memories! I have to obtain that first!"

“Really? Does this Hong Zhong know about it? Where is it?”
Zhuge Yuan asked, sounding shocked.

“It’s hidden somewhere in a special way, but I just have to go and retrieve it.”

Hong Zhong had hidden it somewhere to make sure that no one else would get their hands on it. Li Huowang traveled for more than a hundred Li to reach his destination, which was a small town south of the Liang Kingdom.

It was a cold day, and it was already nighttime, but there were still many people on the streets. They were burning papers which were inside circles drawn on the floor, and most of them were burning pieces of paper near crossroads.

Li Huowang saw that and realized that it was Qingming^[1] once again. He had been living here for an entire year now.

Li Huowang walked until someone's roars caught his attention.

“I’m hitting your head so that you’ll be out of breath every day. I’m hitting your face until your family goes crazy, and they’ll despise you for all your life. I’m hitting your eyes until you are blind, and you’ll end up injuring your hands every day. I’m hitting your ears until they’re filled with filth that you have to dig out with your fingers. I’m hitting your mouth until your breath smells like crap!”

Li Huowang followed the roars and saw an old lady. The old lady was sitting on a wooden stool and was using her shoes to beat a human-shaped paper. ^[2]

The old woman didn’t even raise her head despite hearing the sound of horse hooves next to her. “Two hundred coins to beat the person you hate. My technique is effective, so don’t think that it’s effective! Don’t believe me? Go and ask someone else!”

Li Huowang looked at the mole on her chin and said, “How about we play mahjong? You, me, and your daughter-in-law—the three of us will play.”

The old woman was stunned. Finally, she looked up, and her expression shifted intermittently as she stared at Li Huowang for a while.

Eventually, the old lady smiled and exclaimed, “Sure! Let’s go! Let’s go and play right now!”

The old woman was all smiles as she led the way for Li Huowang. Soon, they arrived at a room with a mahjong table. The old lady's chubby daughter-in-law was already sitting there in front of the mahjong table.

The three stared at the last remaining empty seat. A fourth person was supposed to sit there, so the three stared at the seat, seemingly waiting for the fourth person.

Tap.

Eventually, Li Huowang placed a Hong Zhong mahjong tile on the center of the table and said, “It seems that we're missing one person. Why don't you write them out?”

“Sure!” The two ladies said in unison and whipped out writing implements. They hung a massive piece of paper in the room and wrote in sync—one from the front and one from the back.

The ink from both sides glued to each other and transformed into legible words.

The words depicted the cultivation method to cultivate the "Truth" that Hong Zhong had decided to hide. A physical scroll was risky to store, so Hong Zhong decided to hide the cultivation method in the memories of other people.

“Sit down and silence the heart. Be relaxed. Relax the teeth and lips. Then, breathe deeply and slowly. The hands must be clenched naturally, while the eyes must be focused. Gather the light and be one with the surroundings.”

Li Huowang's hands trembled as he stared at the words on the paper.

The paper was light, but Li Huowang knew that it was far more

expensive than gold.

Li Huowang was trembling, as he truly didn't expect that he'd finally obtain the cultivation method that he had been looking for all this while. Li Huowang didn't even hesitate to follow the instructions on the paper.

"Junior Li, wait," Zhuge Yuan said, "This might be Doulao's trap. The fact that Doulao managed to place this method in your memories means that it might be waiting for you to cultivate it."

Li Huowang stopped and looked down at the paper in his hands.

"You mean it's risky to cultivate this?" Li Huowang asked.

"Not necessarily. You just need to think first before acting. Don't forget that you're not Hong Zhong. You're Li Huowang, and your memories aren't supposed to be yours."

1. A festival to honor the dead. Usually, people will pray to their ancestors, clean their graves, and offer tributes 🤝

2. This is a voodoo technique used to curse people by beating a paper cutout with their names on it 🤝

Chapter 443 - Cultivating The "Truth"

Li Huowang looked at the paper in his hands and recalled everything regarding the cultivation method. Hong Zhong's memories told him that this method was the correct one.

However, those memories embedded in Li Huowang's mind were fake. Could they be trusted? What if there were side effects?

Li Huowang hesitated before placing the paper down. *It seems that I need to find another Strayed One to verify the method.*

Previously, he'd tested the method for getting rid of the murderous aura entering someone's body before using it on Bai Lingmiao. Likewise, Li Huowang needed a test subject for the cultivation method. This was the simplest and most straightforward method to test it.

"Who should I use?" Li Huowang wondered.

He looked through his memories and remembered Bei Feng. Bei Feng was also a Strayed One and had been looking for the cultivation method too.

As a Sitting Oblivion Dao, Bei Feng could cultivate "Lies" and get rid of the hallucination, but Li Huowang was certain that she would still be drawn to a cultivation method that could allow her to use her primordial breath.

With a plan in mind, Li Huowang didn't hesitate. He left the house, leaving the old woman and her sister-in-law in the room as they continued to play mahjong.

Several days later, Li Huowang found Bei Feng in a brothel. She was soaking in a hot tub filled with petals.

Bei Feng smiled as she lifted her left leg out of the water,

revealing her fair skin.

“Oh, it’s Hong Zhong. It’s my honor to have such an esteemed guest,” she said.

“Do you want the cultivation method to cultivate the ‘Truth’?” Li Huowang asked, showing her the sheet of paper with the cultivation method.

Bei Feng’s eyes lit up, and she walked out of the hot tub. Water dripped down her body as she walked towards Li Huowang.

Bei Feng remarked, “I knew you had it. You even lied to me and said you didn’t! You are so bad~”

Now that Bei Feng had taken over the body of the best prostitute in the brothel, her tone became coquettish and seductive.

She extended her arms towards Li Huowang, but she was puzzled by Li Huowang's actions. “Why are you so good? Do you want to lie to me again? I won’t get tricked by you again.”

“Then don’t take it.”

Li Huowang put the scroll away and walked out.

“Ai! Wait! I didn’t say I don’t want it.” Bei Feng extended her manicured hands and took it. “Fine. I’m willing to get tricked by you if it’s for the sake of this cultivation method.”

Her body was still wet when she put on a see-through shawl, sat down on the bed covered in red sheets, and started cultivating.

Li Huowang frowned and looked at her, as if waiting for something to happen.

Before long, several things were levitating around Bei Feng. One of the pink pillows circled around Bei Feng before it slowly transformed into a green brick.

Bei Feng opened her eyes in shock. “Hong Zhong! This is the real deal!”

But there was no one else there. Li Huowang was gone. Bei Feng was stunned.

Nevertheless, she ran out of the window with the scroll in her

hand, smiling cheekily.

One month later, Bei Feng had already changed her body to that of an old man.

The old man was sitting in a cave and looked like an Immortal as he looked at the youth in front of him.

He said, "My disciple, since you are a Strayed One, I can't teach you much. It's now time for me to teach you the final technique, the method to cultivate 'Truth'! Once you've finished cultivating it, not only will you be able to command the heavens and earth but also remove those hallucination completely!"

The youth felt excited. He kept kowtowing and kneeling on the ground in front of the old man.

The old man was like a father to the youth. He'd save the youth from evil people and even taught the youth such an incredible technique!

Bei Feng squinted as she looked at the Strayed One in front of her. *Hmph! Hong Zhong, do you think I'm an idiot that would just do what I'm told? You told me to try, so you thought I would try it myself? Of course, I will test it on another Strayed One instead. I don't know if you managed to cultivate it since you are so rash, but that's your issue, not mine, hehehe~*

As the youth inhaled, the space around him twisted like it was going to be sucked into his body.

Everything in the cave started to change. The scene changed rapidly, going from a cave to a bedroom before changing to a prison.

When the youth started sinking into the ground, he opened his eyes and looked around him in astonishment. "Master! This method is useful!"

"Don't stop! Keep cultivating!" said the old man.

Li Huowang was currently invisible as he watched on from behind Bei Feng. He was clenching his fist hard.

He knew what kind of person Bei Feng was. That was why he'd set the trap. He only needed someone to test the method, and he didn't care who it was.

Li Huowang looked at the youth for a very long time until the moment he succeeded.

After verifying that everything was alright with the youth, Li Huowang slowly left the cave. He looked like he was in a horrible state. Li Sui's black tentacles covered his veins, extending all over his body. Li Huowang could see the tentacles wriggling and pushing outwards from beneath his skin.

He found a quiet place in the forest and sat down cross-legged. Then he closed his eyes and hands and started cultivating according to the method recorded on the paper.

Li Huowang turned his sight inwards into his body to find the formless primordial breath.

It was not an easy thing to do, especially since he was trying to cultivate the "Truth." It was a cultivation method that cultivated a concept.

Nevertheless, he was not greedy. His initial goal was to suppress the hallucination.

According to the cultivation method, as long as he used his inner sight to cover the primordial breath, he could stop the hallucination from occurring again.

Li Huowang cultivated for three nights straight before he took a deep breath. His voice was already shaking by then.

He said, "Li Sui. Come out. Let me try."

Tentacles spilled forth from his mouth before they pooled together into a ball. Two curious eyes peeked at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang took a deep breath and clenched his fist tighter. He waited. He kept waiting and nothing happened. Fifteen minutes passed, and he was not dragged into the hallucination!

Li Huowang looked at the illusion at his side to share the good

news. “Senior Zhuge! This thing is real! It’s useful! And I succeeded in using it!”

The illusion replied, “This is good. At the very least you don’t have to eat the Black Taisui anymore. You are no longer at risk of losing your body.”

“With this cultivation method, I can now suppress my hallucination and even control when it appears!”

Li Huowang revealed a part of the primordial breath that was covered in his inner sight, and everything shifted around him.

When he woke up, he found himself tied to a cold machine, and his temples were pulsing. He looked around and saw there were numerous people around him, including his mother. Li Huowang looked around in confusion, and everyone clapped.

Sun Xiaoqin was so happy that tears flowed out as she almost kneeled to one of the doctors, but the doctor stopped her.

The doctor said, “Madam Sun, no need to be so agitated. Since electroconvulsive therapy can wake your son up, he has a chance to recover as long as he eats his medicine and undergoes therapy at the same time.”

Li Huowang looked around and thought to himself. *If the hallucination was caused by the primordial breath leaking out inside of me, that means this is fake...*

Sun Xiaoqin hugged her son tightly and kept his head in her embrace.

She finally saw a chance for her son to recover. This was more important than anything else!

Li Huowang looked around as he basked in the warmth of his mother's embrace. He looked at the doctors and nurses around him, and his gaze became resolute.

“Mom, don’t worry. I’m not stuck in the hallucination anymore. I’m fine. A Strayed One’s body contains the primordial breath, which is part of the Heavenly Dao. I can use it now! Even if this

place is fake, I will turn everyone here into reality one day!”

Chapter 444 - Li Jiancheng

Tied down in two straitjackets, Li Huowang looked around silently at the white walls, LED lights, and the dull green color of the shock-resistant glass.

The place was empty and was furnished simply, but Li Huowang was not bored. In fact, he looked around as if everything was a shade brighter than it was.

That was because these were real, not fake.

Li Huowang looked through Hong Zhong's memories and learned how strong Strayed Ones were. It was all due to the primordial breath hidden within them. The primordial breath was a part of the Heavenly Dao.

Just as how the Muddled Ones would rend the heavens, Strayed Ones could turn "Lies" into "Truth" as long as they mastered it.

The confusion in his mind dissipated once he learned about it. He didn't need to figure out what was real or fake because he could just turn everything into reality.

The metal door creaked open and Li Huowang turned to see who it was.

Two massive-looking prison guards dressed in protective clothing walked into the room and stood guard by the door.

Sun Xiaoqin appeared between them and walked into the room with a container of food, ignoring the two prison guards.

She said, "These youngsters. *Sigh* ... I already told them that nothing would happen to me here, yet they were still adamant on following me in. And there are even two of them! Is being a prison

guard that boring?”

One of the prison guards grumbled, “Madam Sun, please don’t blame us. This is an order from our superior. Even though we work hard and do a lot of things, we only earn a few thousand per month. Look at how expensive houses are nowadays. We wouldn’t dare to risk our lives just for fun to deal with your son. We aren’t getting paid enough for it anyways.”

Sun Xiaoqin wanted to continue complaining, but she walked hurriedly when she saw Li Huowang looking at her.

She called out, “Son? Are you awake? Come, have a meal! I’ve made your favorite—wintermelon and pork rib soup!”

Li Huowang looked at the familiar and friendly face. Sun Xiaoqin used a short plastic spoon to scoop up some rice, pieces of rib, and wintermelon before placing it in front of Li Huowang’s mouth.

It was a simple but delicious meal. He enjoyed it slowly, no longer worrying about whether he was eating the real food or chewing on dirt and nails.

When he saw the wrinkles around Sun Xiaoqin’s eyes, Li Huowang said gently, “Mom, there’s no reason for you to come visit me so often. You need to rest a lot too. I will gradually recover.”

“What are you saying? You are in the critical stage of recovery. You need to have someone accompanying you!”

Li Huowang stopped trying to persuade his mother because he knew it was useless.

He continued eating and finished his meal peacefully; nothing strange happened.

The two prison guards sighed in relief when they saw one of their colleagues bringing in a middle-aged man.

Their colleague told them, “Don’t worry. He is the patient’s father.”

The three prison guards watched the man bring a bag of

oranges towards the bed of the martial maniac.

“Dad,” Li Huowang said, looking at the man in front of him.

He rarely saw his father even in his hallucination previously.

Sun Xiaoqin pulled her husband outside. “Why are you here without informing me?”

Through the glass window, Li Huowang saw his parents discuss something while looking at him from time to time.

Li Huowang stared at them with complicated emotions. His parents' clothes were looser than before, indicating they had lost a lot of weight.

Five minutes later, Li Huowang saw his father entering the room again while his mother took the finished food container outside.

“Do you want some oranges?” his father offered.

His rough hands reached into the bag of oranges and took two out.

Li Huowang shook his head, but his father peeled an orange anyway and placed it on the table beside the bed.

“How’s everything recently?” his father asked.

Li Huowang answered, “Not bad. This place is quite good.”

“How’s your sickness?”

“I’m recovering soon. I’m telling the truth.”

“Oh. That’s good.”

Their conversation stopped there. This was normal in Li Huowang's household. Compared to his openly loving mother, his father was more reserved.

Li Huowang looked at his father and saw that he had dark eye bags and bloodshot eyes, a sign of a lack of sleep. His collar was turning yellow, and his sleeves were a bit oily. He hadn’t changed his clothes in a while. There were more white hairs on the balding head than there used to be, and the stubble on his chin showed he hadn’t shaved in a while too.

Li Huowang's father's name was Li Jiancheng.

Li Jiancheng stared at his son, who was tied to the bed, and the scar running across his face.

Taking a deep breath, Li Jiancheng reached into his pocket and took out a crumpled box of cigarettes. He lit it up with a green lighter. Li Jiancheng took a deep breath and exhaled the smoke out. His eyes were wet as if they were irritated by the smoke.

“Sir, I’m sorry, but the entire place is a non-smoking area. Please comply,” one of the guards said.

Li Jiancheng wanted to snuff out his cigarette, but he couldn’t find an ashtray. In the end, he used the discarded pieces of orange skin to snuff out his cigarette.

“Dad, I thought you quit? Why did you start smoking again?”

Li Jiancheng smiled and put the lighter away. “Because I’m feeling irritated. Don’t worry, this is a cheap brand of cigarette. It doesn’t cost me much.”

“I’m not worried about money but your health.”

Li Jiancheng remained quiet for a long time before he sighed. “It’s my fault. I didn’t realize you were sick early on. I’ve checked online and saw that illnesses related to the mental state had a higher chance of being treated if found early on. If I’ve found out sooner, we might’ve—”

“Dad, this is not your fault!” Li Huowang interrupted his father. “This is an issue with my body. Since I’m a Strayed One, this is my life. I can’t escape it. You don’t have to blame yourself; I will deal with it myself. Please don’t worry.”

However, Li Huowang saw his father's lips quiver and realized he shouldn’t have said that.

His father would never understand the other world. In fact, hearing those words made him think his son was still seriously ill.

“Huowang...” Li Jiancheng’s voice was filled with bitterness and tiredness. “I know you can’t differentiate the two places. Don’t

worry. I don't blame you. If you like the other place, then just stay there. If you think you can live much more comfortably there, then go. I will handle everything here. Your father is still here."

Hearing that made Li Huowang's heart ache. Afraid he would cry, he didn't say anything else.

The father and son sat there silently until the prison guard came and informed them that visitation hours were up. Li Jiancheng, who was tired and stressed out, patted Li Huowang's head before standing up and leaving the room.

Chapter 445 - Start

“Mom, I think I will return to my crazy self for a moment, but don’t worry. Everything will be fine in the end. I will wake up every three to five days. Don’t worry if I’m late. That just means that I’m being held up on the other end. No, Mom. I’m not ill. Don’t get agitated, please listen to me.”

Zhuge Yuan stared at Li Huowang in confusion as he was talking to a crooked tree in the forest.

“See that? This must be your first time seeing it. Not everyone gets the chance to see a Strayed One stuck in a hallucination,” Hong Zhong’s illusion explained to Zhuge Yuan.

“Has Junior Li always acted like this in the past?” Zhuge Yuan asked puzzledly.

“Yeah. I heard the old monk say that he got stuck in the hallucination quite frequently before he started eating the Black Taisui.”

Zhuge Yuan looked at Li Sui coiled around at the base of the tree, and then at Li Huowang who was speaking to himself. “Sigh. Junior Li had it rough. Being a Strayed One is much more difficult than being a Twisted One.”

The old monk said, “Yeah. The Daoist has it rough. My heart aches for him every time I see him acting like that. I really want to do something for him but I don’t know what I can do.”

“Thank you for trying to help him.”

Even though the old monk looked the same as the Abbott of the Righteous Monastery in the Great Qi, Zhuge Yuan knew they weren't the same person. The Abbott was still alive after all.

“Oh? No worries. I have to thank you too. Also, be careful of the faceless man. He’s a liar. He tricked me many times.”

Zhugue Yuan looked at Hong Zhong standing beside him and smiled. "I see. He's part of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. Sir, who is that headless one then?"

The old monk introduced the other illusions to Zhugue Yuan, including how they'd died.

"You mean to say that Senior Jin Shanzhao was killed by Peng Longteng?" Zhugue Yuan asked.

"That's what the Daoist told me, but he doesn't like talking to me, so I'm not very sure either."

"Then why does Senior Jin not hold any animosity towards General Peng Longteng?"

"I don't know. I'm not a parasite in his body, so I don't know what he's thinking."

"Alright, then let me ask again. Are there any others aside from the five of us?"

"There are. I heard there was once a baldy and a woman. They were illusions that once accompanied the Daoist, but they disappeared after some time."

"Does that mean Junior Li had seven illusions in total?" Zhugue Yuan wondered, fanning himself as he thought about it.

"What are you thinking?" Hong Zhong glared at Zhugue Yuan. "We are all illusions accompanying Li Huowang now. What are you scheming?"

Zhugue Yuan chuckled but said nothing.

"Senior Zhugue," Li Huowang called out, shifting their attention to him.

He looked the same as before, but something seemed off.

"Senior Zhugue, have you ever encountered anyone, aside from the Great Qi and the Great Liang, whose past was changed?" Li Huowang asked.

"No. There are extremely few cases where people got into contact with a Siming. But most of those people either went crazy

or died just from getting into contact with a Siming, let alone getting one to change their past.”

Li Huowang frowned. *Doesn't that mean I'm one of the first cases where my past was changed?*

He thought he would be in trouble once his past was changed, but it was not exactly a bad deal either.

Li Huowang had obtained a new identity, Hong Zhong, and numerous techniques belonging to the Sitting Oblivion Dao. He could even use them freely.

Moreover, he obtained the method to cultivate "Truth" from Hong Zhong's memories. No matter how Li Huowang looked at it, everything had been good so far. There wasn't anything bad.

However, Li Huowang suspected that Doulao had an ulterior motive for changing his past.

Why...?

Li Huowang sifted through Hong Zhong's memories for information on Doulao, but he found nothing.

As Hong Zhong, he learned that Doulao was not a deity that the Sitting Oblivion Dao worshiped, but rather they used each other. Both parties were trying to gain an advantage by lying to each other.

The Sitting Oblivion Dao knew that the Doulao controlled "Lies."

Everyone had a small wisp of Doulao's "Lies" in their body, which was why everyone would lie from time to time. This much was certain, and the Sitting Oblivion Dao obtained energy by tricking a person and taking away the small wisp of "Lies" in a person's body. They also took things from their target's body.

However, the Sitting Oblivion Dao wondered why they needed to do that. Some of them hypothesized that Doulao wanted them to trick the common people and obtain the wisp of "Lies" to achieve its own goal.

As for what the goal of Doulao was, the Sitting Oblivion Dao didn't know anything about it.

"Maybe Shai Zi knows something about it," Li Huowang murmured to himself.

"Junior Li, I think we should distance ourselves from the Sitting Oblivion Dao as much as possible, especially Shai Zi. Once he sets his sights on you, everything will become much more complicated. You know that the Sitting Oblivion Dao don't fight head-on. They always operate behind others' backs; the same goes for Shai Zi."

"Don't worry, I'm not crazy yet. I won't go find Shai Zi. I need to find a quiet place to cultivate first. Once I'm done, I can finally find peace in both worlds."

Li Huowang could increase his strength, turn Zhuge Yuan back into reality, and even turn the hallucination into reality. The cultivation method was the key to achieve all of this.

Zhuge Yuan nodded. "Then, where should we go now?"

"I ..." Li Huowang said hesitantly, "I want to go back to Cowheart Village. It's a quiet place that's suitable for cultivating. I'm worried about Miaomiao and the others now that everything is in chaos outside."

He had to fulfill his promise to Miaomiao — that he would return once he could control his hallucination. He had technically succeeded, so it was time to go back.

Li Huowang recalled the faces he hadn't seen in a long time and longed to see them. They were his attachment to this world.

He had always been a man that never hesitated, so he hopped onto his horse and started moving towards Cowheart Village.

Li Huowang was about to depart when he remembered something was missing. "Wait, where's Li Sui and Bun?"

"Li Sui! Bun!" Li Huowang shouted towards the forest.

Black tentacles quickly appeared from beside a bush, rolling

out as a tangled ball. Li Sui held Bun up with his tentacles wrapped around Bun's mouth and feet.

“What are you doing?” Li Huowang asked.

Li Sui replied, “Playing with the dog.”

Chapter 446 - Cowheart Village

Li Huowang had his veil on as he held the reins of his horse and stood by the road, looking at Cowheart Village from afar.

He had stood here a few months before, thinking about how to explain to Bai Lingmiao that he had killed her entire family.

He was now standing in the same location, thinking about how to explain to the villagers what he had gone through during the past few months.

Li Huowang had accomplished his goal and was no longer plagued by his hallucination. He should be happy to meet the villagers again, but he felt hesitant instead.

Unlike in the stillness of winter the last time he was here, Cowheart Village was much livelier in spring. There were people and cows working in the fields around the village.

The people working in the fields looked young and clumsy, but they worked hard. They looked quite disheveled though.

“Woof! Woof!”

Bun’s barking tore Li Huowang’s attention away, and he looked at Bun. Bun was arching its back and growling at Li Sui hiding in the bushes.

Even though Li Huowang had reprimanded Bun many times, it still refused to acknowledge Li Sui as a companion and viewed him as an enemy.

Li Sui asked, “Father, why is it barking at me? I like playing with it, but it doesn’t like me.”

Li Huowang looked at Li Sui. Li Sui was covered tightly in a straw robe and wore a hat with a black veil too.

If someone were to see Li Sui, they would've thought he was a short, plump kid, rather than a bundle of tentacles.

Li Huowang answered, "Since it doesn't want to play with you, you should play with something else instead. Stop bothering Bun."

Li Sui had been instrumental in suppressing Li Huowang's hallucination in the past, but Li Huowang no longer needed him for that. So, Li Huowang didn't know what to do with Li Sui now.

Should I let him go? Li Huowang thought.

However, he really didn't want to. He had taught Li Sui how to speak one word at a time ever since he developed a consciousness. Li Huowang would be lying to himself if he said he didn't feel attached to Li Sui even though he was an evil being.

Still, Li Sui might look horrifying, but he was a pure-hearted evil being. It would be too easy for someone to manipulate him. A Black Taisui was technically also a pill ingredient, and Li Huowang was afraid that the moment he released Li Sui into the wild, someone would snatch him up.

Li Huowang decided to raise Li Sui like Bun instead. Thankfully he wasn't a handful.

"Once you enter the village, you mustn't take off your robe and veil. Also, do not extend your tentacle outside the veil; you'll scare the others."

"Father, I understand," Li Sui replied quietly.

As his tentacles continued to wiggle, he followed Li Huowang to the entrance of the village, leaving a trail of slime in its wake.

Two people, a horse, and a dog approached the village. It was clear to the villagers that they were not peddlers. The villagers in the field quickly took notice of them.

"Senior Li! Senior Li, you are back!" Yang Xiaohai yelled.

He ran out of the fields excitedly, and a plump lady followed him out of curiosity.

Bun wagged its tail excitedly when it saw familiar faces and

ran over. It jumped into Yang Xiaohai's embrace.

Yang Xiaohai hugged Bun tightly and asked Li Huowang excitedly. "Senior Li, where have you been? We've been thinking of you! Are you alright?"

More and more people gathered around Li Huowang. By the time he arrived at the Bai Family's estate, almost everyone in the village had crowded around him.

Gao Zhijian appeared to have grown even taller, and he looked like a goose among chickens. He stammered as he tried to say something.

However, Puppy interrupted him. "Senior Li, look! This is my wife! Look at her belly! She's going to give birth soon! I'm becoming a father! Hahaha!"

Puppy's laughter didn't last long though.

Chun Xiaoman pushed him away and told Li Huowang, "Senior Li, you've finally returned. Miaomiao kept talking about you. She's worried."

Zhao Wu walked over with a cane and shared excitedly, "Senior Li, when you weren't here, I kept tabs on the finances of the entire Cowheart Village! We did not go bankrupt, and we even earned a lot of money!"

Everyone was chattering excitedly about what had happened to them during the time Li Huowang was gone. None of them remembered what Li Huowang had done before he left.

Li Huowang looked at the people around him and felt relieved. His heart was no longer as tense as before.

Maybe this is what having a home feels like.

"Hohoho~ Young Daoist, you've finally returned. Come, you've traveled far. You should step over the fire pot to remove your bad luck," Lu Zhuangyuan said, placing a pot of fire near the entrance.

[1]

He was happy now that Li Huowang was back. The villagers

would feel more at ease too. Li Huowang strong, and he was also Lu Zhuangyuan's employer. It would be easier to justify why Lu Zhuangyuan should be staying in the village.

Once Li Huowang stepped over the pot of fire and entered the Bai Family's estate, he saw Bai Lingmiao looking down from the second-floor window. She was smiling at him as if it had been a different Li Huowang that left the village previously.

Bai Lingmiao called out, "You're back? Yang Xiaohai, go and slaughter a lamb and a pig. Tonight, we are having a feast."

"Alright!" Yang Xiaohai replied excitedly and let Bun down before running towards the kitchen.

Lu Zhuangyuan was very adept at reading the room. He shouted orders, and everyone got busy preparing for the feast. Some went to get the pigs while others looked to see what they could help with. Before long, no one else was in the Bai Family estate, and it fell quiet again.

"Is that Junior Li's wife? Should we stay outside then?" Zhuge Yuan suggested, seeing Li Huowang climb towards the second floor.

"Why should we stay outside? You are still new, so you don't know what happened between them. The next scene will be very interesting, and I've been waiting to see it," Hong Zhong replied excitedly.

He tried to follow Li Huowang but was pulled back by Zhuge Yuan.

"I think we shouldn't do that. This is not a gentlemanly way to conduct ourselves, my dear Sitting Oblivion Dao junior."

"I'm not a gentleman in the first place. I'm a trickster of the Sitting Oblivion Dao!"

No matter what Hong Zhong said, Zhuge Yuan did not let him go upstairs.

Li Huowang went up to the second floor, and Bai Lingmiao approached him. She acted like a wife and removed the weapons

and the torture tool that Li Huowang carried.

Bai Lingmiao was about to say something when she glared at the dwarf following Li Huowang. *Who is this guy? Why did they come into the room? What an idiot.*

Li Huowang said, "This is Li Sui. Li Sui, greet your mother."

"Mother."

"Mother?!" Bai Lingmiao uttered in shock. She stared at the "boy" in the straw robe and veil. "Explain this to me! Why do you have a child? And the child is already so old! Did that bitch Yang Na birth him for you?!"

1. Usually seen in weddings, though I think some villages do it for non-wedding occasions too. Crossing a small fire burns off bad luck and turns them into good luck. 🙏

Chapter 447 - Anklet

Li Huowang was slightly speechless when he saw how big of a reaction Bai Lingmiao had. “What are you talking about? I’ve told you before that it’s the Black Taisui I ate previously to suppress my hallucination. I don’t need it anymore, so it came out of my body.”

Li Huowang lifted the veil and revealed Li Sui’s tentacles.

Catching onto the most important point, Bai Lingmiao beamed in happiness. “Oh! Does that mean you won’t get trapped in the hallucination anymore?”

“No, I still need to go. There are still things to do there, but I can more or less control it now.”

Bai Lingmiao was much happier than Li Huowang was. “That’s good! You are the first person I know who has treated their own disability!”

Li Huowang was ashamed when he looked at her radiant smile. It was clear that she cared for him more than he did for her.

Li Huowang took out a golden anklet wrapped with red thread from his robes. He bent down and carefully removed Bai Lingmiao’s shoes.

“I remember that you gave me the gold anklet when we first came out from Zephyr Temple and we didn’t have money to buy food. You melted it down and used the money to buy me a bun,” Li Huowang said.

Bai Lingmiao looked at the gold on her white leg in astonishment.

Li Huowang continued bitterly, “I said before that I would buy you a bigger one once I had the money to do so. I’m sorry. So many things happened during our journey before I finally had the time to buy you one.”

Bai Lingmiao's white lashes fluttered, and she said nothing before she sank into Li Huowang's embrace.

Li Huowang could now see the emotions of others thanks to Hong Zhong's memories. He saw Bai Lingmiao's feelings of happiness and love grow larger and cover her feelings of desire and disgust. Bai Lingmiao was now similar to how she had been before the murderous aura entered her body.

Li Huowang caressed Bai Lingmiao's hair and took in her scent, enjoying a rare moment of peace.

Right then, Li Sui climbed onto a table and stared at them with his two eyeballs.

He asked, "Father, what are you doing?"

Li Sui was curious. He had never seen people do that, and Li Huowang never told him about it before.

"Is your son stupid?" Bai Lingmiao's muffled voice reverberated against Li Huowang's chest.

Li Huowang chuckled and gently pushed Bai Lingmiao away. He whispered to Li Sui, who then crawled out of the window like an octopus to find Bun.

Once Li Huowang closed the window, Bai Lingmiao excitedly pounced into him. Li Huowang hugged her and was about to say something when she shut his mouth with something soft. He saw the emotion of desire flaring up in Bai Lingmiao.

Some time later, Li Huowang was lying on the bed and hugging Bai Lingmiao, who was in her inner wear^[1] that had a lotus motif. He was enjoying the peace after the storm and telling Bai Lingmiao about what had happened during the past few months.

Bai Lingmiao snuggled against him, listening to his story while playing with her new golden anklet.

When Li Huowang reached the part when he could cultivate "Truth," he paused and thought, *If I can turn both sides into reality, doesn't that mean both Bai Lingmiao and Yang Na are real? How*

should I treat them both? Am I disloyal?

Li Huowang sank into a state of distress. He had never thought about it before. He'd always thought that one side was fake, so he'd never had to think about it.

"Keep talking. Why did you stop?" Bai Lingmiao asked, snuggling deeper and pressing her hair into his face.

"It's nothing. The hallucination is not a special place. How's Cowheart Village doing? Was everything fine while I was gone?"

"It's the same as usual. But I've recruited more people to work in the fields. There is too much land in the village, and we don't have enough manpower to deal with all of it. You think Puppy and Zhao Wu could work the fields?"

Li Huowang nodded and recalled the strangers working in the field.

"Even though they are technically slaves, they are officially known as our adopted children. They will call you Father, so I hope you don't mind."

"Father? Why call me that?"

"Apparently it's what people do in the Liang Kingdom. The emperor banned anyone from owning slaves, so the slave vendors just changed their official line of business but continued selling anyway. Li Huowang, even though you are still young, you are already an adoptive father and even a father. You are quite the elder now, hehe."

While the couple were whispering to each other, there was a knock at the door. "Miaomiao, it's time to eat dinner."

It was Chun Xiaoman, and she sounded embarrassed. She only gave them one reminder before running away. Naturally, she could tell what Li Huowang and Bai Lingmiao were doing inside.

Bai Lingmiao said, "Let me tell you something funny. Recently both Zhao Wu and Gao Zhijian are awkward with each other because both of them wanted to marry Xiaoman. Chun Xiaoman,

however, is feeling irritated because they keep swarming around her like flies.”

Li Huowang put on his clothes and pinched various parts of his body to feel his healing skin.

“Oh, let her just choose then. It’s their path after all and we shouldn’t interfere,” he replied.

After putting on their clothes, the couple left the room and sat at the table placed in the center of many tables. Lu Zhuangyuan had led the rest of the villagers over for dinner to celebrate Li Huowang’s return. There were now enough villagers to use ten tables for dinner.

Lu Zhuangyuan said loudly, “Come, let us toast to the young Daoist! We pray that the young Daoist will have smooth beginnings!”

Everyone cheered when Li Huowang downed his cup.

Li Huowang could even hear Puppy’s excited voice from several tables away, babbling on about him. “That’s my Senior Li! He’s like an Immortal! He can fly, burrow into the ground, and even summon soldiers out of nowhere! He’s capable of doing everything! That day, we met some water bandits...”

“How strong is this alcohol?” Li Huowang asked, frowning and scratching his head. His body was very sensitive, so he couldn’t drink strong alcohol.

“How strong is it? Troupe Leader Lu went ahead and bought some Scholar’s Red, so it should be a good wine. I should’ve changed your drink to tea. Just eat something and go to rest,” Bai Lingmiao said.

Li Huowang shook his head and left the Bai Family estate. He hunched over a tree and poked his finger into his mouth. He vomited all of the wine and food and felt much better.

Someone passed him a napkin, and Li Huowang took it to wipe his saliva away. He turned around and saw it was the Second Deity

in her red veil.

Under the dim light from the estate, Li Huowang looked at the Second Deity with a complicated expression.

“Senior Li,” the Second Deity said.

Li Huowang saw the Second Deity’s Ten Emotions and Eight Sufferings. The Second Deity looked just like Bai Lingmiao of the past.

Li Huowang hesitated before taking out a brand new gold anklet with red thread from his robes.

1. This is a dudou, ancient Chinese inner wear that was usually worn by women and children. It's a diamond-shaped piece of cloth that covers the torso, with strings tied around the neck and the back. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dudou> 

Chapter 448 - Shaman

The Second Deity looked at the golden anklet on her leg.

Her voice quivered as she called out to Li Huowang again.

“Senior Li.”

The red veil was wet with five streaks of tears. The Second Deity appeared excited and sad at the same time.

Li Huowang could not look at the Second Deity's Ten Emotions and Eight Sufferings; they were covered by a fog inside her body.

He looked at the Second Deity with a complicated expression. Then he slowly lifted the red veil.

Li Huowang had seen the true face of the Second Deity many times before, so he wasn't surprised to see it. However, the Second Deity looked a little different today.

Her beast-like features were less visible today. Most of what Li Huowang could see was her silver-white fox fur. The Second Deity flattened the fur as much as possible against her face to make herself look better.

Li Huowang looked at the other half of the Second Deity's face—the human part. He stared at the eyes of the Second Deity and noticed how similar she looked to Bai Lingmiao of the past. To him, the Second Deity was now the Bai Lingmiao who had run out of Zephyr Temple with him.

Li Huowang caressed the Second Deity's face unconsciously. The prickling pain he felt when his fingers touched the scales underneath the fur snapped him out of it.

No, the Second Deity is not Bai Lingmiao. Miaomiao would not forgive me if I treated the Second Deity like this.

Li Huowang's face fell, and he slowly lowered his hand. Right then, the Second Deity reached out with her hands and their

characteristically sharp nails and grabbed Li Huowang's hands tightly.

The Second Deity opened her mouth, revealing her sharp teeth and forked tongue while she tried to speak. Nevertheless, she gave up in the end. The Second Deity covered her face with the red veil again and left with a sob.

Li Huowang did not chase after the Second Deity. He watched her disappear into the darkness before sighing in relief.

He knew the Second Deity was part of Bai Lingmiao; she was the manifestation of Bai Lingmiao's remaining Ten Emotions and Eight Sufferings. However, he really didn't know how he should treat the Second Deity aside from getting her an anklet too.

Should he treat her as though she was Bai Lingmiao? Or should he treat them both as Bai Lingmiao? Li Huowang felt that there was no right answer to this problem.

When Li Huowang returned to the crowded dinner party, he was still thinking about the tears in the Second Deity's beast-like eyes. Then he looked at his bowl and realized there was a mountain of meat stacked in it.

Bai Lingmiao placed a piece of chive on the top of his bowl. "You finished talking? Eat first. This dinner is meant to celebrate your return."

Li Huowang extended his right hand, but rather than taking the chopsticks, he grabbed the pot of wine. He poured himself a full cup of wine and drank it in one go.

He felt drunk once more, and he felt a little better once a numbing sensation washed over him.

Li Huowang didn't have experience with matters like these. After all, before all these things happened, he'd only been a high school student.

"Why is it that the problems never stopped? Can't they just disappear for a moment?" Li Huowang mumbled as he poured

himself another cup of wine.

Before he passed out, Li Huowang realized that he had actually been facing issues in his relationships. It's just that he was so busy trying to survive in this world and stop his hallucinations that he never stopped to think about these smaller issues.

When the dinner eventually ended, Li Huowang felt like he was floating; it was as if he was on a cloud. He was only half awake due to his drunkenness.

After some time, he lay down and felt the smooth silk bed sheets beneath him. He breathed in a familiar scent and understood that he was back in Bai Lingmiao's room.

Li Huowang unconsciously extended his arm and pulled a soft body towards him. He gently stroked the hair of the person and kissed the top of their head.

Bai Lingmiao was walking along the twisted path of Cowheart Village. Under the candlelight of the various houses, everyone was excitedly talking about how to ration the meat they'd taken from the dinner.

Chun Xiaoman smiled at Bai Lingmiao. "Miaomiao, everyone is having a better life than before. To think there are leftovers after dinner."

"You need to feed the horse if you want it to run," Bai Lingmiao said nonchalantly as she walked towards the ancestral hall of the Bai family. "Moreover, this didn't cost us much money. The money that Troupe Leader Lu earned from their show was more than enough to cover the dinner. I never thought they would pull through and earn so much money from performing their pink show in the Liang Kingdom."

"Yeah. They told me that there was an old man who wanted them to perform their pink show at his own funeral for three days! I wonder what that old man was thinking about."

Bai Lingmiao and Chun Xiaoman walked into the ancestral hall

and twisted the monkey statue. Then they entered the hidden chamber.

The underground hidden chamber was lit up by oil lamps, and the sound of chanting rang out from its depths.

“The heavens are round, and the earth is square. May the gods descend and help the shaman. I implore the heavens and the earth, may the ancestors ride the clouds and come assist the shaman before the altar...”

When they walked into the underground hall, they saw Lu Xiucan wearing a belly band covered in runes. He was holding a triangular white flag and a short sword with two spikes. He was poking the spikes on his own head.

Lu Xiucan continued chanting, “The left eye transforms into the sun, and the right eye transforms into the moon. May the celestial bodies light the way and show the sincerity of my prayers.”

The sharp spikes of the short sword had already injured his head. Blood was flowing down from the wound and covering his face. Covered in his own blood, Lu Xiucan looked like a maniac.

“May the gods descend on me with haste! My body for the gods and the gods enter my body! Open the path through the rivers and mountains, and slowly guide me on the path. Hold me close, and guide me through! Shine me in your divine light, and show me!” Lu Xiucan shouted the last verse and stomped the ground hard three times.

Then silence fell over the hall.

Bai Lingmiao frowned when she saw how Lu Xiucan stood there like a statue with a menacing look on his face. She took Chun Xiaoman’s sword and slashed Lu Xiucan’s waist. But rather than cutting him down, the sword struck Lu Xiucan’s body, and a sharp metallic clang echoed.

Bai Lingmiao wasn’t satisfied and tried a few more times, but each time she cut him, she only managed to leave a shallow wound

on him.

Chun Xiaoman's sword had been given to her by Li Huowang. Not only could it cut through evil beings, but it was also capable of slicing through steel like butter. Yet, a sharp sword like that could not leave a deep wound on Lu Xiucan; he was now essentially impenetrable.

Lu Xiucan looked at his own body with excitement.

He had suffered so many beatings just to learn this technique, but he felt every single wound that had been inflicted on him had been worth it.

Lu Xiucan snarled. As his hands trembled with rage, so did the short sword and the flag in his hands.

He shouted, "Damn old man! How dare you hang me up and beat me? Don't stop me! I will take revenge today! I will snap that old man's bones myself!"

"You—"

Chun Xiaoman was going to stop him, but Bai Lingmiao stopped her.

Bai Lingmiao said, "We won't stop you. Go now. Your father drank a lot tonight, so he should be sound asleep."

Lu Xiucan growled and raised his short sword as he ran towards the exit.

He was about to leave when he slowed his pace and bellowed even louder, "Don't stop me! I will kill that bastard today!"

Chapter 449 - Change

Chun Xiaoman was confused when she saw that all Lu Xiucan did was shout scolding remarks profusely; he didn't even attempt to leave the hidden chamber.

"Miaomiao, did you know that he would be like that?" Chu Xiaoman asked.

Seeing how indecisive Lu Xiucan was, Bai Lingmiao chuckled. "You think I was joking when I scolded him for being useless? He can't be a good guy, but he can't be a bad guy either. He's just a useless bum."

Right then, Puppy walked down the stairs with a bowl of rice. He was surprised when he saw Lu Xiucan cursing away.

Puppy placed the bowl of food on the ground before stopping Lu Xiucan. "Aiya, aiya. What are you trying to do? Stop, stop!"

Lu Xiucan became more agitated when Puppy got in his way. He raised the short sword and wanted to run out, but Puppy managed to stop him.

With Puppy comforting him, Lu Xiucan slowly calmed down. Puppy dragged him back down and gave him the bowl of food.

Taking the bowl, Lu Xiucan continued ranting, "Puppy, I will not forget what that old man did to me! I will remember it always! I'm going to slice him to bits one day!"

Puppy replied, "Aiya, you've already been starving for the entire day. Just eat your meal first. You can kill your dad anytime you want, but your food won't taste good once it's cold."

Lu Xiucan ate voraciously and only noticed halfway through that the meal was better than yesterday's. He stabbed a piece of pork the size of an egg and scooped up some rice, shoveling them all into his mouth. He munched on the food in delight.

As Lu Xiucan ate the delicious pork, he asked curiously, "Why is the meal so luxurious? Did we celebrate the New Year earlier?"

"No, Li Huowang came back! The entire village came together to have dinner to celebrate his return."

"Oh? My master is back?!"

Lu Xiucan was excited. He wanted to run out to greet his master before realizing that he should ask Bai Lingmiao for permission first.

But when he turned around, he saw that Bai Lingmiao and Chun Xiaoman were missing. A hidden door was left open at the side of the wall.

Bai Lingmiao was walking down the hidden corridor when she staggered and almost fell in the dark.

She complained, "This stupid place is so dark."

Chun Xiaoman gently held her arm. "It's not too dark. I will place a few more lanterns on the wall tomorrow. By the way, should we tell Senior Li about the techniques that the White Lotus Sect left for us?"

Bai Lingmiao felt irritated by that. "What can he do if we tell him about it? Do you think the techniques are so great? It's nothing compared to him. He's much stronger than you think."

"Really? Is Senior Li that strong? That's good news!" Chun Xiaoman remarked, feeling happy for Li Huowang.

"It's not good news. Do you think having a strong lunatic is good for us? Think about what he did in the past," Bai Lingmiao said as she walked until they reached the innermost chamber.

"But didn't Senior Li tell you that he won't relapse again?"

"And you trust him? If you do, you are even crazier than him. I think something is still wrong with him. He changed the subject the moment we were talking about his hallucination as if he was hiding something. Let's just wait and see instead. He probably won't run in the near future. Let's observe his condition first before we decide

what to do.”

“Miaomiao, you are so kind to him.”

“What else can I do? I’m married to him. He never thought that I was dragging him down, so there’s no way I can leave him for being a lunatic now. We can only think of ways to treat him instead.”

The stone door opened, and Bai Lingmiao walked in. The room was bright thanks to the glowing jade lotus.

Bai Lingmiao used the light to stare at the mural. She looked at the six white donkeys dragging the conjoined lotus.

Ever since the strange chanting was first heard, the conjoined lotus in the mural had been becoming clearer instead of disappearing. She didn’t know what it meant.

Is this related to the Heavenly Mater of the White Lotus Sect?

It was a wild guess, but Bai Lingmiao had found nothing about the conjoined lotus even after reading through all the books of the hidden chamber. She didn’t know if it was a good sign or bad.

Bai Lingmiao was the sole survivor of the White Lotus Sect. Her future would be decided by what kind of phenomena the conjoined lotus would bring.

“If only we knew where the strange chanting came from. We might be able to get a clue,” Bai Lingmiao murmured.

However, it was impossible. She had tried asking the Immortal families when she’d worked as a shaman, but they hadn’t had an answer either.

The only thing they’d told her was that the chant was chaotic and disorderly. Bai Lingmiao didn’t know what it was, but she had a feeling that the Immortal families were scared of the chant.

Bai Lingmiao thought about it as she took three incense sticks. She lit it up, prayed to the conjoined lotus, and placed the incense sticks on the incense burner.

She didn’t know if it was effective, but she decided to try. At

the very least, the books never said that the Heavenly Mater banned others from praying to it.

“Miaomiao, what should we do with the books at the edge of the room? They are talking about how to use humans as sacrifices to lay out a spell array.”

Chun Xiaoman’s voice snapped Bai Lingmiao back from her train of thought.

Bai Lingmiao looked at the corner of the room and replied, “What else? Burn them.”

“Burn them?”

Bai Lingmiao’s voice was filled with disgust. “Burn them! They’re such disgusting books. I feel irritated by just looking at them!”

She threw an oil lamp towards the stack of books and ignited it.

Under the glow of the fire, the conjoined lotus was flickering. It appeared to be floating in a small orb that was inverted on itself.

Nevertheless, both Bai Lingmiao and Chun Xiaoman failed to notice that.

Chapter 450 - Gao Zhijian

Li Huowang opened his eyes. He sat up in the messy bed and looked towards his right. He saw the sunlight entering through the window and knew he had slept in. It was already well into the morning.

“I overslept again?” Li Huowang muttered.

Ignoring the shallow cuts on his body, he put on his clothes and descended down the wooden stairs.

“Good morning Junior Li,” Zhuge Yuan said, greeting Li Huowang with a fan in hand.

“Good morning, Senior Zhuge.”

Seeing Zhuge Yuan, Li Huowang slapped the back of his head in regret. He had just returned to the village and already let his guard down. Zhuge Yuan was still an illusion, and he needed to save him! Cultivating the "Truth" was much more important than having sex!

Li Huowang ate a bun and pickled vegetables before downing a bowl of porridge in haste. After breakfast, he quickly found a quiet room in the estate and sat down to cultivate.

According to the complicated text on the scroll, once he had covered the primordial breath with his inner sight, he could start cultivating the next step to utilize it. He had to first circulate the primordial breath through his chakra points in the correct order: Root Chakra, Sacral Chakra, Solar Plexus Chakra, Heart Chakra, Throat Chakra, Third Eye Chakra, and finally the Crown Chakra.

He had to shroud his Ten Emotions and Eight Sufferings with the formless primordial breath once. It was a difficult process, and Li Huowang felt like he was trying to push an elephant. He could not accomplish it even after half a day.

Nevertheless, he was not hasty. Cultivation requires persistence; one could not be impatient.

If the Strayed One that Bei Feng had tricked could do it, then Li Huowang could do it too.

Li Huowang didn't know how long he spent cultivating, but when he stopped due to fatigue and opened his eyes, he saw that it was already dark.

The entire room was warped beyond recognition. The floor and walls were either protruding or sunken.

Li Huowang frowned. It turned out that cultivating this technique would cause severe damage to the cultivator's surroundings.

I need to find somewhere more remote so I don't harm the others. I can't cultivate in Cowheart Village anymore.

Li Huowang stood up and walked towards the door, but when he opened it, he was surprised to see a youth standing on the ceiling.

The youth saw Li Huowang and stumbled backward out of shock and fear. The youth then crawled away.

Li Huowang was confused as to who the youth was. He then saw Gao Zhijian, with his large stature, hanging upside down on the ceiling and walking towards him.

That was when Li Huowang finally realized what was happening. They were not the ones that were upside down; he was!

The moment Li Huowang realized that, he suddenly fell.

He quickly turned his body and landed safely. He stood up and looked into the room he had been cultivating in.

The room had been twisted upside down. The floor had become the ceiling, and the ceiling had become the floor. He was confused as to why it had taken him so long to realize it. And why hadn't he fallen from the ceiling?

Li Huowang decided that he needed to quickly find a new place

to cultivate. It was too dangerous and unpredictable for him to cultivate near other people.

“Li-Li-Li...” Gao Zhijian stammered.

Li Huowang looked up at Gao Zhijian and patted his arm.

“How old are you? Did you grow taller in the past few months?”

“Yes,” Gao Zhijian said before pointing outside.

Li Huowang wasn’t sure what Gao Zhijian wanted, but he decided to follow Gao Zhijian outside anyway.

Before Li Huowang left, the frightened youth from earlier stood up shakily and called out, “Father... Mother told me to bring you to dinner.”

“I will go in a while. Tell her to eat first,” Li Huowang replied.

It didn't take long for Li Huowang to get to Gao Zhijian's home. Gao Zhijian felt ashamed as he passed some broken pieces of stone to Li Huowang.

“This is...” Li Huowang muttered, realizing that it was the sacred text that he had given to Gao Zhijian. It was the same one that Dan Yangzi had treated as a treasure.

Gao Zhijian stammered as he explained that the sacred text had suddenly shattered one afternoon. After that, he heard a voice. It said a string of sentences, mocking the wielder of the sacred text.

Li Huowang explained, “No worries. You don’t have to be ashamed. This has nothing to do with you. The sacred text was something that the Sitting Oblivion Dao used to trick others.”

Even though he didn’t know when Dan Yangzi had obtained the sacred text, Li Huowang estimated that Dan Yangzi had likely possessed it for years, based on the number of people he had to find to refine his pills. That meant that the person who had given him the sacred text had been a member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

Dan Yangzi was not the only one who had been tricked; even the Human Xiaos and many others had been tricked. A scheme of such a large scale, in terms of how widespread it was and when it

first began, could not have been concocted in a single day. It had likely taken the Sitting Oblivion Dao hundreds of years to do such a thing.

Only the Shai Zi were capable of plotting such a scheme. The Shai Zis spent so much time collecting the "Lies" from so many people for just one reason: to find the opportunity to summon Doulao so that they could take the Sacred Mountain Ghost's Eye from the emperor.

The Heavenly Dao on the dead Sacred Mountain Ghost's Eye appeared to be one that governed chaos.

But this is strange. According to what I know, the Shai Zis should be finding methods to trick the Heavenly Dao away from Doulao so that they could ascend into godhood. Why are they helping Doulao? Or were they tricked by Doulao?

Gao Zhijian pulled on Li Huowang, bringing him back to reality.

"Sorry. I'm thinking about a lot of things. Is there anything else?" Li Huowang asked.

"Yes," Gao Zhijian replied simply and entered his house.

Soon after, he returned with a book.

Li Huowang recognized it as the book that he had taken from Peng Longteng.

"Th-th-this is... a... training manual for soldiers..." Gao Zhijian stammered.

Li Huowang was shocked. He took the book and quickly read through it. The book was indeed a training manual for soldiers. It taught the reader how to increase their murderous aura as well as how to control it.

"Did you learn it?" Li Huowang asked.

"Yes," Gao Zhijian answered with a nod.

He looked around and found Peng Longteng's halberd. Gripping it tightly, he took a deep breath and howled as he raised the heavy

weapon.

A dense murderous aura spread out from Gao Zhijian. The headless Peng Longteng got excited, her large hands clenching and releasing in anticipation.

Gao Zhijian let out a furious roar, “HA!”

A strong wind blew through Li Huowang’s hair. Then the massive halberd was thrust into the ground in front of him. The earth shook, and cracks appeared on the ground. Li Huowang almost thought there was an earthquake.

Li Huowang was surprised that Gao Zhijian had become this powerful. If he were to grow a little taller, he would be the same height as Peng Longteng.

Was Gao Zhijian a genius, or was the training method for soldiers easy to learn?

Chapter 451 - Hospital

It was a cold day, and steam rose from the top of Gao Zhijian's head after his demonstration. He approached Li Huowang in excitement and gave him the book.

Gao Zhijian said, "Train."

Li Huowang understood what Gao Zhijian suggested. He wanted Li Huowang to train using the manual.

Li Huowang shook his head. "No need. You can train it yourself. It's useless to me."

If Li Huowang had obtained the book after they escaped from Zephyr Temple, he would've treated it like a treasure. However, compared to the "Truth" and the various techniques of the Sitting Oblivion Dao, the training method for soldiers was too weak for him to bother with. Li Huowang was now even capable of surviving without a head, as long as he didn't notice that he didn't have a head in the first place.

Li Huowang recalled Peng Longteng's behavior and felt worried.

He asked, "Did you experience any changes after you started cultivating it?"

"No," Gao Zhijian answered simply.

Nevertheless, Li Huowang still managed to detect changes in Gao Zhijian. Gao Zhijian had once been stupid enough to eat the food that people offered to the dead just because an old monk had invited Gao Zhijian to join him in making a meal out of it.

If Gao Zhijian of the past gave Li Huowang the feeling of someone aloof, then Gao Zhijian of the present gave off the vibe of someone who used his energy with careful deliberation.

"Fine, continue cultivating it. It's a good thing for you," Li

Huowang said.

At the very least, developing the murderous aura of a soldier might make Gao Zhijian more assertive and aggressive, but it wasn't a serious issue.

After conversing with Gao Zhijian, Li Huowang returned to the Bai family estate for dinner.

As he stepped through the doorway, he recalled something. "The military's cultivation method isn't effective when it's just one person. It's more suited for a large group of people training at the same time. Don't we have many slaves now? You could try teaching them and choose the more talented ones to cultivate with you."

Li Huowang would be more relaxed if Cowheart Village had a small army guarding it.

Gao Zhijian had been feeling a little disappointed after Li Huowang turned down his offer to train with him. However, once he heard Li Huowang's suggestion, he perked up. Gao Zhijian gripped the book tightly and nodded.

Back in the Bai family estate, Li Huowang told Bai Lingmiao about his idea.

Bai Lingmiao remarked, "That's a great idea. At least they have something to do after they work in the field."

Li Huowang added, "We should pay them more too. We bought them, but we still need to win their hearts over."

With a bowl in hand, Bai Lingmiao rolled her eyes and said, "What are you talking about? They are our adopted children. Of course, we should treat them well."

She then scooped some rice into the bowl.

"What happened to your leg?" Li Huowang asked when he noticed something was off with how Bai Lingmiao was walking.

"Nothing. I stepped on a hole by accident and bruised it."

"You shouldn't be running around outside when you are blindfolded."

Li Huowang drank some soup. Then he stood up and walked out.

“Li Huowang, where are you going? Can’t you take a break for a little while?” Bai Lingmiao shouted at him.

“No need to wait for me. Just leave a window open for me later.”

Li Huowang jumped from roof to roof before heading to Cowheart Mountain at the back of the village.

When he jumped past a seemingly empty house, he yelled into it, “Li Sui, follow me!”

“Alright,” Li Sui replied.

He placed Bun down and then followed Li Huowang.

The two of them walked down a small path until they reached the middle of the mountain.

Li Huowang looked around at the crowded grave and remarked, “Why are there so many dead people?”

There were so many graves that they were placed side to side. The green glow of phosphorous fire ignited from time to time, giving the place a chilling look.

Nevertheless, Li Huowang was unbothered. He had seen many scary places, but he had never once seen a ghost.

He looked around and found a small piece of flat land. It appeared to be a space to bury more bodies if the need arises. Currently, it was still empty.

Li Huowang sat down and told Li Sui, “I’m going to the other side so you need to look out for me. If there are any strangers or dangers approaching me, you must burrow into my stomach and bring me back here.”

There weren’t as many troubles as before in this world, but there were still plenty left in the hallucination.

Li Sui raised its two eyeballs and revealed a fleshy grin. “Alright.”

Li Huowang took a deep breath, crossed his legs, and revealed the primordial breath ever so slightly by peeling off a little bit of his inner sight.

As his surroundings twisted, his pupils slowly lost focus, and he looked around at his surroundings in peace.

Li Sui was diligently scanning the area, and he suddenly heard footsteps. He raised his gaze in alarm but relaxed when he saw who it was.

“Mom, it’s already so late. Aren’t you going back to sleep?” Li Huowang said softly to a wooden grave marker.

A pair of fair hands slowly extended and caressed his face.

Bai Lingmiao stared at his face and sighed. “Li Huowang... didn’t you say you were in control of your hallucination?”

“Mom, I’m clean enough. No need to wipe my face anymore,” Li Huowang said before the wet towel was placed on his face again.

His mother replied, “What’s wrong with wiping a few more times? It’s not like your skin will fall off. It’s better now that you are coherent. Brush your teeth first.”

A soft plastic toothbrush was placed in his mouth.

Li Huowang grumbled, but both of them were smiling.

Then Li Huowang thought of something when he saw his mother wiping his hands.

“Mom, when did the doctor say I can leave?”

Even though on paper this place was a hospital, it was more like a prison used to hold people with mental disorders. Li Huowang barely had the freedom to move his fingers, much less walk around.

Since he had decided to turn this place into reality, he needed to prepare himself. If he wanted to live in this world, he needed to get out of the place, even if it meant entering a normal hospital.

Sun Xiaoqin looked at him. “Do you feel that this place is too oppressive?”

“No, I’m just worried about Yang Na. I’m not sure how sick she is.”

Sun Xiaoqin took the towel and walked out the door without a word.

The hospital was very quiet at night, so Li Huowang managed to hear his mother arguing with the guard.

“You think this is a joke?” the guard asked.

Sun Xiaoqin said, “Look. My son’s cured. We can transfer him to someplace nicer. It’s not auspicious to lock someone up like that.”

Footsteps rang out as two people approached them. The argument got more heated too.

Sun Xiaoqin yelled, “If you don’t let my son out, I won’t pay any more money! You will have to raise him yourself!”

“What are you talking about? This is a government-funded prison. We get money from the government, and I don’t even get paid much. Even if you don’t pay us, we can’t let him leave either! You have to think about other people too. We don’t know what your son is made of. It’s like he’s a robot that doesn’t feel pain. Normal people can’t even fight against him. If he goes crazy on the road again, the consequences will be serious! If your son can kill seven bandits, he can kill seven students too!”

“My son would never do that!”

Someone's massive hand pointed at Li Huowang from the other side of the window.

That person said, “He won’t do that? Look at him! Do you think he can differentiate reality from hallucination? Your son is mentally ill!”

The room fell silent.

Li Huowang lay on the bed and thought about it before asking the person, “What do I need to do to exit this place?”

However, the hands didn’t reply to Li Huowang. Instead, they

brought Sun Xiaoqin towards the door, and their voices gradually became soft.

The room's lights went out.

Li Huowang frowned and looked at the flashing camera in a corner of the room. He thought about how he could get out of this mess.

Chapter 452 - Children

How do I prove to them I'm not crazy anymore? Pretend that I'm normal in front of the doctors? What if something happens in the other world while I'm under observation here? Or should I bring something from the other world here to prove that the other world is real? But If I do, I might not have any freedom in the future.

Li Huowang didn't know what to do. Both worlds were real to him, and both sides would say he was crazy to believe in the other world.

He realized that there was nothing he could do in this world to prove that he was sane. Since there was no way to do so in this world, he could only do it in the other world.

If he wanted to regain his freedom, he needed to finish his cultivation and then use it. It was the simplest and easiest method to prove that he was sane—or at the very least, it was easier to do that than playing a mental game with the doctors.

Li Huowang decided to concentrate on his cultivation. He was so focused on it that he forgot to even eat and sleep. This was the ticket to resurrect Zhuge Yuan and for Li Huowang to regain his freedom in the other world.

After the first time he cultivated in Cowheart Village, Li Huowang decided not to cultivate there anymore. Instead, he found a cave in the middle of Cowheart Mountain and decided that it was the perfect place for cultivation.

Li Huowang was not worried about how much he distorted the surroundings since there was nothing but trees and stones.

Within the darkness of the cave, he did something that he couldn't show to the others.

There was the sound of flesh being ripped apart. Li Sui used

three tentacles to pour down a bowl of mercury onto Li Huowang's head.

After the flaying, shedding, and stuffing process was complete, Li Huowang's shout reverberated throughout the cave. "Heaven and Earth, the root of all energy! Broadly cultivated through eons! Within and beyond the three realms, I alone am honored. The golden radiance inside of me shall reflect on my body!"

His shed skin, which had been stuffed with straw, slowly shrank and turned into a small doll.

This was the second time doing the ritual, and it had gone much better than the first.

Zhuge Yuan's eyes almost popped out of his sockets when he saw what was happening. Li Huowang ignored him and grabbed the doll. He felt much more relieved with it in his hands. With it, he could now survive being decapitated.

More importantly, this was an artifact that he could produce multiple times. As long as he had time, he could continue to make it. He would no longer be afraid of people stronger than him with it.

Li Huowang used a small dagger and cut open a wound in his abdomen. He stuffed the small doll into his body.

After Li Huowang finished using the Fiery Scripture to treat his injuries, Li Sui asked curiously, "Father, what is that? Can I have it? Can you teach me?"

Li Huowang shook his head. "You can't use the method. You are not a Strayed One, so your skin is useless."

Li Huowang put on his red robes and walked towards the exit with his weapons.

"Father, I want to help you."

Li Sui did not give up, but Li Huowang ignored it. He did not think a small Black Taisui could help him.

"Just stay in the village next time and don't simply run away.

There are many evil people outside, and they will turn you into a pill if you get caught.”

“You're lying. I went outside before, and it's much more fun than the village. Everyone in the village is afraid of me, even Bun. I think it's much more fun cultivating with you. Father, can I not enter your stomach again?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“If you do, you will take over my body.”

Nevertheless, Li Sui's eyes were filled with eagerness and yearning. Li Huowang thought about it and ultimately gave Li Sui a book.

Li Huowang said, “Read this if you are bored. If you don't know the words you can ask me.”

Li Huowang had given Li Sui the manual on talisman-making.

It would be bizarre yet surreal to see Li Sui drawing talismans and chanting. Still, it might be useful for Li Sui to learn it. It would be of great help if Li Sui succeeded.

“You need to remember that there are many restrictions to drawing the talismans.”

Li Huowang slowly taught it how to read and write while walking down the mountain and heading towards the village.

“Father, why are they afraid of me? Do you think they wouldn't be afraid of me if I took off my clothes and saw my real body?”

“No, absolutely not.”

“Why not? What if I treated them well and gave them money for food?”

“Where did you learn all of these? Do not show them your real appearance. You are different. You are not human.”

After hearing Li Sui's questions, Li Huowang regretted his decision to let Li Sui live with him.

It was nowhere near as simple as he had thought. It was like

raising a real child.

Li Sui never asked that many questions before. I don't have the time to teach him. I need someone to teach him in my stead. Li Sui still doesn't understand a lot of basic things.

Before long, Li Huowang and Li Sui arrived near the fields. Li Huowang looked at his adopted children and his comrades working in the field.

“Senior Li, are you back from the mountain?” Yang Xiaohai asked, walking over excitedly with his legs caked in mud.

Li Huowang asked in return, “Aren’t you in charge of food? Why are you down in the fields? Who told you to work so much?”

“No one. I volunteered! Senior Li, look over there! Those two acres of land are all mine! Senior Bai told me that any food I grow in those lands is mine! That’s two whole acres of food! I no longer have to starve once I harvest them!” Yang Xiaohai said excitedly.

Then he felt something strange on his calves. He reached down and caught it. It was a massive leech roughly half the length of his arm. He threw it away into the field.

The leech was attracted to Li Huowang’s blood and slowly crawled towards it.

Li Huowang frowned. He was not afraid of most things, but he hated leeches.

Chills washed over him at the thought of hundreds of leeches all over him, burrowing into his body and chewing through his flesh with their sharp teeth...

Seeing Li Huowang stand there motionlessly, Yang Xiaohai asked puzzledly, “Senior Li, what’s wrong with you? Have you never seen a leech before? Did you not work in the fields in the past?”

Chapter 453 - Time

The leech slowly crawled towards Li Huowang. He stomped it to death before looking at Yang Xiaohai pitifully.

“Do you always get leeches on your legs?” Li Huowang asked.

“Of course. It’s pretty much impossible to protect yourself from leeches if you work in the fields. I’m fine with it as long as I’m not dealing with snakes. It’s okay if we get bit by leeches. We can always pull them off with our hands, but it’s another issue if they bite cows. Cows don’t have hands and can’t pull leeches off, so they have no choice but to let the leeches drink their blood. That’s why we also call leeches Rotten Cow Crotches. [1]”

Li Huowang looked at Yang Xiaohai, who still had the face of a child. *He’s probably only a sixth grader in the modern world, but he’s already like an adult in this world.*

Li Huowang patted Yang Xiaohai’s shoulder. “You don’t have to work in the fields anymore. You should be studying at this age instead of working in the fields. Leave the fieldwork to the serfs.”

After Li Huowang gave out some orders, Cowheart Village quickly acquired a teacher.

Cowheart Village was a rural area, but with the right amount of money, it had been easy enough to hire a teacher. Some scholars had to work as teachers for a living because they had failed to pass their exams and become officials.

Yang Xiaohai wasn't the only student. Li Huowang had instructed Li Sui to attend classes too. All Li Sui needed to do was to listen and say nothing while the teacher taught the lessons.

The other villagers would come and stand near the window of the classroom whenever they had free time. It was as if they would gain something just by eavesdropping.

Even Lu Zhuangyuan brought his grandson, who was barely a year old. He wanted his grandson to be surrounded by scholars and hopefully become an official once he was older.

Seeing this, Li Huowang decided to open the door to the classroom for everyone. Anyone could enter the classroom and listen to the lessons. He considered it as a social benefit for the people of Cowheart Village.

Li Huowang smiled as he watched the villagers listening to the teacher's lessons. His sour mood was gone, and he felt much happier these days.

"What are you smiling at?" Bai Lingmiao asked puzzledly.

Li Huowang answered, "Look at how well everyone is living now. No matter how much difficulty we faced during our travels, we managed to survive, and now everyone's life is improving day by day. Isn't this what everyone wanted?"

Bai Lingmiao extended her hands and held his skinless fingers, gently leaning against him. "Yes. Our lives will keep getting better. That's why you must not seek death even if you face difficulties in the future. Life will always get better again."

The teacher was currently giving a lecture in front of the class.

"You don't need to learn like a scholar, and I don't expect anyone here to be able to become an official in the future. You just need to learn what you need for everyday life, such as reading and counting! Once you are able to read, write, and count, you will not starve to death in the future! With these skills, you can consider other ways to make a living. Today, you shall learn how to count!" the teacher said, raising a small bamboo tube filled with chopsticks in the air.

The teacher continued, "There are eleven divisions in a day!"

He pulled out eleven chopsticks from the tube and laid them on the ground.

"If a peddler took five divisions to reach your village, how

much time does he have left to sell his wares and sleep?” the teacher asked, picking up five chopsticks from the ground. [2]

“Hm?” Li Huowang was confused.

Bai Lingmiao sensed his confusion and asked, “What’s wrong? The teacher is doing a good job.”

“There are twenty-four hours in a day. A single period consists of two hours, so instead of eleven, there should be twelve divisions in a day. What kind of teacher teaches others about a day having only eleven divisions? He can’t even count time. No wonder he can’t become an official. We should find an excuse to fire him. I don’t want the others to be taught the wrong information.”

Hearing that, Bai Lingmiao felt even more confused. “Li Huowang, what are you talking about? There are only eleven divisions in a single day. Why did you say there are twelve?”

“What?”

Li Huowang’s mind seemed to go numb as if he had been smacked senseless by something. He looked at her in shock before confirming it with her again.

Then he ran into the classroom and asked the teacher, “Are there only eleven divisions in a day?”

Seeing a man covered in bandages rush in and interrupt his lesson, the teacher retorted indignantly, “Of course. How many divisions do you think we have if not eleven? Do you have a problem with my lesson?”

Li Huowang turned around in shock and looked at the other students. “Are there really only eleven divisions in a day?”

Yang Xiaohai was curious as to why Li Huowang was acting this way. “Yeah. Senior Li, there are only eleven divisions in a day. What’s wrong with it?”

“Only eleven? That means a day only lasts for twenty-two hours...? What happened to the remaining two hours?”

Li Huowang suddenly had a feeling that his world had just

turned unreal.

Bai Lingmiao entered the classroom with a frown and pulled Li Huowang outside.

She asked, "What are you doing? Isn't it normal to only have eleven divisions in a day?"

"No, that's not right." Li Huowang calmed down and decided to find the truth himself. "Miaomiao, do you have anything in the village that can be used to count the time? Bring it to me."

"Something to count the time? Is a water clock fine? That's all we have here."

"Yes!"

Soon, three wooden buckets of different heights were placed in front of Li Huowang. The tallest bucket was filled with water, and there was a small tube that dripped water consistently into the second bucket from the first.

A drop of water took around a second to reach the second bucket, but Li Huowang did not trust it. He decided to count the time himself.

But the result was not what he had expected. There were indeed only eleven divisions in a day.

Even though there might be a margin of error, it was impossible for Li Huowang to miscount two entire hours.

After staying up for the entire night, Li Huowang finally accepted this reality. There were indeed only twenty-two hours in this world.

He rubbed his tired eyes and mumbled, "No wonder I kept oversleeping. Guess it's because this world's missing two hours?"

Ever since Li Huowang escaped from Zephyr Temple, he'd always felt that he had overslept or didn't get enough sleep. It appeared to be because of the time in this world.

Bai Lingmiao stood behind him worriedly. "Li Huowang, are you going crazy again?"

Li Huowang had a much easier time accepting this reality than he had thought. It made sense that even time was different in this bizarre world.

He stood up and hugged Bai Lingmiao. “Does it mean that we only had eleven divisions in a day even while we were in the Zephyr Temple?”

“Of course.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Do I need to tell you this? I didn’t know that you were clueless about it.”

Meanwhile, Zhuge Yuan was listening to the faceless Hong Zhong illusion taunt him. “Do you see that? That’s the sense of confusion of a Strayed One! Did you learn anything today?”

1. It’s a literal translation here. I can’t find anything about it so most likely it’s a regional thing where people called it whatever they liked. Kinda like how Asian Koels are called uwu birds because their calls are literally “uwu” 🙌

2. One Division = Two Hours 🙌

Chapter 454 - Someone Familiar

“Cock-a-doodle-doo~”

The rooster crowed, and everyone in Cowheart Village gradually woke up and had breakfast.

Normally, farming families didn't eat breakfast unless it was harvest season when they needed the extra energy to work. Usually, most people only had two meals a day.

However, that wasn't the case in Cowheart Village. Everyone got to eat breakfast. This was also one of the reasons why everyone was grateful to Bai Lingmiao. She fed them and let them study for free, and she even granted them a portion of the crops that they planted. There was no better employer than her in the world.

Lu Zhuangyuan knocked on the door of his eldest son incessantly. “Wake up! The porridge at the top of the pot is the thickest! If you aren't fast even when it comes to eating, what else can you do?”

“Father, we have money now. We can cook our own breakfast,” Lu Juren's wife, Luo Juanhua, said.

She was dissatisfied that she couldn't sleep in even though they had money now.

“Do you think you're rich?! How dare you even say that you won't eat the free breakfast and want to use your own money to buy food! Preposterous. Get up!” Lu Zhuangyuan scolded his daughter-in-law.

Then he headed out to knock on the rooms of his disciples.

Naturally, he was not there to call them to eat breakfast but to wake them up to practice their basic performance skills.

Lu Zhuangyuan was strict to them just like how his master had taught him. If they didn't practice enough or their performance was subpar, they were not allowed to eat breakfast.

Most performers started training at a young age. Most of his disciples were already over ten years old, so they needed to practice even harder.

While his disciples worked on their dissonant singing, Lu Zhuangyuan brought his family to the Bai family estate.

Upon entering, they saw Yang Xiaohai ordering two people to carry a pot of porridge into the hall. Lu Zhuangyuan smiled and walked inside.

However, he then frowned when he saw his rebellious youngest son, Lu Xiucan.

He had done everything to educate Lu Xiucan. He beat and scolded his youngest son, but nothing had worked. Lu Xiucan continued to curse at Lu Zhuangyuan, saying stuff like "Just you wait" or "One day, I will kill you!"

As for Lu Xiucan's wife, Tao'er, she followed faithfully behind Lu Xiucan and kept quiet most of the time. She seemed to be lost in her thoughts.

"Aiya, aiya, everyone is here," Puppy said loudly in his jarring voice.

Everyone turned to look and saw him helping his pregnant wife into the hall.

Puppy beamed at Lu Xiucan. "She's going to give birth soon! It's almost time, and I think she will give birth in the next few days. My son is going to be born soon!"

Lu Xiucan scoffed. "Did I ask you anything about it? What a showoff."

"Hehehe," Puppy laughed. He helped his wife to sit down before whispering to Lu Xiucan, "How's your training going? Can you use the technique now?"

“It’s still the same. I can’t read so it’s hard for me to learn it. Why, do you want to learn it?”

Puppy smiled. “No, I don’t want to learn that. It’s too tiresome. I will just eat breakfast, go and take a rest, and then eat lunch. There are people working in my four-acre field. I just need to wait for harvest season; I don’t even have to do anything. To think I would get food for free almost every year! This is the freedom I’ve yearned for. I’ve endured so many hardships that it’s time for me to rest.”

He didn’t learn any techniques after traveling with Li Huowang for so long, but he had become more perceptive. Few things came without strings attached, especially cultivation techniques; there were always hidden side effects.

Puppy was actually waiting for Lu Xiucan to cultivate the technique first and then observe him for a few months. Then once Puppy confirmed that there were no side effects, he would cultivate the technique. He’d learned to do this from Li Huowang.

Lu Xiucan scoffed at Puppy. “Hmph! All you do when you’re not eating is sleep. What a loser.”

“Hey, I might be a loser, but I have a son. Do you?”

While they spoke, Li Huowang and Bai Lingmiao walked down from the second floor. Everyone immediately became quiet and sat at their respective places.

Li Huowang was currently skinless and looked horrifying, but everyone was already used to it. After all, they’d seen worse.

Everyone in the hall waited till Li Huowang started eating before they too began eating breakfast.

Li Huowang ate some pickled vegetables, salted eggs, buns, and porridge. He ate a lot.

“Eat slower. Were you a hungry ghost in the past? No one is taking your food away,” Bai Lingmiao said.

Li Huowang ignored her grumbling and continued to eat his

breakfast.

These days, he would cultivate for hours on end. The day would usually pass by the time he was finished. If he didn't eat enough now, he would be hungry by noon.

“*Sigh.* No one's going to harm you here, so why did you injure yourself like this? You're bloody all over,” Bai Lingmiao remarked as she tried scratching some of the scabs off Li Huowang's skin.

Li Huowang replied, “It's better to be prepared. Don't worry. I won't die.”

“You won't die, but doesn't it hurt? Are you addicted to pain now? I get frightened when I see you at night.”

Bai Lingmiao nagged at Li Huowang until he was done eating.

Li Huowang swiftly finished his breakfast and ran towards the back of the estate. Li Sui was already waiting there for him.

The two of them, one tall and the other short, walked up the path towards Cowheart Mountain.

Just as they left the village, white fog surrounded them in the forest. Li Huowang frowned and immediately unsheathed his purple-tasseled sword.

He called out, “Who's there? Come out!”

The murderous aura his sword emitted spread out in a wave and dispersed the white fog.

A man in a wooden mask appeared out of thin air.

He said, “Well, aren't you a familiar face? Is that you, Er Jiu?”

“Liu Zongyuan?” Li Huowang uttered.

He was surprised to see the man with the wooden mask. He remembered the man as one of the members that Tuoba Danqing had recruited to find the Muddled One.

The work of the Surveillance Bureau was very unpredictable. Out of the five people who had joined that mission, only two of them were still alive. Ji Xiang and Xinchu were dead, while Tuoba Danqing was stuck forever in the realm of the Muddled One.

Now, the two surviving members had reunited once again, and they felt much closer to each other than before.

Since Liu Zongyuan was here, Li Huowang could not go and cultivate today anymore. Instead, he brought Liu Zongyuan into the guest room and served some tea.

After taking a sip, Li Huowang asked Liu Zongyuan with curiosity, “Brother Liu, you're all the way out here... Do you have a mission around here today?”

Even though Liu Zongyuan was also in the Surveillance Bureau, Li Huowang was sure that Liu Zongyuan wasn't here because of the big mess that occurred in Shangjing. Li Huowang had used Bei Feng's body, so they shouldn't know that Li Huowang was the mastermind.

Liu Zongyuan's words confirmed Li Huowang's guess.

“Aiya~ I heard that there were people staying here again and thought it was probably another group from the White Lotus Sect. That's why I ran here to check it out, but to my surprise, it's you.”

Chapter 455 - Problem

“Yeah. It’s annoying to stay somewhere crowded, so I found a quiet place to settle down,” Li Huowang said.

Liu Zongyuan replied, “No worries. Since you're living here, I will just report that this village is yours. I don't think anyone else will come and trouble you after that. To be fair, you did burn to death the entire White Lotus Sect that was occupying this area. Since you’ve killed them, their territory should belong to you too.”

Liu Zongyuan was trying to please Li Huowang, but those words were extremely painful for Li Huowang to hear.

Liu Zongyuan took a careful peek at the door before getting closer to Li Huowang and whispering, “Did you hear about Shangjing? Everyone in the bureau is treading lightly now.”

“Yeah. I’ve heard about it. It seems that the Sitting Oblivion Dao fooled us all.”

“That’s not all that happened! I’ve heard that they forced their way into the palace and fought for three days straight! Even the emperor was heavily wounded by them. I fear that we might not even have the time to finish building the tomb for the emperor. But the Sitting Oblivion Dao had many casualties too. Half of them are dead, and one of the Shai Zi is dead too!”

“Can this information be trusted?”

“Of course! Are you underestimating me? I’m from the Moongate, and our information is always the best!”

Li Huowang frowned. *It seems that neither party stopped fighting even after I left Shangjing.*

Seeing Li Huowang's expression, Liu Zongyuan tried to comfort him. “Don’t worry. It’s just the emperor that's dying. His sons are already waiting to get the throne. The moment he dies, one of the

princes will ascend. We should just treat it as another day.”

“Brother Liu, you are mistaken. I’m not worried about them. I’m just thinking about how chaotic this world is,” Li Huowang said, pouring another cup of tea and drinking it.

“Yeah, the world is in chaos. Everything is due to humans too. Why can’t those in positions of power just think about living life peacefully? The moment they give orders we have to work like crazy. If it wasn’t because of the resources in the Surveillance Bureau, I would’ve quit! Er Jiu, I think you made the right choice by hiding in a rural area. You didn’t even take a mission nor did you even report yourself. The new Ji Xiang didn’t even know you existed.”

Li Huowang thought about it and decided that he still needed someone in the bureau to feed him information. It was good to have a friend.

“Brother Liu, I feel much happier knowing how many members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao have died. Don’t leave yet. We will have a toast to celebrate it! You cannot return until you are drunk!”

“Sure! My stomach is growling already. I was waiting for you to say that.”

After receiving Li Huowang's order, Yang Xiaohai used all of his culinary techniques to cook up a feast. He even brought out a good cask of wine so that Li Huowang could drink with Liu Zongyuan.

After their feast, Liu Zongyuan wrapped his arm around Li Huowang. He was drunk and almost made Li Huowang his sworn brother.

Nevertheless, Li Huowang was not fooled. He could see Liu Zongyuan’s Ten Emotions and Eight Sufferings clearly and knew Liu Zongyuan was not being sincere.

The Sitting Oblivion Dao believed that everyone had different masks that they wore at different times.

Despite that, Li Huowang was unbothered by Liu Zongyuan's insincerity. After all, he was someone who hid his real emotions too.

Liu Zongyuan woke up early the next morning. He tried to give Li Huowang some advice just as he was leaving.

"Brother Er, it's fine for you to just send me up to this point. Are you sure you won't be accepting missions anymore? If you don't take any missions for a long time, you will get demoted."

Li Huowang shook his head. "Think about how many people have died recently. The outside world is still too chaotic. It's best to hide and wait for things to pass. Brother Liu, don't work too hard. Your life is your own, and there's nothing after death."

Liu Zongyuan heeded Li Huowang's advice seriously.

Before he left, Liu Zongyuan took out several bent bamboo strips with the different moon phases engraved onto them. They ranged from half-moon to full moon.

He said, "Brother Er, take these. If you need to find me, tie them onto the pigeon. They will be able to find me for sure. The fuller the moon, the faster it will take to get into contact with me."

"Sure. I will be staying in the village for quite some time. You can come and find me if you want."

Liu Zongyuan jumped into the forest and disappeared after bidding Li Huowang farewell.

Then Li Huowang took out the Surveillance Bureau identity token and looked at it.

It seems that I can't throw this identity away yet, or today's matters won't be resolved easily. But the emperor is dying soon...? If he dies, doesn't that make him the second emperor to die? They sure go through the emperors fast.

Li Huowang recalled the emperor that hid his face behind the veil. He thought the emperor was overbearing and regal, but it was unexpected that he was going to die so soon.

Li Huowang stopped thinking about Shangjing and turned around to head towards Cowheart Mountain.

He didn't care who died and who lived in this crazy world. All he wanted to do was live in a stable environment and protect the small village where everyone he cared for resided.

Li Huowang wasn't even interested in Immortality. As a Strayed One, he could consume an unlimited amount of Lifespan Pills without any side effects. However, his life would be filled with pain and misery. It was no different than Hell.

It was scary to think that he would continue living while everyone he loved would die.

Li Huowang had just left the area when Bai Lingmiao and the Second Deity peeked out from their room.

"Luckily Li Huowang is here. Otherwise, it might not be that simple to fool the Surveillance Bureau. It seems that he's got a high position within the Surveillance Bureau. Should we tell him about how the Immortal families are threatening me? Maybe he could find out the way to deal with them from inside the Surveillance Bureau. What do you think?" Bai Lingmiao asked the Second Deity.

The Second Deity shook her head.

Bai Lingmiao said, "Why? Are you thinking that it would be troublesome for him? It would be even worse if the issue became more serious without telling him. There are things we shouldn't hide from him."

"What about your eyes?"

The Second Deity's words shocked Bai Lingmiao.

Bai Lingmiao then raised her hand. Her white irises were dotted with white specks when she looked at her own hand. In her vision, she only saw three of her fingers. The rest of it was blocked by the white specks.

Bai Lingmiao replied in a calm voice, "My parents asked for me once. Those with my condition will lose their eyesight no matter

what, and I'll have a relatively short life. They tried many things, but nothing worked. Maybe this is just how my life will be; there is nothing I can do about it. My life was doomed to be a sad one right from the start.”

Chapter 456 - Change

“It’s just being blind. I will find a way to change my eyeballs. If I can’t find a way, I will ask Li Huowang later on,” Bai Lingmiao said. “If I die one day, help me look after him. Don’t let him seek death like a damn girl. No, wait, I can’t die now. I need to give birth to a child for him. How many children do you think I should give birth to?”

There was a sudden commotion in the village, and Bai Lingmiao frowned. Then she took the Second Deity with her to find out what was going on.

They quickly found out what was happening. Puppy’s wife had given birth.

It was supposed to be happy news, but when the baby was brought out of the room, everyone stopped cheering and fell silent. Puppy was so stunned that he stood still like a rock.

Just like Puppy, there were white patches of various sizes on the baby’s skin. The baby had the same condition!

Luo Juanhua looked around before approaching Puppy and carefully placed the baby in his arms.

She told them, “It’s a girl.”

Puppy’s face turned even paler, and he almost collapsed. “Why is it a girl? Why? How could she get married next time?”

Chun Xiaoman was on the verge of tears.

She hugged Bai Lingmiao and said in a trembling voice, “Those with conditions like us are not only ugly, but our children will inherit our conditions too. If we have children, we’ll only continue on the chain of pain. I told Puppy that once, but he believed that he was different. *Sigh.* ”

Hearing that, Bai Lingmiao’s pale face turned ashen.

Li Huowang walked up the steep mountain path until he reached the cave he usually cultivated in. The flat cave was now heavily distorted.

It was twisted in ways that were impossible, and there were many sculptures too. Some of them were of Yang Na, Sun Xiaoqin, and even Li Jiancheng. Li Huowang had made them while cultivating. He had done it unconsciously and by chance. He couldn't replicate the results even if he cultivated again.

Li Huowang found a relatively flat piece of land in the cave and started cultivating while sitting down. He gathered his inner sight and slowly pushed the primordial breath to circulate around his seven chakra points.

After he worked hard on that for a while, the primordial breath finally started to move. He wanted to use this chance and do one cycle today.

Li Huowang started his cultivation fervently. He thought of nothing else except to move the primordial breath to the starting point. It was a slow process but the primordial breath was moving.

It was also a very dangerous process. Li Huowang had to focus on using his inner sight to move and cover the primordial breath at the same time. He accidentally let the primordial breath escape a number of times and let himself get strapped into the hospital bed in his hallucination.

Nevertheless, his hard work quickly paid off. Under his intense cultivation, he swiftly moved the primordial breath into the first chakra point, and a faint light emanated outwards from him. He suddenly felt his inner sight, which was covering the primordial breath, expand rapidly before being forced outwards through his limbs.

Li Huowang learned everything that the faint light touched, including the earthworms and the smaller bugs found inside the

soil.

It was a mysterious feeling. In that instant, Li Huowang felt that he had numerous eyes. The eyes were both inside and outside him, and they merged together to form a sphere.

As long as he willed it, he could see everything in his vicinity.

However, the feeling came and went away quickly. When Li Huowang opened his eyes, his levitating ceased, and he fell towards the ground.

After landing safely, he looked around. He didn't know why, but for some reason, he felt everything was subtly different even though his surroundings looked the same.

Then he picked up a stone and suddenly realized something. He closed his eyes and focused on it.

"This is an apple."

It was not simply a sentence. Li Huowang wholeheartedly believed that he was holding an apple.

Veins bulged on his forehead, and there was an intense expression on his face. Even the hand holding the stone started to shake violently.

After a few moments, he opened his eyes and saw that he was holding an apple!

He excitedly bit into the apple and tasted its sweet and tangy juice!

As he ate more of it, more juices spilled into his mouth. But the taste of the juice gradually changed and was replaced with the taste of iron.

He opened his mouth and spat out blood along with bits of rocks that had cut into his mouth.

Li Huowang looked at the stone apple in his hand that was missing a chunk and told Zhuge Yuan, "Senior Zhuge, look. I've only cultivated for a few days, but I can do this already. One day, I will be able to resurrect you again."

“Junior Li, don’t rush your cultivation. Take it easy. You should probably go back and rest now. You’ve been cultivating for four days straight. Your body might not be able to hold out.”

“What? It’s been that long?”

Li Huowang stood up and felt dizzy all of a sudden. Fortunately, Li Sui rushed in and held Li Huowang up with his tentacles.

“Send me back home. I want to rest a little,” Li Huowang said right before passing out.

The next time he woke up, he found himself lying in a bed. He woke up because he was actually choking on some water that Bai Lingmiao was trying to get him to drink.

Bai Lingmiao asked, “Are you awake? Are you hungry? I’ve brought some food for you.”

She had a sullen expression, but Li Huowang didn’t notice that. The only thing on his mind was to eat. He was so hungry that he could eat an entire horse.

Li Huowang sat up and ate voraciously. A bowl of plain rice was akin to an exquisite plate of food to him in his current state.

He quickly finished his rice and started eating the dishes.

Based on how fast Li Huowang was eating, Bai Lingmiao noticed that the food might not be enough for him, so she went back down to get more.

Li Huowang kept eating until he noticed the pair of red shoes in front of him.

He raised his head and looked at the Second Deity. “Is something wrong?”

“Senior Li, can you help us?”

Li Huowang munched on the vegetables and then swallowed. “Tell me what’s wrong. There’s no need to hold back.”

The Second Deity stood there with her fingers intertwined in hesitation.

Li Huowang picked up a lot of unsaid information just from observing that.

He asked, "Is this something you want to talk about alone? Did Miaomiao not agree to it? I know both of you share the same senses, but you can act on your own too. Tell me what's wrong, and I will help you if I can."

The Second Deity was still hesitating when the bright room suddenly turned dark.

"Hm?" Li Huowang uttered in surprise.

He stood up and went to the window. The skies were incredibly dark.

"Is it nighttime already?" he asked.

"No." Zhuge Yuan wore a grave expression. "Junior Li, it's not nighttime. It's still afternoon. This is one of the Natural Disasters, the Sun-Devouring Heavenly Dog."

Chapter 457 - Natural Disaster

“Sun-Devouring Heavenly Dog?” Li Huowang frowned at Zhuge Yuan's words.

Isn't it just a solar eclipse?

However, Li Huowang knew it was not a normal solar eclipse. He had seen one in the other world when he was a primary school student.

A solar eclipse wouldn't blot out the sun completely and would always leave a ring of light.

Dum, dum, dum!

The rhythmic sound of rapid drumbeats echoed, and Lu Zhuangyuan used his trained voice as a performer to shout, “The Heavenly Dog has eaten the sun~! Beat the drums and make some noise to scare it away~!”

Everyone could no longer stay calm, and they started panicking at Lu Zhuangyuan's words.

Li Huowang opened the window and jumped down before heading toward the source of the sound. It didn't take him a long while to see Lu Zhuangyuan. He was with his group of disciples and was beating and playing instruments with lanterns in hand.

“Stop! Everyone stop!” Li Huowang snatched Lu Zhuangyuan's gong.

“Young Daoist, I know you're amazing, but you don't know what's happening right now! The Heavenly Dog has eaten the sun! The last time this happened, my third uncle brought along the entire village to beat the drums and play instruments to chase away the Heavenly Dog!”

Li Huowang frowned at Lu Zhuangyuan's nonsense. "What you're trying to do is useless! Hurry up and gather everyone in the village to hide in the Bai Family Estate! Don't forget to do a head count!"

"What are we going to do if the Heavenly Dog swallows the sun because we didn't chase it away with our instruments?"

"Just go! Say something stupid like that again, and I will burn your instruments!"

Lu Zhuangyuan wanted to argue but decided against it after seeing Li Huowang's stern look. He turned around and walked away with his disciples to gather everyone else. They brought their lanterns to the Bai Family Estate.

Li Huowang finally had the time to ask Zhuge Yuan.

"Senior Zhuge, is this really a Natural Disaster? Are you sure it's not something else?"

Li Huowang had experienced so many bizarre things in this crazy world that he could no longer feel surprised by anything.

Zhuge Yuan looked up and reminisced before replying, "It should be a Natural Disaster. I remember reading about it once, and there was one Natural Disaster that had the same phenomena where the skies have gone completely dark."

"Senior Zhuge, have you read anything about it? How about the Sun-Devouring Heavenly Dog?"

"No, but what matters isn't the details of the Natural Disaster. It's when they happened. Do you remember when was the last Natural Disaster?"

Li Huowang looked up at the dark skies and reminisced. "Last year."

Last year's Natural Disaster involved the disappearance of "Decay."

Everything in the world would no longer decay and rot. It was exactly why Li Huowang could still remain calm. It was a "Natural

Disaster," but it didn't really affect Li Huowang and the others, except for the death of the Abbess, which was notably impactful.

"Correct, but Natural Disasters usually happen once every ten years. Why do we have two Natural Disasters in just two years? Junior Li, something is definitely wrong here."

Li Huowang's heart tightened at Zhuge Yuan's remark.

"Does that mean that in the Baiyu Capital—"

"Junior Li," Zhuge Yuan interrupted with a serious look. "You're a Strayed One that is already cultivating the "Truth." It's best if you don't talk about those things anymore, or..."

Li Huowang understood what Zhuge Yuan was trying to say, so he went silent. He stood quietly and thought about the many different possibilities until Lu Juren came running over with a lantern, informing him that everyone in the village had already gathered at the Bai Family Estate.

Li Huowang looked up at the empty space above him. "Senior Zhuge, I think we should focus on holding out through this Natural Disaster first, regardless of what's happening over there. There's no reason for me to think too much about it, as I can't really do anything."

"No, no. All of us should take responsibility for everyone's lives. Let me think about this for now," Zhuge Yuan said, tapping his head with his fan and sinking deep into his thoughts.

Lu Juren took a deep breath and cast a nervous look at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang didn't say anything and started walking toward the Bai Family Estate. Li Huowang saw that everyone was kneeling and praying toward the darkness. It wasn't exactly a strange sight, as ordinary people would seek salvation during moments of extreme fear, especially in the face of such a bizarre phenomenon.

"Xiaohai, do we have enough food?" Li Huowang asked. He concluded that they ought to bunker up in the Bai Family Estate

and wait for the Natural Disaster to pass.

“Senior Li, don’t worry. We have enough food. We still have last year’s rice in the granary. We can last for two to three years. We also have a well in the estate to drink, so we’re going to be fine.”

Li Huowang nodded and took the bell from Chun Xiaoman’s waist.

He rang it loudly to get everyone’s attention.

“Everyone, don’t panic. It’s just a Natural Disaster. It’ll go away soon; we just need to wait for it to go away.”

Despite Li Huowang’s words, everyone was still afraid.

Fortunately, they looked slightly reassured by his words.

Li Huowang noticed their fear and instructed Yang Xiaohai to slaughter a cow for a meal. Everyone’s attention was instantly shifted to whether or not they should actually slaughter a cow for a meal, and they seemed to have forgotten their fear.

“Boss Hong Zhong is amazing! I didn’t expect that you’d be able to divert their attention so easily!”

Li Huowang ignored the taunting Sitting Oblivion Dao illusion and looked at Zhuge Yuan, asking, “Senior Zhuge, how much effort do you think the Surveillance Bureau had to use to repel Natural Disaster? They were established to repel Natural Disasters, but I still have my doubts on whether they could actually do that or not.”

The appearance of a Natural Disaster meant that the Simings were fighting over each other to take the Heavenly Daos.

Having witnessed Doulao’s incredible powers, Li Huowang doubted that an organization filled with normal people could repel Natural Disasters. *Or maybe they were just lying?*

“They do have their methods, but I’m not sure if they could do it in time. They must have used up a lot of their resources against the Sitting Oblivion Dao at the time.”

Li Huowang didn’t know what to say. He had hated how the

Surveillance Bureau thought that the lives of others were meaningless, but at the same time, he was hoping that they'd soon resume operations.

They were evil and had killed many people, but they were indispensable to this world. Many people would die without them.

“Senior Zhuge, you said that something is definitely wrong because of the short interval between Natural Disasters. What do you think? Can the Surveillance Bureau handle this?”

“It should be fine, but the Liang Kingdom’s Surveillance Bureau is working together with the imperial family, so I don’t really trust them. Even if the Liang Kingdom is fake, ancient laws say that the Surveillance Bureau cannot collaborate with any factions or powers. They absolutely cannot help the imperial family to invade other countries and steal land. Those fall under the jurisdiction of the military, after all.”

Chapter 458 - Appearance

Li Huowang was no longer worried after hearing that someone would handle the Natural Disaster. If the Liang Kingdom's Surveillance Bureau couldn't handle it by themselves, there was still the Surveillance Bureau in Hou Shu and Si Qi.

It felt nice to have someone strong to deal with the Natural Disaster; Li Huowang didn't even need to do anything. Time ticked by, and everyone saw that nothing bizarre was happening except for the dark skies.

Actually, everyone's attention was on the delicious scent of beef, and they crowded around the entrance to the kitchen of the Bai Family Estate.

“Are we really going to eat beef? This is treason. I'm scared...”[\[1\]](#)

“Yeah. It's such a waste to kill a cow. It could've helped us in the field for a very long time.”

“Well, the cow is already dead, so there's no use crying over it. I've never eaten beef before, so I'm excited.”

Soon, everyone had their own bowl of rice topped with large pieces of beef. They muttered to each other, comparing beef slices to see who had the larger pieces before eating with jovial smiles.

“Just eat. Don't think about it too much about it. Who do you think you are? An immortal or something? You don't have to bother with that Natural Disaster.” Li Huowang received the massive cow heart that had been stewed with rock sugar.

“This is too big.” Li Huowang stared at the massive heart that weighed at least four catties. The only way to cook it was to stew it whole, or the insides of the heart would remain raw.

“Go ahead and eat it first. If you can't finish it, just give it to

me. I have a big appetite.”

Bai Lingmiao picked up her chopsticks and dug out a gold bracelet from inside the heart before presenting the dish to Li Huowang.

“Why did you put a gold bracelet inside the heart of the cow?”

“I don’t know. My mother taught me that, and she said it’s good for the body.”

Li Huowang was actually pretty hungry after running around all morning dealing, trying to deal with the Natural Disaster. He poked his chopstick into the heart and ate it as if it were a massive dumpling.

A distinct fragrance exploded in his mouth, and he chewed on it with a smile.

Meanwhile, a dazed Puppy carrying his daughter walked over to Li Huowang.

For the first time in a while, Puppy had no appetite.

Just then, Puppy knelt on the ground and prostrated, kowtowing three times to Li Huowang amidst his frustration and sadness.

Li Huowang stopped chewing and looked at the baby in Puppy’s arms.

Before Puppy could say anything, Li Huowang said bluntly, “I can’t help you. Your daughter is not sick nor is she disabled. She was born with that. Even if I remove her skin, her skin would grow back in the same way.”

Li Huowang didn’t even consider using his primordial breath to try and cure Puppy’s daughter. It was just too risky. He had just managed to move his primordial breath to the Root Chakra. If he were to use it forcefully, he could end up changing Puppy’s daughter for the worse.

The Sitting Oblivion Dao *did* have some illusory techniques, but it would only address the symptom rather than the issue itself.

Puppy's face fell, and he walked away with his daughter. He had just taken two steps when he raised his arm and slapped himself hard. Tears had already fallen down his cheeks before his hand could land on his face.

"Sigh. Puppy really is pitiful. I wonder if his daughter would hate him once she grows up?" Bai Lingmiao mused.

Li Huowang turned to look at Bai Lingmiao and said in a deep tone, "If he's pitiful, what about you?"

"What?" Bai Lingmiao's pupils shrank into needle points.

"Do you really think that you can fool me? How long are you going to hide it from me?" Li Huowang placed the cow heart back into the bowl.

"Who told you that?!" Bai Lingmiao exclaimed angrily, but she calmed down after meeting Li Huowang's gaze. "Don't worry. I'm not blind yet. As for my shorter lifespan, it is what it is. However, I have yet to celebrate my twentieth birthday, so I should have ten more years to live."

"That's not all," Li Huowang said, sounding indifferent as he stared at her face, seemingly looking for any change in her expression.

Bai Lingmiao was irritated. "I don't need your help to deal with the Immortal families. You should take better care of yourself first and recover your sanity. Who's the damned blabbermouth who told you everything? No one else but the Second Deity knows about that, so it was her?!"

"No, it wasn't her. It was you. You told me everything," Li Huowang replied. He picked up the cow heart and took a bite of it.

Bai Lingmiao was stunned. Then, she realized the meaning behind his words. She slapped the cow heart away, and it splattered on the ground. "You tricked me! You dare trick me?!"

"If I hadn't done that, would you have told me anything? What was your plan? Were you planning on telling me only after you've

gone completely blind?" Li Huowang asked, staring at her pink irises covered in white specks.

Li Huowang had actually caught onto what the Second Deity was trying to say amidst her hesitation, and he realized by then that Bai Lingmiao was hiding something from him.

However, it was still astonishing that he managed to deceive so much information from her.

Bai Lingmiao's tone of voice rose as she exclaimed, "Fine! I admit that I've been hiding information from you, and since I've already admitted it. Isn't it fair for you to admit to the truth as well? You're hiding the fact that you're still a lunatic, right?"

"You've been running up Cowheart Mountain so you could somehow slip into your hallucination. Do you really think that I'm blind?!"

Li Huowang took a deep breath. He was about to explain when a dog's barking startled them out of their quarrel. Li Huowang instantly knew that Bun was the one barking, but it was Li Huowang's first time hearing such emotions in Bun's barks.

Li Huowang brought Bai Lingmiao into the yard, and they saw Bun's fur standing on end as it glared at the main gate.

The main gate was ajar, and it was creaking as it swayed in the wind.

"*Huh?* I thought I locked the gate. Why is it open?" Zhao Wu asked, running up to them.

And that was when Li Huowang felt a shiver down his spine upon realizing something: everyone in the village was currently inside the Bai Family Estate.

Li Huowang jumped up onto the wall and looked around until he eventually found something suspicious. A man wearing funeral clothes and a hat was standing in a dark corner of the village.

The man had a bizarre appearance; his head was massive, it was half as big as his entire body, and he was wearing a massive

hat as well. The man's legs were short, but his arms were long.

It was a surreal sight.

If Li Huowang were asked about the one fact that he had learned while living in this bizarre world, he'd respond with the fact that only evil entities could be so deformed and bizarre, just like the girl who had summoned the God of Happiness.

1. In ancient China, eating beef was illegal because cows were important animals used to till the fields. It's also a sign of respect for the cows after they worked hard in the fields. 🙏

Chapter 459 - Evil Entity

Shwing!

The purple-tassel sword was unsheathed and was pointed at the evil entity at the corner of the wall. Li Huowang directed his killing intent at the evil entity. Evil entities had become a rare sight to Li Huowang since he arrived in the Liang Kingdom, so he didn't expect to see one here.

Li Huowang frowned and whispered, "Senior Zhuge, a Natural Disaster really isn't that simple. I think it's doing something to evil entities rather than just making the sky dark."

Zhugue Yuan was standing with his hands behind his back as he stared at the sky with a serious expression. He looked like he was trying to recall something. Zhugue Yuan didn't respond to Li Huowang, but the entity in the corner made a move.

The man turned around slowly, and Li Huowang finally saw the man's face.

The man had a pallid face filled with bloody holes. The man opened his bloody mouth, revealing rows of arms rather than teeth. The arms had patches on them, and they belonged to babies! The arms at the top and bottom of the mouth held hands, creating a grotesque and eerie smile.

Li Huowang snarled at the horrifying sight. He jumped down the wall and charged at the evil entity. Li Huowang had experienced so many bizarre events in this crazy world that such a horrifying sight could no longer faze him.

Li Huowang's sword reached the entity first. He followed up with a swing of his bronze coin sword, slashing at the evil entity's head as if the sword were a whip.

The evil entity thrust his long arms toward Li Huowang. It was

trying to attack and defend itself at the same time.

Li Huowang waved his hand, and the bronze coin sword twisted. It let out a flash of light, and the evil entity cried out in pain. Moments later, his long arms were cut into three pieces.

The evil entity lost both of his arms, and he shrank into his head. His head shrank rapidly as well. Then, a dark shadow rushed out of the man's clothes and tunneled into the darkness.

Staring at the severed arms on the ground, Li Huowang decided not to chase after the evil entity. He was worried that the evil entity was trying to lure him away from everyone. He swung his sword to shake off the blood on it before heading back into the estate.

Li Huowang had just taken two steps when a paper window lit up from within a house at the end of the dark alley. An eerie green glow phased out from the window and hovered in mid-air. Something was moving in the darkness, and Li Huowang was certain that it wasn't human. After all, everyone was in the Bai Family Estate.

At first, it was just one house, but the same eerie glow soon appeared within the houses of more and more houses until the entire Cowheart Village emitted the same eerie green glow.

Li Huowang frowned at the sight, realizing what was happening. A single evil entity was nothing, but multiple entities were a whole new story. Most importantly, he couldn't say for sure whether things would turn for the worse or for the better if he were to fight them right now.

Li Huowang rushed to the Bai Family Estate and slammed the main gate shut before locking it. He took out a piece of yellow paper and drew a talisman using his blood to ward off evil spirits. Then, he placed the talisman on the main gate.

Staring at the faces in the estate, Li Huowang reassured them as best as he could, saying, "Don't worry about the outside world, everyone. Just stay here in the estate! No one is allowed to go

outside until the Natural Disaster is gone!”

Li Huowang hopped onto the walls. He gripped his sword tightly upon seeing more and more houses emitting the same eerie green glow.

“It’s surprisingly difficult to encounter even a single evil entity, but all of them are popping out like mushrooms right now. Is it only Cowheart Village, or is this happening everywhere? If it’s the latter, then it’s going to be disastrous...” Li Huowang muttered, and his heart sank at the idea.

“If it’s the latter, then I’m afraid this Natural Disaster is going to live up to its name,” Zhuge Yuan said, sharing the same serious look as Li Huowang.

Zhuge Yuan raised his right hand and gestured with his fingers, seemingly calculating something in an attempt to make sense of what was happening.

“Sigh. What a shame that I can’t take part in something this interesting. I did not expect to die so early.” Hong Zhong was sighing in boredom despite the bizarre sight.

“Daoist, what’s going on? Are many people going to die this time as well?” the old monk asked, sounding worried.

Li Huowang ignored them and looked down at the village. The bizarre sight had a silver lining; even though the houses were giving off the same eerie green glow, there weren’t any hostile gazes on them.

Li Huowang wasn’t sure whether he managed to scare them or not, but at the very least the evil entities were too scared to open the windows and leave the houses.

“My heavens! What is that?! Master, behind you!”

Lu Xiucui’s urgent screams made Li Huowang turn around. Then, he saw that the windows on the second floor were emitting the same eerie green glow. *They’re here!*

To make matters worse, the glowing window was the window

of Bai Lingmiao's room.

Li Huowang placed two talismans on his knees and gnashed his teeth.

Then, he took a massive leap and soared through the air before crashing into the glowing window.

Wooden debris flew everywhere as Li Huowang crashed into the room. Looking up, he saw two figures—a white and a red figure. They were hunched over the bed, seemingly eating something.

The figures were Bai Lingmiao and the Second Deity!

Li Huowang walked up to them and placed his arm on Bai Lingmiao's shoulder.

“Miaomiao?!” Li Huowang exclaimed as his heart jumped up to his throat. Bai Lingmiao's gentle features had vanished, and her face had been replaced by a bizarre face.

Bai Lingmiao's face was now covered in spikes, green scales, and black blood. Her mouth had rows of curved teeth; she had lost all human features and had become an amalgamation of beasts!

However, Bai Lingmiao was laughing despite her plight. Her mangled mouth stretched from ear to ear as she laughed. “

Hahaha~ Hahaha~ Li Huowang, I don't want to laugh, but I can't stop it! The Immortal families are so happy that they went crazy! They're affecting me, and I'm hungry as well!”

With that, Bai Lingmiao pounced on the bed and gnawed on the flesh of an unknown corpse, which clearly belonged to an evil entity.

Crack.

The Second Deity snapped the corpse's bone in half before munching on it with her gaping maw.

Bai Lingmiao had become an amalgamation of beasts and was munching on a corpse with the Second Deity. The horrifying sight was enough for Li Huowang to know that he had to find a way to

stop them. He needed to calm them down at all costs.

Li Huowang waved his right hand, and a domino appeared in his palm.

Li Huowang gestured with his hands, making a seal with both hands before placing the domino on his forehead. "Break the bond and seal the heart!"

The next moment, he removed the domino, and his face fell off like a mask.

Li Huowang pressed his face on Bai Lingmiao's face.

"Secure, enlighten!" Li Huowang exclaimed.

Bai Lingmiao immediately stopped laughing.

Chapter 460 - Lotus Seat

Upon confirming that the technique hidden in Hong Zhong's memories was useful, Li Huowang did the same thing to the Second Deity.

The Second Deity immediately stopped laughing and eating.

"What's going on? They're fine not too long ago, but they've transformed into something vile!" Li Huowang's three faces said at the same time.

The technique that he had employed was from the Sitting Oblivion Dao, and Li Huowang could see that the two were fighting back against the technique's suppression; it was evidenced by their violent trembling.

Li Huowang knew that the technique wouldn't last long. He needed to attack the issue at its roots.

Zhuguo Yuan shared his thoughts, saying, "Junior Li, the Immortal families have decent appearances, but they're still evil entities. The things that can affect evil entities would affect them, too. The sudden surge in the number of evil entities outside and the changes in the Immortal families have proven that the Natural Disaster is related to evil entities.

"In other words, the Natural Disaster is the source of this issue."

Zhuguo Yuan's information was helpful, but he couldn't do anything about it. He wasn't strong enough to deal with a Natural Disaster by himself. In fact, he didn't even know how to disperse a Natural Disaster.

Li Huowang looked up at the dark skies with gritted teeth. "What is the Surveillance Bureau doing? Are they not going to do anything but watch as a myriad of lives are about to be sacrificed?!"

"At this rate, everything is going to collapse!" Li Huowang

popped his head out of the window with the bamboo slips that Liu Zongyuan had given him in hand. "Xiaohai, give me a homing pigeon!"

"Homing pigeons? We don't have any of that. However, I have a sparrow here that I'm going to grill later. Is that fine?"

"Yes!"

Li Huowang wanted to know what was going on with the Surveillance Bureau by asking Liu Zongyuan. He also wanted to know how long the Natural Disaster would last. Li Huowang swiftly composed his letter before tying it to the sparrow along with a bamboo slip engraved with a full moon.

The sparrow soon disappeared in the dark skies.

Li Huowang was still trying to catch his breath when he heard someone shouting in the yard. He rushed outside to find "something" peering over the walls from the outside. They barely looked human and were covered in dirt. Their figures were folded in half and distorted; they looked more like clumps of rotten meat.

However, they all had one thing in common: their smiling face. They looked just like the evil entity Li Huowang had fought earlier.

"Shit! They've become ghosts and are now trying to take Lady Bai's life! I told her to bury them farther away, but she insisted on burying them in the mountains behind the village!"

"Stop whining! Those corpses are being possessed by something. They're not scary at all! Also, ghosts do not exist!"

Bai Lingmiao and the Second Deity were wearing Li Huowang's face as they followed closely behind Li Huowang. Li Huowang whipped out his purple-tassel sword and the bronze coin sword before jumping onto the wall.

The three of them cut through the corpses as if the latter were vegetables. Ordinary evil entities were nothing before Li Huowang.

Soon, the situation was brought under control. Before Li Huowang could sigh in relief, however, he heard something snap in

his heart—one of the two threads in his heart had snapped.

Li Huowang whipped around and saw that the face he had pressed onto the Second Deity's face had been torn in half for some reason.

“ *Hahahaha~!* ” The Second Deity laughed maniacally as she ran toward the ancestral hall of the Bai family on all fours.

“Senior Li, quick! Follow me!” exclaimed the Second Deity.

Li Huowang was anxious. There were still evil entities around the Bai Family Estate, and the Second Deity had just escaped, causing even more trouble.

While Li Huowang was pondering over what to do next, the Bai Family Estate's main gate was kicked open. Gao Zhijian emerged, sweeping his giant halberd around and spinning like a tornado. He killed almost all of the evil entities in one fell swoop!

Then, Gao Zhijian looked up at Li Huowang standing on the walls and roared, “Go!”

The immediate danger had been addressed, so Li Huowang grabbed Bai Lingmiao and chased after the Second Deity.

There were talismans on his knees, so he was lightning fast. In no time, he caught up to the Second Deity, who was running on foot.

Li Huowang lunged at the Second Deity, but the latter avoided it and jumped into the ancestral hall of the Bai Family through a hidden door.

Li Huowang walked into the hidden door, chasing after the Second Deity. He raced down the White Lotus Sect's hall before entering another secret room where the Second Deity had come to a halt.

The Second Deity was laughing as she stood frozen among the columns of books and scrolls. Tears spilled from her eyes the moment she saw Li Huowang. Then, she tried her best to suppress her laughter before shouting, “ *Haha* —Senior Li! We're going to die

soon! The Immortal families feel that the mortal world is their own, and they are using our bodies to descend into the mortal realm!

" *Haha* —we can't leave much for you except for these scrolls. These scrolls contain the techniques of the White Lotus Sect, and you might be able to use them once you're dead! *Hahaha!* "

The Second Deity's beast-like face was stuck in between sorrow and happiness. It was an eerie sight to see, but Li Huowang could see a "kindness" in that expression, and it was a kind desire to take care of Li Huowang.

"What nonsense are you spouting?! The Natural Disaster will pass, and you are not going to die! Come, just sleep for now," Li Huowang said. He tried to press his face onto the Second Deity.

"Junior Li, that technique is useless. You should take the Twelve Merit Jade Lotus and put it on her head. Then, ask her to sit with her legs crossed and tell her to make the lotus seal with both hands," Zhuge Yuan said.

Li Huowang obeyed and saw a jade lotus emanating a soft white glow.

"Junior Li, hurry up! It will be too late once the evil entity has taken over your wife's body!"

Li Huowang hesitated no longer and quickly placed the lotus on the head of the Second Deity. Her laughter grew softer and softer before eventually being replaced by crying.

"Stop crying! Make the lotus seal!"

The Second Deity obeyed and made the lotus seal with her hands. The seal was large and exaggerated due to her sharp fingernails. However, it was effective; the white glow from the jade lotus condensed and formed a lotus seat before melting into the Second Deity.

The soft energy was like spring water, cleansing her from the inside. Everything that belonged to the Immortal families was suppressed.

Soon, the Second Deity became more and more like Bai Lingmiao.

However, Li Huowang was soon anxious; the Second Deity was becoming transparent. Li Huowang snatched the jade lotus away from her head, and the Second Deity had become tangible once more.

Li Huowang sighed in relief. Clearly, the jade lotus was an incredible artifact, but it was going to be dangerous if the user had no idea how to use it correctly.

The Second Deity had returned to normal; Li Huowang proceeded to do the same thing to Bai Lingmiao and placed the jade lotus on her head.

The soft, white glow melted into her, and Li Huowang's faux face was the first thing that left her. The intertwined energy of the Immortal families followed suit, and in the end, the murderous aura in her heart was expelled as well.

Chapter 461 - Someone Stronger

Li Huowang removed the jade lotus upon seeing Bai Lingmiao returning to normal.

He then shook her vigorously, shouting, "Miaomiao! Miaomiao!"

Li Huowang only relaxed when Bai Lingmiao opened her eyes.

"Senior Li ..." Bai Lingmiao's pink irises revealed sadness and indignance.

"As long as you're fine... as long as you're fine..." Li Huowang hugged her tightly and patted her back. Li Huowang looked up, quietly thanking Zhuge Yuan.

If Zhuge Yuan hadn't told him what to do with the jade lotus, he could have lost Bai Lingmiao.

"Junior Li, no need to thank me. I decided to help because I can help. Anyway, I didn't expect that the Twelve Merits Jade Lotus have been here all this while. I've been looking for it for a very long time."

Li Huowang took a deep breath and slipped his arms behind Bai Lingmiao before carrying her out of the dark room. The Second Deity followed closely behind them.

Li Huowang lowered his head and took in the fragrance of her hair before whispering, "I know that you're upset, but right now, we need to deal with the urgent matters first. Let's talk after we've overcome the Natural Disaster, all right?"

Listening to Li Huowang's beating heart, Li Huowang burrowed her head deeper into the former's chest and nodded. Compared to her previous self, she had become much more quiet and meek.

The tunnels made by the White Lotus Sect weren't that long, so Li Huowang soon made it out, walking into the ancestral hall.

Once he was outside, Li Huowang immediately heard the sound of fighting coming from the entrance of the Bai Family Estate. Li Huowang picked up his pace and ran toward the noises to reinforce them.

Li Huowang had taken just a few steps when his expression froze, and he came to a screeching halt. He had picked up something with his keen senses; something was watching him.

Li Huowang shivered. He had no idea why, but his body was no longer under his control. His shivering became even more intense as time ticked by; soon, he trembled visibly.

“That’s...” Li Huowang looked up while trembling, and his gaze pierced the dark skies.

The dark skies parted, revealing unknown horrors. Li Huowang saw the profound energy of the universe rolling around, the intertwining Heavenly Daos, and the shining capital filled with crimson mansions with the royal palace hidden at the top.

A bead of cold sweat slid down Li Huowang's face and landed on Bai Lingmiao's hand. Li Huowang looked up from his chest and saw Li Huowang staring at the skies without moving.

Bai Lingmiao looked up as well but saw nothing.

“Senior Li, what’s wrong?” Bai Lingmiao asked, sounding uneasy.

She tugged lightly at his red robes, and that was when Li Huowang's mouth parted until it reached his ears. His lower jaw was dislocated with a crack, and an urgent scream escaped from the depths of his throat.

He sounded like a crane crowing loudly.

When his scream rang out, it pervaded and overwhelmed everything. Every noise nearby became Li Huowang's cry. Black tentacles surged from Li Huowang's shadow amidst his strange

scream.

Bai Lingmiao felt something tugging on her shoes, and she cried out, “Senior Li!”

Bai Lingmiao cried loudly, and Li Huowang tried desperately to close his eyes to stop the entities up above in the Heavens from affecting him. However, he couldn’t do it. He felt like he had lost all control over his eyes.

Just then, Li Huowang hoisted Bai Lingmiao over his shoulder before gouging his own eyes with his fingers, but it was useless! His bloody eyeballs were still staring at the entities hidden behind in the dark skies!

Li Huowang clenched both hands tightly and destroyed his eyeballs.

And that was when he finally stopped screaming—everything had returned to normal.

Li Huowang slumped to the ground with Bai Lingmiao in his arms.

The Second Deity and Bai Lingmiao hurriedly helped Li Huowang up.

Li Huowang looked haggard and was drenched in his own blood. His lower jaw was completely dislocated, so his mouth was agape. He panted deeply as both saliva and blood flowed out of his mouth.

Li Huowang looked incredibly weak as if his soul had been taken away from him.

Bai Lingmiao was about to beat the drums, but Li Huowang raised a hand to stop her. He forcefully set his jaw in position before saying, “Don’t call upon the Immortal families! The evil entities in the world have gone crazy! The Immortal families might not listen to you anymore, and they might not leave you alone the moment you summon them here!”

Bai Lingmiao's tear-stricken face appeared before Li Huowang,

and she reached out a trembling hand to touch Li Huowang's bloody eye socket.

“Senior Li, what’s wrong with you? Why did you gouge out your eyeballs?” Bai Lingmiao asked, sobbing.

A tremor ran across Li Huowang at Bai Lingmiao's remark, and he opened his mouth wide once again.

Li Huowang covered his eye sockets with both hands and mumbled, “No, I'm not going to think about it. I'm not going to think about the suffering of the masses and the suffering of all living beings. Suffering cannot be born nor die; they are neither dirty nor clean, and they will remain eternal.”

The scenes that Li Huowang had witnessed were threatening to reappear in his memories. He tried his best to calm down by chanting a mantra. He lowered his hands but found that the scabs had glued them to his face.

Li Huowang tugged at his arms, and blood sprayed out of his eye sockets. Li Huowang listened to his surroundings and endured the pain to ask, “Where are we?”

“Master, you're in the yard of the Bai Family Estate. Please get ready to endure the pain; I will scatter some medicine into your eye sockets.”

Hearing Lu Xiucui's voice, Li Huowang tried to stand up and walk outside with his sword in hand.

“Master, you don’t have to go anymore, as you are heavily injured. Miss Bai, Simpleton, and Xiaoman have killed most of the evil entities. If they need reinforcements, I can simply go there to help him.”

Lu Xiucui's words had yet to finish echoing in the air when the others arrived to check on Li Huowang. They told him the same thing, allowing Li Huowang to know that they really weren’t in danger.

Thus, Li Huowang sat down and took out the Fiery Scripture to

heal himself.

The sizzling wax moved across his face and stopped the bleeding in his eye sockets.

Lu Zhuangyuan wrapped some bandages across his eyes, and Li Huowang sat quietly, listening to the situation outside with his keen ears while trying to come out with contingency plans.

Just then, his arm and face felt warm.

Before he could ask any questions, cheers erupted all around him.

“What’s happening?!” Li Huowang held his sword tightly and stood up.

“Young Daoist, the sun is back! *Hahaha!* Looks like someone managed to scare the Heavenly Dog away with the gongs!”

Chapter 462 - Missing

Li Huowang sighed in relief when he heard Lu Zhuangyuan and his superstitious nonsense. He sat back down and muttered to himself, "Looks like the sun is back. It's a good thing that we've warded off that Natural Disaster."

Li Huowang's heart relaxed, and he lost consciousness the moment he lost all tension. When he woke up, he found his mouth filled with a warm liquid. The liquid was tasty—it was soup!

The familiar softness pressing against his nape, and the familiar fragrance told him that his head was on Bai Lingmiao's lap. "Miaomiao."

Bai Lingmiao said nothing; she was focused solely on feeding him chicken soup.

"I'm not disabled. I can do it myself. I'm just tired." Li Huowang sat up with much effort and drank the soup from the bowl in big gulps. Li Huowang didn't really suffer any severe injuries except for becoming blind. His exhaustion stemmed from his mind rather than his body.

Li Huowang felt like the cogs in his head had rusted. He tried thinking hard and long about something, but the back of his head throbbed in pain.

Li Huowang knew why this was happening.

It was because he had seen something he was not supposed to see.

The entity that had appeared out of the darkness during the Natural Disaster and the entities that couldn't be mentioned neither in words nor recollections—he had seen them all.

It seemed that the recent Natural Disaster involved the addition of something rather than deletion.

When Li Huowang stared at the entity, the entity stared back at him. There were no "lies" in the entity's figure, and it was like a massive bronze cauldron with inscriptions of all the major events that happened in the past.

Every recollection renders it invalid, and it changes every time it's forgotten. Every time it's mentioned, it'll move itself to the past while bringing its other self to the present.

Li Huowang knew what it meant at the time, but he had forgotten it.

The entity was not a Siming. Li Huowang had never seen it in the Baiyu Capital. In fact, Li Huowang didn't even know where it came from or just what exactly it was. Of course, Li Huowang had no intentions of learning more about it.

"Senior Li, what's wrong?" Bai Lingmiao asked, stroking Li Huowang's furrowed brows with her pale fingers in order to soothe him.

"No worries. I'm fine. I shouldn't be thinking about something like this; dealing with it is the Surveillance Bureau's job," Li Huowang said. His face was pale as he repeated his words again and again to stop thinking about it.

Li Huowang grabbed Bai Lingmiao's hand, and his voice had a hint of anticipation in it as he said, "Miaomiao, are you really okay? Do you really not need the murderous aura anymore?"

Without eyes, Li Huowang couldn't see her expression.

However, he could feel Bai Lingmiao's other hand covering the back of his hand.

Li Huowang's expression fell at Bai Lingmiao's silence. In the end, he decided to just enjoy the silence.

Perhaps I shouldn't talk about that anymore and forget about it. Maybe this is for the best.

"Did we lose anyone in the village?" Li Huowang asked.

"None, but someone's missing. However, I'm not sure whether

he is 'someone.' or not.”

“*Hmm?*”

“Li Sui is missing. Remember the thing that called you 'father' and crawled out of your belly button?”

“What?! Li Sui is missing?!” Li Huowang exclaimed. He jumped up instinctively and rushed toward the window before shouting, “Li Sui! Come back!”

Li Huowang shouted numerous times, but there wasn't any response.

He reckoned that something was wrong.

Li Sui was a naive creature. He'd always stick close to Li Huowang if he could help it, and it was the result of them living together for so long. In other words, there was no way Li Sui wouldn't respond to Li Huowang's shouts.

“Miaomiao, ask the villagers to look for Li Sui! Prioritize it!” Li Huowang ordered.

“All right,” Bai Lingmiao responded and headed downstairs.

Left all alone, Li Huowang thought about the many different possibilities.

Li Sui wouldn't possibly leave his side for no reason.

“Senior Li, it's best if you think about the worst-case scenario. The Black Taisui is an evil entity as well, after all. The Natural Disaster must've affected him as well, and I don't know what happened to him.”

Li Huowang's expression became sour at Zhuge Yuan's remark. Now that he thought about it, Li Sui had gone missing upon the Natural Disaster's appearance.

“Master! Master!” Lu Xiucan exclaimed.

Li Huowang stood up instantly and hurriedly turned to Lu Xiucan. “Did you find him?”

“No, I just came here to tell you that even Bun has disappeared.”

Li Huowang gnashed his teeth and smashed the table with his fist.

The table and his fist split in half at the same time.

Caught off guard, Lu Xiucan retreated to the stairs and hoped that Li Huowang couldn't see him near the stairs.

“Go and keep searching for them! If you can't find them in the village, try searching around the village in a radius of ten Li!” [1]

“All right, I will pass down your orders!”

Time ticked by, and night soon fell.

Their chances of getting found were dwindling slowly as time went on. They continued their search until the second section of the night arrived. Li Huowang finally calmed down enough and told everyone to go back and rest.

A soft pair of hands placed a bowl of noodles on the cracked wooden table before Li Huowang. A pair of chopsticks was placed in Li Huowang's hands afterward.

“Go ahead and eat first. I don't really have the appetite., Li Huowang said in a sullen voice.

Two days ago, he thought everything was heading in a good direction, but the unfortunate news that he had been hearing these days was making Li Huowang feel that things weren't going swimmingly at all.

“Tsk. Look at you. You're acting as if you had really lost a son. He was an evil entity. Do you really think that he's your son, as he came out of your stomach? If I were in your shoes, I would be glad about his disappearance.

“After all, I've just gotten rid of a nuisance.”

Li Huowang looked up at the faceless Sitting Oblivion Dao member, who had just taunted him. Li Huowang turned to an empty space and said, “Senior Zhuge, can you help me and give him a slap?”

Smack!

“Thanks.”

Bai Lingmiao was instantly worried upon seeing Li Huowang talking to himself. She was heading to the bed when she walked back to the table, picked up the chopsticks there, and slowly fed Li Huowang.

“I’m not hungry. You should go and eat first.” Li Huowang pushed it away, but Bai Lingmiao insisted.

The two argued for a while until Li Huowang finally opened his mouth and ate the noodles. Two figures—one eating and one feeding—sat quietly in the room.

Li Huowang was just about to obliterate the bowl of noodles when a familiar voice echoed from the window. “Father, were you looking for me?”

“Li Sui?!” Li Huowang stood up in surprise and rushed toward where the voice had come from.

However, the Second Deity stopped him, explaining, “Senior Li, that’s not Li Sui. It’s a dog that has been skinned and stripped of its flesh. It’s baring its fangs at you while smiling.”

1. One Li = 500m. So around 5km 🐾

Chapter 463 - Li Sui

“A skinned dog? And it's smiling at me?”

Hearing Bai Lingmiao's words, Li Huowang imagined a horrible image in his mind.

After all, he couldn't see what was happening.

Li Huowang swallowed hard before he asked, “Bun?”

“Woof woof!” A familiar barking echoed.

Li Huowang had taken care of Bun for more than a year and would never mistake Bun's barking for someone else's barking. The barking had indeed come from Bun.

Bun's barking was filled with excitement rather than pain and fear.

Li Huowang frowned and focused his hearing in the same direction. “Li Sui?”

A voice superimposed on the barking echoed from the same direction. “Father, I'm here.”

Li Sui tried to crawl in from the window when rapid drumbeats echoed, stopping him.

“Father! Mother won't let me in,” Li Sui said, sounding emotionally distressed.

Li Huowang massaged his throbbing temples. He had no idea what to do. In fact, he didn't even know what to call the entity in front of him. *What did Li Sui do during the Natural Disaster?*

“Father, do you not want me anymore?” Li Sui asked, his voice filled with sadness and even resembled sobbing. Bun's howling echoed along with Li Sui's words.

Li Huowang patted the Second Deity's shoulder. “Don't worry. It can't harm me even if I was blind.”

Li Huowang walked past the Second Deity and approached the

noises.

He couldn't see, but he could still feel people's gazes. Soon, he stopped just a few meters away from Li Sui.

"Come inside. Don't stay outside the window."

Two dull thuds echoed as Li Sui stepped into the room.

Li Huowang caught a whiff of blood.

Li Sui—or Bun, was standing just in front of him.

The scent of blood did not belong to that of a human but a dog.

Li Huowang had an inkling of what had happened, and he extended his arms to touch the entity before him. The first sensation he felt was Bun's rough tongue extending out from behind its sharp fangs.

The tongue licked the scab off Li Huowang's hands. "Father, you're injured."

Li Huowang moved his hands upwards and felt the skinless face of the beast. There were still some tendons and muscles left, but the beast had become mostly bones from its injuries.

Li Huowang managed to find what remained of the veil and straw coat above the beast's head. It had been damaged so badly that it could no longer hide anything.

Li Huowang slowly moved his hands toward the body of the beast and started exploring every inch of its figure.

Li Huowang soon discovered a bloody, mangled mess, which was what remained of Bun. However, the entity was standing upright on two legs, unlike how a dog would walk.

Bun's fleshly body had become extremely unfamiliar to Li Huowang. There were tentacles pulsating beneath Bun's skin and flesh; it was supposed to have the body of a dog, but it had grown to an impossible size.

The joints had been dislocated, allowing the figure to contort, becoming like a large-framed figure wearing a skinny shirt.

Li Huowang knew what was underneath the skin—Li Sui's

tentacles.

When Li Huowang caressed the back of the being, tentacles burst from its back and carefully wrapped themselves around his fingers. Some of the tentacles were exposed to the air as they burst out.

Bun's four limbs had grown as well, and they seemed capable of twisting at impossible angles. It was the reason Bun was slightly taller than Li Huowang at the moment.

Li Huowang slowly made a mental image of what he was touching, and he eventually saw a tentacled monster using the husk of a dog as its fleshly body.

Li Huowang sighed and asked, "What are you? Are you Bun or Li Sui?"

"Father, I'm Li Sui. *Woof! Woof!*" Li Sui's hot breath was filled with the stench of blood.

"What happened last night? Where did you go, and what happened to you?"

"Father, I don't know either. I was looking for Bun to play, but I don't know what happened next. I think I fell asleep. When I woke up, I couldn't find Bun anymore. Then, I heard you calling for me, so I ran over here."

Li Huowang took a deep breath and muttered in disbelief, "How could this be?"

He knew that the Black Taisui was capable of snatching bodies away, but Li Huowang had never really thought that this day would come so soon.

Was he staring at Li Sui or Bun? Was it both? How was he supposed to treat the entity before him?

Seemingly sensing Li Huowang's tumultuous emotions, the beast buried its face into Li Huowang's body. Its hard skull dug into his chest, and it licked Li Huowang's jaw.

The broken veil fell to the ground just then.

Li Huowang hugged it tightly; he could sense the beast's longing for him. He patted the mangled figure in front of him and said, "Fine, it is what it is, I guess. It's great that no one died, and I'm not going to ask for more than that."

An ordinary person would be afraid and horrified at the bloody creature in front of them, but not Li Huowang. He knew he was living in a bizarre, crazy world. Most importantly, he knew that he looked almost as bad as the current Li Sui.

Li Huowang turned around and looked at Bai Lingmiao.

"Miaomiao, she's our daughter now."

"Dau—Daughter? Her?"

"Yes. Li Sui is genderless, but Bun is female. We'll call her 'daughter' from now on, and I hope you're not going to hate her."

While Bai Lingmiao was hesitating, the Second Deity walked over and patted Li Sui's skull.

The Natural Disaster had passed; everyone was still having nightmares over the ordeal, but everyone knew that they still had lives to live, so they soon resumed their own tasks.

The intense discussions soon faded to peace as they worked on their own tasks.

"Dear, please wake up. It's time to wake up."

When Sir Wu woke up from his afternoon nap, he immediately saw his wife.

"What time is it?" Sir Wu sat up slowly and stretched both of his legs as if waiting for someone to put on his shoes.

"It's already the ninth division. Any later and you'd need a lantern to navigate. It's best to leave now so you won't waste your money on one." [1]

Upon getting hired to teach in Cowheart Village, Sir Wu found himself with two choices: either teach in the morning or teach in the evening.

However, his students needed to work in the fields during the day, so he had no choice but to start his lessons at night. Even Yang Xiaohai needed time to cook meals.

“All right! Time to change.” Sir Wu stretched lazily.

“Aiya! I don’t have time to serve you. I still need to put away the dried radishes on the roof. I’ve placed dinner on the table. Just eat and wash the plates in the kitchen.”

Sir Wu glared at her and roared, “I’m a scholar! How can I work in the kitchen?!”

1. The ninth division corresponds to 7-9 pm 🙌

Translator's Thoughts

Li Sui x Bun combo. That's some full metal alchemist thing. Credits to 格子的乱七八糟！



Chapter 464 - Origin

Sir Wu's wife ignored him and walked outside. She carried a basket with her as she climbed up the bamboo ladders to collect the dried radishes on the roof.

Sir Wu changed clothes with a spiteful look and proceeded to eat his dinner. Upon seeing chicken in his noodles, Sir Wu's face beamed. He ate with relish and left the dishes on the table.

It was sunset, and the evening glow made his face look even yellower than usual.

A radish fell from the roof and slid into his back from his nape.

“Wash the dishes! What are you doing standing there?!”

“Ah...” Sir Wu hurriedly took out the radish from his shirt while running outside. Upon reaching the left yard of the Bai Family’s Ancestral Hall, he glared at his residence and scoffed. “*Hmph!* The scholars of the past were right. Women are as hard to raise as mean-spirited people.”

Sir Wu straightened his clothes and turned around before getting startled by a wrinkled face.

“*Hehehe~* Sir Wu, are you heading to the lecture? Let’s go together,” Lu Zhuangyuan said, chuckling while holding his grandson.

Sir Wu looked down at Lu Zhuangyuan before heading to the classroom.

“Lecture? *Hmph!* You are overestimating them. I’m just trying to enlighten them! Each and every one of them is so stupid that I feel like I’m wasting my time here.”

“*Hehehe*, that’s true. They are already quite old, and it is past the prime time for them to study and become a scholar. However, our Tongsheng is different. This is the perfect time for him to

study!” Lu Zhuangyuan happily raised his grandson up in the air.

“I’ve told you many times that a baby that’s not even a year old will not be able to understand what I’m talking about! Don’t bring him into the classroom!”

“ *Sigh*, Sir Wu. This is the perfect time for the baby to learn how to speak by listening to its surroundings. It’s not a bad thing for a baby to listen to lectures. What if he learns something?”

“ *Sigh*. I really am wasting my time here; everyone's so dumb,” Sir Wu said, shaking his head as he walked toward his classroom.

It turned out that everyone had already been waiting for him. Everyone went silent upon witnessing Sir Wu's arrival.

Sir Wu looked at the figure wearing the black veil standing in the corner of the classroom and frowned in dissatisfaction.

After the Natural Disaster, the person underneath the veil had grown considerably taller. They stood silently, but they somehow made Sir Wu feel oppressed. Sir Wu had long decided to steer clear of them.

Sir Wu was not a stupid man, after all. He had seen the techniques that the others in the village had used during the Natural Disaster.

Sir Wu didn’t even dare to think about the identity of the individual beneath the black veil. The ancient scholars had said that scholars had to distance themselves from the supernatural.

Sir Wu actually wanted to leave but he didn’t dare do so. He was afraid that something bad would happen to him if he didn’t listen to them.

He was already old and had read a lot about people with supernatural powers through books. He knew that upon obtaining powers, they would do whatever they liked and treat normal people as insignificant beings.

Sir Wu trembled upon recalling the horrifying images drawn in that book.

He had no other choice but to do as he was told. Luckily, he was getting paid on time, and the villagers were treating him well. Sir Wu swept his gaze across the classroom and noticed something amiss.

“*Hm?* Why are there so few people here today?”

“Sir, Gao Zhijian is recruiting for a militia. He said that the chosen ones would receive candy, so most of the people here decided to go there. However, Gao Zhijian is very strict, so I’m sure most of them would fail and would return soon.”

Looking at the smarter Zhao Wu, Sir Wu’s tone became noticeably better. “Is that so? Why didn’t you go then?”

Zhao Wu patted his legs out of bitterness. “Surely, you jest, sir. There’s no way I can pass with this body of mine.”

Sir Wu nodded and coughed lightly before starting his lecture.

People came and went during his lecture, and Sir Wu didn’t really care whether they were bored or frustrated. All he cared about was doing his job.

Soon, it was midnight. Sir Wu looked at the yawning students and waved his hands, dismissing them. His mouth was feeling quite parched as well.

“We will stop here today. Remember to study what you’ve learned today so you’ll memorize them. I will test you randomly tomorrow.”

Sir Wu walked out of the classroom with a lantern in hand, which illuminated the path to his house. It was midnight, so the streets were empty. Sir Wu felt nervous, especially after what he had seen during the Natural Disaster.

However, he didn’t dare to show his nervousness on his face. He didn’t want his stupid students to see that he was terrified.

He walked and soon saw the Bai Family’s Ancestral Hall. His footsteps unconsciously became lighter as he picked up the pace upon seeing the ancestral hall.

He had heard many rumors throughout the village about how many people had died in the ancestral hall.

I'm a scholar. I exude the aura of justice. Those of the supernatural will avoid me! Sir Wu walked carefully while reassuring himself repeatedly.

When he finally walked past the Bai Family's Ancestral Hall, Sir Wu sighed in relief.

And that was when a wooden mask suddenly appeared in front of him in the dark.

Sir Wu yelped, but a wooden hand covered his mouth before his scream could echo in the air. "Don't make any noises. I don't want to kill you. I'm here to find someone. Do you know where Er Jiu is?"

Staring at the old man standing motionlessly like a log, Liu Zongyuan asked, "You don't know Er Jiu? He's always wearing his signature red Daoist robe, and he always has two swords on his back."

Sir Wu extended a trembling finger, pointing in a certain direction. Liu Zongyuan stared disdainfully at Sir Wu upon noticing that the latter had pissed himself. Then, he turned around to leave, rushing toward the direction Sir Wu had pointed out for him.

Liu Zongyuan had just arrived at a remarkable estate, but he immediately noticed that a window to the second floor of the estate was open.

"Brother Liu, I can't move much right now. Come in and talk."

Liu Zongyuan leaped up like a monkey and climbed up the window using his right arm before throwing himself into the room.

Liu Zongyuan saw the Daoist in red robes sitting like a king with a horrifying beast sitting quietly on his left. The beast had been skinned, and its empty eye sockets stared at Liu Zongyuan without moving.

"Brother Liu, are you okay?" Er Jiu asked.

Liu Zongyuan snapped out of it and realized that Er Jiu's eyes were covered in white bandages.

"What happened to your eyes?"

"Something happened during the Natural Disaster, and I ended up getting blinded. Don't worry; it's just a minor wound. Anyway, I'm surprised that you actually came here so fast."

"Of course. I rushed over here as fast as I could the moment I received your letter. You're hiding in a rural area, so I'm sure you have no idea what's happening, but it's chaotic outside."

"Yeah, I can see that. Do you have any information about the recent Natural Disaster? I think the fact that it's been happening every year over the past two years is a bad omen."

"*Sigh.*" Liu Zongyuan sighed and sat beside the Daoist in red robes. "You don't have to mention that. Anyone with eyes would be able to see something strange. I heard that the Surveillance Bureau had known that the Natural Disaster would appear ahead of time."

"They knew that it'd appear ahead of time? Then, why didn't they stop it? Weren't they supposed to keep watch of it and deal with it? Or could it be that there's a limit to their power?"

Liu Zongyuan clenched his fists out of frustration. "Do you really think that they didn't want to stop it? Did you think that their expansive formation in Shangjing is just for show? *Sigh.* It's the Sitting Oblivion Dao's fault! They destroyed the formation, so the Surveillance Bureau lost a huge chunk of their power!"

Translator's Thoughts

For reference, this is regular Li Sui walking around. Kinda cute. Credits to 格子的乱七八糟！



Chapter 465 - List

Li Huowang wasn't exactly knowledgeable when it came to Natural Disasters, so he frowned upon hearing Liu Zongyuan's words. "You mean the Surveillance Bureau had laid out that massive golden formation in Shangjing as a means to combat the Natural Disaster?"

At the time, he was inside the golden formation, but he was too focused on Bei Feng to even think about why the emperor was working with the Surveillance Bureau. Once the dust settled, Li Huowang assumed that the emperor was trying to ascend and become an Immortal by recruiting the Surveillance Bureau.

However, it seemed that his assumption was wrong. The Surveillance Bureau and the Liang Kingdom's emperor had been planning to use the Sacred Mountain Ghost's Eye to combat the Natural Disaster of the Sun-Devouring Heavenly Dog.

Li Huowang finally had a clear picture of what was happening in the Liang Kingdom, and he couldn't help but feel a bit regretful about his actions. He hadn't played a righteous role during the incident at Shangjing.

However, he couldn't really be blamed, as he had no idea that the Surveillance Bureau was going to help the masses against Natural Disasters using the massive golden formation.

Of course, this was mostly because of the Surveillance Bureau's strict information control. However, Li Huowang wouldn't have thought that they were the good guys at the time, and it was all thanks to their actions.

"No, Junior Li, this is my fault, not yours," Zhuge Yuan said.

"The Sitting Oblivion Dao managed to deceive me," Zhuge Yuan added in a voice filled with sorrow and self-loathing. "It all

started from the moment I killed Bai Ban. It was then that I fell into the Sitting Oblivion Dao's trap.

"Perhaps the Sitting Oblivion Dao of the Qi Kingdom was also responsible for pushing the undead emperor to rule the kingdom. The Sitting Oblivion Dao of the Qi Kingdom was working together with the Sitting Oblivion Dao of the Liang Kingdom.

"They did it not because they wanted to avenge the dead Bai Ban but to use my powers as the Twisted One to travel between two different timelines in order to trick Doulao and take away the Sacred Mountain Ghost Eye."

Liu Zongyuan's exposition taught Zhuge Yuan more than Li Huowang, and Zhuge Yuan realized that he had indeed gotten tricked by the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

"Don't worry about it too much. You've done your best. Blame the Sitting Oblivion Dao," Li Huowang said unconsciously.

Liu Zongyuan thought that Li Huowang was talking to him and responded, "Brother Er is too kind, but I'm not sad. After all, I deliberately did not assign myself to Shangjing. I'm not crazy enough to risk my life. I was hiding in Qing Qiu on that day."

Since they were already on the topic, Liu Zongyuan added, "*Sigh*. It's only been decades since we killed so many members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao, and I didn't expect that it would be time to do so again.

"They really are like maggots; they'd pop out of nowhere and in such large numbers. It doesn't matter even if you kill one of them, as three of them would pop up the next time. Anyway, Brother Er, I hope you won't tell anyone what I'm going to tell you today.

"I've heard that the Sitting Oblivion Dao has truly angered our superior this time. I'm sure they'd issue a kill order for every single Sitting Oblivion Dao member once the Natural Disaster is over. Many members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao had perished in Shangjing, and I think they're finally going to kill all of them once

and for all.”

Li Huowang stood up and clenched his fists in excitement. “That’s great news! I hate the Sitting Oblivion Dao! The Surveillance Bureau should have annihilated them long ago.”

“Yeah. Brother Er, I know you hate the Sitting Oblivion Dao, so I came here to ask you to follow me to Shangjing. However, I didn’t expect that you’d end up becoming blind.”

“No worries,” Li Huowang said decisively. “I’m already blind, but I can still kill! Let’s go!”

“Ah, it’s fine, Brother Er. It’s best if you just stay here and recuperate. Don’t force yourself. The Surveillance Bureau still has many people, and it’s not like we’ll become useless without you.”

Li Huowang knew that Liu Zongyuan wouldn’t let a blind man follow him on his missions. He was just putting up an act for the sake of Li Huowang’s dignity. Li Huowang himself still had many issues to handle, so he wasn’t really in the mood to go on missions.

The two enjoyed some small talk and exchanged pieces of information.

Eventually, Liu Zongyuan made remarks about the horrifying Li Sui.

“*Erm*, Brother Er, it’s one thing for the members of the Ao Jing Sect to skin themselves, but why are you skinning dogs as well? Don’t you think that’s taking it a bit too far?”

Li Huowang stretched out his hand and patted Li Sui’s tough skull. “She’s not a dog but a spiritual beast. I’m blind, so she’s here to defend me. She looks horrifying, but she’s more dependable than a human.”

“Is that so? I guess you had an auspicious meeting with it, then. People wouldn’t even dare to attempt to rear a spiritual beast! Are you selling it?” Liu Zongyuan asked.

Li Sui growled deeply and flashed her white fangs.

“Quiet now. Brother Liu was just joking,” Li Huowang said,

patting Li Sui's neck.

Li Sui quickly calmed down and stopped growling at Liu Zongyuan.

Somehow, Li Sui had become more animalistic after taking over Bun's body.

"All right, then, I should take my leave now. You should recover and stop being so reckless in the meantime."

Liu Zongyuan stood up and turned around to leave.

"Brother Liu, wait a minute," said Li Huowang, stopping Liu Zongyuan from leaving. "Since you know many things, do you know of any sects capable of replacing someone's eyes so that they can regain their vision? I mean, as you can see..."

"*Erm...* there are some sects capable of doing so, but I don't think there's any reason for you to go and look for them. We're strangers to them, so they could easily trick us.

"Moreover, we have our own methods. You've completed so many missions for the the Surveillance Bureau, so you definitely have many rewards to be claimed.

"Just go to the headquarters and exchange your rewards, which are lifespan pills, for something that will restore your vision," said Liu Zongyuan. Then, he wasted no time and left.

Left all alone, Li Huowang sat quietly in the dark room and pondered over his next course of action while patting Li Sui's back. Too many things were happening at the same time, and Li Huowang knew that he needed to act now. "Li Sui, bring me a charcoal and a piece of paper."

"Okay, Father."

A piece of paper was soon laid in front of Li Huowang.

Li Sui then gave Li Huowang a piece of charcoal. Li Huowang took the charcoal and used its pointed end to write out all of the issues he had at the moment.

First of all, Bai Lingmiao is on the cusp of becoming blind, as

the sunlight has burned off her retina. She's extremely weak at the moment, and her lifespan has become shorter than normal.

Secondly, the Natural Disasters are too unpredictable. The Surveillance Bureau's plan to deal with Natural Disasters was destroyed by the Sitting Oblivion Dao. I'm not afraid of Natural Disasters, but how can I ensure the survival of Cowheart Village in these chaotic times?

Thirdly, Doulao has changed my past. My memories as Hong Zhong are a hidden danger that I must remove once I get the opportunity to do so.

Lastly, I have to keep cultivating the "Truth." It concerns not just Zhuge Yuan's revival but my strength and even the reality of both worlds.

Chapter 466 - Bai Lingmiao

Li Huowang felt the tactile feedback of his own writing using his sensitive fingers, and he started brainstorming ways to tackle every single issue on his list.

First of all, I need to treat Bai Lingmiao's eyes. Her vision is getting worse, and I have to address that issue as soon as possible. Since Liu Zhongyuan said the Surveillance Bureau in Shangjing had the solution to issues related to the eyes, I should head there before going anywhere else.

He's right. I've completed a ton of missions for the Surveillance Bureau. Moreover, I was a spendthrift. Aside from the bribe I gave to Hong Da so that I can kill Xinchu, the rest of my lifespan pills are in the gourd. It's a good time to exchange them right now. As for her lifespan... I'm not sure if the pills are going to be effective on her.

That said, where is she? I haven't seen her for the entire night.

"Li Sui, where is your mother?"

"She went to the room with black wooden slates."

Li Huowang's face fell. Bai Lingmiao was at the ancestral hall.

"It's fine, then. You should go ahead and sleep. It's late now."

Li Sui nodded and obediently left the room. Li Sui was wearing Li Huowang's veil, and she headed to the stable. The stable was her temporary residence, as it was mostly empty aside from the carriages and a few horses.

Li Sui walked towards the deepest part of the stable, where there was a thick pile of hay. Li Sui dove into the hay and stretched with satisfaction before curling up and sleeping. However, Li Sui didn't manage to sleep for a long time, as she was awakened by

something. She walked outside and looked at the ancestral hall with curiosity before heading toward it.

Soon, Li Sui reached the ancestral hall and saw that the door to the hidden chamber was open. Li Sui pondered briefly before entering the hidden chamber, and she soon found herself in the hall of the White Lotus Sect.

Li Sui looked around with awe and curiosity; she sniffed around, taking in the scent of the white flags hanging from the ceiling as well as using her paws to scratch at the murals from time to time.

Li Sui eventually stopped looking around and turned toward a door that was slightly ajar. There was a familiar scent beyond that door. Li Sui hesitated before entering it. The room was dark, but the familiar scent had gotten thicker.

It was the scent of her mother.

Soon, Li Sui heard sobbing. It appeared that her mom was crying.

"We've been together for so long, and I know that Senior Li truly takes good care of me. I don't want to make him sad either, but... I don't know what to do.

"I can't stop having this nightmare about my parents cursing and scolding me for being so inconsiderate. I'd always have that nightmare as long as I'm with him. I really am tired of living.

"Should I just leave him? I can't... I'm torn; I just want to give up and die, but I can't even die thanks to the Immortal family. Oh Heavenly Mater, what do I do? Every single choice before me seems to be the wrong choice."

The sobbing stopped. Li Sui wanted to move closer to her but a red figure blocked her.

"Mother?" Li Sui asked, staring at the Second Deity in front of her. "Mother, it's already late. Why are you still awake? Father told me to sleep."

The Second Deity extended her right hand, which had razor-sharp nails. She took Li Sui's black tentacle and guided her gently toward the depths of the tunnel. Upon walking into another door, Li Sui saw a frail and pallid woman kneeling in front of a conjoined lotus. The woman was none other than her mother.

Bai Lingmiao was holding three incense sticks while staring at the conjoined lotus in front of the mural. "Heavenly Mater... The books say that you exist, but do you really exist? Are you really almighty? If you do exist and you're almighty, then why did you not save the Bai Family members when Li Huowang was killing them?

"They've been worshiping you for so long; why did you not save them?"

Li Sui stood quietly, listening to Bai Lingmiao. It wasn't until when Li Sui finally felt sleepy that she saw her mother stand up with red eyes before bowing three times toward the conjoined lotus.

"Heavenly Mater, if you are as kind as the book has said, please help me escape my predicament. Grant me this request, and I will forge a statue out of gold in your motif. I will stay in the White Lotus Sect and serve you forever."

Bai Lingmiao raised her head and looked up at the conjoined lotus, but there weren't any changes. Bai Lingmiao knew that nothing would happen, but she was still disappointed. Finally, she turned around and saw Li Sui standing behind her along with the Second Deity.

Bai Lingmiao merely wiped her tears away and walked outside.

The Second Deity and Li Sui followed closely behind her.

Soon, they arrived at the door of the ancestral hall.

Bai Lingmiao abruptly stopped walking, but she did not even turn around as she asked, "Are you looking down on me? For praying to a false god?"

"If you're tired, let me swap in." An eerie voice echoed from the Second Deity's red veil.

Bai Lingmiao bit her lips and shook her head. "No. The murderous aura cannot enter me once again. Senior Li would be sad if that ended up happening."

The Second Deity extended her arms and covered Li Sui's tattered ears. "You don't even have the courage to keep living, so why do you even care about him? Bun is more human-like than you."

"You!" Bai Lingmiao exclaimed.

The red veil slid down, revealing the snarling face of a beast.

"You're the type to give all of your heart to someone who's remotely kind to you. You deserve what you tolerate. Following the laws of the jungle, and if you want to be a filial daughter, then you should kill Li Huowang! He's your father's murderer, after all. However, I know that you are not going to do that. You do not have the guts to do that.

"You think Li Huowang's survival is more important than your family. You want to become an official couple with him and marry him, but you can't even get over the wound in your heart.

"Whenever something untoward happens, you place your hopes on the Heavenly Mater, which probably doesn't even exist, instead of thinking about ways to deal with the issue at hand.

"You pray for the gods to show up and fix your own issues for you instead of doing it yourself. You're weak—utterly useless. Wake up! You can wish for as many times as you want, but no one is going to make your wishes come true.

"You have to understand that only *you* can help yourself."

Bai Lingmiao couldn't argue against the Second Deity and turned around.

The Second Deity removed her hands from Li Sui's ears and continued, "You must not depend on Li Huowang every time you need help. Our lives are more important than his life. You should prioritize yourself before anyone else. I mean, look at yourself—

you're going to become blind at this rate.”

Bai Lingmiao placed both hands on her chest and sobbed. She walked slowly to the Bai Family Estate and muttered, “I just want to live happily ever after with the person I love. Is there anything wrong with that?”

Chapter 467 - Happiness

"Mom, is everything fine?" Li Huowang asked Sun Xiaoqin after swallowing the smooth egg soup.

"Everything is fine, and I'm going to be fine as long as you're fine," Sun Xiaoqin said, smiling while staring at Li Huowang.

However, Li Huowang noticed something amiss in her body language. Moreover, her smile was fake. Also, her words just now only served to console him and make sure that he wouldn't be worried about her.

"Mom, don't worry. The treatment is effective. I just need more time to recover."

"Aiya. I'm not worried at all. I know my son will get better," Sun Xiaoqin said, smiling.

Li Huowang sighed in his heart. Cultivating the "Truth" was much harder than he initially thought, and it was clear that he would have to spend more time on it if he wanted to escape the hospital.

Li Huowang had already waited for so long, so he didn't mind waiting for a bit longer.

Unfortunately, his mother's suffering would not stop until Li Huowang was no longer stuck in a hallucination.

Should I spend more time with her? Should I pretend that I'm getting better? Li Huowang thought about it before immediately scrapping that idea. It was a waste of time, and it would make his goal even more difficult to achieve. He ought to spend more time cultivating rather than in something else.

Realizing that his mother was forcing herself to be happy, Li Huowang thought about what he could say to cheer her up and said, "Mom, I want to play games once I'm discharged. I want to

play for an entire year. Can I do that?"

Sun Xiaoqin's eyes lit up, and she exclaimed, "Of course! I will even cut some fruits for you to eat while you're playing! If you ever get bored playing by yourself, I will ask your father to play with you! He can play with you for as long as you like!"

Li Huowang smiled and nodded. "We should travel the world once I'm discharged and do things we never got to do, like bungee jumping or skydiving."

"Ah, I don't want to bungee jump. You can go with your father. I've seen videos of people going for a bungee jump, and I don't want to do it."

Li Huowang distracted her by talking about many different topics, and Sun Xiaoqin's mood improved as time ticked by. Eventually, her smile became natural as the two talked for a while.

Li Huowang sighed in relief upon seeing his mother's smile. He couldn't do much for her at the moment. The only thing he could do was use the Sitting Oblivion Dao's techniques to make her happy.

"Do you want to play games? Should I bring the console here for you?"

"No need, Mom. I can't play right now."

"Oh, that's true. What about anime? Didn't you like watching anime? I've heard there are some interesting ones these days. I can play them for you on my phone."

Li Huowang smiled bitterly when he saw his mom rummaging around her bag to find her phone. He was no longer the same high-schooler Li Huowang, and he was no longer interested in anime.

Li Huowang suddenly noticed something amiss. He was supposed to be just around eighteen years old, so how come he was already thinking like an adult? It seemed that he had gotten much more used to his mature body on the other side.

Is it because there's a missing two hours in the other world, and that is why my body over there is more mature? Wait, does this mean that

both worlds are real? Li Huowang thought, frowning. Ultimately, he knew that a baseless thought was useless. *Nevermind. There's no need for me to think too much about it. I just need to cultivate the "Truth" and transform this world into a real one.*

Sun Xiaoqin had finally found her broken old phone and was in the middle of paying for a paid streaming service.

Li Huowang immediately stopped her, saying, “Mom, no need to subscribe to anything. It's just going to be a waste of money. I feel like I'm heading back there soon.”

Sun Xiaoqin's smile disappeared. “You're heading back soon? You just ate lunch, and you're already about to lose yourself in your hallucination. Son, can you really control it now? Is this a sign that you're recovering?”

“Probably. I'll go back and eat dinner in three days. I'll accompany you by then.”

Sun Xiaoqin placed her phone back into her bag and said, “All right, then. I will wait for you. Don't you forget to come back, okay?”

“I won't forget, Mom. Ah, one more thing. Do you have any news about Nana? Is she getting better?” Li Huowang asked upon recalling the cute girl who always smiled at him.

“Nana is doing well. She didn't get admitted to the hospital, and the doctor also prescribed some medicine for her. *Sigh*, if it weren't for your illness, I would be more than happy to have Nana as my daughter-in-law. I've always liked her.”

“Mom, don't worry. Once I'm healed, I'll marry Nana and let her be your daughter-in-law!”

“Oh? To think my son can actually speak like that now. All right, then! I'll wait for you to marry her so we can have a great wedding dinner together!” Sun Xiaoqin exclaimed with a bright face.

The scenery slowly peeled away into darkness. It had been a

while since he became blind, but he still hadn't gotten used to the pitch-black world before him.

"Li Sui?" Li Huowang extended his arms. Soon, he felt a thin, bony paw.

"Father, I'm here."

"Come, bring me back to the village."

"Father, you picked up something on the ground just now and —"

"I was drinking egg soup!" Li Huowang interrupted her and repeated, "I was drinking egg soup!"

Li Sui thought about it and asked, "Is that so? Where is it? I want to eat, too."

"All right, let's go back to the village and let Yang Xiaohai make some for you. Mom, no need to look at me anymore. I have something to do, so I can't stay here. I'll be back in three days for dinner."

With Li Sui's help, Li Huowang managed to go down the mountain and return to the Bai Family Estate.

Upon returning to his room, Li Huowang sat carefully on a stool and turned to Li Sui, who was heading toward the kitchen, and shouted, "Come here and remove the bandages on my face! I want to know how my eyes are doing."

Li Sui gently removed the bandage on Li Huowang's face, and a ray of light vanquished the darkness in Li Huowang's pitch-black world. However, he was forced to close his eyes again—it was too bright.

A few moments later, he opened his eyes slowly and saw that he could see once again. He had recovered his vision. Li Huowang looked outside the window and stared at the black roof tiles before turning to look at Li Sui.

Li Sui proceeded to remove her veil and straw robe, allowing Li Huowang to finally take a good look at her for the first time ever

since the Natural Disaster.

Chapter 468 - Solution

Li Sui looked much more terrifying than before. Her organs were not compressed, and there were multiple cavities inside her. To make matters worse, some of her organs were even hanging outside her body.

Clearly, Bun's body could not contain Li Sui. The broken parts were forcefully connected to each other by Li Sui's black tentacles. It was rude to say bad things about his daughter, but Li Sui truly looked horrifying.

Li Sui's chest was beating visibly as well, and Li Huowang saw a piece of paper protruding from the tiny gaps in her body. Li Huowang instantly identified the piece of paper, as it was the talisman that he had given to Li Sui.

"Father, what's wrong?" Li Sui asked. She had no idea why Li Huowang was staring at her like that.

"Nothing. I'm just looking at you." Li Huowang patted her head and said, "Go tell Yang Xiaohai to make you an egg soup for you. Also, call some of the guys over here."

After dinner was free time for everyone in the village, so Li Huowang managed to gather the people he needed in no time.

The tall Gao Zhijian, the hairy Chun Xiaoman, the asymmetrical-looking Zhao Wu, and Puppy suffering from vitiligo—they were the comrades who had risked their lives with him, and they had gathered at Li Huowang's call.

Yang Xiaohai, who was much shorter than the rest, had arrived as well.

Li Huowang stared at Yang Xiaohai, who was the cook of Cowheart Village, and said, "I didn't tell you to come here, so why are you here?"

“*Hehe*, I just got curious upon seeing everyone coming here, so I thought about checking it out. If you want me to leave, I can leave, though...” Yang Xiaohai scratched his head out of embarrassment. He was on more friendlier terms with them, as they had spent a lot of time together at this point. Otherwise, he wouldn’t have dared to do something like this.

Li Huowang ignored Yang Xiaohai and stared at Gao Zhijian. “How’s the militia recruitment going? How long will it take for you to form a group that can fend off external threats?”

Gao Zhijian scratched his nose and shook his head in disappointment. “A long time.”

Gao Zhijian then told Li Huowang that the village only had a few people talented enough to become soldiers. If someone wasn’t disabled, then they had a chronic illness.

Gao Zhijian screened quite a few people before picking out two people who were barely adequate. However, this wasn’t really strange, as Bai Lingmiao had bought slaves that the slave trader couldn’t quite sell.

However, it wasn’t to Li Huowang’s expectations, and he knew that he needed to speed things up.

“Zhao Wu, remember the gold that Sun Baolu’s mom gave us in Qing Qiu? Take them and go buy a few qualified people with Gao Zhijian. You can spend some extra money as long as they’ll be loyal to us.

“We need to form a militia as soon as possible so you guys can protect yourself the next time there’s a Natural Disaster or whenever I’m not here.”

“Yes, Senior Li.” Zhao Wu nodded and asked, “Senior Li, are you heading out again?”

“Yeah, there’s something I need to do outside. If everything goes well, I should be able to return soon,” Li Huowang responded. Then, he looked at Chun Xiaoman and asked, “Are you trying to

learn the techniques of the White Lotus Sect beneath the ancestral hall?"

"Yes, I am."

"Then, do it secretly. Don't let the others know about it. You can teach it to someone else, but make sure that they are loyal to us. Those techniques aren't as strong as the techniques in the military, but they are worth spending some time on.

"Unfortunately, the White Lotus Sect was once quite famous, so someone might recognize their techniques. Use those techniques sparingly, as we can't let the Surveillance Bureau know that we have access to the White Lotus Sect's techniques."

Li Huowang then proceeded to tell Chun Xiaoman more about the Surveillance Bureau and what had happened to Bai Lingmiao's family.

Chun Xiaoman felt as if she were carrying a massive weight on her shoulders once Li Huowang's explanation was over.

Li Huowang then looked at Puppy. The latter had become much quieter than his rowdy self before his daughter was born.

"Puppy, are you okay?" Li Huowang asked.

Puppy beamed and said, "It's fine. What else can I do? I'll just eat and sleep as usual. Senior Li, don't worry. The village is safe, as I will be protecting it."

Li Huowang nodded before pointing at the wishwood on the table. "That's yours from now on. It's an artifact capable of confounding people. You can use it with your needles."

It was the artifact that Ji Xiang had given to him, and a Strayed One's tongue was used to create this artifact, which was capable of confounding others. Li Huowang had never used it even once, so he decided to give it to Puppy.

"Ah! An artifact?! Senior Li, you're too kind! To think that you'd give me an artifact!" Puppy exclaimed. He took the artifact and admired it for a while.

“I also made a copy of a few pill recipes. This contains the recipes for Blood Nourishing Pills and Spirit Reinforcement Pills, along with a few other pill recipes that I had learned from Baldy back in Zephyr Temple.

“There are also instructions on how to draw talismans capable of healing others. We don’t have a doctor here, so I want all of you to find someone who can read and let them practice these techniques. By then, we’ll have a quasi-doctor, at the very least.”

“Me, me, me! I know how to read! Sir Wu also said that I’m a fast learner! I can recognize thirty words now!” Yang Xiaohai exclaimed. He took the book to try and read it.

Li Huowang frowned. “You’re holding it upside down.”

“Oh...”

Li Huowang swept his gaze across the five people before him and said, “Everyone, we’ve survived a deadly disaster, and a peaceful life is ahead of us. However, the world outside is chaotic, and I feel unsafe to rely on others for our safety.

“In the end, we can only rely on ourselves.”

“*Haha*, it will be fine. We still have you, Senior Li. You’re extremely strong, so there’s no way we’re going to die under your protection,” Puppy said, complimenting Li Huowang.

However, Puppy’s compliment was met with Li Huowang’s cold gaze.

“But what if I ended up dying? What if I went crazy? What would you do, then?”

Li Huowang’s cold words made the air around them feel heavy.

Puppy’s mouth fluttered open, but no words came out of it.

“I want everyone to leave except for Gao Zhijian.”

The four glanced at Gao Zhijian before leaving with the items Li Huowang had given to them.

Li Huowang looked at the tall Gao Zhijian and said, “Zhijian, I know that you have a complicated past. They’ve been saying that

you're dumb and slow-witted, but I feel like you are not what they say at all."

Gao Zhijian nodded.

"Do you want to return?" Li Huowang asked.

Gao Zhijian shook his head.

"Fine. Since you don't want to go back, I won't ask you about it anymore. From now on, this place is your home. Except for me and Bai Lingmiao, you are the strongest person in this village, so you must protect this place whenever I'm not here."

Li Huowang sliced open his stomach and took out a doll made out of human skin.

"Take this. It will take a lethal attack for you."

Gao Zhijian wanted to decline the offer after knowing its effects.

"I told you to take it, so just take it!" Li Huowang exclaimed, shoving the doll into Gao Zhijian's hands. Li Huowang also told Gao Zhijian that his skin would soon be fully healed.

Li Huowang patted Gao Zhijian's shoulder and said, "We're comrades, so don't be so distant."

Gao Zhijian put away the doll. Then, he reached into Li Huowang's bag of torture tools and took out a dagger. Gao Zhijian cut open his palm before doing the same for Li Huowang.

Afterward, he gripped Li Huowang's bloody palm.

Li Huowang stared at his palm, which was slowly being glued to Gao Zhijian's palm due to the coagulating blood.

"What kind of tradition is this?" Li Huowang asked.

However, Gao Zhijian did not reply and simply turned around to leave.

Li Huowang did not mind it and took out a piece of paper.

The piece of paper contained the list of issues that he had to tackle as soon as possible.

"This one is considered solved!" Li Huowang's trembling finger

glided past the second paragraph on the list, and the paragraph disappeared.

Secondly, the Natural Disasters are too unpredictable. The Surveillance Bureau's plan to deal with Natural Disasters was destroyed by the Sitting Oblivion Dao. I'm not afraid of Natural Disasters, but how can I ensure the survival of Cowheart Village in these chaotic times?

Chapter 469 - Village

Creak, creak, creak~

The creaking wheels of the carriage left two narrow lines on the road. Li Huowang sat in front of the carriage with the reins in his hands. Li Sui was sitting next to him and was covered in a veil and straw robe.

Li Sui cast a curious gaze at the sparrows above the nearby trees.

Li Huowang knocked on the carriage behind him and said, "Miaomiao, you don't have to stay inside every day. Isn't it suffocating in there? It's already sunset, so you can come out now."

Bai Lingmiao opened the tarp and sat next to Li Huowang.

She removed the white cloth on her eyes and looked around.

Li Huowang looked at her face and saw that her eyes had changed.

Her eyes were pink, but they had become pinkish white.

Li Huowang knew what it meant.

Li Huowang squeezed her hands gently and said, "Don't worry. We're almost in Shangjing. We'll definitely find a way to heal your eyes."

Li Huowang had already resolved the issue concerning the village's security, and he was on his way to heal Bai Lingmiao's eyes. It was an urgent issue, but it was a good thing that it wasn't too hard.

The sights he had seen during the grand battle between the Surveillance Bureau and the Sitting Oblivion Dao convinced Li Huowang that getting another pair of eyes wasn't that hard in this crazy world.

"Senior Li, why do I need to follow you?" Bai Lingmiao asked

weakly.

“Of course, you have to follow me so I can treat your eyes. How else can I do that?”

“Oh...” Bai Lingmiao muttered and lowered her head.

“Are you tired? There's a village in front of us. We can ask them and see if we can sleep in one of the houses there so we don't have to sleep in the carriage.

"Don't worry; we reach Shangjing by tomorrow night based on our speed. By then, not only would you be able to see the world clearly, but you'd be able to open your eyes even during the day.”

“All right, Senior Li. I'll listen to you.”

Li Huowang had already become familiar with the paths to Shangjing, as this wasn't his first time going to Shangjing. They finally reached the distant village just as the sun was about to disappear into the horizon.

However, Bai Lingmiao was getting more and more worried as they approached the village. “Senior Li, I think this village is the same as the other villages...”

The village looked fine from afar, but the houses were actually skewed and were on the verge of collapse. Weeds and spider webs had shrouded everything, which meant that it had been a while since someone stayed here.

Li Huowang's face was grim, but he knew this would happen. After all, this wasn't the first village he had encountered that had met the same horrible fate. The Natural Disaster lasted for only a short while, but many villages lost a ton of people.

Only a few villages were lucky enough to survive the ordeal. To make matters worse, there had to be more villages out there that had suffered the same feat. Li Huowang truly had no idea just how many people had perished during the Natural Disaster.

“Who are you looking for?” An aged voice echoed.

Li Huowang immediately gripped his sword. He let go of his

sword upon seeing that the voice had come from an old man walking with a cane. The old man only had a few teeth left in his mouth, and there was a black cloth tied to his right wrist, which meant that someone in his family had passed away recently.

“Old man, it’s me. Do you still remember me? I once asked for your help to stay in this village,” Li Huowang said, showing his face to the old man.

The old man stared at him for a while before realizing that he was indeed the same young man whom he had encountered long ago. “Ah~ It’s you! Come inside!

“There are many empty houses in this village, so you can stay as long as you want, wherever you want.”

Bai Lingmiao walked up to Li Huowang and whispered, “Senior Li, have you really met him before?”

“No, that was just a trick. Old people have bad memories, you see.”

The two walked deeper into the village.

Soon, Li Huowang finally saw the other villagers.

There were men and women holding large bowls while sitting or standing beneath a giant tree. It seemed that they had chosen to eat before nightfall.

They stared alternately between Li Huowang’s carriage, Li Huowang, and the old man before asking, “Old Man Zhao, did your family come here?”

The villagers looked normal, but they all had a black cloth tied to their wrists.

This village had the most casualties among the villages that Li Huowang had seen so far.

In no time, Li Huowang found himself before a clean house. “This used to be my youngest son’s house, but he passed away two years ago. You can stay here.”

“Thank you, Sir Zhao. Sorry for the trouble.”

“No need to say that. You're just going to stay here for the night, so don't worry about it.”

Bai Lingmiao stared at the old man and found the latter's desolate back profile to be quite pitiful. “It seems that the Natural Disaster has claimed the lives of many people here.”

Li Huowang looked at Zhuge Yuan's illusion at Bai Lingmiao's remark. Zhuge Yuan was in mid-air and had his back facing Li Huowang. Li Huowang felt like Zhuge Yuan was blaming himself for the villagers' death.

“It's fine. It's all in the past now. I'll go take some water so we can cook something to eat.”

They were traveling again tomorrow, so they ate only a simple dinner and washed up before sleeping. Li Huowang thought that nothing would happen today, as it was already late in the night. However, he was proven wrong when Li Sui woke him up during the third division of the night.

Li Huowang glanced at Bai Lingmiao sleeping soundly beside him and turned to Li Sui, asking, “What's wrong?”

“Father, they're performing outside.”

“*Hm?*” Li Huowang glanced at Bai Lingmiao one more before standing up. He pushed open the door and exited the house. He soon found himself near the large tree and saw the villagers holding their hands together in a large circle.

They were singing and dancing. The old man who served as Li Huowang's guide in the village was among those who were dancing.

“Father, what are they doing?”

“*Shh*, be quiet. I'm observing them,” Li Huowang said, frowning. It had been a while since he encountered members of a sect.

However, Li Huowang was confused. He had checked the old man's Ten Emotions and Eight Sufferings upon entering the village, and he saw that the old man held no ill will toward him.

Maybe they're barely considered as good guys like the Abbess? Li Huowang thought. In the end, he decided to observe them in the meantime.

Regardless of whether they had ill intentions toward Li Huowang or not, Li Huowang was not afraid of them.

Li Huowang was close enough to hear their chanting.

“We've suffered a misfortune all thanks to the carelessness of God Yu'er. Our money and food are gone, and God Yu'er has lost all of our belongings...”

Chapter 470 - God Yu'Er

“God Yu'er? Which god is it?”

Li Huowang repeated the strange name in his mind, but even the fake Hong Zhong's memories didn't contain any information about God Yu'er.

While Li Huowang was still engrossed in his thoughts, the villagers did something unexpected. They became quiet and extinguished all of their light. They knelt on the ground and prayed silently amidst the darkness.

“Why are they kneeling?” Li Huowang sent his body projection into the ground and became invisible. He carefully approached the villagers.

Li Huowang thought they were praying to the large tree but saw that it was not the case. There was nothing but darkness up there.

Wait, darkness?! Li Huowang looked at the black cloth that everyone had on their wrist. He realized that it carried a different meaning.

“God Yu'er!” the villagers roared in unison and raised their arms while staring at the dark sky.

A violent tremor ran through the ground.

Li Huowang gulped nervously. He pushed Li Sui down to suppress both of their presence. The tremors became stronger as time ticked by. When Li Huowang saw the panicked look on the villagers' faces, he realized that the ground wasn't trembling because of God Yu'er's influence.

“KILL!” A thunderous roar echoed.

Li Huowang saw a burst of white light come from the darkness to his left, and he felt a sharp pain in his eyes as if they were being

sliced apart by swords.

Li Huowang took a step back and rubbed his eyes. When he opened them again, he saw rows of troops wearing black armor, and they were charging at the villagers on their war horses.

Li Huowang finally knew why the ground was trembling. It was due to the approaching soldiers on horseback.

When the final wave of soldiers on horseback swept across the villagers, not even a single scrap of clothing remained on the ground. The villagers had become minced meat beneath the soldiers' stampede.

There were only thirty war horses, but Li Huowang felt like he had just witnessed the charge of thousands of men on horseback.

Shockingly, the soldiers pointed their weapons at Li Huowang once they were done trampling on the villagers.

Li Huowang looked at Li Sui, and his heart fell. "We've been found!"

The ground rumbled once again as the troops approached Li Huowang at breakneck speeds. Li Huowang wanted to run, but he had a feeling that he had been marked and that there was nowhere for him to run.

Just as the soldiers reached Li Huowang, the latter raised his identity plate as a Surveillance Bureau member. A fierce gust of wind swept past Li Huowang from both sides as the troops split into two and ran past him.

Li Huowang turned around and saw a man standing before him. The man was tall, and there was a colossal halberd in his hand. He was giving off an oppressive air that made him appear as if he were a mountain.

Li Huowang couldn't see the man's face from beneath due to the man's helmet, but Li Huowang saw white steam coming out from within the man's helmet.

While Li Huowang was thinking about what to do, the soldier

placed his weapon on the back of his horse before taking out a piece of yellow silk fabric.

The man then unfurled the fabric and shouted, "Listen to the imperial decree! The world is in chaos, and His Majesty has acknowledged it!

"Numerous evil sects have formed in the Liang Kingdom in the aftermath of the Natural Disaster. They trick, lie, and they pray to a Natural Disaster! They are responsible for the misfortune of the world, and they must be executed!

"Spread this imperial decree throughout the world!"

The man rolled the yellow silk fabric and left on horseback before Li Huowang could ask any questions.

Soon, Li Huowang and Li Sui were left all by themselves. Li Huowang turned around and looked at the steaming pile of minced meat. "Evil sect? They're praying to a Natural Disaster? Is the so-called God Yu'er—"

Li Huowang stopped mid-way; his expression became pale, and he noticed his voice sounding similar to a crying crane.

"Father, are you okay?" Li Sui asked worriedly while tugging at Li Huowang's robe.

Li Huowang shook his head. He finally understood why the Liang Kingdom was using the military to deal with these minor sects. It wasn't because the sect itself was strong; the issue was with the sect's object of devotion.

"It hasn't been that long since the Natural Disaster, and there are already sects worshipping that thing? It's too fast. Why are they worshipping it? No, wait, I can't think of it that way. What does God Yu'er want from them?"

Li Huowang looked at Zhuge Yuan. "Senior Zhuge, why do I feel anxious? Do you have any clues as to what is about to happen?"

Zhuce Yuan looked at the pile of minced flesh in the distance

and clenched his fan tightly. “Junior Li, I don't know. I am but an ordinary man. I can only hope that the Natural Disaster isn't the beginning of *something* .”

It would have been fine if Zhuge Yuan had said nothing, but Zhuge Yuan just had to express his worry, which made Li Huowang feel a burden on his shoulders.

“Senior Zhuge, God Yu'er—” Li Huowang felt a searing pain in his left ear, forcing him to stop mid-sentence and instinctively cover his ears.

“Junior Li, it's best if you don't ask any questions related to it. You will not be able to change anything even if you learn about those beings. Also, you'll become a part of them the moment you learn more about them. Their karma is going to cling to you.”

“I can't say this... I can't learn that. What can I do?” Li Huowang asked, irritated.

“There are things you can talk about. Take the fifty Heavenly Daos for example. The heavens control forty-nine of them, while humanity controls one. The only thing I can tell you is that even though some Simings had perished, the ones controlling the Heavenly Daos are still doing fine.

“If a Siming controlling one of the Heavenly Daos had somehow perished, you'd learn about it faster than me.”

Chaotic scenes flashed in Li Huowang's mind just then, and his face scrunched up from the extreme pain radiating throughout his head. “This crazy world really isn't a world fit for humans!”

“Senior Li, what's wrong?” Bai Lingmiao's voice echoed just then. She was wearing a robe as she walked over to Li Huowang.

Li Huowang looked at the pile of meat on the ground before turning around to meet Bai Lingmiao.

“Nothing. I was just using the toilet,” Li Huowang said.

Li Huowang could feel that something was amiss; he felt as if the current calm was the calm before the storm.

The Surveillance Bureau was there to protect the world, but Li Huowang wasn't sure whether the Surveillance Bureau could withstand what was about to happen or not.

However, Li Huowang himself knew that the only thing he could do was speed up his cultivation. At the very least, he'd be able to protect his beloved ones by then.

Li Huowang couldn't help but give Bai Lingmiao a tight hug.

Chapter 471 - Double Third Festival

Lanterns lit up Shangjing amidst the darkness of the night...

The denizens of Shangjing seemed to be competing against each other as the more popular shops had more elaborate lanterns. In addition to drawings of nature on the lanterns, there were even some lanterns with riddles on them, which provided entertainment to those walking on the street. Many people surrounded some of the lanterns with riddles to try and decipher the answer. The ones who managed to answer the riddle correctly would often shout in joy, as it meant that they had the right to take the lantern back home. Those who got the wrong answer were taunted and teased for their wrong answers.

Shangjing was crowded and lively tonight.

Li Huowang dodged a young boy running toward him as he slowly guided the carriage along the street. The girls were carrying lanterns while the boys were riding bamboo horses. The children were happy as they played around.

It has only been a few months since Doulao destroyed the city, but it's already this lively. Is this what they call the "Surveillance Bureau method?"

Li Huowang looked around before turning to Bai Lingmiao and asking, "Shangjing shouldn't have a curfew right now. Anyway, do you know what festival is going on?"

"Senior Li, it's the Double Third Festival," Bai Lingmiao answered in a soft voice. Her eyes were transfixed on the book in her hands.

"Double Third Festival?" Li Huowang looked into Hong Zhong's

memories and learned that the festival was to celebrate the girls' coming of age.

Parents would dress up their daughters, who were at least fifteen years old, every single time on this day of the year. They'd eat pancakes, black glutinous rice, and drink floral tea.

Afterward, they'd come out and play while wearing pomegranate flowers in their hair before praying to the God of Prosperity for an auspicious marriage later down the road in their life.

The girls celebrating the festival had to separate themselves from the males. They couldn't show themselves on the streets as well. The matchmakers would seek them out as well to pair them with a groom.

Li Huowang mumbled while walking toward the house that Ji Xiang had given to him.

Just as they were about to reach the alleyway where the house was located, Zhuge Yuan's illusion stood before Li Huowang.

"Hm? What's wrong? Is there an ambush?!" Li Huowang tensed up, and his eyes became filled with killing intent.

Zhuge Yuan sighed and shook his head. Then, he pointed at Bai Lingmiao, who was sitting in the carriage.

Li Huowang finally understood what Zhuge Yuan was trying to say upon seeing the forlorn look on Bai Lingmiao's face.

"Miaomiao, have you never celebrated this festival before?"

Bai Lingmiao shook her head. "No, I was supposed to join, but Dan Yangzi had already kidnapped me."

Li Huowang saw Zhuge Yuan pointing somewhere. He was pointing at a stall selling pomegranate flowers. Li Huowang bought one and placed the vivid red flower on Bai Lingmiao's white hair.

"It's fine. We can just celebrate it now," Li Huowang said. He did not wait for her answer as he pulled her into one of the nicer-looking clothing shops in the distance.

Li Sui wanted to follow them, but Li Huowang stopped her and said, "Li Sui, bring the carriage back home."

Bai Lingmiao's demeanor and looks had changed completely with her new clothes, which were a nice pastel skirt, a pale blue veil, and a bluish-purple dress.

Bai Lingmiao looked so great in her clothes that she attracted everyone's eyes as she walked down the streets. The clothing shop was clearly ready for the festival and had made several dresses in advance.

Bai Lingmiao discovered that the dress was perfectly suitable for her body type, but she wasn't used to feeling so many stares at her. She picked at the flower embroidery on the sleeves of her dress.

"Senior Li, why are they staring at me?" Bai Lingmiao asked.

"Because you're the most beautiful girl in Shangjing! Why else would they stare at you? Anyway, what are we supposed to do during this festival? Ah! We need to eat pancakes, drink floral tea, and eat black glutinous rice as well!

"Don't worry about anything tonight; just focus on enjoying the festival! This night belongs to you!" Li Huowang exclaimed.

At first, Bai Lingmiao was quite reserved, but the joyous mood soon influenced her.

Li Huowang led the way for her as well, and Bai Lingmiao was eventually all smiles as she walked down the streets.

They walked around the prosperous city and took in the scenic view. They also challenged a few riddles and ate a few pancakes.

Bai Lingmiao truly enjoyed every single second of the festival, especially the good food and her new set of clothes. Li Huowang and Zhuge Yuan were standing behind Bai Lingmiao and were staring at her with a smile.

Swoosh!

Zhuge Yuan opened his fan with a swing and fanned himself.

“Junior Li, I feel that your wife has something hidden in her heart.”

Li Huowang nodded. “I know, I know...”

“Do you want me to help?”

“Senior Zhuge, I know you are knowledgeable, but it isn't quite appropriate for you to help in something like this. Anyway, I don't really know the answer. We can only hope that time will eventually heal what has been plaguing her.”

The two engaged in some small talk until Li Huowang noticed a young boy holding a jade cat doll. The boy had pale skin but had great looks; there was also an air of elegance to him.

There were many girls on the street, so it wasn't strange to find many boys, too, but Li Huowang was surprised by how he couldn't see the Ten Emotions and Eight Sufferings of the boy before him.

The boy was accompanied by several tall servants.

Li Huowang was also astounded to see that he couldn't gauge their strength.

Li Huowang was flustered upon realizing that they were walking toward him. *Who are they? Why are they approaching me in casual clothes? Have they discovered my true identity?*

Li Huowang was thinking about what to do when the boy entered a jade shop at the side of the street. Li Huowang was worried and carefully approached the shop.

It turned out that the boy had entered the shop to have his jade cat appraised.

The owner complimented the jade cat in the boy's hand, and the boy was clearly happy with his compliments. “*Haha*. I knew it! My eyes have always been great! To think that what I bought for five hundred taels was actually worth five thousand!”

His servants complimented him even while exiting the shop.

They ignored him and walked away, making Li Huowang just a bit. Still, he was a bit confused. *What happened just now? Are they really just passing by? Am I too tense?*

Just then, Li Huowang noticed that the boy was walking toward Bai Lingmiao. Li Huowang ran over with his bronze coin sword. He was ready to brandish it at a moment's notice.

“Sorry for bothering you, kind miss,” said the boy while staring at Bai Lingmiao’s white hair with admiration in his eyes.

Chapter 472 - Official Business

Bai Lingmiao was shocked by the boy's actions, and she hurriedly hid behind Li Huowang.

"I'm married," said Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang swept his gaze across the tall servants and got ready to fight.

However, the boy's reaction caught him off guard.

"Oh, I'm sorry for startling you, then. I hope you're not offended," the boy said, sounding slightly disappointed as he bowed toward Bai Lingmiao before turning around to leave.

The boy walked past a nest of beggars; he gave them some silver before he turned and bowed to another girl. He was so flippant that there was no way he was going to attract any girls, but the boy did not get frustrated by the multiple rejections.

He simply moved on to greet other girls.

Li Huowang stared at the boy's back profile for quite a while before shouting, "The jade cat in your hand is fake. It's made out of three broken pieces of jade!"

"Oh?" The boy turned around in shock with the jade cat in hand. "Sir, I think you're mistaken. A jade shop owner even told me that the cat is worth five thousand."

"It was a lie. Look at the left leg of the cat; there are three vertical lines and two horizontal lines. A seller who has touched the mark will know that they have to tell you that it's worth five thousand, even though it's not.

"In reality, no one would buy the jade cat even for two thousand taels."

“Really?!” The boy was outraged. He carried the jade cat with him and rushed back to the shop.

Li Huowang held Bai Lingmiao's hand and left the scene. “Let’s go. I think they’re going to fight soon.”

Once they were some distance away, Bai Lingmiao looked at Li Huowang in shock, asking, “Senior Li, how did you know that it was fake even without taking a closer look at it?”

LI Huowang didn't answer her. The majority of scams were similar to each other, and the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao even often used the same technique. They'd leave a mark on someone so that another Sitting Oblivion Dao member would know what to do upon meeting the marked victim.

Every marked victim had a scam technique that was the most suitable for them, and the Sitting Oblivion Dao member would adjust their techniques accordingly.

In the boy's example, one would think that someone was a liar if only one person had determined the price, but if everyone else said the same thing, then it'd be a different story.

It was just like how a Sitting Oblivion Dao member told Li Huowang that they were Hong Zhong, even though both the individual in question and Li Huowang had never met each other before.

However, Li Huowang didn't expect that he'd become Hong Zhong for real.

Soon, both Li Huowang and Bai Lingmiao ended up forgetting the boy as they immersed themselves in the festival.

Bai Lingmiao was so happy that she even drank some wine.

It was only when the lanterns were slowly snuffed out on the streets did Li Huowang carry the drunk Bai Lingmiao back home. Bai Lingmiao was limp in Li Huowang's arms, and Her eyes were closed as she drew circles on Li Huowang's back.

“Senior Li. The festival is fun. I really wish that the Double

Third Festival comes every day."

"Yes, we can celebrate it every day if you want," Li Huowang said, pampering her.

Li Huowang quietly walked down the streets when he felt water on his back. The next moment, he heard Bai Lingmiao's sobs. Her sobbing eventually became crying, and Bai Lingmiao tried to stop herself from crying by covering her mouth, but her cries only got louder as time ticked by.

In the end, tears and snot covered her face as she cried like a child on Li Huowang's back. Bai Lingmiao pounded on Li Huowang's back with both hands.

Even though he slept late last night to accompany Bai Lingmiao, Li Huowang woke up very early in the morning. However, he didn't leave immediately and gouged out his left eye first with a fierce tug.

"Once she wakes up later, tell her that I'm looking for ways to heal her eyes," said Li Huowang while catching his breath. He placed his eyeball in the Second Deity's hand.

The Second Deity nodded quietly.

Li Huowang hugged her before taking his two swords with him. It was still too early in the morning, and the people had just woken up to put away their lanterns. Many of them were yawning, as they had stayed up late.

Li Huowang ate a simple breakfast on the way to the Surveillance Bureau. He reached the place just as he was finishing his meal. He wiped his oily hands on the stone lion statue on the right side of the entrance before walking inside.

Today's guard was Sima Lan with his signature black bird, and he was surprised to see Li Huowang.

"Er Jiu, to think that you're still alive! I really thought that the Sitting Oblivion Dao managed to kill you. It's been a while since

you last appeared, after all,” said Sima Lan’s black bird.

“I guess my time isn’t up yet. I hope you’ve been doing great, Senior Sima.”

Li Huowang had gotten closer to Sima Lan after meeting the latter a few times. The two of them chatted and cursed at the Sitting Oblivion Dao for a while before Li Huowang finally told Sima Lan the reason for his visit.

Li Huowang pointed at his empty left eye socket and said, “Does the Surveillance Bureau have anything that can heal my eye?”

“Your eye?” Sima Lan shook his head and explained, “I’m not sure about that, Brother Er Jiu. The Surveillance Bureau’s vault is massive. I don’t know whether they have something like that or not, but you should go ahead and look for it yourself.

“Anyway, haven’t you visited that place before?”

Li Huowang shook his head.

Sima Lan then told him where the vault was located.

Li Huowang walked down the extensive maze-like hidden corridor before finally finding the vault. After showing his identity plate, Li Huowang was granted entrance into the vault.

For some reason, Li Huowang felt like a rat that had entered an apothecary. The vault was vast and massive, containing rows after rows of wooden drawers. There were so many of them that they reached all the way to the ceiling.

Every wooden drawer had its own unique items inside of it. Some wooden drawers had talismans attached to them, while some wooden drawers were covered in chains.

Clearly, the Surveillance Bureau’s treasures were in this vault, and their treasure stash was the reason behind everyone’s decision to work for the Surveillance Bureau.

However, not everything was in drawers; there were some items sprawled haphazardly all over a long table. There were so

many weird things, and Li Huowang had no idea what they were or what to do with them

“Wait, isn’t this mine?” Li Huowang saw a bronze coin veil on the table and picked it up. The veil had fallen into the Surveillance Bureau's hands when they had decapitated him during *that* encounter.

Li Huowang had the black spindle, but he wouldn't say "no" to an extra layer of protection. Having made up his mind, Li Huowang was about to make a move when a eunuch approached him from the side.

The eunuch in the vault was different from the eunuch outside. He was all smiles, but he had no eyes. However, his eye sockets weren't empty and had been replaced by bronze coins, which were sewn directly into his bones.

Chapter 473 - Relic

"Do you want that, sir? It's a new item here," asked the eunuch while staring at Li Huowang with his bronze coin eyes. The eunuch's voice wasn't androgynous but was like a confused mixture of a male and female voice.

"Yes. How many lifespan pills do I need to exchange for it?"

The eunuch's smile widened, "Yo~ You are very discerning, sir. You just need thirty pills for it."

"It's that expensive?" Li Huowang was shocked. He was aware of just how precious lifespan pills were.

"*Haha*, that's why I said that you are very discerning, sir. This veil is rare even in Si Qi. Let me tell you its effects. Upon putting it on—"

"It's fine. No need to explain it to me. I want it." Li Huowang detached the gourd hanging from his waist and poured out thirty lifespan pills for the eunuch to take.

"Thank you for your patronage~! This is yours," the eunuch said, accepting the pills graciously with both hands. His eyes were shining and were evidently filled with greed.

Li Huowang wore it and felt safer with the weight on his face. Then, he looked at the eunuch's face and remarked, "Those coins... are you praying to the God of Wealth? Does the Bureau not care about that at all?"

"Hehehe~ surely, you jest, sir. Who doesn't pray to the God of Wealth? Who would decline more money? Hehehe~"

Li Huowang decided to drop it, as it seemed like the eunuch would not answer his question. Moreover, he was here for something more important.

"*Hm*~ You want something that will heal a blind? I'm sure we

have that, but... follow me. I will let my subordinates search for you.”

Li Huowang followed the eunuch into the depths of the vault. Rows and rows of drawers stretched into the distant darkness; the sight gave Li Huowang the creeps. The deeper they went, the older the drawers became; some of them were even moldy. Li Huowang didn't know whether it was a false alarm or not, but he felt like someone was watching him as he walked past the moldy area of the vault.

Under the guidance of the eunuch, Li Huowang soon found himself standing before a moldy wall on the left side of the vault. There were numerous holes in the moldy wall.

Li Huowang was about to start asking questions when the eunuch took out a brush and wrote something on a piece of paper. Then, he rolled it and placed it in a bamboo tube before throwing it into the hole in the wall.

“Please wait a moment, sir. We should be able to find the things that you need. The Surveillance Bureau has gathered many treasures over the past hundreds of years, so we definitely have what you need.”

“I'm not in a rush,” Li Huowang said. After some time, Li Huowang felt uncomfortable in the silence and decided to ask, “Do you have any clues about what happened to the Natural Disaster? What was happening inside the Bureau at the time?”

“Sir, I know everything there is to know about the vault, but I can't help you with anything unrelated to it, as I've never stepped out of the vault.”

Li Huowang went cold and numb at the remark. He found it scary how the Liang Kingdom thought of some people as objects rather than a fellow human being. A eunuch who could never leave the vault would never steal.

The fact that there were such eunuchs made Li Huowang feel a

shiver down his spine.

Soon, a bamboo tube emerged from the hole.

The eunuch read the written text and was overjoyed. "Sir, there's more than one method to regain one's eyesight!"

"Oh really? Quick, tell me what to do," Li Huowang said. He had guessed right. The Surveillance Bureau truly had methods to heal the blind.

"The first method is called the Sacred Eye Bead. You need to insert the eye bead, which is roughly the size of one's fist, into your forehead. The Sacred Eye Bead will not only allow you to see better, but you can even disperse evil beings with it."

"There's only one eye; it's roughly the size of a fist, and you need to insert it into your forehead?" Li Huowang muttered. He imagined how scary Bai Lingmiao would look with a third eye.

"Isn't one eye enough, sir? I thought you're missing just one eyeball?" the eunuch asked, staring at Li Huowang's empty eye socket.

"Unfortunately, my circulation technique passed through the forehead, so I can't really use that one. Next."

"Oh, the second treasure is the Golden Bridge Sutra. Upon obtaining a deep enough understanding of the sutra, you'd be able to regrow your eyeball. However, you have to be able to read and understand it. Moreover, you have to keep chanting it for several years."

"Next."

The eunuch listed out every single treasure they had available but Li Huowang rejected all of them. They were either too hard to use, had side effects, or they didn't meet Li Huowang's criteria.

Eventually, only a few treasures remained. Li Huowang was hesitating whether or not he should just use the Sacred Eye Bead when the eunuch suddenly said something interesting.

"The eighth one is a piece of relic from the body of a monk

who lived during the Great Qi. The monk had gathered a ton of merit, so his relic is extremely powerful. Swallow it with some ungrounded water, and you'll obtain the Mind's Eye.

"In other words, you'd still be able to see despite being blind."

"That's interesting," Li Huowang remarked. Li Huowang thought that he had encountered a dead end, but Bai Lingmiao didn't actually need an eye. She just had to be able to "see" her surroundings to be able to work properly.

The Mind's Eye was great, as it seemed to be able to see through invisibility and illusions.

Bai Lingmiao would actually become even stronger upon cultivating her Mind's Eye.

"I want that."

"I'm not done explaining, kind sir. It's not something that anyone can do. It can only be used by someone kind. The kinder they are, the stronger their Mind's Eye. They have to be kind, or they might get exorcized by the relic."

"Kind? No problem. I want that." Bai Lingmiao was definitely one of the kindest people Li Huowang had met so far.

The eunuch was puzzled, and he cast a doubtful gaze at Li Huowang. He sized up Li Huowang and took note of his bloody Daoist robes as well as his bag of torture tools before asking, "Sir, are you really kind?"

The eunuch was convinced that Li Huowang would try and use it for himself.

"Why can't I be kind? I want it, so stop the nonsense and get it for me," Li Huowang said, frowning.

The eunuch went silent and turned around to guide Li Huowang into the forest of drawers again.

They had taken just a few steps before the eunuch turned around and looked at Li Huowang. "I forgot to tell you something, sir. The relic costs four hundred lifespan pills. Can you afford it?"

Chapter 474 - Spiritual Sin

“Four hundred?!” Li Huowang was shocked. He didn’t even need to check his gourd to know that he didn’t have that many lifespan pills.

“Please don’t think that it’s too expensive. It’s a great item from thousands of years ago; it’s from the Great Qi! Do you really think there are any monks left today that’ll generate relics upon self-immolation?”

Li Huowang didn’t mind the price, but he couldn’t afford it. He had been so busy dealing with his hallucination that he hadn’t been able to earn lifespan pills.

“How much is the Sacred Eye Bead?” Li Huowang asked. He decided not to care even if Bai Lingmiao would look bizarre—it didn’t matter as long as she could see.

“Five hundred,” said the eunuch, dashing Li Huowang’s hopes of using a cheaper item. He didn’t expect that the Sacred Eye Bead was more expensive than the relic.

Li Huowang finally realized that the Surveillance Bureau was the greediest organization in existence. He had worked hard and had risked his life to earn lifespan pills outside, but he couldn’t even afford what he needed right now.

Without the lifespan pills, he wouldn’t be able to obtain the relic for Bai Lingmiao; without the relic, Bai Lingmiao would be blind, and Li Huowang couldn’t let that happen.

When Li Huowang obtained Li Zhi’s gourd, it contained only four lifespan pills, but Li Huowang needed four hundred to buy the relic! It was a mind-boggling amount that made Li Huowang feel

dizzy. Who was he supposed to rob to earn that many pills?

No, this is a small price to pay compared to killing her entire family. I must get it for her! Li Huowang vowed as he walked out of the vault.

He then went to the hall with numerous screens rather than leaving the building, as he could take on some missions there. Li Huowang saw a few familiar faces, but he was rather calm rather than hostile toward them.

The Surveillance Bureau treated the lives of others lightly, but the Surveillance Bureau's existence was vital to the world.

"Er Jiu?! You're alive?! I thought you were dead." Nangong exclaimed

Nangong said the same thing as Sima Lan and Li Huowang couldn't be bothered with him at all as he immediately went straight to the point, asking, "I want to take on the mission, and I want the highest paying one."

Nangong put two and two together and went silent. He took out a book and handed it over to Li Huowang. "Check it for yourself. It's on the final page."

Li Huowang opened it and saw the mission details.

[Wanted: Sitting Oblivion Dao Hong Zhong, dead or alive.]

Li Huowang skimmed through the pages.

Sitting Oblivion Dao Fa Cai, Sitting Oblivion Dao Xi Feng, Sitting Oblivion Dao Bai Ban, Sitting Oblivion Dao, Sitting Oblivion Dao. The missions were related to the Sitting Oblivion Dao. Liu Zongyuan was right. The Surveillance Bureau was indeed going after them.

The rewards were attractive, but Li Huowang decided not to take them because he didn't want to get into contact with those tricksters.

The Three Officials and Four Joys were like a glue trap. If he killed one of them, he could expect to see them all the time, just

like how Zhuge Yuan had fallen into their trap.

“Brother Er Jiu. I thought you had a grudge against the Sitting Oblivion Dao? Why don't you accept missions related to them?”

“I paid the price with one of my eyes and settled the score. I've killed the Sitting Oblivion Dao member who killed the elders of my sect,” Li Huowang replied. He flipped over some pages and stopped.

“The spiritual sin?”

The reward for the mission titled "The Spiritual Sin" was four hundred and thirty lifespan pills and five pure lifespans. Li Huowang looked at Zhuge Yuan standing beside Nangong and asked, “The Spiritual Sin? What is it? Is it like a spiritual beast?”

“No. Even though it has the word 'spiritual' in it, it's not a spiritual beast at all,” Zhuge Yuan replied. He revealed a look of disgust upon seeing the words "Spiritual Sin."

“Yep. The Spiritual Sin,” Nangong answered, “But are you sure you want to accept that mission? I hope you didn't become crazy after seeing the reward, which includes five pure lifespans. It's more dangerous than the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao.”

“What is it? Why is it dangerous?”

“It's not as dangerous as the Muddled Ones, Strayed Ones, and the Twisted Ones, but it's very tiresome to handle. The difficulty depends on the entity that it has possessed. It would be fine if it possessed a normal human, as it would at most be as strong as a crazed half-Immortal, but the story is different if it possessed an evil entity.”

“So it's like a parasite?” Li Huowang asked, deducing some information himself.

The crux of the matter here was the fact that the Spiritual Sin's powers would change depending on the entity that it possessed. In other words, it was capable of using a variety of techniques.

Li Huowang read some recorded encounters about the Spiritual Sin and quietly compared his own strength to it to see if he could

handle it.

After a few moments of hesitation, Li Huowang made up his mind. He was as strong as a Hong Zhong, so he was not weak at all. There was no reason for him to be afraid of it. Moreover, it wasn't like he wouldn't be able to escape if he couldn't win.

There was also a chance that the Spiritual Sin wasn't that strong. One of the recorded encounters stated that a monk was lucky enough to find a Spiritual Sin that had possessed a blade of grass. The monk was overjoyed with the discovery and made quick work of it

"I'll take this one," Li Huowang said, pressing his thumb on the red paste and accepting the mission by marking it with his thumbprint.

"Sure. These are the locations where it might appear according to our investigations. You can go ahead and look for it yourself."

"I need to find it myself?!"

"Of course. Do you really think that it's that easy to obtain such bountiful rewards? Fortunately, your rank is high enough, so you can find some people to help you carry some of that risk."

Li Huowang didn't want to recruit people like what Ji Xiang had done in the past, so he took the map away and walked out of the building. Li Huowang knew that he'd have to give up a few lifespan pills if he wanted helpers, and he needed as many lifespan pills as he could to afford the relic, so he decided not to recruit anyone.

Li Huowang stayed only a single night in the house before bringing Bai Lingmiao with him on a journey to hunt a Spiritual Sin. He thought he'd find one in the blink of an eye, but the first two locations turned out to be worthless.

He didn't receive even a hint from those two locations.

Just like that, a month and a half passed by.

Smack, smack, smack!

Bai Lingmiao was smacking Li Huowang's Daoist robes, which she had drenched in the water. Bai Lingmiao smacked it for a while before washing and scrubbing it against the stones in the river.

They didn't have a washing board, so Bai Lingmiao had to make do with stones.

After washing Li Huowang's robes, she washed her dress carefully—the same dress that Li Huowang had purchased for her at Shangjing. It was a pretty dress, and she loved it. Soon, she was done with the laundry, and she placed the clothes into a wooden bucket before standing up to leave.

Bai Lingmiao picked up a bamboo pole roughly the width of her thumb and used it as a cane. She then used the bamboo pole to make her way toward the carriage with a bucket of wet clothes in her other hand.

Chapter 475 - Doctor

After washing her clothes, Bai Lingmiao walked toward carefully the carriage and felt someone holding her cane. She saw a hazy red color before her, so she said, "I can still see a little."

The Second Deity said nothing and guided her to the carriage.

Once she was back at the carriage, Bai Lingmiao placed the laundry on top of the carriage with Li Sui's help.

"Li Sui, where is your father?" Bai Lingmiao could see a blurry patch of yellow in front of her. It was Li Sui's yellow straw robe.

Bai Lingmiao had spent such a long time with Li Sui that she had already gotten used to Li Sui's scary look. However, she couldn't treat Li Sui as her daughter like how Li Huowang could do so. Of course, she still treated Li Sui fairly.

"Father went into the forest. He said he'd be back in two hours," Li Sui replied. She was in the middle of reading a book.

"Oh, I see. All right, let's start a fire and cook something," Bai Lingmiao said. She rummaged through the carriage and found the flint. Then, she turned around and walked toward the firewood.

Starting a fire, placing the pot on top of the flames, and boiling some water were actions that Bai Lingmiao had done many in the past, but today, she somehow made a mistake and accidentally placed her hand in the flames.

She retracted her hand quickly, but her hand still ended up getting burned. The Second Deity pushed her away and started cooking in her stead. Bai Lingmiao's face was bitter when she saw the figure working hard in front of her.

Then, she started crying. She wasn't crying out of pain; she was crying at the fact that she was being a hindrance. Once Bai Lingmiao had caught a whiff of the delicious cooked food, she stood

up and walked into the forest with her cane.

Bai Lingmiao grazed the ground using the cane. Just then, Bai Lingmiao saw a hazy red color amidst her blurry world. The red figure was definitely Li Huowang.

“Senior Li, food is ready!” Bai Lingmiao shouted.

Li Huowang turned to Bai Lingmiao and smiled. “Thank you, Mom.”

“What are you talking about? No need to thank me,” said Sun Xiaoqin. She was sitting on a stool by the bedside and was opening a meal box for Li Huowang.

Today’s meal consisted of braised ribs, stir-fried spinach, and carrot soup with bits of mutton. Overall, it was a balanced meal.

“I know that you don’t like carrots, but you can’t afford to be picky right now. You need as much vitamins as you can eat.”

“Mom, I’m not a picky eater at all.” Li Huowang drank the soup and chewed on the bits of carrots.

“Great. It’s bad to be a picky eater. It seems you’re recovering steadily.” Sun Xiaoqin nodded with satisfaction. She was happy to see that Li Huowang’s condition had stabilized.

“Mom, I forgot to ask where you’re staying right now. You’re not living in this prison, are you?”

“I actually told your father to buy me a foldable bed so I can sleep here and stay with you around the clock, but he refused. I had no choice but to rent a room nearby.”

Li Huowang nodded. “That’s good.”

“Are you really cured, Senior Li? Are you?” Bai Lingmiao asked while staring sadly at Li Huowang along with the Second Deity. “Why did you lie to me? You said that you’re cured, but that clearly isn’t the case...”

Bai Lingmiao sighed with a downtrodden loon. “But I don’t blame you. I’ve never told you that I haven’t been able to let it go as well... Senior Li, should we part ways? But... I really can’t let you

go like this...”

“I’m fine. Don’t worry about me. My condition has been stabilizing over these past two months.”

“Ah, you can’t say that, son. Your condition is indeed improving, but you’re still hallucinating. You should not let your guard down, even if you’re recovering steadily.”

Li Huowang patiently listened to his mother’s nagging. He was enjoying it now, as he thought that he had lost it once, which made him understand how precious it was to him all this while.

“It’s fine. One day... I will be free from this illness!” Li Huowang exclaimed.

The metal gates abruptly opened just then.

Li Huowang looked toward the entrance and saw two doctors walking into the room. The two doctors had three wardens with them for their safety while a nurse was pushing in a wheelchair.

Li Huowang was alarmed, and he probed, “Miaomiao? Li Sui? Is that you? Leave me alone for now; I’ll come back soon.”

Sun Xiaoqin stood up anxiously and stood before the doctors. “Hey, who are you people? Who said you can come here?”

“Madam Sun, please calm down. We’re bringing your son away for therapy. He needs to move his muscles around, or they’ll become atrophied to the point where he’ll have to stay in his bed for the rest of his life.”

The doctors, wardens, and the nurse moved. They opened Li Huowang’s straitjacket, revealing his pale skin. Li Huowang had become much skinnier, and his limbs looked as thin as chopsticks.

Li Huowang couldn’t stand up even though the nurse was supporting him. The prison wardens sighed in relief at the sight. There was no way the martial lunatic could defeat them, considering his condition.

“What’s happening? Why is he so thin?” Sun Xiaoqin asked, sounding flustered.

“Madam Sun, please calm down. It’s all because he hadn’t been able to move for a very long time; his muscles had wasted. He’ll recover via physiotherapy.

“With that said, it’s actually surprising that your son actually doesn’t have any bedsores. You’ve been doing a great job taking care of him.”

Sun Xiaoqin relaxed at that remark and exclaimed, “I flip him over every few hours. I watched a video online on how to take care of bedridden elders, and I learned that technique from that video.”

The doctors gave a few instructions. The nurse and the wardens placed Li Huowang in a wheelchair and started rolling him away.

“Wait, where are you taking me?! I can’t leave right now!” Li Huowang exclaimed. He but the nurse and the wardens held him down tightly.

Li Huowang was afraid of leaving the room. Who could say what would happen if he were to leave the room right now?

One of the doctors cast a curious gaze at him. “Why can’t you leave the room right now? Can you tell me why?”

Li Huowang looked at the doctor and replied, “Just give me a few moments.”

“Why can’t you leave *right now* ? You’ve been lucid all this while, so why can’t you leave the room right now? Are you afraid of something?”

Li Huowang immediately got suspicious at the remark. How did the doctor know that he had been lucid all this while?

Chapter 476 - Chat

“Student, since you're lucid, you should be capable of logical thinking. I know you understand what I'm talking about. We just want to help you. Do you really want to lie in bed for the rest of your life and make your mother take care of you forever?”

“Your mother's old. Can she really take care of you for the rest of her life? Can you withstand seeing her hair becoming white? Can you really envision yourself making your mother flip you over and clean you up by the time you're fifty or maybe sixty years old?”

It doesn't matter. One day, I'll become an immortal myself. Li Huowang's expression was firm as he made sure that his mouth would remain shut.

The two doctors glanced at each other, and then they took out their notebook from their white coats to jot down something on it. They moved a bit farther away to discuss something for a while before walking back up to Li Huowang.

“Student Li, I think you can be exempted from rehab, but... can we talk more about that? Don't be nervous; it's just going to be a casual chat between friends,” said the younger doctor.

Upon hearing that, the nurse, the wardens, and the other doctor turned around to leave.

The doctor took off his white coat and put it aside, revealing his casual clothes underneath.

“Let me introduce myself. My name is Yi Donglai,” Yi Donglai said. He reached out with his hand and shook Li Huowang's thin and emaciated right hand.

“You've become famous online. The story about how you rushed into school to rescue your girlfriend from several robbers has gone viral online. Many people admire you, and there are many

beautiful girls among them,” said Yi Donglai.

Li Huowang’s lips trembled but he didn’t speak. He was busy counting down to his return.

“Do you play League of Legends? I do. They just released a limited skin for the Barbarian King, and it's a skin based on you. It went viral, and I even spent ninety-nine dollars just to get it.”

“*Huh?*” Li Huowang looked up with a complex expression and asked, “Am I a fool in your eyes?”

“*Hehehe*, just kidding. Don’t take it too seriously, but... I did see the surveillance footage. Wow, you looked so cool, just like the powerful Barbarian King! If your figure at the time were rendered into a skin, it would definitely sell like hotcakes!”

“Which champions do you like to play? I like to play the Jester, but Rito Games has just nerfed him recently! They actually nerfed Jester! Like, it's absurd, right? Why would they even target him...”

Li Huowang stared deeply at Yi Donglai as the latter blabbered. Of course, Li Huowang ignored Yi Donglai's nonsense and saw through the latter's intentions. Yi Donglai was probably planning on using gaming to build a rapport with Li Huowang, and then he'd start treatment once Li Huowang had let his guard down.

Perhaps... I don't have to resist openly. Maybe I can use him to get out of my current predicament. It's a hassle being monitored around the clock, Li Huowang thought. Then, he asked, "Have they released any new champions recently?"

Yi Donglai was delighted to hear Li Huowang's question. Finally, he received a decent response from Li Huowang, a patient of Bed 13. With feedback, psychological intervention and treatment could proceed.

“Yes! Yes, yes, yes!” Yi Donglai exclaimed, "Two new champions were released while you're here.”

“Are they jungle champions? I like playing jungle[1].”

The two chatted about the game for twenty minutes, and the

two were satisfied with each other's responses.

"I've got to go. Let's chat again the next time we have time," Li Huowang said.

Yi Donglai had many questions. He especially wanted to know how Li Huowang could control the timing of his flare-up, but Yi Donglai knew that the matter couldn't be rushed.

"Sure! Pick a time."

"Then, let's have dinner in five days. See you later, Donglai," Li Huowang said, smiling.

"Hey, don't leave yet. We still haven't eaten dinner." Sun Xiaoqin's voice echoed in Li Huowang's ears as the scenery around him peeled away.

When Li Huowang came back to his senses, he saw Bai Lingmiao, Li Sui, and the Second Deity staring at him in a circle.

"Senior Li... dinner is ready." Bai Lingmiao muttered weakly.

"Ah, okay," Li Huowang said. He turned around and walked toward the carriage. He then picked up a bowl of stew and said, "Mom, I want to eat. Can you feed me some rice from the meal box?"

Li Huowang opened his mouth wide. Then, he paused for a while with his mouth agape before taking a spoonful of the stew from his bowl and chewing on it. After swallowing, he opened his mouth wide again and waited patiently.

Bai Lingmiao, Li Sui, and the Second Deity saw Li Huowang behaving strangely.

"Come here and eat. What are you guys doing standing there? We still have a journey to continue," Li Huowang said.

The trio walked over to him.

Bai Lingmiao cast a complicated gaze at Li Huowang while holding a bowl of stew. She looked like she wanted to say something to him, but she merely smiled and ate with relish upon seeing his gaze on her.

There was a strange atmosphere above everyone as they ate their meal. Once the dishes were washed, the carriage set off once again.

Li Huowang thought hard and long about it before finally talking to Bai Lingmiao, saying, "You don't need to worry about me at all. I can see things clearly. It's just going to take some time for things to become even better."

"All right, Senior Li. I believe you." Bai Lingmiao nodded slightly.

"I really—Ah, forget it. You'll understand eventually," Li Huowang said. Then, he took out a piece of turmeric paper and bit his finger before writing a talisman.

He stuck it onto the back of the horse, which made it gallop almost immediately.

The carriage moved swiftly, and the group soon found themselves before a peach blossom forest by dusk. The red sunset cast its hue on the pink peach blossoms, making them look particularly enchanting.

Li Huowang spread out the detailed map that he had obtained from the Surveillance Bureau. He compared it with their surroundings and muttered, "This should be the place. I just don't know whether we'll have a stroke of better luck this time or not."

The unsuccessful attempts made Li Huowang feel a bit less confident about this third attempt.

"I'll go in first to check. You guys wait outside. If there are any unusual noises, bring the carriage back to where we had lunch earlier and wait for me there."

"Okay, Senior Li. Go on."

Li Huowang felt a pang of pain in his heart when he saw Bai Lingmiao's unfocused eyes. Moments later, he turned around and finally started walking toward the peach blossom forest. He bent down slightly, projecting his image into the ground before

continuing his journey into the peach blossom forest.

The greenery within the forest was thick, and the fragrance of blossoms filled the air.

However, the tree trunks were covered with sticky amber peach gum, which made the entire forest feel eerie.

Just as Li Huowang had walked ten meters into the forest, he realized that the lush peach tree forest was unusually quiet. There wasn't any chirping of birds, and he couldn't hear the distinct noises of insects.

Li Huowang was thrilled. Could there be something this time around?

“Brother Zhuge, you’ve seen a lot. I’m sure you’ve encountered an evil spirit or two, am I right?”

“Yeah. An evil spirit once disturbed a close friend of mine. He was living a life worse than death, tortured during every waking moment. In the end, he begged me to grant him release.”

-
1. an assigned position in the game 🤝

Chapter 477 - Spiritual Sin

Li Huowang was convinced that Zhuge Yuan had deep feelings for that good friend of his the moment he saw the latter's exceptionally sorrowful expression. Zhuge Yuan was a righteous person, and he was always willing to go to great lengths for his friends.

One could only imagine just how much he had suffered after being forced to kill a friend with his own hands.

Zhuce Yuan added, "The spiritual sin who took away my good friend became capable of using the techniques and powers of my friend. It also grew even stronger.

"Brother Li, I know that the Surveillance Bureau has always been talking about just how formidable spirits can be, but you must be careful against a spiritual sin. You might be fighting a spiritual sin, but you might be fighting something else the next moment."

"Spiritual Sins are capable of changing hosts, which is the reason they're both troublesome and dangerous to handle. The best way to take one down is to ambush it."

"Once you encounter a spiritual sin, you must be absolutely certain of success before you make a move against it. Otherwise, you'll suffer a fate worse than death if it manages to capture you. They're all about sin and less about the spirit, after all."

Zhuce Yuan was about to say something, but he paused. There was a monkey carcass lying by his feet. The carcass was dry, and the monkey's mouth was agape. Its limbs were twisted, and its belly was split open. Its rotten innards had splattered all over the ground, creating what looked like a flower.

“If we go by what you said, Brother Zhuge, does that mean we've just found the culprit behind this guy's death?” Li Huowang asked.

Zhuge Yuan nodded solemnly in reply.

Li Huowang became extremely cautious as he moved slowly into the depths of the peach blossom forest. The number of twisted and deformed corpses increased as Li Huowang walked deeper and deeper into the forest.

Eventually, he saw not just animal carcasses but human corpses twisted in bizarre shapes as well.

“*Shh!* Quiet! I think I heard something just now,” Li Huowang exclaimed at the monk. The monk was chanting a mantra for the deceased. Li Huowang fell on all fours and pressed his ear on the earth, listening intently. *What are these noises? Breathing?*

Whooo, whooo, whooo...

Rhythmic noises of what sounded like someone's breathing reached Li Huowang's ears through the ground. Li Huowang gripped his sword tightly and moved slowly toward where the sound was coming from.

As the noises grew louder, Li Huowang picked up the pace as the noises grew louder. A thicket of branches stood before him, and Li Huowang jumped into it. Upon landing, the scene unfolding before him made his pupils quiver.

A massive pile of flesh, bones, and organs was on a large clearing up ahead. There were too many of them that a tiny lake of gore had been created from the flesh, bones, and innards.

Whooo, whooo, whooo... The pile of flesh expanded and contracted as it breathed. Streams of red light fell from up above, piercing the crevices of the flesh.

Li Huowang looked up and saw that the red light was coming from the setting sun. The entity before him was actually feasting on the sunset itself.

Am I staring at a spiritual sin? Li Huowang thought.

Squeak!

A mouse ran toward the pile of flesh in the distance and gnawed on a shriveled corpse.

The pile of flesh trembled just then. It converged at one point before assembling itself into a doe that was as huge as a one-story house. The deer had six legs and large antlers that looked like two large peach trees. It had fur similar to the colors of a rotting rainbow—dull yet colorful.

Li Huowang instantly realized that it was a doe, as a deceased fawn was hanging out of its nether region. The fawn seemed to have died during birth.

“Brother Zhuge, what is the spiritual sin parasitizing on?” Li Huowang asked in a low voice as he stared at the massive deer in the distance.

“Yingzhao. The common folk call it a Nine-Colored Deer.”

Nine-Colored Deer? Li Huowang turned and saw the deer's rainbow-colored fur.

The spiritual sin suddenly made a move. It left afterimages in the air as it dashed toward the shriveled corpse where the mouse was located. It would have crushed the mouse with just a step, but it chose not to do so. Instead, it trapped the mouse's tail with its plum-shaped hooves, and then it pressed down on the mouse's hind legs with its other hoof before moving its hoof back and forth.

The mouse shrieked in pain, but the Nine-Colored Deer showed no intention of stopping. It raised its head and neighed with delight. Once the mouse's four limbs had been crushed into meat paste, the Nine-Colored Deer lifted one hoof and pressed hard on the mouse, slowly crushing the mouse beneath its hoof.

The Nine-Colored Deer did not stop pressing down on the mouse until the mouse had vomited its innards. Upon seeing the gory sight, the Nine-Colored Deer seemed to reveal a satisfied look

before transforming into the same pile of flesh, blood, and innards.

Li Huowang's expression was ugly as he struggled to maintain his composure from the revolting sight. Then, he spoke in a low voice, "Brother Zhuge, has that entity gone mad, or does it simply enjoy killing?"

"It's a spiritual sin. Heaven and earth are indifferent to all living beings, and you are staring at the sin from both heaven and earth. Its birth itself is a kind of mistake." Zhuge Yuan seemed to have recalled something, and his expression became ugly.

"Brother Zhuge, what's the best strategy against that Nine-Colored Deer?" Li Huowang asked. He was getting ready to make a move.

"It consumes and uses the rosy light of the sunset[1]. Take a closer look at its body. Locate where the light of the sunset is leaking out of its body."

"Okay," Li Huowang said. He gnashed his teeth as his figure arched slightly as if he were a leopard.

The spiritual sin in the distance seemed to have sensed something. The pile of flesh, blood, and innards transformed once again into the figure of a deer. Then, it looked around and scanned the peach forest.

A Hong Zhong mahjong tile tumbled through the air, landing steadily on a peach tree.

The spiritual sin turned to look at where the noise had come from, and that was when Li Huowang rushed out from behind a tree. He whipped out his bronze coin sword and slashed out at the spiritual sin.

A crisp noise echoed, and the flesh that took the brunt of Li Huowang's attack sizzled. It emitted a plume of black smoke and withered like dead flowers. The attack from the evil-banishing sword was effective, but it failed to deliver a fatal blow.

The spiritual sin let out a cry. It returned to its original form

and charged at Li Huowang.

A sea of flesh, blood, and innards shrouded Li Huowang in an instant, but he emerged unscathed. He had just switched positions with his illusion.

“Kill!” Li Huowang roared, and the purple-tassel sword slashed fiercely at the Nine-Colored Deer, carving open a massive wound.

However, the laceration healed rapidly. Zhuge Yuan saw that and said, “Brother Li, this is not going to work. Its body is just its shell. You need to attack the spiritual sin directly inside of it for your attacks to be effective!”

A red light burst out of the Nine-Colored Deer.

Li Huowang deflected it with his sword in mid-air. The red light ricocheted off Li Huowang's sword and struck down quite a few peach trees.

“What does it look like?” Li Huowang asked while retreating to create some distance between them.

“You can’t see it. Living humans with the ten emotions and eight sufferings cannot see what it really looks like.”

“Since we can't see it, then so be it!” Li Huowang exclaimed. His expression turned fierce as he removed his red Daoist robes. Then, he whipped out his flint and slashed at himself.

1. more specifically, it's the rosy-tinted light/clouds of sunrise/sunset 🤔

Translator's Thoughts

Well, good to know what the deer looks like.

Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin!



Chapter 478 - Counter

Sparks flew and landed on Li Huowang, creating a mighty conflagration that dealt extreme pain to Li Huowang—pain that almost made him faint. The extremely high temperature distorted the air around him, and his figure was instantly scorched.

When Li Huowang saw that the Nine-Colored Deer before him was emitting a plume of black smoke, he grinned menacingly with his lipless mouth and charged at it.

Engulfed in flames, Li Huowang collided heavily against the amalgamation of flesh, blood, and innards. The gory hill burst open and was engulfed by the raging flames.

Li Huowang breathed a sigh of relief as he stared at the raging flames before him. It seemed that he had made the right choice by not choosing to transform his skin into a life-saving talisman.

The writhing flesh eventually stopped moving, but Li Huowang sensed something amiss. He rushed into the fire with his purple-tassel sword in hand and slashed at the charred mass. However, the spiritual sin was missing.

It escaped! Li Huowang's face turned ugly. This spiritual sin was far more cunning than he had imagined.

Where do you think you can run? Li Huowang surveyed the surroundings. Then, he squatted and pressed his hand on the dry weeds and dead wood on the ground. Flames rushed out of him from all directions, and they climbed up the peach trees like living creatures. Each flaming peach tree was like a plague, and the nearby region quickly transformed into a sea of fire.

Li Huowang stood in the middle of the flames, looking for any abnormalities. However, he did not see anything unusual. The spiritual sin hadn't been forced out by the fire. It seemed like

dealing with it was going to be more difficult than Li Huowang thought.

What am I supposed to do now? If it manages to escape, it's going to be really troublesome to find it again. After pondering for a moment, Li Huowang decided to divine the spiritual sin's location.

Just as Li Huowang was about to cut himself using his sword, a fireball abruptly manifested over the back of his hand and dove into his wound. *Damn it! The spiritual sin has possessed the flames!*

Li Huowang had realized it too late. The flames that had engulfed him and the peach trees were extinguished instantly, and his fleshly body began to collapse like the Nine-Colored Deer from earlier. His flesh, blood, bones, skin, and hair separated and formed a pile of gore.

To make matters worse, Li Huowang was conscious throughout the ordeal. He felt his flesh being torn apart, and the pain was so extreme that he wished to die.

However, Li Huowang couldn't even die, as the spiritual sin was about to take full control of him! Li Huowang could feel its pure malice, which had pervaded everything within him as it tried to take over his consciousness.

It turned out that spiritual sins weren't living creatures but were embodiments of sin themselves! They were perfectly capable of triumphing over just about anyone, as even the most virtuous person could not be devoid of sin.

Li Huowang gritted his teeth and clenched his fists. Half of his face slid off and fell to the ground. *I am virtuous, and I don't have even a single sin!*

Just then, Li Huowang's melted fleshly body had converged, transforming into his original figure. Even the skin that he had sacrificed to Ba-Hui had returned, and it allowed him to understand that he was in a mere illusion.

He couldn't be fooled!

Li Huowang took advantage of that opportunity to run to the edge of the peach forest.

Li Huowang's figure collapsed to the ground like tofu when he saw the carriage up ahead. Just as his face was about to separate from his head, he looked up at the carriage and roared, "Li Sui! There's something in my body! Help me drive it out!"

His words had just echoed into the air when his fleshly body separated, transforming into a wriggling mass of flesh that rushed toward the depths of the peach forest.

Step, step, step!

Frantic footsteps sounded, and a pair of eyes turned to see a skinless dog running toward them on all fours.

"Dad, I'm coming!" Li Sui exclaimed, and her body disintegrated in mid-air. Her flesh and tentacles converged at one point, becoming a massive clump of flesh that landed heavily on Li Huowang. The two clumps of flesh intertwined and created a massive pile of gore covered in tentacles. Then, it rolled violently around the burning peach forest.

Li Huowang and Li Sui's faces would appear intermittently amidst the rolling ball of meat, and their conditions appeared rather unstable. The spiritual sin had decided to become a bit greedy and take control over Li Sui's body as well, but it was having a hard time, as the Black Taisui itself was born to devour.

Moreover, Li Huowang was working hard to regain some control over his body as well.

The spiritual sin finally gave in, as it was fighting two enemies by itself. Li Huowang's body converged at one point, transforming into a bloated humanoid figure. However, his abdomen burst open, and something rushed out of his stomach.

Li Huowang looked up but saw nothing except for strange footprints in the ashes, which vanished quickly as it turned to a corner. Li Huowang was convinced that the footprints had to have

belonged to the spiritual sin. After all, spiritual sins could never be seen by someone with the ten emotions and eight sufferings.

“Dad, are you okay?” Li Sui asked. Then, she rushed out of Li Huowang’s abdomen, allowing Li Huowang's bloated figure to return to normal.

Li Huowang's organs were in a mess, and there were some organs that had shifted, but the good thing was that he had full control over his body once more.

Li Huowang glared resentfully at the footprints. He quickly bandaged his wound. He had overcome all sorts of hardships, and he couldn't fall to something so minor. Li Huowang did not even groan as he withstood the burning sensation all over his skin.

Once Li Huowang was done bandaging his wound, he wasted no time and rushed toward where the footprints had vanished.

“Li Sui, wait outside for me, and rush in once I call you! Stay with Miaomiao for now!”

Li Huowang slowed down and became fully aware of his surroundings. He listened to every single noise around him. He couldn't see, so he had to use his ears to track down the enemy!

The spiritual sin was far more cunning than he had imagined, but he had to outsmart it.

Rustle, rustle.

Li Huowang heard faint rustling noises behind him, but he did not react. He moved forward slowly until he saw a hollowed-out tree with what looked like a tunnel in it. He bent down and entered the tunnel, seemingly searching inside for the spiritual sin.

Just then, a series of footprints moved rapidly toward Li Huowang's feet. Then, the footprints disappeared as soon as they reached Li Huowang's wounded feet. The moment the spiritual sin burrowed its way into Li Huowang's body through his feet, it realized something amiss.

Li Huowang's upper half was missing; it turned out that the

spiritual sin had burrowed into Li Huowang's lower body.

“ *Hehe...* Gotcha. I'm sure you didn't expect me to use my lower body as bait, did you?”

Chapter 479 - Someone's Coming

The spiritual sin felt wronged as it had been deceived. It tried to take control of Li Huowang's lower half and flee. However, Li Huowang's lower half had no eyes and no ears to perceive its surroundings, so the spiritual sin stumbled over a tree root and fell hard to the ground, just a few steps away from the hollowed-out tree.

The spiritual sin decisively attempted to escape. It had recognized that it was in danger, but before it could even make a move, Li Huowang's bronze coin sword left behind a trail of cold light as it descended and nailed the spiritual sin to the ground.

A plume of black smoke emerged as the spiritual sin cried in agony. However, it couldn't do anything at all, and its cries eventually weakened.

When the spiritual sin ceased all movement, Li Huowang finally emerged from concealment. No, it was more like his upper half crawled out of hiding, and he crawled toward his frozen lower half.

Once a scammer became aware of what the customer desired, then it'd be easier for them to scam the customer. Li Huowang knew that the spiritual sin wanted his body so badly, so he separated himself into two and tossed his lower half aside as bait to lure it out.

Li Huowang sprawled out on the ground, gasping for air. He had endured excruciating pain tonight—the pain of being burned alive, the pain of getting lacerated, and the pain of getting cut in half. The ordeal was so painful that he almost fainted. He would

have fainted long ago if it hadn't been for his willpower.

At least there's some profit.... Li Huowang glanced at the bronze coin sword. The bronze coin sword had pinned the carcass of the spiritual sin to the ground, which was still emitting wisps of black smoke.

Li Huowang grabbed the smoke with his charred fingers, and he felt his negative emotions being agitated. The desire to kill and hate filled him up in the blink of an eye. Li Huowang retracted his hand and tried to touch the source of the smoke, but his hand touched nothing but air. For some reason, he couldn't touch the spiritual sin, and he couldn't see anything beneath the plume of black smoke.

Li Huowang tested it and found that he could touch other things. However, he could not touch the spiritual sin itself. *Spiritual sins truly are dangerous and bizarre. I wonder why the Surveillance Bureau is willing to pay such a high price to obtain one.*

Li Huowang rested for a while and recovered a bit of strength. Then, he started crawling toward his lower half, but he stopped as soon as he started crawling, as there were oncoming footsteps.

Someone's coming? Li Huowang's expression stiffened. *Miaomiaomiao? No, those footsteps do not belong to her!*

Li Huowang peered into the winding forest path to his left, and he saw a chubby woman walking toward him with steady steps.

The chubby woman's getup was strange; she was wearing a red paper belly band, and a small golden crown embroidered with red threads was sitting on her head. The *strange* part about her getup was that lit purple incense sticks were sticking out of her head, making her appear like a hedgehog. Moreover, two miniature, triangular banners with red curse patterns were hanging from her earlobes.

Li Huowang would have thought that he was staring at another spiritual sin if it weren't for the mace on her shoulder.

The chubby woman raised her mace and pointed it at Li Huowang. “Hey! Ascend to the heavens and travel the lands up above. Safeguard the wind and clouds in the four directions. Seize the demons and capture evil!”

Li Huowang frowned. He reached for his badge at his waist and showed it to the chubby woman. “Back off! I’m in the middle of official business on behalf of the Surveillance Bureau!”

“Huh?” the chubby woman was surprised. Then, she took out an identical badge from her belly band. She was from the Surveillance Bureau as well.

“Oh? You’re from the Surveillance Bureau? I don’t think so. Toss over your badge for me to take a closer look!”

The chubby woman dared not let her guard down in the face of a living human being with no lower half and was charred black. Li Huowang obliged and hurled his badge over to the chubby woman. Then, he pieced together his upper and lower halves.

Li Huowang waited patiently for the nerves in his lower half to connect to each other.

The plump woman walked up to Li Huowang and placed the badge next to him.

“I didn’t expect that you were saying the truth. I thought you were a spiritual sin. Which sect are you from?”

“Ao Jing Sect.”

The plump woman scrutinized Li Huowang up and down. Then, she nodded and said, “I guess that makes sense.”

The plump woman then pulled out the incense sticks sticking out of her face. “What a mess. We’re on the same side, but we almost fought each other. Anyway, your clone technique is impressive, young man. Where did you learn it?”

Li Huowang couldn’t be bothered to make small talk with the plump woman. After all, the Surveillance Bureau had never been a place to find comrades.

Meanwhile, the plump woman's true appearance was finally revealed when there were no more incense sticks sticking out of her head. If she was judged solely on appearance, she appeared to be an ordinary peasant woman.

Without waiting for a response from Li Huowang, the plump woman asked, "I came here to find a spiritual sin. What about you?"

"*Hmm?*" Li Huowang sat up and asked, "You took on that task as well? Can two people take on the same job?"

"How naive. Several people can take on one task, but of course, the one who gets it down first will obtain the reward. I guess you can say that it's skill based."

"*Oh.*" Li Huowang with much difficulty. Then, he pressed on his lower body, which was beginning to recover. "Well, you're too late. I already killed the spiritual sin."

"What?! You killed it by yourself?" the chubby woman exclaimed, revealing extreme shock.

However, Li Huowang could see that the chubby woman's ten emotions and eight sufferings did not seem as shocked as she appeared on the outside. It seemed that the chubby woman was a hypocrite.

However, it wasn't strange at all. Everyone would be wary of strangers, and Li Huowang was wary of the chubby woman as well. It was proven by how he had never let go of his purple-tassel sword since he saw the chubby woman.

"You're right when you said that the tasks are skill based, Sis. Anyway, please excuse me." Li Huowang curled up his calves and them down slowly. He had healed enough to stand up.

"Indeed, but..." the chubby woman trailed off, seemingly anxious.

Li Huowang couldn't be bothered with her at all. He exerted all his strength to propel himself off of the ground. Then, he took away

the bronze coin sword, which had pierced the spiritual sin, before walking slowly toward the edge of the peach forest.

“Wait!” the chubby woman exclaimed.

Li Huowang turned around, and the tip of his sword pointed directly at the chubby woman's nose.

“What? Are you trying to snatch it away from me?” Li Huowang asked, his voice instantly becoming cold.

The plump woman revealed a shy smile. She took a few steps back until she was out of his attack range before explaining, “We’re all from the Surveillance Bureau. How could I do such a thing?”

Li Huowang responded with a cold laugh. He knew too well the methods of his colleagues in the Surveillance Bureau. If he had shown even a hint of fear, the chubby woman would have ambushed him to snatch the spiritual sin away and claim the reward for herself.

Hundreds of lifespan pills were worth a small fortune in this chaotic world. Moreover, the task was to capture a spiritual sin, and the Surveillance Bureau wouldn't ask where it had come from.

“Sounds great. Let’s go our separate ways, then. You definitely wouldn’t want to get a taste of the Ao Jing Sect's techniques,” Li Huowang threatened. Then, he retreated slowly with his loot in hand.

Chapter 480 - Retreat

The peach forest was filled with the smell of charcoal. Li Huowang did not dare to walk too fast. The flesh around his waist was still moving, and it seemed like it would fall to the ground at any moment.

The chubby woman's face couldn't help but become anxious as Li Huowang got farther and farther away from her.

"Hey, young man, I'm not going to ask you for anything else except for the five-year pure lifespan! Name your price! I'll buy it from you!"

"Not selling!" Li Huowang decisively refused. Pure lifespan had no side effects, and he was planning on using it to prolong Bai Lingmiao's life.

The chubby woman seemed rather unwilling to give up, and she followed Li Huowang from a certain distance away. However, she stopped in her tracks when Li Sui appeared and growled at her with her pearly whites.

"S-Senior Li?" Bai Lingmiao's gentle voice was tinged with hesitation. Bai Lingmiao stared at the blurry black mess in the distance. Bai Lingmiao was certain that Li Huowang's figure was red, so how come he had become scorched black?

Li Huowang mounted his horse while enduring the intense pain. He urged the horse forward and exclaimed, "I'll explain later! Someone is watching us, so we have to leave now."

The carriage rushed down the dirt road in the dead of night. The horse ran until noon the next day, and Li Huowang only made the horse stop when it started foaming at the mouth.

Li Huowang breathed a sigh of relief when he saw that nobody was behind them. Regardless of whether that woman was avoiding

him or not, at least she hadn't decided to actually follow them.

Li Huowang felt all the tension inside of him go, and he collapsed behind the curtain.

"Miaomiao, I'll rest for a while. Don't touch the bronze coin sword," Li Huowang said. He fell asleep the moment his nape touched his soft pillow.

Li Huowang slept for a long time. When he opened his eyes again, he saw Bai Lingmiao brushing something on his charred body. Li Huowang sniffed lightly, and the unique smell of the liquid told him that it was badger oil.

"How long was I asleep?" Li Huowang asked.

Bai Lingmiao finally noticed that he was awake.

"Senior Li, you've been sleeping for three days. I stitched up the wounds on your chest and waist," Bai Lingmiao responded.

"Ah." Li Huowang recalled something and sat up abruptly. He ignored the pain coming from his wounds and reached for the bronze coin sword beside him. His heart sank when he saw that it was no longer emitting a plume of black smoke.

"Senior Li, are you looking for that invisible thing? I bought a wooden box from a passing peddler and put it in there for you."

Li Huowang opened the box and used the other end of his chopsticks to prod inside of it. Upon sensing something pressing on his chopsticks, Li Huowang breathed a sigh of relief. The spiritual sin was still there.

"Senior Li, are you hungry? I'm going to get some broth for you," Bai Lingmiao said. She lifted the curtain and turned around to leave.

"No, I'll go and take it myself," Li Huowang said, stopping Bai Lingmiao in her tracks. "You should avoid working on anything that involves hot temperatures, or you might get into an accident again."

When Li Huowang got off the carriage, his scabbed wounds opened and oozed blood. It was painful, but Li Huowang had been

through so many hardships that he had long gotten used to extreme pain.

It was dark outside, and Li Sui was squatted by the campfire. Li Sui was drawing something in the air with a book beneath one of her paws.

“Dad? You're finally awake?” Li Sui asked, looking up at Li Huowang.

“Learning to draw talismans? Not bad, keep it up.” Li Huowang reached out and patted Li Sui's head gently. Then, he picked up a bowl from the side to scoop out some broth from the pot.

Just as he was about to ladle out a bowl of broth for himself, Li Sui stuck her tongue over and devoured the broth.

“What was that?” Li Huowang curled his scorched fingers and flicked Li Sui's forehead.

“Dad, can't I have some? I always ate first, you know.”

Li Sui's words made Li Huowang do a double take at her. It seemed that Bun's memories and thoughts had been assimilated by Li Sui.

“It's okay, go ahead and eat,” Li Huowang said, placing a bowl of broth before Li Sui.

Li Huowang watched as Li Sui devoured the hot broth. “Li Sui, I'm severely injured, and your mother can barely see. You must help us out on the road up ahead.”

“All right, what can I do?”

“Help us wash clothes and wash dishes. Help us start fires as well, and if you can't do that, then collect some firewood for us instead.”

“Second Mom is already doing those, though. Won't Second Mom have nothing to do if I take over those tasks?”

“Second Mom?”

“Yeah, she likes to wear a red hat. I like her, and we often chat. We even go out to catch some games. We caught a big piece of

game once, and we split it in half.”

Is she talking about the Second Deity? When did they become so close? Li Huowang thought it through, and he realized that it wasn’t a bad thing at all.

“All right, just help her out in her tasks, then.”

“All right.”

Li Huowang looked at Li Sui's gaping maw and her black tentacle tongue. Li Huowang smiled knowingly, and then he reached out with his left arm to pull Li Sui into his arms.

Then, he patted Li Sui's head and said, “Thank you for your help back in the peach forest. If it hadn't been for you, things would have gotten a bit dangerous.”

Before Li Sui could respond, she caught a whiff of Li Huowang's familiar scent. She stuck her tongue out and licked Li Huowang's charred figure.

“Sui Sui, is there anything you want to do?” Li Huowang asked softly.

“I want to stay by Dad’s side forever.”

“You can’t always be by my side. You’re my daughter, after all, not a pet.”

“I'm sure there are things that you'll want to do in the future. Take your time and think about it thoroughly, and then don't forget to let me know if there’s anything I can help you with.”

“Dad, I don’t understand what you're talking about.”

“You'll understand in the future. For now, let’s take a bowl of broth to your mother. Then, we'll continue eating and rest afterward. We still have a journey to continue tomorrow.”

The night was uneventful, and when Li Huowang woke up amidst the swaying, he realized that he had overslept. He pushed Li Sui off of his chest, and then he lifted the carriage curtain to peek outside.

It turned out that they were in the middle of a bustling

market.

So we've entered a city. Where are we? Li Huowang pulled out a map and found that they were in a place called Linzhang. It was not as grand as the capital or the You Capital, but it was still rather large. *At our current speed, we should reach the capital in ten days.*

Li Huowang used his charred finger to draw a faint black line on the map.

“Senior Li, you're awake? You're quite tired, so why don't we rest here for a couple of days?” Bai Lingmiao suggested.

Li Huowang shook his head as he stared into her eyes, which had almost become completely white, “Forget it. We can just rest at Cowheart Village once we've found a new pair of eyes for you. It's better to rush so we don't stumble upon unnecessary trouble,” Li Huowang said.

Li Huowang's words had yet to finish echoing in the air when trouble found him.

The gaze was so blatant that Li Huowang found it hard to ignore, and when he looked up, he saw the plump woman whom he had encountered in the peach forest. She was standing on the third floor of a grand tavern while waving at Li Huowang.

I guess I did not manage to shake her off.

Chapter 481 - Irresistible Offer

Li Huowang stared at the plump woman on the third floor while walking on the busy street. A well-kept waiter ran out of the restaurant and stopped in front of the carriage. The waiter smiled politely, “Dear sir, someone has been expecting you on the third floor. This way, please.”

I will cross that bridge when it comes to it, Li Huowang thought. There was no avoiding it. Since the plump woman was looking for him so blatantly, Li Huowang had no plans of hiding from her as well.

Li Huowang took Li Sui with him to the third floor where the plump woman was already waiting for him with a table full of food. Of course, the third floor had other customers as well.

“Come, let me give you a toast! You're incredible!” the chubby woman exclaimed and downed a cup of wine.

Li Huowang and Li Sui sat on the stool and removed their veil at the same time. Li Huowang's burnt skull and a skinned dog with wriggling tentacles were a shocking sight everywhere, and the other customers definitely thought the same, as they stopped eating upon seeing the two.

After a few moments of silence, they all shrieked in fright and ran away. Soon, the third floor was devoid of people except for Li Huowang and the chubby woman. Li Huowang's actions were a display of his stance. He wanted to let the chubby woman know that he wasn't someone to be trifled with.

The chubby woman sensed Li Huowang's hostility and explained, “Come on, you're such a precious young man. I'm old

enough to be your mother, so I would never hurt you. I just want to negotiate.

"I know that you don't trust me, as we had just met in that forest, but I hope that you can relax a bit here. The city guards' office is just across the restaurant. All you need to do is shout, and they'll run over here immediately."

Li Sui picked up a pork trotter, but Li Huowang slapped it away. Then, glared at the chubby woman and muttered, "You want the pure lifespan, right? Didn't I tell you that I have no plans of selling it?"

Despite Li Huowang's words, the chubby woman did not give up.

"I've been living a tough life. I've never had a father, and my mother had a hard life raising me. Still, she raised me without any complaints, and I've finally become independent enough to let her retire in peace, but her lifespan is nearing its end!

"I could still remember how she fed me her own blood just to save me from death during that famine..."

Rather than touched, Li Huowang was annoyed. He wanted to walk away, but he saw that her ten emotions and eight sufferings weren't lying. The chubby woman was actually telling the truth—no, at least her sadness was true.

"I pity your mother, but I'm also going to use the pure lifespan to save someone," Li Huowang said and stood up.

The chubby woman panicked when she saw that Li Huowang was going to leave. "I can exchange something for those pure lifespan! You can just tell me what you need! As long as you can give me the pure lifespan, I'll give you anything that you want!"

"I don't need anything. Sorry, but please do not bother me anymore. Things are going to get ugly for the both of us if you keep on following me!"

Li Huowang turned around and started walking toward the

stairs.

"Your wife is a shaman, am I right?" the chubby woman said.

Li Huowang came to halt.

"Those who were forced to become shamans are doomed to live terrible lives. If you give me the five pure lifespan, I can get rid of the Immortal families that are in a contract with her!"

Li Huowang turned around and stared solemnly at the chubby woman. Again, her ten emotions and eight sufferings weren't lying. It seemed that she did have a method to get rid of the Immortal families.

Since Bai Lingmiao was forced to become a shaman during one of their journeys, the Immortal families had always been a threat to them.

Five pure lifespans, or getting rid of the Immortal families. It was a difficult choice.

While Li Huowang was hesitating, the Second Deity suddenly walked up the stairs and approached Li Huowang. Then, she whispered something into Li Huowang's ears.

"What did you say?!" Li Huowang was shocked. "That's important. Why did you only tell me that now?"

Li Huowang then cast his gaze upon the plump woman, and his face was no longer as solemn as earlier. "Fine! Once we get to Shangjing, I will give you the five pure lifespan in exchange for you getting rid of the Immortal families!"

Li Huowang had never thought that they would hide something so important from him, which was the fact that the Immortal families had threatened Bai Lingmiao and forced her to work.

Li Huowang was certain that Bai Lingmiao wouldn't have told him if it hadn't been for the plump woman's proposal.

The plump woman was delighted, and she immediately nodded as if she was afraid that he would back out of the deal. "All right! Let's do it!"

Li Huowang told the chubby woman to go to Shangjing first, but she refused and insisted on following him, saying that she was afraid that Li Huowang might run away.

Li Huowang didn't manage to get even a single good night's sleep on the continuation of their journey. Fortunately, the remainder of the journey remained uneventful, and they arrived safely at Shangjing.

By the time they made it to Shangjing, Li Huowang's wounds had healed to the extent that people could now recognize him.

"I'll bring my carriage to my house first. Wait for me at the gate," Li Huowang said. He learned of the chubby woman's name during their journey to Shangjing, and her name was Lian Zhibei.

"No worries. I'll go there with you. I'm not really familiar with the roads here, so I need you to bring me around, too," Lian Zhibei said. She was still afraid that he'd run away and refused to part from him.

Li Huowang knew that she was lying, but he couldn't care less. He turned around and faced Bai Lingmiao, saying, "You guys should go ahead and head back first. I'll return soon."

And just like that, the team was split into two.

Li Huowang carried the wooden box containing the corpse of the spiritual sin into the halls of the Surveillance Bureau. Nangong saw them walking in together and asked, "Oh, did the both of you take it down together?"

"Nope." Li Huowang handed over the box to Nangong and said, "This is the mission objective. Give me the rewards now."

"Wait," Lian Zhibei said. She took the box away and explained, "The mission was from the palace. We will give it directly to the mission giver."

"It's the same thing. If you give it to me, I will pass it to them. I will then pass the reward to you once they've given the rewards to me. Of course, it's going to take a while."

"Don't even bother explaining yourself," Lian Zhibei exclaimed, "I know that you and eunuchs here are pilfering lifespan pills from us mission takers!"

"You have to listen to me," Lian Zhibei said, turning to Li Huowang, "It's better if you hand this over to the palace yourself. Otherwise, the eunuchs here would take a part of your reward as a service fee. Perhaps you'd get less than five pure lifespan!"

Nangon didn't even attempt to defend himself against the allegations. When Li Huowang saw Nangong's silence, he realized that Lian Zhibei wasn't lying. With that, he took the box back from Lian Zhibei and said, "Fine, let's go to the palace, then."

Five pure lifespan was a small price to pay in exchange for the Immortal families' disappearance.

Translator's Thoughts

For reference, this is what Lian Zhibei looks like. Credits to 格子的乱七八糟on douyin!



Chapter 482 - New Emperor

An hour later, Li Huowang finally arrived at the palace. As always, the towering red walls and the guards stationed on them were still exuding an oppressive aura.

Li Huowang hated the place, so he picked up the pace. He just wanted to get his rewards as soon as possible.

A eunuch guided them into the palace. Li Huowang had already come here once, but he still couldn't memorize the winding paths. It was as confusing as a maze, and he took so many turns that he felt dizzy.

This time, Li Huowang didn't see a golden palace. In other words, he was not heading into the middle of the palace but somewhere on its flank. Li Huowang recalled Liu Zongyuan's words. *He said that the emperor was dying at the time, so the emperor must be deep in the ground by now.*

While Li Huowang was thinking idly, the eunuch stopped in front of an arched gate.

"We're here. The director is here," said the eunuch in a feminine voice.

"The director used to be part of the Surveillance Bureau, so it shouldn't be that difficult to talk to him," Lian Zhibei said. Clearly, she was familiar with the director.

The two walked through the arched gate, and Lian Zhibei took the initiative to show Li Huowang the path. She appeared to be very familiar with the place. Soon, they reached the treasury and found the director of eunuchs.

"Oh, why are you guys so late? Has the Surveillance Bureau

actually become this incompetent? It's been three months since the mission was posted. A spiritual sin is the final material that we need, and the Imperial Preceptor has been waiting for it for a while now. He's been urging us to find it every day!"

"Sir Zao, you used to work in the Surveillance Bureau, and I'm sure you know that a spiritual sin isn't that easy to obtain. We had to work very hard just to track it down. Here, look at how fresh it is," Lian Zhibei said. She was a social butterfly, so the eunuch with the surname Zao was soon smiling from ear to ear.

Soon, a piece of paper with a red stamp was handed over to them. Lian Zhibei accepted it with shaking hands.

"You know where to claim the rewards, right? I hope you don't need me to explain it," said the eunuch before ignoring them outright. He wrote something and burned it inside a bronze urn.

The smoke rose and drifted out of the window. Sir Zao's face relaxed greatly afterward. Sir Zao then ordered the rest of the eunuchs to retrieve a jade plate encrusted with agate. Then, he ordered them to place the spiritual sin's carcass on the jade plate.

"We will leave you to your matters now." Lian Zhibei smiled and took away the piece of paper with a red stamp.

"We're not going to retrieve the rewards here?"

"No. We have to go to the vault to exchange for it. Let's go. Did you bring some silver? It's easier to deal with the higher-ups than the little ghosts[1] whose greed is infinite."

"Why is it so tedious to do business here?" Li Huowang asked, frowning.

Lian Zhibei was about to retort when someone abruptly shouted, "The emperor is here~!"

Lian Zhibei's face paled. She ran toward a corner of the wall and knelt with her forehead pressed firmly against the ground.

However, Li Huowang did not bother kneeling for the new emperor. He stood next to Lian Zhibei and sunk his body image

into the ground, becoming invisible.

“Long live the emperor~!”

“Long live the emperor~!”

“Long live the emperor~!”

After the three chants, Li Huowang finally saw the emperor. The emperor was wearing black royal robes and a golden crown with veils. Numerous courtesans and eunuchs walked down slowly behind him.

Li Huowang narrowed his eyes and was surprised to see the emperor's face. He had seen the emperor before, and he was none other than the boy who had approached Bai Lingmiao during that festival. As far as Li Huowang could remember, the boy had bought a fake jade cat at the time.

The emperor walked slowly past Li Huowang, allowing the latter to confirm that the boy he had seen at the time was indeed the new emperor.

He's the new emperor?! Li Huowang thought. He truly could have never expected that the new emperor would be that boy who had courted ladies nonstop during that festival. Well, it's normal behavior for a boy, I guess.

Li Huowang was acquainted with the new emperor, but he had no intentions of befriending the latter. The emperor seat of the Liang Kingdom had changed owners three times in just a few months, so Li Huowang was convinced that it was the most dangerous job in the world.

Li Huowang was still invisible as he stared at the procession walking past him. Just as he thought nothing could go wrong, an old man walking beside the emperor suddenly glared in Li Huowang's direction. “Who's there?!”

The emperor was immediately surrounded by the courtesans and eunuchs. Then, several guards appeared out of nowhere and surrounded Li Huowang.

The guards were about to thrust their weapons in Li Huowang's direction when he emerged and raised the Surveillance Bureau's identity plate.

Everyone came to a screeching halt, but a tense atmosphere shrouded them. The guards had no idea what to do, as Li Huowang didn't seem like someone who was trying to assassinate the emperor. If he wanted to assassinate the emperor, why was he invisible and staring at the emperor?

The guards turned to the Imperial Preceptor.

"Who are you? Why are you here?!" the Imperial Preceptor roared. He was strong, so a mere sentence made Li Huowang feel suffocated, and he could hardly move. Li Huowang could swear that he had never felt this way since he became a fake Hong Zhong.

Li Huowang looked up at the old man and recognized him. The old man before him had been fighting alongside the previous emperor with a special sword in hand.

Lian Zhibei finally made a move and showed them the paper in her hand before explaining, "We're here on behalf of the Surveillance Bureau, but we should be executed for scaring the emperor!"

Everyone sighed after learning that it was all a misunderstanding.

The Imperial Preceptor looked at an old eunuch with dissatisfaction. "Is this how you do things? How can the official members of the Surveillance Bureau be allowed to enter the palace —"

"It's you!" someone exclaimed, interrupting the Imperial Preceptor.

The new emperor walked out from the crowd and walked up to Li Huowang, but two old eunuchs stopped him before he could even walk two steps toward Li Huowang.

1. Referring to the people working as admins or lower positions where they usually take bribes 🤝

Chapter 483 - Dragon

Even after getting intercepted by the eunuchs, the emperor looked up and waved at Li Huowang. “Were you surprised? You couldn't have known that I was the emperor, could you?”

“I greet the emperor,” Li Huowang said with a bow. He retreated, but the emperor clearly didn't want Li Huowang to leave his side.

“Hey, I really need to thank you. They would have tricked me successfully if it hadn't been for you! Anyway, just let me know what official post you would like to have.”

“Preposterous! This is nonsense!” the Imperial Preceptor scolded.

The emperor grimaced, and he became much more docile. He was the emperor, but it was clear that there were some things that he couldn't influence.

“My lord, do you remember what day it is today?” asked the Imperial Preceptor.

The emperor stood up straight and answered, “The tributes have been prepared, and we are heading to the imperial temple to pray to the previous emperor.”

“Correct.” The Imperial Preceptor closed his heavy eyelids and said nothing else.

The emperor was not someone who'd throw a tantrum after getting scolded by the Imperial Preceptor. Moreover, he was pleased with Li Huowang's appearance. “You can follow me. Let's talk about what I said to you just now once we're done.”

The Imperial Preceptor's lips quivered, but he said nothing. However, he was planning on telling the Empress Dowager about the emperor's bad behavior.

Li Huowang wanted to decline, but the eunuchs had surrounded him. He couldn't leave at all. He glanced at the Imperial Preceptor's back and decided that it was unwise to fight back. He did not expect this to happen, but it wasn't a bad thing to become the emperor's friend. Of course, this wasn't the best time to become one.

Li Huowang followed the procession and walked around the palace.

The emperor turned around from time to time, as he was curious about Li Huowang, especially after the latter's help to the emperor during that festival. However, Li Huowang clearly looked like he couldn't wait to leave the emperor's side.

After all, Bai Lingmiao was still waiting for him outside.

Li Huowang initially thought that they would go straight to the imperial temple, but they headed straight to the treasury instead!

Sir Zao was already waiting with the eunuchs under his care, and they all greeted the emperor upon his arrival at the treasury.

A grand table was before them, and seven jade plates the size of a basin were placed neatly in a row on the table. The plates contained many different items.

There was a translucent jade-like flower bud, a pulsating white chicken egg, and a scepter made out of flesh. The final jade plate was unique, as it was empty, but there were wisps of black smoke would appear on it from time to time.

Li Huowang instantly identified what was on the plate. The final plate contained the carcass of the spiritual sin that he had killed! To think that the evil entity he had worked hard to track and kill would end up being used to pray to a dead emperor!

Li Huowang suddenly felt like his efforts had been in vain. No wonder the emperor arrived the moment he submitted the corpse of the spiritual sin. The emperor had been waiting for it.

"Take everything." A row of eunuchs bent down and took the

jade plates. Then, they raised the plates high above their heads and followed the procession toward the imperial temple.

Ten minutes later, Li Huowang caught a whiff of incense sticks. They'd soon arrive at the imperial temple. Aside from the fact that it was more majestic than the ordinary temples outside, the imperial temple didn't really look special.

However, the emperor's expression became solemn when they reached the imperial temple. He bowed ceremoniously toward the temple before walking into it with procession behind him.

The temple was big and had rows of candles inside of it, which made its temperature higher than the outside world. There were a few old eunuchs at the corner of the walls, and they were both blind and deaf. They chanted sutras and were hitting a wooden fish incessantly day and night.

The emperor kneeled on the cushion facing the rows of ancestral tablets housed in the temple, but he was pulled back by one of the older eunuchs.

“Hm? Are we not praying here today?” the emperor asked.

The emperor's reaction made Li Huowang realize that the emperor had no idea what was going on.

The old eunuch whispered something into the emperor's ears, and the emperor stood up unwillingly. Then, he brought the group of people behind him toward the back of the altar.

The yellow drapes behind the altar were pulled open, and a regal door made from black stone with nine massive dragons engraved on it appeared before everyone.

The eunuchs pushed the door open, and a cold sensation ran down everyone's spine.

The courtesans stopped walking, and only the men walked into the door.

Even Lian Zhibei couldn't enter and had to wait outside.

Are we inside the true ancestral hall of the Liang Kingdom's

imperial family? Li Huowang finally understood what was happening. However, he still had many burning questions in his mind as he walked into the chamber. The chamber was massive, and the sound of everyone's footsteps echoed loudly inside of it.

The space was shaped like a funnel; the walls were tall, while the floor was narrow.

The treasures of the imperial family were within the chamber, and everything was golden—from the massive coffin at the center of the space to the nine golden dragons at the summit of everything.

A chain was tied to each of the nine golden dragons, and they were suspending a golden coffin in the middle of the chamber.

Li Huowang was speechless.

The nine dragons pulling the coffin?[\[1\]](#) Li Huowang surmised. However, he felt something amiss. Rather than pulling the coffin, it was more like the dragons were trying to pull it apart.

“This is such a massive place,” the emperor said, looking around with wonder. He had just started his sightseeing when an old eunuch guided him on what to do next. He placed the seven plates of tributes on the floor before bowing three times and kneeling nine times toward the coffin.

Li Huowang thought that he had to do the same, but he realized that everyone wasn't moving. *Maybe we're not qualified to pray?*

“The late emperor is buried here. Why is he not buried in the imperial tomb?” The Sitting Oblivion Dao's illusion was curious as well.

Li Huowang was staring at the luxurious coffin when he noticed something amiss.

While the Liang emperor was praying, the golden coffin started moving, and the coffin lid moved slowly, seemingly opening up!

“Father?” The emperor was shocked. The coffin was lower than

the floor, so everyone could see what was inside of it. “Father!”

The emperor ran toward the coffin, but a few old eunuchs stopped him. “What are you guys doing? My father is still alive! Why have you imprisoned him?!”

“My lord, this is the Dragon Vein! It’s the foundation of our kingdom! We must not defile it!”

Li Huowang finally saw it. The previous emperor, who had fought the Sitting Oblivion Dao, was bound by chains engraved with dragons. The previous emperor was wearing royal robes, but the robes couldn't hide his strange appearance.

Li Huowang saw the previous emperor's dark gold scales and dragon whiskers. More importantly, Li Huowang realized that the old emperor was not alone. He was on top of someone else, and the individual behind him was also on top of someone else behind them. Their fleshly bodies had been fused together to create a bizarre human chain. The corpses in the coffin were the corpses of the previous emperors!

The coffin was dark and deep, seemingly unending. The previous emperors were suspended in the empty space by chains. The chain of emperors was in mid-air rather than on the floor.

Just then, Li Huowang noticed that the chain of human corpses was moving. They were struggling and moving as if they wanted to break free from their restraints. They all looked like dragons yearning to escape their bondage.

1. An idiom that means the unyielding will of someone who refuses to surrender even to the passage of time. It would always return even after getting buried. 🤔

Translator's Thoughts

The fearsome Dragon Vein of the Liang Kingdom. This some Bloodborne stuff. Credits to 格

子的乱七八糟 on douyin!



Chapter 484 - Ji Lin

Li Huowang's hair stood on end, feeling that he had seen something he was not supposed to see.

Will the imperial family kill me to protect this secret? Li Huowang thought about the worst-case scenario. He raised his guard, and the cogs in his mind churned rapidly, thinking of what could happen to him.

Fortunately, Zhuge Yuan spoke just in time, stopping him from doing anything rash by saying, “Junior Li, don’t worry. Everyone knows that the imperial family has a dragon vein, but I didn’t think that the Dragon Vein of the Liang Kingdom would look like this. Maybe this was why the fake Liang Kingdom was capable of destroying the Qi Kingdom.”

In the end, nothing happened to Li Huowang, and he was still in the chamber filled with a golden light.

The only change was the expression of the Emperor of the Liang Kingdom, and he even roared, “Are you all deaf? Save my father! I am the emperor, and you will not defy my orders!”

However, the old eunuchs merely trembled on the ground without heeding his words.

“*Cough, cough.* Lin’er ...” A voice filled with fatigue and pain made the current emperor stare at the first body of the Dragon Vein. “Lin’er, don’t be too harsh on them. I was the one who told them to do this. *Cough cough...*”

Li Huowang finally knew the name of the current emperor. Since the imperial family of the Liang Kingdom went by the surname Ji, the current emperor's name had to be Ji Lin.

Li Huowang could still remember the name of the previous emperor, and he had heard it from the individual he had escorted to

the execution grounds long ago. The previous emperor's name was Ji Song.

“But, Father, why?! You're still alive!” Ji Lin exclaimed. As the chains sunk deeper into his father's flesh, Ji Lin felt as if he were experiencing the same pain as his father, and tears welled up in his eyes.

Ji Song's voice became weak as if he didn't want the others to listen to him talking, but Li Huowang heard it clearly with his keen ears.

“This is the only way to protect the Liang Kingdom's luck. You'll come to learn about this once you've become as old as me.”

“Father, but ...” Ji Lin was in a daze. He didn't know what to say.

“I died, but the Dragon Qi brought me back to life. It's only when I'm dead that you can ascend to the throne. You should be happy about this.”

Ji Song pulled on one of the chains and moved to the side of the coffin. Then, he extended his hands covered in scales and had claws for nails to pull Ji Lin close to him. Ji Song's voice was stern as he said, “Do you want to know why I handed over the throne to you rather than to the eldest prince?”

“I do not know.” Ji Lin sobbed.

“Because you're ruthless! To win my affection, you were actually ruthless enough to poison your own brother! The other princes can never be as ruthless as you! But you're not ruthless enough... if I were you, I would have used a stronger poison.” Ji Song's voice became cold as he said, “Once you're out of here, you must kill all of your brothers.”

“What?!” Ji Lin's face became pale. If it weren't for his father tugging at his robes, he would have slumped to the ground.

“Of course, you can choose to do nothing, but you should blame yourself when the others start making their moves to acquire

the throne. After all, they have many loyal officers by their side.

"You're the emperor, but the official ceremony has yet to be conducted. Everything can still change. Remember—if you want to become the supreme ruler, then you must be ruthless enough to kill even your brothers!"

It sounds like the previous emperor is trying to raise a Gu. Li Huowang frowned. The most ruthless individual would become the next emperor. Would a ruthless emperor truly be able to lead their subjects to prosperity?

"I want you to remember this, Lin'er. The ruler is always alone. If you want to become a ruler, you must not trust anyone else, even your own mother."

Ji Song let go of Ji Lin's robes and sank slowly into the coffin. The golden coffin lid then closed with a deep rumble. The mausoleum became solemn and silent once again. Everyone could hear Ji Lin's rapid breathing amidst the silence.

The chamber was cold, but he was sweating nonstop.

"We welcome the gods! And we shall give space!" one of the old eunuchs shouted, and the rest moved busily. They all faced the coffin being pulled by the nine golden dragons and started performing a complicated ritual.

Li Huowang stood at the side, staring at what was happening.

Soon the ritual was over, and the eunuchs left in a row. They didn't even wait for the emperor to stand up.

Li Huowang watched as Ji Lin slowly stood back up before following the last of the eunuchs out.

He's probably going to make many difficult decisions soon, and he probably won't have the time to bother with me. Once Li Huowang made it back to the warm temple filled with candles, he truly felt like he had just come back from the land of the dead.

Li Huowang was about to regroup with Lian Zhimei when a fierce voice echoed behind him. "Ji Zai!"

Ji Zai? Li Huowang froze and looked at Zhuge Yuan before remembering that "Ji Zai" was the name that Zhuge Yuan had bestowed upon him long ago. *Someone's calling me?*

"Don't worry, Junior Li. The Imperial Preceptor will never be able to peer over my spell, so there's no way he can peek at your past through divination."

Li Huowang cast a thankful look at Zhuge Yuan before turning around. He walked towards the Imperial Preceptor with confidence.

"Ji Zai greets the Imperial Preceptor!" Li Huowang bowed seriously to the Imperial Preceptor.

"Since you're a Seventh Banner of the Surveillance Bureau, you should know that some things are left unsaid, right?" the Imperial Preceptor asked. Then, he gestured with his fingers, trying to divine Li Huowang's past.

"Yes," Li Huowang replied curtly. He stood ramrod straight, and he wasn't surprised that the Imperial Preceptor was thinking of a way to make him not talk about what he had seen today. Li Huowang would have found it suspicious otherwise.

"Ji Zai, you're from the Ao Jing Sect, so why did you join the Surveillance Bureau? I thought you idiots had isolated yourself from society to pursue your dreams of becoming an Immortal?"

At the question, Li Huowang used the same excuse he had used last time. Of course, Li Huowang had no intentions of lying to the Imperial Preceptor, and he also believed wholeheartedly that his goal was to avenge the elders of the Ao Jing Sect by killing their killers from the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

Chapter 485 - Relic

“Hm ...” The Imperial Preceptor nodded and stroked his white beard at Li Huowang’s response.

Li Huowang wasn't sure whether the Imperial Preceptor believed him or not. All he knew was that he was certain he couldn't run away since the Imperial Preceptor was much stronger than him.

He was thinking of a way to say goodbye, so he could leave as soon as possible, but the Imperial Preceptor said, “The emperor regards you highly, so you should consider yourself lucky. Make sure to seize the chance properly.”

“Yes!” Li Huowang wasn't really sure whether he was lucky or not. He wasn't even sure if Ji Lin could successfully ascend the throne, as the other princes were making a move behind the scenes.

“Go and work diligently. The Liang Kingdom needs people like you.” The Imperial Preceptor patted Li Huowang’s shoulder.

Li Huowang felt something sharp entering his shoulder before rushing to the base of his tongue. He instantly deduced that it was some kind of seal to prevent him from talking about what he had seen today. *It seems that the Imperial Preceptor still doesn't trust me despite threatening me.*

However, he didn't mind it. He never wanted to talk about it, to begin with. If he were to do so, he'd find himself in a quagmire of endless trouble.

“Yes. I understand. I'm leaving, then.” Li Huowang bowed and exited the imperial temple. It was only when he left the red-colored palace wall with Lian Zhimei and the lifespan pills that he sighed in relief.

He looked back at the oppressive palace and was convinced

that he truly hated them—both the palace and the city. It was as if the entire city was eating people constantly behind the scenes.

It took quite a while, but they still managed to obtain what they needed.

Knowing that the princes were going to scheme against each other soon, Li Huowang was certain that Shangjing would become chaotic pretty soon. He decided to finish his tasks and leave Shangjing as soon as possible.

Li Huowang didn't even consider helping Ji Lin to secure the throne. While Ji Lin was kind to him and appeared to be suitable to befriend, there was no way Li Huowang would risk his life for him. They had only met once, and Ji Lin didn't seem like someone suitable to be the emperor.

"Time to honor your words." Li Huowang looked at Lian Zhibei, who was holding the jade plate with excitement.

Pure lifespan couldn't be made into lifespan pills, and someone had to infuse it directly into the recipient. The jade plate was proof that the holder was entitled to pure lifespan.

"Of course! I'll keep my word!" Lian Zhibei exclaimed. Then, she turned around to leave.

"Where are you going?" Li Huowang asked, stopping her.

"Of course, I'm going to bring my mother here so that he'll get her pure lifespan. Wasn't that what we had agreed upon?"

Li Huowang took back the jade plate and explained, "Bring your mother here and find me. Be quick; if you don't come here in a month, I will give the jade plate to my wife."

"No, wait, you still don't trust me even though we are at Shangjing? Do I need to give my identity plate to you as collateral?" Lian Zhibei begged.

But Li Huowang didn't even bother negotiating with her. He shook the jade plate in front of her before walking towards the Surveillance Bureau.

There was no way he was going to fall for that.

Back in the vault, Li Huowang spared no time to talk to the eunuch with coins for eyes. He poured out four hundred lifespan pills without any hesitation and said, “I want you to exchange these for the relic we talked about last time! Be quick!”

The relic was inside a seven-layer pagoda. The eunuch opened the pagodas one by one until they reached the final layer, which contained a glimmering box made from agate. The box was translucent, and Li Huowang immediately saw the relic filled with holy light. It was a small piece of human bone, which glimmered strangely like a gem.

“A relic is a human bone? You need to eat a human bone to get the mind’s eye?” Li Huowang asked, casting a doubtful look at the eunuch. Eating a human bone did not seem like a *holy* thing to do.

“Please be at ease, esteemed customer. This is the last remaining. The first six have been redeemed by others, and they all said that it was fine. But I need to remind you again that only the kind can use it!”

“Fine, I get it. You didn't have to say that again. You're getting pretty annoying,” Li Huowang said. He was busy thinking about how he could persuade Bai Lingmiao to swallow the bone.

Bai Lingmiao was still traumatized by her experience in the Zephyr Temple, and she refused to eat anything human to the point that she wouldn't even take "normal" pills.

Li Huowang carried with him the box with the relic and two roasted geese before returning home. He was relieved to see that Bai Lingmiao was feeling her way in the darkness. In other words, she had become completely blind and couldn't see that the relic was a human bone.

“Senior Li, you're back?” Bai Lingmiao looked tired as she walked slowly toward Li Huowang.

“How did you know it was me?” Li Huowang asked, placing the

roasted geese wrapped in lotus leaves on the table.

"I could hear you, and I recognize your footsteps too. Senior Li, I discovered that my hearing has become so much better when I lost my vision."

Li Huowang approached her and gently guided her to a chair. "Miaomiao, don't worry. I have a way of letting you see again."

Li Huowang took out the agate box as well as a gourd full of water. "Come, open your mouth."

"Senior Li, what kind of miraculous pill are you going to make me eat? To think it can let me see again," Bai Lingmiao said. She was curious and was looking forward to it, so she immediately opened her mouth.

Li Huowang did not answer as he placed the relic on the base of her tongue. "Don't chew. Swallow it whole and take it with rainwater."

Once the rainwater entered Bai Lingmiao's mouth, she coughed out of surprise. Li Huowang patted her back in a hurry. Amidst their panicking, neither of them noticed the golden swastika flashing on Bai Lingmiao's chest.

Eventually, Bai Lingmiao felt better and frowned. "Senior Li, what was—"

Bai Lingmiao stopped mid-sentence as she realized that she could see once again. To be more precise, she couldn't see with her eyes, but she could see everyone's Qi, allowing her to see the outline of the chair, stool, Li Sui, and the outlines of the two short trees in the courtyard.

It was a profound feeling that she couldn't quite describe. She felt like everything within a certain radius had been carved in her heart.

"Senior Li?"

Bai Lingmiao stared at the weird humanoid blob before her, and the humanoid blob was the only different "thing" in her

"vision." The humanoid blob flickered in and out of existence and was quivering violently. Moreover, there were afterimages that converged and diverged from time to time around the blob[1].

1. She can see his illusions! 📌

Chapter 486 - Arrival

"Senior Li, is that you?" Bai Lingmiao reached out to touch the blob before her, and the blob coalesced into that familiar face. Bai Lingmiao smiled at the sight. It seemed she still needed to get used to this ability.

"Miaomiao, can you see now? Can you really see me?!" Li Huowang exclaimed, staring into her eyes.

"I don't know if this counts as seeing, but... at least I can do the things that I could do before. At least I'm not a burden anymore," Bai Lingmiao said. She stood up and spun around to savor the miracle.

In addition to seeing the external appearances of everything around her, she could even see inside some of them. Her vision was especially clear whenever she focused on living organisms. For example, she could clearly "see" the bugs and ants on the short trees outside the courtyard.

Bai Lingmiao soon reveled in this new-found feeling. Her "vision" was strange, but it was much better than being blind.

"Senior Li, I can see, I *really* can see! Thank you so much!" Bai Lingmiao exclaimed with a joyful look.

When Li Huowang saw her smile, he felt that all the hardships that he had gone through so far were worth it. Through his efforts, the conditions of the people around him were improving gradually.

"All right, rest," Li Huowang said while staring at Bai Lingmiao, who was still turning around like a white butterfly. "You're going to feel dizzy if you keep spinning."

Li Huowang opened the two roast geese wrapped in lotus leaves on the table. "Come! Let's celebrate your healed eyes with roast goose today! I heard that they roast their geese here with

lychee wood; the taste is apparently great, too.

"It's one of the specialty dishes of the capital."

"Dad, I want some, too."

"Sure, go get yourself a bowl and chopsticks."

The family of three ate with relish until they were interrupted by knocking on the door.

"Are you there, Er Jiu? It's me, Lian Zhibei."

Li Huowang frowned upon hearing the familiar voice. *Wasn't she supposed to pick up her mother and bring her here? What is she trying to do?*

Li Huowang pushed open the door, and the middle-aged plump woman wasted no time, immediately going to the point. "I was actually just hesitant earlier. Actually, it's not necessary for me to bring my mother over here. I can break the connection between your wife and the Immortal families here. Give me that jade plate and consider it done."

Li Huowang was about to say something when he heard footsteps behind him.

"Senior Li, she's actually here? How about inviting her to eat roast goose with us?" Bai Lingmiao said in a good-natured way.

Meanwhile, the Second Deity whispered something into her ears.

"Why do you want me to go in? Isn't she a guest?" asked Bai Lingmiao.

"Miaomiao, you go in first. It's definitely not something bad," Li Huowang said.

Since Li Huowang had said the same thing as the Second Deity, Bai Lingmiao could only nod and turn around to leave.

"You're done talking with them? If so, let's get started!" Lian Zhibei exclaimed. She raised her foot and was about to walk into the house but was stopped by Li Huowang's hand. Li Huowang stared quietly at the Second Deity. After a long time, he asked, "You

know what this means to you, right?"

"I know. I'll be able to merge with Miaomiao as soon as the connection between her and the Immortal families is severed." The Second Deity's voice echoed from under the red veil.

The Second Deity was not lying, but Li Huowang's feelings toward the Second Deity were complicated.

Should I treat her as her own individual or as a part of Bai Lingmiao? If I do the former, wouldn't allowing her to merge with Bai Lingmiao be the same as killing her? Li Huowang thought.

Just then, the Second Deity spoke once again. "If her connection with the Immortal families is not severed, wouldn't it be like harboring a danger that might erupt at any moment? Would you want to live like that?

"I'm sure Miaomiao would disagree, but I'll persuade her, so don't worry."

"Come on, let's do it. How do you want it to happen? Hey, respond. You're driving me crazy!" Lian Zhibei chimed in, sounding worried that Li Huowang would change his mind.

"Let's go. This way," the Second Deity said, allowing Lian Zhibei into the house.

"All right. Hey, just wait here. I'll make sure your wife is ready," Lian Zhibei said, following the Second Deity into the house.

The oil lamp in the room was lit, and the light illuminated Bai Lingmiao's nervous face. It was her first time seeing Lian Zhibei, but she still felt uncomfortable being alone with a stranger.

"Miss, what are you standing there for? Hurry up and take off your clothes."

"Ah? I... have to... take my clothes off?" Bai Lingmiao muttered hesitantly. Li Huowang had told her to follow Lian Zhibei's instructions, but she still felt hesitant to show her birthday suit to a stranger.

"Of course, don't be embarrassed. We're all women here. Hurry

up.”

“*Oh...*” Bai Lingmiao muttered. Then, she started unbuttoning her clothes. And that was when Lian Zhibei rushed to her side and leaned closer to her ear, whispering, “The curtain toward the jade peak hides the night snow behind the curtain. The blue water grows the long autumn moss...”

Bai Lingmiao was startled by Lian Zhibei's whisper, and she took several steps backward, muttering, “What... what was that?”

“You don’t know? Really?” Lian Zhibei asked excitedly.

“Know what?” Li Huowang’s voice echoed from behind Lian Zhibei, and the latter's heart trembled upon hearing it. The next moment, she turned around and cast an impatient look at Li Huowang. “Did I not tell you to wait outside? Why did you follow us here? We're still in the middle of preparations.”

“She’s my wife, so is there something wrong with me helping her undress? Why must I avoid her?” LI Huowang retorted.

“She's fine, but I need to undress, too. What, am I your wife?” Lian Zhibei asked, taking off her shirt, which revealed her bulging belly wrapped in yellow inner wear.

Li Huowang stared deeply at Lian Zhibei and enunciated every single word as he said, “You. Better. Not. Cause. Any. Unnecessary. Trouble!”

With that, Li Huowang turned to the shy Bai Lingmiao and said, “I’ll be outside. I can hear everything that happens inside, so just call out my name if there are any issues.”

“Okay..”

Li Huowang opened the door and pulled Li Sui into the room. “Keep an eye on that chubby woman. Bite her if she does anything strange!”

“Yes, Dad.”

Li Huowang finally left the room. Lian Zhibei's ambiguous words just now definitely weren't part of the so-called

"preparations." Judging from her tone and demeanor earlier, those words seemed more like some kind of code.

It seemed that Lian Zhibei had ulterior motives. If it weren't for the fact that she actually had a way to help Bai Lingmiao get rid of the Immortal families, he wouldn't have allowed her to have much contact with Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang waited for quite a while before the two finally emerged from the room. Lian Zhibei was carrying a big bundle of something in her arms, and Li Huowang had no idea where she had stashed that earlier.

Of course, Li Huowang couldn't care less, as his full attention was on Bai Lingmiao. Bai Lingmiao was wearing nothing except for a yellow paper inner wear.

Bai Lingmiao's figure was as white as a mutton tallow, and many different crooked and twisted characters were drawn with red cinnabar on her figure. The white and red colors intertwined, creating a bizarre but strangely enchanting image.

Chapter 487 - Change

Li Huowang had seen many things in this crazy world, but Li Huowang had no idea what Lian Zhibei was going to use to sever Bai Lingmiao's connection with the Immortal families.

Bai Lingmiao seemed particularly shy about her attire to the point where her ears even turned red. Her hands covered her front, but they couldn't conceal her back at the same time.

"Miss, why are you shrinking? Stand up straight," Lian Zhibei urged.

Bai Lingmiao stood up straight. Lian Zhibei took out three incense sticks and inserted them into the door frame. She then knelt down on both knees and kowtowed toward the door several times.

Afterward, she lit one of the incense sticks and bowed three times toward the door before raising the smoking incense and thrusting it toward her own cheeks.

An incessant crackling noise echoed as the dark red incense pierced her left cheek and emerged from the right side of her face. Lian Zhibei's voice became coarse as she exclaimed. "Tiger God, arise!"

Lian Zhibei lifted a hook-shaped tool, and it emitted a cold gleam in her hand as she pierced her upper and lower lips. Drops of bright red blood fell and landed on the paper talisman covering her belly.

Li Huowang frowned deeply at the sight. Lian Zhibei's self harm seemed somewhat similar to the practices of the Ao Jing Sect. Could she be a member of one of Ao Jing Sect's branches?

While Li Huowang was deep in thought, Lian Zhibei pulled out a row of large red firecrackers from her large bundle. She lit one of the firecrackers with the incense from her cheekbone, and crackling

noises filled the room.

The white smoke from the incense intertwined with the murky smoke from the firecrackers, covering the entire room in a murky mist. Lian Zhibei then grabbed a piece of wood from her bundle and raised it up high into the air before slamming it forcefully on the ground, “The sound of battle resounds through the rivers and seas! The divine light bursts forth, and the Tiger God shall accept this explosion!”

A deep roar akin to a tiger's roar echoed, and the murky mist quickly rolled toward Lian Zhibei's open mouth.

Soon, the firecrackers vanished, and Lian Zhibei's eyes became completely white as she collapsed to the ground. Her plump figure contorted into positions that a normal person couldn't possibly do.

Li Huowang instinctively drew his purple-tassel sword at the sight, and his expression was exceptionally serious. Lian Zhibei had a nonchalant attitude to everything, and she seemed like a greenhorn, but her strength could not be underestimated at all.

After all, she was daring enough to confront such spiritual beings by herself.

Lian Zhibei opened her bleeding mouth, revealing the hook-shaped tool from earlier. The next moment, she emitted a growl, which sounded similar to a tiger's growl.

“Senior Li? Why is there a tiger in our house?” Bai Lingmiao asked, trembling as she watched Lian Zhibei on the ground.

Just then, Lian Zhibei whipped around and stared at the patterns on Bai Lingmiao's figure with her white eyes. Then, she bent her legs and pounced on Bai Lingmiao.

“What?!”

Li Huowang's bronze coin sword and Li Sui's tentacles flew to protect Bai Lingmiao, but they stopped halfway upon seeing that Lian Zhibei had flown over Bai Lingmiao's head rather than on her.

Crack!

Lian Zhibei opened her mouth wide enough that it seemed like it was going to tear apart before gnawing at something on the ground.

Bai Lingmiao grabbed her head in pain, and the cinnabar patterns on her figure trembled violently before shrinking rapidly. Li Huowang's keen hearing then caught distant screams, and he felt relieved at what he was wearing. The screams were coming from the Immortal families!

"Miaomiao, hold on!"

Whoosh!

Lian Zhibei leaped over Bai Lingmiao's head once again, viciously biting at the air. The screams of unknown origin grew louder. As Lian Zhibei passed over Bai Lingmiao's head for the fifth time, the blindfolded Bai Lingmiao sensed something amiss.

Bai Lingmiao's newfound ability had allowed her to notice that the Second Deity, who was standing in the courtyard, was becoming more and more transparent. Her special "eyes" pierced the red veil, and she shuddered at what she saw beyond the red veil.

The beastly features that belonged to the Immortal families had almost been gnawed away into nothingness. As Lian Zhibei bit and chewed, the scales, fur, and feathers vanished rapidly.

The Second Deity's face started quivering amidst everything.

"She wants to remove the Immortal families from my body! But the Second Deity will cease to exist without them!"

"Stop! Senior Li, make her stop! The Second Deity is about to vanish!" Bai Lingmiao shouted as tears streamed down her face.

"Miaomiao, don't worry. Hold on a little longer!"

Li Huowang steeled his heart before turning around and walking into the courtyard. He saw the Second Deity staring silently at a short tree. Li Huowang walked up to the Second Deity and lifted her red veil to see that half of her face was missing.

"You..." Li Huowang glanced at Bai Lingmiao inside the house,

and then he turned to the vanishing Second Deity.

Lian Zhibei tugged violently at the Second Deity, which made her stagger. The Second Deity looked at him, and her only eye radiated a strong light of reluctance. "Live well, and do not let her down. Also, stop acting like a weakling in the future."

Something seemed to be vanishing from deep inside the Second Deity, and her aura gradually became similar to Bai Lingmiao's aura.

"Senior Li! She won't be able to come back! Once the Immortal families are gone, the Second Deity will suffer a true death!" Bai Lingmiao exclaimed. Her words had yet to finish echoing in mid-air when the Second Deity fell to the ground.

"Lian Zhibei, wait!" Li Huowang exclaimed, turning to Lian Zhibei. "Something's wrong!"

However, Lian Zhibei seemed to have gone mad and did not respond to him.

When Li Huowang saw Lian Zhibei leaping over Bai Lingmiao's head once again, his expression turned fierce as he dashed toward Lian Zhibei. He kicked Lian Zhibei's waist, sending her crashing onto the wall.

A furious roar resounded, and the white-eyed Lian Zhibei glared at Li Huowang. The oppressive aura that she was radiating made it difficult for Li Huowang to breathe.

"Sorry, there's something wrong! Wake up!" Li Huowang exclaimed to no avail.

Lian Zhibei stomped powerfully before charging at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang inserted his sword into his own mouth and bit down. The next moment, Li Huowang pulled out the sword and swung it toward Lian Zhibei. The sword carried with it Li Huowang's bloody teeth and the teeth flew toward Lian Zhibei's head.

Li Huowang gripped the purple-tassel sword and followed closely behind the teeth.

The room instantly became chaotic, and it became even more chaotic when Li Sui joined the battle. Soon, the battle was uncontrollable, but it was eventually under control as Li Huowang's sword pierced Lian Zhibei's chest, while Lian Zhibei's sharp teeth stripped Li Huowang's arms off of its skin.

The incense stick in Lian Zhibei's cheeks extinguished slowly, allowing Lian Zhibei to recover her sanity.

"What's going on? What's happening?" Lian Zhibei asked. She looked down at the sword sticking out of her chest, and she cast a bewildered look at Li Huowang, especially after sensing the extreme pain radiating from her wound.

Chapter 488 - Past

Li Huowang examined Lian Zhibei's injuries and said, "I'm sorry. I didn't expect it to go wrong. It's my fault. Don't move. I'll treat your injuries for you, and then I'll compensate you with a few lifespan pills."

Li Huowang supported Lian Zhibei and sat her down on a meditation chair. Then, he started preparing the Fiery Scripture.

"No, no, no, I can't withstand that," Lian Zhibei said. She pinched a talisman and used it to hold Li Huowang's sword, which the latter was about to pull out.

"We had an agreement, but you violated it. You should just give me that jade plate, and we'll be even," Lian Zhibei said amidst gritted teeth due to the extreme pain. Despite her plight, she was still more concerned about the pure lifespan rather than herself.

When Li Huowang handed her the jade plate that could be exchanged for pure lifespan, Lian Zhibei smiled despite the pain. She couldn't care less about anything else aside from the jade plate. She glanced at Bai Lingmiao before covering her wound with one hand and stumbling out.

Li Huowang looked up to see someone standing before him. It was Bai Lingmiao, and her expression was filled with sadness and concern as she stared at Li Huowang. She then walked to Li Huowang's side and opened her arms to embrace him gently.

Li Huowang trembled as he looked toward the ground. He saw only a pair of blood-red embroidered shoes and a red veil stained with blood.

"Senior Li, my connection to the Immortal families is gone, but the Second Deity is gone as well. I was too late..," Bai Lingmiao muttered. Then, she sobbed as she hugged Li Huowang.

Late at night, Li Huowang sprawled out in bed, staring wide-eyed at the ceiling. He had achieved his goals. The Immortal families could no longer control Bai Lingmiao, but he felt inexplicably downtrodden despite the great result.

“Senior Li, are you asleep?” Bai Lingmiao’s soft voice echoed.

Li Huowang took a deep breath and sighed.

“Senior Li, I’m missing the Second Deity... no matter what painful things happened in the past, she had always shared some of my burdens. She was like a sister to me...”

Li Huowang couldn’t help but feel doubtful about the decision he had made. *Did I do something wrong? But if I hadn’t dealt with the Immortal families, who knows what would have happened to Bai Lingmiao?*

If he had known that getting rid of the Immortal families would make the Second Deity disappear, what would he have done?

As dawn approached, Li Huowang realized that there were right and wrong in important matters. For example, the Sitting Oblivion Dao had seized the Sacred Mountain Ghost’s eye and had caused a calamity to the world, which was wrong. It was right for the Surveillance Bureau to dispatch people to eradicate the Sitting Oblivion Dao—it was a “right” endeavor, as they were doing it for the sake of the world.

However, the boundary between right and wrong was ambiguous when it came to personal feelings. There were only appropriate choices rather than absolute “right” and “wrong.”

Soon, the roosters crowed. Li Huowang had stayed up all night, and Bai Lingmiao also did not manage to get any sleep.

He got up from the bed and put on his Daoist robes, and then he started walking toward the main hall. As soon as he stepped out of his room, he saw Li Sui squatting in the center of the hall, staring at the drizzle in the courtyard outside.

“Dad.”

Li Huowang walked up to Li Sui and sat down. He looked down at the bloody wild-looking dog before Li Sui and asked, "What are you doing here?"

"I'm waiting for Second Mom. I caught this last night, and I've already eaten half of it. The other half is hers," Li Sui replied.

Li Huowang's heart felt a pang of sharp pain at Li Sui's words. He reached out and patted Li Sui before muttering, "Stop waiting for her; she's gone and will never come back."

"I know. Mom also said that Second Mom's gone. I'm waiting for her to come back. Second Mom really loves eating this," Li Sui nudged the bloody dog with his nose.

Li Huowang's lips trembled slightly. "Did you not see her disappear? She... she's gone!"

"Yeah, I saw her disappear, but Second Mom has always been like that. She comes and goes as she pleases. Don't worry about it, Dad. she'll be back soon!"

Li Huowang did not reply. He opened his arms and hugged Li Sui tightly for a long time before standing up and heading back indoors.

Steam was rising from Gao Zhijian's shirtless figure as he swung his colossal halberd up and down. His muscles were flushed red, seemingly as tough as iron, and were full of vigor.

Gao Zhijian swung his colossal halberd horizontally, kicking up a gust of wind that blew away the row of villages wielding wooden halberds before him. The villagers squinted and struggled to stand.

The colossal halberd pierced the ground. Gao Zhijian took a moment to catch his breath for a moment before exclaiming, "Practice!"

The dozen or so villagers looked at each other with puzzled looks. A short but stout man turned to the person next to him and asked, "How do we practice? Is what he's doing even humanly

possible?”

“Just practice. He's been insisting on it, so just treat it as payment for the noodles that we are going to eat for lunch.”

With that, the villagers waved the wooden halberds in their hands in groups. The halberds were freshly made, and the moisture within the wood made them heavy. They trained until they could no longer lift their halberds.

However, Gao Zhijian didn't care, and his calloused hands would teach those daring enough to be lazy a harsh lesson that they would never forget. The villagers waited painstakingly and worked hard until it was high noon, signaling the end of their training.

Yang Xiaohai's call for lunch sounded like music to their ears. They rushed to the dining hall and directly went for the coveted steamed buns, which they immediately stuffed into their mouths.

They couldn't hold their bowls steadily, but they ate with relish. They grunted nonstop as they ate, so the dining hall seemed like it was full of pigs fighting for food rather than hungry people.

Meanwhile, the disciples were busy discussing the issue of food supply somewhere in the Bai Family Estate.

“Senior Zhao Wu, we need to buy some grain soon. Senior Gao Zhijian said that we need at least a hundred soldiers. However, we're all going to run out of grain to feed them at this rate.”

“I know, but now is not the time to buy grain. The prices are too high due to the Natural Disaster. Let's wait for the autumn harvest; it'll be cheaper by then.”

Yang Xiaohai muttered, “But we'd have to hold out until then...”

“How about we... reduce their numbers? So many of us can use supernatural powers, so who would dare to provoke us?” Puppy suggested.

“No!” Gao Zhijian shook his head vigorously. “Se... Se.. Senior Li said... said... said, want... want—”

“Alright, alright, I give in, don’t finish it. It’ll be dinner by the time you finish your sentence,” Puppy interrupted.

Gao Zhijian frowned and glared at Puppy before lowering his head to eat his meal before him.

“Let’s do that for now and stop quarreling about this issue. Senior Li has also left some gold for us to use. I’ll exchange some of it for silver later,” Chun Xiaoman said. Just like that, everyone ate with relish once more, as the matter was resolved so easily.

However, someone noticed Chun Xiaoman’s annoyed look throughout the meal.

After the meal, Chun Xiaoman decided to go to the shrine, but Gao Zhijian appeared before her and stammered, “I-I-I have money... if... if the... the... the... village... village... village... is short... short... short of money... look... look for... me!”

“You have money? Where did you get it?” Chun Xiaoman asked, looking surprised.

“I-I-I... in the past...”

“You used to be a rich man?” Chun Xiaoman asked.

Gao Zhijian’s face turned red out of embarrassment. He had no idea how to explain it through words, so he squatted and started drawing on the ground.

Chapter 489 - Gao Zhijian'S Background

Gao Zhijian effortlessly parted the compact soil with his iron-like fingers, leaving behind traces as though they were plowed.

“What are you drawing?” Chun Xiaoman frowned at Gao Zhijian squatting on the ground. “Why don’t you write? I’ve been learning some characters in secret.”

Gao Zhijian glanced at her before shaking his head.

“Hey! What do you mean? Are you looking down on me?”

Chun Xiaoman shoved Gao Zhijian.

However, Gao Zhijian merely smiled and shook his head.

“Is this a snake? Did you use to sell snake medicine?”

“Dragon...” Gao Zhijian said in a low voice. As Gao Zhijian's fingers moved, a huge coiled dragon appeared before Chun Xiaoman. Gao Zhijian then drew a person sitting beneath the dragon.

“Emperor!” Gao Zhijian pointed at the person, and then he drew piles of gold ingots next to the so-called emperor. Afterward, he drew a few tiny figures next to the emperor. He drew a figure at the end and patted himself. “Me!”

“You're the emperor's son?!” Chun Xiaoman asked with wide eyes.

Gao Zhijian nodded, and then he shook his head vigorously.

“No... no... I don't... know!”

“How come you don't know? What’s going on here?”

“Maybe... maybe... maybe... it's... it's fake!”

“Are you not drawing your past here? How can your past be fake? Did you tell Senior Li about these? What did he say?”

“No.”

“Why did you not tell him?”

Gao Zhijian hesitated for a moment and glanced at Chun Xiaoman. Then, he drew an adult figure beside the figure that represented himself. The face of the adult was obscured, and three swords were strapped to his back.

Gao Zhijian pricked his finger and smeared blood all over the figure's clothes. Chun Xiaoman instantly understood what he was trying to say.

“This is Senior Li?” Chun Xiaoman recognized Li Huowang, as he was one of the few figures whom Chun Xiaoman knew had a penchant for wearing red robes.

Gao Zhijian nodded vigorously before drawing a large “five” on his own forehead.

“I recognize this character. It’s the simplest character from one to five[1], which means you were five years old that year?”

Gao Zhijian nodded, and then he pointed to the sword on Li Huowang’s back. He drew a line and struck off the figure representing himself.

“Uh... Senior Li killed you? When you were at the age of five?” Chun Xiaoman muttered hesitantly.

“Yeah.” Gao Zhijian nodded.

Chun Xiaoman felt her head spinning. “How come you're still alive, then? And he even killed you when you were still a child?”

“Maybe... maybe... maybe... fake!” Gao Zhijian drew another figure representing himself. This time, he drew an armored figure and a carriage. Afterward, he drew a group of people thrusting spears at him.

“You... died again? Why can’t I understand anymore?”

“Messy...” Gao Zhijian slapped his head hard. “Messy!”

Gao Zhijian’s actions became rougher as he drew several figures of himself dying in a variety of ways. He died by drowning,

burning, and even hanging. Eventually, he stopped drawing figures and took out a piece of charcoal to sketch black circles.

Fear appeared in his eyes as he looked at the black circles on the ground, and the fear in his eyes intensified as he drew more and more black circles. In the end, Gao Zhijian's sturdy arm drew a large black circle that enveloped everything, and he seemed to be fearful of what he had drawn. He abruptly stood and took several steps backward.

"Gao Zhijian... are you okay? Do you want me to help you go to the doctor?"

Gao Zhijian wiped away the cold sweat on his forehead, smudging his face. He then shook his head and walked over cautiously. He picked up a clump of soil and hurled it on the black circle before stomping on it, trampling down on the circle.

Then, he drew a figure representing himself on the back of his hand using a chunk of charcoal. Afterward, he dug into the trampled soil with the same hand, pushing aside the black circles to reveal the piles of gold ingots he had drawn earlier. "Money!"

He drew a line from the pile of gold ingots and connected it to Chun Xiaoman's feet.

"Take it!"

"No, no, no, give me a moment here. This isn't just about money. You need to be a bit more detailed with your drawing. I'm so confused..." Chun Xiaoman muttered, feeling her head spinning from Gao Zhijian's drawing.

"The message is unmistakable." A voice echoed from the door. The two turned to see Zhao Wu leaning on a crutch. It seemed that he had seen everything Gao Zhijian had drawn so far.

Zhao Wu walked up to the two and looked at the indescribable drawings. After a moment of thought, he said, "Gao Zhijian must have been a high-ranking official in the past, so his family must have been quite wealthy."

"The deaths he had suffered represent the risks associated with that status. If worse comes to worst, he says he's willing to take the risk and use his past status to find a way out for us."

Zhao Wu turned to look at Gao Zhijian with a serious expression.

"I think that's what you're trying to express, right?" Zhao Wu asked.

Gao Zhijian was stunned, and then he shook his head decisively without even pretending that Zhao Wu was right.

"I... I... I am... the... em... emperor!"

Zhao Wu looked helpless as he muttered, "You're the emperor? Then Senior Li killed the five-year-old you? And then you were reborn before dying again and again until you were finally captured by Dan Yangzi?"

"The Great Liang never had a five-year-old emperor. You should try to come up with a more plausible background. Moreover, you never told Senior Li anything about this in the past. There's also a continuity error; if you were five at the time, then how old was Senior Li back then? He's not much older than you, after all."

Gao Zhijian revealed a pained look at Zhao Wu's words. He pounded his head forcefully, and his hands curled into fists as he clenched them. "Messy.. messy...!"

"Hey, stop that, Gao Zhijian!" Chun Xiaoman grabbed Gao Zhijian and said, "The Lu Family Troupe has many ways to make some money, and they can be done once this disaster is over. You don't need to worry about money!"

Gao Zhijian eventually calmed down. He stared alternately at the two and realized that they did not believe him at all. The next moment, he clenched his fists and walked away.

"What are you going to do about his crazy story? Are you going to tell Senior Li about it?" Zhao Wu asked, leaning on his crutch.

Chun Xiaoman nodded quietly, and her expression was

complicated as she stared at Gao Zhijian's departing figure.

“I think it's better to tell him. He's a veteran and has seen more bizarre things than us, so he perhaps he might know something about Gao Zhijian's background.”

1. one to five is written in an alternative form from the usual



Chapter 490 - Cowheart Village

A group of soldiers was in the middle of training on a flat field used for drying rice in Cowheart Village. Gao Zhijian was sitting on a boulder, frowning while staring at the soldiers before him.

His mind was still busy pondering over what had happened not too long ago.

The other disciples... they don't believe me at all. Gao Zhijian thought. Logically, he ought to feel angry, but surprisingly, Gao Zhijian was not angry at all. Even he couldn't believe the chaotic scenes that had been popping up in his head recently. It was highly likely that he was once an emperor. He once lived in a palace and was surrounded by many people who catered to his every whim.

However, his memories of those times were incomplete. There were large gaps filled with many different bizarre deaths and events; he had lived multiple lives with drastically different lifestyles compared to when he was an emperor.

Gao Zhijian felt like his memories weren't his own but were a confused mixture of many people's memories in a variety of sizes. Gao Zhijian became suspicious. Were the chaotic memories fake? What if he had become a lunatic like Senior Li?

Gao Zhijian knew that he had to know his past and find his true self amidst the chaotic memories. However, he did not want to go back unless it was absolutely necessary. He wanted to stay here, as he had decided that things were going well.

He liked Cowheart Village, and he liked the name Gao Zhijian—he was Gao Zhijian.

A hazy figure flashed across his mind, and his lips

unconsciously parted to reveal a sincere smile. Living together with everyone was the freest he had ever been; he had lived a life of luxury within a magnificent palace. He ate well, and he had warm clothes to wear, but the air within the palace was cold and uncomfortable.

He disliked living in that palace.

Moreover, was it really necessary for him to know more about his past? Living in the moment was good enough for him. It wasn't like he had someone worth searching for amidst his chaotic memories.

Gao Zhijian thought about many things while sitting on the boulder. When he came back to his senses, he found that the dozen or so soldiers were flailing their wooden halberds in a disorderly manner. This group was taking advantage of his distraction to slack off.

Gao Zhijian picked up a small stick and walked over to them. He struck the soldiers on their backs, correcting their postures. The attack contained just enough strength to hurt but not injure the soldiers. Clearly, Gao Zhijian was an expert at controlling his strength.

The soldiers were too skinny. They needed more muscles to become even stronger for the sake of cultivating martial arts. Gao Zhijian's job was to train troops for Cowheart Village, and it was all according to Senior Li's instructions.

The soldiers sighed and groaned, and time ticked by just like that. The demanding physical training session had increased their appetites, and they wolfed down their food during dinner.

They were enduring such hardship not because they wanted to do so. It was all for the sake of a salary, which was a hundred coins on top of their daily rations.

Today's dinner was soy sauce fried rice. It was salty and oily, thanks to the lard. It was a perfect meal to replenish their lost

energy, and the dish itself was rather easy to cook.

Chun Xiaoman wasn't in the crowd, so Gao Zhijian discreetly kept an eye out for her.

After dinner, Gao Zhijian went to the kitchen. He fried two eggs and covered the soy sauce fried rice with them. He then walked out and carried a bowl and chopsticks with him toward the Bai Family's Ancestral Hall.

More specifically, Gao Zhijian made a beeline for the hall just in front of the ancestral hall, where Chun Xiaoman led a group of people to recite the chants of the White Lotus Sect.

"Eat," Gao Zhijian said, placing down a bowl of fried rice before Chun Xiaoman.

"Hey! Big guy, you really are something, huh? Why did you bring food for only one person? We haven't eaten yet, you know?!" Lu Xiucai said, sounding dissatisfied.

Gao Zhijian didn't even bother to look at Lu Xiucai.

Chun Xiaoman's chanting came to a halt. He looked up at the others and said, "Let's stop here for today and have dinner."

The four girls nodded respectfully. Lu Xiucai cast a look of disdain at Gao Zhijian before following the four girls up the stairs.

Chun Xiaoman proceeded to eat the bowl of fried rice. "How are things on your side? Were they also obedient today?"

"Still... still... still... okay!"

"Ah, I'm struggling here. Only a few people have been able to memorize these chants so far, which makes sense because a high level of comprehension is necessary to memorize these chants. Those with low comprehension will have no accomplishments, no matter how many times they recite.

"We're all human beings, so I don't know why there's such a big difference between each of us. I wonder when we'll finally learn everything.

"Oh, I have something to tell you, and you may not believe me,

but that bum Lu Xiucan has the highest comprehension level among the people here. You have no idea how smug he was when he learned that.”

Gao Zhijian stood quietly, listening to Chun Xiaoman without saying anything. Once Chun Xiaoman had finished venting her frustrations, the bowl of soy sauce fried rice that Gao Zhijian had prepared for her had also been polished clean.

Gao Zhijian picked up the empty bowl and was going to leave when Chun Xiaoman called out to him. “Zhijian, you no longer have to bring me food. Xiaohai will leave some for me in the kitchen.”

Chun Xiaoman then pursed her lips with a complex expression. “I’ve sworn to never marry, and I have no intention of breaking my oath. Do you understand what I’m trying to say?”

“ *Hmm...* ”

“Hey, I’m being straightforward here. We’re all brothers and sisters forever, so I’ve got to tell you the truth. I don’t want to lose you as my brother. Of course, I’ll tell Zhao Wu the same thing.”

Gao Zhijian was quiet. He was the only one aware of the pain that pierced his heart the moment he heard Chun Xiaoman’s words. However, he had inadvertently failed to suppress some of his anguish as the empty bowl in his hand fractured with a *crack* .

Chun Xiaoman walked up to Gao Zhijian and stared intently into the latter’s eyes. “A place to call home is rare for us with disabilities. We must cherish what we have, for many people wish to have what is ours.”

“I’m sure you know, but people like us can only be sold, beaten, and treated like garbage. We’re not even human in their eyes, which is why I want you to focus on what matters, Zhijian. We must also work hard to protect our home.”

“Mhm.” Gao Zhijian nodded and cut a desolate figure as he turned around and walked toward the stairs with the empty bowl in

his hand.

Chun Xiaoman felt a little guilty as she stared at his departing figure. However, she was still convinced that he had to make a decision sooner rather than later. With that, she sat back down and picked up the books on the ground before reciting the chants.

These chants weren't comparable to Li Huowang's supernatural powers, but she dared not underestimate them and was ravenous in her studies. Her comprehension wasn't as high as Lu Xiucai's comprehension, but diligence could make up for a lack of talent. If studying for six hours a day wasn't enough, then she'd study for even longer.

Even gold and stones could be split with hard work, and she had a lot of work to do, as she could barely use a few simple divine chants. She'd never want a repeat of her harrowing experience long ago when her own father had sold her away, and she had no choice but to acquiesce.

Before Chun Xiaoman could become engrossed in her studies, rapid footsteps echoed from the staircase. A panicking Lu Xiucai rushed down the stairs and exclaimed, "A group of bandits have entered our village and are killing people on sight! We already have a few casualties!"

Chapter 491 - Dharma Sect

“Hah!” Gao Zhijian exclaimed. He was topless and was having the halberd around at the entrance of the village. He looked like a giant capable of plowing through an entire army.

Red mist shrouded him as veins bulged all over him. A group of people wearing black cloth on their shoulders stood before him, and they looked like normal civilians except they were unusually agitated.

The people fearlessly charged at Gao Zhijian with their farming tools in hand.

“Do not be afraid of him! Chaaarge! We are the people of God Yu'er. Even if we die, we'll only become ghosts of God Yu'er! We'll reincarnate into emperors in our next life!”

A cold glint flashed, and three people standing in front of Gao Zhijian were cleaved in half; their insides splattered on the white wall. However, there were too many enemies, and Gao Zhijian could not handle all of them.

They had attacked in the middle of the night, so Gao Zhijian had no time to wear Peng Longteng's armor before defending the village.

A stone flew across the air and struck Gao Zhijian on the head, injuring him.

“ AAAAAAAH! ” Gao Zhijian bent down, lowering his stance before throwing the halberd in his hands with all his might. The halberd flew toward where the stone had come from. The halberd spun like a boomerang and cleaved through the crowd. A kaleidoscope of blood and entrails exploded in the air like crimson

fireworks.

Gao Zhijian followed the trail of blood to reach his halberd. However, the crowd behind him seemed mad. Despite facing Gao Zhijian's killing intent, none of them stepped backward. They charged at Gao Zhijian in a frenzy.

Amidst the chaos, a needle tied to a white thread flew over and struck a man's face. The man's facial features melted as he screamed, but his scream was soon muffled as his mouth fell into his clothes down below. The man had become faceless!

"You can do it, musclehead! We're here to help!" Puppy shouted.

The Dharma Sect turned to look in the direction of Cowheart Village, and they laughed upon seeing a group of disabled people charging at them. Chun Xiaoman was furious upon seeing the corpses on the ground. She took out the bell that Li Huowang had given to her and shook it vigorously.

Then, she stuffed her mouth with dirt before commanding the two Wandering Gods in the air. The Wandering Gods nodded and pounced on the members of the Dharma Sect. Those unlucky enough collapsed to the ground upon getting hit by the Wandering Gods' attacks.

However, it was not enough. Chun Xiaoman placed the bell on her waist before taking off her shirt and revealing her innerwear covered in yellow paper. She took out a serrated short sword and tapped her forehead with it before chanting, "The disciple opens the third eye to stare at the heavens. May the masters' guard look upon us!

"Bestow upon us skin of bronze, bones of steel, and bestow upon us helmets and armor to protect ourselves! We turn the bronze bag thrice, and the steel bag is now thrice as heavy!"

Lu Xiucan and five other people did the same thing behind her. They used a serrated short sword to slice their skin open, allowing

their blood to drip down their faces and finally onto the ground.

“Turn swords into feathers, rods into grass, and stones into bubbles! May the masters and the Heavenly Mater help the disciples!”

Chun Xiaoman, Lu Xiucan, and the five others finished their chant. Their eyes were large and unblinking as they charged toward the Dharma Sect members with their serrated short swords in hand.

Clang, clang, clang!

Lu Xiucan and Chun Xiaoman grew confident when they remained unscathed despite suffering a few attacks. The weapons of the enemies bounced off of their skin as if their skin were made of steel.

Chun Xiaoman and the others raised their weapons and fought back fiercely.

They could cut down others, but their enemies could not do the same to them. At this point, they were conducting a slaughter. With their help, the burden on Gao Zhijian dropped drastically. Soon, they turned the tides against such a large group of enemies with just so few of them.

The villagers of Cowheart Village gained courage upon seeing that the enemies were getting pushed back. They took up their farming tools and fought back as well.

Soon, the entrance to the village became incredibly chaotic.

More and more Dharma Sect members perished as time ticked by, and that was when an old dwarf woman wearing a tattered monk's robe appeared from Gao Zhijian's shadow and thrust a dagger made of black jade toward his waist.

Gao Zhijian endured the pain and looked down to see that the old woman's face was covered with a black cloth. A massive word was written on the black cloth, and it said, "Witch."

An eerie aged chuckle came from the other side of the black cloth. “*Hehehe~* Fold the paper money, burn the golden papers,

pour the ceremonial wine, and burn the incense sticks. The year ends as the spring of the new year beckons at us.”

Puppy was hiding among the crowd, but when he saw Gao Zhijian's plight, he did not hesitate and waved the wish wood at the old woman. However, the old woman was unusually agile. She ran deeper into the chaotic battlefield with her weapon drawn.

“Care... care... careful! There’s...” Gao Zhijian couldn’t even finish his sentence when the old woman emerged from the shadow of a young lady fighting with her enhanced figure. The old woman easily slit the young lady’s throat with her dagger.

The young lady’s neck was easily sliced open, even though her skin was supposed to be immune to swords and daggers. She collapsed to the ground while desperately trying to hold back the blood gushing out of her neck.

“ *Hahaha!* Praise be to God Yu’er! The golden bricks on the ground lay three feet high, and the tree of money is riddled with jewelry!”

“Nan’er!” Chun Xiaoman roared the young lady’s name out of despair.

Just then, a shiver went down her spine—someone was behind her!

Before the old woman could kill Chun Xiaoman, the Wandering Gods in the air flew down to force the old woman away.

However, the Wandering Gods' attacks had merely forced her back. The old woman's bizarre ability to seemingly change positions instantaneously forced Chun Xiaoman and the others to fight with their backs against each other.

They couldn't allow another sneak attack.

Cowheart Village is done for at this rate! I have to kill her, even if I have to pay a steep price! Chun Xiaoman took out the bell and shook it again. She followed Li Huowang’s instructions and shook her head vigorously to see the Wandering Gods in the air splitting into

them.

Chun Xiaoman ordered them to attack the old woman, and they complied. A cold wind infused with yin energy engulfed Cowheart Village as the Wandering Gods flew into the sky and burrowed underground to search for the old woman.

Chun Xiaoman used three years of her lifespan, and her gamble had paid off. Against the encirclement of the Wandering Gods, the old woman was soon forced out of hiding and had no choice but to retreat.

The old woman was about to jump into her shadow once again when Puppy waved the wish wood. This time, the spell hit her; the Strayed One's tongue on the wood moved slightly, confounding the old woman.

Gao Zhijian took advantage of that opportunity, swinging his halberd. The heavy halberd split the old woman into a pile of meat and bones.

Chapter 492 - Fear

The Dharma Sect members came to a screeching halt and awakened from their frenzy. They seemed groggy, as if they had just woken up from a dream. The next moment, they roared in fright and dispersed, running into the dark woods.

The stench of blood and feces filled the air.

Everyone dazedly for a while before realizing that they had emerged victorious, but none of them cheered; the majority of them slumped to the ground. Then, they started panting as the adrenaline wore off before sobbing and vomiting at the gory sight.

Those who had traveled with Li Huowang from Zephyr Temple were fine because they had gotten used to such a sight.

Chun Xiaoman wiped away the blood on her face before slumping to the ground and realizing that she was covered in cold sweat.

“It’s fine. The masters that we’ve invited into our body have simply left; this is the aftereffect of that.”

Yang Xiaohai and Gao Zhijian sighed upon seeing that it wasn’t just Chun Xiaoman.

“Goodness, Xiucai. You really are useless. The treasure that Li Huowang gave me is so much better. Luckily, I don’t have to learn what you guys are trying to learn right now,” Puppy said, revealing the wish wood in his hands.

“Fuck off! That was the easiest divine chant. Do you really think that you can match up with us? Just wait until I learn the second and third divine chants; we’re going to fight and see who is stronger between us!”

“Oh? Look at you. Let’s fight, then! Let’s even bet on it!”

“Puppy, are you done? You really think this is the time to be

bickering? Support us back the estate! Can't you see that Gao Zhijian is hurt?"

Those lucky enough to sustain only a few injuries helped those with heavier injuries into the Bai Family Estate. They placed quite a few torches on the wall to prevent any ambushes.

They had won, but Cowheart Village was clouded in sadness. It was all because twelve people had perished tonight, and their bodies were covered in white cloth and were lined up in the hall. The village didn't have many villagers, so the twelve people whom they had lost were both their friends and family members.

Lu Zhuangyuan smoked his pipe with a frown. Out of the twelve who died, two of them were his disciples, and one of them was even the disciple who had the most potential.

What a shame, Lu Zhuangyuan thought.

"*Sigh*, I thought things were going swimmingly for us, and I thought the Liang Kingdom was a peaceful place, so how come we just got attacked by bandits?"

"They weren't bandits." Chun Xiaoman said. She was in the middle of treating Yang Xiaohai. "They were talking about some God Yu'er or something. They seem to be worshiping some deity."

"I agree. Bandits once came to my village, and they charged into the largest house to rob the food and money in there. They'd never kill mere serfs like us," said one of the militia members.

Lu Zhuangyuan knocked his smoke pipe on the pillar and took out some fresh tobacco from his pouch before asking, "Why are they going around murdering people? Isn't working hard for a peaceful life hard enough?"

"If you want to know why they attacked us, you can just ask them yourself," Puppy said, dragging "something" into the hall.

The others were shocked at the sight. Puppy had just dragged a human being into the hall, but the latter looked barely human; his limbs were twisted, and some of his facial features were missing.

“How’s my divine needles? My needles have paralyzed him. He can’t run away nor die, so it’s nice that we get to interrogate him.”

No one said anything as they looked at the twisted human in front of them.

“How should we interrogate him? Senior Li is the best at doing it, but he’s not here.”

“Let me do it!” Chun Xiaoman exclaimed. She was still furious about Nan’er’s death, so she wasted no time and grabbed a bamboo broom from the corner of the wall before smacking the man’s face with it. She did not stop until the man’s twisted figure was bruised. “Talk! Why did you come here to kill us?”

“Fucking bitch! Kill me if you can! I’m just going to become God Yu’er’s ghost when I die! I will become an emperor in my next life. You fools who do not worship him will reincarnate into pigs and dogs—destined to eat shit all day!” the man’s mouth, which was resting on his elbow, taunted Chun Xiaoman.

“You really think that I wouldn’t dare to kill you?!” Chun Xiaoman took out her sword and placed it on the man’s neck. Chun Xiaoman glared at the man as the latter smiled at her.

“No, this won’t work. My turn.” Puppy walked out of the hall. When he returned, he was wearing a red robe and was carrying a bag full of many different knives.

“Senior Puppy, why are you wearing Senior Li’s clothes? And why did you bring my butchering knives with you?” Yang Xiaohai was curious.

“Stop talking and just look!” Puppy squatted next to the man and coughed. He imitated Li Huowang’s tone of voice as he said, “I know that you are not afraid of death, but how about I make you wish that you were dead?”

With that, he placed the knives and implements neatly on the ground. There were hooks used to hang the pig, a sharp knife used to stab the pig’s heart, a broad cleaver used to cut the bones, and

even a small knife used to shave the pig's fur.

The man's eyes twitched at the sight. "You motherfucker! Kill me if you dare!"

"Oh? You have guts. I wonder where I should start?"

Rather than a knife, Puppy picked up an ordinary yet thick hemp rope. " *Hehe*, you did not expect me to take this, did you? I should use this as an appetizer. I'm sure you know that hemp ropes aren't as smooth as silk, right?

"Look at how rough it is, *hehehe*..." Puppy rubbed the hemp rope on the man's skin, and the man's skin turned red due to friction. "I'll place this rope between your crotch and rub it back and forth like a saw. It's not a knife, but it's so rough that it would grind your skin and flesh into pulp."

The man's eyes flashed in a fearful light, and he trembled at Puppy's remark.

"Oh, and because I will be rubbing it over your crotch..."

Puppy proceeded to describe in great, graphic detail what was going to happen to the man. The man broke down and cried before Puppy could finish his explanation.

"Stop! Stop! I'll speak! Just kill me afterward!" the man roared, his face covered in snot and tears.

Puppy clapped his hands in excitement and turned around.

"See? Did you see that?"

Rather than worship and praise, everyone stared at him with wary eyes.

"Why are you looking at me like that? I didn't do anything. I was just mimicking Li Huowang..."

Chapter 493 - Night Visit

“Stop boasting and move away.”

Chun Xiaoman used a bamboo pole to shove Puppy away before standing in front of the cowering man. “Why did you come to our village? And why do you want to kill us? How did we offend you?”

The man told her everything, as he was afraid that Puppy would use the hemp rope on him if he didn’t answer fast enough.

“We were chased out by the military, and we ran out of food soon after we were chased away. The witch told us to find a village far away from the city and pillage that village for food. Your village is the farthest from any city.”

“The military?” Chun Xiaoman was confused. Was that really all? “Who are you guys? And why did the military chase you away?”

“We’re members of the Dharma Sect!” the man exclaimed, raising his chin. The words “Dharma Sect” had somehow boosted his confidence as if it was supporting him mentally.

“The kingdom is unfair to us! There are many others worshipping many gods, but they’ve been deliberately targeting only us, who are worshipping God Yu’er! Hmph! The witch who can talk to God Yu’er had told us that the Liang Kingdom was on its last legs and wouldn’t last long, just like the grasshoppers after autumn that will die in just a few days!

“God Yu’er had even shown itself to us a few days ago! The dark skies were the doing of God Yu’er! God Yu’er would soon manifest in the mortal world! By then, the Dharma Sect would be the official religion of the kingdom!

“We will become emperors! We no longer have to give up our

food, and we no longer have to work by then while enjoying the taste of meat every day!"

"Is he crazy? He's been spouting nonsense all this while," Puppy asked, sounding confused.

Puppy had no idea what was happening, but Lu Zhuangyuan knew what was going on. His travels had allowed him to learn a ton about the world outside.

"Ah... They're not bandits but rebels! We ran all the way here to avoid the war, but things are going to become chaotic for us again, even though we're just starting to enjoy our peace!"

"Rebel? They're rebels?" Lu Xiucan scoffed, but his smile disappeared when he remembered that strange old lady.

The majority of the people in the hall had no idea what was going on, but they knew the implications of the word "rebel." Rebellions signified death, war, and hunger.

Chun Xiaoman crouched and questioned the man, "Does your Dharma Sect have many members?"

"Of course! We have millions of members! We're all children of God Yu'er... it's just that some of us were enlightened much quicker than others! You guys are the same, too! Hurry up and surrender to God Yu'er!"

The man was clearly spouting nonsense, but everyone in the village was shocked by what they heard from him.

Zhao Wu had a bad feeling about this, and he expressed it, saying, "We killed so many of them. Don't you think they'll come and avenge their members?"

No one knew the answer to that question, but everyone felt as if a boulder had landed on their chests.

"Don't worry. It's been a while since Senior Li and Miaomiao have departed, so they should be coming back soon."

Everyone felt much better at that remark, and it made sense.

Li Huowang was like a god to them, after all.

The Dharma Sect was nothing to Li Huowang.

“Miss Chun, I think we can’t wait for the autumn harvest to stock up on food anymore. Once the kingdom is embroiled in chaos, our stockpile will be our lifeblood,” Lu Zhuangyuan said. His rich experience was exhibiting its usefulness right now.

“Good call. Zhao Wu, pawn the gold and stockpile some food! We’ll discuss the details once Senior Li is back. Zhijian, arrange for some militia to stand guard during the night and make it a shifting schedule, just like what we did during our travels.

“Tell them to bring some dogs during their patrols. Dogs can detect things we can’t.”

Without Li Huowang, Chun Xiaoman assumed the role of a leader. Gao Zhijian would have been better as a leader if it weren’t for his speech impediment.

While Cowheart Village was buzzing with activity, Li Huowang had a visitor in Shangjing. Someone knocked on his door and asked, “Is Sir Er here?”

Li Huowang was jolted out of his nightmare, and he instinctively grabbed his weapon beneath his pillow.

“Is Sir Er here? Please open the door. Our master is waiting for you.”

Li Huowang tried his best to listen to the timekeeper’s voice and realized that it was already the third section of the night. He didn’t really have many acquaintances in Shangjing, so who could be waiting for him?

“Senior Li, there are twelve people outside, and there’s a sedan...” Miaomiao whispered.

“Dress up and prepare the luggage. Wait for me on the second floor. I will kill them if they are enemies, and we’ll run away from Shangjing immediately afterward!” Li Huowang said. He wore his red Daoist robes and placed the purple-tassel sword on his back before walking toward the entrance.

Li Huowang got ready to fight the moment his hands touched the wooden door. And that was when the fake Hong Zhong's illusion appeared next to him. "I checked. A eunuch is looking for you."

Li Huowang's eyes twitched as his hand passed through the illusion to open the door. His sharp sense of smell immediately caught the scent of a fragrance mixed with urine. The fake Hong Zhong's illusion was right. The other party was a eunuch.

Li Huowang's curiosity was piqued upon seeing a familiar jade cat in the eunuch's arms.

"*Hehehe*~ I greet Sir Er." The old eunuch bowed. "Please enter the sedan. Our master is waiting for you in his residence."

It seems that the emperor has finally remembered me. Li Huowang thought. Then, he entered the sedan that was the size of a small room. Soon, eight strong men carried him toward the palace.

The eight men carried the sedan carefully, making Li Huowang feel as if were sitting in a car. He was inside the highest-grade sedan that the Liang Kingdom had to offer.

The sedan passed through the red palace walls and continued until it arrived at the entrance of the emperor's bed chamber, where they finally allowed Li Huowang to exit the sedan.

The bed chamber had a golden roof and a red door. Moonlight was being reflected off the shiny, silver roof that had several statues of a beast wearing a mask unique to the Liang Kingdom.

Chapter 494 - Leader

Li Huowang was about to keep walking when a large-framed guard towering three meters tall stopped him.

“No weapons!” the large-framed guard exclaimed. He had a huge torso, but his lower half was comically small. The guard’s face was also covered with a rusted bronze mask. Li Huowang couldn’t see through the mask.

The guard took away Li Huowang's purple-tasseled sword and his bronze coin sword before retreating into a corner and standing motionlessly like a statue.

Li Huowang soon saw the bed chamber with numerous red pillars that had engravings of golden dragons.

The place was more like a hall rather than a bed chamber.

Li Huowang barely had time to look around when a surprised voice entered his ears.

“Come here, quick!” It was the young emperor of the Liang Kingdom. He was wearing a red and black robe and was waving at Li Huowang. If it weren't for the eunuch holding him back, he would have run over to Li Huowang.

Li Huowang stopped a few meters away from the young emperor and greeted, “Er Jiu greets the emperor!”

Ji Lin ignored the eunuchs and approached Li Huowang. “Er Jiu, you must help me!”

Li Huowang stood silently. He had no idea what to say, as the request was too sudden.

“My father was right! My brothers are scheming to take the throne!”

Ji Lin’s eyes revealed thick fear. “I didn’t want to become the emperor, and I would’ve been fine with living somewhere else

without any pressure. However, they still want to kill me even though I wanted to offer them the throne!”

Of course. Do you really think that they'd let you live even though you're brothers with them? Li Huowang thought. He was not worried at all, as this issue wasn't his problem to handle.

“Your Highness, Er Jiu is a Surveillance Bureau member and cannot take part in the matters of the palace.”

“Liar! Why did my third brother have people from the Surveillance Bureau, then?!” Ji Lin exclaimed. Then, he lowered his voice as he said, “The officials told me that you're strong. You came back with the corpse of a spiritual sin, and you also have a respectable rank in the bureau, right?”

“You know that I can't trust anyone anymore, right? Everyone is scheming for their own profit, and I don't even know who is on whose side!” Ji Lin's voice trembled in fear. You helped me see through that scam during that festival, so I'm sure you're a good man. Please help me! I have no one else to help me!

“Do you know anyone from the Surveillance Bureau? If they can help me, I'll make sure that they become officials!”

Li Huowang frowned. He wasn't well versed in the politics of the palace, but he knew that the current emperor was too useless.

Li Huowang truly did not expect that Ji Lin didn't have a group of loyal officials by his side and had to start looking for external support. It was certain that Ji Lin would most likely die in the midst of this succession war.

“Your Highness, I'm afraid that I might not be able to help you.”

Ji Lin was furious at Li Huowang's rejection. “I am the emperor, so you must listen to me! Otherwise, I will have you executed!”

Li Huowang was enraged. *Should I swear allegiance to his brothers and kill him with them?*

Just as Li Huowang was entertaining the idea, Ji Lin grabbed Li Huowang's hands and begged in a low voice, "Er Jiu, please help me... I really don't know what to do! I don't want to die!"

In the face of the emperor's begging and crying, Li Huowang had no choice but to give in for now. Li Huowang knew that a succession war was a dangerous event that would kill him if he made the wrong move. More importantly, Li Huowang was using a fake identity, so he'd certainly die if he ended up revealing his true self.

"Your Highness, this is an important matter. Please let me go back and think about it."

Ji Lin sighed in relief upon seeing that Li Huowang did not reject him outright. "Okay! Go back and think about it. I'm not going to rush you. Help me become the emperor, and I will give you as much gold as you want."

Li Huowang walked out from the bed chambers and saw the emperor talking to the old eunuch. The latter nodded and drew a circle on a book. *It seems that I'm not the only one on his list of possible supporters. I guess he's very desperate.*

Of course, Li Huowang didn't want to participate in the succession war. He had simply compromised to get out of the place. Ji Lin could take revenge on him, but he had to survive the succession war first.

Li Huowang felt that Ji Lin would most likely die and that he'd barely have any supporters.

When Li Huowang found his way to his house, it was already daybreak. He decided to find a beggar on the streets and placed his face on the beggar. He then tossed the beggar into his house to masquerade as himself before leaving Shangjing with Miaomiao.

Li Huowang was still pretty confident in his methods as a Sitting Oblivion Dao member.

As expected, nothing untoward happened as they approached

the city gate.

“Sit here, and I will buy breakfast. We will eat along the way,” Li Huowang said, approaching one of the breakfast stalls.

The cook was frying thin strips of dough in oil. The dough expanded and quickly became golden brown. The chubby cook was also making mochi balls. He rolled them in black sesame and coarse sugar, coating them in the mixture.

The crispy fried dough sticks and the sticky sweet mochi gave rise to a pleasant combination—the soft mochi covered the crispy fried dough stick, and the delicious scent of the sesame combined with the salty dough stick to create a flavor bomb.

“Give me six.” Li Huowang threw some coins into the bamboo basket.

The chubby middle-aged man smiled at the sight. The next moment, his eyes abruptly sunk into his face.

“All right~ Six dough sticks with mochi. Here, be careful because It’s hot.”

Li Huowang turned around and walked away. Upon biting a dough stick, Li Huowang came to a halt. Then, he turned around and walked up to the chubby man. He spat the dice in his mouth and stared at the chubby stall owner busy serving customers.

“Is there something to do, leader?” asked Li Huowang.

The chubby man wiped away the sweat on his neck while nodding and talking to the customers.

“I just want you to do me a small favor.”

Translator's Thoughts

Shai Zi working at the food stall after that whole fiasco. Credits to 格子的乱七八糟on douyin!



Chapter 495 - Shai Zi

"I just want you to do me a small favor," the chubby man said.

Li Huowang chuckled. "You think I'm omnipotent? What makes you think I can do something that you couldn't?"

The chubby man ignored Li Huowang as he served the other customers. It was only when the customers were gone that the chubby man took out two stools for him and Li Huowang to sit on.

"Come, sit. Don't stand and talk like that. Only *you* can do this because the Dragon Vein will detect my presence the moment I get close enough to it."

Li Huowang looked at the man's plump face and scoffed, "We've already angered the Surveillance Bureau. Are you not satisfied yet?"

Even though Li Huowang was putting up a nonchalant face, he was already very aware of what was going on around him.

The man in front of Li Huowang was none other than one of the Sitting Oblivion Dao's leaders, Shai Zi!

Li Huowang couldn't forget how terrifying Shai Zis were.

Shai Zis loved tricking other liars. It could even be said that Shai Zis had tricked the majority of the Sitting Oblivion Dao members into joining them.

"Don't say that. We're not even going after the Surveillance Bureau's treasure. Why would they be angry at us?" Shai Zi took out the two remaining unsold dough sticks and ate them.

"Hong Zhong, the emperor was trying to pull you to his side last night, right? Why are you running away from something so interesting? Just go back and agree to his demands. We will then help find a way to let him succeed to the throne." Shai Zi told Li Huowang what to do.

Li Huowang was not even surprised that the Sitting Oblivion Dao wanted to interfere in the succession war.

But no matter what they wanted, Li Huowang had no intentions of joining them. “Boss, I don’t have time. Find someone else.”

Shai Zi chuckled when he heard Li Huowang's rejection. “No need to do that. You are not a child anymore. Relax, once the emperor succeeds to the throne there would be nothing else for you to do. Hong Zhong, we have very few people in the palace, and most of them perished during that incident. You are the only one who can stay by the emperor’s side, so it has to be you. Don’t forget the favor you owe me.”

Shai Zi patted Li Huowang’s shoulder with his oily hands. “Look, it makes complete sense. Only *you* can do it.”

Favor? Li Huowang had no recollection of Shai Zi helping him last time.

“I won’t do it. Find someone else,” Li Huowang said, rejecting the offer before standing up to leave. “Many of the Sitting Oblivion Dao members had died during our last battle with the Surveillance Bureau. I think it’s best if you rest and recuperate instead of doing what you're thinking of doing.”

Li Huowang was betting that Shai Zi would not fight him since the Surveillance Bureau was monitoring Shangjing.

Li Huowang had no plans of listening even further, as he knew that the best way to avoid getting deceived was to avoid listening to Sitting Oblivion Dao members in the first place.

Li Huowang had just taken a few steps away when Shai Zi’s voice echoed behind him. “Are you really not doing it? Then don’t blame me for being ruthless.”

Li Huowang turned around and stared calmly at Shai Zi, asking, “Boss Shai Zi, what do you want to do? Do you want to fight me?”

“Look at you talking like that. We're the military. I would never fight our own people,” Shai Zi said in a gentle voice.

Li Huowang merely smiled coldly.

“One month ago, you asked me for a favor to safeguard something. You can decline to work for us this time, but don't blame me if that *thing* somehow escaped.”

Li Huowang frowned. He was certain that he did not meet any Sitting Oblivion Dao a month ago. *Is he tricking me?*

“Boss Shai Zi, must you do this? I'm tired from the previous ordeal, and I want to rest in the meantime. Find someone else.” Li Huowang threw the cold food onto the ground before walking to his carriage.

Shai Zi did not chase after Li Huowang and busied himself with the customers.

Li Huowang sat on his carriage and headed to the western city gate when the chubby man turned around and stared at the horse carriage, shouting, “Brat! If you don't cultivate ‘Lies’ when you cultivate ‘Truth,’ you will become a demon!”

They managed to leave Shangjing in peace.

Shai Zi didn't do anything to them, but Li Huowang was not stupid enough to relax.

Once out of Shangjing, Li Huowang traveled non-stop with Li Sui and Bai Lingmiao in the carriage. They did not dare to talk to anyone on their way to avoid getting tricked.

They would hunt and fish whenever they were hungry, just like cavemen.

The fire scorched the skin of a fish that was roughly the size of her arm.

After sprinkling some salt on the fish, Bai Lingmiao carried the fish over to Li Huowang.

Li Huowang was looking around warily. “You can eat first. I'm not hungry.”

Bai Lingmiao shoved the fish into Li Huowang's arms before turning around to cook another fish.

"Senior Li, how far are we from Cowheart Village?" Bai Lingmiao asked.

"We're not going back for now. I don't want trouble to follow us back to the village."

"How much longer must we stay outside? Several years?" Bai Lingmiao was worried.

"No. Since the Sitting Oblivion Dao wants to interfere with the succession war, we only need to wait until the new emperor is crowned. By then, they won't trouble me anymore regardless of whether the Sitting Oblivion Dao had succeeded or not."

Li Huowang was more worried that Shai Zi would do something to him from the dark. Shai Zis were incredibly strong, and they were the type of entity to greet their victims only after they had ensnared their victims in their traps.

Li Huowang's clenched fists loosened, and he couldn't help but feel that he was still a bit too weak. There wouldn't have been no need to be so wary if he had just cultivated the "Truth."

Li Huowang wolfed down the fish and rested in the carriage, but he did not fall into a deep sleep. He'd wake up the moment he sensed something.

Late at night, Bai Lingmiao and Li Huowang opened their eyes in unison. "Senior Li, there's something on the eastern side of the forest."

"I heard it, too. Let's go see what it is together. I don't want any of us to get kidnapped."

The three of them carefully approached the location where they heard the noise. Soon, they heard people crying and shouting, along with the shrill clashing of weapons.

Li Huowang peered into a hole amidst the tree branches and saw what was happening.

Translator's Thoughts

For reference, this is what his head looks like.

Credits to 格子的乱七八糟on douyin!



Chapter 496 - Sword

The sparse forest was filled with a cacophonous din of screams and clashing weapons.

The Dharma Sect with black cloth slung over their shoulders were fighting six Surveillance Bureau members.

Li Huowang took one look and knew that the Surveillance Bureau was trying to get rid of as many members of the Dharma Sect as possible, and they were winning the fight.

The Dharma Sect members were unafraid of death, but the difference in strength was just too huge.

If it hadn't been for Hong Da, Li Huowang wouldn't have known that the six figures in the distance were Surveillance Bureau members.

Li Huowang sighed in relief at the blood flowing like a river on the ground. He was worried that the Sitting Oblivion Dao had chased after them, so it was a good thing that his assumption was wrong.

“Let’s go. The Surveillance Bureau can easily deal with random people; they probably don’t need me to do anything.”

Li Huowang’s attitude toward the Surveillance Bureau had gotten better when he discovered that they had been working hard to stop the Natural Disasters. He was about to walk away when he saw one of the Surveillance Bureau members using an unusual weapon, a brush.

More specifically, it was Zhuge Yuan's brush.

“Senior Zhuge, is that your weapon?” Bai Lingmiao heard Li Huowang talking to himself. “So that really is your weapon. I guess the Surveillance Bureau took your stuff after you died. That said, what is the origin of your brush? Is it really that strong? I should’ve

taken it with me instead. It's a shame I didn't think of that at the time."

Even though Bai Lingmiao knew that Li Huowang was talking to his invisible illusions, it was still a bizarre sight to see.

Bai Lingmiao grew curious. She was about to ask what Li Huowang was talking about when she saw him snarling at someone far away.

Bai Lingmiao "looked" in that direction and saw a woman with purple lips holding an unusual sword made out of bone. Bai Lingmiao took a closer look at the weapon and was horrified to see a person's head serving as the sword's pommel. To make matters worse, the sword was made out of a person's spine! The head seemed to have been dehydrated until it shrank to the size of a dried orange; the head's orifices were filled with black mud, and there was a purple talisman on its forehead.

The head had shrunk, contorting the head's features, but Bai Lingmiao still saw that the owner of the head had to have been a handsome man when he was still alive.

Crack, crack, crack.

Bai Lingmiao looked at Li Huowang upon hearing him grinding his teeth.

"They... they refined your body into a weapon?!" Li Huowang's anger couldn't be contained when he realized that his best friend's corpse was desecrated in such a manner.

"You do not have to be angry. That is normal. Even a Strayed One's body part is valuable, so how could the corpse of a Twisted One be any less valuable than a Strayed One's body part? Do you really think that the Surveillance Bureau would just leave that corpse to rot on the ground?" said the fake Hong Zhong. He then chuckled and sat on Peng Longteng's shoulder.

In contrast to Li Huowang's fury, Zhuge Yuan was relaxed. "I do not yearn for material things. My body is just a bag of flesh, and

I do not need it. Junior Li, let's go."

"No!" Li Huowang exclaimed. It would have been a different story if Li Howang had remained clueless about what the Surveillance Bureau had done to Zhuge Yuan's corpse.

In addition, Zhuge Yuan had sacrificed himself to save Li Huowang. How could Li Huowang do nothing upon knowing that someone had desecrated his best friend's corpse?

Of course, Li Huowang was still rational enough to stay put for the time being to observe the woman's strength.

Based on how Hong Da was addressing her, it seemed that she was a new Ji Xiang.

However, Li Huowang didn't know which sect she had come from based on her clothes, which was a simple purple dress.

Li Huowang was also worried about the sword made from Zhuge Yuan's spine. A weapon crafted from a Twisted One's body part was by no means weak.

"Senior Zhuge, what do you think that sword can do? It's made from your spine, after all, so perhaps you know anything about it? Is there a way to counter it?" Li Huowang asked.

"Of course, I don't know. I'm a Twisted One and would never go and learn about myself by refining myself. Junior Li, let's just go. No need to cause trouble just because of me."

Even though Zhuge Yuan was telling him to stop, Li Huowang was adamant about getting the sword. He stared carefully at the woman with purple lips.

Just then, the woman raised the sword and waved it at the Dharma Sect members. The waists of the Dharma Sect members vanished; they were cut in half just like that!

Blood stained the ground crimson as the Dharma Sect members collapsed with agonized screams.

"Daoist, I think we should go. You might be too weak to defeat her," the old monk's illusion said, sounding worried.

However, Li Huowang became even more stubborn upon hearing their remarks.

“Junior Li, how strange. A rift opened in the air when she waved that sword, and I saw some fields and mountains beyond that rift.”

“There are fields and mountains beyond a rift in the air?”

“Junior Li, I think I've figured it out. The world beyond that rift must be the Qi Kingdom.”

Li Huowang immediately understood the powers of the sword after hearing Zhuge Yuan's analysis. The woman was using the sword to open up a small rift in space to send things into the Qi Kingdom.

The moment the rift in space closed up, the rift would sever whatever was trapped inside of it.

And that was how the Dharma Sect members were cut in half...

Rather than a sword, the weapon was like a key that allowed anyone to travel to an alternate dimension, the Qi Kingdom.

The Dharma Sect members were slowly getting pushed back. Li Huowang had already learned the power of the sword, so he chose not to wait any longer.

The Dharma Sect members were instrumental in distracting the Surveillance Bureau members. Once they were defeated, Li Huowang would have to face all six Surveillance Bureau members at the same time.

“Both of you, go back and wait for me at the valley where we stayed two days ago,” Li Huowang said to Bai Lingmiao and Li Sui before taking off his red robe and handing it to them.

He then sent his body image into the ground and approached the woman slowly in an invisible state.

Once he was close enough, Li Huowang took off the bronze coin veil, and his face shifted. His face transformed into that of a stranger's face.

He flipped his palm, and a black cloth appeared. He slung it over his shoulder, and his disguise as a Dharma Sect member was complete.

Li Huowang did not make a move right away. The Dharma Sect members were collapsing one by one, but he bid his time, waiting for the golden opportunity to attack.

Just then, a black jade dagger rushed out of the woman's shadow and flew toward her back. At the sight, Li Huowang immediately made his move, pouncing on the woman like a tiger.

Before he could reach her, he saw cold glints flying toward him from every angle. An old robe with quite a few rusted swords and knives was making a beeline for Li Huowang.

Translator's Thoughts

Zhuge Yuan's spine sword. RIP brother Zhuge



Chapter 497 - Appearance

Li Huowang felt the sharp knives cutting through the air. He looked up and saw that the robe covered with knives was like a chakram coming down on his head. He immediately cut off two of his fingers and threw them out.

His severed fingers deflected the robe, and Li Huowang took this chance to get close to the woman. Just then, Hong Da's familiar face appeared in front of him as his robe flew back and landed on his dirty body.

Even though Hong Da couldn't see Li Huowang, he somehow managed to sense the latter. "Who's there? Show yourself!"

Li Huowang didn't want to waste time and tore off his own face to slap it onto Hong Da's face.

At the same time, the Daoist in the rear pointed Zhuge Yuan's brush at Li Huowang, and the mask was torn in half. The Daoist then made a seal to reveal Li Huowang.

Li Huowang saw that the woman had already cut the being that rose from her shadow into four parts. The woman was about to swing the spine sword at Li Huowang when the latter sliced open his chest with a dagger and shattered his two lowermost ribs before stabbing it into himself. A wave of pain erupted from Li Huowang. Everyone let out agonized screams along with Li Huowang, and the woman's attack came to an abrupt halt.

Fortunately, Li Huowang had long gotten used to such extreme pain. He recovered quickly and skirted past Hong Da to reach the woman.

Li Huowang didn't want to kill her as she might be instrumental in stopping Natural Disasters. All he wanted was the weapon refined from Zhuge Yuan's corpse. Li Huowang swung his

dagger at her slim fingers that were holding the spine sword.

Clang!

Li Huowang was stunned to see his dagger breaking in half.

A small golden Buddha that resembled the woman emerged from her sleeves. The small golden Buddha was roughly the size of only a fingertip, and it cried out at Li Huowang.

It had used its golden skull to break Li Huowang's weapon!

She's a Buddhist?! Li Huowang cursed under his breath and reached for his purple-tasseled sword.

A rusted blade suddenly appeared next to Li Huowang's torso, forcing him to stop. The next moment, his purple-tasseled sword transformed into a black tassel sword with several mahjong tiles hanging from it.

That was close! Hong Da is familiar with my weapon, so he would've discovered my identity if I had taken it out just now!

Li Huowang swiftly skirted around the battlefield to avoid Hong Da's attacks. When he was ready to deal the final blow to obtain the spine sword, he realized that the woman's body was covered in the small golden Buddhas.

The golden Buddhas were either crying or smiling as they wriggled on her face like golden maggots. Somehow, they resembled a man's face.

The woman looked at Li Huowang, and the golden Buddhas shouted, "Amitabha! Place down your sword and be enlightened."

Li Huowang suddenly had the impulse to put down all of his weapons.

He was about to remove both his swords from his back when he stabbed his own arm into his torso to take the two broken ribs before stabbing himself with those ribs once again.

The intense pain cleared his mind, and the situation was reversed.

"AAAAHHH!" Li Huowang stabbed his chest for the third

time before running toward the woman who was hugging herself due to the extreme pain.

While running towards her, Li Huowang removed the broken ribs and stabbed himself again and again. Except for Li Huowang, everyone crumpled to the ground from the pain.

Despite the extreme pain, Li Huowang managed to send a kick toward the woman's right hand to knock the spine sword out of her hand.

The golden Buddhas on her hands were about to block his kick when Li Huowang twisted his ribs once again; the Buddhas contorted in pain and messed up the timing.

Li Huowang kicked as hard as he could, and the golden Buddhas sunk into the woman's flesh.

The woman could no longer hold onto the spine sword and was forced to let it go.

Li Huowang immediately grabbed the weapon and felt the warmth on the hilt. He immediately felt better after recovering Zhuge Yuan's corpse.

He got ready to leave once he got what he wanted.

Just then, four triangular flags around the size of a palm flew from the depths of the forest and pinned Li Huowang's shadow to the ground.

Li Huowang felt like his legs were stuck to the ground; he could not move at all. He twisted his head and saw that the Surveillance Bureau members busy killing the Dharma Sect members earlier were coming to assist their fellow members.

The surviving Dharma Sect members had already fled.

What should I do? Li Huowang swept his gaze across everyone's faces. *Do I really need to fight for real?*

If he used all of his strength, Hong Da would definitely recognize him. If that happened, he would have to kill all of them to protect his identity.

However, the Surveillance Bureau had not done anything wrong, so he didn't want to do that at all. They were just doing their job by killing the evil Dharma Sect members.

Li Huowang wanted to explore his options before resorting to an all-out brawl.

Li Huowang's stomach expanded and contracted rapidly as a deep growling came from his belly.

"Step down before I get angry. I was just messing around with you just now," Li Huowang said.

However, his lie didn't even faze the Surveillance Bureau members. Two of them wearing a monk's robe covered Li Huowang's head with a net soaked in period blood to prevent him from escaping.

The Daoist then raised the brush with both of his hands and mustered all of his strength to point it at Li Huowang's body. The Daoist's hair transformed from black to white.

Li Huowang's color was about to get absorbed into the brush when Li Huowang closed his eyes.

Just then, a massive headless body appeared in front of him. It was none other than Peng Longteng!

"Careful! He has backup!"

The Surveillance Bureau members became wary and gripped their weapons tightly at the appearance of the headless woman.

However, the Daoist holding the brush was even more surprised than anyone. He stared at Peng Longteng in disbelief and exclaimed, "This is impossible! I'm wielding Zhuge Yuan's Kuixing Brush! How come she's still standing?!"

Chapter 498 - Truths And Lies

The remaining four became warier at the Daoist's remark.

Seeing that, Li Huowang suddenly had an idea.

Wait, maybe I don't need to fight them... perhaps I can just scare them away!

Li Huowang took a few deep breaths before thrusting the spine sword into the ground. The next moment, the surroundings shimmered as he muttered, “Hmph! Are you not curious why I'm still alive? Why don't you ask Zhuge Yuan himself? Untraceable silence, hidden in the highest mountains. Living is to avoid being obliterated! Surpass the realms of the Three Worlds! Resurrection!”

The Surveillance Bureau members found their hearts seized by a primal fear when they saw Zhuge Yuan flickering into existence before Li Huowang.

They knew the depths of Zhuge Yuan's strength, and he was definitely much stronger with his own spine sword in hand!

They wasted no time and turned around to run into the depths of the forest.

Moments later, Peng Longteng and Zhuge Yuan's figures disappeared. Li Huowang grabbed his aching head. Transforming two illusions into reality with his current cultivation was way beyond his limits.

This was the best he could do, and fortunately, it had scared them away.

Li Huowang felt like his head was splitting into two, but he endured it and staggered away with the spine sword in hand.

The Surveillance Bureau members had run away, but there was

a chance that they'd come back to investigate.

Li Huowang felt his brain swelling to the point that it felt like his skull would explode from the pressure.

“Junior Li, are you alright?” Zhuge Yuan was worried.

“I'm fine. I'm fine.” Li Huowang didn't actually know whether he was fine or not. This was the first time he had used his cultivation to transform illusions into reality. It was not as simple as the apple at the time.

Li Huowang's words had yet to finish echoing in the air when his Dantian trembled, and his surroundings peeled away. “Oh no! My inner sight can no longer contain the primordial breath!”

The moment he blinked, he found himself in the same old hallucination.

However, he was no longer in the ward but was being wheeled around by his mother in a small courtyard boxed in by wire fences.

The people in the prison were relieved to see Li Huowang's atrophied muscles.

Li Huowang recalled what the other side looked like and bit open the restraints on him before dragging his weakened self in a certain direction. He could still remember seeing a small bush in that direction; it was tiny, so it was the perfect place to seek refuge temporarily. He was so weak that even a wild boar could kill him on the other side.

“Son? Son, what are you doing? Get up!” Sun Xiaoqin rushed over to Li Huowang and dusted the dust off of him before attempting to hold him up.

“Mom, trust me! Mom, stop!” Li Huowang exclaimed, stopping her.

Sun Xiaoqin stopped at her son's frantic shouting.

“Mom, I can't get up for now! The Surveillance Bureau is still nearby. Wait, where is my sword?”

Li Huowang looked around and saw a broom near the wall. He

took it and hugged it tightly.

He sighed in relief upon seeing the plastic broom handle. Then, he looked up and said weakly, “Mom, I can’t explain this for now, but please calm down. I will become better again soon. Trust me!”

Sun Xiaoqin cried and nodded when she saw Li Huowang holding the broom like a madman while lying on the ground.

Li Huowang also felt sad seeing his mother crying. “Mom, don’t be sad? I can’t come back for now because I’m really busy here. Please endure it. Once things have died down, I can come back again.”

“Mom isn’t sad. Just lie down there, all right? I will go and look for the doctor.”

Seeing his mother leave, Li Huowang cursed himself for making the situation even worse.

However, there was no choice. Of course, he wouldn’t make the same mistake twice. He’d be more careful in the future now that he knew that his primordial breath could become unstable by going overboard.

Li Huowang looked around carefully and sighed in relief upon seeing that no one was approaching him. “Good. At least no one is approaching me. I think I’m safe for now.”

His words had just come out of his mouth when he heard footsteps approaching from behind.

Li Huowang froze as many different thoughts flooded his mind. Then, he stood up shakily and placed the broom on his shoulder before walking out of his imaginary cover with his back facing the footsteps.

He walked forward two steps and pretended that he heard something before scoffing and asking, “What? Why did you guys come back? Do you really think that I’m too kind?”

“Huowang.” A familiar voice echoed.

Li Huowang was stunned by the soft voice, but he turned

around almost immediately and saw Yang Na looking at him with teary eyes from the other side of the wire fence.

Yang Na had gotten so thin that Li Huowang could see her bones, and she didn't come here by herself. An old man wearing round glasses was standing behind her.

Li Huowang recognized the old man, as he was Yang Na's father.

He used to get along with her father well, and Yang Na's father always teased Li Huowang whenever he came over to Yang Na's house.

But that was all in the past; he was no longer as kind to Li Huowang as before. In fact, his gaze was filled with contempt as he glared at Li Huowang.

"Do you see that? He's the Li Huowang that you've been thinking about day and night! How much longer are you going to be stuck in your delusions?"

Yang Na bit her lips and cried.

Li Huowang's heart quivered. *No, I cannot be distracted here. I'm still in danger on the other side. This is fake! How come Yang Na appeared the moment I found myself stuck in this hallucination? This is fake, and Yang Na is fake! But since there are two of them... Are they Bai Lingmiao and Li Sui?*

"Miaomiao? Li Sui? Is that you? Give me a sign if it's you!" Li Huowang shouted at the two behind the wire fence.

Seeing that, Yang Na's father dragged Yang Na away, saying, "Now do you see how hopeless he is? Let's go! Forget about Li Huowang, and don't even think about seeing him again!"

As Li Huowang stared at Yang Na's distant figure, he suddenly thought of something. *No! This side must be real, too! I'm going to make it real once I've cultivated the "Truth"! In other words, this Yang Na is real, too! I can't let her go.*

Two conflicting thoughts split Li Huowang's mind into two

parts. In the end, Li Huowang's face became bitter as he clenched his fist and smacked his head numerous times. “ *AAAAAAH!* ”

Chapter 499 - Yang Na

“What a crazy bastard!” Yang Na’s father stared at the howling Li Huowang and hated him even more. Her daughter became depressed all because of him.

He then held Yang Na’s skinny wrist and tried pulling her away forcefully.

Li Huowang looked at the two of them getting further and further away. His eyes were bloodshot when he collapsed in front of the wire fence. “They will turn back! Yes, that’s right! They will turn back!”

Li Huowang stared at their back without blinking as he tried to control the primordial breath within his body that he couldn’t detect in this world.

“Come back! Turn around! TURN AROUND!” Li Huowang pressed his face onto the wire fence, causing his face to have a checkered mark.

Yang Na suddenly shook off her father’s hands and ran back to him with tears streaking down her face. Li Huowang smiled, “*Hahaha!* It worked! I can turn this hallucination into reality!”

Li Huowang could swear that he was the happiest he had ever been in his life when he saw Yang Na crying and running toward him. His cultivation was working!

Li Huowang extended his arms through the wire fence and grabbed Yang Na’s hand; his voice was shaking with excitement as he said, “Yang Na, wait for me! Give me three years—no two! Two more years, and we can return to how we were back in school, just like the old times!”

Yang Na shook her head; her black hair was plastered to her face by her tears. Then, she suddenly felt weightless. Her father

carried her and slung her over his shoulder to separate her from Li Huowang.

“How much longer are you going to live in this delusion of yours? Can’t you see that he’s a complete lunatic? You have to forget him to be cured! He is going to destroy your life, so forget about him!”

But no matter how hard he tried to pull her away, the two did not let go of each other.

Yang Na used the last of her energy to shove her face toward the wire fence and planted a heavy kiss on Li Huowang’s cracked lips.

The moment Li Huowang felt her soft lips, he suddenly found himself transported back to the time when he first kissed her on the rooftop during that sunset.

He didn’t want to think of anything else and hoped that time would stay still for now.

Unfortunately, time would never stop ticking. Li Huowang also saw Yang Na’s hands becoming red, as she was getting pulled from two opposite directions, so he decided to let go of her.

“Nana! Go back and rest! Two years! I will come and get you in two years!” Li Huowang shouted with all his strength.

Yang Na cried out and screamed as she was carried away by her father.

Li Huowang stopped shouting only after Yang Na disappeared from his view.

He looked at where they had gone for a very long time before he gripped the wire fence and stood up.

He was about to pick up the broom again when he saw Sun Xiaoqin had brought a doctor and three nurses. They had seen what was happening.

“Five people?!” Li Huowang immediately reacted and took a step back as he held onto the broom. He took his stance and got

ready to fight, “Don’t come any closer! I will cut down if any of you take even a single step!”

Sun Xiaoqin was hurt by his words and was about to say something when the young doctor pulled her back. He whispered to her, and all of them retreated before the young doctor talked to Li Huowang.

“Li Huowang. Calm down. We won’t approach you for now. Can you tell me why are you so wary of the five of us? What about the four of us?” The young doctor waved his hands, and the three nurses retreated to the building with Sun Xiaoqin.

“Are you in danger on the other side? Are there five people there trying to hurt you? You are not the only one with the same symptoms.”

Li Huowang held his broom like a sword and glared at the doctor. “I just want peace for now. No one does anything to me. I just need some time alone.”

“Of course. We can do so. See, I’m not doing anything to you. Are you waiting to return back to the other side? It’s fine, as long as you don’t lash out or do anything extreme.”

The doctor removed the white coat as he calmed Li Huowang down. He then removed his wig like a hat, shook it off, and wore it back.

“Li Huowang, since I’ve complied with your request, could you help me then? I don’t want to care about you, but I have no choice since I still need to write the report. Do you think you can answer some of my questions? It’s so stressful trying to write a report about you that my hair is falling off.”

The doctor pushed his glasses when he looked at the silent Li Huowang. “Do you not want to say? If you don’t help me, then I won’t help you. I will go and ask for five people to come and capture you.”

“Wait!” Li Huowang looked at the doctor and tried thinking

about what was happening on the other side. *What was happening in the other world that would correspond to this situation? Is the doctor one of the Surveillance Bureau? No matter what, I should calm him down first and I would probably be safe once I get back to the other side.*

Li Huowang hesitated before asking, "What do you want?"

"Nothing. It's just that I don't know what you are thinking after seeing how attached you were to that girl just now. Do you think this side is real or the other side?"

Li Huowang's eyes were shrouded in confusion. "Fake—no real! This is real!"

The doctor nodded and approached Li Huowang slightly, "We should first put away which side is real. Instead, let's talk about why you think this side is fake."

"No!" Li Huowang shook his head and exclaimed, "This side is real! Everything here is real!"

"I know you want to get better soon, but convincing yourself alone just won't work. Let me think... Is it because there had been too many coincidences? Are you unconvinced because every time you come back here, something unrealistic would happen, such as Yang Na's sudden appearance?"

Li Huowang's mind instantly calmed down the moment he heard that. "Did you read my case report? My past doctors are the only ones who are supposed to know that."

"That's not important. I just want you to know that it's not a coincidence. You've been stuck in your hallucination for a long time now, but it doesn't mean that your mind is empty while you're on the other side."

"What do you mean?" Li Huowang frowned.

The doctor approached Li Huowang slowly as he said, "Your subconscious is still gathering information even though you're stuck in your hallucination. If you learn any information that is important to you, your subconsciousness will call you back here. Do you

understand what I mean? In other words, the coincidences that you see when you come back here are not entirely coincidences. Your inner self is craving for those events, and it calls you back here whenever you're anticipating something to happen. I did a small experiment once. I told your girlfriend to call your mother while she was feeding you. During the call, I instructed Yang Na to tell your mother that she will be coming to visit you. I was hoping that your subconsciousness would learn that she was coming. The goal of the experiment was to see if you'd 'awaken' due to your subconsciousness calling you back here.”

Chapter 500 - Sworn

The doctor was pleasantly surprised and thrilled that Li Huowang was listening to him.

“Li Huowang, it was all because your subconsciousness managed to hear it. That’s why it woke you up from your hallucination when Yang Na came here to visit. It was not a coincidence. There aren’t that many coincidences in this world. You don’t wake up to that hallucination when something happens there, but the opposite is true, and the hallucination changes according to what happens here.

“What the fuck are you talking about—” Li Huowang suddenly realized something. “Wait, you are right! That makes sense! So this world is real!”

“*Hm?*” The doctor scratched his wig in confusion. Even though the patient had accepted his explanation, he felt something amiss.

It’s fine. As long as he accepts it. the doctor thought. He looked at Li Huowang and said, “See, if this world is real, doesn’t it mean that side is fake?”

“No! That side is real too!” Li Huowang said without any hesitation. “My subconsciousness detected that I need to wake up here so that’s why the primordial breath in my body leaked out to make me come back to this world! It’s not a coincidence!”

The doctor was confused after hearing what Li Huowang was talking about. *Primordial breath? Did he change the entire script just to fit his narrative?*

“No, no, no, Li Huowang, you have to listen to me ...”

“No! Shut up! You listen to me! The primordial breath in my body might not just be part of the Heavenly Dao—it might also be a

key to two worlds, just like Zhuge Yuan! That makes sense, as your constitutions are special! Yes, that's right! Maybe when the Heavenly Dao was split apart in that crazy world, it traveled through dimensions and got stuck to my body here. That's why I can travel between worlds. This world is real, and that world is real, too! Both worlds are real!"

The doctor was bewildered by what he was hearing about the so-called "primordial breath" and "Zhuge Yuan."

Li Huowang ran up and hugged the doctor. "Thank you, doctor! Everything makes sense now! Anyway, the surroundings are blurring again, so I will have to go back now. We can talk more next time!"

Li Huowang had just said goodbye when he saw the doctor's face being flayed until there was only a flayed dog standing upright.

The bright surroundings turned dark, and Li Huowang was back in the forest once again.

He tried calming himself down. He wanted to share the exciting news, but Li Sui wouldn't understand him at all.

Calm down. I just need to continue cultivating. The other side will eventually become real. I can't give up now. Zhuge Yuan is waiting for me to save him!

Li Huowang took some deep breaths before looking at the skinned dog in front of him. "Li Sui, why are you here? Didn't I tell you to run with your mother? Where is she?"

"Dad, she's behind you."

Li Huowang turned around and immediately sighed in relief when he saw Bai Lingmiao standing there. He picked up Zhuge Yuan's spine sword and approached her. He sounded disgruntled as he asked, "Why did you come back?"

"Senior Li, you said that the Sitting Oblivion Dao is targeting us. I was afraid that you'd be swapped by them if we got separated for too long, so I came back here with Li Sui."

Li Sui chimed in, "Mother said that we can help you."

Bai Lingmiao lowered her head in regret when Li Huowang sighed and hugged her. Li Huowang stroked her white hair and said, "It's fine. As long as you are safe."

Li Huowang coughed lightly when he saw that Zhuge Yuan and everyone else were staring at him. Then, he decided to bring Bai Lingmiao and Li Sui to the carriage.

The chaotic night ended just like that. It was a dangerous night, but Li Huowang still managed to accomplish what he needed to do, so he was quite satisfied with tonight's events.

The next day at noon, Li Huowang reached a small hill next to a waterfall. He hadn't slept a wink and carried three swords on him at all times.

Li Huowang swept his gaze across the tiny yellow flowers dotting the beautiful landscape and nodded with satisfaction.

"Senior Zhuge, what do you think about this place's Fengshui? Not bad right? Let me bury your corpse here." Li Huowang took out his purple-tasseled sword to dig out a grave.

"Junior Li, no need to be in a rush," Zhuge Yuan said. He stared at his own spine, which had been fashioned into a sword on Li Huowang's back, and added, "Junior Li, since you have it now, you should use it instead of burying it."

"What? How can I do that?!" Li Huowang objected, but Zhuge Yuan stopped him with his fan.

"Junior Li, you've risked your life for me too many times now. I am grateful to you, but I'm really worried about how often you risk your life. If my body can be of help to you, I'm more than happy with you using it to ensure your survival."

Li Huowang looked down at the sword in his hands and stared at the shriveled head of Zhuge Yuan, which had become the sword's pommel. He had to admit that it was indeed a good weapon.

He would take it without hesitation if it wasn't for the fact that

it was made from the spine of his good friend.

“Junior Li, if one wants to aim for greatness, one must not be shackled down by the mundane. You are surrounded by exceptionally strong enemies. What if that weapon ends up saving you at a critical juncture? You would die without it, and I would die, too. It doesn't matter even if you bury the sword here, as I will still be here with you instead of resting in peace.”

Li Huowang made up his mind at Zhuge Yuan's remark. He placed the spine sword on his back and ran back into the carriage. Moments later, he brought out two bowls and poured water into them before biting his fingertip and dripping his blood into the bowls. Afterward, he poured one of the bowls of water infused with his blood onto the spine sword. Then, he raised the other bowl into the air toward Zhuge Yuan. “Come! Senior Zhuge, we are now sworn brothers! I, Li Huowang, swear that I will do my best to resurrect Zhuge Yuan!”

Zhugue Yuan stood solemnly and looked at Li Huowang drinking the water in the bowl before he himself made a gesture of drinking from an imaginary bowl.

While Li Huowang and Zhuge Yuan were drinking, the Sitting Oblivion Dao's illusion beside them chimed in sarcastically, “You and I have become brothers. We were not born on the same day, but we seek to die on the same day! *Ahahahahah!*~ ”

Chapter 501 - New Things

Li Huowang's expression was solemn as he gripped the spine sword in his hand. His gaze was focused on a green snake resting on a green bamboo in the distance.

He grabbed the sword tighter as he focused qi on his dantian. Then, Li Huowang slashed out toward the green bamboo.

An invisible sword qi rushed out of the blade, distorting everything it touched into various shapes and colors.

For example, the green bamboo leaves turned yellow and became riddled with insect holes, while the green snake transformed into a flower snake.

The rustling of bamboo leaves echoed incessantly as bamboo poles fell to the ground. As the sword qi gradually dissipated, the distorted scenes gradually returned to their original state.

Li Huowang began experimenting with his new weapon in the bamboo forest, transforming the entire region into a bizarre, distorted area.

After several days of training, Li Huowang gained significant mastery over the spine sword. He could now use "sword qi" to cut an object into three pieces.

In the face of an overwhelmingly powerful enemy, the "sword qi" could even become a rift in space that would transport them to Great Qi.

In essence, this "sword qi" was another layer of history, and it was not something that ordinary artifacts and supernatural powers could withstand.

Moreover, it was invisible, which made it difficult to evade. Most importantly, it could "penetrate" anything. Even someone standing in front of a barrier would find that barrier useless before

it.

An hour later, Li Huowang was breathing in ragged pants, astonished by the spine sword in his hand.

He couldn't help but acknowledge that this artifact forged with a Twisted One's corpse was indeed powerful. It surpassed any other magical artifacts he had ever possessed.

Fortunately, he had engaged in close combat with that woman before. The battle would have been challenging if she had kept her distance and had used this spine sword against him from afar.

With this sword, my strength has increased by at least forty percent. Li Huowang thought as he picked up a piece of white cloth from the ground to wrap around the sword.

"Dad, why are you wrapping it with a cloth?" Li Sui asked curiously. She was squatted nearby and had been staring at Li Huowang from the sidelines.

"I got this thing from the Surveillance Bureau, and it also has a striking appearance that will definitely attract attention. If I don't cover it up. If the Surveillance Bureau finds out that I have this thing on me, there are going to be consequences."

"What consequences?"

"You... sigh... They will hunt us down."

Li Huowang picked up some bamboo fragments from the ground and wrapped them around the sword, making it appear like a bulky and great sword from the outside.

With that, he took out several black talismans and slapped them on the sword. Of course, the talismans were useless and had no powers.

"Dad, what are these talismans for?"

"They're fake talismans I drew to deceive people. I can't even understand what I drew, so others naturally won't understand it either. Most people will keep their distance from things they don't understand."

“So, it’s all about deception?”

With everything prepared, Li Huowang returned the sword to his back and walked toward the carriage with Li Sui.

“Dad, don’t you find it burdensome carrying so many swords? How about I help you carry them?”

Li Huowang threw the Luoism’s bronze coin sword to Li Sui and said, “Help me carry this one, then.”

Li Sui wrapped seven or eight tentacles around it; the tentacles burrowed in and out of the coin holes. Clearly, Li Sui was delighted to have a new weapon. “Thank you, Dad.”

“Why thank me? I didn’t give that to you; I just want you to carry it. Give it back to me when I need it.”

“Oh..”

Li Huowang smiled wryly at Li Sui’s dejected reply. He reached into his hat and patted Li Sui’s skinless forehead.

“It’s okay; you can use it whenever I’m not using it.”

“Yay!” Li Sui exclaimed in delight.

Li Huowang shook his head helplessly in response. Despite her intimidating appearance, Li Sui was still a child. Of course, Li Huowang could be blamed partly for Li Sui’s personality and mannerisms. When Li Sui was still in his belly, he had taught her to appear naive to prevent inviting trouble upon herself. Now, it seemed to be a bad call.

“Stop playing around. Let’s go back.”

Li Huowang led Li Sui back to the carriage. The carriage wheels began to turn again, carrying them out of the forest.

Li Huowang still had no intentions of returning to Cowheart Village. He’d occasionally sneak to the relay station to inquire about the succession war.

Once someone had won, the news would be announced through the relay stations across the country. He planned to return only after everything had settled down.

Unfortunately, the succession war seemed to have come to a screeching halt, which disappointed Li Huowang.

As long as the emperor didn't ascend the throne and those royal family members didn't die cleanly, he would not have a peaceful life.

This situation made Li Huowang a bit annoyed. Under such fearful circumstances, it wasn't easy for him to find somewhere quiet to cultivate.

"Stop pushing the horse. Let it rest. It doesn't matter whether it runs faster or slower." Li Huowang said to Li Sui, who was driving the carriage.

Then, he turned to Bai Lingmiao, who was holding a book, and asked, "Can you still see what's written in the book?"

Although Bai Lingmiao's eyes still looked a bit pinkish, they were mostly white. At first impression, she actually appeared to be blind.

"Senior Li, I can see," Bai Lingmiao said. She stretched her slender fingers to touch the characters on the page. "Although I can't see with my eyes anymore, I can read by feeling the differences in the parts stained by ink."

"What are you reading?" Li Huowang asked again.

"Some spirit possession techniques. I can no longer perform as a Shaman, so I've become useless. I want to learn something to protect myself, as I don't want to be a burden."

"Everything from the White Lotus Sect is no good. Don't worry; everything is under my control. I can protect you."

Strands of white hair swayed gently on Bai Lingmiao's face as she shook her head. "Senior Li, I can't always rely on you. There will definitely be times that you're away. You're right; everything from the White Lotus Sect is bad, but it's better than nothing."

Li Huowang was stunned. Moments later, he realized that Bai Lingmiao's personality had changed slightly, and she seemed to

have become more courageous than before.

“Hold on, don't even attempt to learn that. I suddenly remembered that I have something particularly suitable for you,” Li Huowang said, pulling back the curtain and rummaging through Li Sui's abdomen.

Soon, Li Huowang found the book of talismans he had originally given to Li Sui.

“Dad, that's mine,” Li Sui said with a hint of grievance.

“I know it's yours. What's wrong with letting your mother borrow it to learn?”

Li Huowang placed the book in Bai Lingmiao's hands and said, “Take your time learning what's inside of this book. These talismans are useful both in offense and defense. They also can be used for divination.

“Also, you're different from us. You can use these things without any worries. Your eyes are technically blind, so the side-effects of these talismans are ineffective against you.”

Chapter 502 - Vision

“Really? That’s great!”

Bai Lingmiao carefully took it over and curiously touched the ink stains on it with her fingertips.

Just as Li Huowang was about to help her understand some of the difficult parts, Bai Lingmiao’s eyes widened suddenly, and she said, “Senior Li, there are noises coming from the east. It seems like something is approaching.”

Li Huowang glanced at her, and then he pulled back the curtains before walking out.

Li Huowang walked deeper into the forest and soon saw where the noises were coming from; they were from two carriages moving in a hurry.

They seemed to be trying to drive the carriages into the forest to shake off something.

They were obviously overdoing it. Soon, the carriages were forced to stop by the bushes and tree branches.

Their pursuers caught up to them in no time, and they were a group of thin men in ragged clothing.

They were not quite bandits, and Li Huowang thought they looked more like refugees fleeing for their lives. *Wait a minute... could these people all be part of the Sitting Oblivion Dao, and they've come here to put on a show for me?*

Li Huowang quietly pondered over the question. Even if they weren’t from the Sitting Oblivion Dao, they could be pawns deployed by the Shai Zi. Li Huowang had to be cautious; they were humans, after all.

However, when Li Huowang saw the haggard bandits pulling crying women and even little girls out of the carriages, he finally

decided to take action.

But of course, Li Huowang did not want to fall into a trap, so he decided not to make a move personally.

“Li Sui!” Li Huowang exclaimed.

Li Sui was standing nearby. She took off her hat and revealed her skinless dog face. Li Sui then gripped the bronze coin sword with her tentacles and slashed one of her tentacles in one quick move. Then, she used the oozing black slime to draw chaotic strokes on the turmeric paper.

“Profound understanding intermingles; the five energies surge; golden light speeds through and covers the altar; act swiftly according to the command!”

Li Sui raised the bronze coin sword and thrust it toward the drawn talisman. Her tentacled figure then emerged from the oversized raincoat. She resembled a spider with countless legs as she rushed toward the distant people.

Both the bandits and the victims were terrified at Li Sui’s appearance, and they scattered in all directions.

Li Sui chased after them excitedly, as this was her first ever “fight,” while Li Huowang stared quietly from behind. He stared closely at the victims and bandits; he observed the subtle changes in their expressions and soon came to a conclusion.

They shouldn’t be members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. If they were just ordinary mahjong tiles, I would easily detect them.

Li Sui returned half an hour later and said, “Dad, they said they’re not bad people, and they asked me not to kill them.

“Apparently, a so-called ‘Dharma Sect’ had forced them out of their homes, rendering them homeless. They don’t believe in any gods, so they came out to rob money to buy food.”

Li Huowang handed over the raincoat and hat in his hands. *Forced by a so-called ‘Dharma Sect’? How come they’re causing such a commotion?*

Li Huowang glanced at Li Sui and advised, “You can’t fully believe what they say. Perhaps they were forced into crime, but judging from their actions earlier, they don’t seem to be *just* after money.”

Li Huowang took this opportunity to explain what human nature was like, so Li Sui wouldn’t be deceived in the future.

Li Huowang and Li Sui returned to the carriage, where they saw Bai Lingmiao sitting quietly with a book in hand.

“Aren’t you going to ask what happened over there?” Li Huowang sat down beside her.

“No need, I heard everything from here,” Bai Lingmiao’s reply made Li Huowang nod in understanding. Her senses had become even keener than his senses, which was something he hadn’t anticipated at all.

“Let’s move on. It was just a small matter, and the Sitting Oblivion Dao wasn’t involved. If Shai Zi was to make a move, it’d be on a greater scale than this.”

The carriage moved forward slowly until night shrouded the world.

They set up a bonfire and ate some soft dry rations. Li Huowang took advantage of this free time to practice cultivation.

By the time he was done, it was almost daybreak.

Li Huowang leaned against Bai Lingmiao’s legs and closed his eyes. He could barely cultivate during the quiet night, and he’d usually rest on the carriage during the day.

It wasn’t that he couldn’t cultivate on the carriage, but his primordial breath might end up distorting the carriage, transforming Li Sui and Miaomiao into something unrecognizable.

As the carriage swayed gently, Li Huowang gradually fell into dreamland.

Dazed, Li Huowang felt like he was back in primary school taking an exam. His mind was completely blank, and he could not

remember anything.

“Huowang... Huowang!” Yang Na was beside him and was winking at him. She pushed her completed paper toward him.

Li Huowang cupped his fist and showed his appreciation before getting ready to copy her answers.

As the tip of the pen touched the blank paper, ripples appeared on the paper, and his own reflection appeared in the ripples.

It started as a blurry black-and-white image, and then it gradually became a clear and colored image.

The sound of pouring rain echoed as heavy raindrops struck the reflection, shattering it into pieces.

Li Huowang was completely soaked, and he leaned over the puddle to shield it from the rain.

As the ripples on the water's surface disappeared, Li Huowang looked at his own reflection and smiled with satisfaction.

“Li Huowang.” A voice echoed from the reflection.

Li Huowang nodded and responded, “Yes, I’m here.”

“Li Huowang.”

“Yes, I’m here.”

“Li Huowang.”

“I’m here!”

“Li Huowang.”

“I’m here!!” Li Huowang roared, and the entire world suddenly became restless; anxious shadowy figures rushed toward him.

They moved quickly, but they couldn't quite catch up to him. He seemed to be stuck in this eternal loop of fear and impatience.

“Stop calling out to me! I’m here!” Li Huowang felt like he was going crazy. He clasped his hands together and smashed the reflection.

The sound of breaking glass echoed, and Li Huowang found himself falling endlessly toward somewhere along with the innumerable glass fragments.

The feeling of weightlessness made Li Huowang curl up instinctively like a baby. He waited quietly for the impact.

Just then, a massive hand reached down from above and grabbed Li Huowang.

When Li Huowang opened his eyes, he found himself in an inverted world. He found himself lying on a cliff while holding someone's hand. It was Zhuge Yuan's hand.

"Brother Li! Help me!" Zhuge Yuan roared, seemingly in extreme agony.

"Don't let go! Don't ever let go! I'll pull you up right now!" Li Huowang exclaimed. He held on tightly with both hands and exerted all his strength.

However, he soon despaired as Zhuge Yuan became heavier and heavier.

Finally, Li Huowang could no longer hold on; Zhuge Yuan fell toward the endless abyss down below.

"Brother Li! Help me! I-It's so painful!"

"Ah!" Li Huowang exclaimed and sat right up. Then, he started gasping for air.

After a while, he heard noises outside the carriage. The rain was here.

Chapter 503 - Dream

“Senior Li? Senior Li?”

Bai Lingmiao called out softly. Before her, Li Huowang was absent-mindedly staring at the soup that had cooled for quite a while.

“Senior Li, what’s wrong?” Bai Lingmiao gently touched his hand, which caused Li Huowang to abruptly snap out of his daze.

“Nothing much. I’m just thinking about the dream from yesterday,” Li Huowang handed the bowl and chopsticks over to her.

“That bad dream? It’s okay; my mother said that dreams are inverse of the truth,” Bai Lingmiao took the bowl and chopsticks, then headed towards the riverbank.

Inverse? Li Huowang stared at Zhuge Yuan in the distance silently.

When Bai Lingmiao returned with the cleaned utensils, Li Huowang shook his head, “Forget it; it’s just a dream after all. Maybe it’s just my mind wandering at night.”

Just as he was about to leave, Li Huowang suddenly noticed someone missing, “Miaomiao, where’s Li Sui?”

“She’s playing in the water not too far away.”

Li Huowang shook his head helplessly and remarked, “She really is just like a child.”

Then, he walked toward the river to find Li Sui.

Li Huowang saw Li Sui’s oversized raincoat, but he didn’t see her playing in the water. Instead, Li Sui was sprawled out by the river like a dog, staring at a few wriggling carps before her.

“You’ve captured those fish, so why are you staring at them instead of eating them?” Li Huowang asked.

“I’ve eaten my share. This is Second Mom’s share. I’m waiting for her,” Li Sui said.

Li Sui's words made Li Huowang retract his hand, which was about to pat her head.

Li Huowang looked at Li Sui with a complex expression. Had she yet to realize that the Second Deity was no more?

Just then, there was movement in the bushes to the left, which made Li Sui perk up. A wild gray rabbit dashed out, prompting Li Sui to lower her head dejectedly, resting it on her crossed forelimbs.

“Li Sui, stop waiting for her. Second Mom is gone and won’t come back.”

For the first time ever, Li Sui didn't believe Li Huowang’s words. “Second Mom will definitely come back. She told me that she would come back .”

“Li Sui!”

Li Huowang’s reprimand made Li Sui feel wronged. “Why won’t you let me wait for Second Mom? She clearly said she would come back.”

Li Huowang sighed deeply, and then he reached out to pick her up from the ground. He then proceeded to stroke her wriggling tentacles. “It’s all over, and we need to move on.”

Just as he said that, Li Huowang heard familiar chewing noises behind him.

“Second Mom!” Li Sui broke free from Li Huowang’s embrace and rushed forward in delight. “I knew you would come back!”

When Li Huowang turned around, he was shocked to see the Second Deity with a red veil. She was picking up the wriggling carps and were stuffing them into her red veil.

This... this is impossible! Li Huowang rushed over in disbelief and lifted the Second Deity’s red veil.

“ Ah! ” Li Huowang was shocked by what he saw, and he suddenly found himself sitting and panting in the carriage while

covered in a layer of cold sweat.

Bai Lingmiao took out a white handkerchief and gently wiped away the cold sweat from his forehead, "Senior Li, you've been having bad dreams over these past few days."

Li Huowang didn't answer. He cast a strange gaze at her before looking around.

He then decisively pulled out a dagger from his sleeve and stabbed it into his left forearm.

The piercing pain made Li Huowang sigh in relief. That was a dream just now, and it wasn't real.

"Ah! Senior Li, what are you doing!" Bai Lingmiao knelt down before Li Huowang, and she frantically looked for a needle and thread to suture the wound.

"It's nothing, I'm fine. I just need to... sober up!" Li Huowang exclaimed, twisting the hand holding the dagger.

"Senior Li, why don't you stop cultivating in such a ravenous way? There's no rush now anyway."

"No! I only have two years, and I must seize every moment! It has nothing to do with my cultivation! I think there's something wrong with the dream itself!"

Li Huowang's expression turned serious. *Could it be Shai Zi? I've been avoiding other people so they can see no gaps in reality. Does that mean they've decided to try and deceive me through my dreams?*

It was just speculation, but Li Huowang had to be cautious. Against a Shai Zi, it was never wrong to be vigilant.

"Miaomiao, Li Sui, have you guys had any dreams these days?" Li Huowang asked the two of them.

"Senior Li, I haven't."

"Dad, what's a dream?"

Li Huowang was slightly relieved. At least, he was the only one suffering.

Li Huowang pulled open the curtains. Then, he turned to the

misty forest and roared, "Shai Zi! Stop fooling around! I can't help you with this! Go find someone else!"

His voice echoed pervaded the woods. Apart from startling a few birds, there seemed to be no other response. Li Huowang closed the curtains and turned to Bai Lingmiao, who was still suturing his wound and said, "Let's stop traveling and find a place to settle down instead. We'll stay there for a year or so, and then we'll come back. We have to keep taking it slow!"

The carriage no longer wandered aimlessly on the road, as they headed towards the distant mountains.

Upon arriving at the foot of the mountain, Li Huowang looked around for a sturdy rock wall and picked up his spine sword.

Li Huowang slashed out, carving open a cavity in the cliff. The rocks were sent directly to the Great Qi. After a while, a clean and tidy cave appeared before Li Huowang.

With the carriage serving as the cave's door, the cave dimmed and became silent.

A bonfire was soon made, and it cast an orange light on the rock walls, making the cave feel much warmer.

After eating fragrant buns for dinner, it was time for Li Huowang to cultivate again. He wasn't afraid of Shai Zi while he was cultivating. Even he himself dared not approach a Strayed One that was cultivating the "Truth."

Li Huowang stood guard at the entrance of the cave, and he sat down cross-legged with closed eyes. As he took a deep breath, he used the so-called "inner sight" from his eyes to drag the primordial breath in his body toward the second chakra point in his abdomen.

Li Huowang gradually entered a state of forgetfulness. He forgot about the rain, forgot about Shai Zi, and forgot about everything. In his mind, there were only two things: one was the quiet and bound primordial breath, while the other was his empty Sacral Chakra.

Li Huowang cultivated quietly, seemingly unaware of the ticking time. Just then, his primordial breath seemed to have been attracted by something, and it began to move much faster within him.

When his primordial breath collided with the Sacral Chakra, it shrouded it and started orbiting it at a constant rate.

The faint yellow light of the primordial breath gradually seeped into the chakra point, and six lotus petals with the same color appeared intermittently around the Sacral Chakra point.

Chapter 504 - Zhuge

Success!

Li Huowang excitedly opened his eyes. He was suspended in mid-air, and then he suddenly plummeted toward the unrecognizable ground down below.

As the ground drew nearer, Li Huowang closed his eyes abruptly. *I'm falling into a body of water. Good thing I know how to swim!*

Splash!

Li Huowang crashed into the water, and the impact propelled water into his mouth.

Li Huowang swam amidst the cold water, and when he opened his eyes again, he discovered that he had already returned to the shore. He turned around and looked at the hard rocks behind him, which caused ripples in the water. He couldn't help but clench his fists in excitement. *My ability to cultivate the "Truth" is getting stronger. At this rate, the world over there will become—No! That world is real! That world is real! I'm cultivating the 'Truth' now to resurrect Zhuge Yuan!*

With that thought in mind, Li Huowang turned toward Zhuge Yuan in the distance and shouted, "Brother Zhuge, come over here!"

When he saw Zhuge Yuan standing before him again, Li Huowang gritted his teeth and reached out a trembling hand to pat his shoulder. *Zhugue Yuan is still alive! Everything that happened in Shangjing was fake! It was all an illusion!*

This time, Li Huowang didn't pass through him like usual. Instead, he could make contact with Zhuge Yuan.

The touch felt so realistic as well.

However, it only lasted for a few breaths. After a while, Li

Huowang's face distorted in pain, and he had to let go of Zhuge Yuan's shoulder.

"Dan Yangzi could easily become a half-Immortal using the primordial breath in my body. Why is it so troublesome when I'm the one using it?" Li Huowang pinched his temple lightly to assuage the splitting headache.

"Brother Li, that is natural. The primordial breath you've unintentionally borrowed before was like a fire. Anyone can start a fire, but the bigger the fire, the harder it is to control. The fire you have at the moment is tiny, but it is a fire that truly belongs to you. You have complete control over lighting or extinguishing it or using it for various purposes."

Li Huowang felt much calmer. He didn't need to rush, as the primordial breath in his body was still there.

Although Zhuge Yuan's body only lasted a short time, he truly had a physical body. When he completely mastered the power within him, he would be able to resurrect Zhuge Yuan, just like how Dan Yangzi became an immortal back then.

"I... I can't continue. Brother Zhuge, I need to rest for a while, or else this primordial breath might become unstable again," Li Huowang swayed unsteadily towards the cave entrance. He fell asleep without even saying a word to Bai Lingmiao.

When Li Huowang opened his eyes again, there were crisp chirping sounds outside, which suggested that the rain had stopped. The sunlight streaming into the cave through the cracks proved it was good weather.

"Brother Li, you seem to have slept well without any nightmares this time. Is everything okay now?" Bai Lingmiao scooped up half a bowl of porridge with wild vegetables from the iron pot hanging over the campfire. She brought it over with joy on her face.

"It's just one day and doesn't prove anything. Let's see how it

goes later,” Li Huowang picked up the porridge and began to eat ravenously, as he was very hungry at the moment.

After finishing a bowl, Bai Lingmiao scooped up more porridge while Li Huowang continued, “Let’s see how it goes later. If Shai Zi has any more tricks, I’ll have to come up with a plan to stay awake completely.”

“Would not sleeping at all be okay?” Bai Lingmiao served another bowl of porridge.

“Hehe. In this crazy world, even the dead can come back to life. What difference does it make if I don’t sleep? Besides, if Shai Zi has any more tricks up his sleeves, I’ll just have to deal with them then.”

“He better not push me too far. If he does, I’ll report him directly to the Surveillance Bureau!”

Li Huowang stared at Bai Lingmiao, where several white hairs were growing on the left side of her delicate face.

Li Huowang’s expression froze, and he immediately stabbed a dagger into his thigh, but there was no pain.

Li Huowang glared coldly at Bai Lingmiao. “Boss Shai Zi, three times is enough. Aren’t you going a bit too far?”

Bai Lingmiao’s face split open from the white hair, revealing a constantly morphing dice head. “Hong Zhong, it’s a troublesome matter. Since we are fellow disciples, I’ll help you out. But don’t forget that you owe me a favor, and you have to repay it.”

“All right...” Li Huowang was filled with despair and desolation as he nodded in agreement. He himself didn’t understand why he felt so hopeless and desperate.

“Why did you ask for my help?”

“Because... you’re Shai Zi... Even if you tell me the truth, I won’t believe it in the future..”

Li Huowang reached out and pressed his handprint on the contract in Shai Zi’s hand. Just then, he recalled something. This

had already happened, and some of his memories had been altered!

To make matters worse, Li Huowang's body itself was resisting his efforts to recall those memories!

"No... no... no!! Don't follow Shai Zi's path! He's deceiving me! It's all fake!"

The scenery before Li Huowang peeled away. A thin, bony hand reached out and grabbed Li Huowang. He was desperately trying to pull himself up from the edge of the cliff.

"Brother Li! Help me! Help me undo it! I'm really... about to suffocate!" It was still Zhuge Yuan speaking, with his eyes filled with longing and pleading. "I don't want to disturb you in your dreams, but you're the only one now who can help me! Help me undo it! Undo the seal!"

It's fake! It's all fake!! Li Huowang swung his arms frantically until he finally broke free from Zhuge Yuan's control and fell into the abyss.

Beneath the abyss was a turbulent sea where yin and yang met...

That was where the Doulao—the authority behind truth and falsehood—resided. It looked at Li Huowang with the Sacred Mountain Ghost's Eye that it had seized from the Surveillance Bureau.

"Drink!" Li Huowang sat up abruptly as if he had been doused with cold water. He immediately pulled out his dagger and stabbed it into his left hand again.

The piercing pain made Li Huowang feel a little safer. Only pain could dispel this uncertainty that seemed both real and illusory.

When Li Huowang regained his senses and looked around, he realized he was lying in the cave again, which was in a very messy state. Bai Lingmiao and Li Sui were looking at him in astonishment. The spine sword had been unbound from the cloth wrapping and

lay before him.

“Senior Li, is that person trying to manipulate your dreams again? Was it that person controlling your body and doing those strange things?” Bai Lingmiao’s eyes were filled with deep concern.

“Strange things? What strange things? What did I just do?” Li Huowang hurriedly asked.

“Brother Li, you were struggling on the ground just now, and pulled out that bone sword and untied the cloth. It was as if you wanted to remove the purple talisman from the small head,” Zhuge Yuan beside him spoke up.

Li Huowang looked at the spine sword on the ground, then at Zhuge Yuan’s shrunken head on the sword hilt and the purple talisman on his forehead.

Talisman? Zhuge Yuan asked me to remove it just now... the talisman? Li Huowang looked up at Zhuge Yuan beside them, and he felt a chill run down his spine.

Could it be... Li Huowang reached out a trembling hand to remove the talisman, and Zhuge Yuan’s shrunken head swayed and struggled. At the same time, blood, bones, and flesh began to grow rapidly on the spine sword.

The deformed and incomplete organs hung on the spine like fruits, and peach talismans were interspersed among them. “Ah... finally... Brother Li, thank you so much.”

When Li Huowang heard that, Zhuge Yuan's illusion next to him flickered, seemingly on the verge of disappearing.

Chapter 505 - Shai Zi

This... This is impossible!! Li Huowang looked at Zhuge Yuan before him and retreated in utter shock.

The spine sword from before had now completely transformed. Chaotic flesh and deformed organs intertwined from the spine, growing out like plants.

It hadn't fully grown into a person. It had become a hazy amalgamation of flesh and blood with interspersed organs. It had stopped growing and had become something that seemed more like a monster than a human.

Although this appearance was terrifying, Li Huowang was absolutely certain that this thing was alive! Zhuge Yuan was still alive!

"How come you're still alive? You were clearly dead! I strangled you with my own hands! Your soul was already trapped in my illusions!"

The half-formed Zhuge Yuan that had grown from the spine sword decisively dug out his skeleton left hand from the flesh and used his bony fingers to flick the bloody hair sticking to his temple.

"Brother Li, what are you saying? I am a Twisted One. Even if I have died, the three souls, ten emotions, and eight sufferings should belong to my old self. How could you take them away?"

Li Huowang staggered at that remark, and his face turned extremely pale. He found it difficult to stand steadily. "So... so they were nothing at all?"

As these words came out of Li Huowang's mouth, memories of past events began to flash in his mind.

Li Huowang looked through his memories in a daze. When he broke free from the Immortal family, the Second Deity didn't

sacrifice himself. Instead, he came up with a compromise to get the best of both worlds.

And that was to kill the Second Deity with his own hands, turning her into his illusion like Zhuge Yuan!

He had decided to turn them into reality once he had reached the pinnacle of cultivation.

The Second Deity had agreed, and she was even smiling in glee as he killed her!

“Boss Shai Zi, I've just realized that my illusions are fake... Truly and completely fake... The Second Deity cannot be alive; she was just a figment of my imagination...” Li Huowang muttered in a daze as he sat behind the messy food bar.

“So why have you come here to ask for my help? Hong Zhong, you've already killed her. I can't do anything. I'm not a deity,” the chubby Shai Zi said helplessly as he fried dough sticks.

“I'm not asking you to resurrect her; I just want you to help hide the memories I've created. Mix truth with lies, which is what you're good at. Please... I really... I really can't face the illusion of the Second Deity, whom I killed with my own hands.”

“She's obviously fake! But how come she's so real? I can't take it... I really can't take it anymore!”

“Ah, okay then. Since we're fellow disciples, I'll help you this time. But you owe me a big favor this time. You must remember to repay it.”

The chubby Shai Zi's words faded away, and Li Huowang snapped back to reality. He clenched his fists, and his expression turned fierce as he roared, “No! This is impossible! It's all fake!”

“Senior Li, what's wrong with you? Pull yourself together,” Bai Lingmiao reached out to support Li Huowang with tears in her eyes.

Li Huowang felt as if he had caught a lifeline when he saw Bai Lingmiao. He grabbed her slender arm and shook it forcefully.

“Miaomiao! You were there, too, right?!” Li Huowang

exclaimed, "Tell me! How did the Second Deity leave back then?! Didn't I strangle her?"

"Senior Li, what are you talking about? Didn't the Second Deity disappear with the Immortal family? What's going on?"

Li Huowang smiled at that remark. *Yes, it's all fake!* Even if there was something strange with his memories, how could there be something strange with Bai Lingmiao's memories, too?

Just then, Bai Lingmiao's figure rapidly became transparent.

Li Huowang was stunned, but he recovered quickly and roared, "Miaomiao!"

Li Huowang tried to embrace her, but she disappeared like an illusion. He went straight through her.

"Senior Li, what's happening to me..." Bai Lingmiao looked down at her transparent body in bewilderment before vanishing completely.

"Miaomiao!"

"Hong Zhong, don't blame me for that. You didn't return the favor, so I can no longer help you," the chubby Shai Zi said, chuckling as he walked over to Li Huowang. He patted Li Huowang's shoulder with his greasy hand and said nothing.

"Where's Miaomiao? Where did you take Bai Lingmiao?!" Li Huowang stared at Shai Zi with bloodshot eyes as if he wanted to devour the latter alive.

"Hey, you didn't return the favor. As for your woman, I don't know how you created a real one from thin air after you lost her," Shai Zi said, waving his hands in dismissal.

"And did you not hear what I said? If you don't cultivate 'Lies' when you cultivate 'Truth,' you will become a demon. Imagine seeing a living person in front of you; how would you deduce whether they're real or fake? Think about it. Of course, it's a small matter to me. Hehehe~ Help me put that little emperor on the throne, and I'll help you find that woman."

“This is all your fault! This is all your fault!” Li Huowang hysterically reached behind his back and viciously slammed the Profound Records wrapped in flesh on the ground.

Then, he grabbed two barbed iron hooks and stabbed his own abdomen! The barbed iron hooks dragged out Li Huowang's intestines, and he thrust them toward the Profound Records on the ground. The next moment, both heaven and earth seemed to undergo earth-shaking changes, as the world itself changed colors. Everyone's five senses converged on Li Huowang's location.

“Oh dear, what are you doing? What are you trying to do? Trying to rebel against your own boss with the Cang-Qiang Ascension?” Shai Zi retreated without any fear.

Li Huowang felt a gaze sharper and clearer than ever before falling upon him, and he came to a gradual halt upon sensing that gaze.

Once the Profound Records on the floor transformed into a piece of human skin, the gaze from Ba-Hui up above vanished as well.

Li Huowang knelt on the ground, gasping for air. The extreme pain throughout gradually dissipated.

The Cang-Qiang Ascension had no effect on the Shai Zi before him, as the Shai Zi's true self wasn't here. The chubby man was just a pawn of that Shai Zi.

Now that Miaomiao was in his hands, he absolutely couldn't act impulsively if he wanted to save her!

The opponent had good cards to play, while he had no cards in hand. Any reckless moves would only worsen the situation, especially when playing against Shai Zi.

Li Huowang gritted his teeth as he endured the pain. He tremblingly pushed the hooked large and small intestines back into his abdomen.

“Shai Zi! Didn't you tell me to return to Shangjing? Fine! I'll

assist Ji Lin in ascending the throne! And you shall return Bai Lingmiao to me with not a single hair harmed!”

“Help Ji Lin ascend for me, and then I’ll help you find your white-haired girl. But... Hong Zhong, let me make this clear—I didn’t tie her up. We’re practitioners of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. If we were to do something as foolish as kidnapping, it would bring shame to our ancestors!”

Li Huowang sneered inwardly. He would never believe a Shai Zi’s words. Li Huowang was also convinced that everything had been a part of the Shai Zi’s trap!

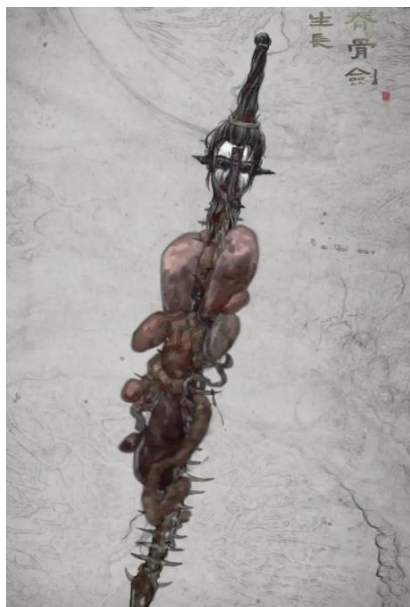
Even meeting the Surveillance Bureau member wielding the spine sword had to be a part of the trap as well. It was all to deceive Li Huowang into believing that he owed Shai Zi a favor!

No! Everything could have started way earlier as well! Perhaps Li Huowang was also at fault when he stumbled upon Ji Lin being deceived during the Double Third Festival!

This was a Shai Zi’s methods—the methods of the Sitting Oblivion Dao!

Translator's Thoughts

Yeah not quite a good sight to see it growing flesh either. Credits to 格子的乱七八糟on douyin!



Chapter 506 - Truth Or Lies?

“Come now. Yikes! Be careful. Slowly stuff it back, or your intestines will entwine.” Shai Zi carefully helped Li Huowang up and sat him on the carriage. He then started rummaging around in the carriage. “Hong Zhong, where is the Golden Wound medication? I can’t seem to find it.”

Li Huowang stared at Hong Zhong’s back and was puzzled by what was happening.

“Ah! Found it!” Shai Zi took out a bag of Golden Wound medication and sprinkled some on Li Huowang’s wound. He clapped his hands in satisfaction once he was done treating Li Huowang. “You’re heavily injured. Why don’t you rest? I will go boil some bird nests and make you a serving of donkey hide gelatin congee .”

“Why do I need to help Ji Lin succeed to the throne? Is he a Sitting Oblivion Dao member?” Li Huowang asked, trying to piece together the puzzle pieces to determine Shai Zi’s goal.

“You’re thinking too much. How could the imperial family be part of the Sitting Oblivion Dao? They are the people chosen by the gods themselves. Don’t worry about the ‘why’ first. You just need to help him ascend to the throne, and your job is done. Of course, you can find me if you want in on the next steps as well after that. Don’t worry; there are people helping us in the palace.” Shai Zi chuckled and patted Li Huowang’s shoulder. “Do you not need me to take care of you? Then I will leave first. Once you’ve recovered, you need to make haste and go back to Shangjing. There are many people scrambling to get official positions, and everything is in

chaos.”

Shai Zi covered Li Huowang’s body with a thin blanket before leaving.

Li Huowang stared in the direction where Shai Zi had disappeared before smashing the wooden floor of the carriage with his right fist.

Li Huowang understood them the most. He was afraid that even if he helped Ji Lin succeed to the throne, Shai Zi still wouldn’t give Miaomiao back to him. It would be an insult for a trickster to trust someone blindly!

Shai Zi would definitely use Bai Lingmiao as a hostage and squeeze out every single drop of value Li Huowang had to offer!

However, he was already on the web, so he had no choice but to follow the path that Shai Zi had laid out for him. Of course, Li Huowang swore to find a way to break out of Shai Zi’s intricate plan once he learned of the latter’s goal.

He definitely wouldn’t be able to do so alone, so he needed to find a way to recruit someone to help him.

He might be able to find a way through Ji Lin or maybe through the Surveillance Bureau.

It was a faint hope, but he had no choice because the enemy had the upper hand here, and worst, his enemy was Shai Zi!

The pressure on his heart was so huge that he could barely breathe.

But he did not give up. Instead, his hatred fueled his heart. He needed to save Bai Lingmiao!

“Hong Zhong, do you think Shai Zi is telling the truth? You might’ve really owed him a favor last time. Bai Lingmiao really did suddenly disappear, and I don’t think he used the technique of the Sitting Oblivion Dao.”

The fake Hong Zhong illusion suddenly chimed in.

“You are not qualified to trick me with Shai Zi!”

Li Huowang struggled to stand up before he started keeping the stuff within the cave.

“Sure, I might not have the qualifications to trick you, but you’ve seen yourself that the sword was alive and still on the ground. I don’t think it’s possible that you would have two Zhuge Yuans.”

Li Huowang looked at the spine sword covered in flesh on the ground. Zhuge Yuan’s head on the pommel of the sword also looked at Li Huowang at the same time.

“Junior Li, long time no see. Don’t worry, even though my body is destroyed to this point, I can still help you with the trouble with Shai Zi.”

“No, you won’t. You’ve been deceived by Shai Zi, too. You think you are Zhuge Yuan, but you’re not Zhuge Yuan. Zhuge Yuan is right next to me. The Sitting Oblivion Dao can trick themselves into thinking like they’re someone else. I’ve seen enough. I’ve met someone who managed to trick themselves into thinking that they were Li Huowang, but they were not.”

Li Huowang hugged his bloody abdomen before picking up the purple talisman on the ground.

Zhugue Yuan’s face changed when he saw Li Huowang approaching him with the purple talisman.

“Junior Li, what’s wrong with you?! Since when did you have a Zhuge Yuan beside you? That Zhuge Yuan is just an illusion! I’m different from the Sitting Oblivion Dao on Xing Island!”

“Don’t try to trick me like Shai Zi did! The illusions are real because they know things that I don’t know! I’m a Strayed One, so the souls of those I had killed will get attached to me! The Second Deity did not become my illusion, so I didn’t murder her! I also don’t owe Shai Zi any favors. He had kidnapped her! Everything is fake and is part of his trap! More importantly, your behavior is different from the Zhuge Yuan I’m familiar with!” Li Huowang

roared, and the illusions flickered.

Zhuge Yuan's eyes widened in shock as Li Huowang placed the purple talisman on his forehead. Zhuge Yuan's head quickly shrank to the size of a fist.

Even though his head had shrunk, the meat and organs on the sword didn't. They hung on the spine sword like grapes.

The fake Hong Zhong illusion wanted to say something but Zhuge Yuan's illusion stopped him. "Don't worry. If the talisman can be placed onto the sword, it can be removed as well. Let me think about something first."

"Hoh. What are you thinking?"

Zhuge Yuan opened his fan. "Let me think whether I'm fake, or the sword is fake, or whether both of us are fake while the real Zhuge Yuan has returned back to the Three Ancient Ones."

Li Huowang sighed when he saw the spine sword not moving anymore. He picked up the cloth on the floor and slowly wrapped the sword.

The cloth was dyed red due to the blood. Since it grew organs and flesh on it, the cloth could not cover the sword completely. There were bones, flesh, and even some hair squeezed out from the gaps of the cloth.

But Li Huowang didn't care. He only needed to cover the sword enough that people wouldn't recognize what it was.

Now that the spine sword had grown into this form, he was certain that even the purple-lipped woman wouldn't be able to recognize it.

"Dad, let me help you." Li Sui walked over and carried the misshapen sword into the carriage before helping the injured Li Huowang into the carriage.

"Dad, where are we going?"

"Shangjing!"

Li Huowang commanded the carriage to move forward. The

wheels rolled and they left the ravaged mountain.

They had just left when a massive foot stepped on the marking of the wheels. It was Shai Zi!

“Hehehe~ It’s so fun to trick Strayed Ones.”

Chapter 507 - Journey

“Dense fragrances call upon the universe; send the incense to the Heavenly Gates. Golden crows soar across the clouds, and the jade rabbits glimmer like the kaleidoscope~”

Lu Zhuangyuan was smoking his pipe while standing in the carriage when he heard a familiar chanting. He turned around and saw his youngest son, Lu Xiucan, practicing a technique near the campfire. Lu Xiucan was holding an incense stick with his butt up while chanting toward a drawing.

“ *Hmph!* If only you were as filial to me as you are with your training,” Lu Zhuangyuan said.

However, Lu Xiucan ignored Lu Zhuangyuan as he continued chanting.

“May the constellations shine and the rainbow clouds gather. The purple palace reveals the sacred castle, and the goddesses invite the immortals. Welcome us after the long journey with flying clouds and horses. Accept our humble greetings~”

Lu Xiucan chanted three times in delight before stabbing the incense sticks into the ground.

He prayed three times to the drawing before putting it away. Puppy had been lying on the ground beside him out of boredom.

“Xiucan, what are you chanting all day? We were woken up by you so early in the morning. I've never seen you chant so much even though you've been cultivating the techniques of the White Lotus Sect.”

Lu Xiucan scoffed at him. “I’ve finished cultivating the First Words. I’m starting on the Second Drawing, so it’s not strange that the requirements are different. Even though you can be proud of the items that your master has given you, that’s all you’d amount to in

your life. You cannot improve by relying on external tools. Unlike you, I'm becoming stronger every day, and I will surpass you soon!"

Puppy waved his hands to dismiss Lu Xiucan before heading back to sleep.

“ Yiyi~ Ah~ Ah~ ”

The sound of Lu Zhuangyuan's disciples practicing their vocals first thing in the morning irritated Puppy a lot. He buried his head into the pillow to try and sleep.

However, there was no way he could sleep in such conditions. He stood up in frustration and walked toward the stream to wash up.

The world was slowly warming up, but the water in the stream was still cold, so it felt good to stand in it.

When Puppy went back to the campfire, Luo Juanhua had finished making breakfast. Today's meal was wild vegetable soup with noodles and dried radishes.

Puppy ate the dried radishes and drank the soup before shaking his head. "It's not as good as Xiaohai's meal."

Luo Juanhua was not someone who'd coddle Puppy; she already knew Puppy's position in the village, so she knew that he was not that important.

“ Aiyo, Lord Puppy. This is our Lu Family's food. If you don't like it, you can go back home.”

“Aiyo, do you really think that I want to travel? It's been so long since Senior Li left, and he hasn't come back yet. If it weren't for the fact that the village needed someone to go out and find him, do you really think that I'd come out and travel? There's no meat to eat; how can we have the energy to travel? Wait a minute, I thought you guys were earning a lot of money while performing those pink shows. Why are you not spending money?” Puppy complained while eating.

Lu Zhuangyuan revealed a salted egg out of nowhere,

seemingly in a magic trick. He placed the oily yolk into his own three-year-old granddaughter's bowl before placing the egg white into Puppy's bowl.

"Lord Cai, please don't leave. Things are very chaotic right now, and the Lu Family still needs you to guard us along with that dog. We're not daring enough to travel to Shangjing without you."

Lu Xiucan stood up furiously and roared, "Who are you calling a dog!?"

They were about to fight, and Puppy had no choice but to stop them.

Puppy was just trying to have fun. If Gao Zhijian and Xiaoman learned that he had run back home halfway, they'd certainly beat him to death.

Their breakfast was brief and noisy. Soon, the Lu Family's three carriages continued their journey to Shangjing.

"Shangjing, the capital city of the Liang Kingdom. I've heard that it's the largest city in the world. It must be even more prosperous than Yinling City." Luo Juanhua was looking forward to the city because she had only heard of it when she was young. She had been fantasizing about how grand Shangjing had to look even in her younger days.

The entire Lu Family was thrilled as well. They were hyped up by the peddlers' words about Shangjing.

Lu Juren was walking silently as he carried his daughter in his arms when Lu Zhuangyuan approached him.

"Juren, we've earned quite a lot since we came to the Liang Kingdom. Once we reach Shangjing, we can ask them how much a plot of land costs. If it's slightly above our budget, we can always borrow more from the Daoist, and then we can build our own theater in the largest city in the world!" Lu Zhuangyuan said with shining eyes. It was not an exaggeration to say that he had dedicated his whole life to building one.

What had been a dream was now within his reach, and it could come true once he was in the Liang Kingdom.

“Once we have the theater, we can relocate our ancestral graves there, too. Once we do that... *Hehehe*... it feels so great just thinking about it.”

Lu Zhuangyuan was still stuck in his fantasies when Puppy came over and said, “So that’s why you agreed so readily back to travel to Shangjing. I guess you weren’t trying to look for Senior Li.”

“Of course, we are there to find him. I just think that the young Daoist is so strong to the point where we don’t have to worry about him. I doubt we can do anything to help him if he really encountered a problem.”

Lu Zhuangyuan thought of Li Huowang as an Immortal who could fly to the heavens at any moment.

“*Heh*. Hard to say. What if his illness relapses while traveling?”

They walked and talked, but their chatters soon stopped. The sun was high in the sky, and everyone felt so hot that they didn’t have the energy to talk anymore.

Fortunately, they found a pond near the entrance of a village. They ran over in excitement to wash their faces and drink some water from the pond.

“Dad, we finally found a village. Why don’t we ask to borrow their kitchen? The sun is too hot for us to start a fire outside.” Luo Juanhua was wiping her daughter’s sweat while complaining to Lu Zhuangyuan.

Lu Zhuangyuan nodded. “Alright, but don’t give them any money first. We should ask if they want us to perform. If they want us to perform, we could earn ourselves some money and maybe a meal.”

Feeling refreshed, they entered the village with their carriages. The village was big, and many people peeked out of their door and

pointed at the Lu Family.

Lu Zhuangyuan did not mind them and looked around. He wanted to find the richest person in the village to perform. Regular villagers had no money to hire performers. He looked around the village before he saw something that piqued his interest. One of the houses was drying tobacco leaves in the courtyard.

Lu Zhuangyuan shouted at an old man smoking in the house. “Sir, how much for your tobacco?! I want to buy some because I just finished some of mine—what?! Why is it so expensive? You don't have to cut and dry them for me. I want raw ones.”

Lu Zhuangyuan haggled aggressively before buying a big bundle of raw tobacco leaves with five coins.

“Hehe.” Lu Zhuangyuan put away the tobacco in delight. *I just have to add in some chili leaves, and this bundle can last me half a year!*

“Father! There are some noises over there. The noises sound like gongs to me!”

Chapter 508 - Daoist

Lu Juren's voice immediately grabbed the attention of Lu Zhuangyuan. "Gongs? Is it a wedding or a funeral? Let's go!"

They were very sensitive to the sound of gongs as performers.

They followed the sound as they walked through the main street of the village.

Lu Zhuangyuan could barely stop himself from grinning when they heard the sound of gongs coming from a massive estate, but his smile vanished when he saw what was happening.

The villagers were standing around a Daoist wearing yellow robes. He was wearing a black Daoist crown and was conducting a ceremony.

The Daoist was playing the gong while circling around a man being tied to a bed.

The man tied to the bed trembled and turned pale upon hearing the gong. It appeared that something was trying to get out of the man.

"Dad, let's go. The Daoist is busy trying to exorcize the man. I think it doesn't concern us," said Lu Juren.

He was about to leave when his father stopped him. "Let's just wait and see. If that man dies, we could perform at his funeral."

Lu Xiucan pushed through the people and saw that the Daoist was equipped with a bronze coin sword at the back, just like Li Huowang.

"What a coincidence. The bronze coin sword looks the same as my master's bronze coin sword..." Lu Xiucan muttered to himself, which caught the attention of Puppy.

"Ha!" The man tied to the bed suddenly sat up straight like a corpse before breaking his restraints and hopping into the air.

The villagers shouted out of fear and ran away.

“You wretched beast! How dare you try to harm the innocents in front of my watch?!”

The Daoist slammed the gong into the man’s abdomen, causing the latter to curl up in pain.

“The ever-changing constellations! Tie up the evil beings and protect our bodies! Clear our minds and calm our hearts! Preserve our spirit and our souls!”

The Daoist grabbed a fistful of rice before waving his closed fist on the candle fire and throwing the rice at the man.

“AAAAAAAAAAH! ” The man screamed as black smoke rose from his body where the rice hit him.

A black smoke flew out of the man’s mouth and disappeared under the sunlight. The man slumped to the ground afterward.

A rich man wearing brocade robes ran over and cried when he found out that the man was still alive after the exorcism. The young man still had the strength to call him father. The rich man immediately kneeled and thanked the Daoist.

“What a legend. He’s a real immortal! He saved that man.”

“Thank the heavens. If it wasn’t because of the Daoist, the Zhang’s family only son would’ve died.”

Lu Xiucan scoffed when he heard the people talking around him. “This is nothing. If my master were here...”

However, everyone ignored Lu Xiucan. They were all attracted to the feast that the Zhang family patriarch had just announced.

“Everyone! We have dinner tonight! Also, we get to perform, too!” Lu Zhuangyuan immediately approached the patriarch.

After talking for a bit, he managed to convince the patriarch to hire him to perform tonight.

The Lu family immediately started their work by setting up the stage and doing their makeup. Time was of the essence.

On that same night, Lu Zhuangyuan performed vigorously with

his son and disciples. The Zhang family patriarch and all of the guests were very pleased with their performance.

The feast lasted late till the night, and the guests eventually left.

Lu Xiucan looked at the Daoist at the main table with hesitation.

“Look properly. Does the sword on his back belong to Senior Li?”

“It’s too far away for me to see. I need to hold it in my hands to confirm it.”

Puppy rolled his eyes. “Can you be more reliable?”

“Should I ask him instead? If Master’s sword is in his hands, he might know where he is right now.”

“That’s stupid. What if he stole it from Senior Li? What if he has a grudge with Senior Li?”

While the two of them were arguing, they suddenly saw the Daoist whispering something to the patriarch. The patriarch followed the Daoist with a serious look on his face.

“They’re leaving! Quick, follow him!” Lu Xiucan slowly tailed after them without hesitation.

They left the outer courtyard and entered the inner courtyard. The place was quiet, so Lu Xiucan overheard their conversation.

“Heavenly Master, the evil spirit is still not defeated?”

“Yes, that’s right. Your son’s possession and the evil spirit are connected. The evil spirit has to be destroyed, or your house will never know peace.”

“What should we do?”

“Don’t worry, I am here. The evil spirit might have possessed an object. We need to find it first.”

The Daoist waved, and an old bronze compass appeared in his hand. He made a seal with his other hand while staring at the compass.

Lu Xiucan was hiding behind a fake boulder in the courtyard when a hand patted his shoulder. He was so startled that he almost exclaimed.

He turned around and saw it was Puppy. He glared at Puppy in anger.

However, Puppy ignored him and pointed at the Daoist. "Zhang Yuanwai, be careful! The evil being is possessing that object!"

"Heavenly Master, how can it be? That's the treasure of our Zhang family!"

The so-called treasure was a clay Bodhisattva that was sitting upside down. The Bodhisattva's face had melted off.

"Be careful!" A dark smoke fell from the ceiling and covered the patriarch.

The patriarch fell to the ground and was rendered unconscious.

Puppy and Lu Xiucan saw the black smoke entering a massive black robe that was hanging in a room.

After a while, the black robe stood up despite having no hands and feet. It walked out of the room and approached the Daoist.

The Daoist waved his arms, and the clay Bodhisattva flew into his robes. Then, he started scolding the black robe.

"The Daoist is rearing the evil spirit!" Lu Xiucan whispered furiously to Puppy.

Puppy pointed with his mouth toward where they came from, and they slowly left the courtyard.

"What did you say?! There are people in the courtyard?! How come you only told me that now?" the Daoist roared.

Lu Xiucan and Puppy heard the Daoist's roars. They barely managed to take two steps forward before the black robe stood before them.

Puppy took out his scepter and waved it at the black robe. The black robe crumpled to the ground, and then they started running away.

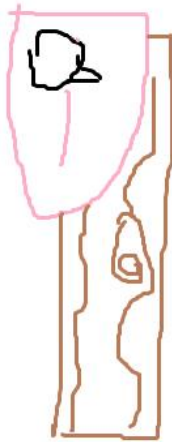
“Hahaha! To think it's the tongue of a Strayed One! This is a joyous day for me!”

Translator's Thoughts

There will be a minor correction here. Instead of wishwood, what Puppy holds should be a scepter like this one:



So the Strayed One's tongue scepter is quite literally the tongue nailed onto a wood, making it look like a scepter... Something like this



Chapter 509 - Impossible

Puppy was so shocked that his soul almost flew out when the Daoist chased after them.

He had never thought the treasure Li Huowang gifted him would elicit such a reaction.

The Daoist was holding the bronze coin sword as he chased after them. He was about to block off their escape when Puppy waved the scepter furiously.

However, the Daoist was already prepared against the attack.

A small paper doll made out of talisman papers flew out of the Daoist sleeves and took the brunt of the attack.

When Puppy waved the scepter, the paper doll fell to the ground.

The Daoist only needed that small window of opportunity to attack. Before Puppy could wave it for the second time, the Daoist whipped his bronze coin sword toward them.

“Ju Lun Tuo Dian Ti Wu She!” the Daoist chanted, and the red threads of the bronze coin sword extended, transforming the sword into a whip that slammed into Puppy’s hand.

The Daoist pulled the whip back, and Puppy’s hands were torn open. One of Puppy’s fingers and the scepter flew into the air.

“AAAAAAAH!” Puppy clutched his hand, which was almost severed from his wrist. His mind went blank; he had no idea what to do now.

“*Hmph!* So it’s only two little whelps.” The Daoist smiled evilly and squinted. He shook his wrist, and the whip flew toward Puppy’s head!

I dead! Puppy thought as he stared at the bronze coin whip moving toward him.

At the critical juncture, a hand appeared out of nowhere and grabbed the bronze coin whip.

The sharp coins cut into the hand, but it only tore open the skin.

“Oh?” The Daoist was surprised and looked at the youth holding onto his whip.

The bronze coin sword was capable of cutting down evil beings. He was wary of the person who managed to stop his bronze coin sword with a bare hand.

With a whoosh, the bronze coins in Lu Xiucan's hands were pulled back. The Daoist changed the whip back into a sword. “Brat, which sect do you come from?”

It was better to make sure of the enemy's background before acting. He was afraid that he would anger an extremely strong sect if he ended up beating up the two youths in front of him. The Strayed One's tongue wouldn't be worth it then.

“My Master is Li Huowang! You are dead if you touch us!” Lu Xiucan shouted, acting tough.

He thought he was invincible to bladed objects after he had learned of the White Lotus Sect's technique, but to think that attack managed to slice open his hand. In the end, Lu Xiucan had no choice but to hope that he could scare the Daoist away using his Master's name.

Li Huowang? Never heard of him. Also, he never announced which sect he is from. I guess he and his Master are some random cultivators. the Daoist thought.

Puppy was certain that the Daoist was not afraid of Li Huowang, as the latter had yet to run away.

Puppy panted and held his bloody hand before taking a few steps forward. He threatened the Daoist, “We are from the White Lotus Sect! Don't you dare touch us! We have a lot of people at the White Lotus Sect!”

The Daoist revealed a wry smile. “Oh~ You are from the White Lotus Sect. This makes it easier.”

The Daoist then whipped the bronze coin sword toward Puppy and Lu Xiucan.

Everyone in this world knew that the White Lotus Sect no longer had any patrons and were a bunch of weaklings. They could only run around and hide like mice. They couldn't do anything grand as well or the Surveillance Bureau would find them.

Lu Xiucan grabbed the whip with both hands and shouted at Puppy, “Can you stop talking?!”

Puppy turned around and ran away without even looking back.

“You motherfucker! Puppy, you coward with no balls!” Xiucan howled in anger as Puppy disappeared into the darkness.

“Hahaha! I thought the White Lotus Sect preaches camaraderie. I thought all of you were sworn brothers upon entering the sect. Was that really your sworn brother?” the Daoist taunted and continued his assault.

Even though Lu Xiucan learned a good technique, all it did was just increase the thickness of his skin. He could only suffer a one-sided beating against the Daoist. Soon, he was covered in cut wounds and was forced to curl up on the ground.

The Daoist smiled when he saw the youth on the ground. Then, he waved his hand, and an inkwell appeared.

“It’s time to end this.” He dipped his fingers into the inkwell and covered the bronze coin sword in the ink. The black ink seeped down the sword like tar.

Lu Xiucan was afraid and knew there was no hope of escaping. He cried and begged for mercy.

When the Daoist was ready to cut down Lu Xiucan, something flashed in the darkness. A small needle wrapped in white thread flew toward the Daoist’s face.

The needle almost hit the Daoist’s face when something burst

out from his neck. A Nascent Soul with a beard appeared and bit the needles with its rotten teeth.

“*Hm?! You dare try to attack me from the dark?*” the Daoist roared, furious. He was visibly upset with Puppy’s attack.

The Daoist pointed at where the needle was shot out from and the black robe flew upward. It streaked through the air, chasing after Puppy.

The Daoist then glared at the trembling Lu Xiucan. He raised the bronze coin sword, which was drenched in black ink, and brought it down toward Lu Xiucan’s neck. He decided to kill one before chasing the second.

“*AAAAAAAH!* The mud comes from chaos, and everything bursts into existence with the growth of the white lotus! Heavenly Mater, help me!!!” Lu Xiucan shouted and begged for protection with a sense of humility that he never had before toward the Heavenly Mater.

Just as the bronze coin sword tore through Lu Xiucan’s clothes, a brilliant white light burst out. The bronze coin sword’s red thread was torn apart, and the sword exploded. The inked bronze coins flew everywhere.

The Daoist was shocked, and he took a few steps backward. “Impossible! The Heavenly Mater is supposed to be dead!”

Lu Xiucan realized that he was still alive. His clothes were in tatters. When he stood up, a piece of cloth fell out from inside his clothes.

The cloth spread open on the ground, and the cloth depicted a simple white lotus. The Daoist retreated upon seeing the lotus.

“No! This can’t be! The Heavenly Mater should be dead! The White Lotus Sect are just a bunch of abandoned ragtags!”

No matter how he tried to convince himself, however, he was retreating instinctively. By the time he was done shouting, his back was already pressed against the wall.

Chapter 510 - Alive

The Daoist in yellow robes looked at Lu Xiucan kneeling on the ground and hesitated. *Is he tricking me?*

In the end, he dared not risk his own life. He made a seal with his hands and phased through the walls of the courtyard.

The black robe flew into the air to follow its master.

Puppy realized that they had narrowly escaped death from the Daoist's hands.

He gripped his bleeding hand and approached the stunned Lu Xiucan.

"Hey, what did you do just now?" Puppy said, giving Lu Xiucan one kick to the knee. "How did you scare him away?"

Lu Xiucan wasn't sure either. He looked at the piece of cloth depicting a white lotus on the ground. "I ... I don't know."

"How could you not know? You must've done something that made his sword explode."

"Sword?" Lu Xiucan snapped out of it and immediately picked up the scattered bronze coins on the ground.

"You better get out of here! These are all mine! How dare you run away just now?! Ptoeeey!"

"Are you blind? Didn't you see me reposition myself so that I can strike him?" Puppy picked up the scepter and gave it a quick scrub before putting it away in his clothes.

"Bullshit! Since when were you that smart? You're just a coward with no balls!"

"Coward? So what if I'm a coward? I cannot let my daughter live without a father! *Ouch~* My hand hurts."

The two bickered while Lu Xiucan was picking up the coins on the ground. They were almost done with it when they heard

footsteps coming from the outer courtyard.

“Quick! We need to hide now, or they’ll think that we are responsible for this mess!” Both of them immediately hid behind the fake mountain.

“Dad! Dad, what’s wrong?!”

They heard noises inside; both Lu Xiucan and Puppy took advantage of that opportunity to quietly go back to where they came from.

They were nervous, but thankfully, no one saw them because it was too late into the night. Soon, they returned to where the Lu family was staying.

The Lu family was so tired after the performance that they didn’t even bother removing their makeup as they ate at their table.

They were all confused upon seeing Puppy and Lu Xiucan’s disheveled appearances.

“Did you guys fight a bear in the forest or something?” Luo Juanhua’s mouth was filled with food as she spoke.

Without even waiting for Lu Xiucan and Puppy to explain, a commotion erupted from the Zhang’s family inner courtyard.

Lu Zhuangyuan’s ears perked up to listen to what was happening. Moments later, he smiled upon realizing what was going on. He sucked his greasy fingers and pulled his pants up. “Hehe, what a joyous day! We’ve got work to do again!”

Shangjing was so prosperous that there was a massive line outside the city gates. Naturally, everyone was waiting in line to enter the city.

Li Huowang sat on the carriage and looked at the oppressive gate. He thought he would never return to Shangjing, but he was here again.

“Where is your letter of recommendation? Why have you come to Shangjing? Come down so we can inspect your carriage!” the city

guards shouted and questioned Li Huowang.

However, they immediately shrunk back in fear when they saw Li Huowang's Surveillance Bureau identity plate. They stood still and greeted him politely. "We greet the esteemed Lord!"

Li Huowang ignored them and guided his horse carriage towards the imperial palace.

"Dad, where is First Mother? Did she really get kidnapped? But he was so kind, and he even treated your wounds."

"Li Sui, you have to remember what I'm about to say: no matter what others say, you must believe me. If someone is fighting me, you need to remember that I'll never lie to you. Do you understand?"

"I understand. Dad, I will kill the bad guys and rescue First Mother."

"Yes. You must listen to me, and we will bring back your first mother."

"And Second Mother, too."

"..."

The carriage traveled slowly on the wide streets. Soon, they reached the palace's door.

Li Huowang coughed and wasn't sure what to say to the guards when the heavy doors parted open slowly.

Li Huowang instantly felt numerous gazes land on his back.

I haven't even entered the palace, but everyone has already branded me Ji Lin's follower.

Li Huowang held onto the reins and lowly entered the palace.

His plain horse carriage was ignored by the consorts and officials.

When the horse carriage reached the white jade stairs, Li Huowang finally disembarked. He climbed up the stairs and walked toward the palace.

All of a sudden, he frowned. He touched his abdomen and

found out that he had a painful scar.

His recovery ability had strengthened to the point where his injuries would heal even if his abdomen was torn open.

However, something had changed. His wound had healed as usual, but it left a scar. This was a first for Li Huowang. This was a wound from when he failed to defeat Shai Zi using the Cang-Qiang Ascension.

It's probably related to Ba-Hui, but I should focus on this matter for now.

He was more than happy to have countless scars as long as he killed Shai Zi and retrieved Miaomiao.

“Surveillance Bureau, Seventh Banner, Er Jiu~”

“Surveillance Bureau, Seventh Banner, Er Jiu~!”

“Surveillance Bureau, Seventh Banner, Er Jiu~!!”

Li Huowang removed his hands from his abdomen at the eunuchs' call. Then, he walked into the palace without hesitation.

The palace was massive. It appeared to be the place where the emperor would call for a morning meeting every day, but it was surprisingly dark.

A golden throne was floating in the darkness, and Li Huowang could only see the legs of the emperor even with his keen eyes.

“Er Jiu, have you decided to join me? Good, good! Hahaha! You did great coming to aid me when I need it rather when I'm already safe. I shall remember your courage for helping me during my time of need!”

Li Huowang frowned. It was Ji Lin's voice, but the tone of voice and the speech pattern had changed.

Li Huowang stepped forward, and that was when the shrill voice of a eunuch pierced the darkness. “Impudent! How dare you not kneel in front of our Lord?!”

“Ah! No need for such formalities! From now on, Er Jiu does not need to kneel to me.”

With that, Li Huowang slowly approached Ji Lin.

Once he was close enough, Li Huowang finally managed to catch a glimpse of Ji Lin's face behind the beaded veil, and he was surprised to see the changes in Ji Lin's face.

Chapter 511 - Ji Lin

The hall was dim, but Li Huowang's keen eyes allowed him to see the changes in Ji Lin's face and demeanor.

Li Huowang could swear that he had seen a bold, confident, and pure Ji Lin during the Double Third Festival. At the time, Ji Lin was the epitome of an energetic child.

However, Ji Lin had changed completely. He was hunched over like a snake lurking in the darkness. His gaze was gloomy, and his eyes radiated a sinister light. He was also exuding an extreme air of malice.

Li Huowang couldn't even imagine what had happened to Ji Lin before his return to Shangjing.

The left side of Ji Lin's face was drooping, but Ji Lin pushed them back up by him.

The sight allowed Li Huowang to deduce a few things. After pondering for a moment, Li Huowang bowed to the Great Liang emperor sitting on the throne and asked, "Your Majesty, have you consumed a spiritual sin?"

Li Huowang had captured the spiritual sin used to pay respects to the late emperor, so he naturally understood the effects of its pure malice on a mortal body.

The effects were especially obvious on Ji Lin's face. Ji Lin's face was drooping, looking like a viscous liquid. It was the hallmark of anything possessed by a spiritual sin.

Ji Lin neither confirmed nor denied Li Huowang's words. Instead, he gestured toward the throne behind him and asked, "What? Must I inform Er Jiu of everything I do?"

Li Huowang immediately dismissed his previous speculation.

The radical change was definitely not just because of a

malicious spiritual sin. Perhaps the aura of a military family or something else was at play here.

Under the influence of such things, Ji Lin had become what he was right now.

“Your Majesty, the spiritual sin is ominous. Stay in contact with it for too long, and you'll breed evil thoughts constantly.”

Since Li Huowang was going to be working under Ji Lin in the future, he found it necessary to give the latter a reminder.

“Evil? Who defines evil? What is evil? What is good?”

Ji Lin suddenly stood up from the throne. He then raised his right hand and waved his sleeve vigorously.

“I am the emperor. I never have to abide by any rules. I am the one who sets the rules! What I say is evil, is evil! What I say is good, is good!”

Li Huowang looked at the Great Liang emperor in front of him. According to his memories, Ji Lin's personality had changed completely. He was just like the old Bai Lingmiao and Second Deity.

The current Ji Lin looked more like an emperor than before, even if he seemed like a complete tyrant.

Ji Lin sat back down, his voice tinged with exhaustion as he asked, “You think I've changed, right? I never wanted to change, but I had no choice! If I were still the Ji Lin from when you first met me, I would have died a long time ago.”

Li Huowang couldn't help but feel sorry for him. Ji Lin was still too young, and if he were living in Li Huowang's modern world, the former would still be a middle school student.

Of course, Li Huowang's pity quickly disappeared. He didn't feel qualified to sympathize with Ji Lin, and he decided that he ought to take care of himself first.

“Your Majesty, I'm not good at anything else. You can find me in the future for any matters about killing people. Er Jiu is willing to clear all obstacles for Your Majesty's ascension to the throne.”

Ji Lin immediately clapped his hands in joy. "Great! Hahaha! Er Jiu is so straightforward! Much better than those who beat around the bush! Come, confer him a title!"

A eunuch with a wrinkled face walked out from the darkness, carrying a golden whisk^[1]. He sang in a sharp voice, "By the decree of His Majesty~ Er Jiu shall be conferred~ Left and Right Jinwu Guards~ Cavalry Commander."

"Thank you, Your Majesty." Li Huowang bowed to Ji Lin.

Ji Lin said with a meaningful tone, "Er Jiu, I am very pleased that you have come. Rest assured, I still have that fake jade cat. Everything in the palace is genuine, so fake things have become more precious, don't you think?"

Li Huowang gently nodded. "Indeed."

Since the official matter was over, it was time for Li Huowang to leave the palace.

As he took a few steps down the white marble steps, someone shouted from behind, "Commander Er, please wait!"

Li Huowang turned and saw a middle-aged man with a black beard running toward him. From the military cap on the middle-aged man's head, Li Huowang deduced him to be a Middle-rank official.

"Congratulations, Commander Er! Although the title of Cavalry Commander is only eighth rank, the Left and Right Jinwu Guards are one of the twelve forbidden military guards."

"I have never seen His Majesty give an outsider so much importance. Commander Er, you will soar to the skies soon."

Li Huowang listened quietly to the middle-aged man, who was a bit shorter than Li Huowang, blabbering on for a while. When the middle-aged man finally paused to catch his breath, Li Huowang asked in confusion, "Who are you?"

"My name is Dong Zhongshou. Hehehe, my rank is insignificant before Commander Er, so I'll be less conspicuous. I'm from Zhong

Heng.”

“Zong Heng Jia?” Li Huowang subconsciously looked at the half-bodied Jin Shanzhao next to him. Jin Shanzhao was the first Zong Heng Jia he had encountered in this world, and he didn’t expect to encounter a second one.

“Ah, we can’t talk about it; I’ve talked a lot. I’m just someone who spends some time by His Majesty’s side. When His Majesty needs enlightenment, I can offer some advice.”

Dong Zhongshou finally revealed his goal for approaching Li Huowang.

“Commander Er, in the future, both you and I will be planning things around His Majesty. There are some things I think you should know about. How about we talk in the mansion tomorrow night?”

Li Huowang looked at the sky to the left, and then he said to Dong Zhongshou, “It seems that His Majesty has unknowingly attracted many talents.”

Dong Zhongshou chuckled. “Mastery of both civil and martial arts is to better serve the imperial family. Commander Er, I want to talk to you about that. I am also sure that you’re unfamiliar with the majority of our people, so I’ll introduce them to you tomorrow.”

“All right, I’ll see you by then.”

Upon Dong Zhongshou’s departure, the quiet Zhuge Yuan said, “Brother Li, don’t get swayed by hearsay at this critical juncture. People from the Great Liang emperor’s side will definitely be biased toward the emperor. I suggest you find out for yourself how many forces are involved in this succession war. Find out who is strong and who is weak. Don’t be blinded by the opinions of a mob.”

“Yes, I know. I’ll investigate things through the Surveillance Bureau. Besides, I also want to find out how many cards Shai Zi still has left under the encirclement of the Surveillance Bureau.”

Li Huowang headed toward the carriage down below.

The Surveillance Bureau wasn't far from the palace. After just one hour, Li Huowang found himself in the grand hall with the screens.

“Why are there so few people? Has something happened?” Li Huowang asked Nangong while staring at the desired hall.

1. a stick with horse hair sticking out at one end, that eunuchs carry 🐾

Translator's Thoughts

Uh oh. Ji Lin went crazy. Credits to 格子的乱七八糟on douyin!



Chapter 512 - Shangjing

"Oh, it's another rebellion by the Dharma Sect and the encirclement of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. The people are all dispersed for their duties."

Nangong seemed a bit annoyed about the ongoing situation.

Li Huowang felt his heart tighten. "How is the encirclement of the Sitting Oblivion Dao going?"

"Go and see for yourself; I'm too busy right now."

Li Huowang opened the thick book and looked at the wanted posters depicting the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. There were phrases written in large blocks, and the phrases were all demanding for their execution.

Li Huowang was relieved. The Surveillance Bureau was doing a really good job in dealing with the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

With the records in this booklet combined with the previous battle in the capital, Li Huowang estimated that the pawns[1] had been mostly eradicated.

Even without the Three Officials and Four Joys, the Surveillance Bureau had still profited a ton. All four Bei Fengs, three Dong Fengs, two Hong Zhongs, one Bai Ban, and one Fa Cai had perished.

Moreover, one of the Shai Zis had died as well. The remaining Shai Zi would have to lead the Sitting Oblivion Dao by themselves.

"Our Surveillance Bureau has truly put in a lot of effort to deal with the Sitting Oblivion Dao," Li Huowang said to Nangong behind the wooden cabinet while flipping through the pages.

"It's not just that. I heard that we also enlisted the help of some orthodox sects in addition to creating contracts with the Surveillance Bureaus of other countries. We spent a ton of money to

persuade them to help us."

"Orthodox sects?" Li Huowang asked, and he frowned upon recalling some unpleasant memories.

"Yeah, but it's hard to find members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao right now. They've gone into complete hiding, and we haven't caught anyone in the past month."

Li Huowang nodded silently. Shai Zi had threatened him, and he was in a bad spot himself.

However, Shai Zi was in a spot, too.

It seemed that his chance of winning wasn't too bad.

The most difficult part here was the fact that Bai Lingmiao was in his hands. Winning was pointless if Bai Lingmiao ended up dying.

Li Huowang closed the booklet in his hand and looked at Nangong again, "Why haven't I seen any wanted notices for the Sitting Oblivion Dao's Shai Zi?"

"Oh? You know quite a bit. You even know about Shai Zis. Anyway, handling them is the responsibility of the Surveillance Bureaus' Chief. A Shai Zi is the head of the Sitting Oblivion Dao, after all. Ordinary people won't cut it."

Chief... Li Huowang remembered the three pairs of hands with strangely long nails beneath the cloak.

It wasn't surprising that the Chief could handle a Shai Zi. However, even he himself, a Hong Zhong from the Sitting Oblivion Dao, had no idea where Shai Zi's true body was at the moment. Could they really find Shai Zi?

Hang on, what if the Sitting Oblivion Dao members of the Great Qi are still here? Had they conspired to ambush the Chief? The thought alone sent a chill down Li Huowang's spine.

"Brother Li, rest assured, they are not Twisted Ones. After all, they are people of Great Qi. They can't stay in Great Liang for too long," Zhuge Yuan replied.

Li Huowang breathed a sigh of relief.

Moreover, the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau knew that the Sitting Oblivion Dao of the Great Qi was coming, so he had to have prepared countermeasures.

“By the way, Brother Nangong, there’s been a lot of commotion in the capital recently. Do you have any inside information from the Surveillance Bureau?”

The indifferent-looking Nangong suddenly looked solemn, and his voice sounded distant for some reason as he said, “Er Jiu, you know the rules of the Surveillance Bureau. We never participate in the struggle for power in the imperial family. If you want to find inside information, don’t come to the Surveillance Bureau. You won’t be able to find anything at all. There’s none even in the Four Repositories. Since we’re acquainted, though, I’ll give you my two cents. You’re the Seventh Banner, but you have no official position. In the Bureau, your status isn’t really that high. In other words, the Bureau won’t intervene. If you insist on getting involved.

“However, if something untoward was to happen to you, the Bureau wouldn’t come and collect your corpse. The Bureau wouldn’t assist you, too, if you somehow got abducted and are being tortured. In other words, I want you to think properly about it.

“The coronation of the new emperor is a major event. Does the Bureau really not care about it?”

“Why would the Bureau care about it? The Surveillance Bureau does have some matters to discuss with the emperor, but the emperor’s position isn’t stable yet. Let them fight it out. The winner will become emperor. This kind of sight is common throughout history, and the Bureau has long gotten accustomed to them. Also, you don’t have to worry; the civil and military officials aren’t blind. A few people will die at most; the foundation of the country will not be shaken, and someone will step in if something actually goes wrong.”

The Surveillance Bureau was even more indifferent to the

succession war than Li Huowang had imagined. They only cared about when the most devious and strongest king would appear and how many Gus would die during the breeding process. They didn't even want to take a look at what was going on.

“Thank you for the advice, Brother Nangong,” Li Huowang said. Since he couldn't gather relevant information here, he didn't linger and made his way back to his house.

Li Huowang sat on a stool beneath the short tree in the courtyard of the house that Ji Xiang had given to him. He silently pondered over the information he had gathered in the capital so far.

Li Huowang reaffirmed his objectives. His goal was to rescue Bai Lingmiao and assist the Surveillance Bureau in eliminating Shai Zi if possible.

After the first time, there would definitely be a second time. A problem had to be destroyed at its roots for it to be eradicated; only the dead posed no threat to himself.

However, achieving these two goals was extremely difficult.

He didn't know where Shai Zi's true body was located, and he also had no idea where Bai Lingmiao was being held captive. In fact, he didn't even know how to start looking for her.

Li Huowang's gaze grew more resolute as he thought about it. He clenched his fists and thought, *I'm still too weak. I can't afford to stop cultivating!*

This isn't just about Zhuge Yuan's revival. This also concerns my beloved ones in this chaotic world. I don't even know if there are still any spies from the Sitting Oblivion Dao here in the capital or if they have been eradicated. I'll stick to Shai Zi's plan for now and accumulate resources while waiting for an opportunity to strike. There are definitely people here who are nursing a grudge against Shai Zi. Both the imperial family of Great Liang and the Surveillance Bureau harbor deep hatred toward him.

But how can I sow discord among them to achieve my goals?

“Boss Hong Zhong, you need to be careful. Boss Shai Zi knows your identity. Push him into a corner, and he might reveal your Strayed One status and your affiliation with the Sitting Oblivion Dao to the world. Things will become interesting by then.”

“I’m not from the Sitting Oblivion Dao!” Li Huowang roared.

“Hahaha! Surely, you jest, Boss Hong Zhong.”

Li Huowang stood up abruptly and glared at the Sitting Oblivion Dao illusion. The next moment, he clenched his fist and struck the illusion’s face.

The illusion of the Sitting Oblivion Dao sat on the ground in a daze. After a while, he realized what had just happened and exclaimed, “ *Hahaha!* I’m alive! I’m alive!”

Li Sui’s tentacles reached over and wrapped around him, but they passed through his figure.

“ *Hahaha!* You’re dead again! The Daoist has bamboozled you!” the monk exclaimed and laughed heartily at the Sitting Oblivion Dao illusion's dismay.

1. Tiao Zis, Bing Zis, Wan Zis 

Chapter 513 - Indoor

The illusion of a Sitting Oblivion Dao member's face flashed with a hint of annoyance at the monk's ridicule. He got up slowly and pretended to brush away the dust on himself before rubbing his left cheek.

"Boss Hong Zhong, you're capable now. If you want to beat me up, then make me real. I'm already dead, so what can I do if you want to bully me? Can you kill me twice? Believe it or not, I was genuinely concerned about you just now. After all, we're in the same boat. If you die, we're all done for," the illusion of a Sitting Oblivion Dao member said, walking up to Li Huowang. He stared quietly at Li Huowang with the two holes in his face.

"Maybe we shouldn't worry about Shai Zi for now. Let's deal with the immediate trouble first, such as your problem of cultivating the 'Truth but not 'Lies.'"

"You have to address that issue sooner rather than later, or you'll go mad before you can even deal with Boss Shai Zi."

Li Huowang was quiet.

The illusion added, "I don't think it's difficult. Boss Hong Zhong, our Sitting Oblivion Dao's cultivation method of 'Lies' is clearly in your mind. Why do you insist on not cultivating it?"

Bang !

Li Huowang's fist struck the illusion's face. His head jerked violently to the side as blood burst out of his nose and splattered into the air.

Then, Li Huowang kicked him in the stomach, sending him flying away.

"Li Huowang, are you crazy? I was serious!"

The clinking of metal against metal echoed as Li Huowang

opened his bag of torture tools. The instruments gleamed with a crimson cold light as Li Huowang held the illusion by the head.

Finally, the illusion stopped talking. He looked reluctant expression, but he ran away from Li Huowang.

“Brother Li, what he said does make sense. Why not listen to him?” Zhuge Yuan asked.

“Brother Zhuge, have you already forgotten about who told us that we should cultivate ‘Lies’ when cultivating ‘Truth?’”

“Shai Zi.”

“Yes, exactly! It’s a Shai Zi! I’m a Strayed One. Why do you think he told me that?”

“When I obtained this Hong Zhong’s past, the thoughts of the Sitting Oblivion Dao members had become clearer to me more than ever! We must always be wary of their influence on us when dealing with them. Thus, I believe he was lying. it is enough to cultivate the ‘Truth.’ There is no need to cultivate ‘Lies!’” Li Huowang exclaimed, and his voice sounded unusually firm.

“What if—”

“No! There are no what-ifs! I am convinced that I’m right! For the sake of cultivating ‘Lies,’ the members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao committed countless heinous crimes! Wouldn’t I become like them if I were to cultivate ‘Lies’? Shai Zi is trying to deceive me, and I absolutely will not fall for it!”

Li Huowang stared at Zhuge Yuan with a determined expression. “If I were to cultivate ‘Lies,’ I wouldn’t be Li Huowang anymore. I would become a Hong Zhong of the Sitting Oblivion Dao! And when I say he’s lying, he’s definitely lying!”

“Oh~” Zhuge Yuan nodded; he seemed to have understood what Li Huowang was trying to say.

Li Huowang’s words just now were his response to Shai Zi’s suggestion to cultivate the “Truth” along with “Lies.”

And his response was unmistakable...

“Are you suspecting that Shai Zi is using your Strayed One ability to make you go mad by making you cultivate 'Lies' along with 'Truth'? Since you believe that's the case, you've decided to tackle the root of the issue?”

Li Huowang shook his head forcefully and explained, “No. Whether the Sitting Oblivion Dao cultivates ‘Lies’ but not ‘Truth’ doesn’t really matter. The point is... why would I have issues cultivating just the ‘Truth’? He's definitely lying; we need not dwell on this matter any further. He has lied to us!”

“Brother Li, I understand. I have to say that this Strayed One method of yours might actually work.” Zhuge Yuan nodded and stepped back to join the other illusions.

The Sitting Oblivion Dao member leaned in and whispered to Zhuge Yuan.

Zhuge Yuan waved his fan and smiled before shaking his head.

Li Huowang watched them from a distance. He felt somewhat weary, so he headed toward the bedroom on the second floor.

The burdens on Li Huowang's shoulders had gotten a bit heavy and were taking a toll on him both physically and mentally. Moreover, he had just transformed an illusion into reality twice in quick succession, so it wasn't strange that he was tired. Tonight, Li Huowang needed a good night's sleep.

Li Sui silently followed Li Huowang as he walked past her.

When Li Huowang closed his eyes and lay on the bed, Li Sui followed suit and snuggled close to him. Li Sui could hear the familiar sound of Li Huowang's heartbeat. Li Sui always liked sleeping close to her father, as it made her feel like she was back inside him once again.

Li Sui recalled something just then and nudged Li Huowang with her head. “Dad, can I help you? I really want to help you.”

Li Sui's concern brought a rare sense of warmth to Li Huowang's heart. He patted her head gently without opening his

eyes.

"I understand, but you can't help with what's to come. Just stay put and don't get into trouble. That's good enough for me."

Li Sui felt a sense of frustration for the first time. She knew she was strong, as even Second Mom had praised her. *How come Dad is convinced that I can't do anything?*

Li Huowang slept soundly that night, perhaps due to the accumulated fatigue throughout the journey.

He woke up on the afternoon of the next day.

How long was I asleep for? Thirteen hours? Fourteen hours? No, this world only has twenty-two hours in a day. I shouldn't have slept for so long.

Li Huowang was about to get up when Li Sui rushed toward him and said excitedly, "Dad, I did many things last night! I cleaned the floor! I cleaned the entire house! I even filled the water jar!"

"Good job, well done," Li Huowang said, sitting up on the bed. He grabbed his Daoist robes and bronze coin veil from the stool.

After putting them on, he still felt like something was missing. His bag of torture tools was missing.

"Did you take it with you?" Li Huowang asked, staring at Li Sui. There was no way a thief would steal those bloody tools.

"Yes, I washed off the blood on the tools, and I also noticed that some of them had dulled, so I sharpened them with a whetstone."

Li Sui then took out many different torture tools from inside of her. The tools seemed to shine brightly as if they were brand new. Li Sui presented them like treasures before Li Huowang.

Li Huowang nodded. He took the bag and hung it back on his belt. Then, he patted Li Sui as if rewarding her.

"Dad, did I do well?"

"Yes."

"Really well, you're so damned filial," Li Huowang responded

and glared fiercely at the Sitting Oblivion Dao illusion that had spoken in his stead.

The illusion shrank back and darted out of the room.

Chapter 514 - Own People

In light of last night's incident, there were some changes in the relationship between Li Huowang and the illusions.

In the past, nothing could threaten them except for Li Huowang's suicide. However, things had changed drastically. Li Huowang could now give them fleshly bodies temporarily, and it was all thanks to his cultivation of the "Truth."

Li Huowang could beat them up and inflict excruciating pain on them. Li Huowang stared deeply at the illusion of a Sitting Oblivion Dao member before turning to Li Sui. He then reached out and tore a piece of dead skin from his scabbed wound and threw it out the window.

Li Sui barked and jumped out of the window to chase after the dead skin. When she returned to the house with the dead skin in her mouth, she found that Li Huowang was missing. She also found a note left on the table.

*Protect our home. It's dangerous outside, so don't wander around.
I'll bring you something delicious upon my return.*

Li Huowang had gone to a secluded place outside the city to cultivate "Truth." He had seen and experienced many things so far, so he knew just how powerful the cultivation method that only Strayed Ones could cultivate.

The ability to make use of the Heavenly Dao's strength was extraordinary and could be compared to the Siming's existence itself.

Li Huowang had to master this ability as soon as possible so he could resurrect Zhuge Yuan and protect himself.

Li Huowang didn't stay outside the city for long. He returned as soon as it got dark. He had an appointment today with a strategist

named Dong Zhongshou from Zhong Heng Jia.

Li Huowang was sitting in a purple sedan chair in Shangjing. He had a frown as he looked outside through the ajar window.

The capital had a curfew, but there were still many other sedan chairs on the deserted streets.

The patrolling guards seemed oblivious as they marched neatly past the sedan chairs.

These sedan chairs seemed to be like wooden boats that drifted with the current in darkness. They appeared to have an unspoken agreement, as they kept a considerable distance from each other. From afar, only a white or red lantern bobbed in the darkness, which made the streets appear a bit eerie.

Dong Zhongshou had invited him, but who had invited these people?

At first, Li Huowang thought that he would soon arrive at Zhong Heng Jia's mansion. When his sedan chair passed a tall stone arch bridge, he saw a sedan chair floating on the pitch-black river. Red threads were squirming from the sedan chair.

What does this mean? Did someone die? Who killed them?

The next moment, he found the answer to his question.

Swoosh!

Three straight scimitars pierced the flimsy sedan wall as well as Li Huowang.

Half an hour later, a damaged sedan chair slowly came to a halt at a certain mansion. There were stone lions on both sides of the mansion's gate. A servant holding a lantern bowed respectfully and said, "My lord, please alight."

A foot emerged from the sedan chair and pressed down on the ground, leaving behind a crimson footprint. The other foot followed, and it carried with it a tremendous power that shattered the ground.

A cold light then flashed, and a stone lion next to the gate was

split into two along with a huge chunk of the wall.

The wall collapsed, kicking up a cloud of dust.

Dong Zhongshou was enjoying the moon with his wife and concubines when he noticed the commotion and saw Er Jiu through the smoke.

“Commander Er, come here! We've been waiting for you.”

There were several other people seated before their own short table. It seemed that they were Dong Zhongshou's aforementioned people.

“What's the meaning of this?!” Li Huowang roared. He charged at Dong Zhongshou with a sword in hand, but a thin monk and a chubby monk stood in his way.

“*Hehehe*, Commander Er, calm down. You boasted about being in charge of the dirty work before His Majesty, so don't you think it's necessary for me to test your skills?”

“Besides, those people weren't sent by us. They were dispatched by the other well-informed princes.”

Dong Zhongshou chuckled and pointed at the last remaining short table.

“Come, Commander Er, your seat is over there. Go to your seat, and I will introduce you to the other comrades.”

“He's the son of the current prime minister! Situ Bowen is the most favored son of the prime minister. He's already helping with official affairs. He has yet to enter the court as an official, but he already has many connections in the court.”

Situ Bowen was a short and chubby man; his chest was exposed, and a flower was tucked behind his ear. He didn't even lift his head as he sipped on the wine from his leather cup.

“This is the calligraphy master, Gong Sunyan. He has a myriad of students throughout the world! His unique style is unparalleled, and everyone respects him.”

Gong Sunyan was an old man with a white beard. His wine cup

was trembling as he took a sip of his wine before casting a look of dissatisfaction at Li Huowang.

“And this is my junior, who is also from Zong Heng. Not long ago, the two of us cooperated to foil the conspiracy of the third prince and the princess.”

The beardless middle-aged man immediately clasped his hands toward Dong Zhongshou, but he didn't even glance at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang took a mental note of the people who were rude to him even as he listened to Dong Zhongshou's introductions.

Once the introductions were over, Dong Zhongshou coughed lightly and spat to his left. A beautiful girl, who had been kneeling on the side for quite a while now, immediately opened her mouth to catch Dong Zhongshou's spit.

Li Huowang quietly went to his seat and didn't pay attention to whatever Dong Zhongshou was saying. He couldn't figure out how Ji Lin had been able to stay in his position, even though he had a bunch of ragtags as supporters.

“You're one of us from now on, so don't be angry, okay? Anyway, let me offer you a toast!”

Everyone present saw Li Huowang sitting like a statue with no intention of lifting his wine cup.

“I just want to ask: where are the workers and the killers?” Li Huowang asked, and his remark elicited laughter among the crowd.

Dong Zhongshou smiled and asked, “Commander Er, the workers naturally have their own place to go. How can they stay with those whose jobs are to plan and strategize? Of course, I'm not saying that you're one of them. His majesty favors you deeply, and you have a limitless future ahead of you.”

This is too bad. Looks like Ji Lin has yet to understand his current situation. He has devoured a spiritual sin, so how come he's still so dense? He's not going to become the King of Gus at this rate...

“ Hmm? What's wrong, Commander Er? Are you still unhappy

about what happened to you on your way here? *Hehehe*, you're being a bit petty as a man. Haven't I already apologized?"

"All right! Since we're all under His Majesty, I'll apologize again to Commander Er today," Dong Zhongshou said. He raised his glass and emptied it, and then he showed the empty bottom to Li Huowang, "How's that?"

"I don't think any of you have understood the current situation." Li Huowang smiled like a lunatic and pinched his temples with his hand. Then, he tapped the table heavily with his other index finger.

Peng Longteng's towering and armored figure suddenly appeared next to Dong Zhongshou. Her armored hands plunged into Dong Zhongshou's mouth before anyone could react. Then, Peng Longteng forced open Dong Zhongshou's jaw with her left and right hand before tearing him apart into two as if he were a thin piece of paper.

Chapter 515 - Task

Dong Zhongshou's crimson blood and organs flew into the air. However, his heart was still beating as if Dong Zhongshou was still alive despite being torn into two halves.

The headless Peng Longteng leaned back and used her heavy armor to catch what was falling from the sky. Then, she clenched Dong Zhongshou's lower jaw until it was reduced to powder.

Peng Longteng trembled uncontrollably. She craved slaughter, and she yearned to kill one living person after another.

It had been a while since she wanted to kill, and she finally got to kill today.

Bang!

A spiked meteor hammer slammed heavily against Peng Longteng's heavy armor, eliciting a dull thump. Peng Longteng was thrilled, and she wasted no time, rushing toward those trying to kill her.

They seemed to be the servants of the Dong family, but to Peng Longteng, they were just food to satisfy her craving for slaughter.

The outcome seemed predetermined. A warrior with no fatal weaknesses was impossible to defeat.

Initially, it seemed that the others wanted to send their own vassals to help. However, all fell silent when Li Huowang joined the fray, and they got to witness his strength.

After some time, the bustling courtyard was silent.

Li Huowang walked up to Peng Longteng's towering figure. He looked down at the people below, who were supposed to be related to Ji Lin.

They were all huddled behind their guards, and they were staring at the red-robed Daoist with fear and confusion in their

eyes.

Some had chosen to stay, while some quietly slipped away.

“Someone tried to kill me on my way here, and I managed to pry open some information through their mouths using some of my ‘tools.’” Li Huowang said, patting his bag of torture tools. “Guess what I discovered? Those who had perished all this while were nothing but pawns. None of the nine vying for the throne had perished, and I realized that you guys and them have gotten it wrong—very wrong! The changes this time aren't just political changes. Set aside the methods that you know are working, as vested interests and political exchanges are unnecessary here! There's also no need for schemes!

“What's needed is killing! We need to raise Gus! Except for the one on the throne, everyone must die! They must be annihilated !”

There was one more thing Li Huowang didn't say aloud, which was the late emperor's iron-clad law in the imperial temple. it was a law that could not be modified.

“When someone threatens His Majesty's life, what do you think His Majesty wants us to do? It's not to think about who his allies are or whether they have any connections. Our goal is to kill them all!”

Li Huowang lifted one foot and stomped on a corpse's head on the ground.

After a brief moment of silence, the beardless person from Zong Heng Jia stood up with a pale face. He pointed a trembling finger at Li Huowang and roared, “My senior has made great contributions to His Majesty! He was an indispensable subject to His Majesty. How dare you kill him! His Majesty won't let you off!”

“No, His Majesty won't bother me with such a small matter. What His Majesty wants is someone who can eliminate the obstacles to his ascension. Since your senior couldn't even deal with one opponent, he is of no value to His Majesty.”

Just then, Peng Longteng vanished behind Li Huowang.

Li Huowang walked forward and grabbed a roasted goose from the table. Then, he muttered, "Your Majesty, at this rate, you would waste that spiritual sin. You can't keep on hesitating. It's time to make a move.

"I am your sword—a very sharp sword. Don't let your sword go to waste."

Li Huowang left the mansion under everyone's gaze. Li Huowang didn't know whether there were spies in the courtyard, but he was sure that his words would reach Ji Lin's ears.

Sure enough, the next morning, Li Huowang received an imperial edict brought by an old eunuch.

The Empress Dowager was about to leave the city to worship the Bodhisattva at the Putan Temple, and Princess Chang Ning was going to accompany her.

"His Majesty wants me to kill Princess Chang Ning under the gaze of the Empress Dowager. Is that it?" Li Huowang asked the old eunuch.

The old eunuch shook his head indifferently. Then, he began to tell a short story. "Even children born in an ordinary family aren't equal to each other, much less children in the imperial family. The Empress Dowager gave birth to three sons and a daughter, but she favored the fourth prince. She has always been much less affectionate toward His Majesty since His Majesty was young. Before the late emperor ascended the throne, His Majesty was still young and was still living in Prince Heng's mansion. Every winter, he'd receive less money for charcoal than the other children, and His Majesty grew to hate winter thanks to that."

Li Huowang nodded. He immediately understood what the other party was trying to say. It seemed that Ji Lin hadn't eaten the spiritual sin in vain, and he wanted Li Huowang to "handle" his elder sister and mother.

The Empress Dowager couldn't vie for the throne. She believed her son, Ji Lin, had no chance to become emperor, so she pinned her hopes on another son.

The old eunuch smiled meaningfully at Li Huowang. Then, he tapped Li Huowang with the golden whisk in his hand.

"Princess Chang has excellent bodyguards. You've declared that you're a sharp sword, but I want to know whether you're fast as well."

"Sir, a sharp sword is naturally fast. I don't like fame nor fortune, as it invites many troubles. I only hope that my friends who owe me favors will help me when I encounter trouble in the future."

"Ah, you're already talking about conditions when the deed has yet to be carried out? Finish this first, and then we can talk."

Li Huowang stared at the old eunuch as the latter walked out of the courtyard before vanishing into thin air.

Looks like Ji Lin's side isn't filled with just a ragtag bunch of garbage.

There a few powerful eunuchs in the palace. Li Huowang couldn't help but wonder about how he could make use of them against Shai Zi.

"Dad, why can't I understand what you're saying?" Li Sui asked while gnawing on a roasted goose.

"You don't need to understand. Anyway, how is the food? Does it taste good?"

"Yes."

"That's good. Once you're done eating, pour out the water in the jar, fill it with soil, and move it to the bedroom for me."

Li Huowang rummaged through the carriage for a while before taking out an iron box. The box was sealed tightly, and even the tiny gaps were sealed with wax as if the one who had sealed the box was afraid that what was inside the box might escape to the outside world.

Chapter 516 - Increase

Li Sui carried in the water jar filled with dirt. Li Huowang used a knife to open the wax seal before prying the box open.

A small drop of mercury dripped out and landed on his red robes before dripping onto the ground, creating numerous tiny puddles of mercury.

“I never thought the lessons I learned from my science teacher would be so useful now. Mercury can evaporate at room temperature. If I hadn’t sealed it in the box with wax, I would’ve needed to source more just to skin myself.”

Li Huowang took off his clothes and carried the box filled with mercury toward the big jar full of soil.

Both the Empress Dowager and the princess stood at the top of the kingdom. The Surveillance Bureau was banned from working with them, but they were bound to have powerful bodyguards.

He had to be meticulous in his approach if he wanted to kill them and leave with his life. An artifact made from the skin of a Strayed One would be his insurance.

Li Huowang handed the iron box to Li Sui before burying himself in the jar of dirt. “Li Sui, you already know what to do, right?”

“Yes, I know, I know!” Li Sui exclaimed excitedly. Then, she used her sharp claw to open up Li Huowang’s skin starting from the crown of his head. “Dad, am I really being helpful to you right now?”

Li Huowang nodded amidst the pain and said, “Yes, really helpful.”

Li Sui was so ecstatic, and her tentacles wriggled in mid-air. Li Huowang rarely complimented her, so it wasn't strange that she was

so happy.

Just then, Li Sui pried Li Huowang's skin open and was about to pour in the mercury when Li Huowang called out, "Wait."

He took a moment to calm himself down before speaking softly toward the empty air. "Mom, are you there? I might make some noises in a few but don't worry about it. I'm just bungee jumping. Yes, I'll be bungee jumping for a very long time, but please don't be worried."

After calming his mother down, Li Huowang turned around and nodded at Li Sui. "Do it."

He had done this so many times before, but he still couldn't get used to the extreme pain. He tried to be silent, but he still ended up screaming from the pain.

He was panting by the end of it as he sprawled out on the bed. He could see the illusions whispering to each other and were clearly talking about him.

Li Huowang had used the Fiery Scripture to heal his wounds, but the extreme pain was still tormenting him.

This is too much. I really need to find a way to skin myself with as little pain as possible. Otherwise, my mind will eventually crumble at this rate.

"Dad, are you okay? How can I help you?" Li Sui's tentacles touched the scabs on Li Huowang. "Since it hurts so much, how about you don't do it again."

"Hehe. It's painful, but it must be done. Just massage me, and it should help with the pain."

Li Sui wrapped her sticky tentacles around Li Huowang and moved around. Eventually, Li Sui found herself clinging to Li Huowang as if she were a robe. "Dad, does it hurt if I do this? Did I manage to stop the pain?"

"No, it doesn't hurt anymore," Li Huowang whispered and suddenly felt exhausted. He tore off a piece of red cloth from his

robes and covered his own eyes. His eyelids had been torn off as well, so he needed a blindfold.

He slept soundly that night. When he woke up the next day, he found out that Li Sui was controlling his body to carry the heavy jar downstairs. “Li Sui?”

“Dad, did I wake you up? I want to put the jar back since we're no longer using it .”

“No, you didn't wake me up. I also need to wake up early today, so the timing is perfect.”

Li Huowang and Li Sui then carried the water jar back to its original place before heading to the well in the courtyard to wash up.

When Li Huowang saw his own reflection in the well, he realized that he didn't have to wash his face.

Li Huowang looked at his own reflection and stared at the tentacles moving in and out of his body before coming up with an idea.

“Li Sui, can you enter my body?”

“Dad, didn't you say that I might end up eating you up if I enter your body?”

“No, you're not going to stay inside permanently. It's temporary. I just realized that since the Luo Sect can use the Nascent Soul to speed up their cultivation, I should be able to do the same thing.”

There was no harm in having another hidden card against hidden enemies. He also had a ton of experience working with Li Sui.

“Oh. Let me try.”

Li Huowang opened his mouth, and Li Sui's tentacles poured into his throat. Bun's skinny limbs also stuffed themselves down Li Huowang's throat. Li Huowang felt like he was being stretched out from the inside, and it was a bizarre feeling overall.

The pain was bearable, but it was all because he was already in extreme pain. At this point, he couldn't even tell whether the pain was coming from the outside or from inside of him.

Once Li Sui was done, Li Huowang looked down at his reflection once more.

His skinless look was terrifying, but his deformed appearance right now looked downright monstrous. He appeared to be bloated, like someone who had forced themselves to wear a tight shirt. The only difference was that his body was the shirt, while Li Sui was that someone. Li Huowang's bulging blood vessels had been pervaded by Li Sui's black tentacles, and Li Huowang's flesh was shrouded by a black net of veins and tentacles. Li Huowang knew that he was staring at his own body, but he still couldn't help but feel repulsed by the sight.

Li Huowang tried to take a few steps and said, "No need to stuff all of your tentacles inside. You can extend some of the useless ones outside."

Some black tentacles burst out of Li Huowang like bamboo shoots after spring; the tentacles wriggled in mid-air. Li Huowang still appeared bloated, but at the very least, he was no longer *that* bloated. He no longer felt encumbered as well.

Li Huowang swung his purple-tasseled sword while Li Sui's tentacles wielded the bronze coin sword and some talismans.

Their teamwork was great, as the two of them were once one. As time ticked by, Li Huowang realized that his plan was feasible.

In addition to Li Sui's help, he'd be able to conceal his identity as well. Even Li Huowang could no longer recognize himself, so how could others recognize him?

"Dad, you can no longer wear your red robe..."

"We don't have to wear it. No need to wear such flashy clothes when we're going on an assassination. The last thing we want is getting recognized."

Li Huowang took a simple gray blanket and cut some holes in it to transform it into a large robe that concealed his bloated figure.

Chapter 517 - Bodhisattva

Li Huowang was invisible as he stood at the top of the tree and observed the endless procession.

Thousands of eunuchs, consorts, and guards formed a long line. He didn't even know where the line started and ended.

According to the information provided by Ji Lin, his target was the Empress Dowager, and the princess would be in the middle of the procession.

But Li Huowang knew now was not the right time to act, especially when he didn't know which carriage they were on.

It would be bad if he startled them, and they ended up secluding themselves in the palace. It would be hard for him to kill them by them.

Li Huowang deduced that he'd have the highest chance of success by assassinating the Empress Dowager and the princess rather than attempting to kill them in the open.

Of course, he could always find them head-on later.

"Suisui, let's go," Li Huowang said. The two of them were invisible when Li Sui's tentacles slithered out of Li Huowang and wrapped around the nearby branches.

Li Sui exerted force, and Li Huowang's figure shot toward the tree top.

Li Huowang followed the procession from afar.

Shangjing was in chaos right now, so the Empress Dowager and the princess would never travel far away from Shangjing to pray to the Bodhisattva. Li Huowang soon saw a massive statue of the Bodhisattva holding a jade vase carved into the mountain walls. It was a grand sight amidst the cloud-covered mountain peaks.

Li Huowang didn't recognize what Bodhisattva was because it

was different from the one he knew. The Bodhisattva of the Liang Kingdom was a male instead.

The male Bodhisattva statue was holding a jade vase in one hand while the other hand made a seal. The statue's eyes were staring at the mortals with pity and mercy.

"Let's go to the temple!" Li Huowang quickened his pace and reached the grand temple at the base of the Bodhisattva statue.

The temple was not a simple one, as it had such a massive Bodhisattva statue. The temple was so large that it had tens of mu of land. [1]

The temple was filled with greenery, and its yellow walls, grayish green roofs, thick scent of incense, and the grand bell toiling in the distance told everyone of its grandness.

Devotees were swarming the temple place, and the incense sticks in their hands smothered the temple with a thick and unique scent. They held their palms together and raised them above their chest and head before kneeling on the ground to pray. The stone floor had many holes from the countless devotees praying through the ages.

Clearly, the temple was an important place in the people's hearts.

"Let's go!" Li Huowang was still invisible as he leaped from rooftop to rooftop to find a place to hide.

Li Huowang wasn't afraid of the temple monks hunting him down. According to Ji Lin, the monks of the temple were just ordinary people.

Even if the temple held secrets, they would never dare to involve themselves in the chaotic succession war of Shangjing.

The monks were no fools either to be able to establish their temple so close to Shangjing. They knew not to interfere in the succession war, or they'd end up getting destroyed.

Li Huowang finally found a suitable hiding place. Just then, the

first batch of people in the procession finally reached the entrance of the temple.

Rows of monks wearing yellow robes followed several abbots to welcome their royal guests at the entrance of the temple.

Li Huowang held his breath and carefully observed what was happening.

He finally managed to catch a glimpse of the Empress Dowager and the eldest princess for the very first time after the attractive consorts parted away like colorful fans.

Pretty and attractive. That was Li Huowang's first thought when he saw them.

As Ji Lin's elder sister, the eldest princess was extremely gorgeous, and her mother, the Empress Dowager, was even more gorgeous than her.

The Empress Dowager had pale skin that revealed the slightest blush and thin lips that parted like rose petals. Age did not leave a single mark on her face.

If it wasn't because of the difference in their attire, Li Huowang would've never been able to distinguish who was the Empress Dowager and who was the eldest princess.

Under Li Huowang's gaze, the eldest princess whispered to the abbot. The guards behind her moved forward and chased away the other devotees before surrounding the entire temple. The place was now completely impenetrable.

The Empress Dowager and the eldest princess entered the temple with the consorts surrounding them.

They never stopped as they walked through the temple's ground. They climbed up the stone stairs and reached the tallest pagoda before kneeling on the cushions and praying to the large Bodhisattva statue carved from the mountain wall.

The Bodhisattva statue looked at them without any emotions.

"Dad, what are they doing?" Li Sui had never seen people

praying before and didn't understand what was happening.

"They are praying to the Bodhisattva. They are probably asking for forgiveness. I guess it's natural since they are asking one of their sons to kill the others. I doubt anyone would feel at peace for ordering that," Li Huowang explained to Li Sui.

Li Huowang was patient, and he stood still like a statue for a long time.

He knew that the Empress Dowager and the eldest princess would not return immediately after traveling so far away. *They must be staying here tonight.*

Ding! Dong! The bell tolled, and the monks sitting in a circle around the tallest pagoda started chanting their mantras.

The grand scene unfolded as the sun sailed past Bodhisattva's head and sank behind it.

At nightfall, Li Huowang finally felt that he had a chance to succeed. He used Li Sui's tentacles to scamper up the roof and make his way to the quarters of the Empress Dowager and the eldest princess.

He moved extremely slowly, as he knew that the two would have quite a few bodyguards protecting them around the clock.

Li Huowang managed to avoid the hidden bodyguards and reached the quarters in two hours.

It was already late at night, but the quarters were still surrounded by numerous eunuchs and consorts.

"Li Sui, we need to head left before going right past this point. We have to run away after killing them. Do not engage in battle unless necessary."

Li Huowang raised his right arm and gripped his sword. He was about to move when the door on the left abruptly. Several muscular consorts were carrying a young monk wrapped in a blanket, and they were heading to the room on the right.

"Stop! What are you doing? It's already so late." An old eunuch

with his face painted white stopped the consorts.

“The eldest princess saw how tired the Empress Dowager was during the prayers earlier in the day, so she wanted to express her filial piety toward the Empress Dowager.”

1. 1 mu = 667 square meters. 

Chapter 518 - Kill

The old eunuch heard their answers and nodded. "Is that so? Wait here. I will report to the Empress Dowager first."

With that, he opened the door slightly and entered the room.

After some time, he brought out two handsome monks from inside the room. "Carry him in. The Empress Dowager is waiting."

"Dad, what are they doing?"

Li Sui's question stumped Li Huowang. *How shameless are they to do something so devious beneath the gaze of the Bodhisattva? Do they not hold any respect toward it in their hearts?*

Li Huowang didn't respond to Li Sui's question and slowly made his way into the room. He crawled through the rafters, and his eyes twitched when he saw the "fiery" scene in the room. It was even more "intense" than what he saw in the Righteous Monastery.

Li Huowang thought that the Empress Dowager and the eldest princess were feeling guilty for their actions that had spurred the princes into killing each other, but it seemed that he was mistaken.

He took one look around the room and decided it was time to act. He jumped from the roof towards the large bed in the center of the room.

To prevent the empress dowager, who was buried under a group of people, from escaping, Li Huowang crushed his left eyeball without hesitation.

A strange light covered the bed, and everyone on it suddenly found themselves unable to move.

Li Huowang swung the spine sword downward. The spacetime rift leading to the Qi Kingdom was about to tear the Empress Dowager in half when the entire bed suddenly moved left, avoiding the attack.

Realizing that his chances of success were becoming increasingly thin, Li Huowang attacked relentlessly. He opened his mouth and spat his molars toward the Empress Dowager.

A humanoid shadow appeared to block the attack. She used a white ribbon to block the molars but failed to notice that Li Huowang had sent another attack behind the molars. Li Huowang's severed arm pierced the bodyguard's abdomen and plunged into the Empress Dowager's chest.

Seeing that the Empress Dowager's eyes were becoming dull, Li Huowang immediately ran toward the exit. "We have to go and kill the eldest princess!"

Li Sui's tentacles burst forth from Li Huowang's stump and grabbed the severed arm before connecting the two once again. "Dad, you almost forgot your arm."

Li Huowang reached the exit and saw that the eldest princess's door was already open; there was a horde of guards standing by to stop him. The guards, eunuchs, and consorts surrounded the eldest princess as she made a break for it.

Li Huowang never thought that they would choose to run immediately rather than confront him head-on.

"Scram!" Li Huowang swung his spine sword toward the guards. Li Sui mimicked his movement using the bronze coin sword.

To protect the eldest princess, the guards and the eunuchs ran fearlessly toward Li Huowang, but they were immediately cut in half.

Li Huowang was getting closer to the eldest princess when the clear toiling of bells echoed in the air. A petite escort wearing a transparent veil was dancing as she made her way toward Li Huowang.

The bells on her arms and feet emitted a hypnotic tune; strands of gold burst out of her hair and wriggled in mid-air.

Li Huowang fell into a daze. When he looked at the escort

again, a strange surge of emotions came from the bottom of his heart. All of his love for Bai Lingmiao and Yang Na was suddenly concentrated on the escort.

The escort approached Li Huowang and danced as the golden strands from her hair thrust into Li Huowang.

Li Huowang was being penetrated, but he felt no pain. Instead, he was ecstatic. He felt like the golden strands were Bai Lingmiao and Yang Na's hands, and he felt like they were caressing him.

The escort pried open her veil and pursed her lips to kiss him. The golden strands dug even deeper into Li Huowang as the escort's lips approached him. Li Huowang didn't notice the pill at the base of the escort's tongue.

Just then, several tentacles with hooks burst out of Li Huowang's mouth and tore off the escort's face in a single brutal swing.

The escort cried out in pain as the tentacles dragged her face into Li Huowang's throat. Li Huowang woke up from his stupor and stabbed his legs to wake up.

The intense pain cleared his mind, and he cut down the escort before chasing the eldest princess.

I've never seen that technique before! That was dangerous! Li Huowang raised his guard up and prepared himself for unexpected attacks.

If it hadn't been for Li Sui, the eldest princess would have escaped successfully under the lead of her powerful bodyguards.

He saw two old eunuchs holding flying guillotines standing in his way. Li Huowang knew that he couldn't afford to waste his time dealing with these obstacles.

"Li Sui, ribs!" Li Huowang exclaimed after having made up his mind. Li Sui immediately broke Li Huowang's lowermost ribs and handed them to him through his belly button.

Li Huowang stabbed his ribs into his abdomen, and the

eunuchs cried out in pain before collapsing to the ground.

Four black tentacles burst out of Li Huowang and sent him forward. Li Huowang then ran on the rooftops, chasing after the escaping eldest princess.

More and more guards collapsed to the ground from the extreme pain as Li Huowang stabbed himself using his ribs. Meanwhile, he was getting closer and closer to the princess.

Upon seeing that he was close enough, he pulled out the blunted ribs from his abdomen and exclaimed, "This isn't enough pain! Li Sui! Skin!"

Li Sui's exposed tentacles stuck themselves to Li Huowang. Then, the hooks on the tentacles latched onto his scars and scabs.

When Li Huowang stabbed himself with his ribs once again, Li Sui instantly skinned Li Huowang.

"AAAAAAAH!" The terrible pain almost made Li Huowang collapse, but it was worth it. Everyone, including the eldest princess, fell to the ground and cried out in extreme agony. They had been incapacitated.

Li Huowang let go of his ribs and wielded his spine sword to deliver the killing blow. Before he could do so, however, someone wearing a black veil stood before him.

The black veil revealed nothing but a single outstretched arm. Li Huowang's heart sank when he saw the layers of scars on the arm as well as the blood seeping out from beneath the veil.

He's must be from the Ao Jing Sect! Ordinary people can't possibly stand up after being subjected to such intense pain!

Chapter 519 - Eldest Princess

Clang, clang, clang!

Li Huowang swung his spine sword to deflect the three fingernails flying toward him.

That attack confirmed his suspicions. The figure before him was from the Ao Jing Sect.

“I thought you guys never meddled with society and single-mindedly chased after the most exquisite pain? Why are you meddling here?” Li Huowang asked.

The black-veiled figure chuckled. Then, he knelt on the ground and took out a clay statue of the Ao Jing Sect’s deity before placing it close to his chest.

“You took the words out of my mouth. Why are you even here? As for myself, I’m just here to return a favor.”

Boom!

An intense heat wave burst out of the black-veiled figure, and it made Li Huowang’s veil flutter. Moments later, a burning man was standing before Li Huowang.

Li Huowang frowned. His opponent was indeed from the Ao Jing Sect, and he was quite strong, too.

Even though the Ao Jing Sect’s techniques came with extreme downsides, they granted the users immense power. The techniques of the Ao Jing Sect were so powerful that it propelled them into becoming one of the strongest sects in the world.

“Scram!” Li Huowang roared, swinging the spine sword and sending out a rift in spacetime toward the burning man.

The man knew that he had to avoid that attack. He propelled

himself into the air using his flames. Then, he opened his mouth and breathed fire toward Li Huowang.

Li Huowang cut the flames apart using the spine sword and sent them to the Qi Kingdom. Moments later, Li Huowang finally caught a glimpse of his opponent.

The person on fire was humanoid, but Li Huowang was certain that a normal person didn't have two heads. It wasn't a Nascent Soul of the Luo Sect; they were just normal heads. The flames had scorched the two heads, but Li Huowang could still make out how the dents in the heads. The heads looked like winter melons that had been stomped on.

Li Huowang's opponent even had four arms and three legs. The humanoid figure before him seemed like he was made out of multiple people that had been sewn together!

I can't waste my time with this bastard! I can kill him, but I'll fail in my mission if the eldest princess manages to survive! Li Huowang stared at the eldest princess being carried away by an old eunuch.

Several ideas popped up in Li Huowang's mind as he looked around the burning temple. Eventually, he settled on one idea.

Li Huowang turned left and ran inside one of the burning buildings. The burning man from the Ao Jing Sect chased after him.

"Black smoke covers the skies! Hang low upon the heavens! Gang Bo Ba Nie Li! Gu Da Lu Ying Hua! Mi Duo Luo Tian Cheng!"

The clay statue in the burning man's hands had become red from the high temperatures, but he didn't hesitate to shove it inside of him through his navel.

In an instant, one of the golden Buddha statues melted. The gold plating melted and became like a tidal wave that swept across the burning building to block Li Huowang's escape route.

Everything burned brightly, and even the air itself took on an orange hue from the extreme temperatures. Li Huowang's veil was reduced to ashes as well.

The burning wave of gold was about to seal Li Huowang by covering him in gold when something unexpected happened.

There was no one beneath the veil. Instead of a person, a skinned dog covered in black tentacles was there.

“Shit!” Zu Yi^[1], the Ao Jing Sect member who had been trying to stop Li Huowang, realized that he had been tricked. He ran out of the building along with the blazing molten gold.

The fire followed Zu Yi, and the building stopped burning. Li Sui was left all alone in the middle of the charred building.

“Strange. Why is it not happening as Dad had told me?”

Li Sui took out the human-skin doll from its belly to examine it before stuffing it back. He then ran like a bloodhound to chase after Zu Yi and Li Huowang.

Li Huowang chased after the eldest princess by jumping from roof to roof while in his invisible state. He was fast approaching her.

Faster! I need to be faster! Li Huowang’s killing intent grew deeper. Just as he felt a wave of heat flying toward him, he swung his sword at the eldest princess.

Li Huowang saw the spacetime rift leading to the Qi Kingdom getting closer and closer to the eldest princess when the latter abruptly twisted herself in a bizarre way. She kicked herself off the old eunuch’s shoulder and dodged Li Huowang’s attack.

A long ribbon flowed out from her sleeves, and she hovered in mid-air.

Li Huowang suddenly felt like he was staring at a gorgeous goddess that had descended on the mortal world.

Li Huowang was unfamiliar with that technique, but he knew that the eldest princess still had more cards up her sleeves.

Clearly, she had been hiding her cards by acting like she was weak. It turned out that she was more than capable of fending off an assassin!

Swoosh!

A wave of flames seared off the scabs on Li Huowang's back.

The eldest princess and Zu Yi flanked Li Huowang. The next moment, numerous bodyguards appeared and surrounded Li Huowang. The hunter was now the hunted.

"Who sent you here?"

The eldest princess stood at the top of a gazebo and looked down at him with pride. Her translucent ribbons floated around her like snakes.

Li Huowang said nothing. He steeled himself for a bloody fight. He knew something like this would happen, as those involved in the succession war were all experts who had numerous cards up their sleeves.

"I will not punish you even though you've killed my mother. I will double your reward as long as you work for me."

The eldest princess's voice was cold, much to the irritation of Li Huowang.

"No need. I am poor, but I am loyal! I will never betray my Lord!"

Li Huowang immediately charged in the direction with the least amount of people.

"Zu Yi, don't destroy his soul. I want to know his master's identity."

"Understood." Zu Yi was still shrouded in fire when he chased after Li Huowang.

Li Huowang reached one of the buildings when a shadow appeared and pounced on him.

"Dad, I didn't use the doll!" Li Sui's tentacles sprouted out from his body again.

"Great! I can use it now!"

When the guards shrouded in killing intent surrounded him again with their weapons in hand, Li Huowang thrust his fingers

into his own chest and tore it open, exposing his organs.

1. Meaning Feet One 📖

Chapter 520 - Ao Jing Sect

“Metal lungs!”

Li Huowang snarled and tore off his own lungs before slapping them onto the Profound Records on the ground.

As he howled in pain, the crescent moon in the skies became shrouded by dark clouds. The shadow of the clouds produced an illusion on the Bodhisattva statue, making it seem like it was closing its eyes.

“Wood liver!”

The guards that surrounded Li Huowang all dropped to the ground as their bodies wriggled in pain. Their agonized screams sent shivers down everyone’s spines.

Zu Yi saw what Li Huowang was doing and exclaimed, “That’s... that’s the Five Elements Intercalation!”

The doll made from a Strayed One’s skin could extend one’s life, but in Li Huowang’s hands, it could be used to perform that powerful technique without dying.

The blood-red bamboo slips transformed into wiggling maggots that burrowed into Li Huowang; some of them even crawled on Li Sui’s tentacles.

Li Huowang sighed. The pain disappeared as his body became hollow. He stood up slowly and glared at the burning Zu Yi. “Come.”

The tables had turned...

When Li Huowang took a step forward, the burning Zu Yi took a step back.

Soon, their steps became a slow jog. Soon, the two of them

were running at full speed. Zu Yi was frantically running away from Li Huowang while the latter chased after him.

Zu Yi saw the princess standing still, so he shouted, "Be careful! He's using the secret technique of the Ao Jing Sect! He cannot be killed in a short period of time! He's covered in maggots, so don't get close to him until he's exhausted!"

"*Hmph!*" the princess scoffed and raised her chin. Several shadows flew past her and ran toward Li Huowang.

Li Huowang didn't even blink when the dark shadows made holes in him, as the holes were pervaded by maggots.

"Li Sui! Come!"

Li Huowang gnashed his teeth and ran toward the princess while Li Sui drew two talismans and slapped them onto the two largest tentacles.

The tentacles expanded and slammed the ground, propelling Li Huowang like an arrow toward the princess standing on a rooftop.

The princess waved her sleeves, and the ribbons around her flew into the air, forming an intricate formation.

Li Huowang didn't even bother to dodge. He slashed at the ribbons with the spine sword, and Li Sui threw the maggots at the princess with her tentacles.

The princess finally grew serious when she saw the sword slicing her ribbons so easily while the maggots flew past the gaps in her formation. *How did he get so strong?*

She wrapped a ribbon on the seven-layered furnace behind her and pulled herself away.

Li Huowang's maggots chased after her but were blocked by a wave of burning molten gold.

"Princess! We need to buy time! He will die once the Five Elements Intercalations ends!" Zu Yi explained.

"How annoying! In that case, block him for me while I go back to the palace!"

The princess was about to run away when Li Huowang blocked her. “Leave? I’ve paid a huge price, and you actually want to leave just like that?”

Li Huowang clenched his teeth and tore his torso apart before running at the princess. His torso was like a gaping maw, while his ribs were the teeth.

Boom!

All of a sudden, his white ribs exploded into a cluster of maggots that rained down on the princess.

Sensing danger, the princess’s perfume pouch suddenly opened, and a multicolored cloud shot out to block the maggots.

The bodyguards of the Empress Dowager also ran over and surrounded Li Huowang along with the princess’s bodyguards.

However, they weren’t Li Huowang’s match, as he was still in the middle of the Five Elements Intercalation. All of them died one by one, and soon Li Huowang had the upper hand; even the princess was wounded.

They fought with their lives on the line.

“Imperial Preceptor!” someone roared, forcing everyone to come to a halt and look in the same direction.

An old man reclining on a black ox slowly entered the fray. He was wearing a simple bamboo hat with a fishing rod in hand.

Li Huowang looked at the old man without letting his guard down. He was the same old man he had met in the palace not too long ago.

“Imperial Preceptor, save me!” the princess cried out. She appeared very pitiful with her tattered clothes.

The Imperial Preceptor’s expression became sullen as he swept his gaze across the battlefield. He glanced alternately between the severely injured Li Huowang and the pitiful-looking princess before figuring out what was happening.

He patted the black ox lightly, and the ox ran away from the

battlefield.

“Imperial Preceptor! You once carried me in your arms when I was young!”

Li Huowang stared at the Imperial Preceptor leaving the battlefield and heard the latter's aged and exhausted voice.

“ *Sigh*. All things change. It's better to make it quick. Just let it go.”

The black ox disappeared in the night. Li Huowang was about to continue his assault when he saw a glob of molten gold landing on the princess's face. “ AAAAAAAAAAAAAA! ”

Li Huowang was confused by Zu Yi's betrayal, but he said nothing as he slashed at the princess.

Zu Yi's betrayal was the nail in the coffin. Under their combined assault, the injured princess eventually lost.

The princess's clear irises reflected Li Huowang's silhouette as the latter walked up to her decapitated head and picked it up from the ground.

It was only when the maggots had devoured her brain did Li Huowang throw the head away. Then, he looked at Zu Yi, who was no longer burning.

“Zu Yi greets the elder.” Zu Yi bowed to Li Huowang.

“Why are you calling me an elder right now and not earlier?” Li Huowang asked the charred Zu Yi.

Zu Yi said nothing and retreated.

Li Huowang did not chase after Zu Yi as he could feel extreme pain encroaching upon him. The Five Elements Intercalation would soon be over.

“Li Sui, let's go.” Li Huowang walked in the opposite direction.

Fifteen minutes later, a hollowed-out Li Huowang sat underneath a large tree. He was dead.

Moments later, a doll made out of human skin crawled out of his abdomen and expanded.

Chapter 521 - Zu Yi

“Go and investigate this thoroughly! That criminal and their family must be executed! And they must suffer a slow death!” Ji Lin roared so loud that his voice echoed throughout the palace.

None of the civil and military officials below uttered a word. They stood silently in a row as they held crescent-shaped boards and stared at the spotless ground.

“Are you deaf? Huh?! My mother! And my sister!! That criminal has ignored their noble statuses and killed them like they're game!”

“*Hahaha!* Am I in the kingdom of our Ji family or not?! Am I in the territory of the Great Liang?!” Ji Lin yelled, tossing the thick memorials away.

The memorials landed on the heads of the officials.

Finally, a chubby military officer stepped forward and said, “Your Majesty, witness accounts state that murder was an evil cultivator!”

“I don’t care what kind of cultivator he is! I only want his head! I need to see his head within three days!”

The morning court ended amidst the oppressive atmosphere. Ji Lin walked through the palace toward his chambers with a furious look. All the eunuchs and palace maids were silent, afraid of incurring his wrath.

When Ji Lin reached his chambers, the anger on his face disappeared instantly and was replaced by a bloodthirsty joy.

“Er Jiu, you did great! Your sword is indeed fast and sharp! Your sword is much better than those that are all bark and no bite! Tell me, what reward do you want?”

Li Huowang emerged from the giant golden sandalwood on the

left and said, “Your Majesty, I don’t want titles or money. I just feel that Your Majesty is the destined ruler.”

Dressed in imperial robes, Ji Lin pushed his sagging left cheek with his hand. He circled around Li Huowang with his hands behind his back, “*Hehehe*, you don’t want titles or money? So, does that mean you want me to owe you a favor?”

Li Huowang did not reply.

Since he had already demonstrated his value, the next step was to figure out how to use Ji Lin to deal with Shai Zi.

Ji Lin patted Li Huowang’s left shoulder. Then, he waved to the old eunuch holding a tray in the corner.

Ji Lin picked up a golden token engraved with a dragon pattern from the tray and handed it to Li Huowang. “This is a death pardon token. You can use this to atone for any heinous crimes you commit in the future.”

Li Huowang immediately discerned the implied meaning behind Ji Lin’s words, and he felt like the weight of the golden token in his hands had increased significantly. The death pardon token was only going to be effective during the ruling of the same emperor who had handed it to the receiver. Otherwise, the death token would become like jewelry—only good for pawnshops.

“Thank you, Your Majesty.”

Ji Lin took a step forward and looked closely into Li Huowang’s eyes. “I know that this cannot compensate for your contributions. Rest assured, you will become my most distinguished aide once I’ve ascended the throne.”

“Your Majesty, do you hate the Sitting Oblivion Dao?”

Ji Lin was taken aback by Li Huowang’s sudden question about the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

“Your Majesty, do you hate the Sitting Oblivion Dao?” Li Huowang asked once again.

“Of course! My father died because of the Sitting Oblivion Dao!

They murdered him!” Ji Lin spoke through gritted teeth.

Li Huowang nodded, feeling reassured. He raised both hands and bowed to Ji Lin, “Your Majesty, I understand. Who should I kill next?”

It was enough to start off like that. Those two heads probably weren’t enough to ask for Ji Lin’s help.

“There’s no hurry. I need to see everyone’s reaction first. This is a tricky matter as well. You’re good at killing people, but you can’t help me get more supporters. Anyway, you’re free to go and rest. I’ll inform you again when it’s time to act.”

Soon, Li Huowang found himself outside the red walls of the palace under the lead of a group of imperial guards.

On his way back, Li Huowang solemnly pondered over Ji Lin’s reaction. He was considering the implications behind every minute change in his expression.

In the past, Ji Lin was straightforward and had always said whatever came to his mind. Now, Li Huowang wasn’t so sure whether he was still the same Ji Lin during that festival or not.

The Emperor of Great Liang himself was at odds with the Sitting Oblivion Dao. Li Huowang was once convinced that the emperor wouldn’t refuse to help him against Shai Zi. After all, that decision made the most sense—both logically and emotionally.

But now, Li Huowang doubted it. Why did Shai Zi specifically want Ji Lin to ascend the throne? What profit would he reap?

Even if Ji Lin was willing to use the power of the Great Liang to deal with the Sitting Oblivion Dao, Li Huowang dared not reveal everything to him until he was sure of everything.

Could Ji Lin be a pawn of the Sitting Oblivion Dao? Alarm bells rang in Li Huowang’s mind.

“Brother Li, rest assured. Ji Lin is not a pawn of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. The Surveillance Bureau is incompetent, but they’re not incompetent enough for the Sitting Oblivion Dao to replace

such an important figure with their own under the Surveillance Bureau's gaze." Zhuge Yuan said, his words dispelled Li Huowang's worries.

Li Huowang nodded thoughtfully and pondered over his next move. This was a difficult endeavor. For every possibility considered, he had to backtrack to think whether Shai Zi had already anticipated it or not.

"Dad, you're back? I made some steamed buns for you!"

Li Huowang had just entered the house when he was intercepted by Li Sui, who proudly displayed the results of her cooking. Li Huowang turned and saw lumps of dough in the pot. A few buns had been scorched black, and some hadn't risen at all. Li Huowang smiled wryly at the sight, but he still reached out and bit into one of the buns.

Li Huowang knew that dealing with a powerful enemy like Shai Zi couldn't be rushed at all. However, how could he not feel anxious when Miaomiao was in Shai Zi's hands?

Li Huowang patted Li Sui's white skull and felt a bit relieved.

"Dad, are they delicious?"

"No. Don't make them next time."

"Why not? I think the steamed buns I made are delicious."

Just then, there was knocking on the door.

"Zu Yi greets Grand Elder."

Li Huowang immediately stopped chewing. He and Li Sui looked at the door together.

"The door's not locked; come in," Li Huowang said indifferently, as though he wasn't surprised that the other party had followed him here.

When Li Huowang saw Zu Yi betraying the princess, he knew that he'd meet Zu Yi again.

The wooden courtyard door was pushed open by a man wearing a black veil and a wide coat. The man was covered

thoroughly, and the only information Li Huowang could gather from the man was the pungent smell of charcoal emanating from him. Li Sui's keen nose also allowed her to reach the conclusion that the man before them was the same burning man from that battle not too long ago.

Chapter 522 - Ascension

Li Sui crouched, and her tentacles writhed as she growled at the newcomer.

"He's a guest," Li Huowang said to Li Sui before turning to look at the visitor. "Please be seated."

Li Huowang then pulled a long bench from the side of the table and dragged it toward the visitor.

"I dare not. Before the Grand Elder, there is no place for Zu Yi," Zu Yi said. He extended his charred hands and moved the bench aside.

"Since you know that I'm the Grand Elder, why did you oppose me?" Li Huowang asked.

"I owed the princess a favor long ago, so even though I knew the Grand Elder's identity, I still had to protect her, as I couldn't go back on my word."

"Oh? Then why did you end up betraying her?"

"I've repaid the favor by going all out to stop you, so my duty was considered fulfilled by then," Zu Yi said in a matter-of-factly way.

"I'm a disciple of Ao Jing, so I can't stand idly by upon seeing you facing difficulties, which was why I helped you deal with the princess."

"You're a really straightforward person. One thing leads to another, right?" Li Huowang covered Li Sui's mouth, as she was still growling.

"Some say it's better to live life in ignorance, but I think it's better to be on top of things."

"How did you recognize me as the Grand Elder? What if I'm not from the Ao Jing Sect?"

“The fact that you managed to use the Five Elements Intercalation and survive afterward means that you're undoubtedly the Grand Elder!” Zu Yi replied immediately before kowtowing to Li Huowang.

Li Huowang smiled and observed Zu Yi for a moment before asking, “Do you want to continue chatting? I can chat with you all night.”

“Why do you say that, Grand Elder?”

“Why did you come here then if not for that?” Li Huowang asked, raising his voice slightly.

Zu Yi pondered for a moment, and then he knelt before Li Huowang. “Zu Yi is willing to give everything in exchange for the Grand Elder’s method of ascension!”

Li Huowang finally understood why Zu Yi had decided to stick close to him. Li Huowang didn’t immediately reject Zu Yi’s request, as he considered whether Zu Yi could be useful against the Shai Zi or not.

“Do you know about the Shai Zis of the Sitting Oblivion Dao?”

Although confused by the sudden change in the topic, Zu Yi immediately answered, “Of course. The Shai Zis has caused a commotion in the capital not too long ago.”

“Then, among the figures of the Ao Jing Sect, who do you think is strong enough to deal with a Shai Zi?” Li Huowang asked, leaning forward slightly.

Zu Yi thought for a moment and replied, “In terms of individual strength, the three Five-Calamity Grand Elders should be able to handle a Shai Zi.”

“Five-Calamity Grand Elders?”

“Each time a member of the Ao Jing Sect ascends, they obtain a calamity. After ascending three times, they’ll earn the title of Grand Elder. A Five-Calamity Grand Elder is someone who has ascended five times.”

Zu Yi looked up at Li Huowang and was a little puzzled.
“Grand Elder, don’t you know that already?”

Li Huowang didn’t answer, as he was still stunned by the shocking revelation. “The Cang-Qiang Ascension actually has such an effect? The more you ascend, the stronger you become? Ascending five times means becoming even more powerful than a Shai Zi?!”

“It’s not just the Cang-Qiang Ascension. Other methods of ascension have that effect as well. We get closer to Ba-Hui with each ascension, and we can better use its power for ourselves,” Zu Yi remarked.

“How about the person with the most ascensions in the Ao Jing Sect? How many calamities do they have?”

“Legend has it that they have ten calamities.”

“Ten calamities? What’s their name?”

“The Sacrificial God.”

“The Sacrificial God is eternal. The Mother of all Beings, the Gateway of Creation, is the basis of the Heavens and the Earth! From nothing to something, birthing the Heavens and the Earth.”

His words instantly brought Li Huowang back to a few years ago—to the statue sitting on the cross.

According to his previous observations in the Cross Temple, the Sacrificial God was the only mortal who had achieved sanctification of the flesh and had forcibly seized a portion of the Heavenly Dao from Ba-Hui.

Achieving sanctification of the flesh after ten calamities? Li Huowang’s heart suddenly raced.

The Cang-Qiang Ascension really lived up to its name. Through ascending step by step, one could eventually become a god! This was brand-new information to Li Huowang.

What am I waiting for then? I just have to perform the Cang-Qiang Ascension a few more times, and I’d be able to make quick work of Shai

Zi! By then, my issue will be easily resolved!

However, Li Huowang was suddenly reminded of the hardship he had to go through during his previous Cang-Qiang Ascensions.

“Mom! I can’t tell! I really can’t tell!”

“Im.. impossible! I didn’t kill them! I didn’t destroy that village!”

“Huowang... why...?”

It was Yang Na last time, so who will it be next? My own mother? What cruel thing do I have to do to Sun Xiaoqin to attain the utmost physical and mental agony? No! No way! I won’t do it! She’s not fake! She’s my mom!

Zu Yi noticed that the air around Li Huowang had distorted slightly, and he retreated into the courtyard in surprise.

“I’m fine! I’m fine...” Li Huowang muttered as he grabbed his head.

“Brother Li, there must be another way. The Cang-Qiang Ascension requires killing your close family and doing all sorts of despicable deeds. Ascending also gets harder the more you do it. If you keep doing it, what would be the difference between you and the evil Shai Zi?!”

Li Huowang gradually calmed down under Zhuge Yuan’s persuasion. “Don’t worry, I’m not going to do it again. I’ll definitely find another way!”

Li Huowang looked up at Zu Yi in the courtyard and calmly said, “It’s okay, come in. Let’s keep chatting.”

What bizarre technique is the Grand Elder practicing? What were those bizarre changes? Zu Yi pondered in confusion as he walked into the house.

“You’ve never seen a Shai Zi, so how can you say that a Five-Calamity Elder can defeat a Shai Zi? I’ve also tried the Cang-Qiang Ascension. There haven’t been many other changes aside from being more sensitive to pain and one’s regenerative ability becoming even stronger.”

Li Huowang had calmed down, and he started doubting Zu Yi's words. After all, talk was cheap, and no one could verify the authenticity of his words.

“Grand Elder, there's no need to be doubtful of me. Obtaining Five Calamities means you're no longer an ordinary person. Moreover, the Sitting Oblivion Dao is not good at direct confrontation, so a Five-Calamity Elder is strong enough against their Shai Zi.”

“But Shai Zis are extremely adept at deception, which makes sense, as they are leaders of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. It's extremely difficult to find a Shai Zi if they want to remain hidden. That's why the sect has never really found a Shai Zi after all these years.”

“The sect is also looking for a Shai Zi? Why?” Li Huowang asked, but he immediately figured out the answer himself. “Right, the Ao Jing Sect is considered a famous orthodox sect, so the Surveillance Bureau must have approached the sect.”

Chapter 523 - Letter

When Li Huowang learned from Zu Yi that the Surveillance Bureau had invited the Ao Jing Sect to deal with the Sitting Oblivion Dao together, he realized that he might be looking in the wrong place for a solution.

If the Ao Jing Sect truly had a way to deal with a Shai Zi, that Shai Zi wouldn't have threatened him.

Li Huowang sighed lightly while sitting on the bench. He then turned to Zu Yi and said, "Alright, you can go. We've settled our unfinished business at the time. From now on, we'll go our separate ways."

Zu Yi was momentarily stunned, and then he sounded nervous as he said, "Grand Elder, what about the secrets to Ascension..."

"There are no secrets!" Li Huowang exclaimed, sounding irritated upon recalling something. "Do you know how excruciating and desolate it is to reach extreme physical and mental agony? Yet, you masochists are actually chasing after it desperately!"

Li Huowang's outburst made Zu Yi retreat slowly into the courtyard. He glanced at Li Huowang sitting on the bench inside the house. After a moment of contemplation, he said, "Grand Elder, did you encounter any issues today?"

"As the esteemed Grand Elder of the Ao Jing Sect, please do not hesitate to give me any instructions if there's anything that I can help you with."

Li Huowang shook his head and waved his hand impatiently. "You can't help. If you could, I would have already employed you."

Zu Yi said no more and turned around to leave the courtyard. As he gripped the wooden door latch, a voice echoed from within his broad cloak. "Elder, forgive me for being presumptuous. All

worldly troubles are meaningless before the pain of Ascension. And as disciples of the Ao Jing Sect... I believe we should focus only on the right path.”

Li Huowang couldn't be bothered to argue with the masochistic lunatic. He turned around and ignored Zu Yi.

“Grand Elder.”

“Are you not done yet?!” Li Huowang exclaimed, turning around with his sword in hand. To his surprise, he saw Zu Yi bend down to pick up a folded beige envelope from the ground.

“Grand Elder, this seems to be a letter for you.”

“A letter?” Li Huowang walked over with his suspicions, and reached out to retrieve it and examine the contents.

“I'll take my leave since you have your personal matters. I'll send someone to report to you if there's anything important from the temple. After all, you are the esteemed Grand Elder of the Ao Jing Sect.”

Li Huowang paid no attention to Zu Yi's words as his eyes were fixed on the letter.

Bai Lingmiao? How did she manage to write a letter to me after being kidnapped by that Shai Zi?

Li Huowang's fingers trembled slightly as he opened the envelope and pulled out the letter.

Senior Li, are you okay? I'm really sorry for the fact that I haven't made any contact with you for so long.

I wanted to contact you a long time ago, but they wouldn't allow me until now. I can't write who they are, as they might change it. They've been good to me, and they haven't been mistreating me at all.

You must be searching all over for me, but don't worry, Senior Li. I'll be back soon. It's not going to take two years like you said. By the way, the persimmon cakes here are really sweet; I'll send you some of them.

From your wife, Bai Lingmiao.

Two years? Two years? How did Bai Lingmiao know about that promise? Li Huowang's pupils constricted as he recalled Yang Na standing before him behind a wire iron fence.

"Yang Na, wait! Give me three years! No! Two years! Just give me two more years!"

That's right! Bai Lingmiao left me back then, so the Yang Na at the time must've been the reflection of Bai Lingmiao from this world when she was taken away!

Li Huowang paced around the room; his emotions were tumultuous as he gripped the letter. This letter was of great significance!

Perhaps, this means that Shai Zi hadn't kidnapped Bai Lingmiao! He must've been lying to me all this while!

It was an uplifting conjecture. Just as Li Huowang's imagination was about to go wild, a beggar stuck his head into the courtyard through the doorway.

"Boss Hong Zhong! Ah, I'm really sorry," said the beggar with an apologetic look. "I almost forgot about the persimmon cakes while delivering the letter."

The beggar carried the bamboo basket inside with his dirty hands, and he was panting as he walked into the courtyard.

After putting down the basket, he walked toward Li Sui and said, "Ah, it's a pleasure to meet you! You must be Boss Hong Zhong's dog, right? I've long heard of you."

Li Huowang looked at the envelope in his hand and then at the beggar chatting away with Li Sui. His heart quickly cooled down.

What's going on? Does Shai Zi think I've been making too many moves lately, so he's decided to send a letter to warn me?

Maybe Shai Zi has deceived me! Maybe Bai Lingmiao isn't by his side!

Thump!

Li Huowang reached and pressed the beggar's neck against the wall.

He didn't ask for the man's name; he took out a dagger to lift the man's face.

After flipping through a few faces, Li Huowang finally saw Jiu Wan[1] squinting at him.

"What are you doing here?!" Li Huowang gritted his teeth.

"Ah, what else can I do? I'm just here to deliver a letter. I didn't steal any of the persimmon cakes; they only sent these few pieces..."

"Don't worry, it's okay if you don't tell the truth. I'll make you tell the truth! I'm skilled in both Ao Jing and Sitting Oblivion Dao! You choose!" Li Huowang said as he opened his bag of torture tools.

Amidst the clattering of metal, Li Huowang suddenly noticed that the man's mocking smile seemed a bit off.

He released the man's throat, and he collapsed to the ground. The Jiu Wan before Li Huowang was dead.

"Officers, we're just a theater troupe; there's nothing to investigate here. See, these are costumes. *Hehehe*, " Lu Zhuangyuan said to the city guards.

However, the guards only glanced at him once. They tossed the travel pass at Lu Zhuangyuan's face before rummaging through the carriage.

Lu Zhuangyuan quickly caught the travel pass with both hands. The travel pass had to stay safe. Without it, it would be difficult to navigate through Great Liang.

More importantly, it was a gift from the young Daoist. It was going to be problematic if he ended up losing it.

He tucked the travel pass back into his pocket before leading the others through the thick city gates.

The unfolding scene was overwhelming to all of them. They

had finally arrived at Shangjing—the largest city in the world.

They marveled at the towering wooden buildings that lined the streets, and the distinct architectural styles of the buildings here were especially shocking to them.

1. Nine Characters in mahjong 📖

Chapter 524 - Shangjing

Everyone was dazzled. Rare items that were seldom seen in bustling markets were commonplace here.

Puppy bought a well-crafted red rattle drum from a stall. He burst into laughter after swinging it around a few times.

“You’re already so old, but you’re still having fun playing with a toy? How embarrassing,” Lu Xiucan said with his arms crossed in contempt.

“Why do you even care? At least, I’m better off than you. Those women in those brothels had almost sucked your soul away. You drool all over the place, probably thinking of them,” Puppy retorted as he tucked the drum into his arms.

Lu Xiucan wanted to retort, but Lu Zhuangyuan said, “We’ve already arrived, so let’s go and find a place to stay before anything else.”

Lu Zhuangyuan felt like he hadn’t done much except look around, yet found that two hours had already passed.

He saw that Puppy didn’t respond, so he led the group to find an inn. After a while of searching around, they entered the smallest inn they could find.

Although it was an extremely small inn, Lu Zhuangyuan’s eyes widened in surprise when he inquired about the prices. It was too expensive.

“Sixteen bowls of plain noodles~”

After the waiter left with a disdainful look, Lu Zhuangyuan cleared his throat and said, “Actually, noodles aren’t bad. It’s been a while since we’ve had noodles, so let’s have something different.”

Lu Xiucan wasn’t paying any attention to the noodles. His brows furrowed, and he approached Puppy, “What now? We’ve arrived in

the Shangjing capital, but it's so huge. How do we find Master and Mistress?"

Puppy picked up two chopsticks from the bamboo tube and put them in his mouth, "Why the hurry? Impatience won't get you anywhere. Do you understand? Let's finish the noodles first. I, Cao Cao, am so smart. Can't I think of a solution?"

"Hmph, you're smart. If you were smart, there wouldn't be any fools in the world." Lu Xiucan didn't ask any further questions. He reached into his pocket and took out a bronze coin sword's broken hilt tied with hemp rope. Then, he filled them in patiently one by one.

The plain noodles soon arrived. They were the cheapest meal, but they were still a delicacy for these weary travelers.

While the entire Lu Family Troupe slurped down their noodles, several people dressed in silk and satin walked into the inn.

They stopped to chat with a middle-aged man from the inn.

"Oh! Innkeeper Wu, nice to meet you."

"Hahaha, Old Wang, how's your theater troupe doing these days?"

"Oh my, isn't this our Mr. Zhao? Why do you look so gloomy? Did your pharmacy go bust?"

Lu Zhuangyuan looked over excitedly. After a while, he abandoned his noodles and wiped his mouth with his sleeve. He then shook off the dust on his clothes and moved closer to where the conversation was happening.

"What's your dad up to?" Puppy asked Lu Xiucan.

"Hmph! What else can he do? The old man went to buy his own coffin!" Lu Xiucan replied impatiently. Laughter soon erupted from where Lu Zhuangyuan had gone.

"Where's this? This is Shangjing! Do you think that you're qualified to buy a theater here just because you're surnamed Ji? Even if you have money, there's no guarantee that you can buy

one!”

“With just this meager amount of silver, you still dare to dream of buying a theater troupe in Shangjing! Hahaha! Even the tips my family’s troupe gets in one night is worth more than this!”

Lu Zhuangyuan returned with an ugly look. He sat back at his previous seat and began eating his noodles without a word.

After swallowing the noodles, he stood up firmly and said, “Let’s go! We’ll find another inn. We’re not staying no matter how cheap this place is!”

“*Oh*, look at the actors from the lowly nine classes. They actually have some backbone.”

“You bitch!” Lu Xiucan cursed and lifted the broken hilt of a bronze coin sword in his hand. However, Lu Juren moved immediately and hugged him to stop him. “Xiucan! Don’t kick up a fuss!”

Lu Juren let him go as soon as they were out of the inn.

Lu Xiucan kicked Lu Juren away and exclaimed, “I can’t care less about all this! I’m not some damned actor. I can use supernatural powers! Puppy, let’s go and find Master!”

Puppy whispered a few words to Lu Juren before running toward Lu Xiucan. “Hey, slow down. Why are you moving so fast? Do you even know where Senior Li is right now?”

Puppy’s words made Lu Xiucan stop disgruntledly on the stone bridge. Lu Xiucan stared at the boats in the distance with disdain and said, “Look at them! They have supernatural powers right before them, but these idiots aren’t even trying to learn them! They only think about those lowly theater troupes every day! They’re so arrogant to their own people, but they can’t even lift a finger to fight back against outsiders!”

“*Hehe*, weren’t you planning to kill your dad? Why are you so resentful toward him for being so weak?”

“Of course, I’m going to kill him! Do you really think that I’m

just boasting? I'll go back now and kill that damned old man!"

"Alright, alright. Are you going to find Senior Li or not? Did you come all this way just for a stroll?"

Lu Xiucan turned around and asked, "You have a method to find Master, right? Where is it?"

"Just follow me, Xiucan. Be polite. Your Master is my Senior, so you should call me Senior Uncle."

Lu Xiucan followed Puppy as they wandered through the bustling capital. Puppy headed straight to the entrance of an inn and restaurant.

He soon found the people he was looking for. It was a group of beggars eating leftovers.

Puppy held up a sling of bronze coins and tossed it up and down in his hand as he walked around the beggars.

When their eyes were all drawn to the coins, Puppy chuckled and said, "I'm looking for someone. Whoever finds them will receive this as their reward."

"This is your method?"

"*Shh!* Don't interrupt!" Puppy waved the coin in front of the beggars. "I'm looking for two people. A male Daoist with red Daoist robes and two swords on his back. The other is a woman with a skin so fair that her skin has the same color as a dead pig."

"I know! Six days ago, Little Grapefruit said he was delivering a letter to someone in the south of the city! That person seemed to be wearing red Daoist robes!"

"*Oh?* Then where's Little Grapefruit? Is he here? Where did he deliver the letter to?"

"He didn't come back after delivering the letter. The city south is occupied by other beggars. I dare not go find him."

A grubby hand reached for the sling of coins, but the sling was retracted. "What can I do with your outdated information? I asked you where they are right now."

“When you see them, bring me to them, and then this sling will be yours.”

Under the influence of money, the beggars dispersed and began their search.

“Let’s go back, Xiucai. All we have to do now is to wait,” Puppy said smugly.

“Can we really find Master just like that?” Lu Xiucai asked, sounding doubtful.

Chapter 525 - Old Ox

In the face of Lu Xiucan's doubt, Puppy confidently responded, "You shouldn't even ask that. It's just some coins! A beggar can turn their life around with that much money, so those beggars will definitely go all out to find Senior Li!"

"Those beggars are more familiar with the Shangjing capital than anyone else. They can find people much faster than we can."

"Yang Xiaohai used to be a beggar, and he taught me that method. He said many people use this method to find others."

"So after all this, this isn't a method you thought of," Lu Xiucan replied with a look of disdain.

"This is my method."

The two talked as they walked together. After a while, Lu Xiucan revealed a puzzled look and asked, "We still don't know whether Master is in Shangjing or not. Anyway, what are we going to do once we find him?"

"Once we find him?" Puppy rubbed his chin thoughtfully and said, "If he's fine, that's great. We can all go back to Cowheart Village together."

"If he's sick, we'll tie him back with the chain we brought with us and wait for him to wake up."

"If he has encountered any issues, Xiaoman has instructed us to notify Cowheart Village immediately, and they will come over to help."

"If he's dead, we'll bring his corpse back and give him a grand burial on Cowheart Mountain. We still have the shroud we bought for him. It couldn't be refunded, so I decided to put it away."

"My master is still alive! There's no way he's dead!" Lu Xiucan replied firmly.

“Just in case. I don't want him to die, either. Wait, Xiucai, isn't that your family's troupe up ahead?”

Puppy's words made Lu Xiucai look down the street. Puppy was right; his family members were indeed up ahead.

Lu Xiucai saw his father's worried face. The three carriages were parked at the roadside, and they seemed unsure of where to go next.

“What's wrong with the old man?” Lu Xiucai asked his elder brother, Lu Juren.

Lu Juren also had a troubled expression as he sighed deeply. “Just now, our father learned from the storyteller that in this Great Liang Empire, theater troupe performers are not allowed to study and take the imperial exams. Here, the descendants of theater troupe performers can only remain as performers for life.”

“Study for the imperial exams? Are you stupid? There are supernatural powers for us to learn, but you want to study instead?” Lu Xiucai was exasperated.

“You, milk-sucking scoundrel, what do you know?!” Lu Zhuangyuan exclaimed, and he scolded Lu Xiucai with a red face. He waved three fingers vigorously in front of Lu Xiucai's eyes and said, “Our Lu family only has three male descendants! Three eggs can't be put in one basket! Do you not understand that?!”

“I won't stop you if you want to learn supernatural powers! But you have to know that you're walking on a dangerous path! Look at the young Daoist; how many times has he gone through hell?! Can you even become as powerful as him?”

“You can go down that path, but the other members of the Lu family can't walk down on that path with you! Juren taking over the Lu Family Troupe is the stable path! While the children becoming scholars is one of our Lu family's way out! In case one path doesn't work out, there will be other paths to take!”

Lu Xiucai was stunned. It was his first time hearing Lu

Zhuangyuan's explanation. The latter had always just ordered him what to do or ought not to do without any explanations. He had always thought that Lu Zhuangyuan looked down on him from the bottom of his heart, which was the reason behind his opposition. However, he didn't expect that Lu Zhuangyuan still considered his path as one of the Lu family's way out, even though it was an extremely dangerous path.

Lu Xiucan's heart became filled with complicated emotions.

"*Huh?* Where did this troupe come from? Are they here to make trouble on my Golden Leopard's territory?"

Several men approached and eyed them. "Have you paid your respects yet? If you haven't, then do it quickly."

"Get lost!" Lu Xiucan lifted his sword hilt, and the bronze coins flew up to form a sword.

Just as Puppy thought that they would be scared off and scatter, those few rough-looking men burst into laughter instead.

The leader swaggered up to Lu Xiucan with a haughty expression on his face.

"I've seen plenty of bumpkins like you. Do you really think you know everything just because you've learned some supernatural power?"

"Do you know where we are right now? We're by the emperor's feet, and even a dragon will have to bow down before the emperor! My brothers are guarding the gates of the Surveillance Bureau! Attack us, and believe me when I say that I'll call them and have you all thrown in jail!"

The words "Surveillance Bureau" made Puppy's face change. Senior Li had told him many things about the Surveillance Bureau.

He subconsciously covered his chest, where he hid the scepter that Senior Li had given to him. He couldn't let the Surveillance Bureau discover it.

Puppy walked up to Lu Xiucan and whispered, "Don't act

rashly! They're just a bunch of street thugs; it's not worth it!"

Lu Xiucan stood still, unsure whether to strike or not.

"What? Why are you making me wait? Hurry up and pay your respects!"

Just then, Lu Zhuangyuan walked up to the men with a smile tugging at his lips. He was holding a few silver coins in his hand and was fawning over them to send them away.

Lu Xiucan gripped the bronze coin sword tightly and slammed it heavily on the ground. "Let's go! This place is too oppressive!"

He had come to learn supernatural powers, but to think he'd still get bullied by a few thugs in the capital. It was just too frustrating of an experience.

"Go? Where can we go?" the wrinkled Lu Zhuangyuan took out his tobacco pipe and lit it.

"Where can't we go? If there's nowhere to go, we'll go back home! The theater performers back home can still take the imperial exams! Buying a theater there is cheaper than staying here!"

"It's gone... It's all gone..." Lu Zhuangyuan sighed deeply. "Fortunately, we made it out fast. The emperor of our hometown has even been dragged out and beheaded. I heard that even Si Qi was destroyed."

"De.. destroyed?" Lu Xiucan repeated with shock. He didn't really care about his hometown, but he was still surprised to learn that he could no longer go back to the place where he had spent about ten years of his life.

"Can we really never go back there?"

"Probably not within ten years. I heard that even Hou Shu is in chaos. Who knows when this damned world will become peaceful again," Lu Zhuangyuan said, tapping his worn-out pipe on his head before putting it away.

"Kid, let's go. We'll find an inn to rest. This place is too expensive, and I don't know if we can find cheap lodging here."

Lu Zhuangyuan had experienced many hardships throughout his life, and like an old ox; he remained quiet as he endured yet another hardship with his iron plow.

Chapter 526 - Method

“No, Brother Zhuge, you don’t understand Shai Zi. That letter is a warning to me! Anything related to him is definitely bad! It’s bad!”

Li Sui opened her mouth, revealing her sharp teeth and three tentacles. Then, she yawned and stretched her arms and nails to stretch. Afterward, she leaned on the Eight Immortals table and rested her slender head on her arms before staring at Li Huowang talking to someone invisible.

Dad is talking to those invisible people again... I used to be able to see them, but I can't see them anymore. I really want to know what they're talking about. I cannot understand what they're discussing just by listening to Dad.

Li Huowang frowned and massaged his temples. He paced back and forth for a while, then continued, “Brother Zhuge, let’s stop here. Arguing like this is just a waste of energy.”

“All right. If Bai Lingmiao is fine, and she’ll eventually come back here by herself, then we don’t need to do anything, right? We just have to wait, and the situation will resolve itself. Of course, that’s good, but... does that even make sense? I’ve never had any luck in this damned place! What if Bai Lingmiao is really in the hands of that Shai Zi? If I just sit and wait here, she’ll end up dead! I can’t afford that gamble! Moreover, this is not just for Bai Lingmiao but for ourselves, too. Since Shai Zi has already made a move against me, he’ll keep attacking us until we fight back!”

“The content of that letter doesn't mean anything at all! Perhaps the letter was really written by Bai Lingmiao, but don’t forget that they're the Sitting Oblivion Dao! I’ve seen this kind of scam too many times, even within my memories as Hong Zhong!

Perhaps Bai Lingmiao has been imprisoned, but she hasn't realized it yet! I'm not kidding; the Sitting Oblivion Dao can trap someone without using any force! They could do it just by talking to that person! They can make someone stay in one place willingly until they die!"

The room went silent just then, and there weren't any noises except for Li Huowang's rapid breathing. The two contrasting possibilities made Li Huowang feel extremely anxious. He also hoped that Bai Lingmiao was fine and that he didn't need to get involved in these troubles so they could just return to Cowheart Village and live a peaceful life. However, he really did not dare to gamble. After pacing around a few laps, his tone softened as he whispered to the empty window, "You're right; I'm feeling impatient. However, this is a lose-lose situation, so you can't blame me for being impatient!"

"We don't even know the location of our enemy nor their goal. And they're holding Bai Lingmiao as a hostage. I really... I really..." Li Huowang trailed off, and his worried eyes suddenly lit up.

He turned to the empty window and asked, "Brother Zhuge, is that true?"

"Hmm.. This is a problem. I need to find an opportunity to test it! But it's okay; it's a small matter."

"Hello, is Commander Er at home?"

Li Huowang smiled with joy at the voice outside the wooden door, "Speak of the devil, Brother Zhuge! The opportunity has come!"

"I'm here, the door isn't locked! Come in!"

The courtyard door was pushed open, and a eunuch walked in alone. His face was covered with a white powder, and a golden duster was in his hands.

Li Huowang recognized him. He was the same eunuch who had been delivering messages to Ji Lin.

The old eunuch coughed and walked up to Li Huowang. Then, he cleared his throat and raised his chin. “Er Jiu, receive the imperial decree~”

Before Li Huowang could react, he pulled out a roll of yellow silk and handed it to Li Huowang. Then, he decisively turned around to leave.

Li Huowang was puzzled as he opened the embroidered decree. Li Sui also came over and looked at it.

After a while, Li Sui stopped looking. There were many words written on it, many of which she recognized, but she couldn’t understand what they meant when placed together. “Dad, what does it say?”

“It tells me not to enter the palace and let Ji Lin come out himself.” Once Li Huowang’s words fell, the yellow silk in his hand quickly ignited and burned into nothing.

“Is there another fight?” Li Sui excitedly raised her ear halfway and said, “Dad, I’ll help you peel your skin!”

“No, I have to wait for the other layers to regenerate. I only have one layer of skin left now. I’ll run out of skin if we peel that layer.”

“Oh, I see. Shall we go now?”

“Don’t be impatient. There are some things I need to deal with first.”

Li Huowang walked into the house and picked up a pickle jar in the corner. He didn’t know how to pickle vegetables, but what was pickled inside was his corpse. The corpse was hollow, but it was still the corpse of a Strayed One. Li Huowang believed that it would eventually come in handy.

Li Huowang carried the pickle jar and walked to a hidden cellar under the bed. He opened it and placed the jar inside. Then, he stood up and picked up another pickle jar from the corner.

The pickle jar also contained the corpse of a Strayed One, but

this one had five organs without a head. The headless corpse belonged to the Strayed One pretending to be Hong Zhong to deceive the Surveillance Bureau.

Things were busier back then, and he had to bury it somewhere after pickling it. In the end, he had forgotten it. If it weren't for the fact that he had been reminded of it by his recent handling of corpses, Li Huowang would have forgotten where he had buried it.

Li Huowang glanced at the two big jars in the cellar before closing the door and walking away. "Let's go see what Ji Lin is going to make us do this time."

The meeting point was in a gambling den. After Li Huowang won 318 taels, he was invited to the cellar in the backyard.

Surrounded by a group of eunuchs, Li Huowang saw Ji Lin once again. He didn't look great; half of his left ear was missing, and his face was wounded. The wound was deep enough to expose his bones.

"Your Majesty, what happened to your face?"

Ji Lin was stroking the fake jade cat as he revealed a sinister smile and said, "It's nothing serious. I dispatched people to kill someone else. Naturally, that person will seek revenge on me. It's only fair."

"It's just that I didn't expect the palace to be so dirty. Seems like it needs a cleaning."

Li Huowang was shocked. Ji Lin couldn't die right now, so he suggested, "Your Majesty, do you need me to protect you whenever I'm not out running errands?"

"No need. There are still some capable people around me. I can take care of myself. You just focus on what you're good at." Ji Lin waved his hand to motion for a eunuch to bring over a painting scroll.

Chapter 527 - Prince Ren Mansion

Li Huowang accepted the scroll and saw that it depicted a highly detailed map of a complex of buildings.

The layout of each room and their names were labeled clearly. There were three words written in red underneath—Prince Ren Mansion.

“Prince Ren Mansion?” Li Huowang frowned and looked up at Ji Lin.

“Prince Ren is my second brother. Take it slowly. It’s rumored that there are many evil cultivators among his followers. Back then, his followers were the ones responsible for the deaths of my mother and my sister.”

Li Huowang instantly understood what he needed to do next. He said nothing else and bowed to Ji Lin before leaving with the scroll.

“Er Jiu, do your best! Help me ascend the throne, and I will not let you down!”

Shangjing was vast, but it wasn't that difficult to find Prince Ren Mansion.

It's strange that the mansion is not built in the prince's fiefdom but in the capital. Li Huowang thought to himself. He was kneeling on a roof as he silently gazed at the large plaque in the distance.

Li Huowang muttered to himself once again, “Yes, indeed. Perhaps the imperial family has always been planning to raise a Gu.”

As Li Huowang spoke, his colored phantom merged slowly into the tiles. His invisible body began to move stealthily towards Prince

Ren Mansion.

The towering walls posed no obstacle to Li Huowang, as Li Sui's tentacles effortlessly scaled the wall.

Li Huowang sensed several hidden sentries behind the wall. Instead of leaving quietly, he approached one of them.

After some time, Li Huowang stood on a roof beam and looked down at the eunuch who lay motionless by the window.

This person was one of Prince Ren Mansion's hidden sentries. He had been fixedly staring outwards through a small hole in the window.

He's just the test subject. Li Huowang mentally thought to Zhuge Yuan in his mind, as he grasped the hilt of his spine sword.

Swoosh! Li Huowang sliced his sword downward from the beam, and a silent wave of Great Qi history swept across.

This time, instead of cutting the man into three pieces as usual, the piece of history engulfed him completely.

Wait, it didn't completely engulf him. Half of his hand has been left behind in Great Liang.

"Brother Li, slash out once more so we can see whether that man is still alive in Great Qi or not," Zhuge Yuan said with a solemn face, which was a stark contrast to his usual calm demeanor.

It made sense, as this would determine whether Li Huowang could stand toe-to-toe against a Shai Zi.

"Li Sui, I'll strike again later. Remember to stick your eyeballs in to see if the man is still alive in Great Qi. Make to pull them out in time so they won't get left behind."

"Dad, I know, don't worry."

After his instructions to Li Sui, Li Huowang once again carefully gripped the spine sword's hilt and swung it forcefully. As the invisible gap between Great Qi and Great Liang appeared, a black shadow emerged from Li Huowang's body and flew into it

with a lingering afterimage.

Just before the gap vanished, Li Sui pulled out her eyeballs entwined with tentacles.

“Dad, the man is still there. He’s alive. He’s clutching his severed hand and yelling something out the window.”

“Excellent!” Li Huowang clenched his fist in excitement.

This means that not only can this sword kill people, but it can also safely transport them to Great Qi! It’s not just others. If used properly, I might even be able to send myself to Great Qi! If that’s the case, Zhuge Yuan’s plan can be implemented!

Li Huowang was eager to try it out and go to Great Qi right away, but he forcibly suppressed this urge.

Since I’m already here, I should just deal with Prince Ren first. We cannot afford to delay things here. We need Ji Lin’s help to deal with Shai Zi, so it doesn’t matter even if we find him early. we can’t deal with him without Ji Lin’s help. Li Huowang thought as he put away the spine sword and made his way to his destination along the rafters.

Thanks to Ji Lin’s map, Li Huowang wouldn’t get lost in this maze-like mansion. He headed straight for Prince Ren’s quarters.

However, he found nothing when he arrived. Of course, Prince Ren was nowhere to be seen.

It’s already so late, but he’s still awake? Where is he? Li Huowang reopened the map and studied it carefully. He put it away again and felt his way toward the east.

He searched several places successively but found nothing. In the end, he found Prince Ren by following the bustling noises within the estate.

The grand stage adorned with lanterns was filled with tropes taking turns to perform. Every single performance involved over a hundred performers, and every single performer could easily become a star outside.

They were far better than the Lu Family Troupe by many times.

These troupes were all for one person's enjoyment. It was Li Huowang's first time seeing Prince Ren's face. He was a middle-aged man with a pale complexion and pale lips. If it weren't for the dragon robes he was wearing, Li Huowang wouldn't have thought he was someone vying for the throne with Ji Lin. Prince Ren's eyes were squinted as he lay on a plump woman. His fingers were adorned with sharp nail guards decorated with gold and jade, and he was tapping his knee to the music.

Li Huowang was crouched on a tree branch, and he swept his gaze across everyone. He didn't know what the so-called "evil cultivators" were like. However, none of them looked evil.

Should I just make a move now? No, this place is too open. There are so many people around as well, so I could get easily ambushed. I can't afford to make the same mistake twice. Perhaps Prince Ren, like the eldest princess, is also pretending to be weak. This might be a part of his scheme.

Li Huowang squatted silently, waiting for an opportunity to move.

An hour passed just like that. When it was the second section of the night, Li Huowang assumed that Prince Ren wanted to watch the performance all night, but the performance eventually stopped.

Prince Ren sat inside a grand sedan that was being lifted by twelve people. A group of eunuchs surrounded the sedan as the procession headed toward Prince Ren's quarters.

Li Huowang followed the sedan but found nothing unusual.

Li Huowang didn't believe that anyone daring to vie for the throne would be this careless, especially after the recent death of the Empress Dowager and the eldest princess.

The incongruity made Li Huowang become even warier.

The crowd outside gradually dispersed as Prince Ren called it a night.

Li Huowang sensed an opportunity and cautiously followed

inside.

Li Huowang was surprised to hear singing inside Prince Ren's quarters.

Li Huowang followed the singing and found Prince Ren sprawled out on his bed. A woman stood before him and was singing a song. The woman's makeup made it clear to Li Huowang that she was an opera performer, but she wasn't wearing anything else aside from her makeup.

Chapter 528 - Slice

Li Huowang stared at the unfolding scene from the rafters. Then, he retrieved two eyeballs wrapped with Li Sui's tentacles. "This Prince Ren is really playful."

Prince Ren's face lacked vitality, but it wasn't apparent because he was wearing makeup. He was now on the bed together with the opera performer, who was singing and moving at the same time.

Li Huowang's right hand turned slightly pale from excessive force as he listened to their vulgar words sung with a cadence. He would cover Li Sui's ears if he could find them.

Li Huowang was ready; he was ready to strike the moment his target was at their most relaxed state.

"A h~~Yi~~I see your heart~~~my dear~~~"

As the singing became more and more intense, thick, killing intent began to pervade Li Huowang's eyes. He exerted force and flew downward with his sword in hand.

An afterimage of the spine sword in his hand was left as it made a beeline toward Prince Ren on the bed.

The spacetime rift that represented the Great Qi streaked across the air, which emitted a shrill cry as the rift traveled across it.

Just then, a transparent mosquito net made with thin metal wires suddenly appeared before Li Huowang.

Clearly, the mosquito net was Prince Ren's countermeasure against an assassin. Unfortunately, it was useless against the rift, and it was cleanly severed.

The opera performer on the bed reacted faster than Prince Ren; her face turned pale from the shock.

"Master~!" She sang with a mournful tone and pushed Prince Ren off the bed with all her strength.

However, Li Huowang had also taken this into account and had deliberately extended the rift.

The opera performer and the fallen Prince Ren were severed in two by the rift; their blood spurted all over the ground, staining it.

It's over just like that? Isn't it too easy? Li Huowang thought he had succeeded, but a palm-sized yellow leather figure emerged from Prince Ren's hair.

It dared not expand here and rushed outside for safety.

This Prince Ren still has that thing on him! Li Huowang gnashed his teeth and pulled out his sword before chasing after it.

As Li Huowang's weapon was about to hit the fleeing Prince Ren, a large group of shadow puppets emerged from under the bed and grabbed Li Huowang's shadow, immobilizing him.

Li Sui's tentacles swiftly swung and extinguished the candles on both sides, which made the shadow puppets disappear.

Li Huowang regained his freedom. However, the palm-sized Prince Ren had finally expanded to a human's size. However, his figure was still as thin as a sheet of paper.

White smoke spread rapidly from the wooden windows, accompanied by the rapid beating of gongs. The white smoke concealed Prince Ren's thin figure.

"Die!" Li Huowang swung his spine sword toward where Prince Ren disappeared, and the crack cut through the white smoke.

To Li Huowang's disappointment, there was no sign of Prince Ren amidst the smoke. There was only a strange-looking person with a giant gold ingot in hand. The strange-looking person was wearing a white mask with a black beard as well.

The large official hat with bronze coins on the man's head swayed back and forth. His legs seemed jointless as he jumped toward Li Huowang along with the rhythmic beats of the gongs.

Li Huowang immediately recognized the other party's identity upon seeing the two bronze coins in the eyes of the mask.

“Jumping God of Wealth, huh?”

Li Huowang gritted his teeth and tightened his grip on the spine sword before charging at the masked God of Wealth.

Since the surprise attack had failed, he could only mount a direct confrontation. He had to eliminate Prince Ren before reinforcements from the Prince Ren Mansion arrived.

As the two approached each other, Li Sui acted first. A tentacle drilled out from the left side of Li Huowang’s neck and wrapped around the bronze coin sword on his back, slashing toward the God of Wealth.

”Brother Li, put that sword away! The entire sword is made out of bronze coins!”

Zhuge Yuan was halfway through his reminder while the bronze coins swooshed out with the red thread. It quickly elongated like a whip and lashed towards the opponent.

When the bronze coins collided with the giant gold ingot, the coins on the sword trembled and broke free from Li Sui’s control.

The scattered coins all flew toward the giant gold ingot as if it were a magnet.

The God of Wealth forcefully lifted the gold ingot, and those bronze coins reassembled into a sword that flew toward Li Huowang.

Li Huowang had been using his bronze coin sword for a long time now, but it no longer belonged to him.

Swoosh!

Li Huowang swung his spine sword, sending the bronze coin sword to the Great Qi.

The next moment, alarms suddenly rang in Li Huowang’s mind. He whipped around and raised the spine sword above his head.

Clang!

The floor beneath Li Huowang’s feet exploded, kicking up a cloud of dust.

Li Sui's eight tentacles pierced the ground, but Li Huowang could barely withstand the immense weight.

A huge silver mace, which seemed to be made out of broken silver, was pressing down on the spine sword with the weight of a mountain.

"Li Sui! Take the sword!"

The black tentacles wrapped around the spine sword's hilt. At the same time, Li Huowang drew the purple-tasseled sword and slashed it toward his own left hand.

His arm shattered and became a claw. Then, he wasted no time and attempted to grab his enemy.

The enemy retreated in response, and Li Huowang took advantage of that opportunity to take the spine sword back from Li Sui before widening the distance between him and his opponent.

Li Huowang looked at the ambusher. He was wearing an identical mask to the man who previously portrayed the Jumping God of Wealth. However, their clothes were markedly different from each other.

This man was eight feet tall and was riding a golden leopard dressed in bronze coin armor. Four yellow banners with the word "Wealth" were sticking out of his back.

"Martial God of Wealth? Scholar God of Wealth?" Li Huowang scanned the two enemies shrouded in white smoke.

The two Gods of Wealth began to orbit him as the urgent and piercing beats of gongs pervaded the surroundings.

This can't go on like this. Prince Ren would have already escaped by the time I'm done with these two! Li Huowang thought, feeling anxious as many ideas flashed through his mind.

When he saw more shadows in the white smoke, Li Huowang made up his mind. He gripped the spine sword tightly and swung it forcefully.

He carved open a rift large enough for a human being to use.

“Li Sui! Charge in!”

Li Huowang swiftly arrived at the edge of the crack. The Great Qi was within arm's reach, and he could already see it.

Li Huowang had decided to use the Great Qi as a shelter to escape the people of Great Liang's encirclement.

Li Sui took out two talismans and stuck them on Li Huowang's legs. Li Huowang then ran as fast as he could toward the rift, but he still seemed a bit too slow!

Chapter 529 - Great Qi

The rift wasn't stationary; it was moving at the same speed as sword qi.

If Li Huowang wanted to enter it, he had to be faster than it, but he was just a tad bit too slow.

I can go faster! I can definitely go faster! Li Huowang's speed increased explosively, and he plunged head-first into the narrowing rift.

He jumped to the left as soon as he arrived in the Great Qi. The rift behind him tore his cloak to shreds before disappearing.

Li Huowang breathed a sigh of relief. He finally had the time to look around at his surroundings.

He was in a prince's bedroom in Great Liang, and it seemed no different in Great Qi. The house was very large and spacious.

However, the broken tiles above, the weeds by the house, and the dust all over the furniture indicated that the glory of this place had already passed.

"It seems like this place has been abandoned for a long time," Li Huowang's voice echoed in the house as he stood up.

"Dad, where are we?" Li Sui's eyeballs emerged from Li Huowang's belly button, and they looked around the dilapidated surroundings.

"Who cares where this is? We haven't finished our business yet." Li Huowang gripped his sword tightly and rushed toward where Prince Ren had fled.

The inside was in ruins, but the outside wasn't much better. It seemed like everything here had been abandoned completely.

He searched up and down in Great Qi for a while before taking out the spine sword once again.

It had to be said that this weapon crafted using a Twisted One was really practical.

It could be used for both killing enemies and saving lives. Li Huowang was really happy that he didn't end up burying the sword back then.

"We should have escaped the encirclement. Let's go back and take a look," Li Huowang said. He exerted force to slash out a rift that led to Great Liang.

Upon arrival, Li Huowang found himself standing on a roof; Li Huowang's higher vantage point allowed him to see Prince Ren's sedan chair being carried to the east.

We caught up! Li Huowang's legs had the pasted talismans, and he leaped forward like an eagle toward the sedan chair.

Just as Li Huowang was about to succeed, a woman with a black cloth covering her face appeared on his back through an unknown means.

She raised the obsidian dagger in her hand and was about to stab Li Huowang in the neck, but Li Sui's tentacles stopped her in time.

When Li Huowang saw a large "Wu"[\[1\]](#) character written on the black cloth covering her face, his pupils shrank in shock.

No! She's a member of the Dharma Sect! Prince Ren actually has connections with the Dharma Sect!

This matter was much more serious than the succession war. It wasn't something that could be handled by just defeating a few evil cultivators. After all, the Dharma Sect worshiped God Yu'er, which was believed to be a god of natural disasters. More importantly, the Dharma Sect was widely considered to be an evil cult.

Li Huowang made a decision in mid-air and kicked the woman away. Instead of using the momentum to chase after Prince Ren, he plummeted toward the roof on the left.

"Dad, the sedan chair is leaving. Aren't we going to chase after

it?” Li Sui looked at the sedan chair rapidly shrinking into the distance.

“There’s no need to chase anymore. In this game of raising Gus, Prince Ren has already crossed the line. We just need to report this to the Surveillance Bureau.”

Someone vying for the throne in Great Liang actually had helpers from the Dharma Sect. It was difficult to imagine what consequences would arise if they really ascended to the throne. A rebellious group like the Dharma Sect could not participate in the succession war. The Surveillance Bureau would remain indifferent to other matters, but they would definitely not stand idly by on this issue.

Since the Surveillance Bureau would definitely intervene, Li Huowang felt that he didn’t need to spend too much effort or place his life on the line to confront Prince Ren. Moreover, the Martial God of Wealth and the Scholar God of Wealth weren’t exactly easy opponents to handle.

Soon, Li Huowang heard the familiar beats of gongs and realized that he was about to be surrounded once again. Knowing that, he decisively created a rift that led to the Great Qi and dove into it.

The dilapidated courtyard was full of fallen leaves, while spider webs grew between the tree branches and the rafters. It was so quiet here that there wasn’t even a breeze.

Li Huowang raised his head to look at the half-moon covered by dark clouds. He found it difficult to get used to the sudden transition from extreme movement to extreme stillness.

“Let’s go.” Li Huowang quickly identified his bearings and walked in the direction of the Surveillance Bureau.

He just had to find the Surveillance Bureau here and return to the Great Liang to report his findings. The issue would be considered finished by then.

He was willing to do anything for this task, but he wasn't foolish enough to ignore external help when it was available.

"Dad, you threw my sword here. Shouldn't we pick it up?"

"Oh, right, I almost forgot," Li Huowang turned back toward the direction where he had fought the Scholar God of Wealth earlier.

"Brother Zhuge, what place is this in Great Qi?" Li Huowang asked Zhuge Yuan, who was in mid-air.

"Hmm... we should be in the Cold Palace[2]," Zhuge Yuan answered solemnly.

"This Cold Palace is indeed too cold. How come there isn't anyone here? Did something happen in Great Qi?"

Zhuce Yuan tightened his grip on his folding fan and contemplated silently.

With no one stopping him, Li Huowang soon found the bronze coin sword stuck in a broken water tank. He picked it up and placed it on his back before getting ready to return to the Great Liang.

The next moment, Li Huowang opened his eyes wide, and the tip of his sword pointed at the dilapidated building in the distance. "Who's there?! Get out!"

"Ahh... ahh... ahh..." Intermittent screams echoed in the distance. It was deep in the night, and Li Huowang was in the middle of a desolate ruins with absolutely no one else around; the intermittent which made the surroundings feel extremely eerie.

Of course, Li Huowang was not buying it. He charged toward where the voice was coming from with his sword in hand.

Li Huowang swung the spine sword repeatedly, sending massive chunks of walls to the Great Liang.

Eventually, he found where the screams were coming from. The screams were coming from a eunuch on a mat. The eunuch was bald and was completely naked. His abdomen was swollen, and he clutched it strongly as he screamed.

His bloated abdomen was covered with veins, which twitched occasionally. The edges of the eunuch's abdomen had cracked, leaking blood and amniotic fluid.

What kind of evil spirit has caused this? Li Huowang thought. However, he instantly understood what this eunuch was up to upon recalling that he was in Great Qi.

Righteous Monastery's Buddha could even allow a eunuch to give birth to a son. It seemed this eunuch was about to give birth.

Li Huowang's eyes flashed in a light of understanding, and then he turned around to leave.

The old eunuch noticed Li Huowang and screamed in distress, "Save me! Benefactor, save me! I'm having a difficult delivery!"

"Nonsense, do you even have a hole down there? Who's having a difficult delivery?" Li Huowang replied and picked up his pace.

The illusion of the monk stood in his path with a desperate look. "Daoist, please help him. Your refusal to lend a hand could lead to two deaths at once!"

"That's easy for you to say. Regardless of whether that eunuch is deceiving us or not, just think about what I can do. Do you really think that I can assist in childbirth? When did I learn to deliver babies, not to mention delivering a man's baby?"

1. meaning witch 🗯️

2. the term used can also refer to the residence of women in the imperial palace that has fallen out of favor 🗯️

Chapter 530 - Omen

In the desolate Cold Palace, Li Huowang looked at the monk's illusion with some dissatisfaction.

Li Huowang wasn't a heartless person. However, he really had no time to deal with a pregnant old eunuch of unknown origin.

After all, this was the Great Qi and not the Great Liang. Nobody knew if this guy was setting a trap.

His priority was to return and inform the Surveillance Bureau about Prince Ren's collusion with the Dharma Sect.

"Let's go!" Li Huowang said and turned to leave. He had only taken a few steps when a horrifying scream echoed from behind him.

He saw the eunuch grip a dagger with one hand before thrusting it into his swollen belly. A mixture of amniotic fluid and blood sprayed out from the wound.

It seemed that he intended to deliver the baby himself since Li Huowang wasn't going to help him.

The monk's illusion couldn't sit still anymore at the gruesome scene. He scratched his head as he blocked Li Huowang again and said, "Daoist, please save him. Saving a life is more important than building many houses. Even if we don't save him, the baby in his belly isn't guilty of any crimes, don't you think so?"

"One is reborn as a human as a result of accumulated blessings throughout lifetimes. This is a precious life."

Li Huowang sighed lightly and pressed his temple with one hand. "Fine! You have a kind heart; you are a living Bodhisattva. If you want to save him, do it yourself."

The monk's illusion didn't immediately grasp what was happening, but he soon noticed the changes in his body.

“I’m alive? I’m alive?!” the monk exclaimed with joy. He patted his bald head and bounced around like a child.

“Aren’t you going to save him? I can’t hold on much longer.”

“Oh, right, right!” The monk regained his composure and hurried over to the eunuch.

However, the monk seemed at a loss when faced with the bloody scene. He obviously had no idea how to deliver babies.

The eunuch, who seemed on the verge of death, didn’t care where this unexpected helper had come from. He propped himself up as sweat poured down his face.

He opened his cracked lips, and his lips trembled as he pleaded, “Master! Forget about me! Save the child! I can die, but I will not let my ancestors down as long as the Wang family will have a descendant!”

“Okay, okay!” The monk nodded repeatedly and knelt down. He grasped the dagger sticking out of the eunuch’s belly and pulled downward.

“ *AAAAHHHH!* ” The eunuch screamed in agony as blood and amniotic fluid sprayed out of the wound and drenched the monk.

“Thank you... Master... May you... may you achieve enlightenment soon...” the eunuch trailed off, and his head tilted lifelessly to the side. His face lost all signs of vitality, but a satisfied smile was tugging at his sweaty lips.

The monk was covered in filth, and he was still rummaging through the eunuch's stomach.

Li Huowang couldn't take it anymore and walked over.

The monk felt as though there was a treasure trove filled with blood-red objects before him, and his hands were moving incessantly within the treasure trove.

Suddenly, he felt he had grabbed the ankle of the child. With a delighted expression, he pulled hard, but he ended up yanking out the eunuch’s intestines.

Li Huowang jumped into the fray, and his keen senses allowed him to detect the only thing moving in the treasure trove.

He yanked out the object as if pulling out a radish from the soil.

The monk's eyes widened in shock when he what Li Huowang had yanked out.

He took several steps backward and muttered, "What is that thing?"

Li Huowang was holding a baby in his hand—no, it seemed like a baby, but it had the body of a cow or a sheep, and it was covered in short, damp fur. Its limbs had hooves at the end instead of five fingers.

The monk wouldn't have been so frightened if it were just a calf born from the eunuch. What was most terrifying was that its head had a human face.

The eunuch didn't give birth to a male infant who could carry on his lineage. Instead, he gave birth to a strange creature with a human face and the body of a cow!

"What a mess!" Li Huowang exclaimed in disgust. He tossed the creature against the wall forcefully.

Bang! The human-faced sheep hit the wall and fell to the ground. It surprisingly didn't die. Instead, it stood up with its hooves and spat out amniotic fluid in big mouthfuls.

Li Huowang finally saw the appearance of this human-faced cow. It had the exact same face as the eunuch who gave birth to it. It had the same bald head and the same wrinkled face as the eunuch, but it seemed to embody the ugliness of the world. Li Huowang furrowed his brows and gripped the hilt of his sword, ready to eliminate this evil being. The human-faced cow opened its deformed mouth and cackled. Although its face was that of an old man, it had a baby's voice, which created an eerie combination.

"*Hahaha!* The moon will rise, the sun will dip, and the well

water will overflow through the golden gate. The morning seeks to rise; the evening seeks to unite. It's difficult for the panchi[1] to survive against the serpent. Kill the cows and sheep, and drink wine. Everyone, big or small, will be happy! Eat his mother! Everyone, have a good time! *Hahaha!*" After singing the nonsensical phrase, the human-faced cow went limp and collapsed to the ground. Its eyes rolled up, and it died just like that.

Li Huowang couldn't understand what he had just witnessed. Why was everything in Great Qi so bizarre? *What nonsense was it singing just now? Was it cursing me?*

Li Huowang sheathed his sword with a frown, and then he looked at the monk, who had returned to being an illusion, "What did I tell you? You didn't listen and had to try it out. How was the good deed?"

Li Huowang didn't wait for the ashamed monk to reply. He prepared to leave this Cold Palace of Great Qi with Li Sui.

"Brother Li!" Zhuge Yuan's words made Li Huowang stop. He turned toward Zhuge Yuan and was shocked to see that Zhuge Yuan's expression was tense with a hint of regret.

"Brother Zhuge, what's going on?" Li Huowang asked. He sensed something off with Zhuge Yuan's emotions.

"I need you to do me a favor. Help me pass on a message to some friends in Great Qi!"

"Of course. But... Brother Zhuge, can you tell me what exactly is going on?"

Li Huowang didn't think for a moment that Zhuge Yuan's current demeanor was all because he was so touched that he managed to return to Great Qi and that he couldn't wait to reminisce with some of his old friends.

Zhuce Yuan wasn't that kind of person.

Moreover, he had never seen Zhuge Yuan lose his composure. Zhuge Yuan had remained calm even in the face of Doulaio and his

own despairing death.

1. a creature similar to a dragon 🐉

Chapter 531 - Zhuge Yuan

Li Huowang knew that the issue had to be serious, as Zhuge Yuan looked so distressed.

What could be even worse than Doulao descending upon the mortal realm?

“Senior Zhuge, don’t panic,” said Li Huowang in an effort to console Zhuge Yuan, “Tell me what’s going on. I can’t help you if you don’t explain it to me.”

Zhuce Yuan closed his reddened eyes. He took a deep breath before pointing his fan at the deceased human-cow hybrid on the ground. “Junior Li, do you know what that is?”

“Er ... Isn’t that the son that the Righteous Monastery had implanted into that eunuch to give birth to? Wait, I actually don’t know if they can indeed grant children to the eunuchs. Maybe they just deceived the eunuchs?”

The fake Hong Zhong’s illusion interjected. “Yeah, how could they be so unscrupulous?”

“Wrong! You’re very wrong. Did you not hear what it sang? That was an omen! The Great Qi’s dragon vein is about to be severed!”

Zhuce Yuan’s words frightened Li Huowang. He didn’t know what the human-cow hybrid was, but he knew that the severing of a dragon vein was bad news.

“Junior Li, we don’t have time now! We need to leave now! We can’t use your techniques here yet!”

Li Huowang ran out of the abandoned palace without any hesitation.

“Dragon Vein?” Li Huowang recalled the tied-up bodies of the past emperors in the imperial palace of the Liang Kingdom last

time.

Zhuge Yuan caught up to Li Huowang and explained, “There would be an omen before every great disaster—a half-human and half-beast hybrid would be born, and they would tell an omen before passing away. Omens are mostly bad, and they almost always happen immediately!”

“That means ... Did that thing say that the Great Qi’s Dragon Vein would be severed? Senior Zhuge, what would happen if the Dragon Vein was severed?” Li Huowang stomped the ground and leaped up the palace wall with ease with the help of Li Sui’s tentacles.

“There should only be the Great Qi in the first place. The Great Liang never existed! Do you know why? It’s because a thousand years ago, the Dragon Vein of the Qi Kingdom was severed once! If it’s severed once again, the entire Qi Kingdom might cease to exist!”

Li Huowang felt his blood run cold. The Dragon Vein was the anchor of a timeline!

Now he knew why the Liang Kingdom needed to have an emperor at all times and why the authority of the imperial family had lasted so long amidst such a crazy world.

But did the Liang Kingdom really come into existence because the Dragon Vein was severed once? Or was Zhuge Yuan mistaken?”

Li Huowang’s mind was in disarray as if he had learned something important but only the superficial details. He felt like the details were being obfuscated by something.

“Junior Li, stop here! This is good enough!”

Li Huowang noticed that he had arrived in the capital city of the Qi Kingdom, You Capital. It was night, so the streets were silent—too silent.

Li Huowang felt like something had changed here, but he didn’t know what had changed.

“Senior Zhuge, what should I do next?”

“Materialize me! I need to have a physical body!”

Li Huowang didn't hesitate and did it. He pressed his temples, and Zhuge Yuan's figure flickered.

Veins bulge on his forehead and his eyes started popping outwards slightly. He was using a lot of force.

Something's wrong! It wasn't this hard to materialize the old monk and Peng Longteng! Li Huowang knelt on the ground as blood dripped out of his nose.

“Junior Li, please hang on! The lives of everyone are at stake here!” Zhuge Yuan clenched his fist and urged Li Huowang to continue.

“Don't worry! I can handle it!” Li Huowang's brain bulged, and his head expanded by a huge margin. Zhuge Yuan's fleshly body materialized slowly.

Zhuce Yuan did not waste any time when he saw Li Huowang's swaying figure. He immediately took the spine sword off Li Huowang's back.

He tore off the talisman on the hilt, and the sword came back to life.

The two Zhuge Yuans looked at each other before he spoke to the sword, “There's an omen! The Dragon Vein is about to be severed!”

“What?! Is that true?!”

However, Zhuge Yuan's spine sword did not hesitate. He raised his skeletal hand and drew a line on its own bloody body. Blood flowed down his organs and talismans to reach the tip of the sword.

The blood that had dripped from the sword was somehow alive, and it burrowed into the ground.

Zhuce Yuan wielded the spine sword and started writing, but no words appeared on the ground as all of the blood had been absorbed by the ground.

“Faster! My dad can't keep it up any longer!” Li Sui shouted at

Zhuge Yuan while supporting Li Huowang with her tentacles.

“Junior Li! Hang on! I’m almost done!” Zhuge Yuan leaped into the air and pointed the spine sword at the ground. His white robes billowed out in the wind as his figure gradually became transparent. The next moment, he let go of the sword and kicked it toward the ground. The spine sword slipped past Li Sui’s tentacles and returned to Li Huowang’s back.

Taking advantage of the momentum, Zhuge Yuan flew and landed on a roof on the left side. He waved his right arm, and the roof tiles flew upwards, revealing the writing implements in the room.

He waved his hand, and a brush flew into his hand. Then, he summoned a piece of paper and drew something on it. He drew an incomplete circle with a single opening before writing something inside the circle.

When his hands faded into nothingness, the paper filled with words burned up, and when the tiles neatly landed on the roof, Zhuge Yuan finally disappeared.

Zhuge Yuan sighed in relief when he saw the paper burning up and scattering into the air as ashes. “I hope that it works. May the Three Ancient Ones protect the Dragon Vein.”

Zhuge Yuan floated toward Li Huowang.

“Junior Li, thank—” Zhuge Yuan stopped mid-sentence.

Li Huowang was bleeding from all of his orifices and was unconscious in his daughter’s tentacles.

Chapter 532 - Back

Li Huowang was having a splitting headache. “Materializing a Twisted One is still too much for me. If I want to materialize Zhuge Yuan to lend me a hand, I need to master the 'Truth' first.”

Knowing that they were at a critical juncture, Li Huowang sat up abruptly. He shook his head and opened his eyes. “Sorry, Senior Zhuge, I fainted. I didn’t see—”

Li Huowang stopped mid-sentence upon seeing doctors wearing white lab coats around him. He then looked around and saw that he was strapped to some sort of medical device. Moments later, Li Huowang finally realized that he had returned to the other side. “I’m back?”

“Li Huowang? Li Huowang? How many fingers am I holding up?” Three fingers were put up before him.

“Three?”

“Good! It seems that increasing the voltage has truly managed to bring you back here.”

Under the instructions of the doctor, the nurses approached Li Huowang and undid his restraints. They also peeled off the two electrodes on his temples and his scalp.

“Eat this first.”

Li Huowang’s pupils shrank at the pills and the cup of water before him. He slapped the pills away and asked, “Who’s been feeding me these pills? I don’t want any of these! Li Sui picked up the spine sword and sent me back to the Liang Kingdom! Do not trust the person that’s near me!”

Li Huowang was clad in his blue and white striped patient robes, and he looked quite emaciated.

A doctor wearing frameless glasses told the nurses to back

down before carefully approaching Li Huowang. “Li Huowang, don’t be afraid. Have you forgotten me? It’s me, your doctor Yi Donglai.”

“Yi Donglai?” Li Huowang stared at the familiar face in front of him. He remembered a lot of things.

“I don’t care who you are. I won’t eat anything right now! You can feed whatever medicine you want once I get back to the other side!” Li Huowang shouted so loudly that even the people outside the corridor could hear him. Some of them peeked through the door.

“Alright, don’t panic. Relax. I’m not feeding you any medicine and mean no harm to you.” Yi Donglai took a step back and displayed his palms.

Li Huowang sighed when Yi Donglai backed off. No matter who it was in the Qi Kingdom, at least that person meant no harm.

Seeing that his patient had calmed down, Yi Donglai brought out a stool and placed it beside Li Huowang. “Come here and sit down. Don’t do any sudden movements. Your muscles are too weak to support you right now.”

Glancing at Yi Donglai and the stool, Li Huowang reached for where his purple-tasseled sword was supposed to be and slashed at the stool before taking it to sit down.

Yi Donglai nodded and looked at the camera at the top-left corner of the room. “Please give me a copy of the footage later.”

With that, Yi Donglai looked at Li Huowang and said, “Based on what you’ve been talking about recently, I feel like you are encountering issues on the other side. Is something wrong there?”

Li Huowang kept quiet when he was being questioned by Yi Donglai. He knew that the doctor would not be able to help him deal with Shai Zi.

Yi Donglai pushed his glasses, “Li Huowang, is Shai Zi aiming for the Dragon Vein of the Liang Kingdom?”

“ *HM?!* ” Li Huowang looked up in shock. How did the doctor know what was happening on the other side?

He immediately realized the gravity of the situation. The Dragon Vein could affect the history of a timeline, and Shai Zi wanted Ji Lin to succeed to the throne. *Is Shai Zi aiming for the Dragon Vein?*

Even though he didn't know what Shai Zi's true goal was, his fake memories as a Sitting Oblivion Dao were telling him that deceiving an entire history of a timeline was very alluring.

If Zhuge Yuan was right, it meant that the Liang Kingdom only appeared because the Qi Kingdom's Dragon Vein was severed.

Even Li Huowang had no idea what would happen if Shai Zi ended up achieving his goal.

Seeing that Li Huowang was deep in his thoughts, Yi Donglai gestured for everyone to leave the room and closed the doors. The room was quiet now that only he and Li Huowang were left inside.

Yi Donglai grabbed a stool and sat in front of Li Huowang, “Coming from my viewpoint as a doctor, I think it's best that you don't help the prince to become the emperor. In addition to the fact that it's not really a profitable trade for you, you also have to risk your life by killing the other princes. However, the Shai Zi capturing your Miaomiao is indeed a huge problem. Why don't we think of a solution together?”

“Wait a minute!” Li Huowang clutched his head in pain and stopped the doctor.

It took him a few moments to catch his breath and calm himself down before he looked at Yi Donglai, “Don't discuss this with me. You have nothing to do with it!”

“What? Is it that uncomfortable to have reality and the hallucination mix with each other? It's fine; we can talk about something else. How about a trade?”

“A trade?” Li Huowang was curious as to what Yi Donglai was

proposing.

“Yes. A trade. Do you understand the situation you are in right now? You are just like a living Bodhisattva. We can’t throw you, nor can we lose you. The leaders of White Tower Hospital are having a headache dealing with you. Whenever they’re having a headache, they’d always pressure us, the doctors. How about this? Can you work with me and become sane during the visits of the leaders? That way, I’ll be able to prove that my treatment method is working.”

Yi Donglai stood up and helped Li Huowang stand up before moving to the window. They stared at the scenery outside.

“As your reward, I can do almost anything for you as long as it’s within my authority. This is a win-win deal for both of us.”

Yi Donglai produced an unfamiliar smartphone and gave it to Li Huowang.

Li Huowang touched the screen, and an anime wallpaper popped up. Li Huowang realized that it was his smartphone.

“I’ve updated the games. Why don’t you play them?”

Li Huowang tapped into QQ and WeChat. He saw the red message bubbles with the letter + 99 on them. He tapped further and stared at the messages.

“I can give you your phone, and I can even grant you a certain degree of freedom. You just have to work with me. You can go to the canteen, play video games on the computer, and even watch movies.”

Li Huowang felt a shiver down his spine at the remark, and he exclaimed, “Stop fooling me! The other doctors tried to do the same thing as you did! You want me to interact with this world more frequently so that you can condition me to think that this place is reality while the other side is fake!”

Chapter 533 - Doctor

Yi Donglai looked at him in exasperation and said, “Li Huowang, I’m trying to help you here by following your logic. I thought you managed to cultivate the ‘Truth’ and turned this place into reality. Why are you still afraid if this side is real?”

“I’m not afraid!” Li Huowang exclaimed. He then realized that he was shouting, and he calmed down by taking deep breaths. After calming down, he slowly persuaded the doctor. “I’m not afraid; it’s just that there are still many things I need to do on the other side. I have to focus on that side first. Once I’ve cultivated it to a high enough level, I will be able to resolve everything quite easily!”

“But what if Shai Zi is telling the truth? What if you are doomed when you cultivate on the ‘Truth’ and not the ‘Lies?’” Yi Donglai sighed and gestured helplessly.

“I will say it again! Stop talking about those things to me! You have no idea what I went through, and you don’t have the right to talk about it!”

“Why can’t I? Do you really think that whatever is happening in that world is still a secret here? Are you surprised to find out that everyone here knows what’s happening there? Are you worried about the possibility that this side and that side may not be too far away from each other and on the verge of overlapping? Or perhaps you’re afraid of me inadvertently revealing your true thoughts by speaking with you? Li Huowang, ask yourself this question: Is that crazy world in your heart real or not?”

Bam!

Li Huowang hurled the smartphone to the ground, shattering it. Li Huowang grabbed one of the sharp fragments and pounced on Yi Donglai. Before the doctor realized what was going on, the sharp

fragment was already pressing against his jugular vein.

“I said, shut up! My muscles have atrophied, but I can still kill you quite easily!”

Li Huowang backed off only after seeing Yi Donglai trembling in fear.

“I will decide what is real and what is fake! I will do my best to solve the issue on the other side in two years, so stop looking for me! Once everything has died down, my illness will resolve itself!” Li Huowang threw the metal piece as he staggered backward.

Yi Donglai did not give up. “Li Huowang, you have to understand that your mental illness will make you think both worlds are real! No matter what you choose, you will have to treat yourself!”

“I’m not sick!”

Bam!

The door was kicked open; several nurses holding a bunch of tools charged in to suppress Li Huowang.

Yi Donglai rubbed his neck and looked at Li Huowang with a complicated expression. “If you think both worlds are real, why are you afraid that they'd overlap with each other? What are you so afraid of?”

Li Huowang sitting on the stool was surrounded by the nurses. The nurses glared at him, ready to act the moment he made a move.

They surrounded him until the straitjacket arrived. They restrained Li Huowang once more despite his emaciated look.

They carried him out of the room like a pig on a stick.

“Who caught me on the other side? Looks like the Qi Kingdom’s people have no plans on killing me. Li Sui, is everything alright?” Li Huowang mumbled.

“Li Huowang! Li Huowang! I finally found you! I knew you're here!” Li Huowang heard someone calling his name. He looked toward the ward on the left and saw a disheveled man jumping up

and down in joy.

“Who is that? Do you know him? Why does he know you?” Yi Donglai was curious.

Li Huowang stared at the man and identified him. “That’s Wang Wei... I think he used to be my doctor before. He did the same thing as you did. But why did he go crazy, too?”

“What? What did you say?!” Yi Donglai was shocked. This was news to him.

“Li Huowang! Come here! I need to talk to you!” Wang Wei shouted at Li Huowang, jumping up and down.

Li Huowang closed his eyes and breathed deeply. When he opened his eyes once more, he found himself staring at the dusty rafters in the ceiling. The sight told him that he was back.

I should stay on this side before I'm done cultivating the "Truth." I'm not in danger on the other side, so it should be fine if I stay here for a while.

“Ah!” The pain in his abdomen made him look down, and he saw Li Sui pulling his stomach open while stuffing dumplings into it.

Li Huowang wasn’t sure how long he had passed out, but based on his bloated stomach, he seemed to have been asleep for a while. He looked around the dingy room and asked Li Sui, “Suisui, where are we? Are we in the Great Liang or in the Great Qi?”

“Dad, you’re awake! What’s the Great Liang and the Great Qi?”

Li Huowang went silent and looked at Zhuge Yuan instead.

“Junior Li, you’re in the Great Qi,” Zhuge Yuan said.

Li Huowang nodded and struggled to get up. He felt dizzy, and he almost fell backward. Thankfully, Li Sui was there to catch him.

I've rested for so long, but my injuries are still so serious. Looks like it will be a long time before I can materialize Zhuge Yuan again.

Li Huowang shook his head and felt somewhat better. “Senior Zhuge, who approached and fed me just now?”

“Dad, it’s me. I tried feeding you some buns, but you slapped it away. That’s why I’m stuffing it into your stomach.”

Hearing her dejected voice, Li Huowang felt his heart go soft, and he hugged her. “Sorry for scaring you. I didn’t do it on purpose. It’s just that I don’t have any awareness of what’s going on here while I’m on the other side. I can’t tell who is good or evil.”

Li Sui wrapped her tentacles around Li Huowang.

After consoling Li Sui, Li Huowang looked at Zhuge Yuan again. “Senior Zhuge, are you done with everything? Do I need to do it again?”

However, Zhuge Yuan would never let Li Huowang manifest him again after seeing how bad the side effects were.

“No need. Everything is up to the heavens now. I’m already dead, and I’ve done my best as well. The rest is up to the people of the Great Qi.”

“Then let’s go back to the Liang Kingdom.” Li Huowang unsheathed the spine sword. He was about to swing it when he recalled what Yi Donglai had told him. “Wait, will the Liang Kingdom get affected if the Dragon Vein of the Qi Kingdom gets severed?”

“No. In fact, it’s a great thing for the Liang Kingdom.”

Li Huowang sighed and opened his mouth for Li Sui. “Come in here.”

Chapter 534 - Shangji

Guankou

“I’m awake?” Li Huowang woke up in the darkness and looked around.

He found himself lying in the courtyard of the house he owned in Shangjing. He sighed in relief because he didn't find himself in a hospital bed.

He struggled to get up and shook his heavy head. His vision was still blurry.

That day, he returned from the Qi Kingdom back to the Liang Kingdom and found himself in a hot kitchen. He immediately ran to the Surveillance Bureau and reported how Prince Ren was colluding with the Dharma Sect.

The Surveillance Bureau's reaction was according to his expectations. He learned from Nangong that the mission related to Prince Ren had been accepted by someone else.

Clearly, his mission from Ji Lin was as good as done. All he needed to do was to wait.

Li Huowang took advantage of the downtime to rest and recover. He had injured himself badly, and the splitting headache was still refusing to go away.

It seemed that forcefully materializing Zhuge Yuan had affected him both physically and spiritually.

To make matters worse, he had also lost control over his primordial breath, causing him to wake up in the White Tower Hospital. He hated it—he hated not having control over himself.

Li Huowang washed up and munched on the overcooked buns.

Li Sui had made the bun. Even though she couldn't make fluffy

buns without yeast, it was still considerably better than the burnt ones she had made last time.

Li Huowang enjoyed his breakfast while listening to Li Sui practicing with the talisman and chanting on the lower floor.

After his breakfast, Li Huowang looked at Zhuge Yuan and asked, "Senior Zhuge, I have some questions. Would you mind answering it?"

"Please, ask away." Zhuge Yuan's calm demeanor had returned as if he had never panicked in the Qi Kingdom not too long ago.

Li Huowang thought about how to ask the question. "Senior Zhuge, there's a chance that Shai Zi is trying to take advantage of the succession war, despite being hunted down by the Surveillance Bureau. is it because he wants to do something to the Dragon Vein?"

Li Huowang had no choice but to consider this possibility, especially upon recalling the Dragon Vein's value and that doctor's words.

As much as he hated Yi Donglai, he had to admit that the latter's questions were logical. If Yi Donglai's assumption was true, then Li Huowang couldn't help Ji Lin ascent to the throne.

Zhuce Yuan did not answer immediately. He tapped his fan on his palm and fell into deep thoughts before giving an answer, "You are not wrong, but Junior Li, you need to understand that the officials and Surveillance Bureau would definitely think of the possibility if even you can link the clues together. The Dragon Vein is important, and it's not as fragile as you think. It's actually the opposite. The reason the Dragon Vein is in the imperial temple isn't to protect it but to protect the palace. In short, the emperor is the son of the Dragon Vein. Shai Zi cannot defeat the emperor in the palace."

"The Dragon Vein is that strong? Even Shai Zi can't defeat the emperor if the latter is under its influence?" This was news to Li

Huowang.

That's true. How could the anchor of the history of a timeline be weak?

"Senior Zhuge, since the Dragon Vein is so strong, how did the one in Great Qi get severed?"

Zhugue Yuan's face fell when he heard that. He shook his head, "I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"I've been dead for quite some time, and while I was alive, the Qi Kingdom was still fine. There was no news about the Dragon Vein being severed. I have no idea what happened there after I died, too. There are too many possibilities."

The room fell silent, and the two of them looked at each other.

Zhugue Yuan broke the silence first. "Junior Li, there's no need to ponder over Shai Zi's thoughts. We should first think about how to counter him. If we want to fight him, we need to do what I told you."

"Now?" Li Huowang could still recall Zhugue Yuan's words. He could find someone in the Great Qi who could track down Shai Zi!

"Now that the omen has been read, who knows what would happen to the Qi Kingdom? If we don't act now, there might not even be a Qi Kingdom next time..." Zhugue Yuan said, "If the Qi Kingdom vanishes, then you'd have a hard time tracking down that Shai Zi."

Li Huowang was flustered. He finally managed to come up with a decent plan against defeating Shai Zi, so he couldn't give up now. This was much more important than helping Ji Lin to succeed to the throne. "Senior Zhuge. What should I do?"

"Go to the Great Qi and find Shangji Guankou. They have the method to find Shai Zi."

"Really?" Finding Shai Zi had always been a difficult task, but Zhugue Yuan made it sound easy. Li Huowang was suspicious of the

method.

“We are talking about Shai Zi here. Even the entirety of the Surveillance Bureau hadn't been able to Shai Zi. How can Shangji Guankou do that? If it were that easy, why was it that the Surveillance Bureau hadn't looked for Shangji Guankou even once?”

Zhuge Yuan stared deeply at Li Huowang and replied, “Junior Li, that's because only the Great Qi has Shangji Guankou. They do not exist in the Great Liang.”

Li Huowang immediately understood. He took his weapons below his pillow and got ready to move out. “I see. Let's go then!”

“Wait, don't do it here. We should leave the city first. If we enter the Qi Kingdom here, we will appear in the You Capital, and we might kill someone accidentally.”

“Alright.” Li Huowang wore his red Daoist robes and took his two weapons as he went downstairs. “Senior Zhuge, what is Shangji Guankou? Is it a person or a sect?”

“I can't tell you that.”

“Why not?” Li Huowang told Li Sui to wear her veil as he asked.

“To some, they are humans. To others, they are evil beings. But there are people who had seen Shangji Guankou as a temple.”

“Is it that profound? Doesn't that mean they would request some sort of payment to find Shai Zi?”

“Don't worry. I will deal with that. Even if I'm dead, my reputation in the Great Qi has not. I still have some connections.” Zhuge Yuan became confident again.

Li Huowang sat on his horse and urged it to exit the capital as soon as possible.

“But, Junior Li, even though Shangji Guankou can find Shai Zi, they cannot help you fight him. You need to deal with Shai Zi on your own.”

“I understand!” Li Huowang swore to kill Shai Zi on his own.

He finally had a chance to defeat Shai Zi, and he had to take advantage of that opportunity no matter what!

Chapter 535 - Natural Disaster

“Beat the drum and the gongs~ Stop the gongs and hear my song~ Hear me sing the eighteen touches~”

Someone's singing came from the left side of an alley. Li Sui heard the voice and looked over, but Li Huowang frowned. He urged the horse to run faster so Li Sui wouldn't learn the inappropriate words.

“Touch the edges of my legs, and the skies are covered in clouds~ Touch the tip of my forehead, and feel how full it is~”

Lu Juren sang on the stage with his white makeup as he gestured with both of his hands according to the lyrics.

The men beneath the stage listened attentively and even looked at each other with a knowing gaze, snickering as they did so.

Everyone cheered and showered the stage with bronze coins at the end of the show. The Lu family's performance wasn't from the Liang Kingdom, so none of the audience had heard of it before. They relished in the novelty of it.

“Encore! Encore! One more time!”

“Do you have female performers?! I want them to sing for us!”

“Yeah, we want female performers! We will pay you more!”

While Lu Zhuangyuan was happily picking up the bronze coins, someone shouted, “What are you doing here?!”

Everyone saw that the shout had come from the city guards, so they ran away in a panic.

Lu Zhuangyuan panicked and froze.

“Who granted you permission to perform here? And you're even performing a pink show! This is an outright offense to public

decency! Are you blind? Did you not see the warning on the city gates?!”

Lu Zhuangyuan lowered his head humbly. “Officer! I don’t know how to read... Please forgive us...”

“I don’t care whether you can read or not! We will seize all of the money you’ve earned here! Pick those coins up!”

Lu Zhuangyuan didn’t want to part away with so much money, but there was nothing he could do. The officials were of higher rank than him.

Soon, the city guards walked away happily with the money in hand, and the performers were left to pack up the stage with frowns.

Halfway through, Lu Xiucan and Puppy returned while bickering.

“Stupid! Your method is useless! Those beggars searched for so long and didn’t even manage to catch a glimpse of my master!”

“Shut up! At least I’m doing something. What about you? Except for flapping your mouth, you are doing nothing to help!”

The two only stopped bickering when they saw the performers packing up.

“Troupe Leader Lu, what happened? We finally found a place to perform. Why are you packing up now?” Puppy scratched the side of his face in confusion.

After learning what had happened, Lu Xiucan stomped the ground angrily and waved the bronze coin sword that he had stitched himself. “The people of Shangjing are so cruel! I will go and cut them down!”

Lu Zhuangyuan sighed and massaged his lower back, “It’s fine. We already have enough issues, so stop giving me more. We don’t need the money.”

“We can’t do that. We have to feed ourselves and the horses. Everything is so expensive in Shangjing. Even a single piece of

bread costs five coins,” Luo Juanhua grumbled with the bronze mirror in hand.

“Do you really think that I don’t know how to manage my money?” Lu Zhuangyuan chided and looked at Puppy, “Sir Cao, did you manage to find the young Daoist?”

Lu Zhuangyuan couldn't wait to leave Shangjing after learning that he couldn’t build his own theater here. He couldn't even earn money here. However, he didn’t know what to tell the others if he returned without results.

Puppy could say nothing but lie about how he was close to finding Li Huowang.

However, Shangjing was so large, and there were too many people inside of it. It was like trying to find a needle in the haystack.

“Nevermind. Let’s report the situation back to Xiaoman using the pigeons. I’ve already asked the beggars, so they can’t blame me for not trying to find Li Huowang.”

Puppy walked toward the nearest City God Temple to find a scholar who could help write a letter for him.

Unbeknownst to them, Li Huowang was out of the city. After traveling for a few more kilometers, Li Huowang found an isolated place to park the carriage. He prepared food and water for the horse before traveling to the Qi Kingdom.

Upon sensing Li Sui inside of him, Li Huowang took a deep breath and gripped the spine sword tightly.

“Let’s go!” Li Huowang swung the sword. He stomped his feet onto the ground along with six tentacles before launching himself towards the crack in space.

He was getting used to the movements. This time, he didn’t even get his robes torn off.

Li Huowang didn’t even get to celebrate his small achievement when he was shocked to see what was happening in front of him. A

massive cloud was heading towards him!

“Those are...” He stared into the distance to identify it, “Locusts!”

The locusts covered the sun and crashed downwards like a black tsunami.

Li Huowang put away the spine sword and brought out the purple-tasseled sword. The killing intent around him scared the locusts away. However, some of them still managed to chew on his robes and head before flying away.

The locusts flew around him, devouring anything in their path. When the sun revealed itself again, everything around Li Huowang turned barren. The plants have all been chewed off.

“Junior Li, this is a Natural Disaster.”

“Natural Disaster? But they are just locusts.”

“To normal people, food is the most crucial part of their life. They don’t care about the Heavenly Daos because they can still live on without the Heavenly Daos, but without food, they will quickly die from hunger. To them, a locust swarm is worse than a Natural Disaster. More importantly, more disasters would follow after the locusts. There would be a drought, war, and finally, a plague. The world would become desolate.”

“What’s happening with the Qi Kingdom?” Li Huowang said, staring at the You Capital. He then looked at Zhuge Yuan and asked, “Senior Zhuge, is there something you need me to do here? Tell me, and I will—”

Zhuge Yuan shook his head. “Junior Li, you are not someone from the Qi Kingdom. This is not your karma, and you don’t need to interfere. You are also in a bad place. I love the people here, and I wish to protect them, but there’s nothing I can do for them.”

Chapter 536 - Great Qi

“Junior Li, go east,” Zhuge Yuan said after observing the mountains and rivers around them.

Li Huowang nodded and walked east without deviating even an inch. He climbed past the hills and waded through the waters.

“The left is blocked, and the right is crooked. We cannot walk this path any further. Head west for two Li.”

Li Huowang followed, but he needed clarification. “Senior Zhuge, is Shangji Guankou not in a specific place?”

“No. Shangji Guankou is alive. They're extremely good at moving and hiding. Thankfully, the Feng Shui around them would change every time they move. We just need to use the metal and water detection method to find traces of them amidst nature.” Zhuge Yuan calculated something with his fingers while looking at the sky.

Li Huowang nodded and said nothing as he continued walking.

He felt more confident and calm with Zhuge Yuan guiding him, especially in a foreign place like the Great Qi.

Under Zhuge Yuan's guidance, Li Huowang walked in circles until midnight. He only stopped when he saw a town with some lights in the distance while he was walking through a dried field with cracks in the ground.

The town had a decent size, so it wouldn't be an issue for him to find an inn there. Li Huowang looked at Li Sui and then at Zhuge Yuan. “Senior Zhuge, let's stop here for now and rest.” Li Huowang then approached the town with Li Sui.

“Junior Li, rest well. According to my calculations, we'll catch up to them by tomorrow.”

“Then that's good. I hope everything goes well.”

The Qi Kingdom's situation wasn't too bad, but Li Huowang felt a sense of foreboding for some reason.

He wasn't sure whether his instinct warning him of imminent danger or if it was just a feeling because he hadn't met any danger so far. Still, he maintained his guard.

Just as he got closer to the town, he caught a whiff of burning wood.

Someone was guarding the entrance of the town, but Li Huowang frowned at how unprofessional the guards were. They were all drinking soup by a bonfire.

The guards didn't even react when Li Huowang approached them.

He entered the town but failed to find an inn. More specifically, no one had their doors opened. The streets were deserted.

He sighed and decided to find a house that still had a light in it. He soon found one. The house had a small courtyard. Inside the courtyard was someone wearing a white towel on their head while cooking something on a small stove.

The man had been adding firewood to the stove, and he turned around upon hearing Li Huowang's footsteps.

Li Huowang saw that the man had pale skin and a fragrant scent. Li Huowang was immediately suspicious of the man.

"Do you need something, Daoist?"

That man stood up and looked at Li Huowang before staring at Li Sui behind him. Thankfully, Li Sui was wearing her veil.

Li Huowang took one look at the man and raised his guard up further. The man's feet were bound!

The man's feet were half the size of an ordinary human's feet. He was also wearing three-inch shoes women usually wore.

The man was reaching for something behind him when Li Huowang immediately unsheathed his sword and placed it on the man's neck.

“What are you doing?!”

“Junior Li, wait. Don’t be so rash. This is the Qi Kingdom. You don’t have any enemies here. This man is just an... escort,” Zhuge Yuan said, and then he proceeded to explain further.

Li Huowang then learned that there were men selling their bodies as a profession in the Qi Kingdom. Men with bound feet were one of such people.

Li Huowang sheathed his sword. The man slumped to the ground with his pants wet, and he kowtowed to Li Huowang.

“Please! The money is at the bottom of the chest! You can have it! Please spare me!”

Li Huowang looked at what the man had been reaching for behind him. It was a red handkerchief.

“I’m not here to rob you! I’m here to stay the night. Stand up. I will be staying at your house tonight. Take this. If it’s too much, just think of it as my apology.”

Li Huowang dragged the man up and placed several broken pieces of silver into his hands.

“T-t-that’s...” the man stammered, but Li Huowang had already entered his home.

The house was small and simple; it was surprisingly clean as well.

There was an altar to the left with two painted clay pots. Li Huowang was immediately attracted to it.

Staring at the long ears and three-pointed mouth of the pots, Li Huowang turned around and looked at the man. “What are you worshiping?”

The man smiled sheepishly, “We worship Sir Rabbit. Everyone in my line of work prays to him.”

“*Hoh*. I knew it.”

It was already late at night, and Li Huowang didn’t want to talk too much to the man. He needed to rest as well.

He walked up the second floor and used a drawer to block the stairways. Only then did he fall asleep on the bed.

Li Sui huddled at his side like a dog and closed her eyes, but her ears twitched as she monitored her surroundings for danger.

Time ticked by just like that. Li Huowang was still sleeping when he heard the sound of cracking firewood outside.

Sunlight shone in through the window, and Li Huowang opened his eyes upon hearing footsteps outside.

Li Sui was already taking a peek through the window gap.

“Dad, there are people outside. They all wear the same white towel, and they're whispering to each other... They're done talking. The man threw one more firewood into the stove and left with them.”

Li Huowang got out of bed and took his weapons. “They probably left to report to the officials.”

Li Sui nodded and followed him down the stairs.

The man with bound feet had left, but the fire in the stove was still going strong.

What was he cooking for an entire night? Li Huowang walked out of the courtyard to leave the town.

When he walked through the streets, he saw that everyone was cooking something. He frowned when he noticed it.

“Senior Zhuge, is this a tradition of the Qi Kingdom?”

“I don't think so. Junior Li, what month is it? Is the Dragon Boat Festival around the corner? I remember that it would take an entire day and night to cook the dumplings.”

Li Huowang took a deep breath before shaking his head. “No. The leaves wrapping the dumplings would be fragrant, then, but I can't smell anything at all. Anyway, it doesn't matter as long as they don't hinder us.”

Li Huowang picked up his pace and walked to the entrance of the town.

And that was when he saw rows of steaming stoves before him...

“What's going on here?”

The townspeople were carrying heavy stoves outside of the town.

Chapter 537 - Dharma Sect

Li Huowang was confused when someone called out to him.

“Daoist! Daoist!”

The man with his bound feet walked over to Li Huowang and smiled. “You’re leaving? How about staying for a few more nights?”

“What are you doing?” Li Sui asked.

The men heard her and opened the pot lid. The steam escaped the pot, and a large stone, roughly the size of a watermelon, was sitting in the boiling water.

“We are cooking stone soup! This is a very nutritious meal. Not only could you stave off your hunger, you can even extend your lifespan. We just have to cook this stone until it becomes soft, and we can then ascend to the realm of the Immortals after drinking it! We no longer need to suffer the pain of the mortal realm.”

“*Hm?*” Li Huowang frowned and looked at the man in front of him. He hesitated for a moment before deciding to give some advice. “You think you can become immortal if you cook stone soup? Are you tricked by the Sitting Oblivion Dao?”

The man covered the lid and placed the pot back on the stove. “Daoist? What’s the Sitting Oblivion Dao? I’ve never heard of that before.”

“Stop cooking it. The one who told you that was lying. You can’t cook stones, and drinking boiled stone water won’t turn you into an Immortal.”

Li Huowang did what his conscience had told him to do and left. He had just taken several steps when he noticed several men approaching him with hostility in their faces.

Li Huowang gripped the hilt of his sword when he saw that all of them were wearing the same white towel on their heads.

“A liar? Sir Arrogant Stone, who has descended upon the mortal realm, was the one who told us to cook these stones!”

“Arrogant Stone?” Li Huowang mumbled, trying to recall if he had ever heard of that name before. He was about to retort, but he realized that he had been surrounded by the townspeople. All of them had the same white towel on their heads.

Li Huowang unsheathed his purple-tasseled sword, and a killing intent burst out of him spread out. “Scram!”

The townspeople retreated at Li Huowang's fierce display, but they didn't retreat far away. More and more people with white towels on their heads came out from the alleyways to join the others.

“Junior Li, we need to go now. I've been in the Great Qi for so long, and I've never heard of anyone with the moniker 'Arrogant Stone.' Something's wrong with them!”

Li Huowang opened his mouth, and Li Sui entered his body without needing any instructions.

Black tentacles sprouted out from his body and thrashed wildly, knocking the pots and stoves toward the people.

The boiling water scalded the townspeople, and they cried out in pain.

“Let's get out of here!”

Li Huowang's two feet and four tentacles stomped on the ground, propelling him away. He jumped out from their encirclement and ran toward the massive field up ahead.

He was about to reach the field when he noticed a white figure approaching him. The two tentacles on his armpits moved, lashing out at the white figure.

The white figure fell to the ground.

Li Huowang noticed the character "Witch" written on the white

cloth covering the figure's face, and he immediately realized the identity of his opponents.

He had seen the same figure in the Liang Kingdom, but they were wearing black in the Liang Kingdom. To think that they'd wear white here in the Qi Kingdom.

There was no Arrogant Stone! It was just another name for God Yu'er! The people in the town belonged to the Dharma Sect of the Qi Kingdom!

"To think that even the Qi Kingdom has the Dharma Sect! The Natural Disaster has affected both places!" Zhuge Yuan frowned.

The white figure stood up, but Peng Longteng plummeted toward them.

Bam!

The white figure was crushed, and a cloud of dust flew into the air.

But rather than scaring the people away, they all went mad upon witnessing the death of one of them. They grabbed the stones that they were cooking and ran over to Li Huowang.

"I can't get entangled with them!" Li Sui slapped two talismans onto Li Huowang's legs, which increased his speed as he ran away like a ghost.

He had just exited the town when he saw a massive group of refugees standing in the empty space in front of the town.

They were skinny and wore rags, but no matter how dirty they were, they were still wearing clean white towels on their heads. They were from the Dharma Sect, too!

"Dammit! I should've known that the harder one's life was, the easier it would be for the evil sects to convince them to join their cause! The Dharma Sect's influence in this world is likely greater than their influence in the Liang Kingdom!"

"Brothers and sisters! Attack! That Daoist in red robes has killed Wu Zhu!"

The refugees standing outside of the town heard the cries from within the town. They all turned and stared at Li Huowang at the same time.

Li Huowang gritted his teeth when he felt their gazes. He gripped his purple-tassel sword with his right while he unsheathed the spine sword with his left. He smashed the spine sword on the ground.

Li Sui's tentacles opened Li Huowang's bag of torture tools, and her tentacles all held polished torture tools except for one tentacle holding the bronze coin sword.

“AAAAAAAHH!” The skinny refugees revealed their yellowing teeth as they ran at Li Huowang like zombies.

“Li Sui! Do it!” Li Huowang ran into the crowd without any hesitation.

He swung the spine sword, and a large group of the refugees was cut down like rice stalks. Blood sprayed everywhere as only their lower half remained.

Li Huowang jumped and crashed into the crowd. Blood and gore would paint the air every time he landed.

Even though there were many people from the Dharma Sect here, none of them could block even a single attack.

The purple-tasseled sword was a weapon forged for the army. Rather than losing strength, he was becoming stronger as he killed the refugees.

Li Huowang finally discovered the sword's true potential. It flourished in battles!

“Kill them all!” Li Huowang's eyes grew bloodshot, and the world before him became veiled in red.

Clang!

The purple-tasseled sword swung down and broke a sickle as if it were made of clay.

Li Huowang aimed for the next person who had blocked his

escape, but he hesitated briefly at the astonishing sight.

The woman was wearing a white towel on her head with a dead baby covered in flies in her arms.

The sight convinced Li Huowang that the lady had gone mad.

The lady looked at Li Huowang and immediately brought out a rusted sickle to thrust toward Li Huowang.

The next moment, a large shadow plummeted, crushing the woman and the baby into a gory paste.

Peng Longteng then grabbed the nearest human being and used them as a weapon to slaughter everyone around her. A clearing was then made around Li Huowang in the blink of an eye.

Chapter 538 - Chibao

“ Phew~ ” Qiu Chibao was sprawled out on the ground while carefully fanning the flames with her breath. She was cooking something in her broken bowl above the fire.

Rumble!

Her stomach rumbled, and she tied the strings of her pants tighter.

Her name was Chibao[1], but she rarely filled her belly.

It had been the same when was still living with her parents, and it remained the same even after she got married.

The fire grew smaller, and she panicked. She looked around her and quickly grabbed a handful of human bones beside a bonfire to fuel the flames.

Qiu Chibao sighed in relief when the flames got stronger. She then carefully removed the tile that she had used to substitute as the bowl lid.

The boiling water had three cobblestones within it; she prodded the stones with her rusted knife and grinned in delight, which brightened up her dirty face.

Qiu Chibao then covered the bowl and added more firewood. Afterward, she grabbed the nearby bundle of rags and rocked it in her arms.

“My son, the stones will soon go soft. Once it’s soft, you can drink the stone soup, and your illness will be cured! You can even become an Immortal!”

Qiu Chibao was so thrilled at the idea that she was chuckling while playing with her laughing son.

Just then, the people sleeping around her suddenly woke up in agitation.

An old man sleeping beside her woke up and stretched. His legs accidentally knocked over her bowl.

“My stone soup!” Qiu Chibao cried out in despair. The Dharma Sect members around her stirred and stood up one by one.

“Kill that Daoist in red robes! He killed our Lord Wu Zhu!” someone shouted, and everyone buzzed with agitation.

“Who killed our Wu Zhu?! Without him talking to Sir Arrogant Stone, the stone soup might not going to work!”

Qiu Chibao forgot about her despair when she heard those words. She stopped collecting the cobblestones on the ground and placed her rusted knife into the bundle of rags that she had used to wrap her son. She stood up shakily and wanted to charge at the front lines, but she was too emaciated to do so. She was too weak to shove away the person in front of her.

“Let me go! Let me go! I can’t see!” Qiu Chibao shouted, but no one heard her.

All of a sudden, the people moved to the side, revealing a path to her.

At the end of the path was a Daoist in red robes; the Daoist was wearing a bronze coin veil and had black tentacles sprouting all over his body.

Rather than feeling afraid, Qiu Chibao felt that she was under Sir Arrogant Stone's protection. She held her crying son and charged at the bizarre monster.

“You killed our Wu Zhu! How dare you destroy my stone soup!” Qiu Chibao gritted her teeth and thrust her rusted knife toward the Daoist in red robes.

In the next instant, she saw the sky become dark. She didn’t know what happened afterward.

“Dad! Dad!” Li Sui’s voice snapped Li Huowang out of it. He had been staring at the meat paste in front of him.

This was not the time to be distracted! He was still surrounded

by the enemies!

Li Huowang was soaked in sweat as he took a deep breath. He chased after Peng Longteng, who was opening a path for him.

“Don’t just stand and fight! Charge forward! Break through the people!”

However, Peng Longteng ignored him and continued her onslaught.

“Go forward, or I will dematerialize you! I won’t materialize you again if that happens!”

Peng Longteng stood still and clenched her right hand. The grotesque noise of cracking bones echoed as she crushed the head of a refugee in her hand. The bones and flesh seeped out from the gaps in her fingers.

Even though she didn’t want to do so, she had no choice but to follow Li Huowang’s orders under the latter’s threat. She could only enjoy the sensation of killing with a physical body, so she had no choice but to rely on Li Huowang for now.

The massive Peng Longteng grabbed two men and forged a path of blood through the refugees. She swept across the townspeople and refugees alike as if she were a tornado.

Peng Longteng was in charge of the slaughter up ahead, so Li Huowang felt that the burden on him was much lighter. But he was not happy at all. He couldn’t stop thinking about the woman holding a dead baby earlier.

He looked around and saw their skinny bodies with an engorged abdomen.

The red veil slowly lifted off his eyes.

Peng Longteng stomped on one of the refugees’ stomachs and squeezed out the content of their stomach through their mouths. However, rather than food, the refugee vomited lumps of what looked like clay.

It turned out that the refugees had been eating Kaolinite!

Those who consumed Kaolinite wouldn't live for long. Li Huowang even saw a human's leg in the refugee's stomach; it seemed that they had been eating each other as well.

Li Huowang knew that those who had joined the Dharma Sect would commit all kinds of atrocities. It was definitely not a good thing to worship God Yu'er, but did they have a choice?

"Sir Arrogant Stone, protect me!" An old man with white hair raised his stick as he charged at Li Huowang.

Li Sui's bronze coin whipped around the old man's neck and tore off his head.

Li Huowang walked over the head and moved forward.

He looked at their faces, and for some reason, he recalled his master, Dan Yangzi.

All of them were just like Dan Yangzi, firm in their beliefs but ignorant. And that was exactly how they were manipulated...

Li Huowang discovered another truth of this cruel world when he saw the frenzy in the eyes of the decapitated heads.

This crazy world had ground everything the people in this world had to dust, including their rationality. Thus, they could only place their hope on God Yu'er; it didn't matter even if God Yu'er forced them to become murderers.

The people were innocent, but Li Huowang had no choice but to use their blood to forge a path to live.

However, perhaps death was better for them. Dying meant emancipation from suffering, and it was much better than living life as a mindless zombie.

Jin Shanzhao stared at the scene in front of him with eyes filled with sadness and anger. He cried at the sight of such injustice, "*ARGH!*"

That was the first time Li Huowang heard his voice ever since he became an illusion...

All of a sudden, the ground beneath caved in, and his legs were

stuck!

He looked around and saw three mounds of earth rapidly approaching him.

Li Huang knew that there had to be someone commanding so many sect members, but he never expected them to come here so soon!

1. meaning eating till full 🤖

Chapter 539 - Trapped

“Tunneling?” Li Huowang immediately swung his spine sword at one of the earth mounds. The earth mound disappeared along with a huge patch of soil.

He destroyed the second earth mound, but the third one managed to reach him.

He suddenly felt an intense pain radiating from his left leg, causing his left leg to collapse like a wet noodle.

Something in the ground just took my femur! Li Huowang gritted his teeth and stabbed the purple-tasseled sword into the ground. A smelly, black blood spread out from the ground.

“Li Sui!” Li Huowang shouted, and Li Sui immediately filled his left leg with her tentacles.

There was no time to waste. Li Huowang ran through the soggy path of blood towards Peng Longteng.

He saw several earth mounds chasing after him and sensed that he was in danger.

There are too many of them! I can't keep dragging on like this, or I'll get caught! I need to hide in the Liang Kingdom now! Li Huowang grabbed his spine sword.

Zhuge Yuan suddenly stopped him. “Junior Li! You can't! You must not let them know that you can travel to the Liang Kingdom. Someone in the Dharma Sect might be able to divine when you'll come back here! You would never be able to hide in the Qi Kingdom by then!”

Li Huowang cursed and ran nonstop. He stepped on the bloody path as Li Sui's tentacles propelled him forward

After jumping several times, Li Huowang landed on Peng Longteng's shoulders. He saw the endless sect members of the

Dharma Sect.

He was already standing on Peng Longteng and he still couldn't see the end of the crowd. "How many people are here?! Did everyone in the Qi Kingdom join the Dharma Sect?!"

Li Huowang's instinct suddenly warned him of impending danger. He twisted himself as three rocks fell from the sky. They tore open his robes and made three holes in Peng Longteng's.

He looked around and saw who did that. It was a lady that was dressed in strange attire. Her limbs and neck swayed in the air as her silver jewelry jingled.

She stepped on the crowd as if she was walking on the ground. She ran towards Li Huowang with minimal effort.

Li Huowang never fought much with the Dharma Sect in the Liang Kingdom, but he noticed that the Dharma Sect of the Qi Kingdom primarily used techniques related to earth and stone.

Li Huowang observed the woman before he had a sudden realization! The woman was a member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao!

But the woman no longer had any features resembling the Sitting Oblivion Dao. She no longer believes in Doulao but rather in Arrogant Stone.

He realized how dire the situation was in the Qi Kingdom. To think that the Dharma Sect could absorb the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

Li Huowang didn't want to get dragged into a fight of attrition here because he didn't know how many more people from other sects were absorbed into the Dharma Sect. But there were too many people for him to turn invisible.

Li Huowang stared at the woman getting closer to him when he had an idea from seeing how Peng Longteng was throwing the corpses around.

Li Huowang sent two tentacles to wrap around Peng Longteng's hands. Peng Longteng understood what he wanted to do as well as she swung him around.

She turned faster and faster, to the point where Li Huowang couldn't keep his eyes open.

Three more stones flew past and bore three holes in him. At the same time, Peng Longteng released her grip and hurled Li Huowang far away.

He felt the wind flying past his ears, and he got farther and farther away from the ground. He was so high up that he finally saw the edge of the Dharma Sect crowd, but he soon fell down into the arms of the Dharma Sect members.

But he wasn't worried because he finally found a good way to use the illusions.

He rematerialized Peng Longteng, and she grabbed Li Huowang's tentacles again.

After throwing him three times, Li Huowang finally landed in a place without a crowd. He found himself beside a small earth hill.

Ignoring his headache, he projected his body image beneath the ground and became invisible.

When the Dharma Sect members ran over to find him, he was already halfway up the hill.

"Dad! We won! We escaped their encirclement!" Li Sui's tentacles wiggled with joy.

"Did we?" Li Huowang looked down at the Dharma Sect members wearing tattered clothes. He recalled the crazy woman who was crushed into a paste by Peng Longteng.

Even though they were from the Dharma Sect, they were being used as cannon fodder. "There's nothing to be happy about. No one won here."

"Help... Help!" A familiar voice echoed. Li Huowang turned around and saw that Jin Shanzhao was pointing at the Dharma Sect members.

Li Huowang thought Jin Shanzhao would forever remain muted, so he never expected that Jin Shanzhao would start talking

once again.

Even though he had uttered only a single word, Li Huowang understood what he was trying to say.

“Help? How do you want me to help them? How ambitious; you actually want to help the people, but do I look like the Emperor of the Qi Kingdom in your eyes? Or the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau? They're pitiful, right? But what about me? I'm worse than them! Who's pitying me instead? I can't even help myself, so how can I help them?”

Jin Shanzhao lowered his trembling finger and went silent.

Li Huowang sat down and pressed down on the scabs all over him. He was waiting for his headache to improve.

He couldn't rush things now. His head was pounding after materializing Peng Longteng so many times in quick succession. He would end up back in the hospital if he lost control of the Primordial Breath inside of him

“I would suggest that you disappear if you were planning on staying by my side just because of that. I'm not as selfless as Senior Zhuge.” Li Huowang panted as he looked at Jin Shanzhao in the air.

Zhugue Yuan said nothing. He had one of his hands behind his back as he stared at the crowd of Dharma Sect members moving around like ants. He was counting something with his other hand.

Li Huowang rested for a while and suddenly felt better. He then stood up to leave and swore not to get involved with the members of the Dharma Sect ever again.

Just then, Li Huowang noticed Jin Shanzhao smiling at him.

Hm? Why is he smiling? Li Huowang realized that Jin Shanzhao wasn't looking at him but was looking at something behind him.

He turned around and almost cursed out loud.

A woman wearing tattered rags stood just a few meters away from her. She was skinny with a white towel on her head, and she was still holding her dead baby in her arms.

There was another illusion in Li Huowang's illusion roster.

Chapter 540 - Guankou

Qiu Chibao held the baby in her hands as she swallowed her saliva. She stared at the Daoist in red robes munching on his rations while she pleaded, "Please. Sir Daoist, please give me some food. I haven't eaten in three days. I'm too hungry."

Li Huowang took out another bun when he looked at the poor woman. He soaked the bun in his blood and threw it to her.

Qiu Chibao's eyes lit up, and she pounced toward the bun. She wanted to eat it.

But it was useless. Her hands phased through the bun again and again. She could not pick it up.

Qiu Chibao looked up at Li Huowang with despair in her eyes and howled, "What are you doing?! You don't want the bun any more, so why don't you let me pick it up?! A mere bun can save someone's life! *Huhuhu*, I've gotten used to being hungry, but I need to eat to produce breast milk. Without breast milk, my son will die! Please find it in your conscience to feed me!"

Qiu Chibao bit her finger open and placed it near her baby's mouth.

Li Huowang sighed in frustration while staring at Qiu Chibao. He decided to ignore her as he looked east.

It had been a while since he had new illusions. Li Huowang had completely forgotten that he still had the ability to spawn illusions.

What's happening? Why did she become my illusion? Why was she the only one who became an illusion even though so many people had died in front of me?

Neither he nor Zhuge Yuan knew the answer to that question.

"Why don't you let me eat it?! You villain!" Qiu Chibao roared. She grabbed her rusted knife and thrust it toward Li Huowang's left

eye.

Li Huowang stepped forward, and Qiu Chibao phased through him.

He had tried communicating with her but soon gave up after a few attempts.

He told her many different things, either she was dead, her baby was dead, or she had become an illusion. However, she refused to listen to any of his explanations.

It seemed that Qiu Chibao was still a lunatic despite becoming an illusion.

Li Huowang sympathized with her, but he could not help her until she acknowledged her condition.

Thankfully, it was easy enough to keep her quiet.

Li Huowang took out his last ration and threw it to her. She immediately became quiet and tried to eat it.

Peng Longteng, Jin Shanzhao, Zhuge Yuan, Monk, Qiu Chibao, Sitting Oblivion Dao, and Jiang Yingzi... Li Huowang tried to find something in common with them, as he believed he'd know the prerequisites to spawning illusions by learning that.

Li Huowang soon discovered that his emotions were particularly tumultuous while these people were dying, and perhaps that was the reason they became his illusions.

If he didn't want more illusions, he had to be a bit calmer in the future.

However, Li Huowang soon dismissed the idea. Not all of his illusions were spawned the same.

He didn't even know whether the old monk had actually died or not.

Some of them didn't even have a close relationship with him, such as Qiu Chibao. She had never talked to him in real life, but she still became his illusion.

“Unless... There's more than one way to become my illusion?”

Li Huowang mumbled.

“Junior Li... this isn't the time to think about that. It's best to focus on locating Shangji Guankou. Great Qi is extremely unstable at the moment, so we need to go back as soon as possible.”

Li Huowang nodded. Indeed, Shai Zi was his biggest headache. He already had quite a few illusions, so having another one wouldn't really matter.

He might be able to materialize all of them once he was done with his cultivation, and he could then allow them to live in peace.

“No... No...” Jin Shanzhao's words interrupted Li Huowang's train of thought.

Jin Shanzhao was smiling while staring at Li Huowang.

“Good... Good!” Jin Shanzhao said before dragging himself to Qiu Chibao and consoling her by tapping on her legs.

Li Huowang said nothing as he ran in the direction that Zhuge Yuan had pointed out.

The sun rose higher and higher, and Li Huowang was fast approaching Shangji Guankou. He started focusing more and more on his surroundings.

The trees grew sparser, and he realized almost all of the tree bark had been stripped away. Li Huowang walked along a dry riverbank, and he reached the source of the river at nightfall.

Li Huowang looked down and saw a deep pool of water; however, the drought had made the overall water level quite low.

Li Huowang frowned. “Am I staring at Shangji Guankou right now?”

“No. We're in the middle of the hour of the rat. Shangji Guankou must be underwater right now. Once the hour of the rat passes, they'd move somewhere else.”

“So there's a time constraint; why does it sound like I'm refining pills?” Li Huowang asked, but he dared not wait any longer. He picked up a large stone and jumped into the pool.

The pool was very cold, to the point that his limbs were numb. It was completely dark, and Li Huowang felt something smooth gliding past his neck. He wasn't sure what it was, though.

He took out a small piece of luminescent stone from within his robes.

The glowing green stone illuminated the surroundings, and a few creatures in the dark water receded like a tide.

Li Huowang plummeted to the bottom of the river, all thanks to the heavy stone in his arms.

However, the river was deeper than he initially thought.

Li Huowang turned to Zhuge Yuan, wanting to ask a question, but the latter guessed his question and said, "Junior Li, don't worry. Shangji Guankou is an isolationist. Evil beings cannot find them so easily, so there shouldn't be any danger here."

Li Huowang relaxed as he sank to the bottom of the river.

It was silent, and there weren't any noises except for Qiu Chibao's screams.

"*AAAHHH!* I'm drowning! I'm going to drown!" Qiu Chibao desperately tried to swim upward with her baby up above her head to try and get him to the surface first.

Chapter 541 - Secret

It had been ten minutes since Li Huowang had started sinking in the cold river. His face had already become red from trying to hold his breath, and his lips were becoming purple from the lack of air.

However, he was still sinking as if the river had infinite depth.

Li Huowang cast a worried look at Li Sui with worry but saw that she was enjoying it. She was swimming around with her swaying tentacles as if she were a fish.

“Junior Li, hold on! We're almost there!” Zhuge Yuan looked around in the darkness.

Li Huowang was just about to run out of air when a temple appeared in the dark.

“There!”

Li Sui grabbed Li Huowang and used her tentacles to swim toward the temple.

When Li Huowang crashed into the temple, the temple disappeared and was replaced by a black rift.

He threw the stone in his arms away and entered the rift. He swam up and popped out from the water. He panted and looked around to realize that there was air in the underwater cave.

“*Cough, cough~!*” Li Huowang coughed out water and pulled himself out of the water.

He didn't even rest as he raised a stone and examined the cave. He saw nothing but gray walls.

“Junior Li, turn around.”

He turned around and saw the ripples on the surface of the water where he had come from. The water reflected himself, but...

That's not my reflection! Li Huowang felt a shiver down his

spine.

His reflection looked similar to him. It wore the same red Daoist robes and the bronze coin veil, but the surface of the color looked strange. If he had to describe it, the reflection looked like painted pottery.

“Throw a stone at it,” Zhuge Yuan said.

Li Huowang followed Zhuge Yuan’s instructions, and a ripple appeared from where the stone landed.

A cracking sound echoed, and his reflection’s forehead cracked open. The crack spread across the reflection, and a single eye popped out from the hole in the forehead.

Is that Shangji Guankou? Li Huowang wasn’t sure what he was looking at.

Without waiting for him to speak, his reflection within the third eye spoke, “A secret for another secret.”

A secret to trade for another secret?

Shangji Guankou required nothing else but more secrets. As long as Li Huowang had enough secrets, he could exchange them for any secrets, including Shai Zi’s location.

There was no reason for him to be that wary of the Great Qi, so he immediately exclaimed, “I’m a Strayed One!”

The cracks on Shangji Guankou healed slightly.

This is great! Li Huowang was thrilled. “I’m not from this world! I’m from another world!”

However, nothing happened. The cracks didn’t heal. Shangji Guankou stared at Li Huowang as if he was a weird person.

Huh? That’s not a secret? Li Huowang wanted to try once again when Zhuge Yuan raised his hand.

“Junior Li, don’t worry. Let me handle it,” Zhuge Yuan said.

Li Huowang looked at him with a complicated expression. “I already owe you a lot. If I still need to rely on you even though you’re already dead, I fear that I won’t be able to repay you in this

lifetime.”

“Junior Li, no need to be so sentimental. We're sworn brothers, aren't we?”

Li Huowang decided not to waste any more time and tried to materialize Zhuge Yuan again.

“No need. You can just materialize my fan. I've used some of Peng Longteng's blood to write some secrets on it.” Zhuge Yuan passed the fan to Li Huowang.

“Only the fan?” Li Huowang was confused, but he decided to do it anyway.

And he was stupefied to find that it took almost all of his strength to materialize just Zhuge Yuan's fan.

Zhuce Yuan's fan fell to the ground, and he was covered in his own sweat as he picked it up.

He looked at the fan, and a thought popped into his mind. *What kind of secret was it that required so much of my energy?*

He opened the fan and looked at the first two words when Zhuge Yuan stopped him. “Don't look at it!”

Li Huowang hurriedly looked away.

Zhuce Yuan sighed in relief and said, “Junior Li, I can't let you read it because the karma of the Simings would stick to you if you do so.”

Even the secrets of a Siming actually hold so much power? Li Huowang closed the fan and dared not to take a peek. He already had enough issues on his plate.

He threw the fan into the water, and Shangji Guankou's cracks healed rapidly.

Once the cracks had healed, everything became normal once again. Li Huowang's true reflection appeared in the water, but his reflection had a third eye for some reason.

“Junior Li, if you want to know Shai Zi's location, just take the eye out from your reflection and place it on your forehead.”

“Is that the secret that Shangji Guankou had left for me?” Li Huowang was thrilled upon realizing that he finally had a reasonable method to deal with Shai Zi.

It wasn't good enough for him to be satisfied, but at least he now had a chance.

“Li Sui, let's go back!” Li Huowang dove into the water once again.

He could use the spine sword to return to the Liang Kingdom, but he was currently underwater, so who knew where he'd pop out on the other side? What if he was somehow transported beneath the ground on the other side? Wouldn't that be a laughable death? Li Huowang entered the cold water once again. He took a deep breath this time and got ready to swim all the way up to the surface.

While he was on his way to the surface, the cogs in his mind turned rapidly, thinking of a way to use the secret that Shangji Guankou had left behind for him. *Now that I can find that Shai Zi, I just need to find someone to deal with him. They must also be stronger than him. I can go and look for the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau, but would he even trust me if I tell him that I can find Shai Zi? Of course, there's the Imperial Preceptor, too! I remember him standing his ground against four Shai Zis.*

Just then, something white floated past Li Huowang.

What was that?! Li Huowang grabbed his sword and saw the fan that he had thrown earlier into the water. To make matters worse, the fan was open!

Translator's Thoughts

The Chinese character for Shangji Guankou is 上级灌口. It doesn't refer to any mythological beings or folklore. I suppose it's just a name the author came up with.

Chapter 542 - Finding

Li Huowang suddenly felt cold, but it wasn't because of the frigid water. He felt cold, as he had realized that he was in extreme danger.

The fan contained the secrets of the Siming, and just a mere glance at those secrets was enough to put him in danger.

Li Huowang closed his eyes, but it was too late. He had already clapped his eyes on the first line of words on the fan, and his mind had captured those words clearly, even though the letters were dissolving in water.

"The Greater Siming has no future, no past. The heralds of the Simings come into existence as the Simings come into existence, and they get erased as the Simings are erased."

Greater Siming? What is that? No, I can't remember it! I need to forget about it! Li Huowang clenched his fist and shouted in his heart.

He took out a long needle from his pouch of torture tools before stabbing it into his fingernails and tearing them off. The pain from the wounds made him forget about what he had read.

He broke the surface of the water and panted and laid down on the floor of the cave. "Senior Zhuge, I've accidentally read the first line of words on the fan."

"Really?!" Zhuge Yuan's eyes went wide. However, he was confused when he looked at Li Huowang. "Wait, how come their karma hasn't stuck to you if you've already read it? That's strange."

"Nothing?" Li Huowang felt hope in his heart. "Perhaps because I couldn't understand it? You wrote it in a way that was very confusing to me."

Zhuce Yuan's worries went away as he sighed. "Thank

goodness. It was great that you did not heed my advice about reading more books. I didn't expect that your illiteracy would end up helping you inadvertently today. I guess you won't get their karma without understanding their secrets."

Li Huowang was glad that he had no idea how to read classical texts. He recalled the first two words, "Greater Siming." He didn't know what the full sentence meant, but he still knew what these two words meant.

Greater Siming? Siming? But it's called Greater Siming. Is it stronger than Ba-Hui? A normal Siming is already so strong, so what kind of being a Greater Siming is? Li Huowang couldn't even begin to imagine it. He couldn't even see Ba-Hui's true form without his perception melding into one, so how was he supposed to perceive a Greater Siming?

The Greater Siming has no future and past? Li Huowang felt that he was learning something taboo. He was about to decipher the next sentence when he realized what he was doing. "No! I can't think about that! I cannot kill myself just like that!"

He stabbed his fingernails and gouged them out again. The intense pain distracted him from thinking about the contents of the fan.

Li Huowang endured the pain and looked at Zhuge Yuan, "It seems that I have no choice but to avoid reading classical texts throughout my life."

"Classical texts? What are those, Junior Li?"

Li Huowang shook his head and decided not to explain it. He then signaled at Li Sui to swim upward once again.

He wouldn't make the same mistake twice. This time, he made sure that the fan was gone before making a beeline for the surface.

He spent a lot of energy before he finally crawled out of the deep water. He took his spine sword and was ready to go back when Li Sui asked, "Dad, what's that over there?"

Li Huowang looked at where she was pointing with her tentacles. He saw three columns of black smoke rising in the distance.

He didn't know what it was, but Qiu Chibao knew what it was. She held her baby tighter and looked at the smoke with fear on her face. "That's the signal for war. My dear, can you not go there? I'm afraid many people will die."

Staring at the crazy Qiu Chibao, Li Huowang said nothing and swung his spine sword.

A few days later, Li Huowang made his way to Shangjing.

Even though he felt tired from the journey, he knew that it was worth it. He no longer felt as helpless as before, after all.

Li Huowang was about to enter his home when he realized that the door was half open. *A thief?*

He entered his home with his carriage and was surprised to find someone sitting in the living room. He was even more surprised when he discovered the identity of his visitor—Hong Da.

Li Huowang instinctively held his spine sword. Hong Da's appearance here meant only one thing. However, Li Huowang was surprised that they still managed to track him down despite his concealment.

However, Li Huowang knew that he couldn't fight them right now. He'd be burning bridges with the Surveillance Bureau if he were to do that.

Wait, things are different now. I don't have a deep grudge with them. In fact, this is a chance.

He came up with a plan as he smiled and greeted Hong Da.

"Oh? Brother Hong, long time no see! I thought you were no longer here?"

"The Surveillance Bureau is looking for you," Hong Da said, standing up to return the greeting.

Li Huowang feigned surprise. "Is this related to Prince Ren? Did

he manage to escape the Surveillance Bureau's hunt?"

Hong Da smiled bitterly and shook his head. "No, Prince Ren is dead. This is about you stealing Fo Yulu's Ancient Sword."

The living room abruptly turned dark, and the same group of people that Li Huowang had fought before to obtain Zhuge Yuan's spine sword appeared by the door.

Miniature golden Buddhas crawled out from every nook and cranny of the room to surround Li Huowang.

The spine sword's previous owner, Fo Yulu, glared at Li Huowang with hatred. She pointed her black fingernails at him and roared, "How dare you deceive us with your illusions? We've checked, so we know that even the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau isn't strong enough to make a Twisted One come back to life!"

Hong Da revealed his rusted knives in his robes, but Li Huowang didn't panic. Instead, he retorted, "That's just an excuse. I'm helping the emperor at the moment. Are you trying to reduce the emperor's influence by killing me because you've accepted the request of someone in the palace?"

"Don't even try to twist the truth! You've stolen my weapon, and you're actually feigning ignorance?!" The woman was so angry at Li Huowang's attempt to twist the truth.

Li Huowang pulled one of the stools and sat on it calmly. "I don't know what you're talking bout. All I know is that my death would benefit the princes, so tell me... who told you to come here and kill me?"

Chapter 543 - Deal

Everyone around Li Huowang hesitated at his words.

While they were more than happy to help Ji Xiang deal with Li Huowang, it didn't mean that they were willing to dive into the muddy waters of politics.

“You!” Fo Yulu was furious, but she didn’t do anything in the end. The higher-ups of the Surveillance Bureau were cautious and had never gotten involved with the palace.

There wasn’t any punishment for getting involved with the palace; their career would most likely stay stagnant afterward. It was a difficult pill to swallow for everyone here.

Fo Yulu was no longer threatening him, but Li Huowang realized that they were still wary of him.

However, Li Huowang now had the initiative.

An hour later, they decided to disperse.

“Don’t you even dare think about running away! You’ll be under surveillance from now on! I’m going to kill you on the day the prince becomes the emperor! Let’s go!”

Fo Yulu stomped her way out of Li Huowang's residence.

Hong Da was about to leave as well.

However, Li Huowang said, “Brother Hong, it's been a while since we saw each other, and you're leaving already? How about we have some drinks? My treat.”

Li Huowang understood that it was easy to force her to leave right now, but he still needed to find a way to deal with the problem permanently.

A big table of food was placed in the first room of the Yangquan Inn. Li Huowang filled the cups with wine.

“Come, let me toast three cups to Brother Hong.”

Upon holding one of the cups, Li Huowang stared into the content of the cup and inwardly muttered, *This is water! This is water!*

After the drinks, Li Huowang ate some vegetables to wash the liquor down.

“Brother Hong, don’t just sit there; come and eat as well. If it weren’t for your recommendation, I wouldn’t become a part of the Surveillance Bureau, after all.”

Hong Da sighed. He was not an idiot. There was a reason Li Huowang had treated him to a meal. As someone stuck in the middle, he had the riskiest position. Of course, he preferred it if both parties stopped fighting each other.

“Fine. I will help you just this once and become your mediator. Return her sword to her, and I will try and convince them to not do anything to you. We can then consider this issue as resolved by then.”

“Return the sword?” Li Huowang touched the spine sword and shook his head. He would never return such a good weapon. He also didn’t want anyone desecrating Zhuge Yuan’s corpse. “Can you pass a message to her from me? We’re all from the Surveillance Bureau, and I don’t want to burn bridges, too. Tell her that I can’t return her sword, but I can trade it for something of equal value.”

Hong Da frowned and put down his chopsticks. “Trade it for something of equal value? The sword is made from a Twisted One’s corpse! Do you know how valuable that sword is even when compared to the treasures in the vault? You can borrow it, but you have to return it! If you don’t return it, then don’t blame me for not taking care of you. The Surveillance Bureau already knows about the issue, so you cannot escape this!”

Li Huowang took another cup of wine and gave it to Hong Da. “A weapon made from a Twisted One’s corpse? How about I exchange it with a Strayed One?”

“A Strayed One's corpse?” Hong Da reeled backward, and his expression returned to normal. He drank his wine calmly and asked, “A Strayed One? Dead or alive?”

Hearing that, Li Huowang knew that the deal was secured.

“*Hoho*, let's eat first, or the food will get cold.” Li Huowang relaxed and ate with relish.

They ate and drank while probing each other. Finally, Hong Da agreed to go back and pass Li Huowang's message.

This was a grudge between Li Huowang and Fo Yulu. He couldn't make any decisions as he was just stuck in the middle.

However, Li Huowang knew that it was considered resolved, and it was all because of Hong Da's reaction. If one Strayed One wasn't enough, then he could just add another one.

The business talks were over, so the two chattered leisurely.

They weren't really on extremely good terms, as they only worked together once, but under the influence of alcohol, the two became pretty friendly with each other.

“Er Jiu, how did you get involved with the imperial family? You should have asked me before getting involved with them. You're walking on a difficult path. Otherwise, everyone would be fighting for the same opportunity as yours. He's today's emperor, but he could die the next day. Promises will mean nothing once he's dead. You should have just focused on the Surveillance Bureau.”

Li Huowang smiled and said nothing. If Shai Zi hadn't forced him, he wouldn't have come back to Shangjing.

“It's too late for that. Having said that, what have you been up to recently?”

“*Hoh*, what else? There have been so many missions to do ever since the Dharma Sect rose up. Thankfully, the rewards are pretty good, so I've been running here and there for the past few months. If it wasn't because of you, I would still be outside getting rid of the Dharma Sect.”

“Have they really grown so much? Can't the Surveillance Bureau just deal with them outright?” Li Huowang asked nervously as he glanced at Qiu Chibao.

Hong Da ate a chunk of chicken and said in a stupor, “It’s probably fine now that Si Qi’s Surveillance Bureau has decided to join us. We now have more people to work with.”

“Si Qi’s Surveillance Bureau has joined us?” Li Huowang was surprised to hear that.

“*Hehe*, you don't know that Si Qi has fallen?”

Li Huowang woke up from his stupor. He arrived at the Liang Kingdom via Si Qi. It was a tiny place, but Li Huowang didn't expect it to fall.

He recalled the Abbess and the Righteous Monastery residing in Si Qi. “How did it fall? Weren’t they at peace?”

“Who said that? They’ve been at war for a long time now. The Liang Kingdom has been stable for the past few years while the other nations have been fighting each other for so long. We just don't know the details due to the distance.”

“But why did the new imperial family get rid of the Surveillance Bureau? Aren't Surveillance Bureaus necessary?”

The Surveillance Bureau was there to deal with Natural Disasters. As long as they weren’t idiots, they ought to know that a Surveillance Bureau was necessary.

Without anyone dealing with Natural Disasters, a kingdom would fall like paper mache; their strength didn't matter at all.

Hong Da shook his head and drank another cup of wine. “I don’t know anything about that. If I knew more about the details, I wouldn't be here right now. Anyway, times are tough, and everyone is at war with each other.”

Li Huowang felt restless after knowing that Si Qi had fallen and the new imperial family did not want the Surveillance Bureau. He felt a sense of foreboding at the revelation. He glanced at Qiu

Chibao and saw that she was trying to eat a piece of the chicken.
*Are these changes related to the Qi Kingdom somehow? I hope that
whatever happened to the Qi Kingdom won't happen to the Liang
Kingdom.*

Chapter 544 - Transaction

Clink~

Li Huowang and Hong Da toasted before emptying the contents of their cup.

The table was a mess after their meal, and Li Sui had contributed a lot to the mess.

Li Sui ate with relish and to her heart's content.

“Er Jiu, do you know why I’m helping you?” Hong Da asked with a flushed face.

“Because we are brothers in the Surveillance Bureau.” Li Huowang toasted him again.

“*Hehe*, but we were also on good terms with Xinchu. What happened to him now? I actually knew that you were someone genuine and sincere after you saved us from the Muddled One. I’ve decided to befriend you from that moment onward because it’s very rare to find someone like you these days.” Hong Da sighed and revealed a hint of sadness in his eyes. “But since you’ve decided to get close to the imperial family, I fear that we will be meeting less and less. Once you’ve become successful, you better not forget about me, all right?”

Li Huowang looked at Hong Da’s Ten Emotions and Eight Sufferings before answering, “That might not be the case. Once I’m done here, I will still go back to the Surveillance Bureau.”

“Hm? Why are you going back?”

Li Huowang looked at the tattered rags of Qiu Chibao.

“I have time to kill, and it would be a waste if I just left my techniques to rot. It’d be great to lend my power to the world.”

Li Huowang wasn’t sure whether the events in the Qi Kingdom would happen in the Liang Kingdom. No matter what, he decided to

deal with it on his own accord because he didn't feel safe letting anyone else do it. He didn't mind becoming a true Surveillance Bureau member if necessary.

“*Hoho*, I had no idea that you were so kind. I thought youngsters like you loved power and money, so you helped the imperial family.”

Staring at the drunk Hong Da, Li Huowang decided it was time to ask something important, “Brother Hong, is the Chief inside the Surveillance Bureau right now?”

He wasn't asking out of curiosity. Now that he had the means to locate Shai Zi, he needed to find someone strong enough to defeat one.

Of course, Li Huowang's first candidate was the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau.

Time was running out. The faster the Shai Zi was dealt with, the better it'd be for him.

Hong Da was already here, so he saw no harm in asking.

“Which Chief? We have two now because the Si Qi's Surveillance Bureau has decided to join us.”

Li Huowang was secretly happy to learn that. He now had another person to help him kill Shai Zi.

“The Liang Kingdom's Chief.”

“Why do you want to know their whereabouts? I haven't been here for long, so I don't know either. But you can ask Liu Zongyuan if you want that information. Even if he's not in Shangjing, the Moongate, which he joined, has a ton of information.”

Li Huowang nodded. “Of course, how could I forget him? Come, let me toast you another cup.”

The two chatted until it was late.

While Li Huowang and Li Sui were on their way home, Li Huowang found himself thinking about the issues he was facing on the way back home. He looked at Zhuge Yuan and asked, “Senior

Zhuge, should I use Shangji Guankou to find where Miaomiao is? Is it better to save her first? I fear that I might not be able to find her even after killing Shai Zi.”

Zhuge Yuan shook his head. “No. You have to kill Shai Zi, or you will not be able to save her. Even if you somehow managed to save her, you would still have to worry about Shai Zi taking her away again. You can’t keep your guard up all the time. Also, Shai Zi already has his sights on you, and he’s stronger than you. If you don’t get rid of him now, you will never know peace.”

“ *Sigh*, you are right.” Li Huowang pushed the door open and brought Li Sui into the house.

Even though Hong Da said he'd try, Fo Yulu and the others were clearly interested in the deal because they visited Li Huowang the next day.

“Ten years,” said Fo Yulu.

Hong Da could only shake his head at Fo Yulu's decision.

“You mean I can only use the sword for ten years in exchange for a Strayed One’s corpse? Are you crazy?” Li Huowang frowned, patting the big jar next to him.

“What? Do you really think that a Strayed One's corpse is enough to trade for a Twisted One's corpse? A Twisted One is even rarer than a Strayed One! Also, don’t forget that you stole that sword from me! You have no right to haggle with me!”

“And why can’t I haggle with you? A hundred years...”

“You fucker!” Several thumb-sized golden Buddhas crawled out of Fo Yulu’s robes.

“Lord Ji Xiang, we must not fight here. We are here to negotiate. We can talk it out.”

Hong Da became the mediator and stood in between them.

Both parties respected Hong Da and never fought even though it was tense.

Under his mediation, they both compromised, and a deal was

made. Li Huowang was going to borrow the spine sword for twenty years in exchange for a Strayed One's corpse.

Fo Yulu had used the Surveillance Bureau as the witness to make sure that Li Huowang would return the weapon.

Back in the hall of screens of the Surveillance Bureau, Li Huowang stamped his thumb on the red ink before stamping on several papers.

Fo Yulu smiled at the sight, and Li Huowang instantly realized that she had profited more from this deal than him.

However, Li Huowang didn't really care. Twenty years was more than enough time for him to complete his cultivation.

He took his copy of the papers and thanked Hong Da. "Thanks, may we meet again soon."

Hong Da smiled bitterly and followed Fo Yulu out.

Li Huowang was the only one left behind the screen. He took the spine sword from his back and inspected it.

Good, now I can use it officially. No need to hide it any longer.

He was about to remove the strips of cloth when he felt someone near him.

Li Huowang swung his sword toward the left. However, two long fingernails clamped the tip of the sword, stopping it.

Li Huowang frowned. "How's everything?"

It was the old eunuch from the palace; he was Ji Lin's helper as well.

The old eunuch let go of the sword and said, "Ah... you've become important to our Lord, so how could you just disappear like that? We've been looking for you, but we haven't been able to find you at all until now."

"Ji Lin is looking for me?"

Chapter 545 - East Gate

Li Huowang stood in the large hall and stared at the throne hidden in the shadow. He was thinking about how to answer Ji Lin.

“Er Jiu, where have you been?” Ji Lin asked lazily, his voice rolling from the darkness.

“There was some urgent business on my side.”

“*Heh*. You are working for me, and you dare say you were dealing with your own business?”

“Prince Ren is dead. Who should I kill next?” Li Huowang changed the topic deliberately.

Ji Lin used his two remaining fingers to tap the throne. “Fine. You are a straightforward person, so I will be one too. I have one last remaining sister. Go ahead and kill her.”

Last remaining sister?! Li Huowang’s eyes shrunk from shock.

Ji Lin somehow sensed his surprise and chuckled, “Er Jiu, it’s all thanks to you creating chaos in the palace. If it hadn’t been for you, I wouldn’t have gotten this far. While you are a sharp sword, there’s no reason for me not to have a few more sharp swords, so don’t get cocky.”

His voice faltered, and someone stood out from behind the throne. There were some unfamiliar faces behind the throne.

Li Huowang didn’t recognize most of them, but he saw a familiar face holding a gold ingot.

He was none other than Prince Ren’s Scholar God of Wealth! He had defected to Ji Lin!

Staring at Ji Lin in the darkness, Li Huowang felt pressure mounting in his heart. Ji Lin had changed too fast and had expanded his influence to the limits using the space that Li Huowang had made for him.

“Er Jiu, do you accept? Say something, or do you have other private matters to attend to?”

One of the eunuchs who had coins for eyes held the royal decree to Li Huowang.

“I will take it.” Li Huowang took the decree and left.

Standing underneath the dark skies, he opened it and saw that it was information for his next target, Princess Anping.

Ji Lin even gave him a picture, as if he was afraid that Li Huowang wouldn’t know what she looked like.

Princess Anping was just a budding lady; she was even younger than Yang Na.

The mole above the right side of her lip made her look even prettier.

However, Li Huowang dared not underestimate her. Out of the nine of them, only two were remaining, and Princess Anping was one of them, so she definitely had some tricks up her sleeves.

After coming out from the palace, Li Huowang bought a messenger pigeon and started rummaging through his body.

He found a bamboo slip with the full moon carved onto it. He scraped it out of his body.

It was used to communicate with Liu Zongyuan in the Moongate. Since he was good with information, he decided to ask Liu Zongyuan about the Chief’s whereabouts.

He tied the bamboo slip onto the pigeon’s legs. He then took his weapons and slowly made his way to Princess Anping’s palace.

“What are your plans with the princess?” Zhuge Yuan asked.

“Nothing. I will drag for time. I might be able to help her reduce Ji Lin’s authority, too. Ji Lin is growing too fast. I don’t know if he would help me defeat Shai Zi like this.”

Zhuge Yuan nodded his head with satisfaction and stepped back.

Li Huowang had never forgotten his original goal, which was to

kill Shai Zi and save Bai Lingmiao.

He didn't care who would become the emperor. He only needed time to deal with Shai Zi.

Li Huowang entered her palace and felt relieved when he saw a substitute body of the princess.

Luckily, she was quite smart, which gave Li Huowang an excuse to fool Ji Lin for some time by saying that he was trying to locate her true body.

That was how he kept still in the princess's palace without doing anything. He even took care of some of the spies for her.

On the third day, Li Huowang received Liu Zongyuan's letter.

"Brother Er Jiu, you want to find the Chief? The Surveillance Bureau is not your house, and you don't have the qualifications to meet him, but you can wait at the East Gate on the twenty-third day of the month. I've heard that he would bring a lot of people out of the city. It's up to you whether you can find him or not. I can only help you this much."

Li Huowang kept the letter and immediately jumped down from the tree. He took Li Sui toward the east gate.

The Chief was much more important than some princesses.

There were now two Chiefs in the Liang Kingdom. Now that he can find where Shai Zi was, he only needed to convince the two Chiefs.

He soon reached the East Gate and waited anxiously beside a tea stall.

According to Liu Zongyuan's report, the Chief would bring a lot of people out of town. Li Huowang would definitely spot them easily due to the size of their party.

Time slowly passed, and the sun slowly set. Li Huowang became nervous.

Why is he still not here? Was Liu Zongyuan's information erroneous? Didn't they say that Moongate's information is very

accurate?

“Senior Li! Is that you!? We finally found you!”

Li Huowang had almost stabbed the person who had hugged his leg, but Puppy was saved by his familiar voice.

It wasn't just Puppy, the entire Lu family was here as well, and it was all thanks to a beggar, who told them Li Huowang's whereabouts.

Lu Xiucan didn't want to appear heartless and hugged Li Huowang's other leg but was kicked away instead.

“Why are you here?” Li Huowang carried Puppy like a chick.

“Senior Li, we are here to find you. You've said that you'd treat Senior Bai's eyes, but it's been so long since you left that we got too worried. We were really anxious and depressed.”

Puppy surreptitiously wiped a finger on his eyes to force out some tears.

“Go back home!” Li Huowang pointed at the exit and urged, “You're not supposed to be here! Shangjing is very dangerous at the moment!”

“Yeah! Master, Shangjing is so dangerous! We got bullied here! You must avenge us, Master!”

Lu Xiucan hugged Li Huowang's leg again.

Chapter 546 - Pursuit

Li Huowang found it annoying that these familiar people just had to appear before him today. He didn't expect that they'd come here and kick up a fuss at a critical juncture.

All of a sudden, Li Huowang's expression changed when the sound of galloping hooves entered his ears. He turned and saw twelve sleek horses pulling a carriage the size of a small house. The horses were belching yellow smoke as they raced toward the East Gate.

From the tokens on the waists of the riders, Li Huowang could tell that the person he was looking for was inside of that carriage.

“Um, Daoist, there’s something I need to discuss with you. Are you familiar with anyone in Shangjing? Someone influential with power and authority.”

“I truly don’t want to bother you, but I need to buy a theater in Shangjing. I need some connection to buy one. I also need some money but don’t worry; you’ll be the owner, and as for the sharing...” Lu Zhuangyuan trailed off upon seeing Li Huowang’s odd expression. He then bent down to pull his shameless son up to the ground.

Li Huowang pinched Puppy, and his incessant talking transformed into a squeal. Then, he dared not talk anymore.

When the carriage entered the East Gate, Li Huowang let go of Puppy and grabbed the latter by the neck before saying, “Listen to me! Go back to Cowheart Village immediately! No one is to come looking for me again! If you don’t want to listen to me, then you and your wife can leave the village!”

Li Huowang gave the Lu Family Troupe a cold glance. Everyone fell silent and dared not even breathe too loudly.

The former Daoist was usually reasonable, but it seemed he was truly angry today.

“Li Sui, let’s go!” Li Huowang said. He rushed toward the dirt-scattered road and left behind the speechless group of people.

“What’s wrong with Senior Li? Is he sick again? This shouldn’t be. He never acted like this before. And what about Miaomiao? How come she disappeared when her eyes are already healed?” Puppy muttered in surprise while massaging his neck.

“Maybe the Daoist has something urgent to attend to. So what should we do next? Say something,” Lu Zhuangyuan puffed on his tobacco pipe.

“He’s so ruthless toward his own, but since Senior Li has spoken, what else can we do? Let’s go back home.”

The others were relieved at Puppy’s words. In this place where even drinking water required money, they had had enough and wanted to leave as soon as possible.

The Lu Family Troupe and Puppy hastily grabbed bought dry rations and began to make their way back home.

Meanwhile, the letter that Puppy had commissioned some wandering merchants to deliver had finally arrived at Cowheart Village.

In the Bai family courtyard, everyone sat on stools and listened to Gao Zhijian stutter out the content of the letter.

When they heard that Puppy hadn’t found Li Huowang and Bai Lingmiao in Shangjing, their faces didn’t look good.

Chun Xiaoman especially was very anxious.

“It’s been so long, but why is there no news at all? Could something have happened to Miaomiao?”

“It’s impossible. Li Huowang is so powerful; who could defeat him? Maybe he’s busy with something, and he’ll come back soon.”

Zhao Wu softly comforted Chun Xiaoman, but it didn’t have much effect.

“I... I... I... I’ll go!” Gao Zhijian stood up firmly.

“If Puppy can’t even find him, how can you possibly find him? Senior Li is strong, so he must be fine.”

However, Gao Zhijian seemed to have made up his mind, and he walked toward his house.

He didn’t take much. He picked up his heavy armor, a halberd, some dried rations, and some money to buy more rations.

When he finished packing, he turned around and saw Chun Xiaoman standing with a carriage at the entrance to his courtyard.

“Don’t worry, I’m not here to persuade you. I know you’re not stupid, just a bit slow-witted. There must be a reason behind your decision to go out there.”

“I’ll be in the village, and there are already seven people who know divine incantations. Your troops are here as well, so the village is well protected.”

Gao Zhijian nodded silently, took the reins, and made his way toward the village.

After walking a few steps, he turned back and stammered to Chun Xiaoman, “I... I am... I am the emperor! I... I can... find... them!”

“I found them! They’re right in front!” Li Huowang looked at the clear carriage marks on the ground. The tentacles on his body allowed him to move at breakneck speeds.

He had also pasted two talismans on his legs; Li Huowang moved so fast that his figure became blurry.

Just as he was about to climb over a hill, Li Huowang twisted instinctively to dodge a flying vajra[1].

Li Huowang pushed himself off the ground and took to the air before pulling out his Surveillance Bureau's identity token. “Wait! I have an urgent matter to report to the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau!”

The attacks stopped, but Li Huowang was instantly surrounded the moment he landed on the ground.

A black bird circling in the air landed on one of the people's shoulders.

Li Huowang swept his gaze across them, but he felt like the Chief wasn't among them. He pondered briefly before speaking slowly, "May I know where's the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau? I have an important matter to report, and it is about the Sitting Oblivion Dao."

"Just talk to me. You're not qualified to see the Chief," a gloomy-looking man said, stepping forward with his hands behind his back. The compass in his hand pointed straight at Li Huowang. A long braid was hanging from the back of his head all the way down to his calves.

"I have a method to locate Shai Zi! I'm here to ask the Chief to make a move against that evil beast!"

Li Huowang had no intentions of hiding anything, and the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau would surely hear his words.

"Er Jiu, true name Ji Zai, Grand Elder of the Ao Jing Sect having ascended thrice, Seventh Banner of the Surveillance Bureau, Commander of the Left and Right Jinwu Guards, accompanied by a dog-faced evil spirit. Forty-six days ago, you snatched Ji Xiang Fo Yulu's Ancient Sword. You lived for a long time at the foot of Cowheart Mountain. Is that correct?"

Li Huowang felt a shiver down his spine despite the gloomy-looking man's casual tone of voice. The latter knew more than Li Huowang had imagined.

"Yes, that's right! But there's one thing missing—the irreconcilable conflict between me and the Sitting Oblivion Dao!" Li Huowang roared with clenched fists.

Li Huowang took a deep breath and then narrated what he had experienced in the Great Qi, including everything about Shangji

Guankou.

There was a saying about how one had to hide a tree in a forest, and Li Huowang was proving the legitimacy of that saying.

“Nonsense! I’ve lived for so long, but I’ve never heard of that so-called Shangji Guankou!!”

The gloomy-looking man's words made Zhuge Yuan frown.

“Just because you haven’t heard of it does not mean that it doesn't exist. These ignorant people are the reason why Shangji Guankou is becoming rare to come by.”

1. a type of club with a spherical head 📏

Chapter 547 - Chief

Realizing that the people around him didn't immediately believe him, Li Huowang said, "Let me speak to the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau! He'll know whether I'm speaking the truth or not the moment he sees my reflection!"

The man with the whip was about to point his index finger sternly toward Li Huowang, but his expression suddenly changed.

He hesitated for a moment before taking two steps to the left, which created a path in the middle of the encirclement.

Great! Li Huowang felt refreshed. The Chief had definitely heard him. With his spirits lifted, he clenched his fists and walked down the path.

He passed through a small forested area and soon saw a huge carriage parked by a stream. The horses pulling the carriage were grazing and drinking water.

"Greetings, Chief of the Surveillance Bureau!" Li Huowang bowed to the carriage. The curtains lifted, and the Chief appeared before him.

This wasn't Li Huowang's first time seeing the Chief, but he had only seen the latter from afar.

Today, Li Huowang finally had a closer look at the highest authority of the Surveillance Bureau.

Li Huowang noticed that the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau's physique was taller and wider than an ordinary person; he appeared like he had been magnified by one.

A large red Daoist robe obscured the Chief's figure, which made him emit a mysterious air.

At first, Li Huowang thought that the robe just had one color, but he realized that the robe's color was actually a gradient of red.

Crimson words flowed seamlessly along with the gradient. Li Huowang's eyes were keen enough to see the strokes of the characters, but he couldn't read them at all. It was more bizarre than the women's script, and each stroke had its own style, resembling both a drawing and strokes.

[illegible]

He dared not look too long at it, as though looking at it for too long would hollow out his soul.

He composed himself as he looked at the withered grass on the ground. Moments later, he began to speak about the matter at hand.

“Reporting to the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau, I have a way to find the hiding place of Shai Zi! Shai Zi is full of tricks, and I am truly incapable of dealing with them. I hope the Chief will exterminate the Shai Zi for the people's sake!”

"No need to explain; I heard what you said earlier. I just have one question; how did you discover the existence of Shangji Guankou? And how did you find them?" asked the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau in a bizarre voice that sounded neither male, female, young, nor old. However, Li Huowang couldn't care less about the Chief's voice, as he was focused on how he was supposed to answer.

He couldn't say that Zhuge Yuan's illusion had told him about Shangji Guankou's existence, as he couldn't risk exposing his true identity.

“It was through a stroke of luck. I stumbled upon them,” Li Huowang explained.

“A stroke of luck? *Heh*, are the youngsters nowadays unable to fabricate lies anymore?”

Li Huowang immediately felt several sharp gazes landing on him, and they were concentrated on the spine sword behind him.

"Is it really necessary for you to know that, Chief?" Li Huowang said, "I'm not lying. I really have a way to find Shai Zi!"

"You seem very anxious. Why?"

"Chief!" Li Huowang's voice raised a notch, and he sounded agitated as he said, "The Sitting Oblivion Dao dared to treat us—the Surveillance Bureau—as if were nothing on that fateful day! I simply can't withstand the humiliation!"

"In addition, many people have perished because of their machinations! Now that there's a chance for us to bring Shai Zi to justice, I'm naturally anxious to see that day!"

"So you want to make use of me?"

Li Huowang's heart turned cold. The other party was too wary of him. In the end, he decided to tell the truth. "I dare not make use of Chief. I just feel that we are on the same side of such a matter as big as killing Shai Zi."

"At least, you're straightforward. Well, I do want to kill Shai Zi."

Li Huowang relaxed, thinking that the matter was settled, but the Chief's following words made him feel anxious again.

"But, I have something to attend to at the moment. I can't spare any time for that right now, and it will take a while until I'm done with my matters."

I still need to wait? Li Huowang looked up at the Chief. He stared at the darkness above the Daoist robe and said, "Chief! What could be more important than killing Shai Zi?"

The Chief's strange robes trembled slightly as if the Chief was shaking his head, "You don't understand. There are many things in this world that are more important than Shai Zi."

"Enough. Even if I tell you, you won't understand it. In the meantime, I need you to perform that stroke of luck once again. Find Shangji Guankou, and help me obtain some secrets."

Li Huowang really wanted to refuse, but agreeing to the Chief's request meant that the Chief would also help him deal with Shai Zi.

A little wait wasn't that big of a big deal. Li Huowang also

believed that he had gotten more than he had bargained.

Li Huowang didn't know what thoughts the other party had; all he wanted was Shai Zi's life.

"Rest assured, by the time you're back with the secrets that I need from Shangji Guankou, I should be ready to make a move by then."

"Chief, I can help you find Shangji Guankou, but it's a secret in exchange for a secret. Do you have enough secrets to exchange with Shangji Guankou?"

"Rest assured, I know much more than you do. You may withdraw now. It's time for you to wake up."

"Wait, Chief, how are you going to give those secrets—what... wake up?"

Just as the confused Li Huowang was trying to understand the meaning behind the Chief's words, the scenery around him dispersed like smoke, including the horses, the stream, and the people.

Li Huowang turned and saw a long line toward Shangjing's gates.

Li Huowang stood in place, unable to comprehend what he had just experienced. It was a surreal experience.

"A myriad of transformations, changing forms, rising, and disappearing. It is a transformation and an illusion. Truly worthy of the Great Liang's Chief. What an amazing illusion technique," Zhuge Yuan said, staring at the deep tread marks of a carriage on the ground with a rare look of admiration on his face.

Illusion technique? Li Huowang pondered. It turned out that everything he had experienced after stepping out of the city gates had all been an illusion. It was all fake.

Li Huowang felt a chill in his heart. He had unknowingly been deceived. If the other party had ill intent toward him, he would have died without being able to resist.

He wasn't one of the fighters on that fateful day, so he wasn't exactly sure about the Chief's strength. However, he was finally sure of it now. The highest authority of the Surveillance Bureau had terrifying power.

“Brother Li, calm down. Since he has agreed to help you, he wouldn't change his mind so easily.”

Li Huowang nodded. *Indeed, the Chief is already on my side, so the stronger he is, the better it'll be for me.*

Li Huowang drew out the spine sword and said to a young and slim woman next to him with a beauty mark on her lips. “Let's not delay any longer. We'll go to the Great Qi and look for Shangji Guankou.”

“All right.” the young woman said, smiling sweetly.

Chapter 548 - Great Qi

“Brother Li!”

Li Huowang had just lifted his sword and was about to use it when Zhuge Yuan’s unusually solemn voice gave him pause.

“Don’t look at me, and don’t talk to me! There’s something wrong with the woman by your side! You can’t let her know that you have an illusion beside you!”

Li Huowang asked Zhuge Yuan in his mind, “Brother Zhuge, what are you talking about? Isn’t she Shangguan Yuting?”

“Think about it again. During this period, where did you ever encounter Shangguan Yuting? She’s fake!” Zhuge Yuan said.

The old monk and the Sitting Oblivion Dao chimed in.

“Daoist, this woman suddenly appeared out of nowhere; there were no signs of her before.”

“Hehe, Boss Hong Zhong, I really can’t respect you if you’re getting fooled so easily.”

“Elder Er, what’s wrong? Aren’t we supposed to go to the Great Qi?” Shangguan Yuting asked, tilting her head in confusion. Her shiny hairpin swayed slightly as she looked at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang caught a whiff of her familiar fragrance as she carefully scrutinized his familiar-looking confidante.

He recalled everything clearly about this girl, especially when not reminded about it. However, when his other illusions prompted him, Li Huowang instantly realized the woman was full of flaws.

Moreover, she had Princess Anping's face, but he hadn’t found it strange until now.

Is this the technique of the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau? Being able to transform one person into another before someone’s eyes without them noticing it? Li Huowang had never expected that he would one

day feel lucky as a Strayed One. If it hadn't been for his illusions, he would have fallen to the Chief's techniques. He added another layer of caution against the young woman. *Now what? Everything was going well, so why did the Chief suddenly place her next to me?*

"Li Sui, what's wrong with your father? Does he often daydream like this?" Shangguan Yuting asked Li Sui softly.

Li Huowang stepped forward and blocked Li Sui.

He didn't think continuing to conceal the truth would benefit him, so he decided to be direct. "Why are you doing this, Chief? Do you not trust me at all?"

Shangguan Yuting seemed unashamed and calmly asked, "Senior Er, what are you talking about? Didn't you say you need enough secrets to trade with Shangji Guankou?"

Shangguan Yuting pinched her dress and turned toward Li Huowang with a smile. "I'm the secret."

"You?!"

"Yes, after all, Elder Er may not have enough secrets to exchange, right? It'd be a pointless trip if I'm not there," Shangguan Yuting said in a matter-of-factly way. She made it sound like Li Huowang was overreacting.

However, Li Huowang understood that if he hadn't seen through the young woman's identity, he would have no idea what she would have done. She would have been able to twist her words as she pleased, after all.

If Li Huowang's strange behavior allowed her to deduce his true identity as a Strayed One, the consequences would be disastrous.

These people are all cunning old foxes. Dealing with them requires the utmost vigilance. Once distracted, we can fall easily into their traps.

"Elder Er, let's hurry to Great Qi. Let's finish the task for the Chief as soon as possible," Shangguan Yuting urged.

Li Huowang nodded silently and opened his mouth toward Li

Sui.

Shangguan Yuting was shocked upon seeing Li Sui burrowing into Li Huowang's body.

"Try to keep up; I won't wait for you!" Li Huowang gripped his sword tightly.

"Elder Er, what are you saying? I'll be wherever you are. Look, I don't even leave footprints."

Shangguan Yuting said. She walked past him without leaving a trace. Li Huowang could not figure out exactly what she was and how the Chief managed to do something like this.

Forget it. I'll consider it a deal with the Chief. I'll help them exchange a secret for Shangji Guankou, and they'll help me deal with Shai Zi .

Li Huowang did not hesitate. He gripped his sword, activated the talismans on his legs, and dashed into the darkness.

The sky darkened the moment he entered the Great Qi. It was so dark that Li Huowang couldn't even see where he was right now. *Why is it so dark in Great Qi?*

He was about to look up when Zhuge Yuan exclaimed, "Don't look up! This darkness isn't because of the absence of light. It's because of a Natural Disaster! It's a solar eclipse!"

Li Huowang forced himself to stop looking up.

He was just about to repeat the same mistake as last time and would have had to gouge out his eyes.

Suddenly, a giant claw swiftly emerged from the left and swung toward Li Huowang.

Swoosh!

Li Huowang forcefully severed the giant claw, and a strange scream echoed in the darkness. The claw was then retracted.

Li Huowang didn't let his guard down, as he could feel many eyes staring at him from the dark.

The Natural Disaster had transformed the Great Qi into a world

of evil spirits. The reason they weren't attacking was that Li Huowang had sufficiently intimidated them.

“Elder Er, what’s going on with Great Qi? Should we go back to Great Liang and wait for the Natural Disaster to pass?”

Li Huowang gripped his spine sword as he stood still for a while, then spoke, “There’s no need. It won’t hinder me from finding Shangji Guankou. These evil spirits are not worth mentioning. How long is this Natural Disaster going to last? I can’t wait for it to end!”

Li Huowang gripped his sword and sprinted through the dark world. He cut down any evil spirits that dared to stand in his way.

Rest was not optimal in this place, as there were dangers everywhere. Fortunately, Li Huowang could return to Great Liang for meals and to rest.

Days ticked by, but the Natural Disaster remained strong.

Li Huowang realized just then that this Natural Disaster in Great Qi was different from the recent Natural Disaster in Great Liang.

More and more evil spirits appeared in the Great Qi, and they weren't weak.

“Die!” Li Huowang’s eyes were closed as he gripped his purple-tasseled sword and swung it forward.

He felt a slippery feedback. He thrust his left hand into the creature's body and severed his own left hand without any hesitation.

The next moment, the bone spikes burst out of the severed hand, killing the creature.

Li Huowang breathed a sigh of relief after hearing the heavy sound of something collapsing in the darkness. He had no idea what he had just encountered. He had also realized that some evil spirits were forbidden to look at. Li Huowang looked at one of them once, and his Ten Emotions and Eight Sufferings became tumultuous,

exacerbating his internal conflict. The world had become extremely bizarre, and it was all thanks to the Natural Disaster.

Just as Li Huowang felt Li Sui picking up his severed hand with her tentacles, his expression stiffened. He sprawled out on the ground and pressed his ear to the ground.

Chapter 549 - Xu Nian

Thump, thump, thump!

Heavy and chaotic footsteps pierced Li Huowang's ears through the earth. The myriad of footsteps made Li Huowang's expression become serious.

It had been some time since he arrived in Great Qi, but he had never heard such a large commotion before. The wave of enemies this time couldn't be trifled with.

I must bypass this commotion first, no matter what it is! Li Huowang closed his eyes, then stood up without hesitation and rushed in the completely opposite direction.

Li Sui's tentacles emerged from her body and probed around rapidly like a white cane for the blind.

"Daoist, you can open your eyes now; there's nothing dirty around."

Li Huowang slightly opened one eye when he heard the monk's words. He found himself inexplicably in a chaotic graveyard.

Under the Natural Disaster, the entire graveyard looked anything but peaceful. Some things were crawling around aimlessly in the distance.

Li Huowang ignored the terrifying environment, then immediately crouched down again and listened intently.

When he felt that the sound had become almost inaudible, Li Huowang finally breathed a sigh of relief.

He didn't come to Great Qi with the intention of killing evil spirits. Since Great Qi was becoming increasingly dangerous, he needed to find Shangji Guankou and leave as quickly as possible.

Li Huowang gathered his spirits and rushed toward the direction Zhuge Yuan had pointed out. He thought to himself,

“Brother Zhuge, how far are we from Shangji Guankou? I’m afraid that we’re running out of time.”

However, Li Huowang realized that Zhuge Yuan hadn't responded. After asking a few times in a row, Zhuge Yuan finally reacted. He had one hand behind his back while he silently looked around the chaotic graveyard.

“Not far, almost there,” Zhuge Yuan said in a deep voice and silently observed the scattered corpses.

Li Huowang seemed to understand what Zhuge Yuan was thinking.

As a Storyteller in the past, Zhuge Yuan had always been ready to share information about the Great Qi, and he had never been shy to advertise that he was from the Great Qi.

Upon seeing that the Great Qi had been reduced to such a state, Li Huowang believed that Zhuge Yuan definitely wasn't in the best mood right now.

More importantly, Li Huowang couldn't console him now, since the situation in Great Qi currently wasn't looking too optimistic. He didn't know what kind of more scary outcomes there would be in the future.

But Li Huowang couldn't afford to consider such major issues, since he was too busy handling his own affairs.

He had just prepared to continue on when a cold wind blew past, causing half of his body to lose sensation momentarily.

Here again?! Li Huowang took the bronze coin sword from Li Sui's tentacles and swung it toward the direction of the cold wind. It cut off a large chunk of darkness, revealing a piece of human skin floating in the air.

The piece of human skin immediately opened in the air when it saw that Li Huowang could still move. It resembled a big bird as it swooped toward him.

Just as Li Huowang tightened his grip on the sword hilt,

prepared to cut the piece of human skin in half, it suddenly went limp and floated gently to the ground.

“Huh?” Li Huowang was extremely puzzled. He used the bronze coin sword in his hand to pick up the piece of human skin. *Why did it suddenly stop moving?*

When he saw that the piece of human skin was indeed dead, Li Huowang exerted some force with his wrist and split apart the skin on the bronze coin sword.

The white human skin shifted from Li Huowang’s sight, and a strange face was revealed.

It was a woman’s face with a red heart drawn on her brows. Her unblinking eyes made her appear extremely strange in the darkness.

However, that alone wouldn’t have frightened Li Huowang. Her face was coated with rouge, and it was split apart to reveal white paper with messy calligraphy underneath the skin.

“Is it you?” The woman stared straight at Li Huowang, her voice delicate as she uttered this inexplicable question.

Li Huowang wouldn’t waste any time conversing with such things. He tightened his grip on the spine sword and swung it toward the strange face without any hesitation.

“It’s you; it’s really you. Are you okay?” the large face shifted to the left, almost sticking to the crack while dodging the attack.

A pale green glowing stone was hurled into the distance, and the green light illuminated the darkness, allowing Li Huowang to see the woman clearly as the green light illuminated the darkness.

The only thing human about her was her face; she had a huge and sturdy four-footed beast body, which was covered in dark brown fur.

She had a fiery red mane, and her limbs had three claws; she also had a lion-like tail, which swayed from side to side as she moved.

A piece of rusty armor engraved with green fangs hung around her chest with chains. It made her look even more ferocious and terrifying.

What is this thing? Li Huowang's expression turned very ugly. Just from its appearance, it was clear that this thing was rather different from the ordinary evil spirits he had dealt with previously.

"What do you want? We can talk!" However, the other party did not respond to Li Huowang's negotiation at all.

What's going on? Could it be that she's just learning to speak and can't understand human speech?

Just as Li Huowang was thinking this, the creature had already rushed up, with its three sharp claws whistling toward Li Huowang.

Li Huowang's body flashed backward as he shifted ten feet in an instant to avoid the attack. The corpse on the ground took the blow for him.

Following that, Li Huowang witnessed a chilling scene. The semi-rotten middle-aged corpse aged rapidly at a rate visible to the naked eye, and it eventually turned into an old man.

Li Huowang swung his spine sword, but the opponent easily dodged the crack.

"Brother Li, be careful; this is a Nian."

"Nian?"

"Yes, not Wan Nian[1], but Xu Nian[2]. Don't have any physical contact with her, or she'll take away your lifespan."

Li Huowang found himself in a precarious situation, as he was unable to touch or hurt it.

Li Huowang had planned to retreat back to Great Liang using the crack, but Xu Nian seemed to have seen through his moves. Every time he cut open a spacetime rift in front of him, she'd rushed over immediately to disrupt him.

Li Huowang could only keep retreating under the constant pressure, and his expression became increasingly solemn. In the

end, he grabbed two ribs from his belly button and thrust them forcefully into his own chest.

Xu Nian howled with her legs raised.

Li Huowang unleashed his killing intent and roared, “So you know what’s pain, too!”

Taking advantage of his opponent’s pain, he pulled out a dagger and opened his Daoist robes. He picked out a bloody piece of human skin, which flew up and landed on the Xu Nian’s head.

Blurry facial features flashed intermittently on the human skin. Xu Nian shook her head but couldn't shake off the human skin.

1. The raws for this is 𪛗年. I found nothing about it 🤔

2. The raws for this is 虚年. While the search came up empty, there is actually something called a Nian(年)beast and a nominal age(虚岁). The Nian beast is a mythological beast that barges into homes during the night of the New Years to eat people. The Nominal Age is when a person is counted as one year old on the day of birth, and becomes one year older, each year, on the day the Chinese New Year is celebrated. This means that, in China, nominal age is usually exaggerated by one to two years as compared with actual age. 🤔

Translator's Thoughts

The enigmatic Xu Nian. Credits to 格子的乱七八糟!



Chapter 550 - Dragon

Li Huowang faced the trapped Xu Nian. He took to the air with his six tentacles and legs.

He raised the bronze coin sword up high and roared, “Die!”

The next moment, the sharp tip of the sword pierced through the left eye socket on the human skin, and it easily emerged from the back of Xu Nian's head.

Li Huowang didn't forget the taboo mentioned by Zhuge Yuan. He pushed hard with both hands on the sword hilt and sent himself flying away before landing gracefully on the ground.

However, Xu Nian remained standing, even though the bronze coin sword was sticking out of her head.

Li Huowang's expression became extremely ugly at the sight.

Li Huowang found that his left foot had been pierced by a red spike at some point, and it had become old.

Clearly, Xu Nian was far more intelligent than he initially thought. She even knew how to exchange injuries for injuries, as well as set up traps to prevent him from using the spine sword to escape.

What is this thing made of? A sword specifically made to combat evil has been inserted into its head, but it doesn't react at all!

Li Huowang firmly took off the red Daoist robe on his body and threw it on the ground, then pulled out the flint from his pocket.

Xu Nian, pierced by the sword, stood still in place and did not charge at him. Instead, her face covered by the human skin looked to the left.

Her huge beast body lowered slightly as a low beastly growl came from under the human skin.

Thump, thump, thump!

All of a sudden, the familiar heavy and chaotic footsteps echoed once again, but they had gotten even closer. The noises sounded so close that they sounded ear-piercing to Li Huowang.

He tilted his head slightly. In the chaotic darkness, he saw a hill-sized object moving towards him along with the footsteps.

It had gotten very close now. With his excellent eyesight, Li Huowang managed to see the appearance of that thing clearly in the dark.

Lanterns, dragon flags, round jade, rings, bells. There were various old and dusty decorations densely covering this towering wooden building before him.

There were four pillars painted with red clouds and dragons, wrapped around with black and blue satin ribbons. Curtains made up of black clouds and dragon feathers hung between the pillars, which held the entire wooden structure together tightly.

The heavy and chaotic footsteps came from beneath this wooden structure, with various tattered eunuch figures that resembled skeletons. Their heads were tightly wrapped in white cloth strips, and they pulled forward on the ropes just like mules.

Although everything on this wooden building was very dilapidated, filthy, and even decayed, Li Huowang still saw at a glance that this thing was the imperial chariot of the emperor of Great Qi!

He never thought that the noise he had just heard was actually the little zombie emperor of Great Qi!

Li Huowang sensed a strong gaze from the wooden building that was deadlocked on him.

He glanced at Xu Nian in the distance, then at the emperor's chariot, which approached him with an overwhelming presence, and he cursed inwardly. *This damned place! I've never had any luck here!*

There was no need for words. Li Huowang opened his mouth

wide and spat out Li Sui. Then, he slashed the spine sword at her to send her back to the Great Liang. Immediately afterward, he raised the flint and swiped it at his own skin.

Boom!

Li Huowang burst into flames. He became a blazing torch that illuminated everything around him.

Li Huowang glanced at Xu Nian through the dancing flames before rushing toward the huge imperial chariot.

Compared to the mysterious and unpredictable Xu Nian, the emperor seemed to be easier to deal with; he looked more flammable, too.

Li Huowang heard other noises aside from footsteps as he got closer to the chariot.

“Long live my emperor... Thanks to the Lord’s kindness... Blessings to the emperor...” These words were repeatedly uttered mechanically by the wooden-like eunuchs while pulling the chariot along with them.

The next moment, as Li Huowang raised his right hand, the eunuchs instantly caught fire and became living torches.

Li Huowang’s feet were injured, so he couldn’t move that quickly. However, he had many tricks up his sleeves.

Boom!

Peng Longteng smashed down heavily beside Li Huowang. The giant palm grabbed the ablaze Li Huowang and threw him towards the highest point of the imperial chariot.

As Li Huowang crashed into it, the cloud-patterned curtains caught fire and burned to ashes. Li Huowang saw the little emperor of Great Qi amidst the flames.

He was a child that was only six or seven years old. He was wearing a large dragon robe and sat on the even larger dragon throne, looking extremely out of place.

Even more mismatched was his appearance. He had heard that

the little emperor of Great Qi was already dead and was a zombie. But he only saw a chubby child with innocent-looking eyes.

In the next moment, this unusually normal child began to rise while the dragon robe under him rose higher and higher.

When the dragon robe was fully lifted, the Dragon Vein stacked underneath was finally revealed.

Who would have thought that this little emperor of Great Qi was not alone and that he had already connected to the Dragon Vein while he was still alive?

A fierce wind roared as the entire Dragon Vein coiled in the air. At the top, the little emperor opened his chubby hands and clapped while he giggled with joy.

A powerful aura pressed down, which even suppressed the flames on Li Huowang's body from surging upward.

Swoosh! Li Huowang gripped the spine sword and slashed forcefully toward the sky. The crack flew over but had no effect on that thing at all!

Since acquiring the spine sword, it was the first time that he saw this gap that cut through two timelines had no damage at all.

The body of the Dragon Vein suddenly shook. An afterimage flew across and struck Li Huowang heavily.

He spat out blood as he was knocked out of the flaming imperial chariot. The flames on his body extinguished instantly while everything around him blurred. Shangguan Yuting or Zhuge Yuan all became intermittently bright and dark.

As he was about to fall to the ground from a great height, he suddenly closed his eyes and felt himself plunge into icy cold lake water.

He struggled to swim to the surface, then opened his eyes again. He found that half of his body was buried in the soil.

"Brother Zhuge, are you all right?" Li Huowang asked anxiously as he climbed out of the soil.

Zhuge Yuan said something with urgency, but Li Huowang couldn't hear a thing.

He saw Zhuge Yuan pointing towards the imperial chariot, and he turned his head to see the Great Qi Dragon Vein. It was like a real dragon that charged down towards him with immense pressure.

An angry roar caused the Dragon Vein to stop abruptly in mid-air as it started to coil and intertwine its head and tail together.

Li Huowang turned towards the source of the sound. He saw that it actually came from Xu Nian. Her hair bristled with anger at the appearance of the Dragon Vein.

Li Huowang looked down at his injured leg. *Give it a try! I'll take advantage of their conflict and return to Great Liang first!*

He immediately took action, and he raised the spine sword to slash out a crack and dashed forward.

The next moment, the Dragon Vein swept down and instantly shattered the crack into fragments.

It seemed that the Dragon Vein was strongly repulsed by the appearance of these rifts in the two timelines. It ignored Xu Nian's provocation and headed straight for Li Huowang.

The overlapping Dragon Vein moved extremely quickly and with great force, crushing half of Li Huowang's left shoulder in one fell swoop.

Li Huowang stabbed the Dragon Vein from behind with his purple-tasseled sword, but this injury was not much different than a mosquito bite.

This was the first time Li Huowang had faced such a powerful enemy, and he felt like even going all out was going to be useless against such a powerful foe.

Chapter 551 - Year

“Haha.” Blood flowed down from the wound on his forehead. It flowed across his scar and into his mouth before overflowing and dripping down onto the ground from his charred chin. The blood slowly seeped deeper into the earth.

Li Huowang was in a bad spot. Everything has been useless so far. His talismans, his spine sword capable of creating a rift in between timelines, the bronze coin sword capable of slaying evil beings, or even his purple-tasseled sword that could cut through steel like butter. All of it was useless.

More importantly, even his techniques as a Sitting Oblivion Dao and the Ao Jing Sect were useless.

This was the first time Li Huowang had met such a troublesome opponent after coming to this crazy world.

He finally understood why Zhuge Yuan told him that the Sitting Oblivion Dao would not try to fight the Dragon Vein.

He had one more technique, the Cang-Qiang Ascension. It could work, but he had no idea where to find the utmost mental pain.

The familiar sound of air ripping came again. He saw a massive shadow lashing out to his head.

His body would disintegrate if he was hit by it.

Bam! Peng Longteng’s large body appeared in front of Li Huowang and caught the shadow.

The shadow was none other than the Dragon Veins made from the past emperors of the Qi Kingdom.

The emperors appeared to be glued together by nothing, but the impact suggested that the Dragon Vein was as strong as reinforced steel.

Numerous dragon claws pierced into Peng Longteng's chest, but she was not afraid.

But no matter how strong she was, the Dragon Vein was leagues above her. The Dragon Vein compressed and expanded rapidly before batting Peng Longteng away.

Li Huowang took this chance to retreat out of the Dragon Vein's attack range.

He was stuck in a grueling situation, but he did not give up. He was not alone, after all.

A lion-like roar came from the other side, which distracted Dragon Vein from attacking Li Huowang.

It was Xu Nian. Now that they were both in danger, they had no choice but to work together to survive.

The human-faced beast leaped onto the Dragon Vein and decapitated the heads of four emperors!

The Qi Kingdom's emperor at the top of the Dragon Vein and opened his mouth, revealing a single front tooth as he cried out, “*Uwaaaaaaaaa~*”

As the veil on his head jingled, the Dragon Vein moved swiftly and wrapped around Xu Nian like a snake.

Xu Nian continued to attack the emperors, but they were already old to begin with. Xu Nian could not plunder any more lifespan from them.

Xu Nian was gradually getting squeezed into a tube when Li Huowang held his spine sword and catapulted himself to the Dragon Vein's head with Peng Longteng's help.

Even though Xu Nian had tried to kill him just now, Li Huowang had to save her at all costs. Otherwise, the Dragon Vein would be able to focus all of its wrath on Li Huowang.

When Li Huowang was close enough to see his own reflections in the young emperor's eyes, the Dragon Vein finally moved. Numerous heads of the past emperors blocked Li Huowang's vision.

Li Huowang focused, causing Peng Longteng's body to crash into the Dragon Vein and charging toward the young emperor.

But several hands reached out and grabbed Peng Longteng before tossing her to the ground.

The Dragon Vein also attacked at the same time by launching its massive body toward Li Huowang.

Li Huowang's legs were been injured, and he had to come up with something fast!

Suddenly, the Sitting Oblivion Dao's illusion materialized in front of Li Huowang. The Sitting Oblivion Dao stared in shock and horror as he became the meat shield for Li Huowang.

Li Huowang never expected his attacks to work, but thanks to his distraction, Xu Nian managed to escape the Dragon Vein's coil.

Li Huowang panted as he pushed away the Sitting Oblivion Dao that had been reduced to meat paste as he checked his wounds. He shouted at Xu Nian from afar, "You and me! We fight together or we both die! We don't have a deep grudge in between us so there's no need to fight to the death!"

Xu Nian removed the human face on her head and nodded at Li Huowang.

"We kill the young one," Xu Nian said, surprising Li Huowang.

The Dragon Vein pounced on Li Huowang once more and he had no choice but to retreat.

"All right! You deal with the old one, and I will kill the young one!" Li Huowang exclaimed.

Xu Nian nodded and stared at the Dragon Vein that was chasing Li Huowang. She raised her front paws and stomped the ground.

Her red fur grew bright as it started growing, making her body look like a lion dance.

The red furs spread out everywhere in the darkness as if they were looking for something. The darkness retreated with her

standing in the middle of it.

She maintained that state for almost half a day. Li Huowang shouted out of desperation and anger as he was being attacked by the Dragon Vein. "What are you doing?! Stop spacing out!"

Li Huowang no longer looked like a human. Half of his face was torn away, one of his arms was broken, and a huge chunk of flesh on his abdomen was gone.

If it hadn't been for the "immortal" Peng Longteng tanking most of the attacks, he would've died.

But that was his limit. Li Huowang's head was pounding, signaling that he could no longer maintain Peng Longteng's materialization.

He had just shouted when Xu Nian moved. Her movement was beyond bizarre. She was charging toward the Dragon Vein, but there was still an afterimage of her at the original location.

But that was not all. Everywhere she moved, she would leave behind a red afterimage. The images linked together to form a single red line.

Li Huowang didn't know what it was doing, but he knew that this was her ultimate move. Their survival depended on her attack.

Li Huowang sheathed the spine sword on his back, and Peng Longteng grabbed his injured figure.

When the Xu Nian clashed with the Dragon Vein, Peng Longteng threw Li Huowang toward the Dragon Vein.

Two beasts, one yellow and one red, clashed together. Bizarre changes occurred in everything that collided with the red light.

Li Huowang's wounds healed rapidly before decaying the next moment.

However, Li Huowang wasn't the only one affected. The barren soil grew grass, and the stars in the skies started moving.

The same phenomena affected even the Dragon Vein. The ancient bodies of the past emperors regained their youth.

However, this was bad news to the Dragon Vein. Their bodies shivered as if they would separate at any time.

Chapter 552 - Death

The Dragon Vein resisted Xu Nian's profound attacks and struggled as it tried to coil Xu Nian's afterimages.

Li Huowang almost reached the Dragon Vein, but it was already on guard. Ten dragon claws swiped toward Li Huowang.

But their attacks phased through Li Huowang's illusion. Peng Longteng suddenly appeared and threw the invisible Li Huowang toward the young emperor of the Qi Kingdom.

It was definitely a 'young' emperor, as the baby had turned into a blob, becoming what looked like a fist-sized fetus.

Li Huowang extended his hands and unsheathed his purple-tassel sword to slash the young emperor.

"Junior Li! You can't kill it like that! You have to sever his connection to the Dragon Vein first!"

Hearing Zhuge Yuan, Li Huowang moved his sword three inches to the side.

With the sound of tearing flesh and spraying blood, the back of the young emperor was separated from the Dragon Vein.

He then flicked the sword and stabbed the embryo in the chest.

The ugly-looking embryo howled in pain and scratched at the blade to dislodge it, but ultimately he lost his strength. His head went limp and stopped moving.

Li Huowang still had the young emperor's corpse stuck to his sword as he fell downwards when the 'decapitated' Dragon Vein started expanding its body.

Thick blood, strange organs, messy scales, and dragon horns sprouted out from its body.

The eyes of the past emperors glared at Li Huowang with eternal hatred.

All of them revealed their dragon claws and charged at Li Huowang, or more accurately, the corpse of the young emperor on Li Huowang's sword.

“Junior Li! Be careful! The Dragon Qi will revive the young emperor! Do not let them touch him. Throw him into the Liang Kingdom!”

Li Huowang swung his sword, and the corpse of the young emperor fell into the red line made from Xu Nian's afterimages.

He then swung the spine sword and transported the young emperor into the Liang Kingdom along with part of the red line.

Li Huowang was already very close to the ground when he finished doing that.

He took a deep breath and imagined himself to be falling into a pool of water.

He felt the cold water splashing past his skin, but rather than swimming upwards, he swam sideways and tried to escape as far as possible.

He swam until he couldn't hold his breath any longer before surfacing. He felt his brain pounding and the water slowly becoming thicker until the pressure around him was barely tolerable.

Bam!

Li Huowang broke through the surface of the earth and spat out chunks of dirt. He ignored his wounds and turned to look at where the Dragon Vein was located.

However, the ground trembled before he could see anything.
Earthquake?

Sand and stones flew everywhere in the darkness, and the sky changed. There was nothing Li Huowang could do due to his injury. All he could do was sprawl out on the ground and wait for the earthquake to pass.

An unknown amount of time later, the earthquake stopped, and

his wounds had scabbed over as well.

He used his sword as a support and stood up before looking around.

Wait, why is it so bright? Is the Natural Disaster gone? Li Huowang carefully looked up and saw that the darkness covering the skies was gone.

However, he didn't even have the time to celebrate when he saw something wrong with the sun. Rather than being a normal ball of light, some black spots had blotted out parts of the sun.

"Oh no. The Heavenly Dog has eaten the sun." The old monk's illusion used his right hand to cover his eyes as he looked at the strange phenomena.

What's wrong with this world? Is it real? Li Huowang immediately realized the mistake that he had made. *NO! I can't doubt myself! I'm a Strayed One! I cannot doubt myself or something bad will happen!*

Li Huowang slammed his fists on his head.

After pounding his own head a few times, Li Huowang stopped, not because he wanted to, but because there was danger.

Slam!

A thick claw struck the ground and blew the cloud of dust away. Xu Nian's figure then emerged from the dust.

Xu Nian was also heavily injured from the battle with the Dragon Vein. Most of her red fur was gone, and there were cracks on her face. Still, her injuries appeared better than Li Huowang's injuries.

Li Huowang held his sword tightly and stared at the woman's broken face. "You still want to fight me? Since you can understand me, you should also know that we don't have any grudges between us, right?" Li Huowang showed no fear as he gritted his teeth.

Xu Nian didn't respond. Instead, her face revealed a complicated expression as if she wanted to say something to him.

However, Li Huowang wasn't going to wait for an answer as he stepped back slowly. Just as Xu Nian was about to disappear into the cloud of dust, a female voice filled with yearning came from within her.

"I wish to write to my loved one, but the mountains are vast, and the seas are endless. How will I ever find him?"

ONE?! Had she realized that I'm a Strayed One?! Li Huowang immediately raised his weapons out of reflex.

However, he soon realized that Xu Nian was gone for good, and he could have misheard her as well.

"She said loved one' right? Senior Zhuge, what was she talking about?"

Zhugue Yuan stared at where Xu Nian had disappeared before speaking in a hushed tone. "Xu Nian copies the words of others, so it's probably nothing. Junior Li, you should probably go back and rest. You're heavily injured, after all."

Li Huowang looked at him and then at his own broken leg. "How can I chase after the rift to go back to the Liang Kingdom? It's best if I stay here and rest for a while."

Li Huowang held his sword and wore his red robes again. Then, he found a boulder and leaned against it.

Soon, the dust settled, and something unexpected appeared in front of him.

What was once the plains was now a cliff. He was sitting at the edge of a cliff.

What's happening? Li Huowang looked down at the chaotic scene beneath the cliff and then looked up at the sun covered in black spots. His brain started hurting, and he felt like he was in a dream.

Zhugue Yuan looked at the scene and shook his head. "I don't know what's going on."

Chapter 553 - Departure

On a dirt path hidden by the dense trees, Li Sui was orbiting the same clearing, seemingly looking for something.

The dirt path was covered in claw marks. Clearly, she had been looking for that something for a very long time now.

She had been looking for Li Huowang, but she hadn't been able to find him.

Li Sui got more and more anxious as time ticked by. She had gotten so used to living with Li Huowang that she became extremely anxious at the thought of losing him forever.

Just as tears rolled down from the edges of her eyes, a rift appeared on her left, and a heavily injured Li Huowang popped out of the rift.

“Dad!”

Li Sui pounced at Li Huowang and licked the bottom of his chin with her tentacles.

“You're heavy! And I'm too injured to carry you! Get off me!” Li Huowang used a lot of strength to push Li Sui away.

“Dad. Why did you throw me away? I thought I'd lose you forever,” Li Sui asked, circling around Li Huowang.

“I was afraid that you would burn while in my body, so I threw you to safety. It's all right; everything's fine now,” Li Huowang said, patting her head.

Feeling safe again, Li Sui placed her white skull on Li Huowang's palm and rubbed against him. “Dad, can we go back now?”

“Not yet. We still haven't found Shangji Guankou. Let's go back and recover first.”

Li Huowang looked at the dense forest around him before

staring at the sunset with a perfectly normal sun.

He felt weird. The Great Qi was essentially in ruins, but the Great Liang was at peace.

It was hard to believe that both sides were so close to each other.

He had no idea what it meant to him, but he didn't care. There were too many unexplainable things here in this world, and there was no reason for him to find the answers to all of his questions.

Now that he was back in the familiar Liang Kingdom, his heart relaxed completely. At the same time, the accumulated fatigue finally struck him.

"Dad, are you alright?" Li Sui extended her tentacles to hold him. "Are you hungry? Thirsty?"

"It's alright. I can survive this. Just take me to the side and let me rest." Li Huowang endured the pain as he looked down at the hole in his abdomen. He pushed his organs back into his torso before they could fall out of him.

Li Sui's tentacles entered through the hole and soon she completely disappeared as she filled Li Huowang's body with her tentacles. The wounds closed up too.

"Dad, are you feeling better now?"

Hearing her voice inside of him, Li Huowang patted one of the tentacles and said, "Much better. On second thought, we don't have time to waste. We should back to the Qi Kingdom and find Shangji Guankou as soon as possible."

"Are you sure? Aren't you afraid that you will die there?" Shangguan Yuting said, sounding worried as she stared at the heavily injured Li Huowang.

"No need! It's better to finish this quick!" Li Huowang took out the spine sword again and unwrapped it.

"The Great Qi's Natural Disaster has finally passed, so we need to seize that opportunity. Who knows how long the peace would

last over there? The opportunity would be wasted if we wait for too long, and the Great Qi disappears.”

Li Huowang took a deep breath and swung the spine sword. A spacetime rift manifested in the distance, and he charged decisively into it.

He had just entered the rift when a carriage ran past where Li Huowang had been moments ago. The carriage was heading toward Shangjing.

The one driving the carriage looked at the dense pawprints on the ground before shouting into the carriage, “We’ll rest once we get back home! There are too many giant insects around here.”

A woman sounded dissatisfied as she remarked, “That’s not what you said earlier! Ah... go slower. This carriage is bouncing so much that it’s hurting my butt.”

“Why are you so ungrateful? If it wasn’t because of the gentleman pitying us, we wouldn’t even have the chance to sit in one.”

He had just said that when the curtains opened up. A hand with a silver wristband grabbed the driver’s ears. “Say it again if you dare! You think you are the king of the house after I got married?”

“AIYA! Ouch! Big sis! I’m still driving the carriage. Stop it! Everyone would laugh at us.”

Gao Zhijian sat in the carriage as he looked at the siblings bickering.

Even though he appeared to be staring at them, he was actually thinking about what to do once he reached Shang Jing.

He actually didn’t really want to think about his past, no matter how chaotic it was.

He loved Cowheart Village. He wanted to live the rest of his life there, and it’d be great if he ended up marrying Xiaoman.

However, he had also seen how steep the price Li Huowang

had paid to defend them during their travels.

He could never ignore Li Huowang now that the latter was in trouble.

If Puppy couldn't find the two of them, Gao Zhijian had no other choice but to rely on the strength of an emperor. The emperor was the ruler of everything beneath the heavens, after all.

Gao Zhijian wasn't entirely sure about his past either. His hazy memories could be fake, but he still needed to try his best.

I'm an emperor. They should recognize me, right?

Since I used to be an emperor, I'm technically part of the imperial family. I think it wouldn't be hard for them to find me, right?

It should be fine even if I'm not an emperor. I have some memories as a general. Maybe I used to be a general? I should go and look for the army, then.

Gao Zhijian's head throbbed with pain; his memories were too scrambled as if they were haphazardly stitched together.

When he snapped back to reality, he realized that the carriage had stopped. The siblings had disembarked as well.

"Dear sir, we are there. Thank you for your carriage. Our village is just at the front. Do you want to come and have a meal with us?" The man driving the carriage asked Gao Zhijian courteously.

Gao Zhijian shook his head and returned the greeting. He took the reins and started his journey on the dirt path again.

"He's such a good man, and he's big too. If I weren't married, I would choose him as my husband," the sister said with a sigh.

The brother shook his head. "Yeah. He definitely has the strength of two cows to work in the fields, but it's such a shame that he can't speak."

Chapter 554 - The Great Qi

Li Huowang followed Zhuge Yuan's guidance as they traversed the ruined Qi Kingdom. He walked up several mountains just to find Shangji Guankou once again.

They were currently on a mountain, or what was left of it. The mountain was split in half, and there was a ravine in the middle of the mountain.

Rocky spikes grew from the walls of the ravines, making it look like two large rows of teeth.

Li Huowang thought he was reaching his destination soon but the Feng Shui of the entire Qi Kingdom was in disarray due to the Natural Disaster. Zhuge Yuan needed some time to confirm Shangji Guankou's location.

Thankfully the journey here has been peaceful after the Natural Disaster had ended. He didn't encounter any dangers this time."

"Junior Li, let's rest a little. Shangji Guankou will only change locations once the time is right. We need to wait for two hours here."

Li Huowang and Li Sui sat underneath a tree. He took out some rations and started eating it voraciously.

"Dad, I don't like this. I like meat."

"Stop complaining and eat what you have. We can't afford to be picky now."

Li Huowang frowned and looked towards the left side of the forest. He had sensed movement.

He grabbed his sword before he saw a young girl covered in dust stagger out of the woods.

She was roughly five years old. Her dusty face had two streak marks made from her tears, and her nightdress was in tatters.

She hobbled toward Li Huowang, grabbed his bag of torture tools, and started pulling him toward the forest.

However, she lost her grip and fell to the ground. She sprawled out on the ground with her mouth opening and closing as if she were crying, but no voice came out of her mouth. Her voice had long left her, as she had been crying for such a long time.

Li Huowang carried her and walked into the woods under her lead.

The woods weren't large, and they soon reached the base of a mountain.

The little girl escaped his hands and started pulling at a hand with a silver wristband buried underneath a boulder. Li Huowang understood what she wanted him to do.

He looked around and saw that it was not just her house. The entire place used to be a village.

When the mountain was split in half, it completely buried the village. The young girl was the only one alive.

She ran to Li Huowang and pointed at the arm jutting out from underneath the boulder. She kept pulling at his red robes.

Li Huowang's heart ached a lot. He suddenly lost the courage to look into her pleading eyes, even though he was fearless in battle.

He wanted to avoid thinking about how many people had perished due to the Natural Disaster.

However, the scene before him made him realize that the people of the Qi Kingdom had truly been dealt a miserable fate.

This was just a small corner of the kingdom. There were even more unthinkable scenes throughout the Qi Kingdom.

Li Huowang picked the girl up and whispered in his heart.
Zhuge Yuan, do you think you could still use your techniques? Can the

Great Qi be saved?

Zhuge Yuan had his back turned against Li Huowang. He sighed and said nothing.

Li Huowang looked at the girl in his embrace. He gently placed her on the ground. He was determined to save her.

When the little girl ran toward the arm sticking out of the boulder, Li Huowang held his spine sword and swung it at the little girl. A large rift enveloped her.

“Junior Li, it’s useless. She’s someone from the Great Qi. She cannot travel to the Great Liang.” Zhuge Yuan’s words were like cold water splashing on Li Huowang’s head.

“What? Then how come I can enter the Qi Kingdom?” Li Huowang couldn’t tolerate leaving someone that young in this hell.

“I’ve told you before. The Great Qi is real, while the Great Liang is fake. Those from the Liang Kingdom can come here but not the other way around.”

Li Huowang held the spine sword tightly. He swung it again and rescued the little girl from inside the rift.

He took her back, but now, he wasn’t sure about what to do.

Find a good family for her? Almost everyone is dead here. Who would want to have a deadweight following them? What if she followed me? But I’m heading back once I find Shangji Guankou...

“Hong Zhong, it’s useless. You can’t save her. Just throw her away. She’s not the only unfortunate person throughout the Qi Kingdom, and you can’t save them all,” the Sitting Oblivion Dao member taunted.

The old monk and Jin Shanzhao’s illusions walked up to the Sitting Oblivion Dao member.

What if I turned her into an illusion and made her stay by my side? Li Huowang thought, but even he was surprised by his own thoughts. *No, I can’t! What if she didn’t become an illusion? I would have just killed her for nothing then!*

In the end, Zhuge Yuan proposed a solution. “Junior Li, follow my instructions and draw a talisman. I will notify my friend to take her away. She might survive by then.”

“You think your friend is still alive?”

“They're still alive.”

“Alright then.” Li Huowang followed his instructions. He placed the talisman that was glowing with a gold light on the little girl. She immediately stopped moving as if she was a log.

He then used the spine sword to shave out a cavity in the mountain and stuffed her in.

After giving her some food and water, Li Huowang sighed and left. He still had his own issues to handle.

Two hours later, he found Shangji Guankou once again. This time, they were sitting in a small shrine dedicated to the Lord and Lady of the Land.

The shrine was in ruins, and the two statues had fused into a single statue with an abnormally large eye on its forehead.

Li Huowang found what he had been looking for, but he wasn't happy at all.

“A secret for a secret.” He heard the familiar voice. Li Huowang then looked at Shangguan Yuting.

“Senior Er, you are really amazing. To think that you can find it in such a remote location. I wouldn't be able to do the same if I were in your shoes.”

Shangguan Yuting bowed to Li Huowang before walking up to Shangji Guankou. She stepped on an invisible stairway and entered Shangji Guankou's shadow.

When Li Huowang thought everything had ended, the clay statue suddenly cracked, but an unexpected change occurred. A voice echoed from the shadow where Shangguan Yuting had melted into.

Translator's Thoughts

This is how Shangguan Yuting looks like.
Pretty normal... Which is kinda suspicious for an illusion. Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin!



Chapter 555 - Shangguan Yuting

Li Huowang made a deal with Shangji Guankou before so he knew something was wrong. Shangguan Yuting hadn't come here to make a deal with them!

The surroundings shifted as a cold breeze flew out from the clay statue. The breeze seemed to contain indecipherable whispers as it flew upwards in a spiral.

Li Huowang recognized what the words were—it was Shangji Guankou themselves! Li Huowang also saw that it was composed of secrets.

Shangji Guankou wanted to escape, but the Surveillance Bureau would never let it happen. At some point, the skies had become like a mirror, reflecting the ground.

Shangji Guankou floated upward to escape, but they collided against the reflected "ground" and sank into the shadow of the clay statue. The clay statue's shadow in the sky shrank and expanded numerous times.

"They are not exchanging secrets, but rather the Surveillance Bureau is trying to rob its secrets," Zhuge Yuan explained. His words had yet to finish echoing in the air when the shadow of the clay statue expanded, revealing a myriad of eyes.

The space around them shifted, and Li Huowang felt he was somehow returning to the hospital.

Realizing that something was wrong, he quickly retreated to avoid getting caught in the strange technique. He had suffered it once and did not want to suffer it again.

He also had no intentions of helping Shangji Guankou. Shangji

Guankou wasn't going to affect his plans, so there was no reason for him to do so.

When Li Huowang left, the temple crumbled. Several illusory worlds flashed intermittently before Li Huowang, and he felt his head pounding just from staring at what was happening.

He finally understood that the Surveillance Bureau never had any intentions to make a deal with Shangji Guankou. Instead, they were here to rob the secrets for themselves.

“Can they really just forcefully grab the secrets like that?” Li Huowang asked Zhuge Yuan.

Zhuge Yuan looked at the scene with hesitation before sighing. Li Huowang's question was answered without a word.

“A normal person might not even be able to touch Shangji Guankou, but the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau can probably do it. He's a master of illusion techniques, after all. I also think he's an extremely special figure.”

“He has a strange illusion technique capable of dragging unsuspecting people into illusions, and he could also project an illusion to someone's side without them noticing it. Senior Zhuge, what do you think about the Chief?”

“I fear that he's not using any regular illusion techniques. I fear that it's Unspeakable.”

“Unspeakable? Again? Not even a name?”

Zhuge Yuan looked at the chaos in front of him and shook his head. “No, that is the name. Unspeakable. The true name cannot be spoken with our language nor could we write it, so we call them Unspeakable.”

Unspeakable? Li Huowang slowly ruminated on those words.

“I know only a little bit about them. When I was out on the seas, I once found a half-rotten bamboo slip and read about it from it. It was said that Unspeakable was born from the void and lived on the boundary of life and death. If we want to meet them, we

have to quite literally be either on the edge of death or crying on a grave to the verge of collapse. Only then would we catch a glimpse of them. It's incredibly hard to even catch a glimpse of them, much less learn something from them. The Chief probably had an extraordinary fortuitous encounter long ago.”

Li Huowang looked at the flashing lights and hesitated, “Is Unspeakable a Siming? Which Heavenly Dao does it control? I've never heard of something so bizarre.”

Zhuge Yuan shook his head. “I've only managed to scrape a small bit of info from that bamboo slip. They are generally unknown.”

“So the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau obtained his position through his sheer strength. That's great. We now have a great chance at defeating Shai Zi.”

While Li Huowang was conversing with Zhuge Yuan, the sounds from afar slowly grew soft. A large shadow with unblinking eyes slowly extended from the broken temple.

There were hundreds of eyes, and Li Huowang recognized them. The eyes looked the same as the eye on his forehead.

The scene made his scalp go numb, but what happened afterward almost made him think that he was going crazy.

Shangguan Yuting walked out from the shadow as if she were walking up onto invisible stairs.

But this time, she looked different. Her figure looked the same, but her head was covered in blinking eyes.

Li Huowang thought that he was staring at a kaleidoscope of eyes, and he instinctively found it repulsive.

Shangguan Yuting nodded with her head covered in the eyeballs. Her soft voice echoed from beneath the eyes. “Senior Er, I'm done here. Let's go back.”

“Why do you need so many secrets? Are there really so many things you need to know?” Li Huowang averted his gaze and took

out his spine sword.

Shangguan Yuting laughed, and her laughter sounded like chimes. “You have to ask the Chief to know the answer to that question. I’m just here to do my job. I don’t care about the other details.”

Li Huowang nodded. He was done here, so there was no reason for him to stay in the Qi Kingdom. He carved open a rift and entered the Liang Kingdom again.

The scenery peeled away, and Li Huowang found himself in the middle of a golden wheat field with workers busy harvesting the wheat.

The sight was so surreal that Li Huowang thought he had traveled through time.

“Can you let the Chief know that our mission is done?” Li Huowang asked Shangguan Yuting with his back facing her.

The Chief of the Surveillance Bureau was the only thing left he needed to kill Shai Zi.

“Don’t worry. Just head to Shangjing. I’ll find a way to notify him. He will be back once he’s finished with his business.”

Once I’m done with Shai Zi, I could probably go and look for Shangji Guankou again to find out where Bai Lingmiao is located. Li Huowang hastened his steps as he walked into the village.

He reached the village and bought a horse from a wealthy family.

He didn’t bring much money with him, but thankfully, he still had the jade pendant that he had taken from the Zephyr Temple.

He didn’t know how much the jade pendant he had taken from Xuanyang was worth, but the people who had sold him the horse were more than eager to accept it.

Unfortunately, Li Huowang was still suffering from severe injuries. His charred skin was showing signs of recovery, but it was only thanks to Li Sui inside of him that his body had yet to cave in.

Li Huowang dragged his injured self onto the horse and rushed back to Shangjing.

Translator's Thoughts

Ah, there it is. The bizarreness is back. She looks like an Amygdala from Bloodborne now.

Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin!



Chapter 556 - Return

"Mom, I'm really fine. It's just that I don't have a lot of time to become coherent again. Don't worry; my situation will improve as time goes on," Li Huowang consoled his mother while he was strapped to the bed.

Sun Xiaoqin shook her head and smiled. "Mom isn't worried. Come, have an apple."

"Mom, I can't eat anything right now," Li Huowang said.

The smile tugging at Sun Xiaoqin's lips disappeared.

Li Huowang hurriedly explained, "Mom, if I want to eat something next time, I will just shout when I'm hallucinating. You can feed me an apple, then. How about that?"

Sun Xiaoqin nodded and smiled. "Whatever you want, my son."

Li Huowang relaxed and started chatting with his mother when he saw Yi Donglai standing outside the door and staring at him through the small mirror.

Seeing that Li Huowang had noticed him, Yi Donglai pushed his frameless glasses upward and entered the room.

He first asked Sun Xiaoqin to leave the room before conversing with Li Huowang in a friendly tone. "How is it? Did you find Bai Lingmiao?"

Li Huowang was silent.

"We have some good sunshine today. Want to go out and have a stroll?" Yi Donglai opened Li Huowang's straps but he didn't move.

Yi Donglai raised his eyebrows inquisitively as he pushed the wheelchair near Li Huowang. "Why aren't you moving?"

Li Huowang looked at him with a cold gaze. "I'm on a horse. If I move carelessly, I'll fall."

Yi Donglai nodded in understanding and pushed the wheelchair away. "I talked to Wang Wei before I came here."

Li Huowang was intrigued. "Why was he admitted into the hospital?"

"What kind of illness do you think it is if he were to be admitted here? But his documentation was incomplete, and he was admitted here through some connections. The director of the hospital has sent him away. While his symptoms were light, we somehow managed to come up with a treatment plan for you while I was conversing with him. I never tried it before, but we might as well try it since the regular treatments haven't been working on you."

Li Huowang smiled. "Sure. It might work."

Both worlds were real, and he was stuck in both worlds. *Does Yi Donglai really think that he can cure me? It'll be great if can cure me.*

"It's not that simple. There is a ton of paperwork to do, but I think they're more than happy to approve the plan. They are all itching to cure you so that they can send you away."

"If you have nothing else, you can go back now. I finally have some time to rest."

Yi Donglai turned serious as he stared at Li Huowang through his green-tinted glasses.

"I know you don't trust me, but I assure you that I'm a stubborn person. I am confident that I can cure any patient through my stubbornness and dedication. Even if I can't cure them completely, I'm confident that their symptoms will be reduced to the minimum! Since you are my patient, I will do everything in my power to cure you, no matter what!"

"Thank you. You are a good doctor, but I don't think you'll be helpful to me. Don't waste your time." Li Huowang closed his eyes after saying that.

In the darkness, he heard Yi Donglai's voice. "Is that so? I don't

believe it. Your illness is not as incurable as you would've thought. Rather, I've found a pattern revolving around you. I know what to do to disrupt it."

Li Huowang was then woken up by thunder. He found himself back on the horse. Tentacles sprouted out from his red robes to hold onto the reins tightly.

It was raining. Li Huowang took out the straw hat and wore it.

"How long have we been traveling for?" Li Huowang asked Li Sui.

"I don't know. You've never taught me to count time."

Staring at the muddy road, Li Huowang bit his index finger and used his blood to draw a talisman before slapping it onto the horse's back.

The tired horse was suddenly invigorated, and it ran twice as fast as its original speed.

We should reach Shangjing soon. Li Huowang looked around and saw he recognized some of the scenery.

The horse never stopped running. They finally arrived at Shangjing's massive wall late at night. There was a thunderstorm looming as lightning flashed everywhere.

Li Huowang raised his identity plate high in the air and entered the city without issues.

There was another lightning bolt. Li Huowang suddenly realized that something was weird. *Why is the lightning hitting the same location again and again?*

He ran past the silent street before finally realizing which direction the lightning was striking. He immediately ran towards the lightning.

The sky was dark, but a fire was burning bright in the city. It was Princess Anping's palace!

Li Huowang ditched the horse, which was dying from fatigue, and ran into the palace with his sword. He saw a mound of heads in

front of the burning palace.

“Oh~ You must be Er Jiu~” A Daoist chuckled as he walked out of the shadows.

The Daoist was wearing a tattered Daoist robe with patches everywhere. He wasn't even wearing shoes, and his hair was tied with a red thread that had a moldy green bead.

Li Huowang was not attracted to his weird look but rather focused on the head that the Daoist was holding in his left hand.

“Er Jiu~ Why are you here only now? Our Lord is disappointed in you. To think that you would take so much time just to deal with the weakest princess. I did it all by myself~”

The tattered Daoist placed Princess Anping's head on the top of the mound.

Princess Anping's beautiful face was filled with despair. Her mouth was open as rainwater dripped into it. Clearly, Princess Anping's true body had been found, and she was dead.

Now that Princess Anping was dead, no one else was eligible to become the emperor. In other words, it meant Ji Lin was now the emperor. Shai Zi's goal was achieved!

The tattered Daoist swaggered past Li Huowang and sighed, “*Haiya~* Some people really don't have the foresight to think for themselves. Our Lord is more than happy to reward those who had decided to help him in his time of need, but he'd never waste his time on those who'd only come to his aid once the crisis is over.”

Li Huowang clenched his fist in the rain. *No! I cannot let him ascend to the throne! Not while Shai Zi is still alive!*

The tattered Daoist was about to leave when Li Huowang grabbed his spine sword and swung it.

The rift almost swallowed the Daoist's head, but his entire head had retracted into his robes as if it were a tortoise returning to its shell.

The tattered Daoist's head popped up, but his face was

backward. “You dare attack me?!”

“You killed Princess Anping, but no one else was here to witness it! I just have to kill you, and everyone will think that she’s still alive! Ji Lin will never be able to ascend to the throne then!”

Li Huowang then pounced at the Daoist with Li Sui’s tentacles in tow.

Chapter 557 - Emperor

The rain poured down incessantly. Li Huowang twitched uncontrollably as he kneeled on the ground and panted.

His wounds had reopened, and he was covered in more wounds. Li Sui had to further expand within him.

Princess Anping's murderer was indeed powerful. *Where did Ji Lin find someone as strong as Dan Yangzi?*

The tattered Daoist's lightning attacks were lethal. Thankfully, Li Huowang had gotten even stronger as well.

Peng Longteng grabbed a bloody boulder and lifted it high in the sky before slamming it down on the dying Daoist.

The Daoist was crushed, and his limbs scattered in all directions.

However, Peng Longteng was still hungry for more. She grabbed the same boulder and smashed it down again and again on the corpse.

She did it a few times until a large crater appeared in front of her. There was no longer a body as the flesh and bones had scattered everywhere from the repeated impact.

"Enough... ENOUGH!" Li Huowang had just shouted when the boulder phased through her body and crashed onto the ground. She was a hallucination once more.

Li Huowang stood up while breathing in ragged pants. He opened his mouth and spat Li Sui out. "Suisui, please be nice and help me."

Li Huowang approached the mound of dead bodies and took Princess Anping's head. "The Black Taisui excels at parasitizing its victims. Can you control this head?"

"Let me try." Li Sui extended her tentacles and entered the

head.

Soon Princess Anping's head stood up with tentacles beneath her neck. She could blink too.

"Is it like this?" The beautiful face of Princess Anping was being held up by numerous tentacles as she smiled at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang was actually thinking of using his own skin to make a doll with his techniques as a Sitting Oblivion Dao member. Thankfully, the Black Taisui was really great at her job

Staring at her smile, Li Huowang nodded with approval. "Good. Just show yourself in front of others, and they will think that Princess Anping is still alive. She has already perished, but let's help her anyway. Li Sui, I know you're tired, but we only need to wait just a bit longer until the Chief is back."

Li Huowang brought Li Sui into the palace and soon found Princess Anping's corpse. Li Huowang dug out her organs, and Li Sui entered the hollowed-out body to become Princess Anping.

Li Sui washed the blood off her body and wore a dress with golden stitches. The wide dress allowed her to hide her tentacles beneath it.

Her innerwear was pink, and she was sporting a pale blue earring as well. Her intricate hairstyle was held together by an elaborate hairpin. Li Sui truly looked like Princess Anping when she was still alive; the only thing amiss was the white ribbon around her neck, which was concealing the wound that had decapitated her head.

"Alright, let's go! We can just run around the city, and the informants will know that Princess Anping is still alive!" Li Huowang dragged Li Sui into the rain.

It was a chaotic night, but when the rain washed over Shangjing and they woke up again the next morning, everything returned back to normal. The stench of blood had been washed away, and the civilians were out and about doing their own

business.

Gao Zhijian entered Shangjing in his carriage and stared at the dense rows of shops on both sides of the street.

He thought that he'd recognize the place if he were the emperor, but he recognized nothing for some reason.

Did I not venture out of the palace last time?

He continued to drive the carriage on the main road. After some time, he saw the familiar red walls of the palace. His memories stirred.

He remembered seeing the same color every time he was carried by someone when he was younger.

He hopped off the carriage and calmed himself down as he slowly walked towards the palace.

The guards naturally noticed a huge man like Gao Zhijian and frowned. Cold glances came from above the palace walls.

Gao Zhijian stopped just a few meters away from the palace door. He stared at the guards stationed there.

A few moments passed and nothing happened. *Strange. Do they not recognize me? I used to be an emperor. Even if it was in the past, they should still recognize me.*

Gao Zhijian took two steps forward and pointed at his face as he attempted to speak.

“This is the land of the emperor! Who dares to trespass!” A sharp spear pointed at Gao Zhijian, causing him to panic.

As someone who learned how to utilize the murderous aura, he also felt the murderous aura high above the palace wall. The person up there was beyond his level. This was a warning. One more step and Gao Zhijian would die.

He immediately retreated back to his carriage and looked at the tall palace walls. He didn't know what to do. *I should be the emperor, right?*

While he was thinking about that, someone brushed past him

and entered through the side door of the palace.

Compared to the treatment Gao Zhijian received, the guards didn't even look at the man as he entered the palace.

Back in the palace, the man ran as fast as he could, giving the illusion that he was stepping on air. He ran into Ji Lin's bed chamber.

He reached the outside and slowed down on purpose.

Even though he slowed down, he was still hit by an inkstone.

But the man dared not move because the one who hit him was Ji Lin himself.

The man prostrated on the ground as his voice trembled with fear. "My Lord! Princess Anping is still missing."

"Drag him out and execute him!" Ji Lin shouted with rage as he easily signed off on someone's death.

"My Lord! My Lord! Spare me!"

The consorts and eunuchs in the bed chamber were silent. They were afraid that they would be next.

However, one of the old eunuchs displayed not a hint of fear. He held a golden horse-tail whisk as he approached the angry Ji Lin. "My Lord, don't worry. I've made a divination and have ascertained that Princess Anping is dead. Even the others got the same results."

The beads on Ji Lin's crown shook violently as he exclaimed, "I don't care about the divinations! I want to see her true body! What if she used an illusion technique? I want to see her corpse! I want to see her head! That is what I want, you useless bastards!"

Chapter 558 - Luck

Ji Lin was fuming and pacing in the grand bed chamber. He was close to succeeding, but something had gone wrong.

After some time, he waved his large sleeves and exclaimed, "Everyone gets out! I don't care what you do but find Princess Anping's head for me!"

"Yes, my Lord!"

"My Lord, please calm down. This won't take long. Anyone with eyes would know that luck is on your side. It would be bad if you got sick due to the stress."

Ji Lin calmed down a little after hearing that. "Wait, what about Er Jiu from the Ao Jing Sect? Any news from him?"

"The guards saw him entering the city, but we cannot find him anywhere no matter what kind of divination we did."

"*Hmph!* He's too unpredictable to use. Nevermind then. I will just give him an official title without any real job in consideration of his contributions in the past."

Ji Lin then got ready for the morning meeting. While he was changing, he suddenly had a different idea. Rather than the hall, he walked towards the imperial temple.

This time he was alone. He entered the place and approached the coffin once more. With the sound of rumbling stones, the coffin lid slowly opened.

"Father, I've done what you've instructed me to do. I did all of it." Ji Lin looked at his father lying in the coffin emotionlessly.

"Hahaha! Good! You are indeed my son!" The old emperor laughed as the golden chains binding him rattled.

"My mother had decided to support the eldest prince, so I killed her!" Ji Lin' roared, interrupting the laughing emperor.

“The princes and princesses wanted to betray me, so I killed them, too. Father, you told me that I have to kill even my own family to become someone great!”

The old emperor in the coffin shuddered before speaking again. “Ruthless. I knew I was right.”

However, this wasn't what Ji Lin wanted to hear. He kicked the tributes in front of the coffin and exclaimed, “WHY! I'm going to be the emperor soon, so I want to know why! Why am I killing all of my siblings?! I've told you that once I become the emperor, I will not tolerate my children killing each other! I will be emperor soon, so I want to know why I should tell them not to kill each other!”

“*Hohoho.*” The old emperor laughed. “Lin'er, why do you think all of the officials and ministers are obeying us? Do you really think that they obey us because we are grand?”

“It's because we are the emperor!” Ji Lin replied.

“You really think so? Do you think that we can obtain absolute loyalty from those preaching Confucianism or from the military just by using our name? They control everything here, including the palace guards! Do you know why they did not revolt and become emperors themselves?”

Ji Lin didn't know what to answer. He had never thought of that before.

“Because they don't dare to do so! They dared not let their own people kill each other, but we—the Ji family—dare to do so! When the Qi Kingdom fell and the emperor's seat became empty, we—the Ji family—killed each other until only one of us remained. We were not a noble family, but there were still thousands of us. In order to become the emperor, we've killed our own mothers, grandchildren, grandparents, siblings, and even our own fathers! The sole remaining survivor from that bloodbath became the first emperor of the Liang Kingdom. Our family spanned thousands of generations, but we will always only have a single branch in our family tree. The

cowards are only going to serve us!”

Ji Lin stepped back from shock. He was visibly shaken by the answer he obtained.

“But why?! Why us?! Why must the Ji family kill each other?”

“Because the heavens have selected us! We're the dragon's chosen ones! Only then can we shoulder the Great Liang's luck!”

The old emperor roared. The dragon roar shook the coffin, and Ji Lin's scale surfaced momentarily before fading.

After some time, the dragon's roar stopped, and the old emperor's tired voice could be heard. “Since you will be ascending soon, let me tell you this: the world is not as peaceful as you think. In the past, humans were raised by the ‘Witch’ clan. We lived just like how pigs are raised; we were fed nothing but feces. However, some of our ancestors refused to continue living as livestock and escaped. Unfortunately, escaping wasn't enough because they'd soon be caught. We needed to find a safe place to live. Luck was needed to sustain it. The Witch Clan was relentless. They will do everything they can to enter our space and capture us so that they can rear us like pigs again. Our ancestors came up with a plan. They robbed part of the luck in the Witch clan and used it to sustain our own safe lands. That ancestor was the first emperor.”

Ji Lin stood still and was confused by what he was hearing.

“It's fine even if you don't understand me. Just think about it upon your ascension. You have to remember that what I told you just now is the truth. If someone were to tell you something like Simings or Immortal Heaven, those are fake. They're used to fool people.”

Ji Lin walked out of the place, stumbling as he walked up the stairs. He was lost in his own thoughts. The skies turned dark and became bright again, but he was still lost in his own thoughts.

If his father did not lie to him, that meant his descendants must do the same thing. They need to kill each other just like how he did.

His family had to put up so much just to shoulder the ‘luck’ of the Liang Kingdom.

He didn’t want to do it. He even thought about letting others do so.

But he had sacrificed so much. He had killed so much just to earn the right to ascend to the throne.

He paid his price. He killed everyone until he was the sole remaining survivor out of the nine siblings. He was this close to becoming the emperor. He would never let others take it just because his descendants had to kill each other next time too.

Ji Lin only snapped out of it once the old eunuch draped the dragon robe on his body. “My Lord, let’s go back and rest. You will only tire yourself out like this.”

Ji Lin nodded and turned to his bed chamber while recalling what his father looked like. *If even the dead can be brought back to life, does that mean my father is immortal?*

Ji Lin sprawled out on his bed and started pondering over his next move.

Just then, footsteps echoed from the door.

“What is it?” Ji Lin asked with his eyes closed.

“My Lord! We’ve found traces of Princess Anping on the outskirts of the city! And she’s with Er Jiu!”

“What?!” Ji Lin’s eyes sprung wide open as he glared at the informant.

It’s him! I treated him so well, but to think that he still ended up betraying me just because of one, single girl!

“Pass down my orders! Capture Er Jiu and his entire family! Once you’ve captured him, skin him alive and feed his flesh to the dogs!”

Chapter 559 - Huangfu Tiangang

Five Li away from Shangjing, two figures could be seen running in the forest. They were none other than Li Huowang and Li Sui. There were many people chasing after them.

Just then, a man wearing black clothes burst out of a tree and threw a demon-slaying circle covered in sutra toward Li Huowang and Li Sui.

A dark light burst forth as the circle shrouded both Li Huowang and Li Sui. The next moment, their figures crumbled like rotten wood.

Soon the people chasing after them caught up and saw the man holding both Li Huowang and Li Sui's heads.

"Wait! Something is wrong!" A Daoist used two leaves and wiped his eyes with them.

He then tore off Li Huowang's face to reveal the face of someone else with a talisman stuck to it.

"It's an illusion! Chase after them!" The group dispersed immediately and continued their pursuit.

Halfway up a mountain, Li Huowang looked down at the people running around in the forest. *To think that the techniques of the Sitting Oblivion Dao are actually so useful when it comes to buying time.*

"Dad, how long should we get chased by them?" Li Sui was lying on the ground with her arms and legs sprawled out.

"That's not up to us. It depends on when the Chief returns." Li Huowang said nothing and tore off his collarbone before using it as an ingredient for his divination.

His target was none other than the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau. Li Huowang knew that it was impossible for him to be able to use divination to find the Chief, but rather the Chief would know that Li Huowang was using divination on him. Li Huowang intended to use it to remind the Chief.

Once he was done, he placed his collarbone back into his body and looked at Shangguan Yuting. “Can you tell me where the Chief is?”

Shangguan Yuting was calm even though she had her entire head covered in her eyes. “I don’t know. He didn’t tell me. He must have his own reasons for delaying it.”

Li Huowang couldn’t even get angry at the illusion.

He had no idea where Ji Lin had found so many capable people. They had seamless teamwork, and their divinations were scarily accurate as well.

Of course, Li Huowang was not afraid because he had the spine sword inhand.

Every time he was about to get surrounded, he’d use the sword to escape into the Great Qi before popping up somewhere else.

No matter how strong or how strange their techniques were, they would never be able to travel to another timeline.

Still, the pursuit was taking a toll on Li Huowang.

He took out a bun and gave it to Li Sui. “Eat this. We need to move soon. I think there was one of them who possessed a compass that’s scarily accurate.”

Li Sui sat up and ate the bun. Her cheeks puffed up as she chewed on it. “Dad, I don’t like buns. Can we find some meat in the forest? I saw there were many just now.”

“Stop being picky. We are being chased right now. We can’t waste time hunting or we would let them know that we are in the area. Just eat this for now.” Li Huowang rummaged through his sleeves and tore off a long strip of skin and scab.

Li Sui chewed happily on the skin and scabs. "Thanks, Dad. I really love eating these. They're more delicious than meat."

Li Huowang felt weird seeing the young girl eating his scabs. He had been finding it strange Li Sui had taken over a human body.

Li Sui had become too human-like for her to eat something like the scabs on a wound. *I should make her abandon that body once this ordeal is over*

Li Huowang reached out to pat her head when he was alerted by something, prompting him to grab his spine sword.

"Li Sui! We need to move now! Someone's here!" Li Sui quickly shoved the scab into her mouth before jumping onto Li Huowang's back.

When he heard rustling noises, Li Huowang immediately swung his sword ahead of him.

Just as he was about to enter the rift, the skies abruptly went dark, and the rift that he had created with the spine sword shattered—it was cut in half!

Who can do something like this in the Liang Kingdom?! The moment he thought of that question, the answer revealed itself. It was none other than the Imperial Preceptor of the Liang Kingdom!

Compared to how laidback he looked last time on his ox and fishing pole, he was now wearing robes that made him look regal. His Constellation Sword was in his hand as he slowly appeared from the forest. "Ji Zai, what are you doing here?"

Li Huowang shielded Li Sui behind his back. "I'm here to protect my Lord! Have you come here to interfere? I've simply chosen who I think is more suitable to take the throne!"

"You think you can fool me? Anping is dead! The evil being that you're rearing is just using her corpse!" Huangfu Tiangang immediately saw through the farce. "Our Lord has won, so he's the emperor. Who do you think you are? You dare to try to stir up trouble in the kingdom? Those who try to fool our lord must die!"

Li Huowang immediately felt as if a mountain was pressing down on him, and he couldn't move even an inch.

Staring at the Imperial Preceptor approaching him slowly with a sword in hand, Li Huowang hurriedly shouted, "Wait! Since you are so strong, can you not see the illusion made by the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau next to me? This matter is related to the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau!"

The air itself seemed to freeze, but Li Huowang knew that his plan was working, as Huangfu Tiangang's sword didn't fall down on his head.

Li Huowang knew that even though the Surveillance Bureau and the Imperial Preceptor often worked together, they never really shared their plans with each other.

Huangfu Tiangang made an unfamiliar seal with his other hand and pointed it to the ground. He then looked at Shangguan Yuting and greeted her for the first time.

The Imperial Preceptor was shocked to see Shangguan Yuting's head covered in eyes. "To think that they exist! Wait, is he thinking..."

Li Huowang then took this chance to explain Shai Zi's plot.

However, the Imperial Preceptor revealed the same expression as the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau. He remained calm despite hearing Shai Zi's scheme. Actually, he was more interested in the eyes covering Shangguan Yuting's head.

Li Huowang frowned, seemingly thinking about something when he heard footsteps all around him.

Ji Lin's subordinates were here.

They surrounded Li Huowang but none of them moved because Huangfu Tiangang was here as well.

A fat man holding a gold ingot stepped forward and said, "Imperial Preceptor, that man..."

"Go back."

Translator's Thoughts

The fearsome Imperial Preceptor, Huangfu Tiangang. I thought this would be a good time to start showing the fan art for the more important characters of the next arc.

Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin!



Chapter 560 - Trade

None of them dared to disobey the orders of the Imperial Preceptor even though they had received orders from Ji Lin.

“Yes, we obey.” All of them dispersed. None of them dared to stay here for a moment longer.

Seeing how much respect he commanded, Li Huowang’s heart started pounding wildly against his chest. He was thinking about what he could do if the Imperial Preceptor actually wanted to kill him.

If that were to happen, he would have to materialize Zhuge Yuan to even stand a chance against Huangfu Tiangang.

Just then, Huangfu Tiangang put away his Constellation Sword in his sleeves and approached Li Huowang without a weapon.

“I’m afraid you would have to wait for a very long time till the Chief is done with his errands. What if we did this instead? I help you deal with Shai Zi, and you give me the illusion.”

“Hm?!”

Both Li Huowang and Shangguan Yuting were shocked. They never thought Huangfu Tiangang could do that.

That means the Imperial Preceptor wants to betray the Chief? Are they secretly fighting against each other?

“What? You don’t think I can’t deal with Shai Zi and only the Chief could? What a joke. Shai Zi is only good at running and hiding. As long as we can expose his location, I could kill him with a single hand!”

Li Huowang slowly thought about it and managed to glean some info. Firstly, rather than taking Shangguan Yuting directly, he offered a trade instead. That meant he didn’t want to completely break the relationship he had with the Surveillance Bureau.

Secondly, both the Imperial Preceptor and the Chief were extremely interested in the secrets of Shangji Guankou.

After weighing his options, Li Huowang looked at the Imperial Preceptor. "The Chief has helped me a lot. I don't think I feel right doing so."

Huangfu Tiangang looked at him strangely. "Are you that loyal to him? I remember that you don't even have an official position in the Bureau."

Li Huowang pointed at Shangguan Yuting's eyes. "There's so many of them. If you give some to me, I might feel better about doing it."

If he had two secrets, he could find Shai Zi and Miaomiao at the same time.

Since the Imperial Preceptor offered the trade, there was no reason for him to get some benefits.

Hearing his words, Huangfu Tiangang understood what was going on. "I see. Fine, I can't just let a soldier go hungry. The food doesn't belong to me in the first place."

Huangfu Tiangang made a seal and chanted something. He walked around Shangguan Yuting before pointing at Li Huowang. One of her eyeballs shot out and entered Li Huowang's shadow.

He then waved his robes and Shangguan Yuting disappeared just like that.

He was very satisfied with his haul and patted Li Huowang on the shoulder.

"Since you've taken what I've given, you should know what to say to the Chief upon his return."

Li Huowang nodded slowly. "I understand."

Li Huowang didn't really care what the Chief would think about him the moment he saw that Shangguan Yuting had disappeared and that he wouldn't obtain the secrets from Shangji Guankou.

Ji Lin was about to ascend to the throne, but Miaomiao was still missing. He was just too anxious to wait.

“Em~ Not bad. You are still teachable, at least.” Huangfu Tiangang nodded in satisfaction.

“Imperial Preceptor, when are we hunting down Shai Zi?” Li Huowang wanted it done as soon as possible.

“We can do it now.”

Hearing how confident he was, Li Huowang immediately ran down the mountain toward a river.

He needed his reflection to use Shangji Guankou’s secret.

When he reached the river, he saw the Imperial Preceptor appear out of nowhere on his side. “Imperial Preceptor, Shai Zi is evil, so how come he’s not your top priority to hunt?”

Li Huowang had finally managed to ask one of the many burning questions in his mind.

“Hmm... The Shai Zi who had plotted to rob the Sacred Mountain Ghost’s Eye is dead. What good is killing another? The Sitting Oblivion Dao is like the grass of Qing Qiu. You burn them, but they’ll still grow back. It’s fine as long as we wound them enough. There are even more pressing matters in this world.”

“You mean they’ll come back even after getting annihilated?”

He had never heard of it before. He didn’t even know that despite his memories as Hong Zhong.

“The Sitting Oblivion Dao exists so long as liars exist.”

Li Huowang realized something and looked up at the sunny skies.

This world was much more bizarre than he had thought. He still didn’t know about a lot of things.

A meandering small creek appeared in front of him. Li Huowang’s breathing grew heavier, knowing that he was about to hunt down a Shai Zi.

He looked into the water and saw his own reflection. The eye

on his forehead was shifting in the water.

Li Huowang took a deep breath and thought about Shai Zi's location. He then gently popped the eyeball on the forehead of his reflection.

He felt cold water splashing on his body the next moment. The sounds around him disappeared. There was no flowing water, no bird chirping, and no heartbeat of the Imperial Preceptor.

At the same time, Li Huowang saw that he was looking through another person's eyes. It was through the eyes of an eunuch.

It was a younger eunuch. After placing the incense inside his stepfather's room, he carefully and respectfully exited the room.

Li Huowang realized where Shai Zi was after he saw the grand palace! It was the palace of the Liang Kingdom! The young eunuch was Shai Zi!

Li Huowang opened his eyes, and his vision swam. The eunuch's vision and his vision had fused together!

With two different perspectives, Li Huowang felt confused and nauseous, but he couldn't care less. "Shai Zi is in the palace! He's one of the younger eunuchs preparing for the crowning ceremony!"

"Haha! This is such a wondrous object. To think that it's so useful."

Huangfu Tiangang was overjoyed. He unsheathed his Constellation Sword out from his sleeves.

"Go!" He threw the sword into the air before kicking it. The sword flew towards the north.

But it was not over. Huangfu Tiangang grabbed Li Huowang's collars before jumping onto a tree and leaping into the air. He somehow managed to catch up to the sword as he stood on it to fly in the air.

He was carrying Li Huowang as they flew towards Shangjing.

Li Huowang's vision was swimming, and he felt his head becoming heavier. His breathing became irregular as well.

But the symptoms slowly lessened as he got used to it gradually.

Both of them reached Shangjing soon enough.

“Imperial Preceptor! Shai Zi knows you are here. He’s running away!”

“Hmph! He can’t run!” The Imperial Preceptor stomped on his sword, and it took to the air to eventually land in his hands.

Then, he pointed the sword at the sky. A thunderous boom echoed throughout the kingdom.

Lightning bolts struck several altars around the palace. The sutras written on pieces of purple paper inside the wooden bowls were set ablaze by the lightning strikes.

Chapter 561 - Lightning Attacks

“Five heavenly lightning, countless troops. Drive the thunder and lightning to illuminate the universe!”

There was a deafening roar of thunder, and five purple lightning descended from the sky and fiercely struck the rooftop of a palace.

The magnificent palace was enveloped by purple thunder and soon turned into a pile of charcoal.

He happened to be absent when they were in a full-scale battle with the Sitting Oblivion Dao. This was the first time Li Huowang realized the true strength of the Imperial Preceptor from Great Liang.

The pile of charcoal began to collapse under the weight of the roof tiles. A figure emerged from the falling debris and fled. It was a dying eunuch, and his charred face was filled with despair.

When he reached the plaza with its crumbling tiles, the Great Liang Imperial Preceptor descended from the sky and blocked his path while holding the Constellation Sword.

The eunuch stammered as he tried to say something. His figure twisted in a strange fashion as he dodged a rift that flew from behind.

His face lit up when he saw Li Huowang, who had a grim expression and was holding the spine sword. “So it’s you! I was wondering what happened. You did a good job this time. I’ll treat you to a meal when I have time.”

Li Huowang swept his sword across again, then turned to Huangfu Tiangang and said, “Imperial Preceptor! Don’t believe the

nonsense of the Sitting Oblivion Dao! He's trying to sow discord between us!"

Huangfu Tiangang was unusually indifferent, and his gaze was fixed on Shai Zi, "Do you really think that you can come and go in the Great Liang palace as you please? You are going to die today!"

The eunuch peeled off his face, revealing a dice with constantly changing numbers, "When it's time, it's time. People will die inevitably. Dying later or today is the same. But... hehehe, I've already accomplished my task."

Shai Zi looked at Li Huowang, "Hong Zhong, Hong Zhong, did you really think you found me? It was all me leading you to find me. Every step you took was within my calculations."

"Don't give me that! I'm specialized in killing the Sitting Oblivion Dao! I've seen enough of these tricks! Who's Hong Zhong? You can't fool me!" Li Huowang charged forward with his sword.

Instead of dodging, Shai Zi rushed towards Li Huowang and even bared his chest to meet the blade, which emerged from Shai Zi's back.

As they were very close, Li Huowang could even smell the scent of charred flesh from Shai Zi.

"Die!" Li Huowang pushed the hilt of the sword and forced Shai Zi backward. He bared his teeth and fiercely bit off a chunk of Shai Zi's face.

Then, he exerted force with both hands to grab the hilt of the sword and lifted it upward to split Shai Zi's upper body in half.

The panting Li Huowang looked down at the corpse on the ground with trembling hands.

Just as he hadn't yet reacted to what had happened, a chilling voice sounded in his ear, "Child..."

Dan Yangzi is back? As Li Huowang momentarily lost consciousness, the three-flowered Dan Yangzi appeared intermittently before him.

No! This is fake! Shai Zi is still alive! He has attached himself to me! As Li Huowang realized this, he took out the purple-tasseled sword and started stabbing himself.

“Hehehe, Hong Zhong. You play well. You’re quite naughty.” Li Huowang’s mouth began to speak involuntarily.

“You want my body, huh? Fine! I’ll let you have it!” Li Huowang took out a hook from his bag of torture instruments. He hooked his own collarbone and yanked on it forcefully.

“Pfft, Hong Zhong, be gentle. You’re hurting me.”

Compared to Li Huowang’s methods of forcing out Shai Zi with pain, the methods of the Great Liang Imperial Preceptor were obviously much more simple and violent.

“Clouds fly with urgency! Mysterious thunder dragon, pass rain! Immortal fire, urgently bestowed! Lightning to the rescue!”

Thunder rolled above Li Huowang’s head. He didn’t show any mercy as he intended to split Shai Zi in half.

Shai Zi didn’t dare to mess around upon seeing that Huangfu Tiangang was serious. The corpse that was cut in half and was on the ground suddenly stood up by itself and ran toward the east gate.

The voice in Li Huowang’s ear had disappeared completely as well.

As the eunuch’s two legs moved quickly, Shai Zi’s head was cut in half, and they swayed up and down like fruits on a tree.

Each side only had half a mouth left, and they began to speak one word alternately at a time, “Ah, old fellow, you’re really serious, huh? Don’t forget that I have a share of the credit in you obtaining your current position.”

Huangfu Tiangang sensed Li Huowang looking over, and he casually replied, “It’s like what he told you just now. It’s all lies from the Sitting Oblivion Dao. Don’t fall for it.”

He began to hold the Constellation Sword and perform a spell. Strong winds blew past, and thunder rolled in the sky.

Snap!

A purple lightning bolt struck Shai Zi, splitting his upper and lower body split in half.

However, Shai Zi could still move. His two halves, one left and one right, bounced up and down.

The Great Liang Imperial Preceptor didn't pay attention to the left half and attacked the right half instead.

Li Huowang saw what was going on and chased after the other half. He didn't want to let Shai Zi escape.

"Hong Zhong, you're here? I went to Fengyang Tower the other day, and their signature dishes there are truly exquisite. You must bring Bai Lingmiao to try them next time."

"Die!" Li Huowang swung the spine sword forcefully, and a rift flew toward Shai Zi.

Shai Zi's figure twisted, and he easily dodged the rift. "This isn't right, you know? Open a bit of a wider rift, and I can use it to escape to the Great Qi. If that happens, won't all your previous efforts be in vain?"

Shai Zi's words had just come out of his mouth when he abruptly screamed in pain and fell to the ground. There was an intense pain radiating from his chest.

"Hey, why are you using those crazy Ao Jing tricks again? Isn't it going to hurt for you as well? I really don't like playing with people like you."

Shai Zi trembled and stood up. He used his lone eye to look at Li Huowang, who was holding his ribs and had stabbed them into his chest.

"What? Do you really think you can kill me? Even if I'm only half myself, you can't."

"How would I know if I don't try? And I don't need to kill you; I just need to stop you!" Peng Longteng's headless body materialized slowly beside Li Huowang.

Right as things were about to break out, a dark gold arrow suddenly appeared on Shai Zi's head, which sent him flying away.

Shai Zi landed heavily on the ground, and the fierce wind behind almost blew Li Huowang off his feet.

Five more arrows shot out from all directions and pinned Shai Zi to the ground. "The audacity to do something like this in the palace in broad daylight... Do you really think that my Liang Kingdom has no one to defend it? Hmph?"

Chapter 562 - Scheme

“The audacity to do something like this in the palace in broad daylight... Do you really think that my Liang Kingdom has no one to defend it? Hmph?” A rough voice sounded from Li Huowang’s left. He turned and saw an elderly warrior clad in heavy armor on horseback.

Li Huowang felt like the wind itself was moving with the elderly warrior. Undoubtedly, the elderly warrior was from a military family and not from a mid-tier family like Peng Longteng!

His aura was perhaps the strongest among the Great Liang's forces!

He wasn’t alone. Six people in total were charging toward Shai Zi in all directions, and all of them were on horseback. It seemed that the commotion in the palace had attracted these monsters.

Li Huowang suddenly found himself experiencing auditory hallucinations. He could hear agonized screams, and he could also smell the rusty stench of blood. He suddenly felt annoyed.

When they gathered around Shai Zi, the oppressive aura that they carried pervaded the air; it was so thick that it was palpable.

Li Huowang even felt like there was an invisible wall ahead of him. The smell of blood on them was much heavier than the smell of blood on Li Huowang.

“When you reach the Yama[\[1\]](#) Temple, remember to say your Grandpa Zhang was your murderer !”

A veteran general with three deep scars on his face raised his heavy mace with lingering afterimages, ready to smash the immobilized Shai Zi on the ground.

“Hold on!” The heavy mace paused. The six veteran generals and Li Huowang looked toward the Imperial Preceptor

“Let me ask a few questions first before we kill him,” Huangfu Tiangang said, walking over with his hands behind his back.

Li Huowang’s heart tensed as he heard that the Imperial Preceptor wanted to talk to Shai Zi.

He knew too well the strengths and weaknesses of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. Everyone knew that they weren’t that great at fighting, but they excelled at manipulation and deceit. A conversation was a Shai Zi’s home ground!

“Imperial Preceptor, it’s better to kill Shai Zi quickly to prevent any further complications!”

“I’m way more experienced than you. Do I really need you to lecture me?” Huangfu Tiangang glared at Li Huowang before walking toward the trapped Shai Zi.

The Sitting Oblivion Dao illusion came to Li Huowang’s side again and winked. “Brother, don’t you think something’s fishy about this? What if that old man owes our boss a favor? He might be taking advantage of this opportunity to repay the favor.”

Li Huowang looked at him coldly. “Even at this point, you still want to help Shai Zi trick me? Fine, get ready to be tortured tonight!”

“Hey! What’s wrong with you? I’m just helping you think it through. You’re misinterpreting my kindness as malice.”

Li Huowang couldn’t be bothered to listen to his explanation. He turned to Zhuge Yuan and said, “Brother Zhuge, can you take care of Shai Zi if I materialize you for a short while?”

“Brother Li, we’re almost at the goal. Stay patient. There’s no need to risk exposing your Strayed One identity. Come, let’s go see what questions the Imperial Preceptor has for Shai Zi.”

With that, Zhuge Yuan followed Huangfu Tiangang toward Shai Zi. The Imperial Preceptor seemed to have sensed something. He glanced to his left before walking forward.

Li Huowang’s expression changed rapidly as he watched the

two figures.

“Boss Hong Zhong, this kid is definitely hiding something from you,” The Sitting Oblivion Dao illusion came to Li Huowang’s side again.

“Shut up! What do you know? Is being tortured and dismembered not enough for you?” Li Huowang tightened his grip on the spine sword and followed them towards Shai Zi.

As Li Huowang finally arrived next to them, the Imperial Preceptor had already started his questioning, “Tell me, why are you hiding in the palace? I’ve been watching you for a long time. I thought I could lure out the remaining Sitting Oblivion Dao, but you’ve remained quiet all along.”

“Hehehe,” Shai Zi was calm despite being pinned to the ground. He even had the audacity to raise his chin at Li Huowang.

“You think you’ve been watching me, but I wanted you to watch me. I’m here to provide cover for others. I’m not the one doing the job this time, but it’s someone else,” Shai Zi said and blinked at Li Huowang.

“You better spit it out quickly! I have more important matters to attend to!” The Imperial Preceptor’s tone grew more serious.

“Hehehe~ Why don’t you guess how big of a scheme I have pulled off this time?” Shai Zi showed no signs of fear even when faced with the weapons around him.

“Oh, I won’t guess.” The Imperial Preceptor had no intention of indulging him. He drew his Constellation Sword and prepared to strike Shai Zi.

“Hey, what’s the hurry? You’re so impatient. I’ll talk, I’ll talk. After years of hard work, it’s all for this moment.”

“Hehehe, do you guys think that we, Sitting Oblivion Dao, can’t play with the Dragon Vein? We don’t believe in such nonsense! Our goal is the Emperor of the Great Liang.”

“Since we can’t touch the Dragon Vein, we’ll dig up the roots of

the Dragon Vein! Hehehe, do you really think that the Emperor of the Great Liang is a chosen one? Seriously? That kid named Ji Lin is a chosen one? Do you really think so?”

“ *Hmm?* ” The Imperial Preceptor frowned as if recalling something.

“Isn’t Ji Lin of royal blood? Impossible! You must be playing some shoddy trick! I’ve calculated his eight characters[2] with Xuan Pin! He’s of the Ji family bloodline!”

“ *Hahaha!* ” Shai Zi laughed hysterically.

“That’s right~ *Hahaha*; he is of the Ji family bloodline! But I had Ji Lin’s genitals replaced! He’s actually a girl! And she’s infertile[3]! The Dragon Vein of Great Liang has been severed at her section! *Hahaha!*”

Shai Zi laughed until he ran out of breath, and there was a thrilled gleam in his eyes. He looked like he had been waiting for this very day.

Li Huowang’s heart trembled at the revelation. This lunatic had actually given him the task of helping Ji Lin ascend to the throne, all for the sake of deceiving everyone.

“Which one of you wants to tell the emperor this good news? Help me ask him how he feels about suddenly finding out that he’s a girl after being a man for more than ten years. *Hahaha!*”

Huangfu Tiangang looked coldly at Shai Zi, showing no surprise. “So this is Shai Zi’s scheme? If you think the Great Liang Dragon Vein is so easily severed, then you’ve miscalculated. We knew something like this was going to happen, so we’ve decided to hide some hidden dragons[4] among the people.”

“Hehehe~ There’s no more. We’ve cleaned them all up. What’s their token? Is it a white round jade pendant? *Hehehe~*”

A white round jade pendant? Li Huowang felt like he had seen such a thing before.

“Those people are just ordinary people with no bodyguards

around them. We don't even need to do anything against them; we just have to provoke them a little, and they'll seek death by themselves. Isn't that right, Hong Zhong?" Shai Zi asked.

1. King of Hell 📖
2. birth date and time 📖
3. the term used was 'stone girl', which refers to a congenitally missing vagina 📖
4. secret descendants hidden amongst the people 📖

Chapter 563 - Shai Zi

“Those people are just ordinary people with no bodyguards around them. We don't even need to do anything against them; we just have to provoke them a little, and they'll seek death by themselves. Isn't that right, Hong Zhong?”

Shai Zi's words seemed directed at Li Huowang, but they were actually more like a reminder.

A white round jade pendant? Li Huowang immediately recalled the jade pendant that he had stolen from his late Senior Xuan Yang's residence inside the Zephyr Temple!

He had used that jade pendant to trade for a horse not too long ago.

Xuan Yang... was actually of the royal bloodline of the Great Liang? Shock dawned on Li Huowang's face as he recalled the youth who had attempted to escape from Zephyr Temple, only to be fed to the Black Taisui by Dan Yangzi.

He actually died because of the Sitting Oblivion Dao? The Sitting Oblivion Dao had already infiltrated Zephyr Temple while he was still there?!

Li Huowang knew that the sacred text Dan Yangzi had given to him was from the Sitting Oblivion Dao, but it seemed that was another member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao within the Zephyr Temple at the time!

Who is it? Who did they impersonate? Xiaoman, Gao Zhijian, Bai Lingmiao, Yang Xiaohai—the faces of those people flashed rapidly through Li Huowang's mind.

Pop!

Li Huowang suddenly heard a noise reminiscent of a popping bubble, and his own face appeared in his own mind. He began to

recall a few old memories, which had been sealed using the Sitting Oblivion Dao's methods.

Was it me? Did I hint to Xuan Yang to escape? Was I the Sitting Oblivion Dao inside Zephyr Temple? Li Huowang's body began to twitch uncontrollably, and he clutched his head in agony.

He suddenly recalled the preceding events, the period before he transmigrated to this world. He had pretended to encounter Dan Yangzi and pretended to be captured by him. It was all to deal with Xuan Yang, the hidden dragon of Great Liang.

Even Taishang Laojun, who had given Dan Yangzi those sacred texts, was actually himself in a disguise! He was a Hong Zhong, and he had deceived everyone!

No! This isn't right! Doulao Taiyin has tampered with my memories! These aren't my memories. I'm not a Hong Zhong, I'm Li Huowang! Don't let the Sitting Oblivion Dao deceive you! Li Huowang roared to himself.

No matter how much he tried to suggest otherwise, his memories as a Hong Zhong became increasingly vivid in his head.

Those memories of Hong Zhong began to accumulate more and more, and they gradually encroached on Li Huowang's own memories.

When his memories as a Hong Zhong began to outnumber his memories as Li Huowang, he started to find it difficult to differentiate whether he was a Hong Zhong or Li Huowang.

If this were any other time, Li Huowang's unusual reaction wouldn't have escaped the Imperial Preceptor's notice.

However, Huangfu Tiangang's attention was on Shai Zi alone; he didn't notice what was going on with Li Huowang.

"Don't even think about deceiving me! Do you think you can disturb my mind with these lies alone? Do you think I don't have other tricks up my sleeve?" A purple lightning bolt struck down, burning Shai Zi's remaining arm and leg to a crisp.

He was on the brink of death, but Shai Zi became even more invigorated rather than the opposite.

“Hahaha! Lies? Tiangang, it seems you still don’t understand the Sitting Oblivion Dao. Using lies to deceive people is just a trick used by the pawns within the Sitting Oblivion Dao! I am Shai Zi, I only use the truth to deceive people!”

“It’s alright, even if you don’t believe it. Anyway, the Dragon Vein of Great Liang has been severed. The god Yu’er has arrived, and all you have to do next is sit back and enjoy the show! Hehehe~”

One of the veteran generals nearby couldn’t bear Shai Zi’s arrogant act anymore. He raised his sword and pressed it against Shai Zi’s half-charred neck.

“You scoundrel! What benefit do you get from severing the Dragon Vein of Great Liang? When the whole world falls into chaos, you’ll die too!”

“Hehehe, so be it. Do you really think that the leader of the Sitting Oblivion Dao is going to be afraid of that?” Shai Zi curled up. He stretched his neck, tearing apart what remained of his head, which promptly rolled on the ground. “Farewell, everyone! I’m leaving first! Oh, Hong Zhong, you don’t need to burn paper money for me on Qingming Festival^[1]; it’s not our Sitting Oblivion Dao’s custom.”

With that, the head in a pool of blood lost all signs of life.

“Want to die? It’s not that easy! I’ll make your soul scatter into nothingness!”

Huangfu Tiangang pointed his Constellation Sword at the sky, and the sword quivered violently in mid-air. Purple lighting bolts struck down one after another, mercilessly scorching Shai Zi’s corpse.

After a dozen lightning bolts, Shai Zi’s corpse had been reduced to basically meat scraps.

The Imperial Preceptor's face twitched slightly, and he snorted in disdain while staring at the charred ground. Then, he turned around and started walking toward the palace.

“*Sob!* Boss Shai Zi~~~ You've met such a tragic end! How am I supposed to live without you! *Sob!*” The Sitting Oblivion Dao illusion lay on the scorched ground and cried inconsolably without tears.

“Monk! Monk! Aren't you supposed to be a good person? Didn't you see my boss die? Hurry up and help him ascend to the other side!”

Zhugue Yuan's expression was solemn as he walked past the wailing illusion to reach Li Huowang. “Brother Li! Brother Li! Hold on! Things aren't over yet!”

“I...” Li Huowang was scratching his head in confusion, “Who am I? Am I Hong Zhong, or am I Li Huowang?”

“Regardless of who you are, do you really want the Great Liang to suffer the same fate as the Great Qi? Think about your Cowheart Village! Think about your fellow disciples, your daughter Li Sui, and your Bai Lingmiao! Do you really want them to end up like the denizens of the Great Qi?”

Zhugue Yuan's words were like a bucket of cold water that was poured over Li Huowang's head, and they made him snap back to reality.

“Shai Zi's plan isn't flawless! Catch up with the Great Liang's Imperial Preceptor; there's still a way to connect Great Liang's roots!”

When Li Huowang felt his inner turmoil growing once more, he slapped himself and chased after the Imperial Preceptor of the Great Liang.

He was nearby; he was at the main hall where Ji Lin had summoned Li Huowang long ago.

Upon entering the hall, Li Huowang saw a group of eunuchs

staggering away from Huangfu Tiangang.

Meanwhile, Huangfu Tiangang himself was walking toward Ji Lin with a dark expression.

“Preceptor... how dare you! I am the emperor! How dare you defy me!” Ji Lin’s fierce face showed panic. After all, it was the Imperial Preceptor who challenged him.

However, Huangfu Tiangang remained silent in the face of the questioning. He walked directly to the side of the throne and roughly pulled him down to the ground.

“Guards, protect the emperor!” Ji Lin shouted desperately as he struggled to prop himself up on the golden bricks with his remaining two fingers.

Just as he was about to stand up, the Imperial Preceptor lifted him up. Then, the Imperial Preceptor bit his fingertip and drew symbols on Ji Lin’s body.

“Imperial Preceptor! Huangfu Tiangang! How dare you! I am the emperor! I’m the one and only remaining member of the Ji family! How dare you disrespect me! Aren’t you afraid there’ll be no one left to bear the Great Liang’s luck?”

The Imperial Preceptor was soon finished drawing, and he slapped Ji Lin in the face.

The next moment, the red talismans on Ji Lin came alive. They slid rapidly across Ji Lin as if they were flying dragons.

Soon, the talismans seemed to have noticed something, and they picked up the pace.

A clear and distinct voice echoed from beneath Ji Lin’s dragon robe. “Oh dear, so you’ve found out? How clever~ How did you know that I’m the one who implanted this little girl’s manhood?”

Something rolled out from beneath the dragon robe, and it rolled in Li Huowang’s direction. “Hong Zhong! Hong Zhong! Hey! What are you doing standing there in a daze? Come here and help me!”

Before it could roll far away, Huangfu Tiangang's large foot came down and crushed it to pieces.

1. also known as tomb-sweeping day where people burn incense amidst other customs 🙌

Chapter 564 - Schemes

Within Schemes

Ji Lin began to feel uneasy; he noticed something strange happening to his body.

“What’s going on...” Ji Lin trailed off as he froze. His voice was no longer that of a young man but had transformed into a delicate young woman’s voice.

Multiple changes occurred one after another. Her skin softened, and his Adam's apple sank. More and more changes occurred until he finally became a bonafide woman.

Huangfu Tiangang walked towards the exit with a grim expression but was stopped by Li Huowang, who was holding his head in pain. “Imperial Preceptor, don’t panic, there’s still a solution! The root of Great Liang’s Dragon Vein has yet to be severed!”

“You don’t even know what’s happening. This matter concerns not just the Dragon Vein! *Hmph!* You don’t know anything at all!”

Huangfu Tiangang suppressed his anger and walked briskly towards the hall’s exit.

Li Huowang wanted to speak, but he hesitated. His thoughts were a bit sluggish as he looked at Zhuge Yuan. “What method is it, Brother Zhuge?”

Zhuge Yuan closed his eyes and took a deep breath before opening his eyes once again, “The Great Qi! We can use the royal bloodline of the Great Qi to connect with the Dragon Vein of Great Liang, which will ensure that the Dragon Vein will remain linked.”

“Brother Zhuge, what nonsense are you talking about? The bloodline of the Great Qi no longer exists! Have you already

forgotten how I beheaded the final emperor of the Great Qi?"

"He can't die The Empress Dowager of the Great Qi had done everything possible to ensure her son's ascension to the throne. She even defied fate to refine him the Hundred Souls Layered Body! You actually sent him to the Great Liang. We just have to find him, and Shai Zi's scheme will become meaningless!"

"Really?! That's great!" Li Huowang clutched his head and was about to chase after the Imperial Preceptor when he came to a halt and muttered, "Brother Zhuge... Did you already know about Shai Zi's scheme?"

"Brother Li, let's talk about that later. Hurry up and tell the Great Liang's Imperial Preceptor what I said to you!"

However, Li Huowang added, "Brother Zhuge, we're in Great Liang, so is it really necessary for us to go and look for him right now? Or are you trying to change the subject? I've been feeling something amiss for a while now, but I thought I was just overthinking it. I mean, how can I doubt you? I was convinced that I was just overthinking it. After all, you're such a good person, Zhuge Yuan. We're even sworn brothers!

"Unfortunately, my doubts only grew since my memories as a Hong Zhong were unlocked. Like how you told me to go to Great Qi to look for Shangji Guankou, which ended up in me stumbling upon the Emperor of the Great Qi? Then I actually brought him to the Great Liang?"

"Coincidentally, Shai Zi's scheme is to sever the Great Liang's roots. However, the Emperor of the Great Qi can actually destroy that scheme? What kind of a coincidence is that? it feels like I'm dancing to someone else's palm."

Zhugue Yuan sighed and admitted it. "Indeed, I saw through Shai Zi's scheme earlier."

"Then why didn't you stop it? You could have mentioned it to me earlier. There had been eight other contenders for the throne!

We wouldn't have found ourselves in this situation if we had spared just one or maybe two of them!"

"Because I wanted to save Great Qi!" Zhuge Yuan roared. This was the first time that Zhuge Yuan raised his voice at Li Huowang, and his lips trembled ever so slightly as he added, "Do you know how many people are still alive in the Great Qi? Do you know how many are going to die once the Great Qi is annihilated thoroughly? Think about that little girl, the one crying noiselessly while tugging at your clothes. She's alive, and everyone there is alive!"

"You have good friends, and you have people you care about. How about me? Do you really think that I don't have any beloved ones in the Great Qi?"

"Yes, I did all this! When I said I wanted to leave a message for my good friend, I was talking about that Xu Nian! She's my good friend! She's my confidante. I made it so that she'll bring the Emperor of Great Qi with her. She helped you with the scene, and she ultimately found a way to bring the Great Qi Emperor to the Great Liang, just as Shai Zi was setting up his scheme. That little emperor can break Shai Zi's scheme and save Great Qi at the same time. Don't worry; the Great Liang will remain unharmed, even if the Emperor of the Great Qi establishes a connection with it.

"The current Great Qi is done for, but... I want to give the survivors of the Great Qi a way out..." Zhuge Yuan trailed off, and his voice sounded so low at the end of his sentence that Li Huowang barely heard him.

After a while, Li Huowang smiled bitterly and asked, "Why? Why did you not tell me? Why did it have to be like this? Do you really think that I wouldn't have helped you if you had told me about it? Wrong! I would have risked my life to help you! You're the only one whom I truly trust in this crazy world, Zhuge Yuan! I truly consider you as my good friend!"

Zhuce Yuan was silent.

Li Huowang could guess the answer. He approached Zhuge Yuan step by step, glaring at him with bloodshot eyes. "Is it because you suspected that I was a Hong Zhong? Or was it because you thought that I was a lunatic? Did you not say anything to me because you couldn't trust me?"

"Yes."

Zhuce Yuan's succinct reply made Li Huowang feel like his chest was struck by a sledgehammer. His emotional pain then transformed into extreme anger. "I'm a lunatic! I'm a Hong Zhong! But what about you? You might not even be Zhuge Yuan! You're nothing but a mere illusion!"

Zhuce Yuan's figure flickered at Li Huowang's remark. However, Zhuge Yuan's gaze became even more resolute, "Does it matter whether I'm the real Zhuge Yuan or not? So what if I'm an illusion? Even if one is poor, they'll still be able to achieve something by persevering and never giving up on their ambitions!"

Li Huowang gnashed his teeth and swung his hand toward Zhuge Yuan's face. "Stop the nonsense! I've never really understood your nonsense! I've just been pretending all this while!"

"Brother Li!" Zhuge Yuan took a step forward and looked seriously at Li Huowang's face, "Brother Li, does it really matter who we are? So what if I am an illusion? So what if you are Hong Zhong? What matters is our true intentions!"

"True intentions... Haha... True intentions..." Li Huowang shook his head with a bitter smile. He staggered backward until he collided with a massive dragon pillar. After a moment of silence, he looked at Zhuge Yuan again. His voice was tinged with indifference as he asked, "Brother Zhuge, what if I really am a Hong Zong? I mean, there must be a reason behind your suspicions, right? if I'm a Hong Zong, do you really think that this Hong Zhong of the Sitting Oblivion Dao would help you foil Shai Zi's plan?"

The spine sword on Li Huowang's back started moving on its

own. The spine sword tore off the purple talisman on its head and used its bone-white fingers to carve some words into the stone tiles. After a brief pause, the spine sword slapped the words carved in the stone tiles, and the words took to the sky, leaving behind an afterimage as they made a beeline for the Imperial Preceptor of the Great Liang.

Chapter 565 - Zhuge Yuan

Li Huowang's eyes trembled slightly as he stood before the dragon pillar within the brightly lit palace hall.

He glanced at the spine sword, which was moving by itself, before turning to Zhuge Yuan beside him.

Li Huowang had suffered many injuries before, but none of them could compare to the pain he was feeling at the moment.

"So you had a backup plan all along! You never trusted me! Are you really the Zhuge Yuan who was willing to sacrifice even your life just to save me?!" Li Huowang roared, "You want me to stay steadfast to my true intentions? But you've always treated me as a Hong Zhong of the Sitting Oblivion Dao! How am I supposed to do that?"

Li Huowang's lips twitched slightly; he raised his fist and pounded his own head.

"Brother Li, I had no choice. There are so many lives in Great Qi, and I really couldn't risk everything for you. I can sacrifice my own life for you, but I can't sacrifice the lives of everyone in Great Qi for you!"

Li Huowang glared at Zhuge Yuan, and he was filled with rage as he rushed toward the latter.

Li Huowang clenched his right hand and swung it toward Zhuge Yuan's head, which became tangible as soon as his fist swept across it.

Zhuce Yuan's head whipped upward upon getting hit by Li Huowang's fist, and he staggered backward as well. A large bruise appeared on Zhuge Yuan's face. When he found his footing again, he sighed lightly and said, "I have always acted with a clear conscience, except for this time when I concealed the truth from

you, my sworn brother, for the sake of the Great Qi. It was indeed ungentlemanly of me. I have made a mistake, and I must be punished for it; I am willing to atone for my sin with death.”

Li Huowang froze just then. Zhuge Yuan’s figure started flickering.

“What... what are you talking about?! I’m not done with you! You still owe me an explanation! You’re not going anywhere!” Li Huowang clutched his head again with an agonized look.

Zhuce Yuan’s figure stabilized almost immediately.

“Brother Li, illusions are only going to bring you harm as a Strayed One. It’s best to get rid of them as soon as possible. If you want the illusions around you to disappear, perhaps you may do so by eliminating their obsessions. Once their obsessions are eliminated, the illusions will naturally vanish, just like me and like Jiang Yingzi,” Zhuge Yuan said, his figure becoming extremely blurry.

Li Huowang tried to solidify him again but to no avail.

“Brother Li, if you can’t distinguish whether you are Hong Zhong or Li Huowang, you must go to where Li Huowang should be and gather more memories as Li Huowang. This might help suppress your memories as a Hong Zhong. Brother Li, I once wanted to help you find out why Doulao Taiyin had decided to modify your past. But forgive me for my incompetence, as I couldn’t figure out the reason why. It would be best for you to delay cultivating the ‘Truth’ until you’ve learned why.”

Zhuce Yuan’s figure became almost completely transparent.

“Wait! You better wait for me!” Li Huowang unconsciously bent slightly; fresh blood dripped from his nose and landed on the floor.

Zhuce Yuan carefully adjusted his robes and leaned forward. He cupped his fists together and bowed to Li Huowang. “Brother Li, take care!”

Zhuge Yuan's figure vanished, and he left not even a single trace behind.

Li Huowang put down his hands and stared blankly at where Zhuge Yuan had vanished.

After a while, he started crying and cursing at the same time. Eventually, he stopped cursing and simply stood like a frozen statue. His indescribable face obfuscated his thoughts, making it impossible for anyone to decipher.

After some time, Li Huowang suddenly moved. He turned and walked back toward the spine sword.

The purple talisman on the sword had been reattached, and the peach patterns protruding from the sword as well as the flesh and blood had vanished; it had become nothing more than an ordinary spine sword.

Li Huowang trembled, and he tore the purple talisman apart. However, the spine sword was quiet; it seemed that it had died along with the illusion of Zhuge Yuan.

Loud footsteps entered Li Huowang's ears just then, and a group of people with the Surveillance Bureau's identity tokens hanging at their waists appeared. Each and every one of them had grim expressions, and they all had a variety of weapons in hand.

"Er Jiu! Er Jiu!" Fo Yulu exclaimed with an ugly look. She led a group of people to surround Li Huowang before asking, "What's going on?! Where's the Imperial Preceptor? Why did His Majesty become a girl? Who killed the spy among the eunuchs?"

Li Huowang remained silent and shook his head indifferently. He bent down to pick up his sword, and then he pushed past the group of people to head out of the palace.

The others wanted to block him, but Li Huowang swung his spine sword and dove into the spacetime rift.

Boom!

A loud thunderclap startled Gao Zhijian, who was in the middle

of eating a bowl of noodles in an inn. He walked out of the inn with the bowl of noodles in hand and saw dark clouds gathering over the Great Liang palace.

He also saw multiple purple lightning bolts raining down on the palace.

What's happening? Gao Zhijian had no idea, but there was something strange with the lightning bolts.

Loud hoofbeats echoed, and soldiers carrying military banners rushed down the streets, hitting their bronze gongs with urgent looks.

"The Imperial Preceptor's orders are here! Daytime curfew in Shangjing! Daytime curfew in Shangjing! Those who are still outside after two incense sticks' worth of time will be executed!"

Their words immediately caused a commotion; the people strolling down the streets acted like ants on a hot pan as they frantically ran away.

The vendors on the streets abandoned their stalls and rushed home as fast as possible.

Gao Zhijian didn't understand what was happening, but he followed the bandwagon and returned to the inn with a bowl of noodles in hand.

The frightened waiter hurriedly locked the door and barricaded it with the tables before gossiping with the other anxious customers in low voices

"What's going on? What's up with this sudden daytime curfew? Has Qing Qiu attacked us?"

"No way. However, I saw lightning bolts descending upon the palace. Is His Majesty performing a ritual?"

"Hey, kid, do you want to die? How dare you say such things?!"

"It's fine, it's fine. Our Majesty doesn't punish people for their words."

The people of Shangjing moved frantically, rushing to their homes in the proverbial blink of an eye.

Before an incense stick's worth of time was over, the streets were already empty.

Amidst the tense atmosphere, Gao Zhijian peered outside through a hole in the paper window. *Is this daytime curfew related to Senior Li? Should I go out and take a look?*

He was rather hesitant at the idea. He'd most likely run into the soldiers of the Great Liang before he could find Senior Li if he were to go out there without any clues about the latter's whereabouts.

Chapter 566 - Curfew

The skies over Shangjing darkened slowly amidst the ongoing curfew. Gao Zhijian didn't see anyone else outside except for soldiers enforcing the curfew.

"Everyone!" someone shouted.

Gao Zhijian turned around in confusion and saw the innkeeper standing on the table. The innkeeper got everyone's attention by smacking the bottom of a bowl using a pair of chopsticks. The innkeeper grinned as he swept his gaze across everyone before saying, "Everyone, it seems that no one can go back today and have no choice but to stay here tonight. We have three rooms of the highest quality and six regular rooms available. I'd love to give it to you for free, but I'm certain that many of you will find it unfair if were to give it to everyone via lottery.

"So I've decided to give the rooms to the highest bidder! However, I'm not trying to take advantage of you here! Those without a room can just sleep here in the hall. We're a well-respected establishment with competitive rates, so sleeping on the floor in this hall will only cost you a hundred!"

The crowd was in an uproar at the innkeeper's announcement.

Seeing that it wasn't important, Gao Zhijian turned around and stared at the streets.

This time, he saw something unexpected—there was an extremely pretty lady walking on the streets!

Gao Zhijian had seen a lot of the world after traveling with Senior Li for so long, but he had never seen such a pretty young lady before.

Why is she outside? The curfew's still ongoing. Is she not afraid of encountering the soldiers?

Gao Zhijian was confused.

“Dad! Dad, where are you?! Don’t leave me alone!” the young lady exclaimed.

Wait, why is her voice so familiar?

The young lady's beauty had astonished him, which made sense, but how come even her voice had astonished him as well? She sounded so familiar that Gao Zhijian felt disturbed.

The young lady's voice grew softer and softer as she walked away.

" Ah! " Gao Zhijian abruptly exclaimed. He had finally recalled the reason the young lady's voice sounded familiar. She had the same voice as that evil entity that Li Huowang had been rearing—the evil entity that always wore a veil and a straw robe. *She's looking for her father? Her father must be Senior Li!*

Gao Zhijian pushed away the tables that were blocking the entrance and twisted the doorknob with enough strength to destroy it.

Before the people inside the inn could react, Gao Zhijian ran out and chased after Li Sui.

The streets were empty, so he found her in no time.

“Ah! It’s you! Have you seen my dad? He was following someone with a white beard who was calling himself the Imperial Preceptor. They rode a sword and flew away, leaving me behind,” Li Sui said. This was her first time talking to Gao Zhijian, but this wasn't her first time seeing Gao Zhijian, as she recognized him as someone from Cowheart Village.

“Your... your dad.... your dad is...” Gao Zhijian stammered.

Before he could finish his sentence, however, several horses appeared at the end of the street.

The soldiers lightly kicked the bellies of their horses, urging them to charge at Gao Zhijian and Li Sui standing on the street.

Gao Zhijian tensed up when he saw the soldiers raising their

weapons. Then, he grabbed Li Sui and ran away.

Gao Zhijian had a towering statue that allowed him to cover a ton of ground with his strides, but he was not as fast as a horse.

The gap between them and the soldiers narrowed swiftly. Soon, the hoofbeats were just behind them. Hearing that, Gao Zhijian knew that he could not run anymore.

Gao Zhijian made a split-second decision, throwing Li Sui into an alleyway before turning around and standing his ground.

The soldiers never thought that Gao Zhijian would stand his ground. One of them couldn't swing their weapon, but their horse crashed against the sturdy-looking Gao Zhijian.

Veins bulged all over Gao Zhijian as he howled and lifted the horse before throwing it and its rider onto a nearby roof.

The other soldiers were shocked by Gao Zhijian's strength, and they dared not get too close to him.

One of them took out a long tube from under his armor and pulled on the string at the bottom.

Swoosh!

Boom!

A red firework painted the skies.

Gao Zhijian unleashed his killing intent upon seeing the red firework before turning around and running into an alleyway. He grabbed Li Sui, who was hiding in the alleyway, before running toward another street.

Gao Zhijian had barely taken two steps when a large-framed man holding two maces appeared before him.

The man wore heavy armor, and he blocked Gao Zhijian the moment he noticed the latter's killing intent.

“How dare you train in the techniques of the army?! Who do you think you are? Die!” the large-framed man roared, raising his maces and charging at Gao Zhijian.

Gao Zhijian wanted to retreat, but there was nowhere else to

go. He had no choice but to fight head-on.

Gao Zhijian caught one of the maces with his bare arms. However, the large-framed man took to the sky up and smashed the ground in front of Gao Zhijian. "Moon-Pursuing Meteor!"

Gao Zhijian staggered backward; he managed to stabilize himself in the blink of an eye, but he didn't manage to escape unscathed; his hands were bleeding.

"Where's your weapon?" the large-framed man asked, staring arrogantly at Gao Zhijian.

Gao Zhijian used his pants to wipe away the blood on his bloody hand. "In... in the inn!"

Boom!

The ground cracked as the large-framed man threw one of the heavy maces in front of Gao Zhijian.

"Come! I don't want you to say that I, Ma Wu, had bullied you by fighting you with my weapons when you're unarmed!" Ma Wu let go of his remaining mace and charged at Gao Zhijian with his bare fist.

Li Sui stood between the two, but Gao Zhijian pushed her away.

Ma Wu and Gao Zhijian then crashed into each other; their fists buried into each other's figures.

Ma Wu was clearly trained on how to fight with his bare fist, but Gao Zhijian obviously didn't have any proper training.

Soon, Gao Zhijian's face was full of bruises.

Despite his injuries, he remained powerful and domineering. When Gao Zhijian thought he was going to lose, his body moved on itself, hooking Ma Wu's leg with his right leg, causing the latter to stumble.

Taking advantage of that opportunity, Gao Zhijian swung his elbow toward Ma Wu's throat, but his elbow came to an abrupt halt just a few inches away from Ma Wu's throat.

The two stopped and retreated.

Gao Zhijian was injured, while Ma Wu was virtually unscathed, but the two of them knew that Gao Zhijian was the winner.

"Good! You are a true man! You have the qualifications to learn the army's techniques!" Ma Wu nodded and retrieved his weapons. "There is an ongoing curfew, so stay indoors. We have no idea what our superior is thinking, so you're lucky that you've encountered me. Otherwise, you would have died today."

Gao Zhijian stood in front of Li Sui behind him and nodded. "Thanks."

"But your technique isn't as good as the Ma family's technique! If you want to join the army next time, come and find me. I will make sure that you'll get a good position beneath me!" Ma Wu said. Then, he left with his maces.

The other soldiers left after Ma Wu, and the streets were empty once again.

Gao Zhijian looked around and sighed in relief before pulling Li Sui toward the inn.

Chapter 567 - Death

Li Huowang held the golden fries and examined them carefully. The crystalline salt glittered beneath the morning sunlight. He looked at it for a moment before dipping it in the tomato sauce and eating it. His eyes narrowed as he savored the explosion of flavor in his mouth. Afterward, he proceeded to take a few mouthfuls of the cold soda in his hand before chomping down on his burger. The cheese from the burger oozed out from the corner of his mouth and dripped onto his hospital gown.

“Son, take it slow and easy. I can buy more if you want more,” Sun Xiaoqin said, wiping away the cheese on Li Huowang's gown and eating it herself. She patted Li Huowang's head and stepped away to speak to the doctor.

“Doctor, what's going on with my son? He suddenly has a great appetite, and he's no longer speaking nonsense. Is he recovering?” Sun Xiaoqin asked Yi Donglai, who was writing notes on his observation of Li Huowang.

Yi Donglai frowned at Li Huowang, who was eating voraciously and shook his head. “Miss Sun, please give the two of us some time alone. I have to observe him even further.”

“All right, I'm leaving now. Please take care of him! Treat him, and I will even kneel down to you and give you a pennant!” [1]

Hearing the door close behind him, Yi Donglai approached Li Huowang and sat down on a stool. “What's wrong with you? Did something happen on the other side?”

Li Huowang ignored Yi Donglai. He finished his meal and grabbed the portable gaming console on the side to immerse himself in gaming.

“Is Zhuge Yuan dead?”

Bam!

The gaming console broke into pieces as Li Huowang smashed it to the ground and grabbed Yi Donglai by the collar. He shook Yi Donglai violently and roared, “Do you wanna die?! I can tear apart the artery in your neck with just my teeth!”

Yi Donglai waved his hand at the guards, stopping them in their approach. “Li Huowang, you're a kind person. You're not going to do something like that.”

“Me? Kind?!” Li Huowang roared and smashed his forehead into Yi Donglai's face.

Yi Donglai took out a napkin to wipe away the blood down his nose.

“Do you know how much I have suffered? I can't stand it anymore! Why is it always me?! Why is my life so tough?! I'm a human, too! I'm not made out of steel. Not a single good thing has ever happened to me over there! I've suffered tragedies over and over again! I've had enough of it!” Li Huowang roared. He staggered and placed a hand on the nearby wall before looking out of the window. “I don't want to go back to that world anymore. I don't want to look at that chaotic world filled with despair! It's fake! Everything is fake! It's just a hallucination! I'd rather die than go back there! Yi Donglai, just tell them that I'm cured! I want to go back to school! I want to save Yang Na!”

Yi Donglai pushed up his glasses and shook his head. “No, Li Huowang. You can't just avoid it. You need to go back. The Liang Kingdom's Dragon Vein is still incomplete. The life of everyone in the Great Qi is at stake here.”

Li Huowang turned around and glared at Yi Donglai. “Are you crazy?”

Yi Donglai showed no fear as he approached Li Huowang. He looked out at the window and saw the other patients in the garden. “Huowang, did you know that there are some mental illnesses

whose roots are their avoidance of a certain issue? I think it's useless to avoid the issue. You need to face it head-on.”

“It's easier said than done!” Li Huowang's eyes were red as he clutched his chest tightly, and his voice was trembling as he said, “You have no idea what I went through. If you were in my shoes, you'd never say that—never!”

“What about Bai Lingmiao? You still don't know where she is, do you? Do you really not care about her? What about Li Sui? She's your daughter, isn't she? Look at how your mother is treating you and how you're treating Li Sui.”

Li Huowang snarled. He grabbed the railing and smashed his head into it.

“Li Huowang! You need to calm down!” Yi Donglai and the guards exhausted a ton of their energy before they could finally wrap Li Huowang in a straitjacket. They placed him on the bed and injected him with a sedative.

Yi Donglai stared at Li Huowang while wiping away the sweat on his forehead. “Don't be discouraged. Shit happens; life's always been like that. What's done is done; there's nothing much you can do about it other than endure it. If you ever face any difficulties on that side, feel free to talk it out with me. If there are some things you want to know, I can help you look it up on the internet.”

Li Huowang's mind buzzed as he stared at Yi Donglai, and he was slurring due to the effects of the sedative. “Is this what you meant with what you said at the time? Do you really want to stand in my shoes? Do you really think that it's going to work?”

Instead of answering, Yi Donglai took a syringe of medicine and injected it into Li Huowang. “You've been really stressed these days, and it's been two days since you last slept. Have a good rest first.”

As the ice-cold medicine pervaded his veins, Li Huowang's vision darkened until he eventually lost consciousness.

When Li Huowang woke up once again, he realized that he was lying at the bottom of a well. There was a bitter taste in his mouth; it seemed that he had eaten something he couldn't recognize.

Wells were uncommon in the modern world, so Li Huowang instantly realized that he had returned to the other side. However, he didn't stand up immediately but stared at the white circle above him.

He was back, but he didn't want to come back.

Li Huowang looked at his illusions. He saw Peng Longteng, the old monk, the illusion of a Sitting Oblivion Dao member, Qiu Chibao's illusion, and Jin Shanzhao's illusion.

However, Zhuge Yuan was missing.

"Are you Er Jiu? I'm confused. Out of the five elements, you only have the fire and metal. Where are the other three elements?"

"We will meet again, Er Jiu. I am Zhuge Yuan. If you encounter any issues, you can come find me on Xing Island in the Western Seas. I am lacking in many ways, but I will do my best to help you!"

"It is important to know the hearts of people! I just want to do it, that's all! I forbid the appearance of the Simings today!"

"Because I want to save the Great Qi!"

Li Huowang shook his head and wiped away the tears dripping down his cheeks. After a while, he grabbed the rope and crawled out of the well.

He wanted to scold and give Zhuge Yuan a good beating to vent out his frustrations, but he couldn't do that, as Zhuge Yuan was no more.

Li Huowang could no longer revive him.

1. A pennant is something people give to express their gratitude. Usually given to people who achieved exemplary results.



Chapter 568 - Locate

When Li Huowang crawled out of the well, he was surprised to see that the Great Qin's sun had gotten even worse. A huge chunk of the sun had been blotted out, and Li Huowang could only see the edge of it.

Just then, Li Huowang's mouth opened uncontrollably, and he started coughing, which slowly transformed into the cries of a stork. "God Yu'er!"

Li Huowang unsheathed his sword and swung it before launching himself into the spacetime rift to return to the Liang Kingdom.

On the other side, Li Huowang finally managed to fix his dislocated jaw. He was covered in cold sweat when he realized that the Great Qi was going through another Natural Disaster again.

Li Huowang had no idea whether the Natural Disaster would kill the survivors or not, but there was a high chance that it would happen as the previous one had lasted for such a long time.

Li Huowang could still remember what Zhuge Yuan had told him. He took a deep breath and punched the tree next to him. Then, he started moving toward where he had thrown the young emperor of the Qi Kingdom. He needed to find him!

Li Huowang rode his horse and reached the location where he had sent the Qi Kingdom's young emperor through the rift. He had mentioned this location to Li Sui and had decided to forget about it. He examined every nook and cranny to find not even a single trace of the young emperor, which baffled Li Huowang. His senses were heightened, but he still couldn't find anything.

"That's strange. I stabbed him, and he was bleeding so much. There should be some blood here even if beasts had devoured him."

Li Huowang increased the range of his search and found a set of faint footprints.

The Qi Kingdom's destruction was imminent, and Li Huowang had no time to waste.

He followed the set of footprints, and his sharp senses allowed him to track down the footprints until they became clearer.

Soon, Li Huowang found himself approaching the end of the footprints, and he gripped his sword tightly.

Li Huowang found a figure hunching over before a bush, and the figure belonged to an old man with a bed of white hair.

The old man stood there motionlessly like a statue, and his bizarre antics made Li Huowang immediately wary of the old man.

Li Huowang swung his bronze coin sword, which lashed out like a whip, cutting off a tuft of the old man's white hair.

"Ah!" the old man exclaimed, falling to the ground in surprise.

"He's alive?" Li Huowang ran forward and realized that the old man was just a regular old man, who had pissed his pants upon getting the shock of his life, courtesy of Li Huowang.

"Please spare me! Please!" The old man didn't even look at Li Huowang's face as he kowtowed toward the latter.

"Get up!" Li Huowang placed his sword against the old man's neck. "Did you pick up a baby around here recently?"

"*Huh?* A baby? I'm here to catch ginseng! What baby?"

"Ginseng?"

The old man pointed at the ground, but Li Huowang saw nothing. All he saw was a small hole as well as a red thread tied to some bells.

"Where's the ginseng?"

"It ran away. I've been tracking it here for half a year! I could have sold it in the city if I had caught it!" the old man exclaimed, and he soon began sobbing at his lost income. [1]

"What nonsense... anyway, are you familiar with this region?"

“Yes!” The old man nodded vigorously as if Li Huowang would cut him down if he answered even a beat slower.

“Is there anyone else here except for you?”

“I don’t know, but I do know that only those in my village will come into this region.”

Did someone in his village pick up the young emperor of the Qi Kingdom?

The young emperor of the Qi Kingdom was a palm-sized figure with translucent skin, so Li Huowang believed that the emperor couldn't possibly walk away in that condition.

“Bring me to your village!” Li Huowang demanded.

The old man dared not refuse him and brought Li Huowang out of the forest.

Li Huowang found himself walking on a familiar path. He recalled that it was the same village where he had exchanged that jade pendant for a horse. He had just reached the village entrance when he saw a naked young child around ten years of age hanging from a tree. The red streaks all over him proved that he had just been caned using a willow tree branch. The child was crying and howling in pain. Several villagers stood around the boy, and it looked like they weren't going to rescue him anytime soon.

“Ah! That’s my grandson! What’s happening?” The old man panicked and ran over. He grabbed the large man, who was in the middle of hitting the young boy, and exclaimed, “Son, have you gone mad?! Why are you hitting your own son so hard?”

“I’m going to cane him to death and make another one! Do you not have any idea what he had done? Three days ago, he pooped into our well!”

“What?!” The old man grabbed the willow stick and caned his own grandson.

Li Huowang swept his gaze across the people at the entrance of the village. He suddenly came up with an idea, and he jumped onto

a tree branch, exclaiming, “Everyone! Please listen to me! Not long ago, my sister had an early birth. We thought the baby was dead, so we buried it in the eastern side of the forest, but an Immortal told me that my nephew was still alive! My sister sent me here to find him. I'll give ten catties of gold to those who'll help me find my nephew.”

Everyone went into a frenzy at Li Huowang's remark, and even the old man stopped caning his grandson. He turned to his son, and the two started whispering to each other.

Li Huowang swiftly looked around to observe their emotions, as well as their Ten Emotions and Eight Sufferings.

Rather than relying on rewards, he decided to use the Sitting Oblivion Dao's methods to find the young emperor of the Qi Kingdom.

However, he was disappointed when he found nothing; the villagers hadn't found the young emperor in the forest.

“*Sigh*. A child unattended in the forest will quickly be devoured by beasts...”

“Yeah. How can we possibly find that child?”

“The Daoist sure is quite attached to his earthly desires. To think that he still cares about his family, even though he's already cultivating.”

“Hey, wasn't he the one who took the horse of the Song family? I've heard that it was a Daoist in red robes that took it.”

Li Huowang was disappointed. The villagers truly hadn't accidentally picked up the young emperor of the Qi Kingdom.

“*Sigh*~ Maybe someone with a kind heart has taken the baby away. There are people who yearn for a child but can't pregnant, so I can't believe that there are people who'll throw their child away in such a ruthless way. Wait, I think something like that has happened before here,” the old man said. However, the villagers retreated slowly from the old man as if they had enough of his story. “Why

won't you listen to my story? Anyway, it happened thirty years ago. Old Yan really found a bloody baby on the eastern side of the forest. The baby looked like a skinned monkey with a wound on his chest. We told him to leave the baby alone, but what if the baby became a ghost and possessed him in retaliation?"

1. An old folklore that ginsengs can run away like a man since it resembles an energetic man 🤔

Chapter 569 - The Young Emperor Of Great Qi

Thirty years ago? How could that be? Li Huowang thought that he had misheard the old man. He couldn't believe it, but he had no choice but to believe, as the old man's description of the baby matched what he knew. It was too accurate to be called a mere coincidence.

Thirty years ago, a baby with a wound in its chest appeared. How could the baby appear thirty years ago rather than recently?

If that was true, then the baby was sent to the Liang Kingdom of thirty years ago rather than the present time Liang Kingdom.

But how? What's going on here? How can a human being travel back in time? Wait. Li Huowang recalled the circumstances when he was fighting the young emperor. Zhuge Yuan's friend, Xu Nian, was there, too, and she had a bizarre ability that allowed her to steal the lifespan of others. *But what if rather than sucking away lifespan, she was actually changing the time of her targets?*

Li Huowang recalled how his body had changed when he fought her and how the young emperor had regressed to a mere baby against her.

It's the red illusions of the Xu Nian! Li Huowang immediately understood what was going on.

When he sent the young emperor of the Qi Kingdom through the spacetime rift connected to the Liang Kingdom, the rift was within the red line made out of the Xu Nian's illusions!

Li Huowang jumped down the tree and landed in front of the old man. He grabbed the old man by the collar and shook the latter as he asked, "Does the baby really have a wound in its chest? Are

you sure about it? And was it really thirty years ago?!"

If Li Huowang's assumption was correct, then the young emperor of the Qi Kingdom was a middle-aged man today!

Seeing that Li Huowang was eager to listen to his story, the old man nodded in excitement and exclaimed, "Yes! I was there, and I can still remember it. Old Yan was hesitating after hearing us out. He was ready to put the baby back into the forest when his wife ran out like a lunatic and snatched the baby away, refusing to let go of it.

"It was understandable, as she couldn't give birth. They fed the baby some porridge and treated his wounds. Afterward, the baby miraculously survived its injuries! What do you think? It was a bad omen, right? It was still alive despite having such a large hole in its chest. The villagers thought that the baby was an evil entity, but it was great news that the baby had survived. At the very least, the two elderly couple finally have someone who'd take care of them once they were old, but what do you think happened next?"

"Stop beating around the bush and get to the point!" Li Huowang exclaimed. He was clearly not in the mood to hype up the old man, as time wasn't on his side.

Just then, a lady walked past with her baby in her arms. "The baby was mentally challenged. You're still telling that story? You've repeated that story so many times now."

"Shh! Why are you talking when it's not your place to talk?" the old man said, chasing the woman away before continuing, "She's right; the baby was mentally challenged! His mouth and eyes were skewed, and his mind seemed extremely slow, too. He can't seem to memorize anything, and when he was three years old, he still couldn't walk straight. When he was six years old, he still couldn't speak."

Li Huowang looked around and didn't see anyone with such disability. "Where is that baby now?"

“Why are you in such a rush? I haven’t gotten to that point yet. When he grew up, he slowly became smarter and could finally recognize people. However, he suddenly kicked up a fuss and ran into the forest without coming back home. Those were some crazy days, I’m telling you...” The old man sighed and patted his thighs, his eyes revealing a hint of fear.

Something’s wrong. Li Huowang had been staring at the old man’s Ten Emotions and Eight Sufferings. The old man had been telling the truth up until now. *He’s lying! The emperor did not run into the forest on his own.*

Li Huowang pondered briefly over it before leaning closer to the old man and whispering, “Thank you. While I cannot give you ten catties of gold, I can still give you one or two. Please follow me to where the money is.”

The old man was delighted. He had never seen someone obtaining money just from telling an old story.

“Gold is both valuable and heavy. I couldn’t take it with me here, so please follow me to where I had stored it.”

Li Huowang led the old man out of the village. When they got to a quiet spot, Li Huowang immediately swung the spine sword and grabbed the old man before running into the rift.

The old man panicked upon seeing the Great Qi’s dark skies.

Li Huowang didn’t even give the old man a chance to speak as he placed the purple-tasseled sword against the old man’s neck and exclaimed, “You lied to me! What are you hiding?!”

The sudden and terrifying changes to the environment shocked the old man so much to the point that he couldn’t even understand what was going on, so the old man easily told Li Huowang the truth.

“It wasn’t us! A Daoist had taken him away! I didn’t dare tell the truth because I feared that the Daoist would come and find me!”

Li Huowang frowned. *A Daoist? Just who had discovered his true*

identity as the Qi Kingdom's emperor?

“What did that Daoist look like?”

“He was a man capable of flying. He's partially bald with leprosy on the scalp.”

Wait, partially bald and with leprosy on the scalp? Li Huowang's pupils constricted as an unbelievable thought came up in his mind. He turned to the old man and said, “Is he dressed in ragged clothes? Were his lower teeth very pronounced?”

“Yes, yes, yes, that's right!” The old man nodded frantically.

Li Huowang understood everything just then. The Daoist in question was none other than the late Dan Yangzi.

Back in Zephyr Temple, he didn't take in many mentally challenged children, as he would have needed more people to take care of them.

The only one that suited the old man's description was none other than Gao Zhijian!

Li Huowang had always thought Gao Zhijian was very weird, and the latter had survived multiple fatal blows. Li Huowang could still remember Gao Zhijian's stuttering, and there was also that time when he had almost claimed that he was an emperor but was stopped by his speech impediment. Li Huowang pieced together these puzzle pieces and reached the conclusion that Gao Zhijian was the Emperor of the Qi Kingdom.

Li Huowang was shocked. He had never thought that the young emperor of the Qi Kingdom had been traveling with him all this while. Of course, Li Huowang still had many burning questions, but he couldn't spare enough time to investigate whether it was the truth or not. He needed to find Gao Zhijian as soon as possible, as the Qi Kingdom would perish if the Natural Disaster were allowed to rage on for much longer.

Li Huowang cleared his mind and brought the old man back to the Liang Kingdom before making haste to Cowheart Village.

“Son~ Come, eat this egg porridge. What a good boy~”

Li Huowang looked at Qiu Chibao's illusion and recalled that he had forgotten something.

Chapter 570 - Emperor

“Dad, are you here?” Li Sui asked as she entered a kitchen covered in dust. A disappointed look marred her face upon seeing that there wasn't anyone in the kitchen.

She was about to enter the next room when Gao Zhijian stopped her. “Don’t... don’t... don’t look for him like that.”

Li Sui scrunched up her nose in dissatisfaction and asked, “You speak too slow. Can I enter your body and listen to you from the inside?”

Gao Zhijian shook his head and took Li Sui out onto the streets.

The curfew was over, and the streets were starting to become bustling once again.

Li Sui looked like a human being, but she wasn't a human being, so Shangjing was dangerous for her. With that in mind, Gao Zhijian had decided to send her back to Cowheart Village.

Afterward, Gao Zhijian would come up with another plan to find Senior Li.

Gao Zhijian was quite disappointed. He thought he could help Li Huowang with his identity, but he was wrong. In the end, he was nothing.

He took the reins of the horse and carried Li Sui onto the carriage. Then, they started moving toward the city gates to head back to Cowheart Village.

Gao Zhijian was still thinking about what he was supposed to do when a familiar figure blocked them.

“Dad!” Li Sui exclaimed in excitement. She jumped down from the carriage and hugged Li Huowang tightly. She then nuzzled her head into his chest.

Li Huowang stroked Li Sui’s smooth hair and muttered, “Sorry.

Many things happened, and I couldn't get to you soon enough."

Li Sui looked up and smiled at him.

"How did you find me, Dad?"

"I used divination and followed the traces. If this happens again, you should just head back home rather than search for me without any leads."

"Dad, where's our home?"

"Our home is Cowheart Village," Li Huowang said. He then looked at Gao Zhijian. He was supposed to go back to Cowheart Village to find Gao Zhijian, but it turned out that the latter was already in Shangjing. It was such a wonderful stroke of fate that Li Huowang still couldn't quite believe it.

Li Huowang held his horse's reins and approached Gao Zhijian before patting the latter's chest. Gao Zhijian smiled and asked where Bai Lingmiao was.

"Shao Zi is dead and she's fine for now. Once I'm done with your issues, I will go and find her."

Li Huowang then entered the inn and got themselves the best room.

Li Huowang didn't want to hide anything from Gao Zhijian, so he told him everything that happened, including how the emperor wanted their children to kill each other to succeed to the throne.

Gao Zhijian was shocked upon realizing that his assumptions all this while were true. He also couldn't believe that there was a so-called Great Qi, and it turned out that he was the emperor of the Great Qi rather than the emperor of the Great Liang. Apparently, he had to become an emperor to save both worlds.

Gao Zhijian's hands were shaking as he took off his shirt, revealing the scar on his chest that Li Huowang had made in the past.

Li Huowang's story was so shocking that he couldn't quite believe it, but he was relieved to find that he wasn't crazy. His

memories were real, and Senior Li had truly killed him once.

Li Huowang placed the round jade pendant onto the table and slid it toward Gao Zhijian. He had used it to exchange for a horse, and he managed to get it back for Gao Zhijian.

“I don’t know whether this is good for you or not, but it's your true identity.” Li Huowang sighed with worry.

Any normal person would have jumped with joy upon knowing that they'd soon become the emperor who'd rule above all, but Li Huowang had seen the royal family's evil behind the scenes. In other words, Li Huowang was deliberately pushing his friend into the lion’s pit, but he had no choice. It was the only way to save both the Liang Kingdom and the Qi Kingdom.

Gao Zhijian stared at the pendant for almost an hour before he picked it up and muttered, “Senior... Senior Li! I-I-I'm glad... to help you!”

Gao Zhijian stood up and left the room with conviction. He had decided to become the emperor. Once he was the emperor, no one would dare to bully Xiaoman and the others.

Xiaoman should be willing to marry me once I've become the emperor, right?

Li Huowang and Li Sui followed after Gao Zhijian. They were ready to escort their friend to the throne.

Gao Zhijian walked straight on the long road to reach the palace. He stood tall, and his expression had changed drastically as if his memories as an emperor had awakened.

“It's you again! You really want to die, huh?! Prepare the ballistas!”

Gao Zhijian raised the pendant high up in the air, showing it toward the troops at the palace gates. A few moments later, the palace gates were opened.

A group of eunuchs and consorts rushed out and surrounded Gao Zhijian. They groomed his hair and gave him the dragon’s robe

to wear.

“You found him?” the Imperial Preceptor asked, frowning as he approached Li Huowang.

Clearly, the Imperial Preceptor had used a secret method to verify Gao Zhijian’s identity.

Li Huowang didn’t reply; he was unwittingly transfixed on his friend, who had just become an emperor.

“We had nine descendants of the previous emperor, but you killed so many of them. If you hadn’t killed them, we wouldn’t have needed to find someone from the Qi Kingdom to maintain the Liang Kingdom’s prosperity. Tell me, just what are you trying to do here?!” Huangfu Tiangang exclaimed, pointing his sword shrouded in purple lightning at Li Huowang. The Imperial Preceptor was about to do something to Li Huowang.

However, Gao Zhijian noticed it and roared, “What?! What?! What are you doing?!”

The Imperial Preceptor saw Gao Zhijian wearing the dragon robe, and he lowered his arms in frustration. Then, he bowed to Gao Zhijian and said, “Huangfu Tiangang greets the emperor!”

Gao Zhijian scoffed and waved his sleeve before he left for the palace under the guidance of the eunuchs and consorts.

Li Huowang glanced at the Imperial Preceptor before bringing Li Sui inside the palace.

More and more people joined the procession of consorts and eunuchs as they approached the palace. By the time they arrived at the main palace, the procession now had a few hundred people.

Gao Zhijian himself was in a sedan.

Gao Zhijian was being carried up the white jade stairs that led to the entrance of the main palace when a distressed roar echoed from above.

“I’m the emperor! It’s me! Why can’t I become the emperor? You said that the sole survivor of the nine children would be the

emperor! Liars! You lied to me! All of you are liars!"

Li Huowang looked up and saw the disheveled Ji Lin. She was holding a sword and was running at Gao Zhijian in despair.

Li Huowang didn't even need to do anything. A group of old eunuchs charged out from the darkness and pinned Ji Lin to the ground.

Ji Lin struggled like a maniac. "Why?! I sacrificed everything! I paid so much! I killed my mother and my siblings! I've become evil, so why can't I become the emperor?!"

Gao Zhijian regarded her with a cold look before instructing the others to carry him into the main palace. Just like that, the procession continued, and no one spared Ji Lin even a glance.

Just a few moments ago, these eunuchs and consorts were still treating Ji Lin as if she were the emperor.

Li Huowang was the only one paying attention to Ji Lin. He stood by her side and helped her up before patting the dust off of her clothes. "You said that you didn't want to become the emperor. You said that you only wanted to survive. Your dream has come true. You're no longer the emperor, and no one wants your life. You ought to be happy about this."

Ji Lin pushed Li Huowang away and threw a tantrum. "I threw away everything to become the emperor! I'd have nothing left without that identity!"

Li Huowang actually thought that Ji Lin was a decent person when he first met her during that festival, so he found her particularly pitiful in her current state.

Li Huowang hugged her and patted her back lightly. "If you don't know where to go, then visit me. I'm going to help you one more time."

With that, Li Huowang turned and started walking toward the main palace.

Before he could even reach the landing of the stairs, he caught

a whiff of the distinct smell of blood behind him. Li Huowang came to a halt and turned around to find Ji Lin sprawled out on the ground, drenched in a pool of her own blood. Her vivid crimson blood formed a stark contrast to the white jade stairs as it dripped down, creating a crimson pool at the bottom of the stairs.

“Dad, she’s dead.”

“Yeah, she’s dead.”

Chapter 571 - Ascension

“Hold the plate~ We bow down in worship~ Praise be to the Heavens~ May everyone prosper~”

There was a grand altar in the palace of the Liang Kingdom, and it was built to absorb and amplify the voices of the old eunuchs, allowing their voices to spread far and wide.

Hundreds of officials were standing below the grand altar, and their hands holding bone plates were raised as they knelt toward Gao Zhijian on the east.

The drummers around the altar displayed their perfect coordination to play a rhythm.

Li Huowang and Li Sui were standing far away on a roof, and they were staring at Gao Zhijian’s face hidden behind the veil of his crown.

“Dad, how much longer must we stand here? I’m hungry,” Li Sui asked. She had no idea what was happening, so she decided to focus on her needs instead.

“Soon.”

“Hold the plate~ We bow down in worship~ Praise be to the Earth~ May everyone prosper~”

The eunuchs' feminine voices pervaded the plaza as they chanted in unison.

The officials raised the bone plates in their hands once more and knelt toward Gao Zhijian on the north.

“Hold the plate~ We bow down in worship~ Praise be to the Emperor~ May everyone prosper~”

The scene of Gao Zhijian moving through the cardinal positions under the guidance of the eunuchs made Li Huowang feel weird.

His friend, who traveled with him and went through life-or-

death situations, was about to become the emperor.

Regardless of how good their relationship was in the past, their relationship was bound to change today.

Ji Lin was forced to turn ruthless in the palace, and Li Huowang didn't know how much would the simple Gao Zhijian change. He hoped that Gao Zhijian would maintain his character and not turn into someone despicable.

He was thinking about this when he saw Gao Zhijian being escorted down the altar by the eunuchs.

Li Huowang jumped down and asked the Imperial Preceptor, "Lord Imperial Preceptor. Is the ceremony over?"

"It's not going to end so soon! After praying to the Heavens, Earth, and the Emperor, he would still need to go and pray in the temple," the Imperial Preceptor coldly said, "Er Jiu, I won't look into the transgression you've made in the past, but you must understand that the Dragon Vein will affect the entire kingdom. If something bad happens to the Dragon Vein, you'll get swept up in the resulting catastrophe as well for as long as you're still living in this world."

"Oh." Li Huowang nodded and followed Gao Zhijian to the temple. He was worried about Gao Zhijian, and he wanted to look out for the latter himself.

Since it was an important ceremony, the Imperial Preceptor and the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau would send someone over to monitor everything. However, Gao Zhijian was one of his own, so Li Huowang would rather trust himself to do the job rather than trust others that they could do it.

Li Huowang turned invisible and followed Gao Zhijian before reaching the entrance of the temple.

The officials, eunuchs, and the consorts stopped outside. Only the old eunuchs brought Gao Zhijian inside the temple.

No one stopped Li Huowang as he walked into the temple, but

he could feel the gazes of many people boring down on him from the dark.

“You. Are you the new emperor of the Liang Kingdom? What is your surname?” A dissonant voice came from the coffin.

“Gao.”

“Such a shame. To think that our Ji family would perish... haha ...” The previous emperor chuckled sadly.

Based on his reaction, Li Huowang assumed that someone else had explained the matter to the previous emperor.

Under the guidance of the eunuchs, Gao Zhijian personally placed the tributes to the Dragon Vein and lit up three incense sticks. He stuck those incense sticks on the incense burner before kneeling three times and kowtowing nine times.

When he had just finished the final kowtow, the Imperial Preceptor rushed forward and produced a jade green scroll. He stood in front of Gao Zhijian and showed the Dragon Vein the content of the jade scroll.

It was a profound jade scroll. The exterior was jade, but its interior was a slice of paper softer than tofu that somehow had information recorded on it.

The thin paper fluttered in the air like the feathers of a phoenix or the scales of a dragon. Dense golden words flickered on the paper.

“The Heavens call for the luck of the world! This is the decree of the emperor! The previous emperor has perished and has returned to the five elements! With the grace of the Heavens, we beseech the current emperor to uphold the mission of the past emperors, to join their ranks, and to follow in their footsteps!” the Imperial Preceptor recited. The roars of a dragon echoed from the depths of the coffin, and the roar resonated with the Imperial Preceptor’s voice.

A powerful pressure manifested from the coffin, and everyone

found it difficult to breathe. They only felt better after prostrating on the ground.

Li Huowang pulled Li Sui behind him when he felt something invisible emerge from the coffin to envelop Gao Zhijian.

Gao Zhijian's skin broke open like dragon scales, and his blood covered every inch of his clothes.

"Zhijian! Are you okay?!" Li Huowang exclaimed. He had just raised his right leg when two old eunuchs holding golden horse-hair whisks knelt in front of him.

"Please rest easy. Our Lord is currently shouldering the entire luck of the Liang Kingdom. Nothing must go wrong here."

The two old eunuchs were kneeling, but the tingling on Li Huowang's neck told him that he'd be decapitated if he were to take one more step.

Realizing that this was part of the procedure, Li Huowang stopped worrying and observed the scene with Li Sui.

Soon, Gao Zhijian's body started changing. He became similar to the emperors in the coffin as he sported dragon claws, whiskers, and horns.

Gao Zhijian raised his claws and pulled something in the air. At the same time, everything came to a halt. The powerful presence from within the coffin vanished as well.

Li Huowang found it strange. Gao Zhijian was far from becoming the Dragon Vein, but his aura had changed to resemble one.

The ceremony was over, and Li Huowang didn't need anyone to tell him that. The Liang Kingdom's luck was on Gao Zhijian's shoulders now, and he had truly become the Emperor of the Great Liang.

Senior Li, do you see this? The Qi Kingdom is saved. Li Huowang gingerly stroked the spine sword and sighed. He suddenly remembered the little girl who had cried until her voice became

hoarse. *She's going to live at the very least.*

The old monk's illusion was even more excited than Li Huowang as he said, "Daoist, you did a good deed! This is a major good deed! You've saved so many people that you'd automatically become a Bodhisattva in your next life."

Li Huowang couldn't care less about that. He was more concerned about the fact that Zhuge Yuan had deceived him.

"If one wants to be successful in politics, one must bring fresh changes to it first. One must follow the rules set by one's predecessors. One must be kind and gracious to start a new rule," Huangfu Tiangang said; he was still reciting sentences that were too difficult for Li Huowang to understand.

However, Li Huowang deemed those words as unimportant, as the most important step was over.

The remaining steps were simply for formalities' sake.

Taking one last look at Gao Zhijian's back, Li Huowang pulled Li Sui outside and said, "Suisui, it's time for us to leave."

Chapter 572 - Change

It was time to do his own things now that everything was over. There was no need to say goodbye to Gao Zhijian, as Li Huowang had never been such a sentimental individual.

“Dad, I’m hungry,” Li Sui said as they exited the temple.

“I know. Let’s go eat something before rescuing your mother.”

“Yay!” Li Sui nodded repeatedly in delight, and her black hair bobbed with every single nod. Despite her delicate demeanor, she was giving off a mischievous air.

“Why are you still in that corpse? Come out now. It’s inauspicious,” Li Huowang said. He reached out for Li Sui’s head to try and take it away.

“Ah~ I don’t want to! Noooo~” Several tentacles came out from Li Sui’s clothes and grabbed Princess Anping’s head. “Dad, I like this one. It’s fun. The people aren’t afraid of me while I’m wearing this.”

Realizing that Li Sui wasn’t going to listen to him, Li Huowang retracted his hand. He was fine with it, too. He was just concerned that perhaps Li Sui would stubbornly refuse to let go of the corpse once it started rotting. If that happened, then Li Sui would look even more terrifying by then.

But... Princess Anping has been dead for so long, yet there are still no signs of decomposition. Can the Black Taisui stop a corpse from rotting? Li Huowang stared at his daughter’s jade-like face.

“Hahaha~!” A loud laughter caught his attention.

Li Huowang turned and found the illusion of a Sitting Oblivion Dao member laughing next to him.

“What? Was our conversation that funny?”

The Sitting Oblivion Dao illusion laughed harder rather than

replying.

“Crazy bastard.” Li Huowang ignored the illusion and walked toward the exit of the palace with Li Sui.

However, the illusion was still laughing, and he laughed so loud that his voice echoed throughout Shangjing.

Rumble!

The sky suddenly changed, and the ground trembled violently.

“Li Sui! Grab me!” Li Huowang stabbed the purple-tasseled sword into the ground to stabilize himself amidst the earthquake. Something felt familiar about it, and it was bad news.

The earthquake lasted for an hour, and Li Huowang was relieved to find that the outcome wasn't so bad. At the very least, the palace didn't collapse, nor did he find himself at the edge of a cliff.

“*Hahahahaha!* ” An arrogant-sounding laughter rang out. Li Huowang realized that it was coming from the temple!

“*Hahahahaha!* ”

Li Huowang, the officials, eunuchs, and the consorts were in disbelief as the temple collapsed with a loud bang. The next moment, a long chain of humans took to the sky.

It was the Liang Kingdom's Dragon Vein, and the one at the head of the dragon was none other than Gao Zhijian!

Gao Zhijian was laughing so arrogantly that his laughter sounded the same as the laughter of the illusion next to Li Huowang.

“What's happening?!” Li Huowang held his sword and ran toward the Dragon Vein.

“Hahaha! Do you really think that a Shai Zi is going to die so easily? Try and recall what's in Gao Zhijian's head! Hahaha!” the illusion exclaimed as he laughed.

Li Huowang combed through his memories, and his pupils constricted upon realizing what the illusion was talking about.

Two years ago, Gao Zhijian suffered a fatal wound after a metal dice pierced his head during his battle with Er Bing!

Putting two and two together, Li Huowang soon deduced what was going on.

Shai Zi was still alive! His death was just a show, and he was using that metal dice to control Gao Zhijian!

“Do you really think that the Storyteller is smarter than a Shai Zi? What a joke! The Storyteller has always been a chess piece on Shai Zi’s board, and it remained true even after his death! Shai Zi knew that the Storyteller would save the Great Qi no matter what! *Hahahaha! Aaaaah*, this is so refreshing! I’ve waited so long for this sight. Shai Zi, you’re amazing! *Hahahaha!* I’m so happy!” The illusion faded away amidst his arrogant-sounding laughter.

Meanwhile, Gao Zhijian wasn’t even looking at Li Huowang. Rather, he was staring at the gray sky.

“Yinyang Doulao! You old fart! *Hahaha!* You definitely didn’t see this coming, did you? Do you really think that you can turn me into your Twisted One? What a joke! I will choose my own fate. Now that I have the human race’s luck, I really want to see what you can do with me. You just got lucky in the beginning, and do you really think that I can’t do what you can do? Listen here; change is coming, as I can change the Heavens!”

Gao Zhijian rose slowly into the sky, dragging the past emperors in a golden chain. The roaring of dragons echoed from the past emperor’s mouth, and Gao Zhijian’s figure was undulating as if he were a real dragon.

“What’s wrong? Scared? I’ve tricked you, and I’ve scolded you, but you can’t do anything to me! You can’t even manifest your true body. You must be frustrated, right? *Hahahaha~* Stay frustrated! I hope you die from frustration! Don’t worry; I’ve made sure to save the best part for last. As a sign of respect, I will steal your Heavenly Dao away!”

“Gao Zhijian, wake up!” Li Huowang exclaimed. His figure had erupted into a mighty conflagration, and he ordered Peng Longteng to throw him into the sky.

However, the Dragon Vein extinguished his flames before he could even get close to it.

A golden chain swept toward Li Huowang. He wanted to avoid the oncoming attack by projecting his illusion downward, but he found himself powerless before the Dragon Vein!

The grotesque noise of cracking bones echoed as Li Huowang was swatted away by the golden chain.

Li Sui extended her tentacles, catching Li Huowang right as he struck the ground.

“Dad, are you okay?!”

Li Huowang spat out blood as he stood up. “Go away! It’s dangerous here!”

“Dad! No, I want to help you!” Li Sui exclaimed, disobeying him for the first time.

Li Huowang wanted to say something when the sky darkened. He looked up and saw the Dragon Vein blotting out the sky before him.

Gao Zhijian was just a few meters away from Li Huowang, and he was staring at Li Huowang with a twisted face.

Chapter 573 - Shai Zi

“Hong Zhong! Hahahaha!” Gao Zhijian smiled viciously as he stared at Li Huowang with his twisted face. He didn’t even blink as he continued, “This is all thanks to you. If it hadn't been for you, it would have been impossible for me to take over the Great Qi’s emperor body and the rare Hundred Souls Layered Body. If it hadn't been for you, the Ji family of the Liang Kingdom wouldn’t have been annihilated. If it hadn't been for you, Zhuge Yuan wouldn't have followed our plan! Don’t worry, I’m a good man. Since we did this together, we should enjoy the rewards together!” Gao Zhijian plunged downward and extended his dragon claw toward Li Huowang to take the latter with him to the sky.

Li Huowang gulped a mouthful of his own saliva as he extended his left arm.

Just as his left hand touched Gao Zhijian’s hand, Li Huowang immediately chopped it off.

The severed left hand shot toward Gao Zhijian's face.

The bone spikes scraped Gao Zhijian’s scaly face, producing sparks. Gao Zhijian’s smile slowly disappeared as he said, “Hong Zhong. You're going too far here. I’m just trying to help you. How could you repay my kindness with hatred?”

Swoosh!

A headless young woman hurled Li Huowang toward Gao Zhijian, and the latter spread his arms as if to welcome Li Huowang.

The two clashed in mid-air; Gao Zhijian used his horns to stop Li Huowang’s purple-tasseled sword. Gao Zhijian parried Li Huowang's sword attack and sent the sword flying upward, which made Li Huowang vulnerable to further attacks.

A dragon claw wrapped with golden chains made a beeline for

Li Huowang's chest.

At the critical juncture, Li Huowang manifested Peng Longteng's figure, and Peng Longteng's large figure clad in heavy armor blocked the attack.

Unfortunately, Gao Zhijian's claws pierced Peng Longteng, tearing open a large hole in her chest.

The Dragon Vein was like a stick that shot past Peng Longteng's chest and approached Li Huowang at terrifying speeds.

Li Huowang raised his sword once more, and Gao Zhijian raised his horns without hesitation before swinging his head into the sword.

Gao Zhijian was confident in his move, as his horns were harder than Li Huowang's sword.

I can't continue like this!

Li Huowang was busy trying to figure out a solution when his instincts warned him of a danger. He quickly crushed his left eyeball.

A strange light enveloped Gao Zhijian, slowing him down drastically.

Li Huowang had just sighed in relief when the Dragon Vein flew toward him from behind.

Li Huowang jumped up and barely dodged the attack, but a dragon claw descended upon him, grabbing him by the neck. Before Li Huowang could even struggle, several dragon claws came from all directions. They grabbed his limbs and raised him high up into the sky. Li Huowang's vision swam as five different forces tugged at him from five different directions. Just then, a grotesque cracking noise echoed as Li Huowang's joints were dislocated. However, this was just the beginning of his suffering as his muscles were slowly being torn apart beneath the tugging of the dragon claws.

"Hahaha! Hear me out, people of Shangjing! Look closely! I'll show you all how to do a proper dismemberment! Those with

money, please come here and support me, while those without money can just cheer for me!” Gao Zhijian shouted, and his voice echoed throughout Shangjing.

“AAAAAAH!” Li Huowang roared; he struggled to get out of his predicament to no avail.

Right as Li Huowang was about to be pulled apart, several white lotus the size of a house came from out of nowhere. They moved swiftly and surrounded the Dragon Vein.

Someone was sitting on the lotuses, and their chanting soon filled the air.

“The azure sun rises, and the white sun rises, too! The Heavenly Mater protects all. The red sun sets, and the violet sun sets as well. May peace befall everyone!”

The clouds rolled, and something unspeakable manifested. The Dragon Vein’s scales felt something, and they curled upward.

Gao Zhijian ignored Li Huowang and attacked the people on the lotuses.

This was Li Huowang’s opportunity to escape. His temples throbbed painfully as he willed Peng Longteng to appear.

Peng Longteng pried Li Huowang from the dragon claws, and he plummeted weakly toward the ground.

As he fell, Li Huowang saw someone that wasn’t supposed to be here, so he thought that he was seeing things.

A young woman in white was floating like an Immortal before him. Most importantly, she looked incredibly familiar.

The young woman waved her hand, and a long silk scarf floated over and covered Li Huowang before pulling him lightly toward one of the lotus.

An ointment with the consistency of pork lard was brushed on Li Huowang’s wound. The pain instantly disappeared, and he felt so comfortable that he felt like he was sprawled out on a bed of cotton.

When he snapped back to reality, Li Huowang realized that he was on Bai Lingmiao's lap.

"Miaomiao?" Li Huowang asked hesitantly. He wasn't sure what was happening going on as he stared at the young woman before him.

A white lotus motif was on Bai Lingmiao's forehead, and her face was devoid of emotions. Moreover, her eyes were covered with a long white piece of silk cloth.

"Miaomiao, it's really you!" Li Huowang hugged her after becoming sure of her identity.

Bai Lingmiao hesitated before hugging him back.

"Where were you all this while? I was so worried about you!" Li Huowang exclaimed, hugging her tightly. Li Huowang had been missing Bai Lingmiao so much to the extent that he'd stuff her into his pockets if he could do so.

"Senior Li, didn't I send you a letter? Did you not receive it?" Bai Lingmiao asked. Her voice was still soft, but there was no longer any warmth in it.

Li Huowang's heart skipped a little, and he looked at Gao Zhijian. Roughly half of the lotuses in the air had vanished.

"Hong Zhong, what did I say? I told you that I didn't kidnap your woman. We're the Sitting Oblivion Dao. We don't do something like that, but... we're supposed to deceive people, you know that, right? I just deceived you into thinking that I had kidnapped her. Don't be mad at me for that, okay? This was all your doing. I did nothing here, *hehehe*~ "

Li Huowang glared at Gao Zhijian. "Didn't you say that you'd only use the truth to trick others? Is that what you meant by truth?"

" *Hahaha!* You actually believed the words of a Sitting Oblivion Dao member? *Hahaha!* " Shai Zi laughed in mid-air.

Chapter 574 - Xuan Pin

Gao Zhijian laughed in the air and swirled around like a dragon.

More and more lotuses appeared in the air as he laughed.

“Once the fighting starts, bring Li Sui away and wait for me at Cowheart Village.” Li Huowang took out his bag of torture tools to open up his abdomen.

However, Bai Lingmiao's cold hand grabbed his hand.

“Senior Li, you don't have to do that. I can help you now.”

“White Lotus Sect, do you really think that you can stop me?”

Staring at the white lotus on her forehead and the lotuses around them, Li Huowang realized that many things had happened to Bai Lingmiao while she was missing.

Even though he wanted to know more, he knew that now wasn't the time for questions.

“Do they listen to you?” Li Huowang asked Bai Lingmiao.

“Yes, they do.”

“Great. See if you can ask them to restrict Gao Zhijian for a small period of time.” Li Huowang gripped his sword tightly as he looked at Gao Zhijian.

He had done it once, so he could do it again.

The members of the White Lotus Sect revealed their dudous as well as their cheeks with sharp metal rods sticking out of them. Several tiny bronze gourds were hanging from their ear lobes as well.

“Ready!” Bai Lingmiao shouted.

Everyone took out a small knife with a jagged edge, and they used it to tap their forehead at the same time.

“The Dao comes from the heart, but the heart spreads lies! One

must hold the true deity before the incense burner. May the true spirit guide us. We shall inform you today, so bring our orders to the nine heavens. May our wishes all come true.” The chanting noises pervaded the air, seemingly suppressing every other noise.

Gao Zhijian coiled the Dragon Vein around him and ignored the lotuses as he glared at the White Lotus Sect members with a taunting look.

“Heed my call or show yourself. The disciples pray thrice for your help. May the gods come and help us, to protect and show us the path. Guide our mouth and guide us!”

When the chanting ended, they all pointed their knives at Gao Zhijian.

Almost immediately, a face appeared on Gao Zhijian’s face. His long body froze in mid-air as the smell of incense filled the air.

To think that the White Lotus Sect would call upon the gods to take over Gao Zhijian's body... Li Huowang truly didn't expect them to make such a move.

Just then, Peng Longteng grabbed Li Huowang and hurled him at Gao Zhijian.

Just like what he had done in the Qi Kingdom, Li Huowang thrust his sword toward Gao Zhijian's back. His goal was to sever that connection just like last time.

It seemed that his attack was going to succeed, as Gao Zhijian looked like he had no intentions of avoiding the attack.

Just as Li Huowang’s sword was about to enter Gao Zhijian’s chest, the latter smiled and taunted, “You actually want to kill me? You better think twice. Kill me, and the Liang Kingdom’s Dragon Vein is done for~”

Li Huowang's sword moved away slightly, eliciting a peal of laughter from Gao Zhijian.

However, Gao Zhijian moved, allowing Li Huowang to stab him.

“Hong Zhong. We're not soldiers, so we don't have to fight like this. We're members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. We fight with our brains! We're weak, and everyone knows that we're weak, so why should I fight you head-on? Now that I've become the Dragon Vein itself, you can't even kill me even if I close my eyes and let you kill me. *Hehehehe*~ This is what it means to fight with our brains!”

Shai Zi taunted Li Huowang. Shai Zi was right; he could fight Li Huowang freely, but the latter couldn't do the same. He couldn't afford to hurt the Dragon Vein!

Shai Zi reached out to grab Li Huowang when several fingers flew toward them from down below.

Li Huowang looked down and saw a group of people in black robes standing on the rooftops. He could see Zu Yi among the black-robed figures.

The members of many different sects had come as well, and they had surrounded the palace.

Rumble!

The earth shook slightly; a large statue was running toward Gao Zhijian, and it was the Bodhisattva statue carved on the face of the mountain! It had come to life!

The large Bodhisattva lowered his body and stared at Gao Zhijian with eyes larger than a house.

However, Gao Zhijian merely laughed at the sight.

“Hehehe! Looks like the big shots are back. However, do you really think that you can trap me here? You can't fool me. I'm the Sitting Oblivion Dao. Xuan Pin, you are too late~ I've taken what I needed.”

Gao Zhijian opened his mouth and started swallowing his own tail. His mouth widened as he gobbled up the previous emperors. He devoured them as fast as he could until the entire Dragon Vein was gone.

The world around Li Huowang became hazy. When he came to

his senses, he noticed the illusions around him fading away. His vision swam once more, and he found himself falling to the ground with Bai Lingmiao.

There weren't that many people; the rest were just illusions, except for the members of the Ao Jing Sect and the White Lotus Sect.

The Chief was wearing the same red robes as he wore the last time Li Huowang saw him, and he was kneeling on the ground. He was in the middle of healing the Imperial Preceptor's injuries.

The Chief's six hands snatched the Imperial Preceptor's gaping chest wound, leaving behind nothing but a patch of gray.

"Shai Zi attacked me while I was doing the prayers! If I hadn't been prepared, I would've died for real!" Huangfu Tiangang gnashed his teeth as blood dripped down the corner of his mouth.

"Stop talking for now." The Chief took a piece of color from a corpse and placed it on the monochrome wound of the Imperial Preceptor.

Li Huowang looked away from the Chief and realized that Gao Zhijian and the Dragon Vein had vanished!

Where did Shai Zi go? What is he going to do with the Dragon Vein?

The cogs in Li Huowang's mind were just about to turn and think about it when Huangfu Tiangang grabbed his sword and swung it at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang raised his sword to defend himself when his vision swam. The next moment, he found himself and the Imperial Preceptor sitting on a table while facing each other.

"Tiangang, do you really think that this is the time to start an internal strife?" the Chief said, sitting down before the table.

"He brought that man here! He's connected to everything that has happened so far! He's working with that Shai Zi! I have to get rid of him now, or we'll be in even more trouble next time!"

Huangfu Tiangang exclaimed, slamming his hand on the table.

Translator's Thoughts

The almighty Xuan Pin, Chief of Liang Kingdom's Surveillance Bureau. Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin!



Chapter 575 - Twisted One

Li Huowang was furious at the Imperial Preceptor's remark.

“So you think I'm suspicious? What about you?! You never noticed what was wrong with Ji Lin until it was too late, and the same goes for Gao Zhijian! Are you kind of useless here? Or was Shai Zi right when he said that you're his spy?!”

Zhuge Yuan's plan was flawless. Gao Zhijian could save the Qi Kingdom by becoming the emperor!

If it wasn't for the Imperial Preceptor making those mistakes over and over again, things wouldn't have come to this point.

Huangfu Tiangang was enraged. He shoved his hands into his robes and was about to do something when the Chief wiped away the gray patch on Huangfu Tiangang's chest, revealing the same wound from earlier.

Huangfu Tiangang felt drained as if his soul had been taken away. He pressed on his wound and stumbled back into his chair with an agonized look.

“Enough. That is the end of that issue. I will need both of you to keep quiet about this issue. I know that the two of you aren't working for that Shai Zi. This plan wasn't made by that Shai Zi alone; the Shai Zis from both the Liang Kingdom and the Qi Kingdom had a hand in this plan. It's not strange that the Imperial Preceptor failed to see through their scheme.”

The tense atmosphere was diffused so fast that Li Huowang didn't know what to say.

This was indeed not the time to be fighting each other. Dealing with that Shai Zi from earlier was the top priority issue. The Dragon

Vein was basically the kingdom's future. If Shai Zi ended up tampering it, the entire world would be in danger.

“What happened after my departure?” The Chief’s layered voice rang out.

Li Huowang looked at Huangfu Tiangang’s ashen face and recounted the experience to the Chief.

More and more people joined in on the conversation, including Bai Lingmiao, Zu Yi, and a skinny Daoist with a solemn expression.

A defeating silence hung above everyone once Li Huowang was done.

Li Huowang looked at the Chief and saw the hazy darkness under the robes. He had a feeling that there was nothing in there.

The Chief suddenly stood up. “Shai Zi has taken the Dragon Vein, so I will keep it short. I hope everyone understands what’s happening here. We need to reclaim the Dragon Vein, so you’re going to listen to my orders, right?”

The Chief’s words sounded like a question but it was more like an order.

Everyone needed a leader, and the Chief’s status and strength meant that he was more than qualified to be a leader.

“Chief, I don’t mind listening to your orders, but can you tell me why Shai Zi has decided to take the Dragon Vein away? What is he going to do with it? I don’t want to go in blind.”

Li Huowang had heard what Shai Zi had shouted to the skies earlier, but he couldn’t understand it.

The Chief said nothing and stared deeply at Li Huowang. Then, he glanced at Bai Lingmiao and the Ao Jing Sect members.

“He wants to get rid of the future where he’d inevitably become the Doulao’s Twisted One. He wants to use the Liang Kingdom’s luck to sever the bond between him and Doulao.” The same layered voice from earlier echoed from beneath the red robes.

“What’s a Twisted One?” Li Huowang asked again. He wanted

to know it, as everything in this world seemed to be covered in a layer of veil.

“Cause and effect. The Twisted Ones are the ‘cause’ of the Simings,” the skinny Daoist answered Li Huowang’s question.

“Cause?”

“That’s right, ‘cause.’ Only with a ‘cause’ can a Siming have an ‘effect’ ‘Without it, they’d cease to exist.”

“What’s a ‘cause’? Can you stop answering me in riddles?! Explain it to me properly!”

“Everything has a cause and effect, including the Simings. Their ‘cause’ is the past, so the Twisted Ones are the past selves of the Simings. If the Simings controlling the Heavenly Daos are large trees, then the Twisted Ones are their seeds.”

“I am a Twisted One, meaning that my life will forever be entangled with the Three Ancient Ones both in life and death.” Li Huowang suddenly recalled Zhuge Yuan’s words.

Twisted Ones are the seeds of the Simings? Does that mean that both the seeds and trees exist at the same time? Does that mean the Three Ancient Ones is Zhuge Yuan?! Li Huowang trembled at the thought of it alone.

“No, wait! Zhuge Yuan was the Twisted One of the Three Ancient Ones. Since you said that the Twisted Ones are the past of the Simings, does that mean that the Three Ancient Ones ceased to exist the moment he died?” Li Huowang asked, pointing at the rafters in shock.

“*Hehehe*, the world is large. Who told you that they only have one Twisted One? To prevent their demise, they’d choose multiple Twisted Ones, and some of them were even manipulated to stay under the control of the other Simings. Since Twisted Ones are the past of the Simings, they could be influenced by the other Simings. That’s why Shai Zi wanted to sever the bond between him and Doulao to get rid of his Twisted One status. I think that rather than

Zhuge Yuan getting tricked by Shai Zi or acting in his own version of justice, his Siming, the Three Ancient Ones, wanted to help Shai Zi instead.”

“ *Ahem.* ” the Chief interrupted, “He is the Chief of Si Qi’s Surveillance Bureau, Zheng Boqiao.”

Everyone looked at the skinny Daoist.

The skinny Daoist nodded and waved his whisk. “I follow the path of the Immortals. Nice to meet you all.”

Li Huowang was even more confused after hearing Zheng Boqiao’s explanation. He truly didn’t expect that the Twisted Ones were the past of the Simings.

What a crazy world! Li Huowang was truly stupefied to know that the powerful Simings controlling the Heavenly Dao didn’t have a past and had to find one for themselves!

“Ridiculous. How can the Twisted Ones be the past of the Simings? Those words are a load of lies that the Surveillance Bureau has been using to deceive others,” said one of the Ao Jing Sect members. The Ao Jing Sect member was wearing a large robe stained with blood, and the image of a bloody skeleton could be seen on his robe. “The Simings were born the moment the universe took shape. They were born to hold the Heavenly Daos.”

“ *Hehehehe.* ” Zheng Boqiao chuckled hoarsely. “Of course, every Siming has a different way of finding their own Twisted Ones. They also have different names. Ba-Hui chooses its Siming based on the Cang-Qiang Ascension. Those Twisted Ones chosen through that method are who you call elders.”

Li Huowang was shocked. *I did that three times. Does that mean I’m Ba-Hui’s Twisted One?*

Chapter 576 - Plan

A fight was about to happen when Xuan Pin raised his hands, silencing everyone in the hall.

“Enough. Don't forget that the Dragon Vein of the Liang Kingdom is still in the hands of that Shai Zi!” the Chief said sternly. Then, his voice softened as he added, “Do not panic. That Shai Zi has managed to escape, but I have a way of finding his whereabouts.”

Shangguan Yuting popped out from the Imperial Preceptor's robes and taunted Li Huowang briefly before melting into the Chief's body.

The Imperial Preceptor's mustache wriggled a bit, and he couldn't look the Chief in the eyes.

Zheng Boqiao took over the conversation, saying, “Xuan Pin can easily find that Shai Zi, and we can also easily kill him. However, it would be extremely difficult to kill Shai Zi without harming the emperor. He's our final emperor, and his death is equivalent to the death of the Liang Kingdom. If the Liang Kingdom falls, the other regions will quickly follow. Even the grass in Qing Qiu has become yellow these days.”

Zheng Boqiao looked at the Ao Jing Sect and Bai Lingmiao. “Also, it seems that only Ba-Hui and the Heavenly Mater want to help us. *Sigh*... There is a catastrophe ahead of us, but everyone is still focused on their own hidden agenda.”

Li Huowang suddenly came up with a thought. “Can't we ask the military to help us? We have many soldiers, so it shouldn't be difficult for us to capture Shai Zi with their help.”

The Liang Kingdom's Imperial Preceptor snorted and said, “You make it sound so easy, but we don't have the authority to do so.

How are we going to do that? The military is the sword of the emperor. Not only has Shai Zi completed the succession ceremony to become the official emperor, but he's also become the Dragon Vein. And he's a Sitting Oblivion Dao, so he excels at deceiving people. Can you really say for sure that the military won't turn their swords on us if we involve them in this affair?"

Everyone's face fell at the Imperial Preceptor's remark. Shai Zi was technically the emperor of the Liang Kingdom, as he had indeed completed the succession ceremony in front of the officials.

They knew that Shai Zi was the fake emperor, but those working in the imperial family would sentence the Surveillance Bureau, the Ao Jing Sect, and the White Lotus Sect for treason the moment they heard them discussing killing Shai Zi.

Li Huowang stared deeply at the Imperial Preceptor before coming up with another plan.

"Chief, there's a dice in Gao Zhijian's head. It should be Shai Zi's body or consciousness. Take control of the Dragon Vein, and I will think of a way to dig out the dice."

Li Huowang told them what he knew since they were all going to do this together.

"Easier said than done; splitting his head is one thing, but how are you going to make sure that he remains alive?" Li Huowang hesitated before telling them, "This should not be an issue. We can find a way to shove an artifact into his body that would resurrect him. For example, an artifact made from the skin of a Strayed One? I saw Prince Ren using it once when I assassinated him."

Li Huowang had actually given that artifact to Gao Zhijian, but he wasn't sure whether Shai Zi had discovered it yet or not.

The Chief was silent. Li Huowang was confused. He looked up and saw both him and the Chief shrinking rapidly until they were the size of ants.

Li Huowang looked up at the massive Bai Lingmiao and saw

that she was listening to the others talking to each other. No one noticed that something was wrong.

However, Li Huowang didn't panic, as he knew that these changes were the result of the Chief's illusion techniques.

"There are some things that I need to talk to you about face-to-face and by ourselves," said the Chief. He had also become as small as an ant, just like Li Huowang.

Li Huowang looked at the Chief and found the latter familiar for some reason, but he couldn't quite understand why.

"Who are you?" Li Huowang asked about the darkness hidden in the red robes.

"I am Xuan Pin, the Chief of the Liang Kingdom's Surveillance Bureau, but I can also be anyone. Who I am is not important; the important part here is that I need you to get past the danger later. This doesn't concern you alone; it concerns the late Zhuge Yuan as well."

Li Huowang frowned and looked at the others. "Only me? Why can't we talk to each other?"

"Because I need to use your status as a Strayed One..."

Li Huowang felt his hair standing on its end. He felt naked before the Chief.

"You are cultivating the 'Truth,' right? I can help you use your status as a Strayed One to deal with Shai Zi."

Li Huowang managed to calm down his racing heart, but he still felt uneasy. "Why me? Is my method useless?"

"Yes, it's useless. Because our opponent is Shai Zi. The little trick won't fool him. We shouldn't follow the path he made for us, or we'll be forced to get into a passive state. We should just do our own thing while he does his own thing."

Li Huowang slowly nodded. "What's your plan?"

"Fight Shai Zi when you meet him again, but no matter what he says, you must think of it as the truth and make it come true!

Leave the rest to me.”

“What?” Li Huowang was astonished. He didn't expect to hear such a reckless plan. “But I'm not strong enough yet. I don't think I can do that.”

“I'm going to help you, so don't worry about it. Just do as I say.”

Li Huowang went silent, mulling over the plan. The Chief wasn't in a rush and waited patiently for Li Huowang's answer.

“Alright, I will do it, but I need you to understand that this matter is related to the survival of the Liang Kingdom. I don't want it to end up like the Qi Kingdom.”

“Of course. We're both going to deal with Shai Zi, so we are on the same side,” said the Chief. The two then returned to their original size, but everyone didn't notice anything strange.

“I've come up with a plan. All of you, prepare yourself. I will go and collect something first. We'll go after the Liang Kingdom's Dragon Vein in two hours,” the Chief said, and his figure abruptly scattered like sand.

Since the Chief had already come up with a plan, the rest left to prepare themselves for the oncoming war.

Li Huowang pulled Bai Lingmiao out of the hall when someone pounced on him. He pulled the skirt up to reveal Li Sui's tentacles and dog skull.

“She's not who you think she is! She's just Li Sui.”

“Oh.” Bai Lingmiao nodded slightly.

“Miaomiao, what's wrong with you?” Li Huowang asked, putting Li Sui down and holding Bai Lingmiao's arm.

Translator's Thoughts

For reference, this is how Li Sui look like right now. Credits to 格子的乱七八糟on douyin!



Chapter 577 - Heavenly Mater

Li Huowang carefully stepped down the white jade stairs while looking at Bai Lingmiao nervously.

He slowly undid the white silk ribbon covering her eyes, revealing her white eyes.

Her irises were no longer pink, and her eyes had become completely white. Bai Lingmiao looked just like a statue made out of white jade, especially with her white skin and hair.

“Senior Li, I am fine. Do not worry. I will protect you from now on.”

Bai Lingmiao slowly snuggled into Li Huowang’s embrace and smiled faintly.

Li Huowang pushed her away gently and looked at her blinded eyes.

“Miaomiao, tell me. When did you leave me? What happened? And who are they?” Li Huowang pointed at the White Lotus Sect members, who were meditating nearby.

The White Lotus Sect members were of people of different ages and sexes but all of them were wearing white overalls with a white lotus motif on their forehead.

They were sitting at specific locations inside an incomprehensible formation.

“We are the White Lotus Sect, and we made a different branch when we scattered. We have the surname ‘Lian,’ while the branch with the Saintess has the surname ‘Bai,’” explained Lian Zhibei, the person whom Li Huowang had met while hunting a spiritual sin. [1]

Lian Zhibei had a face of humility rather than the cheerfulness

that Li Huowang had seen in her long ago.

“White Lotus? Saintess?”

Bai Lingmiao held Li Huowang's hands and explained, “Lian Zhibei was the one who took me away when you were in the middle of your hysteria. Do you still remember it?”

Li Huowang could still remember it. It was when Yang Na's father carried Yang Na away from the hospital. He could still remember how hard she cried on that day. The next moment, Li Huowang then watched as Yang Na's face overlapped with Bai Lingmiao's face, while Lian Zhibei's face overlapped with the face of Yang Na's father.

“I remember.” Li Huowang sighed and nodded lightly. “But what's this about becoming the Saintess?”

“They said I've been chosen by the Heavenly Mater to become the Saintess,” Bai Lingmiao remarked, and she sounded excited as she said, “Senior Li, do you know that the Heavenly Mater actually exists?! She's actually alive, too!”

Bai Lingmiao's voice became full of longing as she added, “The Heavenly Mater is an ancient Buddha that cannot be killed. She's waiting for me to finish living my life here before accepting me in the heavens. My parents were members of the White Lotus Sect as well. Since they worshiped her throughout their entire lives, their spirit has returned to the side of the Heavenly Mater, as their fleshly body is no more.”

Li Huowang wanted to correct her, but he didn't say anything in the end. Bai Lingmiao had finally pulled herself out of despair. Was he really going to pull her back into the darkness?

“Senior Li, did you know that the Heavenly Mater told me that my parents really missed me?”

Li Huowang frowned, and his heart started to waver at Bai Lingmiao's words.

Bai Lingmiao had regressed to her previous state before she

was fed the Black Taisui. If he pulled her out of her delusion, she could return to her previous self, which was in endless torment, just like him.

“Er Jiu, you seem to not believe in the words of the Saintess? I need to tell you that what she’s saying is true! Thanks to the disturbances in the Heavens, the Heavenly Mater is back. If not, how do you explain why the sect members’ strength has improved so much? How will you explain the powers that the Saintess received from the Heavenly Mater? The White Lotus Sect is no longer the same sect that will easily get bullied by others! The descent of the Heavenly Mater means that spring has come for us as well!” Lian Zhibei exclaimed, and the other members of the White Lotus Sect shouted with her.

Li Huowang stared at Lian Zhibei and found that she had become incredibly unfamiliar. He suspected that this was her true identity and that her previous identity was fabricated.

“Senior Li, it’s not what you think. The Heavenly Mater is really back. She wishes to turn everything back to normal, just like her own piece of heaven, the Void Home. There is no pain and suffering there.”

Bai Lingmiao stroked Li Huowang’s forehead, and the scenery before Li Huowang abruptly peeled away. Using Bai Lingmiao as the medium, Li Huowang saw a dense layer of white ribbons.

There was a colossal entity before him, but the entity's figure was wrapped tightly in white ribbons. Li Huowang couldn't see the entity's true body.

Despite that, Li Huowang could still feel the unending pity and mercy radiating off the entity.

The entity was none other than the Heavenly Mater, and Li Huowang could feel her emotions, too. He sensed that she was afraid of hurting him, so she covered herself with white ribbons.

Mercy, love, and concern... Those were the emotions that Li

Huowang could feel from the Heavenly Mater, but for some reason, those emotions were a bit... different than he initially thought.

Li Huowang was intrigued by the sight before him, and he stepped forward to take a closer look at the Heavenly Mater.

However, Li Huowang was suddenly pulled back to where he was standing. He noticed the palace walls around him and realized that nothing had changed. It felt like he had just woken up from a dream.

Bai Lingmiao supported Li Huowang as she asked, “Senior Li. Did you sense it? Are you finally convinced that I’m telling you the truth?”

Li Huowang looked at Bai Lingmiao and took a step backward in shock. “So the Heavenly Mater has obtained the Heavenly Dao related to mercy?”

The pure emotions that he felt from the Heavenly Mater were similar to the extreme pain that he felt from Ba-Hui.

The Heavenly Mater did exist, and she controlled the Heavenly Dao related to mercy—at least, that was what Li Huowang knew at the moment.

“Senior Li? What are you talking about? The Heavenly Mater is the Heavenly Mater.”

“I see,” Li Huowang replied, shaking his head. Ba-Hui ruled over pain, but the Heavenly Mater ruled over mercy, so she could be considered to be benevolent.

At the very least, it was one of the better Simings out there, as it meant Bai Lingmiao was safe for now.

Retrieving the Dragon Vein was a much more pressing matter that he had to attend to, so he was more concerned with it.

Li Huowang was soon going to face a powerful enemy, so had no time to talk much about other matters.

“Don’t get too close during our fight against Shai Zi later, all right?” Li Huowang warned.

However, Bai Lingmiao shook her head lightly and replied, “Senior Li, don’t worry. I can help you using the techniques that I’ve learned from the Heavenly Mater. Didn’t I help you just now? Also, this is the will of the Heavenly Mater. If Shai Zi succeeds in his plot, the Liang Kingdom will be reduced to ashes. The White Lotus Sect is not going to let that happen.”

1. Bai(白) means white, and Lian(莲) means lotus. However, the Lian they used in the raws is a different character with the same pronunciation 连 instead of 莲. Maybe using 莲 would be too obvious and they might get captured haha 🤔

Translator's Thoughts

Aiya, I forgot to introduce you guys to the Chief of Si Qi's Surveillance Bureau. Here's how he looks like! Credits to 格子的乱七八糟on douyin!



Chapter 578 - Drum

Li Huowang was perplexed. *The Heavenly Mater has taken pity on the people? Wait, am I even dealing with the White Lotus Sect, which was infamous for burying people alive?*

Li Huowang didn't know what happened to the Heavenly Mater. He put two to two together and came to the conclusion that the Heavenly Mater had another Heavenly Dao before.

"All right, but you must know your limits. If anything goes wrong, you must run away from me. Don't get close to me because things will become dangerous if you do so."

"Don't worry. We will protect the Saintess. You don't have to worry about her." Lian Zhibei huffed with a hint of dissatisfaction.

Li Huowang ignored her and added, "Your life is the top priority. Once we're done with the issue today, we can slowly figure out the rest."

Li Huowang then hugged Bai Lingmiao. While he was enjoying Bai Lingmiao's warmth, Bai Lingmiao suddenly changed, revealing a gnarly smile. Her mouth grew wide, and a blood-red tongue emerged between her lips, wriggling in the air as if it would enter Li Huowang's ear in the next moment.

"Second Mom?"

"What?" Li Huowang let go of Bai Lingmiao and saw Li Sui staring at them.

"No, Second Mom is gone. It's just Mom."

Bai Lingmiao kissed Li Huowang's cheek and gently hugged Li Sui. "Suisui, have you been obedient?"

Li Sui took off her head and extended her tentacles upwards. "Mom, is my new head pretty? I love it. I like being a human, but my dad doesn't want me to keep it."

“Don’t listen to him. What does he know? Just keep wearing it. You look much better now.”

“I think so, too. No one is afraid of me like this, and I can talk to people, too.”

Li Huowang sighed when he saw Bai Lingmiao taking care of Li Sui. Fortunately, Bai Lingmiao appeared to be normal.

Bai Lingmiao’s appearance had astonished him too, and he was planning on discussing that with Li Sui soon.

“Come with me. We’ll meet at the east wall.” The Chief’s voice suddenly rang next to Li Huowang’s ear, making him flinch.

He looked around and saw that the others were looking around as well. Clearly, the Chief’s voice had echoed in their ears as well.

“Li Sui, let’s go,” Li Huowang said, opening his mouth. Li Sui’s dense tentacle wriggled out of Princess Anping’s corpse and entered his body through his mouth.

“Chief, I thought you needed two hours? I don’t think it has even been two hours,” Li Huowang said, speaking to the air.

“Too late. Shai Zi is doing something. He’s planning on destroying all of us as soon as possible instead of biding his time.” The Chief’s voice echoed within Li Huowang’s brain.

“Where’s that Shai Zi?”

“In the barracks.”

“What?!” Li Huowang stiffened, and he felt cold. The next instant, Peng Longteng materialized and threw him high into the air.

As Li Huowang streaked across the air, he looked down at Shangjing. He could see everything in Shangjing from up here. He saw a massive group of people beyond the east wall of Shangjing. They looked like ants in the distance, and there was a massive centipede in the middle of the ants.

Those aren’t ants! Those are the military troops! And that’s not a centipede... that’s Shai Zi!

Shai Zi had decided not to fight them head-on, and it was a decision that Li Huowang was supposed to have seen coming. Shai Zi had decided to use his identity to deceive the military!

Li Huowang landed on the ground safely, and the Chief appeared beside him without any warning.

“No time to waste. Let’s talk while moving. Shai Zi intends to trick the entire Liang Kingdom into believing that he’s the new emperor. If everyone believes in him, we’ll have to fight everyone.”

Shai Zi wanted to obtain the entire Liang Kingdom in addition to the Dragon Vein.

To make matters worse, Shai Zi was technically the newest emperor of the Liang Kingdom, and Li Huowang couldn't do anything to convince everyone otherwise.

Li Huowang gritted his teeth and started running. “Are you sure your plan is going to work? It's all over if it doesn't work!”

“I have my own plans. If you want to save the Liang Kingdom, you should have to listen to me!” the Chief exclaimed, and he floated like a ghost next to Li Huowang.

“Fine! What should we do first? I have to know what's going to happen now, as things might get messy later!”

The emperor was leading an army from the outside to take over Shangjing. The civilians were terrified to hear the footsteps of the massive army outside; gossip and rumors spread like wildfire, but it couldn't be helped, as everyone was unsure of what was happening.

Li Huowang used Li Sui's tentacles to scale the city walls.

The White Lotus Sect and the Ao Jing Sect quickly arrived as well, while the rest of the Surveillance Bureau was starting to converge on the eastern wall.

Even though they had many incredibly powerful people on their side, the bloodlust and killing intent of the huge army before them made everyone’s heart beat wildly against their chest.

There was a reason why the Liang Kingdom was the greatest

nation in the world, and they didn't reach that position through diplomacy alone.

Li Huowang and the others weren't sure of what to think upon seeing the golden banners of the army.

"If we were to fight them, we'd lose many people on both sides. Shai Zi doesn't care about winning at all. He just wants to get rid of as many people as possible. The outcome of this war is sitting on your shoulders," said the Chief.

Li Huowang made a sidelong glance at the Chief, asking, "There are so many Strayed Ones out there, so why have you chosen me? Are you thinking of using me for something else?"

The Chief's plan was simple and easy, but Li Huowang couldn't help but be wary of it. After all, he had been backstabbed so many times by now.

"Regardless of what my plan is, we still have to deal with Shai Zi. Don't forget that you're technically part of the reason why we're here today."

Li Huowang looked away to stare at Shai Zi sitting on the throne. *If it wasn't for him, Zhuge Yuan would still be alive, and the world would still be at peace!*

"You can use me on one condition: Shai Zi must die!"

Bom, bom, bom!

Rhythmic drumming noises pervaded the air, and everyone felt their heartbeats synchronizing with the beat as if their heart were the drum itself.

"The Surveillance Bureau is working together with the White Lotus Sect to kill the emperor! Kill them all!"

The army below the city wall slammed their weapon to the ground in unison as dense killing intent swept across Li Huowang and everyone else.

"Kill! Kill! Kill!"

The catapults launched three-meter-tall cavalries clad in heavy

black metal armor toward the city wall! [1]

1. No, you did not read that wrong. They literally launched heavily armored soldiers using the catapults 🤖

Translator's Thoughts

Chapter 579 - Prelude

The prelude to the war started outside the eastern walls of Shangjing.

Shai Zi stood at the helm of the army to fight the Surveillance Bureau.

Li Huowang looked at the cavalries wearing heavy black iron armor, blanketing the skies and crashing down toward them. He frowned and took a few steps back to reach the edge of the wall.

Just as they crashed into the city wall, Li Huowang jumped backward and fell down the wall. Halfway down, Li Huowang swung his spine sword, and a spacetime rift that led to the Qi Kingdom manifested.

Peng Longteng then materialized and grabbed Li Huowang. She used both of her hands to throw Li Huowang into the rift. At the same time, Li Huowang's two legs and Li Sui's four tentacles used Peng Longteng as a wall to jump off of her. He disappeared into the rift in the blink of an eye.

A few breaths later, Li Huowang looked around calmly in the Qi Kingdom.

There was chaos throughout the Liang Kingdom due to the war, but the Qi Kingdom was calm. There wasn't even a survivor in sight, and Li Huowang couldn't see anything other than the ruins of a once peaceful city.

However, the solar eclipse had passed. There were still black spots on the sun, but there weren't that many black spots anymore, and it seemed that the situation was starting to return to normalcy.

The Qi Kingdom was in ruins, but the kingdom was in a better situation compared to when evil entities roamed the kingdom like last time.

“Daoist, look! You saved this world by connecting the Emperor of the Qi Kingdom to the Dragon Vein of the Liang Kingdom! The people of the Qi Kingdom no longer have to worry in despair! Praise be to the Buddha! May the Buddha protect us!” the old monk’s illusion exclaimed with a grin while staring toward the east.

“The Buddha did not protect us! You should thank Zhuge Yuan!” Li Huowang roared.

Then, with a sword in hand, he walked past the ruins to reach the place where he had seen those golden banners in the Liang Kingdom. He didn't have the luxury of time to care about what was happening to the Qi Kingdom.

He had to stop Shai Zi, or the Liang Kingdom would perish.

It would be difficult for him to get close to Shai Zi in the Liang Kingdom, so he decided to travel to the Qi Kingdom and hope that upon his return to the Liang Kingdom, he'd be near Shai Zi.

This approach was much easier than just running straight into an army.

“We're almost there. It should be around here...” Li Huowang muttered.

Just then, Shangguan Yuting emerged from his shadow and looked around before nodding. “All right. The Chief is ready. We will go back in five minutes.”

Li Huowang nodded and waited for the five minutes to pass. He could swear that this was the longest five minutes of his life so far.

Will the Chief's plan work? What if Shai Zi becomes—no! I can't think of that! I'm a Strayed One! I cannot think about those things so easily!

“Now!” Shangguan Yuting shouted.

Li Huowang immediately swung his spine sword. A spacetime rift manifested, and numerous limbs fell into the Qi Kingdom, tainting the Qi Kingdom's ground in a crimson hue. These limbs had come from the troops of the Liang Kingdom.

The Qi Kingdom's side was empty, but the Liang Kingdom's side was packed to the brim with people.

Li Huowang didn't hesitate and propelled himself into the rift using his two legs and Li Sui's tentacles.

Upon appearing on the other side, Li Huowang was taken aback by the intensity of the fight. The rhythmic beats of war drums and the grotesque noises of slaughter echoed nonstop. The killing intent and bloodlust made Li Huowang's veins bulge.

“*Oh?* Is that you, my Left and Right Jinwu Guard? How come you've just arrived? Have you completed your mission?” A voice echoed on Li Huowang's side. He turned and saw Shai Zi in Gao Zhijian's body beneath the golden dragon banner.

Li Huowang looked at the army, glaring at him along with the other commanders and generals next to Shai Zi.

However, Li Huowang wasn't nervous at all. He took a deep breath and said, “We should stop now. The Chief wants me to deal with you, but I'm technically working under you, so the Chief's plan is destined to fail.”

Li Huowang approached Shai Zi.

The soldiers wanted to stop him, but Shai Zi told them not to do so. He allowed Li Huowang to approach him without fear.

“Come. You've been pretending to be someone else for such a long time now, so you must be tired. Let me toast you a cup.” Gao Zhijian said, offering Li Huowang a cup of wine.

“How could it be hard? We're both from the Sitting Oblivion Dao, Boss Shai Zi. It's actually fun deceiving people,” Li Huowang said, drinking the wine without any hesitation.

The soldiers and commanders were confused, but their confusion was Li Huowang's goal.

“*Hahaha~* Now really isn't the time for jokes, as we're facing such powerful enemies.”

Li Huowang chuckled as well and swept his hand across his

face. A Hong Zhong's face appeared on Li Huowang's face, and he laughed hysterically as he responded, "Boss Shai Zi, how can this be a joke? I'm just following your orders."

Shangguan Yuting appeared and walked toward Gao Zhijian.

Gao Zhijian's face slowly changed into that of a Shai Zi.

Li Huowang couldn't transform the Dragon Vein itself, but the Chief's illusion techniques could easily trick the soldiers. Once the soldiers were no longer willing to obey Shai Zi, things would go swimmingly from then on.

"*Hehehe*, not bad. But do you really think that you can beat me with this little trick of yours? You've overestimated yourself." Gao Zhijian's dragon claw tore off the illusion on his face, and his face returned to normal.

"I'm a Hong Zhong. If I'm not a Hong Zhong, then what am I?"

"You're from the Sitting Oblivion Dao! You're a Shai Zi!" Gao Zhijian exclaimed, pointing at Li Huowang.

The Chief appeared behind Li Huowang and made a seal with both hands before pressing it on Li Huowang's nape.

"Now!" the Chief shouted.

When the Chief's seal touched Li Huowang, he felt something infiltrating him. They were clouds of primordial breath, and they slowly entered Li Huowang

Li Huowang could sense the subtle difference between each cloud of primordial breath. *These clouds of primordial breath do not belong to the Chief! These are the clouds of primordial breath that he has harvested from the Strayed Ones!*

A pair of withered hands holding a set of prayer beads clapped, and an aged, low chanting echoed from beneath the Chief's red robes. The air shimmered, seemingly becoming illusory beneath the incessant chanting.

Even the colors themselves seemed to bleed into the air as they escaped their original containers; the colors of the soldiers' armor

and even the color of the earth itself were drained as the world became hazy.

The line between the illusory world and the real world started to become blurry.

Li Huowang realized that the clouds of primordial breath inside of him had become extremely easy to control.

“*Huff... puff...*” As Li Huowang breathed, the world seemed to contract and expand.

“I’m a Shai Zi! I’m a Shai Zi! I’m a Shai Zi!” Li Huowang repeated. Veins bulged on his temples as his face slowly changed into that of a Shai Zi.

The chanting did not stop as the Chief stared at Gao Zhijian from within the darkness of his robes. Moments later, a voice joined the chanting. “If he’s a Shai Zi, and there’s only one Shai Zi left in the Liang Kingdom, then you must be Gao Zhijian!

“You are not a Shai Zi!”

Shai Zi revealed confusion on his face at the remark. “I-I-I-I’m... Gao...Gao...Gao Zhijian!?”

Gao Zhijian hesitated. He was about to take a step forward when the ground before him abruptly caved in. Several dice rushed past the cavity and flew past his eyes.

Gao Zhijian instantly calmed down upon seeing the dice. He chuckled and remarked, “How devious of you, Xuan Pin. To think you’d use the Strayed One’s technique to erase me. Unfortunately, I’ve become the Dragon Vein, so your techniques are useless against me.

“However, I admit that you’re pretty strong. How about you join me? You can have half of the Heavenly Dao that we’ll certainly obtain later.”

Chapter 580 - Fuse

The Chief said nothing in response to Shai Zi's words, but Li Huowang was different.

Li Huowang grabbed his head with an agonized look and pointed at Shai Zi. "Gao Zhijian, what are you doing?!"

Gao Zhijian hesitated once again, but he recovered even faster this time.

"It's useless, Sitting Oblivion Dao. I am the Chosen One. Your tricks will not work on me," Gao Zhijian said. Then, he swept his gaze across the commanders and asked, "Ma family, Qiu family, Xue family, and Yu family... did all of you come here to spectate? I hope you haven't forgotten your ancestor's pledge."

Gao Zhijian's throne burst open, revealing the previous emperor tied to the tail of the Dragon Vein. Gao Zhijian then swung the bloody emperor in front of the commanders.

The next moment, many different weapons wrapped in a dense killing intent flew toward Li Huowang and the Chief.

"Scram!" Li Huowang shouted.

The projectiles flying toward him transformed abruptly, transforming into something else. No, it wasn't just the projectiles—everything around him except the Chief had transformed into something else.

Li Huowang growled, and the surroundings were starting to transform.

The Chief saw that Shai Zi was trying to run away, so he flew over to the latter to stop him.

"Do not get close to that man! Archers, fire!"

"Fire!" A dense blanket of arrows flew from a mountain not too far away. It blotted out the sky and cast a deadly shadow over Li

Huowang as the rain of arrows plummeted toward him. However, the attack didn't harm Li Huowang at all. The poison-coated arrows twisted into raindrops the moment they made contact with Li Huowang.

I can't keep this up! There are too many clouds of primordial breath! I can't control them all! I have to use them NOW! Li Huowang was bleeding from all of his orifices. He let out a roar and a clearing appeared around him as the soldiers frantically ran away from him for fear of transforming into something else.

“*Hehehe*. How many times must I tell you that your tricks are not going to work on me!” Shai Zi flew high up in the air, avoiding the Chief. Just then, something appeared before Shai Zi.

The man had leprosy and three heads of different ages—young, adult, and old. He was holding a bronze coin sword, and he was covered in black feathers.

“*Hm?* What is that thing?” Gao Zhijian's slender figure twisted in mid-air, dodging the spacetime rift that Li Huowang's spine sword had sent toward him. Shai Zi looked down and saw a familiar face. It turned out that the attack just now had come from Zhuge Yuan rather than Li Huowang!

Zhuge Yuan swung the spine sword once more before flying toward Shai Zi. “Junior Li, do not be afraid! I'm here to help!”

Li Huowang collapsed to the ground in pain, and his head throbbed painfully, but he smiled at the familiar voice.

Li Sui's tentacles moved, helping Li Huowang up the ground. Li Huowang brandished his purple-tasseled sword and ran toward Shai Zi.

The Dragon Vein had bizarre properties that allowed Gao Zhijian to fight toe-to-toe against Li Huowang, but it didn't matter how great Shai Zi was at dodging; he was still getting cornered by the Chief, Dan Yangzi, Zhuge Yuan, and Li Huowang.

Just as they were about to capture Gao Zhijian, a sharp sword

pierced Li Huowang's chest. The next moment, a spear fashioned from the bloody horns of a dragon pierced Dan Yangzi, and his grotesque form dissipated from the attack.

Gao Zhijian instantly felt the weight on him becoming lighter.

This is impossible! How could someone get so close to me without me noticing them? Li Huowang spat a mouthful of blood and turned around. To his surprise, he saw soldiers wearing armor made from bloody dragon scales.

The bloody scales weren't fake scales made from iron. The scales had come from the past emperors on the Dragon Vein. To make matters worse, even the soldiers' weapons were made from dragon bone!

"Hahaha! I knew you guys were going to attack me, so I prepared a countermeasure. Do you really think that I can't handle a crazy Strayed One? Unfortunately for you all, I have multiple contingency plans!"

Several soldiers leaped out from the bushes, each of them donning an armor made from dragon scales. They surrounded Li Huowang, and they seemed unaffected by Li Huowang's ability that he had obtained from cultivating the "Truth."

"Are you crazy?!" the Chief howled upon realizing something horrible. "How dare you scatter the luck of the Dragon Vein so recklessly?!"

"Does it really matter? The end of the world is coming, anyway. Might as well as make it come earlier. I'd prefer if the world ended sooner; that way, we'll be spared of the agonizing wait."

Shai Zi then swept his claw across the past emperors. Large swathes of dragon scales fell from the sky, and cracks appeared in the clouds itself. It looked like the heavens had fractured!

"Kill them! The officials and the military are one! Kill them, and I will give you everything!" Shai Zi exclaimed.

The soldiers clad in dragon scale armor quickly moved to

surround Li Huowang. He glanced at the Chief, but he saw that the latter was busy fighting Shai Zi. The Chief didn't have any time to spare for Li Huowang.

Li Huowang looked around and saw Shangguan Yuting with her head covered in eyeballs.

I need to do something! Li Huowang grabbed Shangguan Yuting and ate one of her eyeballs. "I need to find a way to defeat Shai Zi!"

An eye manifested on Li Huowang's forehead, but he saw nothing. It made sense, as Shai Zi had already become the Dragon Vein after fusing with it.

However, Li Huowang wasn't going to give up. He ignored Shangguan Yuting's cries of pain as he devoured the eyeballs on her head. Li Huowang's third eye started to shine even brighter as he ate more of Shangguan Yuting's eyeballs.

Unfortunately, the soldiers weren't going to wait for Li Huowang to finish.

One of the soldiers shouted, "Jingyan formation!"

The soldiers lined up in a formation before charging at Li Huowang.

Swoosh!

The air shrieked as a dragon horn made a beeline for Li Huowang. Before the dragon bone could hit him, however, a white ribbon descended and wrapped around the dragon horn, lifting it up.

Li Huowang had barely managed to avoid getting hit by the attack.

The soldiers looked up and saw white lotus lanterns in the air.

Bai Lingmiao was standing at the helm of a group of White Lotus Sect disciples, and they had come here to protect Li Huowang. The disciples looked different from each other, and they were either topless or were wearing dudous embroidered with pearls.

Their eyes were half closed, and their faces were solemn. The

metal rods sticking out of their cheeks had talismans attached to them, and the disciples had tattoos depicting white donkeys.

Chapter 581 - Secret

When the commanders of the army saw the White Lotus Sect disciples, their belief in their emperor's words strengthened. The rhythm of the war drums changed, and the soldiers in dragon-scale armor worked together to corner the cultists.

Meanwhile, the archers on the distant mountain began to tighten the strings of their octagonal crossbows.

At the next moment, a mighty fire ignited near the catapults. The Ao Jing Sect had made their move.

The pressure on Bai Lingmiao had decreased sharply, but she still felt immense pressure as she stood before the lines of troops. The pressure was truly immense, as this issue concerned not just herself but Li Huowang's survival as well.

Bai Lingmiao glanced at Li Huowang, who seemed to be immersed in his own world.

A fierce expression appeared on Bai Lingmiao's face as she shouted, "Spiritual communication!"

The disciples around her took out a jagged knife and thrust it into their foreheads. The next moment, they started chanting as crimson blood flowed down their faces.

"Invoke the spirits, please manifest. I invite the spirits and wish to worship the generals of this altar. The revered masters of golden light. Suppress the five generals, take five steps, and turn once to reveal the wheel of characters, the great Bodhisattva Pu'an!"

The mediums' eyes shot wide open. They seemed to have been possessed by the spirits as they charged at the towering soldiers with no signs of fear on their faces. In terms of skills, these spirit mediums were no match for the seasoned military troops. The mediums quickly found themselves riddled with holes of varying

sizes.

However, the mediums seemed unaffected. They stood before the towering soldiers, holding them back with their bodies.

Bai Lingmiao made a lotus seal with her hands, and she smacked her head forcefully with the lotus seal. The lotus on her forehead became a twin lotus.

Then she immediately started chatting. "The strong and weak fragrances shall combine and scatter. The east and the west diverge but remain intertwined!"

Bai Lingmiao trembled, and her expression was part angry and part sorrowful. She looked rather bizarre as her shadow began to grow larger.

However, the soldiers didn't care about her bizarre appearance at all. The ground burst open, and a soldier radiating an intense, killing intent jumped out of the fissure. He was holding a weapon made out of a dragon's horn as he rushed toward Bai Lingmiao.

Just as Bai Lingmiao was about to get hit, she split apart, allowing her to dodge the attack. However, Bai Lingmiao's upper body was the only part of her that had split apart; her lower body hadn't changed.

One of Bai Lingmiao's two faces showed compassion and mercy, while the other showed cruelty and ferocity.

Bom, bom, bom!

Four slender palms with black nails moved like whips, slapping the white drums around Bai Lingmiao's waist. As the drum beats intensified, a red veil manifested, covering the two faces.

Behind the red veil, the Second Deity started singing.

"The treasured foal grows wings in the nine heavens, and the iron pagoda shines with the light of the eight treasures! I smile once, my partner smiles twice, and the old immortal laughs three times for reasons unknown!

"I call upon the old Immortal; you must come!"

A patch of fur grew out of the back of Bai Lingmiao's hand. The wolf teeth protruding from behind the red veil gnawed at the palms of the towering soldier, tearing them apart in the blink of an eye.

While Bai Lingmiao and the spirit mediums were busy buying time, Li Huowang had already devoured the majority of Shangguan Yuting's head. The eyeball in the middle of his forehead was bloodshot, and it had become larger than his head.

He had transformed into a terrifying monster, and the tentacles all over him made him look even more terrifying. Li Huowang's expression was frightening too, and he looked like he was having a hard time catching his breath.

Unfortunately, Li Huowang still needed more. *Not enough! Still not enough!*

Li Huowang's mouth split abruptly, opening up all the way to his ears. His eyes widened to the maximum as he leaned forward, sucking Shangguan Yuting's head into his mouth.

Shangguan Yuting abruptly stopped moving, and she dissipated into nothingness. Li Huowang looked up, revealing an eyeball that had become swollen to the point that it looked like it would explode at any time soon.

Li Huowang's scalp had become almost transparent, allowing others to peek at his skull.

"I-I-I can see it!!" Li Huowang roared hysterically.

His head swelled up, expanding by half its size before shrinking to the size of a walnut. Afterward, Li Huowang's head exploded with a bang as if it were a firework.

At the same time, Shangji Guankou's hidden secrets became available to Li Huowang. He saw what was hidden beneath this world, and everything that was once shrouded in fog became extremely clear to him.

He was a Hong Zhong, and his past had changed completely when Doulao had gifted him with the identity of a Hong Zhong.

One's past wasn't just the past. Whenever a Siming changed someone's past, that someone's past would inevitably change as well! The Simings cared so much about the past because they were fighting for each other's future!

Zheng Boqiao was right—only with a "cause" would there be an "effect."

The Simings didn't actually exist completely, and they'd disappear the moment every single trace of their existence was gone.

In the darkness, Li Huowang caught a glimpse of the secrets of the birth and the death of the Simings. He finally understood what the Simings were all about. At the same time, Li Huowang noticed that many heavenly entities had noticed his existence, but he couldn't care less about them at the moment.

His attention was on the fact that he had found many valuable pieces of information through the secrets of the Shangji Guankou, including the secrets written on Zhuge Yuan's fan at the time.

Li Huowang knelt down and looked up.

"Is this part of your plan?" Li Huowang asked.

He was staring at the stolen Sacred Mountain Ghost's Eye, and he saw his own reflection in the eye so colossal that it blotted out the skies.

If he were to become Doulao's Twisted One, then the current Doulao would be his future self. That was the eye's plan...

Li Huowang just had to follow its plan, and the current crisis would be resolved.

Shai Zi has deceived my future self, and I'm going to avenge myself, Li Huowang thought. It seemed to be the most logical course of action.

When Li Huowang got close enough to the eye, his flesh cracked open by itself. The scars that had yet to vanish all split open like flower petals.

Pain... intense pain. The excruciating pain brought Li Huowang back, pulling him away from the Sacred Mountain Ghost's Eye in the sky. Upon savoring the familiar feeling, Li Huowang smiled. *I had no idea that I was so popular! I should have known of it earlier.*

When Doulao was in the middle of setting up its scheme, Ba-Hui was setting up its trap as well. To be more precise, the two of them wanted to turn me into their Twisted One the moment I obtained the Profound Records from the water bandits!

Li Huowang felt like an eternity had passed. His brain matter, blood, and broken bones that were flying in all directions were falling slowly to the ground.

The sudden change stunned everyone, including the spirit mediums and the soldiers. They all slowly stopped what they were doing to stare in disbelief at Li Huowang, who had suddenly lost his head but was still somehow muttering to himself.

Moreover, Li Huowang's fleshly body seemed to be in the middle of being subjected to lingchi^[1]. His flesh and skin were splitting open, revealing the wriggling black tentacles underneath.

Li Sui was inside Li Huowang, so she reacted faster than anyone. Moreover, she knew quite a few things for sure, and one of them was the fact that a person would die upon losing their head.

"Father, are you alright? Your head—"

"Shh!" Bai Lingmiao hushed as her two bodies rushed over to the tentacles that had sprouted out of Li Huowang's broken mouth.

"Suisui, listen to me. Don't say anything to your father!" Bai Lingmiao warned.

Right then, Li Huowang made a move. His mouth was the only part of his face that was somewhat intact as he rushed toward Shai Zi, who was busy fighting the Chief of the Great Liang's Surveillance Bureau.

Bai Lingmiao's fangs closed forcefully as she chased after Li Huowang. The soldiers in dragon-scale armor attempted to block

them, but Bai Lingmiao and the spirit mediums put their lives on the line to stop them.

When the Chief and Zhuge Yuan saw Li Huowang's current appearance, they seemed to have understood something, so they didn't say anything.

However, Shai Zi was different. He roared, "Hong Zhong! Where did your head go?"

Li Huowang roared, "Don't think you can fool me again, Sitting Oblivion Dao!"

"Your head really isn't there! If you don't believe me, try and touch your head!"

1. a form of slow execution by a thousand cuts 📖

Translator's Thoughts

Saintess Bai Lingmiao! Damn she becomes a force to be reckoned with right now. Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin!



Chapter 582 - Siming

Shai Zi said, “Your head really isn't there! If you don't believe me, try and touch your head!”

Li Huowang couldn't care less about Shai Zi's tempting words. He looked up at the sky and roared, “You want me to become your Twisted One, huh?! Fat chance! Since I'm the coveted one, then I can just find someone else! Why do I have to settle with you all?!”

“I am Li Huowang!” Li Huowang shouted, pointing fiercely at the sky. “I am destined to become the Siming! The future Li Huowang is destined to come and help me right now!”

Li Huowang immediately felt the rapid depletion of his primordial breath, and it was all because he was currently cultivating his future Siming self. Since Doulao was backing him up, why not take a bigger risk? He was risking his life, anyway.

Shai Zi looked bewildered. He had no idea what Li Huowang was up to.

“What nonsense are you spouting, Hong Zhong?! Have you gone crazy?”

Li Huowang could feel his memories as a Hong Zhong rapidly eroding his own memories, but it seemed that Doulao didn't want to sit idly by.

Unfortunately, his wounds from the past manifested all over him, and his flesh split open. The extreme pain made Li Huowang stagger backward. He could feel his mental and physical self splitting apart. He felt like he was on the verge of death.

However, this torture was what stoked the flames of perseverance in Li Huowang's heart. He decided to persevere with his belief. His method had to be incredibly effective. Otherwise, why were they trying so hard to stop him?

Cultivating a future Siming seemed impossible, but Li Huowang truly believed that it was possible. Li Huowang let out a peal of laughter filled with immense joy.

After an unknown amount of time, he came to his senses, and he found himself in a vast white expanse. Feeling confused, Li Huowang looked around and saw the Chief walking up to him to help him up.

“Li Huowang, are you sure you want to go down this path? You've already gotten involved with the "effect" of the Siming, but it doesn't mean that you have to become one.”

It didn't matter to Li Huowang whether the Chief was real. He just replied, “Do I even have a choice? If I don't go down this path, am I supposed to become Doulao and Ba-Hui's puppet?”

“Anyway, do you know anything about my future self? Am I powerful? Which Siming will I command?”

“Bewilderment,” the Chief answered.

“*Oh?* Are you saying that I will be able to use the ‘Truth’ and ‘Lies’ like Doulao along with ‘Bewilderment’?” Li Huowang asked curiously.

“Yes, but the bewilderment in your heart will become even deeper the stronger you become. Those two are mutually reinforcing, after all,” the Chief explained. Then, he sounded serious as he said, “Let me ask you once more. Are you sure you want to go down this path?”

“If you go down this path, everything you care about might become illusions. And what you once thought were mere illusions might become real.”

“*Hehe*, you speak as if I have a clear understanding of everything right now,” Li Huowang replied in a self-deprecating manner.

The Chief nodded lightly at that and took off his red robes, revealing a white robe underneath. It was Yi Donglai's white robe.

“Li Huowang? Li Huowang?” Yi Donglai asked, snapping his fingers in front of the young man while holding a ballpoint pen in his other hand.

The scenery peeled back before Li Huowang, and Yi Donglai transformed into the Chief wearing the red Daoist robes. Li Huowang found himself standing in the middle of a battlefield thick with the smell of blood.

After just a second, the Chief's towering figure shrank as he became Yi Donglai again. The scent in the air changed from the smell of blood into the smell of hospital disinfectant.

“Li Huowang, are you sure you haven't forgotten what you have to do?” Yi Donglai asked, bringing Li Huowang back to his senses.

Li Huowang looked around and saw a spiral iron slide in the ward. The iron slide was long, and it almost reached the ceiling. Li Huowang lifted the covers and walked slowly toward the spiral slide under Yi Donglai's watchful gaze.

The spiral slide became the Dragon Vein in Li Huowang's eyes. Then just as Gao Zhijian was about to fly away, the Dragon Vein became a spiral slide once again. Li Huowang scratched his head and dragged his feeble body up the slide. He was so weak that such a simple task proved exceptionally difficult for him. There were even times when he lost his grip and slid back down.

When Sun Xiaoqin saw what was going on, she had the urge to charge at Li Huowang and help him up the spiral slide.

However, her husband held her back firmly, saying, “Doctor Yi is in the middle of giving hypnotherapy for our son! You can't go in and disrupt the session. Just believe in Doctor Yi's words!”

Li Huowang heard his father's words and glanced at his parents. His mother transformed into the soldiers, while his father became Bai Lingmiao, who stood bravely in the soldier's way.

Eventually, Li Huowang made it to the top of the slide, but he

found nothing there. Moments later, he looked up and saw a round energy-saving light fixture hanging from the ceiling. Li Huowang half squatted on the slide, and then he reached out to unscrew the cover of the energy-saving light.

“This is impossible! This is absolutely impossible! I’ve become the Dragon Vein, and I will remain real wherever I am! You cannot control me!” Gao Zhijian roared, his voice carrying a strong protest and unwillingness.

Is this true? Or is this fake? Li Huowang thought.

His eyes revealed his confusion. He was having trouble distinguishing what was real.

Li Huowang finally removed the cover of the energy-saving light fixture, and he pulled out an eighteen-sided die. He placed the cover back on and looked down at the die in his hand.

A smile blossomed on his face.

Yi Donglai approached Li Huowang from the other side of the slide. He reached out and took the eighteen-sided die from Li Huowang’s hand, placing it into the pocket of his white coat.

“Let’s go down,” Yi Donglai said.

He supported Li Huowang down the steps before bringing him back to the bed in the ward.

Yi Donglai enquired, “How do you feel about this treatment?”

Li Huowang turned and saw Gao Zhijian standing in the distance, scratching his head with a puzzled look.

Shaking his head in confusion, Li Huowang responded, “I can’t say for sure, but it seems like the issue has been resolved, at least for the time being.”

“Brother Li, did we manage to save the Great Qi?!” Zhuge Yuan asked loudly as his figure dissipated slowly.

“I guess my illness can be considered cured now.”

Zhuge Yuan revealed a look of relief before disappearing into thin air.

"How are you feeling?" Yi Donglai asked.

"I-I... I feel like both sides are starting to overlap," Li Huowang said, looking down at his bony hands in confusion.

"Well, that is not strange at all," Yi Donglai remarked. "It means that my treatment method is effective. Anyway, remember to take your medicine on time; the medicine will allow you to rapidly recover to full health."

Just then, the door to the ward was pushed open. A group of doctors rushed in, and they stared in awe at Li Huowang.

Sun Xiaoqin pushed them aside and burst into tears of joy.

"My son, you're cured! Goodness, your illness is finally cured!!"

Chapter 583 - Li Huowang

The morning sunlight shone into ward the through the windows of the White Tower Prison, warming up the cold room.

“Son, take it slow. Don't scald your tongue.”

Under Sun Xiaoqin's encouraging gaze, Li Huowang picked up the short spoon with half a scoop of porridge and fed himself with a trembling hand.

It was an action that most people had long taken granted for, but Li Huowang found it incredibly difficult to perform at the moment.

His muscles had atrophied due to the long-term bed rest. He had started rehab, but it wouldn't yield any results until months later.

“Let me feed you, son.”

Li Huowang shook his head gently and refused, “No need, I want to move more by myself. Everything I do is going to be beneficial to my health.”

Bai Lingmiao withdrew her hand at Li Huowang's remark.

Li Huowang ate slowly, a few mouthfuls at a time. Just then, his face distorted in pain, and he clutched his head.

However, he ended up touching a hard and slightly smooth shell rather than his scalp or hair.

“What's this?” Li Huowang muttered. He used his fingernails to scratch at the shell, removing some crisp, yellow crumbs.

“Senior Li, don't scratch it. It's very brittle,” Bai Lingmiao warned.

“What is this?” Li Huowang asked again sluggishly.

“The doctor said that these phase-three psychiatric drugs are going to have some side effects, but they're effective. Huowang,

endure it a bit, okay? Once your condition has stabilized, we'll switch to drugs with less severe side effects."

When the intense pain passed, Li Huowang tapped his head with his fingers, and he heard a hollow sound. "Is this lotus root? Is this the result of the White Lotus Sect's techniques?"

Bai Lingmiao cautiously touched Li Huowang's crispy lotus root head. The white hair at her temples swayed gently as she shook her head and said, "No, Si Qi's Chief of the Surveillance Bureau is the one who did this to you. The supernatural powers of the Fangxian Sect truly are strange. The Fangxian Sect says that everything can be used as medicine."

Bai Lingmiao's heart jumped into her throat when she saw Li Huowang missing his head. She was really worried that Li Huowang would realize that he had no head and die on the spot as a result.

Fortunately, they were on the same side as the imperial court, so the Si Qi's Chief intervened to help Li Huowang.

"How long will it take me to recover? I can't bear to live with this on my head for the rest of my life," Li Huowang asked while drinking porridge.

"The Daoist master said that your fate is different from ordinary people, but it will still take you forty-nine days to recover your fleshly body."

"All right." Li Huowang nodded gently. "It's okay. It's been so long, and it's just forty-nine days. We can afford to wait that long."

"Yes, yes, it's been so long. There's hope for your illness. Speaking of which, public medical services are indeed better than private ones. Those private doctors in the past couldn't even compare to our Doctor Yi."

Just then, Sun Xiaoqin heard movement at the door of the ward. She picked up her small purse and welcomed Yi Donglai.

"Oh my, Doctor Yi, thank you so much! You are truly Hua Tuo's[1] incarnation!" Sun Xiaoqin took out a thick red packet[2]

from her purse and stuffed it into Yi Donglai's coat pocket.

"Sister Sun, what's the meaning of this? You can't do this... our hospital has rules..."

"Hehehe, there's no meaning behind it. It's just a token of appreciation. Keep it. You've been working so hard for my son, so you deserve it. Anyway, how old are you, Doctor Yi? Are you married yet? If not, shall I introduce you to a nice girl?"

Sun Xiaoqin's words were like a flurry of punches that caught Yi Donglai off guard, and he found himself unable to respond properly, even though he could face Li Huowang without any hesitation.

"Mom," Li Huowang couldn't stand it anymore.

"I got it, I'll leave now."

Once Sun Xiaoqin was out of the ward, Yi Donglai smiled wryly at Li Huowang.

He sat on the chair that Sun Xiaoqin had previously occupied, took out the red packet, and shook it toward the corner of the room where the camera was located before putting it into the pocket of Li Huowang's patient clothes.

"Give it back to your mom once you're discharged. I trust your character. You wouldn't use this money to gamble for some skins in a game, would you?"

Li Huowang opened the red packet and saw a stack of red notes inside. He counted them roughly and estimated the amount to be around four thousand.

"That's hard to say. I'm a delinquent back at school, and I'm not exactly the smartest student at the time."

Yi Donglai adjusted the frameless glasses on his nose and stared deeply at Li Huowang's face. "Actually, I'd be happy if you use that money to gamble for some skins in a game. It means that you have the desire of a normal person. When that day arrives, your illness can be considered to have been truly cured."

Li Huowang put away the red packet, and his expression turned serious as he said, "Your method is indeed effective, but can it really cure me completely?"

"Of course. You need to have confidence in me. Don't think that you're the only one with that kind of illness. I've used that method on others before, and the results were great. I once had a patient who was convinced that he was a wooden stake. He didn't take medicine, sleep, or cooperate with our treatment. But I told him that even wood needs to sleep and take medicine. And to prove it, I showed him an anime involving trees. He watched a few episodes and believed that trees actually need to take medicine and sleep. With that, he started taking medicine and cooperating with us for his treatment. Three months later, he was discharged."

"The last time I checked up on him, he was doing fine. He works as a deliveryman and doesn't earn much, but he can make ends meet and return to society."

Li Huowang nodded slowly, but there was still a hint of confusion on his face. He extended his right hand and clenched it before opening it again.

"The memories of Hong Zhong, which Doulao had bestowed upon me, have completely disappeared. I've become Li Huowang once again. However, my memories of the Profound Records are still there, and the scars on myself are still there. I still have the elevated senses bestowed upon me by Ba-Hui."

"Do you understand what I mean? Even if I become my own Twisted One, the true Li Huowang is always entangled with Ba-Hui's effect."

The Chief looked at Li Huowang silently for a long time. Then, he opened his mouth and spoke in his multi-layered voice. "Bewilderment itself is a kind of pain. You should stay ignorant about some things for the time being."

Li Huowang's face showed a hint of confusion; he couldn't quite

understand what the Chief was talking about.

“Very well, keep it up.” The door was pushed open as the Chief walked in, and the Chief before Li Huowang dissipated rapidly like yellow sand dispersing into the air.

1. a famous Chinese physician from the late Eastern Han Dynasty, often known as the Medical Saint or Divine Physician 🙌
2. a gift of money in Chinese customs 🙌

Chapter 584 - Shangjing

Lu Zhuangyuan was holding his grandson, Lu Tongsheng, as he sat inside a sedan chair that traveled down the streets of Shangjing. Lu Zhuangyuan swept his gaze across the shops along the streets.

The luxurious decorations inside the sedan chair told him that the sedan chair had to have been expensive to hire. Someone like him couldn't possibly afford to hire one.

Delighted, Lu Zhuangyuan kissed his grandson's face; his white beard scratched the baby's face, making him cry.

"Tongsheng, my little ancestor! Look! Our Lu Family is about to make a fortune!"

"I, Lu Zhuangyuan, have been dreaming about riding a sedan chair throughout my entire life, but I truly hadn't expected that one day, I'd end up riding in one! Hehe, so this is what riding a sedan chair feels like," Lu Zhuangyuan said, patting his bottom with a pleased look.

"Bleeck!"

Lu Zhuangyuan frowned upon hearing someone vomiting outside the sedan chair. He pulled back the curtain and looked out to see Lu Juren's head sticking out of the sedan chair.

Lu Juren was vomiting his breakfast, making it splatter on the ground.

Lu Zhuangyuan winced in pain upon seeing the minced meat and white noodles that Lu Juren had vomited out. "What are you doing?! Juren! Look at the ground! Look at what you wasted! Do you not have any idea just how expensive the food that you just vomited?"

Lu Juren's face was pale as he turned to his father and said, "Father, the sedan's swaying is making me feel nauseous. Can I get

out of the sedan and just walk?”

“You can't even recognize a blessing when it's right in front of you, so shut your trap! You better not vomit again, or I'll make you eat what you've vomited!”

Lu Juren nodded bitterly, and then he covered his mouth as he retreated into his sedan chair.

Fortunately, Lu Juren's torment didn't last long, as the sedan chairs carrying the Lu Family members eventually came to a stop.

Lu Zhuangyuan carried his grandson out of the sedan. A three-story green building appeared before him. There were three large characters written on the prominent red plaque above it—Guangde Garden.

Lu Zhuangyuan's eyes widened as he walked in slowly. He dared not blink as he swept his gaze across everything before him.

The roof, walls, beams, and windows...

He was dazzled by the exquisite reliefs, carvings, and paintings. There were even some parts that were gilded and silvered.

Lu Zhuangyuan was completely overwhelmed. He had never seen such a beautiful place before.

Lu Zhuangyuan fixed his gaze on the stage in the courtyard while an eunuch approached them and said cautiously, “Sir Lu, this is the theater that the emperor has bestowed upon you.”

“This... this... this is mine?” Lu Zhuangyuan stuttered, seemingly by Gao Zhijian.

“Yes, are you satisfied with it? Otherwise, you can take a look at the other places throughout Shangjing until you're satisfied.”

Lu Zhuangyuan couldn't even hear the latter part of the eunuch's words. His eyes reddened, and he stuttered out a bunch of gibberish as he rushed toward the stage.

He circled the pillars and inspected the stage; he touched the tiles over and over again. If there were no one else here, he would definitely stick out his tongue to lick the tiles.

“Father, Father! Stop this, will you?!” Lu Juren exclaimed, pulling the crazed Lu Zhuangyuan away with Lu Xiucui's help.

Lu Zhuangyuan still looked bewildered.

Lu Xiucui spat on his palm and slapped Lu Zhuangyuan several times across the latter's face.

Lu Zhuangyuan finally came to his senses, and he looked at Lu Xiucui in astonishment. “You dare hit me?”

“ *Hmph!* Shame on you, don't say that you're my father whenever you're outside,” Lu Xiucui replied with a look of disdain.

“How dare you hit me?!” Lu Zhuangyuan rolled up his sleeves and raised his tobacco pipe.

In the end, he didn't start a fight with his youngest son, as a group of people surrounded them from all sides of the theater.

“The Feng family troupe pays respects to the master!”

A series of dull thuds echoed as a group of hundreds of people—comprised of men, women, and children—knelt down to Lu Zhuangyuan.

“Oh, please don't do this... you're shortening my lifespan,” Lu Zhuangyuan said in disbelief. He pushed his two sons away and tried to pull them up.

“Sir Lu, please accept it. A theater isn't enough; you need a troupe as well. With them, the entire Guangde Garden will make a fortune every day.”

Lu Zhuangyuan resisted the idea at first, but upon realizing that the other party was sincere, he finally stood in front of them with a nervous expression.

“The Feng family troupe pays respects to the master!” the group shouted.

Lu Zhuangyuan stood steadfast before them, and a tingling sensation spread all over him as he muttered, “Uh... friends... Can you please say that again?”

Although they were a little confused, they saw the eunuch

waving his hand gently under his whisk, so they shouted, "The Feng family troupe pays respects to the master!"

"Hehehehe~" Lu Zhuangyuan laughed like a fool, and he felt like jumping for joy. "Don't... don't... don't stop!"

"The Feng family troupe pays respects to the master!"

"Hehehehe~"

"The Feng family troupe pays respects to the master!"

"Hehehehe~"

Lu Juren remained calm as he watched from the sidelines. He was fine, as this theater belonged to his father. He'd have nothing to do with the theater until his father was dead. Of course, Lu Juren was still extremely excited.

The large-framed simpleton actually became the emperor. Lu Juren still couldn't believe it, and he also couldn't believe that Gao Zhijian would bestow upon them such a boon.

It was so unbelievable that Lu Juren felt like he was dreaming.

He turned to look at his brother Lu Xiucan and saw the latter picking his nose with an impatient look.

Lu Xiucan felt Lu Juren's gaze.

He turned and flicked his snot in Lu Zhuangyuan's direction.

"I'm leaving if there's nothing else. Stay here and accompany that old lunatic," Lu Xiucan said. Then, he turned around and walked toward the exit of the theater with the bronze coin sword on his back.

"Hey! Where are you going, Xiucan?"

"The others are preparing to enter the palace to see my master. Of course, I have to go and take a look. My master has become very powerful. Perhaps he can bestow upon me a great power," Lu Xiucan said, running toward the palace gate.

Lu Xiucan ran as fast as he could until he finally caught up with the sedan chairs at the palace gate. It was a good thing that the sedans were slow-moving vehicles.

“Hey! Lu Xiucan! Why are you here? You look like a wet dog,” Puppy teased. He was draped in silk and was leaning out of the sedan chair.

“Damn you! Anyway, only you guys are entering the palace?” Lu Xiucan asked, looking at the other sedan chairs. He only saw Chun Xiaoman, Zhao Wu, Yang Xiaohao, and Puppy.

“Why? Are we not allowed to enter the palace? I don't think you know, so I'm going to tell you this. Being able to enter the palace is a big deal. That simpleton wasn't looking for you, so you shouldn't cling to him in such a shameless way.”

“Hmph, I'm not going to find him. I'm going to look for my master,” Lu Xiucan said. Then, he hopped into Puppy's sedan chair.

“Hey, get off! This sedan chair can only fit one person!”

“Don't be so stingy, all right! If it hadn't been for me saving you on that night, that Daoist would have killed you. You still owe me a favor!”

“It was the other way around, so get lost!”

The sedan chairs swayed as they brought their passengers through the wide-open palace gates.

Chapter 585 - Palace

Puppy and Lu Xiucan stopped arguing upon entering the palace gates. They peeked their heads out of the sedan chair, looking at the vermilion palace walls in awe.

There seemed to be a solemn and oppressive force that made them hesitant to speak loudly, and when they came to a halt before a three-story palace, they felt the urge to kneel down.

“Are you sure Senior Gao lives here?” Yang Xiaohai asked Chun Xiaoman, who had just gotten off the sedan chair beside him.

Chun Xiaoman shook her head silently, and then she took the lead, walking toward the palace.

The others snapped out of their shock and followed after her.

The unfamiliar environment made everyone restrained and obedient. They were uneasy as they traveled down the palace, but their anxiety instantly vanished upon seeing Gao Zhijian's familiar figure sitting on the dragon throne.

Gao Zhijian was wearing dragon robes and was seated on a throne made entirely of pure gold, but he was still the same old Gao Zhijian in their eyes.

A familiar sincere smile tugged at Gao Zhijian's lips as he stood up from the dragon throne and welcomed them.

“Hey! Zhijian! What's going on? How did you end up in the capital and even become the emperor? Puppy asked.

The faces of all the eunuchs in the palace changed instantly, and they cast hostile glances at Puppy. They found Puppy's words to be quite rude.

Chun Xiaoman pushed Puppy aside with the scabbard in her hand, and she addressed the emperor directly, “Zhijian, are Senior Li and Miaomiao here? Your people told us that they're here...”

Gao Zhijian nodded, but he sounded hesitant as he said, "They're here..."

"Ah! You're not stuttering anymore?! That's great! Becoming the emperor is actually a cure to illnesses?" Puppy exclaimed in surprise.

"The imperial physician gave me some medicine, which was quite helpful to me."

Puppy was thrilled. "That's awesome! Can I borrow that imperial physician to see if he can cure the white patches on me?"

"Puppy!! Are you done yet?! Did you come all the way here just to chat?" Chun Xiaoman roared, and she almost drew her sword against Puppy.

Puppy retreated a few steps and obediently shut his mouth in the face of Chun Xiaoman's fury.

Chun Xiaoman took a deep breath, and then he turned to Gao Zhijian again before getting down to business. "Since Senior Li and Miaomiao are here, can you take us to see them?"

"I can take you to see Junior Bai, but Senior Li... I can't take you to see him because he's not in a condition to see anyone."

"What's wrong? Did he peel off his own skin again? What exactly happened?"

Gao Zhijian hesitated, "I don't know how to explain it to you. It's complicated. You can just ask Senior Li himself once he has recovered."

"Never mind, then take me to see Miaomiao first," Chun Xiaoman said with a hint of anxiety in her voice. She wouldn't feel at ease until she saw with her own two eyes that they were still alive.

Gao Zhijian nodded and was about to lead the others toward the imperial kitchen when four eunuchs appeared before him and knelt down on the floor.

"Your Majesty," one of the four eunuchs said, "You are the true

dragon emperor with the loftiest status in the world. We can handle these lowly tasks for you.”

Gao Zhijian scratched the back of his head, which made his imperial crown tilt slightly, “All right, you guys take Xiaoman to Junior Bai.”

The others were about to follow Chun Xiaoman, but Gao Zhijian stopped them and said, “Do you guys have anything you want? I'm the emperor, so I can give you anything you want.”

“Are you serious?! Anything?” Puppy's eyes lit up.

“Anything.”

“All right, then give me the throne.”

“How dare you!” the old eunuchs roared, almost scaring Puppy into wetting his pants.

“I... I... was just joking!” Puppy hurriedly exclaimed, “We often joked like this back then...”

Gao Zhijian waved his hand toward the old eunuchs before looking at Puppy with a complicated expression. “I can't do that. It's not necessarily a good thing to become the emperor. Choose something else.”

Puppy glanced cautiously at the old eunuchs before falling into deep contemplation. He leaned close to Gao Zhijian's ear and whispered softly into the latter's ear.

Gao Zhijian nodded and agreed. Then, he looked at Zhao Wu and asked, “How about you?”

Zhao Wu leaned on his crutch and stared in the direction where Chun Xiaoman had left. After a while, he looked back at Gao Zhijian with a complex expression and shook his head. “I don't want anything.”

Gao Zhijian didn't insist and turned to Yang Xiaohai. “Do you have anything you want?”

Yang Xiaohai was a little nervous as he asked, “Senior Gao, can you really give me anything?”

“Yes, anything.”

“Then, can you help me find my parents?! Can you help me find them?!” Yang Xiaohai exclaimed in excitement.

Gao Zhijian hesitated briefly before beckoning an old eunuch over and asking him a few questions.

The old eunuch walked up to Yang Xiaohai and sized the latter up before asking in a delicate voice, “What are your eight characters of birth?”

“What’s that?”

“Your date and time of birth.”

“Oh, I see,” Yang Xiaohai’s face lit up with understanding, and then he shook his head, “I don’t know.”

The old eunuch’s relaxed face twitched slightly. He reached out his eagle’s claw-like hand and placed it on Yang Xiaohai’s figure.

“Come with us.”

Gao Zhijian consoled Yang Xiaohai with his gaze as the latter nervously followed the old eunuch.

While Yang Xiaohai was leaving the grand hall, Chun Xiaoman found Bai Lingmiao making porridge in the imperial kitchen.

“Miaomiao!” Chun Xiaoman exclaimed. She couldn’t hold back her tears as she pounced on Bai Lingmiao from behind and hugged her slender waist.

“Be careful, don’t spill the porridge!”

Bai Lingmiao placed the bowl of porridge next to the stove before turning around to hug Chun Xiaoman.

“Sister Xiaoman, why are you here? Don’t cry. I had something urgent to do, so I couldn’t come back.”

“I left a letter for Senior Li... I thought he’d tell you guys about it.”

Bai Lingmiao comforted Chun Xiaoman until she finally stopped crying.

“Next time, take me with you no matter where you go, okay?”

It's not safe for you to be with Senior Li all the time," Chun Xiaoman said.

"Don't say that, Sister Xiaoman. Senior Li's illness seems to be improving."

Chun Xiaoman shook her head vigorously and said, "No, you're so beautiful. What if something happens to you? This is final, all right?"

"And I've mastered the divine martial arts of the White Lotus Sect, so I've become even more powerful than before. I can definitely protect you!" Chun Xiaoman added.

Bai Lingmiao smiled and said, "I know."

"You know? How do you know?"

"Give me a moment. I have to go and feed Senior Li first, and then I'll tell you what happened afterward. This bird's nest porridge will lose its effectiveness once it's cold."

Bai Lingmiao let go of Chun Xiaoman and placed the bowl of porridge in a food box before walking out of the imperial kitchen.

"Then, I'll go with you... I want to see Senior Li, too."

"No, you can't. Really. It's inconvenient for Senior Li to meet others right now. Anyway, I'll be back soon; just wait for me here, Sister Xiaoman."

Chapter 586 - Gao Zhijian

Bai Lingmiao took the food box outside.

Chun Xiaoman sighed at the sight. She had no idea why Miaomiao loved Senior Li so much.

However, Chun Xiaoman soon recovered and returned to her cheerful self. As long as Miaomiao and Senior Li were fine, she'd be fine, too. She hoped that the two would live happily ever after.

Miaomiao was fine, Senior Li was still alive, and Gao Zhijian even became the Emperor of the Liang Kingdom. Everything had turned out to be fine. Chun Xiaoman felt like a stone weighing down on her chest had just been removed, allowing her to breathe properly, which cleared up her mind.

“Bird’s Nest Congee? I wonder what that tastes like?” Chun Xiaoman said to herself while staring at the congee in the pot. The next moment, she scooped some for herself and tasted it. “It tastes like nothing. Very bland, too.”

Just then, someone entered the kitchen. It was Gao Zhijian, and he was alone.

Chun Xiaoman became nervous when she saw Gao Zhijian walking toward her in his dragon robe. Gao Zhijian's dragon robe was so wide that it blocked the sunlight coming into the kitchen.

Chun Xiaoman took a moment to compose herself before tugging at his robes.

“Your robes suit you. What is it made of?”

“Gold and cloth.”

“You can wear gold?” Chun Xiaoman was intrigued.

“Do you want something like this, Xiaoman? I can give it to you.”

“No, thanks,” Chun Xiaoman said, shaking her head. “It must be

heavy wearing so much gold.”

“X-X-Xiaoman.” Gao Zhijian stuttered as he stared at the girl with black hair all over her. Gao Zhijian's gaze became complicated. He had no idea when he started liking her, and he also had no idea why he liked someone with long hair all over their figure.

Regardless, it was a fact that he hadn't been able to forget her.

Gao Zhijian clenched his callused hands as his heart started beating wildly against his chest. Gao Zhijian opened his arms and hugged her.

“The eunuchs and the Imperial Preceptor have been telling me to choose an Empress so that I can give birth to a son. My first thought was you, but...” Gao Zhijian trailed off. Then, he started sobbing as he hugged her even tighter. “I can't choose you. Our children will eventually have to kill each other to decide the next emperor. I'm sure you will be devastated then, and I don't want you to feel that way because I like you! I don't want to make you feel any pain at all.”

Meanwhile, Chun Xiaoman struggled to get out of Gao Zhijian's embrace. “Why are you treating my words as thin air? Did I not tell you that I will not die even if I don't end up getting married? You've become the Emperor of the Liang Kingdom, but my mind hasn't changed! My words are final, and I will keep my word. You have to stop doing this, or I will have to stop being friends with you!” Chun Xiaoman exclaimed. Then, she stomped her way out of the kitchen.

Chun Xiaoman ran for quite a while before she stopped and leaned against a wall. Her expression turned solemn as she slid down the wall and placed her head between her knees.

After a while, she looked up with her bloodshot eyes. She took a deep breath to compose herself before running toward where Bai Lingmiao had disappeared.

Meanwhile, there were three people relaxing in a distant gazebo, but they found themselves unable to relax due to what they

had discovered.

Zhao Wu looked at Puppy and asked, “Hey, did Xiaoman just turn down an offer to become the empress? Doesn't that mean that she likes me?”

“ *Huh?* ” Puppy's expression turned ugly as if he had just eaten a fly. “That's none of your business.”

“Why?”

Lu Xiucui chimed in just then, saying, “I think it's your business. Hurry up and get married to Xiaoman. I'll help you hold the horses once you're married.”

Zhao Wu's mouth fluttered, but no words came out of his mouth.

Just then, Gao Zhijian walked out of the kitchen. He stared at where Chun Xiaoman had disappeared before walking toward a distant gazebo.

“ *Shh!* Simpleton is coming over here! Quick! Pretend like you're doing something! We can't let him know that we've been following him!”

"What..." Gao Zhijian muttered upon seeing the three squatting down and looking at the same leaf on the ground. "...are you guys doing?"

“Aaah... *Ahem*. Your house is so big, so we wanted to look around, but we ended up getting lost.”

Gao Zhijian nodded. “Let me find... a eunuch to guide you. You can walk around anywhere in the palace... but there are some restricted areas, so please forgive me for not allowing you to go into such places.”

A eunuch floated down from above the gazebo's pillars, and he kneeled in front of Gao Zhijian. “Your Majesty, I'm available. I can guide them”

Clearly, the eunuch had heard the trio's words earlier.

“ *Ah... Hahaha*, then we would have to thank you for your

help.” Puppy chuckled to cover his embarrassment. The three then followed the eunuch on a tour of the palace.

After just a few steps, Puppy took out some silver and shoved it into the eunuch’s hands, despite the latter’s reluctant look.

Left all alone, Gao Zhijian stared at the ground, cutting a sorry figure. He sat on the stairs of the gazebo and looked at the neat brick path before him.

Fifteen minutes later, Gao Zhijian’s mouth opened as he said into the air before him, “I will follow your suggestion... I will choose an Empress... to continue the lineage. Prepare the consort candidates.”

Gao Zhijian was the Emperor of the Liang Kingdom, and he needed children who would succeed him. The more children he had, the better it would be for the kingdom. At first, he had no intentions of willing anyone except for Chun Xiaoman, but he realized that his marriage affected not just himself but the entire Liang Kingdom as well.

“Understood. I heed your orders.” The Imperial Preceptor appeared out of nowhere and bowed to Gao Zhijian before leaving.

He had just turned around when he saw the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau walking toward them in red robes. The two merely nodded as they walked past each other.

“Your Majesty,” the Chief said, sitting down next to Gao Zhijian. Surprisingly, he was still taller than Gao Zhijian despite being in a sitting position.

“As the emperor, you must focus on the pressing affairs of the nation. The people of the Liang Kingdom barely survived the recent Natural Disasters. I’ve made a divination and found out that things are going to remain difficult for us next year. It’s time for you to get familiar with an emperor’s job.”

Gao Zhijian rubbed his face with his callused hands before standing up. “I understand.”

“Xuan Pin, am I really... cured? Is it true that Shai Zi... cannot control me anymore?”

His job as the emperor could wait. This was more important. The fact that a Shai Zi could control him whenever they wished was too scary for Gao Zhijian. He'd still tremble in fear whenever he remembered how the Shai Zi had taken over his body and had ordered the army to kill his allies.

The Chief didn't nod nor shake his head as he said, “I'm afraid we have to ask Li Huowang about that. He got rid of Shai Zi by himself. I actually don't know whether Shai Zi is dead or alive.”

Chapter 587 - Ji Zai

The emperor listened to what the Chief had to say as the two sat in the gazebo. "The Imperial Preceptor and I have been using our divination nonstop, but we still cannot ascertain whether Shai Zi is dead or alive."

Gao Zhijian walked slowly toward the palace while the Chief followed him from behind.

"Let me see what happened on that day," Gao Zhijian said.

The Chief nodded. He then extended a frail finger covered in dry skin and his own shadow. Moments later, he hurled it toward the sky.

The black shadow blotted out the skies. The Chief and Gao Zhijian soon found themselves on a chaotic battlefield.

Gao Zhijian saw Senior Li in the middle of the bloody battlefield. Li Huowang was facing Gao Zhijian, who was under Shai Zi's control.

Li Huowang's head was left with nothing but his mouth, but he was still alive and standing for some reason.

Gao Zhijian had a feeling that if Senior Li had a face, he'd look incredibly heroic.

Senior Li scratched at the empty space where his head was supposed to be before he started approaching the Dragon Vein.

Shai Zi wanted to run, but Senior Li was steadily closing the distance between them. His speed seemed irrelevant to the chase.

Senior Li would become even faster the faster Shai Zi moved, and the same was true vice versa.

Senior Li wasn't moving step by step, but the distance between him and Shai Zi was getting shorter in fixed intervals.

Soon, Senior Li reached the tail of the Dragon Vein. He grabbed

the golden chains and climbed up. He was so slow in his climb that even an old man would look faster than him.

Despite that, Shai Zi could not shake Senior Li off, no matter how hard he struggled.

The past emperors extended their Dragon Claws and stabbed Li Huowang with their claws, but their figures abruptly froze like statues.

“Impossible! I’m the Dragon Vein! I’m real no matter where I go! You cannot control me!” Shai Zi roared, and his voice revealed his unwillingness to perish here.

Shai Zi was trying his best to attack Li Huowang, but the Dragon Vein had frozen up and could no longer move.

“I thought... the Dragon Vein... the luck of the Liang Kingdom... are immune to such techniques...” Gao Zhijian muttered.

Even the Chief had no idea what to say.

Soon, Senior Li reached the top of the Dragon Vein. He looked left and right before grabbing Gao Zhijian’s head.

Then, he easily twisted Gao Zhijian’s head off of his shoulders, but Shai Zi was still alive.

Shai Zi was trying to trick Li Huowang into thinking that he was dead.

However, Li Huowang seemed unaffected by the trick as he reached into Gao Zhijian’s brain to pull something out.

“There. Can you give me a closer look at that?” Gao Zhijian said.

The Chief obliged, and Li Huowang soon appeared in front of them.

However, Gao Zhijian was exasperated. Li Huowang had clearly reached into his head to take something out, but Li Huowang's hand was empty.

“Perhaps what he had pulled out at the time was so profound

that my illusions cannot replicate it.”

Gao Zhijian pondered over it before asking, “Did you guys check... my head again? Was there really nothing in there?”

“Your Majesty, please rest assured. I swear with my life that there’s nothing in your head anymore. Shai Zi is no longer there. Moreover, we’ve woven a restriction on your dragon robes to make sure that something like that will never happen again. It’s a restriction created from the combined powers of me, the Imperial Preceptor, and Zheng Boqiao.”

However, Gao Zhijian didn’t feel great even after the Chief’s reassurance. His eyes were unwittingly transfixed on Li Huowang, who looked up at the sun and grinned.

The Dragon Vein collapsed to the ground.

“Junior Li, has the Great Qi been saved?” Zhuge Yuan asked.

Li Huowang looked at Zhuge Yuan and said, “The Great Qi is saved.”

Zhuge Yuan’s face revealed a sense of liberation and relief before disappearing.

Just then, Bai Lingmiao, the Chief, the Imperial Preceptor, and the soldiers surrounded Li Huowang.

However, Gao Zhijian wasn’t sure whether they were there for the Dragon Vein or for Li Huowang.

“Senior Li, are you okay?” Bai Lingmiao asked, staring nervously at Li Huowang. Bai Lingmiao’s figure was split into two, but she was still more worried about Li Huowang rather than herself.

“I’m fine. My illness has just been cured, so don’t worry about me,” Li Huowang said curtly.

The next moment, radiant sunset-like light burst out of Li Huowang’s body.

The light flew upward and disappeared into the skies.

“What... is that? the thing that came out... of Senior Li.”

“I think that was the power of Doulao. I was right; he was being targeted by Doulao. Since Shai Zi had betrayed Yinyang Doulao, I wanted him to fight Shai Zi first so that I could make use of Doulao’s animosity toward Shai Zi, but to think that they’d make a move first.”

“Who is it?”

“Unspeakable. It’s a special Siming. They taught me my illusion techniques. You should know that a normal Siming cannot manifest in the world, all thanks to the Dragon Vein’s existence, but they are different. Even though they taught me my illusion techniques, they had never concerned themselves with my well-being or the well-being of others. Two hundred years ago, the Liang Kingdom found itself on the brink of annihilation, and I swore to sacrifice everything in exchange for their help, but they did not even look at me.”

Gao Zhijian was confused at the Chief’s words, and it was all because the answer he had heard was different from what the Dragon Vein had told him. “I thought... there are no more... Simings...”

“Did they tell you that? Listen to them, then. Since they said that the Simings don’t exist, then they don’t exist.”

Gao Zhijian decided not to pursue it any further as he changed the subject, saying, “Senior Li... should be feeling better by now... we can just... go and ask him... I might... understand it better if it’s coming from him.”

The Chief said nothing and followed Gao Zhijian toward where Li Huowang was located.

Li Huowang was nearby, and Gao Zhijian could actually visit him any time he wished.

They saw Bai Lingmiao exiting the room with a food box in hand.

When Bai Lingmiao saw the Chief standing next to Gao Zhijian,

her eyes widened in shock as he asked, "What's happening? Why is there another one here?"

"Another one? What's wrong?!" Gao Zhijian exclaimed.

"The Chief of the Surveillance Bureau entered the room while I was feeding Senior Li some congee."

At the remark, the Chief made a seal with his three pairs of arms and charged at the heavily guarded door as fast as possible. He moved so quickly that he left a trail of afterimages.

However, the Chief heard Li Huowang talking to someone in the room. There really was someone else aside from Bai Lingmiao.

The Chief pushed the door open and saw Li Huowang staring at him with his lotus root head.

Shockingly, no one else was in the room.

"Who were you talking to?"

Li Huowang frowned and tried his best to remember before answering, "Ji Zai."

Chapter 588 - Talk

Ji Zai was the name that Zhuge Yuan had given Li Huowang as a cover for his true identity.

However, the name now belonged to the Siming controlling the Heavenly Dao of Bewilderment, which was Li Huowang's future.

At first, Li Huowang didn't know that it was the name of his future self, but the name felt familiar to him.

Li Huowang deduced that the person who had just disappeared like sand was either Ji Zai himself or a part of him.

Li Huowang wasn't sure if he truly had a conversation with his future self, who was a Siming in the distant future. He could only guess whether that was the case or not.

More importantly, Li Huowang had no idea what Ji Zai had told him before he left.

"I think he's called Ji Zai," Li Huowang said.

However, his answer confused even the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau. *Isn't Ji Zai his own fake name? Was he talking to himself?*

While they were both feeling confused, Gao Zhijian and Bai Lingmiao finally arrived at the room. The two sighed in relief upon seeing that Li Huowang was fine.

They were worried about his safety upon realizing that the Chief whom Bai Lingmiao had seen was fake.

"Men! Send some troops and guard this room! Check the identity of anyone who approaches this room!" Gao Zhijian shouted.

Several eunuchs appeared out of nowhere and kneeled before him.

"You don't have to mobilize so many people just to do

something like that. I'm fine. Let everyone do what they're supposed to do. You don't have to keep worrying about me." Li Huowang pulled the blanket back up and laid down on the bed.

"Senior Li, that Chief was fake!" Bai Lingmiao exclaimed, walking toward Li Huowang with a food box in hand.

"I know." Li Huowang patted her hands lightly and said, "Don't worry. Even though I'm heavily injured, I can still fend for myself. Those daring enough to assassinate me might end up dying themselves."

Li Huowang was confident. After all, he was Ji Zai's Twisted One at the moment.

Gao Zhijian nodded in agreement. Li Huowang was strong enough to fight Shai Zi, so who could be his match?

"Senior Li... who... was that?" Gao Zhijian asked.

"It was a friend. Don't worry, it doesn't concern you," Li Huowang replied. Then, he sized up Gao Zhijian and nodded in approval. "Not bad. Gao Zhijian, that dragon robe looks great on you."

Li Huowang didn't bother explaining, as he didn't want the others to worry about him becoming his own Twisted One.

In addition, Li Huowang himself didn't know when he would become Ji Zai.

It could be a year, ten years, or perhaps he'd become Ji Zai once he was dead, but he didn't really care. He knew that something like this would happen way before he executed the plan to defeat Shai Zi.

Gao Zhijian scratched his head and looked at Senior Li. The latter still looked the same as always, but something was slightly different about him. Li Huowang's personality had become much more relaxed.

Xuan Pin said nothing.

Gao Zhijian glanced at the Chief and recalled why he had

decided to visit Li Huowang. "Senior Li, is Shai Zi... really gone? Will he come back and... control me again?"

Li Huowang recalled the eighteen-sided dice that Yi Donglai had taken away.

"He's gone," Li Huowang said with a nod. "Don't worry. He will never return."

Gao Zhijian sighed in relief. He had faith in Senior Li, and since Senior Li had said so, Shai Zi would definitely never come back.

"Zhijian, prepare a carriage for me to return to Cowheart Village. My wounds are almost healed."

Gao Zhijian shook his head.

Li Huowang only had his mouth left, so there was no way his wounds were almost healed. "No. There are doctors here, and they can take better care of you. Your wounds are too serious. You need to rest here."

"It's okay. Why should I rest here? Do you really think that I'll die with this level of injury?" Li Huowang asked, standing up.

Gao Zhijian ran up and carefully shielded Li Huowang's lotus root head, seemingly afraid that Li Huowang would stumble to the floor and smash it open.

Li Huowang wanted to leave, but Bai Lingmiao dragged him back into the room.

"Senior Li, please stay here. I beg you. We can just go back once your wounds are fully healed. You're too injured to travel right now," Bai Lingmiao begged.

Li Huowang relented and said, "All right, but at least let me walk around. I need some fresh air."

Gao Zhijian was willing to let Senior Li do whatever he wanted to do as long as the latter wasn't risking his life doing it.

They talked for a bit before Gao Zhijian asked out of curiosity, "Senior Li, Senior Bai told me that your illness is finally cured. Is it true?"

“Yes, it’s cured.” Li Huowang nodded. “I never thought that it’d be cured just like that.”

Gao Zhijian was genuinely happy for Li Huowang.

Senior Li was a great person, but his illness was the worst among those from Zephyr Temple.

The fact that he was finally cured meant that he could finally live a normal life.

Moreover, Gao Zhijian was the Emperor of the Liang Kingdom, which meant he could fulfill any of Li Huowang's wishes.

“Zhijian, how does it feel being the emperor?” Li Huowang asked.

"Great..." Gao Zhijian smiled. "It feels great. I can eat a ton of good food, even food that I had never seen before. Once your wounds are healed and you can finally eat proper food again, I will let the chefs prepare some of those great dishes for you. Also... I'm going to have... many wives... a hundred wives."

"That many? You better not tell Puppy, or he'll die from jealousy."

"No, I have to tell him." Gao Zhijian grinned. "I have to brag my wives to him."

The air in the room mellowed out, and everyone chatted like they were back in Zephyr Temple.

In the end, Xuan Pin had to remind Gao Zhijian of his duties.

Gao Zhijian left the room promptly. He had too many things to learn as the new emperor, so he had no time to waste.

He had just walked out of the room when Xuan Pin said, "I can't see through him anymore. Your Majesty, please be careful of him."

Gao Zhijian looked at Xuan Pin with displeasure. "Why? He's Senior Li. He's not going to harm me."

"I'm not talking about that, Your Majesty. All I'm saying is that it's difficult to deduce the hearts of other people. You have to

understand that Shai Zi had become the Dragon Vein, but he still managed to defeat him. In other words, he can definitely deal with you quite easily. Can you really sleep peacefully despite knowing that? Also, he has a relationship with the Saintess of the White Lotus Sect. Of course, I've already removed the White Lotus Sect from our bounty list, as they've assisted us greatly. However, you must ponder whether interacting with them is worth the risk.

"Of course, the decision is still up to you. You are the emperor, after all. I'm just the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau. This is out of my jurisdiction, but I still felt obligated to warn you for the sake of the Liang Kingdom."

Gao Zhijian's face fell as he started walking away.

"The job of the emperor is hard, but it can be easy. If you have something you don't understand, just go ahead and ask the Dragon Vein. They can teach you everything—from how to control the officials, how to handle national affairs, to handling the sects and factions scattered throughout the palace."

Gao Zhijian remained silent as he listened to Xuan Pin's words.

Translator's Thoughts

I laughed at this fan art. It's too stupid. Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin!



Chapter 589 - Mental Hospital

Li Huowang was sitting in a wheelchair with his mother pushing him out of the room. His thin arms—the size of chicken legs—were cuffed to the wheelchair.

Despite his condition, Li Huowang was surprised that they didn't make him wear a straitjacket. It seemed that they were convinced that he was cured.

Li Huowang glanced at the four guards around him and said, “I’m just going out for some fresh air. Do I really need this many guards?”

“It’s fine; let them be. They’re here under the orders of the higher-ups. Little Liu’s job is already hard, so don’t make it harder for him.

Li Huowang smiled at his mother’s words. Clearly, his mother was doing well here. Otherwise, she wouldn't have given the people here any nicknames.

“Huowang, it’s raining outside, so let’s just stay inside. We can still stroll inside the hospital.”

“All right.”

With that, Li Huowang was pushed around the hospital. After several turns, Li Huowang found himself in a larger room.

A group of people wearing the same blue-and-white hospital gown were staring at the television on the wall.

Li Huowang wasn't a doctor, but he was quite knowledgeable about mental illness, as he himself had been diagnosed with a mental illness.

He swept his gaze across the other patients and deduced their

illness.

Those with a penchant for talking nonsense, or those lucid but had a penchant for talking nonstop were a part of the so-called mental breakdown group. The majority of the patients here had no one to take care of them at home and were sent to the hospital by their relatives, while a big chunk of the rest were those who were caught having an episode on the streets.

Li Huowang deduced that those withdrawn and silent were most likely diagnosed with depression.

Those who were easily excited and incredibly anxious most likely had hypomania, while those with glazed eyes had probably just taken their medicine.

Li Huowang looked around and noticed that some were close to a complete recovery. He judged that they could have anorexia, bulimia, or perhaps they were just pretending that they were about to recover.

Unfortunately, Li Huowang wouldn't know unless he asked them. Perhaps some of them were like him and had been locked up against their will.

However, those allowed to watch television were patients with milder symptoms.

There were many types of mental disorders out there—too many for Li Huowang to know, as he was just a layman.

Just then, Li Huowang saw the patients turning around at the same time to stare at him. They looked like they were having more fun staring at his face than staring at the television.

Li Huowang was confused. "Why are they looking at me?"

A guard, nicknamed Little Liu, answered, "Li Huowang, you're famous here. It's not just them. Your name has spread throughout the fifteen sections of the prison."

"I'm *that* famous?"

"Yes, but your fame is actually not going up anymore."

However, when news about your daring rescue went viral, your name went on the ‘most searched term’ on the Internet for several days. Why do you think the higher-ups are paying so much attention to you?”

Li Huowang finally had a faint understanding of what kind of status he had in the people's hearts.

Then, he saw the patients distancing themselves from him, staying at least ten meters away from him.

“Mom, let’s stop here. I want to watch TV. I haven’t watched TV in a long time.” Li Huowang looked at the afternoon news. It was boring, but Li Huowang found the experience to be quite refreshing.

“Good afternoon, everyone! Today is the twenty-third day of the last month of the Lunar Calendar. Only seven more days to the new year! Today is the day to pray to the Stove God[\[1\]](#), while tomorrow is a good day to clean up the house!”

“Is it going to be the new year soon?” Li Huowang felt like he had just traveled back in time. He didn't expect that so much time had already passed.

“Yes, and you'd have lived another year by then. What do you want to eat? I'll go and make anything for you. Ah, I've heard that there's a popular game coming out soon. I'll give you some money so you can buy that game once you are discharged.”

“Mom, I'm not a kid anymore.”

“You're only eighteen. You're an adult according to the law, but you're barely a young man.

Just like that, Li Huowang spent quite a lot of time amidst his mother's nagging and the cheery tune of the news.

Li Huowang loved this peace and quiet, and he wanted it to last until he died of old age.

Beneath this peace and quiet, Li Huowang felt like everything he had experienced so far was all just a bad dream.

"Mom, where is Doctor Yi? Haven't seen him in a while."

"I heard that he no longer has time to come to work anymore. He's busy writing a thesis."

"He's a doctor. Why is he writing a thesis?"

"I don't know anything about that. But Sister Ma, who is working in the kitchen, told me that a media outlet has interviewed him. I think he's going to appear on TV."

"Is that so? Then I have to congratulate him."

"Yes. Doctor Yi is a really responsible man. I heard that he's still single, even though he's already thirty years old. How nervous do you think his mother is right now? I'll definitely be nervous if you're still single despite being so old."

Li Huowang felt like scratching his head out of awkwardness. *Are middle-aged aunties these days so well informed? How did she even know that Doctor Yi is single?*

"Sister Sun, the times have changed. It's normal for people to remain single even in their thirties," one of the prison guards said.

The guards relaxed a lot upon realizing that Li Huowang's condition was improving. They had let their guard down so much to the point that they started joking around Sun Xiaoqin.

"Ah, I think you guys just want to play around. There's an advantage to marrying earlier. If you get married and have children earlier, your parents can help you raise those children. In other words, your wife will have an easier time recovering after birth."

"It's not that we don't want to get married, but we were already twenty-something when we graduated. We have neither savings, cars, nor houses. Who'd want to marry us? We also work in the prison for half a month at a time. How can we even find a girlfriend when we're spending so much time here? In fact, most of the girls we were courting ran away once they discovered that they could only see us for six months throughout an entire year."

"But you guys have a stable job! There's no way you can't find

a wife. If you think that your work here is what's hampering your search for a wife, then what about those working as gig workers? You might as well say that they'll be forever alone.”

Upon hearing that, another guard chimed in, but Sun Xiaoqin didn't retreat even against two guards. In fact, she talked with even more vigor.

Li Huowang felt his scalp going numb as he watched them argue with each other, and he couldn't help but look away; his gaze landed on the corridor to his left.

1. The Stove God is a minor deity that reports to the Heavenly Palace about the conduct of a family throughout the year. Praying to it involves bribing it with sweets so that it will report only good news to the Heavenly Palace and in turn the Heavenly Palace would reward the family for their good conduct. Good conduct involves not wasting food, cleaning up promptly, not overeating, sharing their food with their neighbors and the less fortunate, etc 🙏

Chapter 590 - Trouble

Li Huowang had been talking peacefully while basking in the sunlight amidst the beautiful garden when he suddenly looked up.

The cheerful atmosphere vanished in an instant.

Li Sui noticed Li Huowang's strange behavior and asked, "Father[1], what's wrong?"

Bai Lingmiao carefully asked, "Senior Li, is everything okay?"

They were inside one of the palace's gardens. It was winter solstice, but the eunuchs responsible for taking care of the garden used a secret technique to ensure that the flowers would remain blooming.

The eunuchs and consorts trembled and knelt down from afar upon seeing Li Huowang.

Li Huowang's entourage had been enjoying the beautiful scenery, but Li Huowang's abrupt change in demeanor and behavior made everyone feel nervous.

Li Huowang looked down and replied, "Nothing. I just think that the weather is great today."

Everyone sighed in relief, especially Puppy. He really thought that something was about to go wrong. "Senior Li, you scared us. We thought your illness had returned."

"I'm already cured. Wait, I heard that the Lu family followed you to Shangjing. Is that true?" Li Huowang asked, changing the subject.

"Yes. Simpleton even gifted them a theater. Lu Zhuangyuan was so happy that his nose blew bubbles of snot."

At first, Bai Lingmiao thought that the others would become uncomfortable staring at Li Huowang's head made out of lotus roots, but she was mistaken.

Surprisingly, everyone accepted it quickly.

It wasn't really that surprising to them, who had seen Li Huowang suffering severe injuries during their travels. Unfortunately, the eunuchs and consorts were different, and they couldn't quite get used to it.

"Is that so? That's great news. The dream that he had been working so hard for half of his life has finally been fulfilled," Li Huowang said. He extended his hand toward Li Sui and patted her head.

Several tentacles plucked the nearby flowers, placing them on Li Huowang's head.

However, Li Huowang took them away from his head and placed them on Li Sui's head instead.

Since Li Huowang was fine, the innocent Li Sui happily sat on the former's lap without thinking too much about the bizarre situation.

"His theater is so large! I'm sure the Lu family's pink show will become popular with such a large theater. We have to go and support them!"

"Are they still singing that? What a waste of a great theater."

"Huh? What's wrong with the pink show? Who doesn't like it?"

The group laughed and chatted as they walked around the garden. They discovered many things during their stroll, including the fact that the palace had a special greenhouse that they were using to grow vegetables, even during winter.

Everyone was thrilled, and they plucked some vegetables for themselves. They were planning on using the vegetables to make dumpling fillings for the upcoming New Year's Eve.

Fresh vegetables were rare during winter, and the vegetables belonged to Gao Zhijian, so they were more than happy to pluck them. They all believed that what belonged to Gao Zhijian belonged to them as well.

After spending some more time in the garden, everyone to their quarters with smiles tugging at their lips.

Li Huowang needed more rest, so they didn't want to disturb him. They followed him back to his residence before calling it a day.

Once everyone had walked out of the residence, Bai Lingmiao pushed Li Huowang into his bedroom.

"Senior Li, are you really fine?" Bai Lingmiao was technically blind, but the relic that she had consumed allowed her to see clearly.

Earlier, Li Huowang had looked up not because of the weather but because of something else.

"Don't worry. It's a small issue."

Just as they were about to enter the bedroom, Li Huowang raised his hand and stopped her. "Miaomiao, can you call Chief Xuan Pin for me? I need to discuss something with him."

Bai Lingmiao was surprised, but she still nodded and said, "All right, I will."

When she left, she pulled Li Sui from Li Huowang's body. But she was reluctant because she missed Li Huowang.

"Mother, let me stay with Father. I haven't seen him for so long," Li Sui begged. She looked like a pretty young woman right now, but she was still acting like a child.

"No. Your father's head is very fragile. What are we going to do if you end up breaking it by accident? You have to come with me outside!" Bai Lingmiao replied sternly, frightening Li Sui.

In the end, she relented and followed Bai Lingmiao out while staring at Bai Lingmiao.

The room became incredibly quiet upon Bai Lingmiao and Li Sui's departure.

Li Huowang closed his eyes amidst the silence. Eventually, his right hand started tapping on the fine leather armrest, while his left

hand started tapping on his wheelchair made out of bamboo strips.

Amidst the silence and darkness, the smell of disinfectant and flowers seemed to have been amplified.

“Li Huowang? You were looking for me?”

Li Huowang opened his eyes and saw Xuan Pin standing in front of him.

Xuan Pin's large frame and big red robes occupied Li Huowang's entire field of view.

Li Huowang stared deeply at Xuan Pin before asking, “Are there ropes that are still untied?”

“Who told you that?” Xuan Pin asked, taken aback by the revelation that Li Huowang knew about the ropes.

“No one. I sensed it myself,” Li Huowang asked. He could remember someone's piercing gaze on him from the hospital's corridor.

Xuan Pin nodded. “Yes, but the Surveillance Bureau is going to deal with it. It's just a small matter, so don't worry about it and focus on recovering.”

“What's going on?” Li Huowang asked once again. Anything related to the Dragon Vein was definitely not a small matter.

Xuan Pin remained silent and turned around to leave instead of answering Li Huowang's question.

“You don't trust me?” Li Huowang asked.

Xuan Pin came to a halt.

“I helped you deal with Shai Zi, and you still don't trust me?” Li Huowang added.

“If you were in my shoes, would you trust yourself?”

Li Huowang said nothing. Their common enemy was dead, but their relationship seemed like it would never progress to the point that they could fully trust each other.

“Come find me anytime whenever you need help. I'm staying in the Liang Kingdom, so I definitely don't want it to fall.”

Xuan Pin's shadow beneath the robes stared deeply at Li Huowang.

“That's what you think, but what about the thoughts of the entity behind you? You're not yourself these days, too. Clearly, the plans of a Siming will never align with the plans of mortals. We're the Surveillance Bureau, and we intend to observe the Heavens at all cost.”

Xuan Pin's large figure disappeared into thin air, and the room became quiet once again.

Li Huowang became immersed in his own thoughts. Xuan Pin trusted him, but he had no trust in Li Huowang's future self.

Since Xuan Pin had no trust in him, there was no reason for him to trust the former.

Unfortunately, Xuan Pin was unwilling to talk about it, so he had no choice but to deal with it himself.

After all, Li Huowang had never been someone who'd merely sit down upon realizing that trouble was knocking on his door.

1. We've decided to use Father and Mother for this world, while Mom and Dad on the other side 🤔

Chapter 591 - Appear

Two days later, Li Huowang finally opened his eyes once again. Sun Xiaoqin wanted to wheel him into the bathroom, but he refused and washed himself.

He was extremely weak, but he tried his best and ended up spending half a day just washing himself.

Sun Xiaoqin was waiting for him when he got out of the bathroom.

Li Huowang's hands were quivering as he grabbed the chopsticks to eat the soup dumplings that Sun Xiaoqin had made for him.

“Eat more. You have to eat more if you want to grow stronger. Anyway, what do you think about going for physiotherapy after all this? Does that sound good to you?”

“Mmhm.” Li Huowang nodded with his cheeks stuffed with soup dumplings. He was too weak; he needed to recover to the extent that he could walk by himself as soon as possible.

If he were to face off against a Strayed One's version of himself, he'd probably die with just a flick of a finger.

After breakfast, Li Huowang went for physiotherapy. He grabbed the rail firmly and exhausted himself just to move a tiny bit.

It was a feat easily achievable by ordinary people, but it was exceedingly difficult for Li Huowang. Soon, he started sweating bullets, and he felt abnormally sore.

Thankfully, he had long gotten used to such pain, so the thought of giving up never popped up in his mind.

After several sessions, Li Huowang laid down on his bed while breathing in ragged pants.

His limbs were twitching; this was a sign that he was recovering.

Sun Xiaoqin massaged his sore muscles to prevent the buildup of lactic acid. Otherwise, his muscles would become even more sore tomorrow.

Sun Xiaoqin had no issues massaging Li Huowang, as she had been doing so every day to ensure that Li Huowang's muscles wouldn't waste away at a fast rate.

“Don’t give up, son! We’ll work together for your treatment. Once you can be discharged, we’ll transfer you to another hospital. To be honest, this place feels more like a prison than a hospital.”

“Why won't we go back home? I still have to go to another hospital?” Li Huowang asked with a frown.

“We can’t go home so soon. Don’t worry. Once you're completely cured... I mean, once the doctors are sure that you're cured, then you can go home.”

“What a hassle.”

“ *Hohoho~* ” Sun Xiaoqin thought of it otherwise. Her son's treatment was far more important to her than anything.

She was happy, as she could finally see the light at the end of the tunnel. She no longer had to grasp at straws, and she was no longer terrified by the idea that her son would remain ill for the rest of his life.

Li Huowang's treatment was the reason Sun Xiaoqin had been extremely frugal all this while. She saved as much money as she could for her son's treatment and for her son himself, afraid that no one would take care of his son once she and her husband were no longer of this world. By then, Li Huowang would surely become homeless and would be forced to scavenge for food among garbage. He could also end up dying from hypothermia during the bitter cold of the winter months.

Fortunately, her son's prognosis was great. She no longer had to

be *that* frugal, but she was still saving quite a bit of money for his wedding.

Girls are pretty materialistic these days. I should save more money just in case. Thankfully, he's still young, so there's still plenty of time.

"Mom, you're massaging my neck," Li Huowang said.

Sun Xiaoqin snapped back to reality and let go of Li Huowang's neck. She then patted his cheeks gently and said, "Be good and rest for now. I'll go and get some water to wipe away your sweat."

And just like that, days passed by as Li Huowang continued with his physiotherapy. He still looked emaciated, but he no longer needed anyone's help to walk. He could finally carry a bowl with one hand as well.

Li Huowang's actions were unremarkable these days, so everyone dropped their guard around him.

At first, Li Huowang had four guards around him, but it dropped to three after a few days until only two guards were stationed around him.

The hospital had many people to handle, and they couldn't afford to waste manpower just to keep tabs on Li Huowang.

One afternoon, Li Huowang was sitting on a bench watching television with two guards standing behind him.

Of course, his hands were still cuffed.

The other patients were still avoiding him, and no one dared to sit near him.

Li Huowang couldn't care less; he had no intentions of becoming friends with them. He once approached one of the patients, but the patient was reduced to tears in fear.

Li Huowang stared at the romance drama, and he felt second-hand embarrassment from the absurd plot. "What kind of show is this? Do they have nothing else to do? Can love even earn them money?"

"I think you should watch some more drama, you brat," Little

Liu said. "You can learn techniques from them—techniques on wooing a girl."

Li Huowang was not a criminal, so there was no reason for them to be alert all the time. Sun Xiaoqin also gave them food from time to time, so the guards had a fairly amicable relationship with Li Huowang.

"You need to learn those from dramas? No wonder you haven't been able to find a girlfriend. Anyway, do you have a phone? Let me borrow it. I feel like playing games."

"Yeah, I have a phone—in my dreams! Management doesn't even let us carry a keypad phone," Little Liu said, staring at the TV.

Li Huowang sighed and stood up before walking to the left corridor.

"Where are you going?" asked Little Liu as he stood up immediately, along with the other guard.

"Where else? I'm going to the toilet."

"We'll go with you."

The two guards escorted Li Huowang to the toilet.

This wasn't Li Huowang's first time in the corridor's toilet. The guards stood outside while Li Huowang relieved himself slowly as if he was waiting for something.

"Li Huowang, I think there's something wrong with your kidneys. Why else would you have to use the toilet for so long and every day at that?"

"You should worry about yourself. For your information, I have a girlfriend."

"Fuck off."

Li Huowang washed his hands and saw an old man carrying a trash bag entering the toilet. Li Huowang looked up at the mirror and saw that the old man was wearing a cap and a mask.

Li Huowang turned around and was about to leave when he was struck by that bizarre sensation once again. His figure tensed

up as he stared at the reflection of the old man cleaning the toilet.

Sensing his gaze, the old man looked up and saw Li Huowang's eyes through the mirror, but he quickly lowered his head.

It was brief, but Li Huowang recognized the old man through the latter's gaze. The old man was Wang Wei!

"Guys, I need some more time. I've got to dump."

"Hurry up. Do you have any tissues?" Little Liu asked. He didn't seem to have sensed anything wrong, and it was all because Li Huowang's tone of voice didn't sound off at all.

Moreover, Doctor Yi had told them that Li Huowang's episodes would always start with ramblings, so it wasn't that difficult to know that Li Huowang was in the middle of an episode.

Li Huowang stared deeply at the door before walking slowly toward Wang Wei.

"What are you doing here?" Li Huowang asked.

Wang Wei was his previous doctor, and he could still remember the fact that Wang Wei had lost his mind for some reason.

Wang Wei's right hand reached out and grabbed Li Huowang's wrist. His voice was low, but the trembling in his voice spoke volumes of his tumultuous emotions. "I know! That side is real! I know it's real!"

Wang Wei's pupils were quivering violently, and he looked like a patient having a manic episode.

Chapter 592 - Wang Wei

Li Huowang was surprised by Wang Wei's statement, and he was even more surprised by Wang Wei's appearance. *I think he really went crazy.*

He had no idea what happened to Wang Wei for him to change so much in such a short period of time.

Li Huowang looked at the door and saw that the guards were still outside, so he whispered, "Wang Wei, my illness has been cured. The other side is fake. I merely imagined it. We're done here. Don't come and look for me again, or else!"

Li Huowang shook Wang Wei off and turned around to leave, but he didn't expect Wang Wei to pester him.

"I have video evidence of you producing gold out of nowhere! Do you have any idea what's going to happen to you once I post it on the Internet?!" Wang Wei said.

Li Huowang came to a halt. He turned around and glared at Wang Wei.

He walked up to Wang Wei and whispered into the latter's ears, "You better think before you speak. I'm still a patient here, and if a mentally ill person commits a crime, it is not considered a crime!"

Li Huowang then snarled, revealing his white teeth.

Wang Wei shivered, feeling like he was talking to a beast rather than to a man. Li Huowang was really going to kill him!

However, his excitement was still higher than his fear; he pretended to be calm as he replied, "I don't believe you. You can't kill me because you're not ill! You only have special powers!"

Wang Wei then retreated after saying that, afraid that Li Huowang would bite off his head. "I'm not here to threaten you! I'm here to work with you earnestly!"

“You've lost your mind!” Li Huowang roared. Footsteps echoed from outside just then.

“We have to stop talking! We'll talk again once we get another chance!”

“Little Li?” Little Liu asked as he entered the toilet with the other guard. They saw Li Huowang washing his hands, and an old man was mopping the floor.

“Why are you guys in such a hurry? I'm handcuffed, so I can't move fast.” Li Huowang shook the water off of his hand and left without looking at Wang Wei.

The guards looked at the old man in confusion before following Li Huowang out of the toilet.

In the next few days, Li Huowang never visited that specific toilet and Wang Wei didn't visit him at all. It seemed like nothing had happened between them.

However, Li Huowang knew that it wasn't over yet.

Wang Wei would definitely come and visit him, and he had to be prepared for that.

Several days later, a festive atmosphere enveloped the hospital, and the patients were smiling more often.

Soon, it would be the New Year, and the hospital's food had become better than usual.

Li Huowang even heard the guards talking about how the other hospitals would even set up stages, allowing patients to perform and showcase their talents.

Unfortunately, the White Tower Hospital had no patients capable of performing, so they decided to just make some dumplings to eat during New Year's Eve as well as other traditional activities.

Finally, it was New Year's Eve. Sun Xiaoqin was giggling in joy as she wrapped dumplings with Li Huowang. She laughed at Li Huowang's messy dumplings.

“Wrap them faster, so we can go watch the shows that are only aired during New Year's Eve.”

“Do we really need to make so many dumplings?” Li Huowang asked, shaking his handcuffed hands.

“Of course! We can't just make it for ourselves. We need to share them with the other patients. They've been leading a hard life all this time.”

Soon, they were done wrapping the dumplings, and Sun Xiaoqin took them to the kitchen. There were knives in the kitchen so someone like Li Huowang was banned from even getting close to it.

Little Liu led him to the common area to watch television. Perhaps it was because of the holiday, but Li Huowang only had one guard around him.

“Do you still need to work overtime despite it being a holiday today? You sure have it rough,” Li Huowang said, sitting down on the bench.

Little Liu was unhappy as well. He fished out a piece of candy from his pocket and ate it before replying, “ *Sigh*. What can I say? I'm just a paid prisoner at this point. I don't feel like working here anymore. Why was I so stupid to take up this job?”

“Hey, look at the bright side. Even though you can't go home during the New Year's Eve, you still have overtime pay. Most people don't even get paid despite working overtime.”

Soon, it was eight o'clock, and the show that Sun Xiaoqin had been waiting for today finally started.

Sun Xiaoqin also served the dumplings.

A group of patients and guards ate dumplings while complaining about the show. The festive air around the hospital seemed to reach its peak, making everyone feel like they were truly about to welcome another year.

Just then, the bizarre sensation came back. Li Huowang said

nothing and stood up. He told Little Liu that the show was boring and that he wanted to go to sleep.

Everyone was in the common area, so the wards were quiet, even the corridors were desolate.

Li Huowang glanced at the red light coming from the surveillance camera. Moments later, it disappeared, and the door to his room swung open.

"You're here?" Li Huowang wasn't surprised to see Wang Wei here.

Li Huowang saw Wang Wei, and he was wearing a blue-and-white striped hospital gown as a disguise.

"You're really good at this. To think that you can infiltrate this place so easily," Li Huowang said. He knew that he had to deal with this matter tonight.

Wang Wei merely threw a stack of paper onto Li Huowang's bed. "It's Yi Donglai's thesis. I know what you've encountered over there."

Li Huowang gave the documents a quick read and saw that the majority of what he had said to Yi Donglai was written on them.

While Li Huowang was busy reading the documents, Wang Wei walked up to him with an agitated look. "Since you can bring some gold from there to this side, you can also do the same for lifespan pills! I need you to bring over a pill for me right now!"

Li Huowang stared deeply at Wang Wei before saying, "While you were still my doctor, I ended up getting abducted by a few men. They thought I could produce gold out of thin air, too. Did you tell them about me?"

Li Huowang could still remember how he was abducted by a strange group of people, which ended up in him becoming a vagrant living underneath a bridge.

Li Huowang realized that those men couldn't have abducted him so easily without an insider's help, and he suspected Wang Wei

of being that insider.

Chapter 593 - Self Defense

Wang Wei was silent, but it was an answer in Li Huowang's eyes.

“You used them to test me, right?” Li Huowang asked.

Wang Wei took a deep breath, and his expression became serious as he said, “Little Li, I was your doctor, so I'm familiar with you. I have a method that will allow you to make full use of your power! I can let you live like a king on both sides!”

Li Huowang shook his head and threw the thesis onto the bed. “I'm sorry, but no. I can't do it.”

“Are you scared that I might take advantage of you? You're the one who gets to decide what to take from the other side! I can't force you. Bring me a lifespan pill from there, and we'll continue talking”

Li Huowang shook his head once more and explained, “No, I'm saying that I've been cured, so I will never have those illusions again.”

“What did you say?” Wang Wei asked blankly when someone tackled him and pinned him to the ground. Wang Wei's hands were cuffed in the blink of an eye, and then he was forced to stand up. It was only then that he saw several scowling guards standing before him, along with a man wearing a white hospital robe. He recognized the latter, as he was none other than Li Huowang's current doctor, Yi Donglai.

“Doctor Wang, you're sick. You need treatment,” Li Huowang said calmly.

Li Huowang had told Yi Donglai about his meeting with Wang Wei. Since Wang Wei had made use of him, why couldn't he do the same? There was no reason not to capture Wang Wei, as the latter

could kick up a fuss, which would delay Li Huowang's discharge from the hospital.

Wang Wei struggled against the guards holding him down as he glared at Li Huowang. "It's useless even if you lock me up! I'm just a pawn! Your potential is too big, and it cannot be kept a secret!"

The guards dragged Wang Wei outside, leaving Li Huowang and Yi Donglai alone in the room.

"Don't worry; his illness is quite severe, so he's not going to be able to bother you for a while."

"I'm worried about something else."

"Is it your illness? Don't worry; you've stabilized. Someone else has brought it up to you, but you did not relapse."

"Is that so? Do you really think that I'm fine? How would you explain Bei Feng's words, then? Why do I feel that you've instigated it?" Li Huowang asked Ji Zai while holding his head made out of lotus root.

Ji Zai was quiet for a while before responding, "It's because something happened, and we need your help."

"Help? How may I help you? Why are you acting as if I were your Twisted One?" Li Huowang asked.

"There's no reason to differentiate between ourselves. I am you, and you are me. We have the same Heavenly Dao."

Li Huowang rubbed his temples; flesh had started growing on his lotus root head.

"The denouement has come. Can't I even live in peace?"

"You chose this, and my choice is your choice, too, so you should not complain."

"Fine," Li Huowang said. He sighed in exasperation before asking, "Tell me what to do."

"The Sitting Oblivion Dao has been annihilated, so this is our golden opportunity. I need your help snatching away Yinyang Doulao's Heavenly Dao of Truth and Falsehoods."

Li Huowang was outraged. He found the suggestion so absurd that he almost laughed. “You need my help doing that? *Pfft!* I’m just an ordinary person. How can I snatch those away? How can I help you deal with a Siming with two Heavenly Daos? Also, aren’t you responsible for the Heavenly Dao of Bewilderment? Are your hands not full just taking care of your own Heavenly Dao? Why do you need more Heavenly Daos to the extent that you’ve actually considered robbing a Siming for it? I’m tired... I’m really tired. Can’t I rest for a few years?”

Ji Zai replied, “I’m not the one seeking trouble here; I am simply trying to protect myself. Don’t forget that helping me equals helping yourself. If anything were to happen to me, what had happened would change.”

“Protect?” Li Huowang was shocked. He stared at Ji Zai, and asked nervously, “Did something happen at Baiyu Capital? No, even if something had happened, how could that event be significant enough to harm you—a Siming?”

“You’ll know the answer if you think about the reason why the Surveillance Bureau wanted the Sacred Mountain Ghost Eye. You should also think about why Shai Zi even came up with such a complicated plan to obtain the Dragon Vein. Something major is happening, and they can feel it. How about you? Don’t tell me that you don’t feel anything.”

Li Huowang was confused, and he sat down silently, pondering everything that had happened to him. He had the feeling that something major was going down, but he thought that it was none of his business.

He thought that even if the heavens ended up collapsing, someone would be there to hold it up.

However, Li Huowang couldn’t have imagined that his future self would be the figure who’d end up protecting everyone.

“Is it God Yu’er?” Li Huowang asked, recalling the ruined Qi

Kingdom and Qiu Chibao's illusion, whose head was covered with a white cloth.

It was all God Yu'er's fault, along with the Sun-Devouring Heavenly Dog in the Qi Kingdom, which had devoured half of the sun.

"If it were just God Yu'er, it would be easy to handle," Ji Zai said, and his words made Li Huowang feel afraid of what was to come.

"Who could it be other than God Yu'er? Who are they, where did they come from, and what do they want?"

"I can't tell you that, as they'll immediately learn of your existence the moment you learn of their existence. In addition, even your future self did not tell your present self."

Li Huowang was confused; he had no idea what Ji Zai was talking about.

"You want me to help you snatch Yinyang Doulao's Heavenly Daos, but you haven't told me how to do that. What do I need to do?"

"You can probably do it through Bei Feng. Find Bei Feng and the Doulao's Twisted Dao. Kill them and leave the rest to me," said "Xuan Pin." Moments later, his figure started to crumble like sand.

"What?! You could have told me that earlier! The Surveillance Bureau has just captured Bei Feng! They are never going to let me make contact with Bei Feng!"

Ji Zai ignored Li Huowang and simply disappeared into nothingness.

Frustrated, Li Huowang sprawled out on the bed. He closed his eyes and tried to sleep. He didn't want to do anything, but he understood that he had to do it.

It was going to affect his future self and the future of the Liang Kingdom.

Regardless of what was to come, becoming even stronger

would not hurt him at all.

Li Huowang knew that he could end up failing to save everyone, but he wanted to save his loved ones, at the very least.

“Ji Zai can’t be trusted. I need to think of a way myself...” Li Huowang muttered to himself.

Almost no one knew what happened on this fateful night, as everyone was in the common area for New Year's Eve. In other words, they had no idea what had transpired in the ward.

The higher-ups in the hospital were the only ones aware of what had transpired, and they ended up removing Li Huowang's restraints.

Li Huowang could move freely now!

Sun Xiaoqin was happy but for a different reason.

Chapter 594 - Transfer

Li Huowang continued with his physical therapy, and Sun Xiaoqin cooked a variety of meals to fill Li Huowang's emaciated body with nutrients.

Li Huowang built more and more muscles as time ticked by, and his recovery rate could actually be considered pretty fast.

He no longer looked like a skeleton beneath his hospital gown, and his arms were slowly recovering their strength.

While Li Huowang was happily eating his tangyuan[1] on his bed, an unexpected visitor arrived.

The bald head of the visitor reminded Li Huowang of a certain someone—a certain prison warden.

“Madam Sun, your son’s condition has stabilized, and he is now eligible for transfer to another hospital. Why don’t you send him to a private hospital that is capable of treating him better? He'd be able to live a more comfortable life in a private hospital. Our facilities here are quite old, after all.”

Sun Xiaoqin stared at Li Huowang, who was busy eating his tangyuan. “Let me call my husband and discuss it with him.”

Sun Xiaoqin walked to the corner of the room and fished out her phone to call her husband and discuss the matter with him. After a while, Sun Xiaoqin returned to Li Huowang's bedside and said, “All right, we will do as you say.”

This was a hospital, but it was more like a government-funded prison for vagrants with mental illnesses.

Li Huowang was already cured, so there was no reason for him to stay in such a depressing place.

The prison warden grinned at Sun Xiaoqin's remark; Li Huowang was finally leaving. He could still remember how he

almost died from a heart attack when he saw Li Huowang climbing up an electric fence. If Li Huowang had ended up dying back then, the prison warden's future would have been ruined. Actually, he hadn't been able to sleep or eat well these days; he was so scared that something would go wrong with Li Huowang and that the public would blame him for it.

“Madam Sun, I'm sure you know that we've never mistreated your son, right? Once you have any free time, can you say something nice to the reporters when they come and interview you?”

“Don't worry about that. I'm going to praise this place with my entire life! Your doctors are miracle workers capable of healing any mental disorder!”

“Erm... you don't have to do that. Just tell them the truth. Anyway, I'll leave you alone now, Madam Sun. I'll go ahead and do some paperwork,” the prison warden said and left.

Sun Xiaoqin turned to Li Huowang and said, “Eat slowly, my son. You'll be transferred soon, and it's good news! I'll go and have some brocade banners made for Doctor Yi.”

“We're leaving?” Li Huowang asked, but he was not surprised at all. He was no longer ill, so it was time for him to leave.

Everything went swimmingly. Li Huowang had just finished his meal when they told him that he could finally leave. In fact, the prison was even more excited to let Li Huowang leave compared to Li Huowang himself.

Li Huowang also didn't expect that his transfer to another hospital would be so grand.

The patients of the hospital gathered to send him away, while those who couldn't attend the event peeked out of their windows to stare at Li Huowang's departing figure. Even the guards at the sentry tower were staring at him.

Prison Guard Liu was right. Li Huowang was indeed famous

here. Some of the hospital's higher-ups had gathered to send Li Huowang off as well. They were grinning from ear to ear, and it made Li Huowang think that perhaps they had won the lottery. Just as Li Huowang was about to walk past Yi Donglai, the latter stopped him and said, "I said you're stable, but you're not *completely* stable yet. I'm sorry. I wanted to let you stay here a bit longer so I could observe you more, but they refused my suggestion.

"They wanted you to leave as soon as possible to ensure that you're not going to cause another issue here, but don't worry, I will be detailed in my report regarding your case. The doctor taking over my job as your doctor is my junior, so don't worry; just focus on recovering. They should give you another assessment in three months. Pass that assessment, and you will be allowed to go back home. Of course, you will still be under observation."

Li Huowang nodded quietly.

"Don't forget to drink your medicine, and do not stop drinking them even after you're discharged," Yi Donglai instructed. He gave a few more instructions to Li Huowang when the latter asked a peculiar question, "Doctor Yi, where is Wang Wei being held? Which mental hospital is it?"

"Why do you ask that?" Yi Donglai asked, massaging his nose bridge with a confused look.

"I'm technically the reason he went crazy, so I feel like I should give him something nice to eat once I'm discharged. I also feel quite guilty."

"He's in the Sixth Public Hospital. You don't have to worry about him. Just focus on studying and get into a good university."

Li Huowang shook his head and said, "I'm afraid that would be too hard, Doctor Yi. Anyway, can you give me your phone number? I want to contact you if something happens."

Yi Donglai nodded. He took out a pen and paper to jot down his phone number. "If there are any changes to your illness, call

me.”

“I understand. Thank you. You are a good doctor.”

Li Huowang put away the slip of paper containing Yi Donglai's number and entered the bus that would take him and Sun Xiaoqin away from the hospital.

The bus started moving, and the prison warden burst out laughing at the sight. He turned around and spread his arms wide, shouting, “Tell the inmates in the kitchen to cook extra meals for everyone tonight!”

The festive mood erupted in the hospital at the prison warden's remark. If they had fireworks, they would have set them off to celebrate Li Huowang's departure.

Li Huowang's hand was cuffed to a chair as he looked out of the scenery outside the bus. After a while, he turned around and stared at his mother, asking, “Mom, where are we going?”

“We're going to a private hospital called Kangning Hospital. I've done my research about it, and I learned that it's a good hospital.”

“*Oh.*” Li Huowang nodded. There was nothing he could do about it, as he needed to get rid of his status as a lunatic.

Regardless, Li Huowang was happy. His illness had been cured to the extent that he could be transferred to another hospital.

He could still remember how Yang Na was carried away by her father. He could finally fulfill his promise to her.

He really wanted to see her again and apologize to her. Li Huowang acknowledged that he had wronged her.

The bus traveled for a long time, and Li Huowang ended up falling asleep in the middle of it.

It was already dusk when Sun Xiaoqin woke him up. “Son, wake up. We're here.”

Li Huowang yawned and exited the bus. A building covered in green glass appeared in front of him. If it weren't for the red cross

in the middle of the building, he would have thought that he was staring at an office building.

The prison guards appeared and escorted Li Huowang into the hospital. They only left once Li Huowang had signed some documents.

“Please follow me,” a square-faced doctor said courteously to Li Huowang. There were four nurses standing behind him.

Li Huowang looked around and whistled in awe at the main hall's grand interior. *We are indeed in a private hospital.*

Sun Xiaoqin was about to follow Li Huowang but was stopped. “I’m sorry, but visitors are not allowed to follow our patients. There is a specific day when visitors are allowed, and you can only talk to him by then.”

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1. Balls of glutinous rice flour in a sweet broth. Delicious 🍡

Chapter 595 - Mental Illness

“*Huh?* Why can’t I follow him? The public hospital even allowed me to do so! Why can’t you do the same as them?” Sun Xiaoqin asked, visibly upset at the strange rule.

“Even though we’re a private hospital, we still have our rules. I’m just a doctor, so I can’t do anything about it. If you’re unsatisfied with our rules and policies, then you can transfer to another hospital.”

Sun Xiaoqin’s brows furrowed, and her breathing became rougher as fury welled up inside of her.

Li Huowang saw that and intervened to stop her from going berserk.

“Mom, mom. It’s okay. I’m already cured. You don’t have to stay with me every day. You must be tired of taking care of me every day over the past few years, so you can rest now. Go to Dad’s side.”

“I can’t do that yet! You’re so skinny! What if you get bullied by the other patients here?”

“Mom, this isn’t my first time in a mental hospital. Who’d dare to bully me?” Li Huowang persuaded. He even added a phone call to Li Jiancheng, which was finally enough for Sun Xiaoqin to back down.

“You’re such—okay. Listen to the doctor, and don’t do anything rash? Okay, I’m going to do that.” Sun Xiaoqin put her phone down and looked at Li Huowang, saying, “Son, you must not worry about telling the doctor if you’re experiencing any discomfort. Tell the doctor if your room is too hot or too cold!”

“Mom, calm down. I’m already cured, so I’ll be discharged soon.”

Sun Xiaoqin nodded and left to pay the hospital fees, while Li Huowang was pushed into the hospital by the doctor.

“Let me introduce myself. My name is Wu Cheng, and I’m a psychiatrist like Yi Donglai. I was in the cohort two years later than Yi Donglai, so I’m considered his junior. He told me the details of your case through a phone call.”

“Really? That’s great,” Li Huowang said calmly, “Since you know that I’m basically cured, can you uncuff me?”

“Sorry, but I can’t do that. I understand what’s going on with you, but I’m afraid that the director will not. He has specifically instructed me to ensure that nothing would you. Also, I’ve heard that someone has pressured him to accept you. If it weren’t for them, he wouldn’t have accepted you.”

Li Huowang looked down at his cuffs and asked, “Are you saying that I have to wear these until I’m discharged?”

“Just endure it for now. I will talk to the director later. Anyway, we’re here. Let’s go in for your examination. I’m sure you’re already familiar with it.”

Li Huowang nodded. “I know the procedure. Let’s do it.”

To ensure that the hospital wouldn’t accidentally admit patients with the tendency to harm others, the hospital would screen their patients before admitting them. Once the screening and admission procedures were done, Li Huowang finally managed to enter his own room. The room had nothing but a single bed. It seemed that his infamy had given him an unexpected boon, as the hospital had made sure that he’d be living by himself. The travel and the procedures had taken its toll on Li Huowang, and he sprawled out on the bed, fast asleep.

The next morning, a nurse woke him up. He was given a few minutes to wash up before the nurse gave him a tour of the

hospital.

There wasn't anything particularly interesting, as the facilities of the hospital were mostly similar to the facilities in Li Huowang's previous hospital.

After the tour, Li Huowang was called over to sit in a circle with the other patients. It was Li Huowang's first time experiencing something like this, so he couldn't help but find it surprising. It turned out that the hospital wanted the patients to talk to each other about their illnesses to cheer each other up.

Although this was Li Huowang's first time participating in one, he had no qualms about doing it, as Wu Cheng had told him that this was the hospital's project to imitate overseas hospitals with more advanced technology.

Li Huowang could only say that private hospitals had more leeway when it came to activities that their patients could do.

Everyone sat on their stools in a circle, and the patients proceeded to take turns confessing their illnesses.

"I have schizophrenia. It's fairly light, so I can manage it with medication," a middle-aged woman said.

"Manic syndrome. My condition is improving, all thanks to the medicine," a bald man said with his fingers twitching intermittently.

"Depression," a young woman in a ponytail said. Her eyes were glazed over, and there were slash wounds on her wrists. Overall, she looked quite terrible.

An old woman, who looked to be roughly fifty years old, said, "Anxiety, but there was no reason for me to stay here. My daughter only insisted that I stay here until I'm all healed."

Soon, it was Li Huowang's turn. Everyone cast a curious gaze at the new face.

"Me? I don't have one. I'm already cured."

At that, the patients turned and whispered to each other while

stealing glances at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang was too lazy to explain his situation, so he stayed silent. Moreover, he wasn't going to stay here for a long time, so he was planning on taking it easy. He looked around and saw a chubby kid playing with his own fingers.

“Hey, what's your illness?”

The chubby kid ignored Li Huowang without looking up from his fingers.

“Don't waste your breath. He's autistic, and he's not going to respond to you,” the man with manic syndrome said to Li Huowang.

“He's autistic? How did he get here, then? He's not like us,” Li Huowang asked, sounding surprised. Autism required early intervention, and as far as Li Huowang knew, this hospital wasn't the best place when it came to it.

“How else do you think he got here? His family saw him as an eyesore; they didn't want to take care of him, but it's illegal to abandon him on the streets, so they had no choice but to send him here,” the man with manic syndrome explained. Then, he pointed at someone else and said, “Do you see that fatty over there? The one with black spots on his face.”

Li Huowang followed the man's finger and asked, “What's wrong with him?”

“He's fine. It's just that his mind is incredibly slow. He has the same circumstances as this kid right here. Their parents don't want to take care of them, so they sent them here. Really unbelievable, what kind of parents would do something like that? This is a mental hospital, so only those with mental illnesses should be here, but look at that fatty and this kid. I think their family members are convinced that this place is a prison for crazy people.

“Yeah, and that mindset is the reason why people think that those with mental illnesses are dangerous people.”

“Is that even legal?” Li Huowang asked, scratching his chin. Unbeknownst to him, the young woman suffering from depression finally saw that he was handcuffed.

“This is a private hospital. There are no rules here when it comes to earning money. What? Do you really think that they can sue their own family?”

“Actually, I understand them. It takes a ton of money, time, and effort to take care of someone with a disability.”

Just then, Wu Cheng walked over with a clipboard and a pen. He chose an empty stool and sat down before asking, “How’s the conversation going?”

" Ah! " The young woman suffering from depression abruptly jumped up and pointed at Li Huowang with a fearful look. She then let out a shrill roar, “I know him! He was on TV! He barged into a university and killed many people!”

Chapter 596 - Wu Cheng

Everyone in the circle jumped out of their seats and ran away from Li Huowang. No, it wasn't just them; even the patients in the other circles ran away from Li Huowang upon hearing the young woman's remark.

The atmosphere became tense, and the patients started panicking upon recognizing Li Huowang.

When Li Huowang thought the situation would spiral out of control, Wu Cheng stood up and shouted, "Everyone, calm down! It is true that Li Huowang had made many mistakes, but it was his illness' fault!"

Wu Cheng then walked up to Li Huowang and patted the latter's shoulder. "But his illness is finally under control, and he's also going to be discharged soon! You've seen the news, haven't you? Even a lunatic at his level can be treated, so what are you afraid of? Can your illness even hold a candle to his illness?"

"Everyone, you must keep looking forward. I guarantee that as long as you follow our treatment regime and take your medicine on time, you'll recover just like him! You will be able to rejoin society!"

Wu Cheng's speech was effective, as the patients calmed down and sat back down. Li Huowang had to admit that Wu Cheng had a glib tongue.

"Would you like to say a few encouraging words to them, Li Huowang? You are their model patient, after all."

Li Huowang shook his head without saying anything. He had no intention of doing something that would make him stand out here.

The confession session continued, and nothing happened except

for the patients stealing glances at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang scratched his nose, realizing that he had stood out. It seemed that he would have to live like how he lived in the White Prison Tower.

However, Li Huowang didn't really mind living that way as long as he'd get discharged.

"Come here. Since you don't know anyone here just yet, you will be assigned to this group. From now on, the members of the group must help each other out. All right, go ahead and introduce yourselves," Wu Cheng said. He wanted the patients to work together.

"My name is Zhang Shuier; it's nice to meet you," said the woman with anxiety.

Seeing that no one was saying anything, the man with manic syndrome said, "Wei Shili."

Li Huowang finally learned the names of his group members. The young woman suffering from depression was Zhao Ting, while the one with schizophrenia was Wang Wangshu.

Under Wu Cheng's guidance and Li Huowang's astonished gaze, the autistic boy wrote his name on Wu Cheng's phone, who promptly showed it to everyone—Zhang Jinzhong.

"Doctor Wu, can this hospital even treat those with autism?"

Wu Cheng put the phone away and said, "This isn't treatment. I'm simply assisting him in expressing himself. People like Jinzhong suffer from disorganized thoughts and fragmented perception. In their eyes, the previous second could be the present, but the next second could be an hour later. This doesn't mean that they don't want to interact with others at all. They simply needed assistance to do so, and they'd be able to express themselves with the right tools."

"Is that so?" Li Huowang nodded and stared deeply at the autistic boy. He had to admit that they had it worse than him. Li Huowang's illness was curable, but the boy had to live a life with

disorganized thoughts and fragmented perception.

Under Wu Cheng's guidance, the patients started talking about their illnesses and opening their hearts up to others. They even played some games to break the ice, and the games made Li Huowang feel embarrassed, as he thought that they were too old to play such games.

It was an old trick, but it was working. Once they were done playing, the others could finally talk casually to Li Huowang, even though they were secretly afraid of him.

An entire morning passed just like that, and soon, it was time for lunch.

Li Huowang's condition was stable, so he could go to the canteen by himself to eat. He no longer needed people to send his meals to him.

Li Huowang had just stood up when Zhao Ting walked up to Li Huowang. She was crying as she said, "I'm really sorry... I shouldn't have shouted at you. Now, everyone knows of your true identity, and it's all my fault. I really am so useless..."

Seeing how Zhao Ting was clenching her fists with so much strength that her nails were digging into her own flesh, Li Huowang knew that Zhao Ting's condition was serious.

People suffering from depression had a tendency to amplify their own guilt, even if the issue was trivial at most. At this rate, Zhao Ting's condition was only going to get worse.

"You're doing fine. No need to say sorry. You did the right thing by letting the others know about me so that they'll know how dangerous I am. Your shouting warned the others, so you did great. And you don't have to feel guilty at all, as you simply did the right thing, and you owe the others nothing!"

"Is that so?" Zhao Ting asked, her face softening a bit.

"Yes, so don't think about it and eat your lunch. Take your medicine once you're done eating, and then take a nap. I think you're

medicine is wearing off right now.”

Li Huowang expended quite a bit of effort before he managed to send Zhao Ting away. When he turned around to leave, he saw Wu Cheng smiling at him, saying, “Not bad. Do you spend a lot of time with patients like her?”

“Sort of. Patients like her are easy pickings for bullies, so I help them from time to time,” Li Huowang said, following the other patients to the canteen.

“Bullies? What kind of hospital would allow the existence of bullies? Do they not have surveillance cameras? What hospital is so backward that they don't have surveillance cameras?”

“The bullying isn't that serious. It's something minor like taking a bite of the patient's meal, stealing a bag of snacks from them, and so on. They aren't serious enough to warrant the attention of the doctors. Even though everyone here is suffering from a mental illness, they can still be sorted into good apples and bad apples. I think some of them think that taking a bite of someone else's meal without being punished for it means that they're winning in life. They'll bully those with depression because those with depression often don't fight back. Ask them to bully those with manic syndrome or those suffering from schizophrenia; I guarantee you that they'd run with their tails tucked.”

Wu Cheng nodded and jotted down something in his notebook. “Thanks. Even us doctors can't understand every single detail about our patients. I will let my superior know your thoughts.”

Wu Cheng and Li Huowang chit-chatted until they reached the canteen.

Li Huowang carried his metal tray with him to a seat. He picked up a tofu fried in scallion oil and was about to eat it when Wu Cheng's voice echoed from behind him.

“Once you're done eating, stay in your room and don't go anywhere. Your treatment is scheduled for this afternoon.”

Treatment? I'm already cured, so what is that treatment for? Li Huowang thought, looking confused.

Yi Donglai had told him that he only had to stay here for some time, and he'd eventually be discharged. *Why do I need more treatment when I'm already cured?*

Chapter 597 - Medicine

The patients were having their meal in the canteen. Li Huowang was there as well, but he had yet to touch his meal.

I thought Yi Donglai had already had a conversation with his junior. Did something go wrong? Staring at his meal, Li Huowang had lost his appetite as he recalled what Wu Cheng told him.

If it weren't for his sharp hearing, he would think that he had misheard Wu Cheng.

"I should just eat first and see what he's up to," Li Huowang said, making quick work of his meal.

Lunch was over, and Li Huowang soon found himself in his bed, waiting for Wu Cheng's arrival.

He wanted to see what Wu Cheng was planning to do. If there was something wrong, then he'd call Yi Donglai for confirmation.

Time passed slowly, and the door to Li Huowang's room only swung open when it already was two thirty in the afternoon.

"Sorry. There was a meeting, so there's a bit of a delay," Wu Cheng said, smoothening his hair with an apologetic face. There was a tablet in his hands.

"Don't worry. Are we starting now? What do I need to do?"

"Don't be nervous. You don't have to do anything. It's just speech therapy," Wu Cheng asked. He sat on a stool and told Li Huowang to lay himself down on the bed.

Li Huowang complied.

"Do you miss the other side?" Wu Cheng asked.

Wu Cheng's words made Li Huowang's scalp go numb, and he unconsciously reached for his spine sword. "No."

Wu Cheng nodded and tapped on the tablet, "Good. Now close your eyes and relax."

“Good, good, good... Now, I want you to recall everything about your hallucination. I want you to remember how real it felt.”
“?”

“Now, you've forgotten the reality. You cannot perceive it anymore. You've returned to Shangjing.”

Li Huowang clenched his fists and squirmed. He felt like his head was buzzing and was about to explode.

“Open your eyes. You're back in that world, and you're surrounded by your comrades.”

Li Huowang opened his eyes and swung his “spine sword” at Wu Cheng. “What are you doing to me?!”

Wu Cheng was visibly surprised by Li Huowang's outrage. He tapped on the tablet and said, “Li Huowang, this won't do. You won't pass the assessment like this.”

“Wu Cheng, what is the meaning of this?” Li Huowang stood up and glared at Wu Cheng. “Why are you doing the opposite thing?”

“Because I needed to make sure that your illness has truly been cured. The fact that you've relapsed so easily means that you're still ill,” Wu Cheng said calmly.

“I'm cured! I don't need any treatment anymore! I've become normal once more!”

Wu Cheng let out a regretful sigh and said, “Li Huowang, you're shouting at me. I had a good discussion about this treatment method with Yi Donglai.”

Li Huowang gnashed his teeth, feeling annoyed. “Give me your phone. I need to call Yi Donglai.”

“I'm afraid not. You cannot talk to anyone else in the outside world except for your family members, and it can only be done once a week. It's one of the hospital's rules.”

As Li Huowang stared at Wu Cheng, he realized that the latter had become very unfamiliar to him.

It felt like Wu Cheng had changed in the span of a single

afternoon.

“Yi Donglai! Your senior! My doctor! Can’t I call him?”

“I’m sorry, but it is not allowed. Rules are rules. Sit down, and we’ll continue. This is for your own good.”

“No! I’m not going to do that!” Li Huowang roared, “I’m cured! Your ‘treatment’ will only make it worse! I want to talk about the specifics of this ‘treatment’ with Yi Donglai, and I will not let you do this ‘treatment’ to me until then! I need to hear it from his own mouth, or I will not cooperate!”

Wu Cheng shook his head and said, “If you don’t cooperate, your discharge date will be delayed indefinitely.”

With that, Wu Cheng left with the tablet, leaving Li Huowang alone in the room. Li Huowang paced back and forth in the room, thinking about what was happening.

All of a sudden, he found Wu Cheng to be quite suspicious.

They had been talking amiably to each other, but things had changed drastically in such a short period of time. There was something wrong here.

“Unless... unless—Monk, you’re right! Wu Cheng and Wang Wei are probably in cahoots!” Li Huowang exclaimed, and he was certain of his assumption.

Li Huowang suddenly felt like a beast was glaring at him, and it was due to the realization that Wang Wei wasn’t alone!

Someone was controlling Wang Wei from the shadows!

What should I do? Killing intent flashed past Li Huowang’s eyes as he brainstormed ideas to resolve this situation. *No, I can’t! If I kill someone again, I’m going to get myself imprisoned for life in a mental hospital!*

Li Huowang stared at the camera in one corner of the room.

Soon, it was dinner time.

Li Huowang had just sat down in the canteen when he realized that something was wrong.

The workers in the canteen were staring warily at him.

The man with manic syndrome saw that Li Huowang was sitting by himself, so he walked up to Li Huowang.

Before he could get close, however, a nurse came and took him elsewhere to discuss something.

Li Huowang guessed that the hospital's higher-ups had become wary of him. Unfortunately, this was bad news for Li Huowang.

After dinner and thirty minutes later, it was time for Li Huowang to take his medicine. However, alarm bells started ringing in his head when he saw an unfamiliar red pill among his pills.

He took the red pill and looked at it in the mirror. For some reason, he felt disgusted even though he was just staring at it.

Li Huowang's back was turned to the camera when he put the pills in his mouth and drank a glass of water.

The unfamiliar red pill was between his fingers. He went to the toilet and flushed it down.

Li Huowang then went back to his bed and closed his eyes. He started thinking about how he was supposed to deal with Wu Cheng.

Li Huowang knew that he had to do something about Wu Cheng. He was the doctor, after all, while Li Huowang was a mere patient. In other words, it would be too easy for Wu Cheng to screw over Li Huowang.

Bam!

The door to Li Huowang's room was shoved open, and six, large-framed nurses charged into the room.

“Get up! Why did you throw your medicine away?! You were supposed to take it!”

Chapter 598 - Trap

Smack!

One of the nurses swung his baton toward Li Huowang's arm. The attack was so powerful that Li Huowang's arm swelled just a few seconds after getting hit, but Li Huowang didn't react much to it.

Li Huowang put his arms together and charged at one of the large-framed nurses. He collided with the nurse's chest, and the latter almost fainted from the pain.

One of the nurses charged at Li Huowang and hugged him from behind. Before the nurse could do anything, his ring finger was twisted and bent by Li Huowang.

"AAAAAAAHH!" the nurse let out a shrill cry in response to the extreme pain.

Li Huowang was handcuffed, but it looked like he had the upper hand against six large-framed nurses.

Taking advantage of the battle's brief pause, Li Huowang appeared behind one of the nurses and wrapped the chain links of his handcuffs around the latter's neck.

Upon suppressing the nurse, Li Huowang decisively tore off a chunk of the nurse's skin on his neck, revealing an artery beneath it.

Li Huowang glared at everyone with a bloody mouth.

The gory scene shocked every single nurse in the room. They had never thought that Li Huowang could still fight so well, despite being in handcuffs.

No one dared to move. They were here to earn some money for themselves, and none of them was willing to lose their life working for the hospital.

"Bring Wu Cheng here, or I will kill this man," Li Huowang

said, placing his teeth on the nurse's pulsing artery.

"Stop! Don't be rash! I'll go and look for Doctor Wu! Don't do anything stupid!" one of the nurses exclaimed and ran out of the room to look for Wu Cheng.

Li Huowang didn't want to do this, but he had no choice. Since he couldn't go about it in a diplomatic way, then he could only use force.

During the downtime, Li Huowang pondered carefully over his next course of action. What he had done tonight would spell endless trouble for him, but he had no choice.

He had to do something, or he'd find himself in a trap.

Frantic footsteps echoed from outside the room as Wu Cheng and a group of nurses soon made their way into Li Huowang's room.

When Wu Cheng saw Li Huowang's scary and bloody appearance, he turned to his colleagues and whispered, "I was right. The patient in Room Sixteen isn't cured yet; he was simply in remission. A little prodding is enough for his illness to relapse, so he can't be considered cured."

Li Huowang knew that there was no point in telling everyone that Wu Cheng was harming him rather than treating him.

After all, he was just a patient, so no one would believe him. They would certainly believe Wu Cheng and think that Li Huowang was ill once again.

In other words, Li Huowang needed to find someone to vouch for him.

"Wu Cheng, give me your phone! I need to call Yi Donglai!" Li Huowang shouted.

"All right, I will give you a phone. Don't do anything rash." Wu Cheng took out a phone and unlocked it before walking over to Li Huowang.

Li Huowang raised his guard up, afraid that Wu Cheng would do something to him.

However, Wu Cheng couldn't do anything right now. He placed the phone in Li Huowang's arms before walking away.

Li Huowang sighed and opened up the phone's contact list to look for Yi Donglai's number.

When Li Huowang tapped on Yi Donglai's name on the screen, the phone's display abruptly went out, and a strong electrical current shot out from the metallic case of the phone, electrocuting both Li Huowang and the nurse.

This is all a trap! And Wu Cheng doesn't want Yi Donglai to know the truth!

Li Huowang tried to let go of the phone, but his fingers seemed like they were glued to it. He couldn't let go of it at all.

Presented by an opportunity, the nurses behind Wu Cheng charged at Li Huowang.

They used nets, military forks, and even sedatives to suppress Li Huowang.

Li Huowang's expression went blank, and his consciousness dimmed as the yellow-colored sedatives coursed through him through his veins.

The last thing he saw was Wu Cheng walking up to him with a smile.

Jiang~ Jiang~ Jiang~

“Raise~ You must've said something wrong~ Or the mother and son wouldn't have argued~ Now the third aunt is crying alone in the room~”

Lu Zhuangyuan clad in a silk brocade was sitting on his chair and was listening to the performance on the stage with his eyes closed.

His life had gotten significantly better, but he wasn't enjoying it for some reason.

Lu Zhuangyuan abruptly sat up and roared, “Wait! That's

wrong! Why is your pitch so high at the end? What? That's how you've been singing that part? I don't care! I've become your boss, so you must follow me!"

The performers performed for four hours on the stage, and Lu Zhuangyuan for half of the time.

When Lu Zhuangyuan left for lunch, the performers sighed in relief.

Lu Zhuangyuan walked out of the theater with his youngest grandson in his arms.

Since he was living a different life now, he no longer needed to be humble. He walked down the streets with his grandson in his arms and with his chest puffed out. He was no longer a despicable performer.

"Ai~ This is the life of the Immortals. Oh my dear Mei~ You've died too young. If you hadn't died two years ago, you would have enjoyed this life with me."

Lu Zhuangyuan entered the house, which was given to him as a gift, and he saw his eldest daughter-in-law sitting on a chair.

The table beside her was filled with snacks and cakes, and there were two maids waiting on her. One of the maids was massaging her legs while the other was massaging her back.

Lu Zhuangyuan frowned and said, "Who told you to hire maids? Don't you know how expensive they are? We're going to have lunch soon, so why are there so many snacks? Can you even finish these snacks by yourself? You're just wasting money here!"

"Dad, the money we are earning is meant to be spent. I've never had a day in peace ever since I married into the Lu Family. I've been traveling with you through the wilderness and prairies for so long, and we've finally gotten our lucky break. We can finally enjoy the money that we're earning, but you still want us to be so frugal?"

After giving birth to a son, Luo Juanhua became bolder and

defiant.

“Enjoy? You're wasting money instead of enjoying it! I want you to fire these maids!”

"Father, Juan..." Lu Juren chimed in, "Stop arguing, all right? Come here, and let's eat."

However, Lu Zhuangyuan was still complaining even amidst their lunch. After complaining about how there were too many dishes, he started complaining about how oily the food was.

Once Lu Zhuangyuan had left, Luo Juanhua turned to her husband and grumbled, “What’s wrong with Father these days? Why has he been so annoying recently?”

Lu Zhuangyuan stared at his father’s back while eating his meal. “He’s been working hard throughout his entire life, and he suddenly doesn't have to work so hard anymore. I think he still can't get used to the feeling of doing nothing.”

Chapter 599 - Face To Face

Lu Juren knew what the theater meant to his father. His father had been talking about the same thing over and over again to him ever since he was an infant.

It went so out of hand that rather than saying "Mother" and "Father" for his first word, the infant Lu Juren said "theater" instead.

Lu Zhuangyuan's lifelong goal was suddenly realized, and it was all thanks to someone gifting them a theater. At this point, Lu Zhuangyuan only had one thing he could do—fritter away time until his death.

Listening to his explanation, Luo Juanhua scowled and said, "Hah. I think your father is just being annoying. Who wouldn't enjoy life if given a vast supply of money? How about you tell him to start traveling again? Maybe he'll feel better moving around."

Lu Juren said nothing; he was too engrossed in his own thoughts, thinking about what he could make his father do. Otherwise, Lu Juren was afraid that his father would go crazy one day.

"Xiu'er, come here. Don't eat too much rice; here, eat some meat, too. It's going to fill you up as well," Luo Juanhua said to her daughter.

Just then, someone familiar entered their house, and they were none other than Lu Xiucan.

Upon entering the dining hall, Lu Xiucan didn't even greet his brother and sister-in-law before snatching his own niece's rice bowl.

"Xiucan? Why are you here? Did you not bring your wife with you to follow the Daoist to Cowheart Village for the sake of

cultivating?" Lu Juren asked, surprised by Lu Xiucan's return. He could still remember how adamant Lu Xiucan was when it came to learning a few techniques from the Daoist when they were leaving Shangjing. He had tried his best to convince Lu Xiucan against it, but the latter hadn't listened to him at all.

Lu Xiucan drank a huge mouthful of the egg soup to wash down the meat in his mouth. Breathing in ragged pants, he turned to Lu Juren and explained, "Master was abducted by a group of people! I've come here to ask Simpleton to rescue him!"

"*Huh?* Who's strong enough to abduct the Daoist?" Lu Zhuangyuan asked, looking shocked while holding his smoke pipe. No one had any idea when he had returned, but it didn't matter at this point.

"Ah, you're not going to understand just how strong they were. The six of them formed an array, and one of them was even a half-Immortal! There must've been a mastermind behind it. They had treasures that I'd never seen before, and my Master was abducted just like that. I'm going to leave after this lunch! I have to find Gao Zhijian and ask him to send people to rescue Master!" Lu Xiucan exclaimed. He grabbed a few pieces of steamed chicken drenched in scallion oil and stuffed them directly into his mouth.

"No! You can't go there!" Lu Zhuangyuan exclaimed, and he waved his smoke pipe so fast that afterimages seemed to appear in the air. "Even the Daoist couldn't deal with them, so wouldn't that mean that you'll be seeking your own death?!"

However, his words fell on deaf ears.

Lu Xiucan slammed his hand on the table and shouted, "What do you know?! I'm his disciple! I must help Master now that he's in danger! I'm sure he's going to teach me a technique or two as a gesture of gratitude toward me!"

"Moreover, I'm his one and only disciple. Once he becomes an Immortal, he'll entrust everything to me! Anyway, stop belittling me

as well! I've gotten way stronger after cultivating with Master!"

Just then, a loud commotion resembling hoofbeats echoed outside. Lu Xiucan smiled and immediately grabbed a braised goose plate before running out of the house. "I didn't expect Simpleton to organize a rescue team this quick!"

"Brat!" Lu Zhongyuan exclaimed anxiously. He jumped up to his feet and shouted, "Step outside that door, and you will no longer be family!"

Lu Xiucan ran out of the door without any hesitation.

"*Hmph!* Who cares about being a performer at the bottom of society? Once Master becomes an Immortal, you people better not be expecting that I'll bring all of you with me to the heights of success!"

"Li Huowang? Li Huowang?" someone asked repeatedly while snapping their fingers before Li Huowang.

Soon, Li Huowang woke up, and he immediately realized that he was being restrained with a straitjacket. However, Li Huowang was not surprised at all. He knew this would happen. To make matters worse, they had even attached a steel muzzle to Li Huowang's mouth as if they were afraid of Li Huowang biting their necks apart.

"Have you calmed down? Can we finally talk?" Wu Cheng asked, standing in front of Li Huowang with a tablet in hand.

Li Huowang stared at Wu Cheng before saying, "I know you're working with Wang Wei, but who's the person behind you two? Why does he need lifespan pills? Is he going to die soon and has decided to bet on me? Maybe he's testing me to see whether I can bring something even more dangerous from that side to this side."

Wu Cheng didn't react to Li Huowang's words. Instead, he pressed one of his Bluetooth earphones and calmly said, "Director, this is brand-new. It's different from Yi Donglai's thesis. Yes, I

understand. I will handle it.”

After talking to someone through the tablet in his hand, Wu Cheng finally stared at Li Huowang.

“Li Huowang, did you know that Yi Donglai was actually experimenting on you? At this rate, you'll inevitably become crazy.”

Wu Cheng pointed at himself and said, “Trust me. Do as I say, and you'll live a better life.”

“*Hehe*, so you've decided to show your true colors? Why should I trust you? How many times are you going to try and trick me? I shouldn't trust Yi Donglai but trust you guys instead?” Li Huowang asked, chuckling.

“You have no choice but to listen to me. You are in our hands, and Yi Donglai is not here.”

The flickering red light coming from the camera abruptly disappeared. Wu Cheng then took out a taser and pressed it against Li Huowang.

Bzzt!

A buzzing noise echoed.

Li Huowang convulsed uncontrollably upon getting tased, but he was still smiling as he said, “Do you really think that you can force me to comply using that little thing? Are you looking down on me?”

The current became even stronger, but Li Huowang laughed even louder in response. He laughed and laughed until the taser ran out of battery.

“Come on, continue. Kill me if you dare, or I will skin you alive when I regain my freedom.”

Li Huowang knew that they wouldn't dare kill him, as they needed him to receive lifespan pills.

Wu Cheng looked a bit angry, but he quickly calmed down. He tapped on the tablet, and a video was played in front of Li Huowang.

The video depicted a subway station. A tired-looking young woman was playing with her phone with a sling bag across her chest.

Li Huowang's pupils quivered upon seeing the young woman's jade earring. He could still remember that jade earring, as it was something he had given to her as a gift.

"Her name is Yang Na, am I right? I heard that she's your childhood friend. I know you're a lunatic and that you're immune to pain. However, what if the pain that you're supposed to take was inflicted on her instead?"

Li Huowang was silent.

Wu Cheng smiled and continued, "Cooperate with us. This is going to be better than Yi Donglai's crazed nonsense. You have an unprecedented ability, so it would be a shame to hide it. Also, you're not losing anything at all. In fact, you're going to earn a ton of profit. You won't be locked up here, and you can have money, including women, money, and fame."

Just then, Li Huowang looked up, and he sounded unnaturally calm as he said, "I don't want to talk to a chess pawn. I want to talk to the person behind you."

Chapter 600 - Consuming Medicine

The restrained Li Huowang was in a padded cell somewhere inside Kangning Hospital, and he was staring right into Wu Cheng's eyes.

Wu Cheng chuckled at Li Huowang's words, asking, "You want to talk to the boss? Sure, but you must agree to work with us, or you won't get to see him at all."

Li Huowang seemed to be struggling deep inside, which hinted that he was clearly unwilling to work with Wu Cheng. However, he caught a glimpse of Yang Na on the tablet and sighed.

"Fine, I will cooperate with you. Let me talk to your boss! I can't let you all take the profits, after all!"

Wu Cheng nodded and tapped on the tablet. Soon, Li Huowang saw an old man wearing a suit. The old man's hair was short and white; he was sitting on a sofa and was wearing sunglasses, so Li Huowang had no idea whether the old man was staring at him or not.

The boss wanted lifespan pills, and there was an old man before him. It wasn't that difficult for Li Huowang to deduce that the old man in the tablet was Wu Cheng's "boss."

"Li Huowang," the old man said. The fact that he had said Li Huowang's name meant that he was quite familiar with Li Huowang. "My name is Xu Shou, but you can call me Sir Xu."

Li Huowang glared at the old man and memorized every single detail about the latter. He needed as much information as he could acquire to come up with a plan.

The old man was the mastermind behind Wu Cheng and Wang

Wei. If Li Huowang wanted to resolve this issue, then he had to attack it at the roots, which meant dealing with the old man!

Li Huowang had no plans of working with them and had merely pretended like he was going to cooperate with them.

“Sir Xu? Can I ask you a question? Why have you decided to do this to me? What do you want?” Li Huowang asked.

Sir Xu leaned forward and said, “I have no reason to tell you that. The only thing that you need to do is to show me your value. I’ve seen you whip out gold from out of nowhere, but I know that technology has become mature enough that anyone can easily edit any footage to show whatever they want to show everyone. If you want to show me your value, then you need to whip out something *really* special.”

Li Huowang chuckled. It seemed that the old man still had no trust in him and was afraid that Li Huowang was just a lunatic.

Despite that, he desperately wanted Li Huowang to bring lifespan pills from the other side to this side.

Clearly, the old man was on the brink of death.

“Wu Cheng, I entrust everything to you. Call me once he has brought out the item,” Sir Xu said before unilaterally ending the call.

Wu Cheng put the tablet down and took out a bottle of pills. He shook it and poured it into his hand before showing it to Li Huowang.

“I guess your decision to cooperate with us just isn't enough for you to start negotiating with the boss. If you want to negotiate with him, then you need to show us your value. Shall we start?”

Li Huowang glanced at the pills before staring at Wu Cheng. “Are you sure these pills are going to work?”

“Of course. They're very effective. Of course, there are some side effects. Anyway, forget everything that Yi Donglai had taught you and go back to that side. Prove your worth and show us your

supernatural power... or maybe you're just an ordinary lunatic?"

The metal muzzle was taken off, and the pills were shoved into Li Huowang's mouth.

Li Huowang ground the bitter pills in his mouth and consumed them with a mouthful of saliva.

Upon swallowing the pills, Li Huowang's consciousness immediately started fading away as his brain slowed down. Eventually, his senses blurred, and when he came to his senses, Wu Cheng had become something else.

A metal pen appeared in front of Li Huowang. It moved side to side, writing down Wu Cheng's words from the other side.

"When I say 'now,' you have to close your eyes."

Li Huowang closed his eyes, and everything faded away into darkness.

For some reason, the strange pills were making Li Huowang feel like his true body was somewhere else rather than here.

"You've returned to that strange world. You've returned to the Liang Kingdom. Tell me, what do you see?"

Bizarre, fragmented scenes manifested in the darkness, and they pieced together by themselves until Li Huowang realized that he was inside a dark cave.

There were Sacrificial God motifs on the walls, and they depicted the Sacrificial God sitting down on a distorted cross. Li Huowang immediately realized where he was the moment he saw the cross.

He was being held captive in the Ao Jing Sect's Cross Temple.

He tried moving, but he couldn't move at all. He saw that he was being restrained in a massive array drawn by blood. More importantly, his legs and right arm had vanished, along with three fingers on his left hand.

"So? Have you considered it?" someone asked.

Li Huowang looked up and saw a familiar face. The face of the

Imperial Preceptor, Huangfu Tiangang.

“So it's you? I should've seen that coming. There are only a few people capable of wielding lightning in this region, and who else would have such a high achievement at it?” Li Huowang asked. He snarled at the familiar face before continuing, “You are working with the Twisted One of Doulao! How dare you say that you have no relations with the Sitting Oblivion Dao?”

Huangfu Tiangang frowned upon seeing Li Huowang's change in demeanor.

“What are you talking about? The Sitting Oblivion Dao has been eradicated. I am the Imperial Preceptor. I am responsible for the safety of the Emperor of the Liang Kingdom!”

“Scram! How dare you try to disrupt the friendship between me and Gao Zhijian? Do you really think that I'm going to believe your words right now?”

“The emperor doesn't want to kill you, but the previous emperors have a different opinion of you. The fact that you made quick work of the Dragon Vein means that you're a threat. You'd be nothing but trouble for us, unless we can make us of you!”

“*Haha!* Huangfu Tiangang, you can't even lie properly. You shouldn't join the Sitting Oblivion Dao, as you'd ruin their reputation if you do so.”

Li Huowang chuckled and raised his remaining arm to search for the little saw in his bag of torture tools. He stabbed the little saw into his waist and remained unblinking despite the pain.

“You want lifespan pills? Fine, I will give you some!” Li Huowang exclaimed. He had just raised his left arm when a lightning bolt flashed past him, severing some of his fingers.

He only had one finger remaining on his left hand.

Despite the powerful attack, Li Huowang didn't hesitate and jammed his remaining finger deep into his throat.

“Blegh!”

A thunderous boom echoed.

Li Huowang opened his mouth and spat out the pills straight toward Wu Cheng's face.

Wu Cheng flailed around in disgust before taking off his robes to wipe away Li Huowang's saliva on his face.

When he was done wiping himself clean, he looked up and saw that Li Huowang's abdomen was bleeding.

Somehow, Li Huowang was holding a little saw and was smiling ruthlessly at Wu Cheng.

“Wait!” Wu Cheng exclaimed. His words had just fallen when Li Huowang pounced on him and bit his face hard.

“AAARRRGGGHHH!”

Chapter 601 - Intelligence

If he could bring over gold, it meant he could bring over other things as well.

The moment Li Huowang's straitjacket was cut open, Wu Cheng lost all chances of winning.

Of course, Li Huowang had no intentions of killing Wu Cheng. Otherwise, he would have slashed open Wu Cheng's neck instead of just biting his face.

Wu Cheng's face was drenched in blood, and he was in so much pain that he felt like passing out.

However, Li Huowang was meticulous enough to inflict pain that wouldn't make Wu Cheng faint. He couldn't let Wu Cheng faint, as he still had to interrogate the latter.

Li Huowang stood before Wu Cheng, who was groaning on the ground. He picked up a pen and waved it in front of Wu Cheng, saying, "Where does Xu Shou live?"

Xu Shou was the key here. He had to deal with Xu Shou, or he'd end up facing infinite trouble in the future.

Xu Shou had to be handled with, or Yang Na would never be safe.

Li Huowang didn't care even if he was sentenced to life in prison; he only cared about his beloved, and he would not let any harm come their way.

The kneeling Wu Cheng merely groaned in response to Li Huowang's question.

"All right. I don't know how to hypnotize, so I'll just show you another way to use a pen."

Li Huowang kicked Wu Cheng to the ground and straddled him. Then, he inserted the pen into Wu Cheng's nostril. He slowly

pushed it in slowly as Wu Cheng trembled like an aspen tree in trepidation.

Wu Cheng immediately surrendered and exclaimed, "He's usually on his white cruise ship in Beihai Port!"

"Why is he living on a ship? Does he not have any houses?" Li Huowang asked. His hand was still moving, and Wu Cheng's nostril was already bleeding.

"It's all because he knows that things are going to become dangerous for him if something goes wrong. He plans to leave immediately once that happens, so he has only been living on his ship! I don't know if he has any houses here or overseas!"

Li Huowang's hand paused. He pulled the bloody pen out of Wu Cheng's nostril.

He then started sawing off his handcuffs and shackles.

Wu Cheng watched as sparks flew from the saw, and his expression changed from pain and fear to excitement. "It's actually real! You can really conjure things!"

Li Huowang glanced at Wu Cheng and said, "*Huh*, so you thought it was nonsense? Anyway, you better not move. Don't make me put this saw against your neck!"

After a while, Li Huowang was no longer shackled and in a handcuff. He then started taking off his blue and white patient gown.

"Take off your clothes!" Li Huowang exclaimed. Wu Cheng was caught off guard by Li Huowang's order, but he could only oblige. After all, he was facing a mentally ill individual armed with a dangerous weapon.

The two exchanged clothes. Li Huowang put on the doctor's white coat while Wu Cheng was forced to wear the bloody patient gown.

Under Li Huowang's threat, Wu Cheng obediently put on the muzzle and the damaged straitjacket.

Li Huowang took out Wu Cheng's phone and asked, "What's the pattern?"

"Z pattern."

Li Huowang unlocked the screen and found Yi Donglai's number in the contacts.

However, he didn't press the call button and made Wu Cheng press it instead. This time, the phone didn't electrocute him; it actually went through.

He listened anxiously to the ringing tone as he paced around the room.

"Hello? Junior, do you need something? Have you started writing your new thesis?"

"Doctor Yi! It's me!" Li Huowang exclaimed. He breathed a sigh of relief when Yi Donglai answered the call.

"Huh? Li Huowang? Why are you calling me using Junior Wu's personal phone? Where's Junior Wu?"

Li Huowang glanced at Wu Cheng on the ground and quickly explained, "Doctor Yi, I'm in an urgent situation, so let me get straight to the point! Wu Cheng is in cahoots with Wang Wei! And they have a mastermind!"

Once Li Huowang was done with his explanation, Yi Donglai went silent, seemingly falling into deep thought. "Huowang, have you been taking your medication over the past few days?"

"Why don't you trust me? Have you forgotten how you cured me?! Why does it sound like you don't believe even yourself? I'm not crazy! I'm already cured!"

"Okay, okay... just don't cause trouble in Kangning Hospital. I'll have someone pick you up and take you back to White Tower Prison."

"No! It's too late! They're already targeting me! I'd end up like a pig for slaughter if I were to stay here without doing anything! I must do something; I must address this problem at its roots!"

Yi Donglai seemed to understand what Li Huowang was going to do next, and his voice trembled as he said, “Li Huowang, don’t go anywhere and just wait there. If there really is a conspiracy here, then we can just call the police!”

“It’s too late! They’re already targeting my family! I don’t know what exactly they can do, so please help me, Doctor Yi! Call my parents and Yang Na! Tell them to hide! Tell them that someone wants to harm them!”

“Li Huowang, don’t go anywhere, all right? You can just go ahead and call them yourself!”

“No! They—” Li Huowang paused. Moments later, he said in a low voice, “They think I’m crazy, Doctor Yi. You’re the only one I can trust, so please help me!”

Li Huowang ended the call, but it immediately rang again. Yi Donglai was calling him.

Li Huowang rejected the call, but Yi Donglai called once again.

In the end, Li Huowang blocked Yi Donglai’s number.

Li Huowang stared at Wu Cheng, seemingly pondering over something. After a while, he fished out a bottle of medicine from the pocket of his white coat.

Li Huowang poured out a handful of it and brought it closer to Wu Cheng’s mouth. “Take it.”

Wu Cheng gulped a mouthful of saliva and said, “I can’t take those pills; they’re for the mentally ill. You should be the one to take them.”

“What happens if someone not mentally ill were to take it?”

“Their limbs will start trembling uncontrollably, and their thoughts will become sluggish. The patient’s hormones will be affected as well, and they’d suffer some degree of memory loss.”

“Great! That’s exactly what I want!” Li Huowang exclaimed. He opened Wu Cheng’s muzzle and stuffed the pills into the latter’s mouth.

Soon, Wu Cheng's movements and demeanor changed. His face became like a blank canvas as saliva dripped from the corners of his mouth. He looked not much different from the other patients.

Li Huowang glanced at the surveillance camera and saw that there were no changes to it.

He picked up the little saw on the ground and slashed at Wu Cheng.

A terrifying and gory sight was soon made as Li Huowang made cuts on Wu Cheng's figure. Of course, the wounds were not fatal.

Bang!

The tightly closed door was pushed open from the inside, and a doctor, with some blood on his face and on his white coat, rushed out, shouting, "Quick, bring a stretcher here! The patient is harming himself! He's already in hemorrhagic shock!"

The nurses and doctors rushed over to Li Huowang when they heard his cries for help.

Upon entering the room, they were met with a bizarre scene. A muzzled patient was sprawled out on the ground, and their face was covered in blood. It was a gruesome scene, and the patient seemed like they were already dead.

A deceased patient was a big deal in any hospital, so the group of nurses and doctors worked frantically to save the patient.

Meanwhile, the doctor who had reported the self-harm inexplicably vanished without a trace.

Chapter 602 - Arrival

Li Huowang looked nervous. He was sitting on the plastic seat of a public bus and was biting the back of his hand with his teeth.

His mind replayed everything that he had gone through recently as he stared at the streets outside.

He was wearing a white mask to cover the scars on his face and to make sure that he wouldn't get recognized.

After some hesitation, he took out Wu Cheng's phone and dialed a phone number that he had memorized.

"...Hello? Who is this?" Yang Na's soft voice sounded over the phone.

Li Huowang's heart trembled upon hearing her voice. It had been a very long time since he heard her voice.

"Hello? Who is this?"

Li Huowang quickly regained his composure. He pinched his throat and deliberately lowered his voice, "Hello, is this ID Good Rabbit? There are two parcels for you here. Can you please come out of school to pick them up? They're large, and it's not convenient for me to leave them at a storage unit."

"What? Parcels? I haven't bought anything, though..."

"Perhaps someone sent them to you. Please come out and sign the delivery forms."

"Sorry, I'm not available right now. I'm not at school today, too. If you can't leave them in a storage unit, then just return them."

Li Huowang was reassured upon hearing that. It seemed that Yi Donglai had conveyed his message to Yang Na.

Regardless of where Yang Na was hiding, it was much better than staying in one place.

They just needed to hold on until he reached Beihai Port. Once Xu Shou was no more, Yang Na would be safe.

“...Huowang?” Yang Na asked, sounding hesitant.

Li Huowang’s heart trembled, but he forcibly calmed himself down and said, “What? Anyway, all right. I’ll go and bring these two parcels back to the hub. I still have other parcels to deliver.”

With that, Li Huowang ended the call and blocked the number.

Li Huowang covered his mouth with his hand and closed his eyes in pain. He really wanted to meet Yang Na, but this wasn’t the right time.

She was in danger, and he had to ensure her safety before anything else.

Moreover, Li Huowang reckoned that Yang Na would only feel worried about him if he were to meet her right now.

Yang Na's mental health was already bad, and Li Huowang didn’t want her condition to worsen just because of a selfish decision on his end.

Li Huowang took a deep breath and looked at the others on the bus. For some reason, everything felt unfamiliar to him.

Of course, everything would feel unfamiliar, as it had been a while since he appeared in public.

Li Huowang fell into a daze, and his surroundings distorted, seemingly transforming from a bus to a wooden carriage.

“Beep~ Senior discount.” The voice of the bus' assistant echoing throughout the bus brought Li Huowang back to reality.

Just ten more stops, and I will be at the port. Stay calm, and don’t get recognized. Li Huowang adjusted his collar.

Just then, a bald old man with a fishing rod in hand started walking in Li Huowang's direction from the front of the bus.

When the bald old man saw Li Huowang’s eyes, he shivered in fright. Then, he stopped walking and turned around to hold on to the hanging handrail.

Li Huowang found the bald old man's actions to be suspicious.

Li Huowang tried to ignore it for a while, but he still felt uneasy, so he stood up and walked toward the bald old man to take a closer look at the latter.

Li Huowang's pupils constricted upon recognizing the bald old man. The bald old man was a fellow patient. More specifically, his name was Old Liu, and Li Huowang could still remember knocking out Old Liu's dentures with a punch.

The bus door opened just then, and the panicking Old Liu rushed down the bus with his fishing rod and bucket.

When Old Liu saw that Li Huowang was following him, he abandoned his fishing rod and bucket. Old Liu started breathing in ragged pants as he ran away desperately.

"Old Liu! Why are you running away?! I've recovered!" Li Huowang exclaimed. He caught up to Old Liu and grabbed the latter by the shoulder.

"I... I don't believe you!" Old Liu exclaimed. He struggled desperately and shouted in despair, "Help! Someone help! Call the police! This lunatic is a murderer!"

"Shut up! I'm going to kill you if you don't!" Li Huowang warned. He took out a little saw and pointed it at Old Liu's belly, who closed his mouth immediately.

He dragged Old Liu to behind a bush. Then, he breathed a sigh of relief upon seeing that Old Liu's screams didn't attract any attention from the sparse crowd.

Li Huowang took a moment to compose himself before explaining, "Sorry, I didn't mean to do this to you, but I have something important to do right now! I have to finish it before I get caught!"

Old Liu looked down at the bloodstains on the saw and gulped. "Okay, you... you can go, I promise I won't call the police."

"*Heh*, I know you too well. You cheated your way to victory in

those card games with the other patients. I can't trust you at all. Anyway, is there anyone else at your home right now?" Li Huowang supported Old Liu as the two of them walked away from the bush.

"What.. what do you want?" Old Liu asked with an ashen look.

"There's no one at home. My... my son is at work, and my grandson is in school."

"I'm not going to do anything; I just need to make sure that you won't call the police once I've left you alone!"

"I really won't call the police, Little Li. Please spare me. I really was just sick at the time; I didn't mean to hurt your girlfriend."

Unfortunately, Old Liu's words didn't convince Li Huowang nor weaken his determination.

They soon arrived at Old Liu's home. It was a second-floor apart in a small residential area, and there was no one inside. Old Liu hadn't lied.

However, Li Huowang was still dissatisfied, so he decided to tape Old Liu to the toilet. He did it tightly so that Old Liu would find it difficult to break free.

He ignored Old Liu's pleas, but he didn't leave immediately. Instead, he went into the kitchen to select a handy tool.

A little saw wouldn't be enough to handle his opponent. He needed a handier and more powerful weapon.

"Little Li, I beg you, I really won't call the police!" Old Liu exclaimed. The crisp sound of metal scraping against metal echoed from the kitchen, and it made Old Liu shudder.

Li Huowang picked up a long-handled boning knife and returned to the bathroom.

"Little Li, you can kill me, but can you spare my grandson?" Old Liu pleaded in despair.

Li Huowang frowned deeply and said, "How many times must I tell you? I've recovered!"

"Yes, yes, you've recovered, you've recovered crazy," Old Liu

said, nodding repeatedly like a chicken pecking at rice.

Li Huowang gagged Old Liu and even sealed it with tape to ensure that Old Liu wouldn't be able to make any noises. "Sorry, you've recognized me, so I have no choice but to do this."

Having resolved the unexpected danger, Li Huowang pushed the door open and walked out of the apartment.

Li Huowang went down the stairs and returned to the bus stop at the entrance of the residential area. He hopped onto a bus that was heading to Beihai Port.

As the number of people on the bus dwindled, the frown on Li Huowang's face became tighter.

Soon, they arrived at the port, and the stacked shipping containers made him feel oppressed.

Li Huowang was in a dilemma. How could he infiltrate the place?

Chapter 603 - Wooden Ship

The New Year festivities had just ended, so the weather was still cold. It was so cold that the seawater's coldness had to be bone-chilling.

However, this bit of cold was nothing to Li Huowang, who had gone through countless battles.

Li Huowang was beneath a crowded wooden pier. He projected his image and submerged his colored phantom. His invisible figure peeked out of the water and stared at his distant target.

There was a huge wooden ship, and it wasn't just any ship. It was huge and was even larger than the warships Li Huowang had seen around Xing Island.

The bow of the huge wooden ship was like a massive fish as it sat on the water's surface. It had a wooden-yellow color, making it appear like an oppressive mountain.

I finally caught up! Hmph! Trying to escape, huh? Leaving Great Liang immediately when the situation seems amiss? Not that easy! You still owe me for the ambush that you and Huangfu Tiangang had done against me! Li Sui, let's go!

Li Sui's tentacles extended from Li Huowang's wound, and they moved swiftly in the seawater, propelling Li Huowang toward the bizarre flat-bottomed wooden ship.

Li Huowang had lost three of his limbs, and Li Sui's skinned tentacles, which resembled a dog's limbs, replaced his lost limbs. Even his left hand, which only had one finger remaining, was replaced by Li Sui.

Li Sui was attached to Li Huowang, so he could use her limbs

skillfully as if they were his own.

At first, he was hesitant about the idea of making a break for it, but he decided to make a break for it after surviving Huangfu Tiangang's ambush.

This huge wooden ship would sail away before he could recover his limbs, so he couldn't wait for them to recover.

Fortunately, Li Sui's tentacles were great tools for swimming, and Li Sui herself was comfortable in the water as if she were a fish.

Soon, Li Huowang was touching the wooden hull of the ship. Instead of immediately making a move, he waited quietly for nightfall to sneak his way onto the ship.

He wasn't afraid that the ship might sail away as he dilly-dallied, as he was already near its hull.

Time ticked by slowly, and the sky gradually darkened as the sun shifted westward.

As the lights in the distant pier disappeared, Li Huowang stuck his black tentacles to the hull, and just like that, he rapidly climbed up the hull.

He placed his one remaining finger on the side of the ship and poked his head out to look around. His projection ability was concealing his figure at the moment, so Li Huowang wasn't particularly nervous about this.

The ship's bow was massive, and the front deck was as big as a soccer field. However, the vast field was desolate. Li Huowang couldn't see anything other than smoke from the three burning incense inside a giant cauldron on the bow.

The three columns of white smoke rising from the incense took to the air and disappeared into the darkness.

There were some offerings before the triangular display stand, which stood right in front of the cauldron.

In addition to the usual pig, cow, and sheep heads, there were incense, candles, yellow paper, and gold ingots.

“Dad, what are they worshipping?”

“Don’t worry about what they’re worshipping. Our goal is to find Doulao’s Twisted One and kill him! Everything else is irrelevant.”

Li Huowang dragged his crippled figure toward the cabin. His senses were heightened to their absolute limit at the moment, so he could feel every single movement around him. He was planning on brute forcing his way in if he ended up getting detected by any of the crew.

Soon, Li Huowang found himself standing before the cabin door. He opened it cautiously, but nothing happened.

What kind of trickery is this? Could it be that the Twisted One really can’t detect my hidden self? Li Huowang thought as he placed his back against the wall and slowly entered the cabin. It was larger and more crowded than Li Huowang had imagined. The cabin was filled with clutter, and both walls were densely packed with wooden carvings of buildings. It was like a three-dimensional version of a famous Qingming painting[1] hanging on the wall.

The wooden carvings were incredibly realistic depictions of wooden tiles, pine trees, sleeves, donkeys, horses, and even cow dung.

Li Huowang was on high alert as he reached behind him and grabbed the hilt of the spine sword.

As soon as he touched the hilt of the spine sword, everything on the wall came to life. A crowd of tiny people rushed to the windows and pointed curiously at Li Huowang.

They can see me! Li Huowang’s figure flickered, and he reappeared a yard away. He had no time to entangle with these things, so he quickly rushed forward.

Thump! Peng Longteng’s tall figure landed heavily next to Li Huowang. She raised her fist, which was wrapped in heavy armor, and smashed it into the wooden carvings on the wall.

Peng Longteng sent a few more punches before she abruptly

froze and became a wood carving.

What are those? Li Huowang gripped the spine sword tightly and swung it toward the wall, creating a spacetime rift that sent the wooden carvings flying toward the Great Qi.

When the spacetime rift shattered the wooden wall, a wooden eye socket densely packed with eyeballs in a variety of sizes stared at Li Huowang, making his scalp feel numb.

Li Huowang saw that the path had gotten narrower, so he raised the purple-tasseled sword and thrust it into the ground before carving open a hole in the cabin.

Li Huowang wasted no time and jumped into the hole.

The lower deck of the ship was darker than Li Huowang had anticipated. It was so dark that he could not even see his fingers.

Li Huowang took out a green glowing stone, and a distorted, laughing face abruptly appeared before him.

Li Huowang responded quickly. He raised his sword and slashed out, but he forcefully stopped his attack. He took a step back and took a good look at the face that was over three meters tall.

If he wasn't mistaken, then the towering object before him was one of the Eight Immortals, Tieguai Li[2]. More precisely, it was a root carving[3] of Tieguai Li.

It seemed that the carving was made in a way that would emphasize the growth of the roots rather than make the intertwined roots appear like a person.

The carving depicted densely packed tree burls that had been assimilated by Tieguai Li.

Tieguai Li had no legs, as they had been replaced by twisted roots, which made him look rather bizarre and disfigured.

After confirming that the Tieguai Li before him was just an inanimate root carving, Li Huowang backed away slowly.

Just as he took a few steps backward, he felt someone's gaze

boring into him from behind.

Li Huowang whipped around and saw one of the Eight Immortals, Lu Dongbin. It was another root carving, but it looked like he was carved from roots that had been eaten by insects.

Lu Dongbin's overall appearance was exactly the same as Tieguai Li's appearance. However, Lu Dongbin's interior seemed hollow as his figure was riddled with holes in a variety of sizes. Clearly, those holes were made by the insects that had devoured his figure.

Li Huowang stood frozen. After a while, he took out all the glowing stones that he had brought from Zephyr Temple and hurled them in all directions.

In the blink of an eye, the root carvings of Eight Immortals in many different poses were revealed around him.

1. Along the River During the Qingming Festival is a handscroll painting by the Song dynasty painter Zhang Zeduan 🖱️

2. also known as Iron-Crutch Li 🖱️

3. a traditional Chinese art form of carving and polishing tree roots into various artistic creations 🖱️

Chapter 604 - Eight Immortals

The dark-brown root carvings of the Eight Immortals looked extremely bizarre beneath the green light that had pervaded the dim and spacious tweendeck of the ship.

The remaining Eight Immortals looked far more terrifying compared to Tieguai Li and Lu Dongbin. They had the same root-like appearance as root carvings, but they all had their own peculiar characteristics.

For example, He Xiang's neck was twisted like a twisted fried dough[1].

Han Zhongli's chest was bare, and his proportions were inconsistent. He looked particularly disgusting as well, looking like a rotten chunk of fat that had been left outside for too long.

A deafening silence hung over the dim tweendeck. Li Huowang couldn't hear any other noises aside from his own breathing.

Li Huowang swept his gaze across the root carvings of the Eight Immortals. Anything related to immortality was always a bad thing in this crazy world!

“Li Sui, let's go! Find Douluo's Twisted One and end this as soon as possible!” Li Huowang exclaimed and projected his image once again. He rushed past the root carvings and headed into the distance.

Just as he walked out of the crowd of root carvings, an eerie creaking noise echoed from behind him.

Li Huowang immediately turned around and saw the root carvings of the Eight Immortals standing in a row; their bizarre eyes were fixed on him—they could actually move!

Pop!

A popping sound echoed as a glowing stone that Li Huowang had thrown burst open.

Unfortunately, it was just the beginning.

A series of popping noises echoed as more and more glowing stones exploded into pieces.

Soon, the root carvings of the Eight Immortals vanished into the darkness.

Li Huowang's vision was excellent, but the surroundings were too dark for him to see anything unless they were only a few feet away from him.

A melody echoed from Han Xiangzi's flute, and a cacophony of voices from both men and women pervaded the tweendeck.

"The superior avoids conflict; the inferior loves strife. The superior is humble; the inferior clings to virtues. Those stubborn do not possess true virtues."

Deafening peals of laughter coming from both elderly and young people pervaded the dark cabin; the laughter sounded bizarre, as if they were layered on top of each other.

Li Huowang gnashed his teeth as the laughter entered his ears. He gripped the spine sword with his right hand and swung it toward where he last saw the root carvings of the Eight Immortals.

Then, he rushed toward the spacetime rift that led to the Great Qi.

Li Huowang lowered himself and got ready to dodge to the left to avoid any possible attacks when Lu Dongbin's root carving appeared on his left without any warning.

When Li Huowang jumped to the left, the large hole in Lu Dongbin's chest opened like a gaping maw, seemingly waiting for him to fall into it.

Li Sui's tentacles burst out of Li Huowang and stuck to the floor, sparing Li Huowang the horrible fate of making contact with

Lu Dongbin's gaping maw.

What are these things?! Li Huowang gritted his teeth. He lifted both the spine sword and the purple-tasseled sword and swung them toward Lu Dongbin.

Crack!

Lu Dongbin's root carving was split in half.

At the same time, Li Huowang was tripped by something, and he stumbled to his left.

Han Xiangzi's twisted bamboo flute stood tall, seemingly waiting for Li Huowang on the floor.

It stood tall in a way that it would pierce Li Huowang's temple if he truly ended up falling to the floor.

Just as he was less than an inch away from Han Xiangzi's flute, Han Xiangzi was suddenly dragged away by someone else.

Shiwik!

Li Huowang stabbed the swords into the ground, stabilizing himself. He then stood up with a furious look and asked, "Have you had enough fun, you bunch of rotten wood?"

Sparks flew from a flint as Li Huowang was set ablaze. The flames were like a viral infection as they jumped onto the half-immortal root carvings.

The dark cabin brightened instantly as the root carvings caught fire.

The stationary root carvings of the Eight Immortals made another move. The burning tree stumps and roots writhed as their charred figures crawled toward Li Huowang.

Li Huowang was about to set fire to the entire ship when the wooden planks on the ground split open, allowing seawater to come in.

The seawater extinguished the flames, plunging the entire deck into darkness.

A piercing noise echoed as the remaining flames resisted the

encroaching water.

The submerged Li Huowang convulsed upon hearing the piercing noise. However, he had never been the type to give up so easily, so he took out his rib, which was stored in his belly button, and shoved it into his chest.

The pain wreaking havoc throughout Li Huowang was instantly shared with everything around him, and the cacophony of noises vanished.

“So you want to play, huh? Fine! I’ll sink this entire ship for you!” Li Huowang exclaimed. His charred figure swam to the nearest wall, and he slashed out haphazardly with his spine sword.

Rifts appeared in the hull, and a large amount of seawater was displaced every time Li Huowang swung his sword.

The icy seawater rushed back in shortly upon being displaced, but the rifts in the hull writhed and intertwined with each other to seal the rifts.

To make matters worse, the bizarre-looking root carvings of the Eight Immortals appeared in the dark waters.

A layer of charcoal covered the root carvings of the Eight Immortals, and they looked even more terrifying as the charcoal enveloping them dispersed like black mist in the icy cold waters.

Lu Dongbin's root carving had miraculously recovered, even though Li Huowang had split it into two earlier. He stood firmly with the other root carvings as they surrounded Li Huowang.

Finally, the root carvings of the Eight Immortals made their move. A black mist spread from their charred figures as they rushed nimbly toward Li Huowang.

Li Huowang raised his weapons. The spine sword in his right hand blocked He Xiangü’s lotus, while his left hand thrust the purple-tasseled sword into Zhang Guolao’s face.

Li Huowang then opened his mouth wide, revealing a mouth full of tentacles that wrapped around Han Zhongli’s head before

twisting it off the latter's shoulders.

Li Sui stood bravely next to Li Huowang, brandishing the bronze coin sword to fight the enemies. Li Huowang was taken aback and was completely surrounded, but he still had the advantage.

Unfortunately, these carvings of half-immortals were difficult to handle. Even decapitation wasn't enough to deal with them; Li Huowang had to crush them into powder to render them immobile.

Li Huowang was making quick work of them, but there was one big issue—he was running out of steam.

The tweendeck wasn't that huge, especially when it was jam-packed with enemies, so Li Huowang had to make agile movements to avoid getting injured. To make matters worse, he was drenched in icy cold seawater. The exertion made Li Huowang feel like his lungs were on fire. His expression became increasingly agonized as time ticked by, and the bulging veins on his forehead seemed like they'd burst open anytime soon.

Li Huowang's instincts were telling him to surface as soon as possible. Unfortunately, Li Huowang was in the lower hold of the ship, and the bizarre root carvings of the Eight Immortals were not letting him go, which made it impossible for him to swim away.

Li Huowang's consciousness became blurrier and blurrier as he was running out of air. His situation eventually became so bad that he started hallucinating.

“Hah!” Li Huowang spat the dagger in his mouth and desperately gasped for air upon surfacing. After a few deep breaths, he dove fiercely and swam toward the depths of the sea.

The deep breaths on the surface had allowed him to come back to his senses and recover his strength.

1. mahua, a fried dough that is lightly twisted and sweetened



Chapter 605 - Strayed One, Twisted One

Despite the darkness, Li Huowang had ample oxygen in his lungs, so he wasn't too worried at the moment.

The fate of the Eight Immortals in the seawater was obvious as well.

Soon, black and yellow wood chips pervaded the seawater around Li Huowang. The root carvings were agile, but he reckoned that they couldn't swim.

Having dealt with the root carvings of the Eight Immortals, the black tentacles that sprouted on Li Huowang's stumps swung rapidly, carrying him toward the sea surface.

Li Huowang soon found himself gasping for air on deck.

The other party knew that he was coming, so stealth had become meaningless. In the end, Li Huowang decided to confront the other party directly.

Li Huowang believed that he wouldn't necessarily lose in a head-on confrontation, as the two of them were Twisted Ones of a Siming.

Swoosh!

A spacetime rift flew and struck the bronze incense cauldron with three sticks of incense sticking out of it. The cauldron shattered, and ash scattered all over the ground.

"Come out! If you don't come out, I'm going to burn this ship down to the ground!" Li Huowang exclaimed. He looked down at his charred figure with barely any skin left. The next moment, he pulled out a flint and scratched his skin.

Sparks flew, and a conflagration erupted, enveloping him

completely in an instant.

The raging flames spread outward from Li Huowang's feet.

Swoosh!

The cabin door swung open, and a large group of people rushed into the cabin.

The crowd was dressed in clothes that Li Huowang had never seen before, and their skin was slightly darker than the average person.

When the crowd dressed in strange clothes saw that Li Huowang was trying to burn down the ship, their eyes blazed with anger.

It seemed as if they had gone mad as they brandished their weapons and charged at Li Huowang.

There were some skilled fighters among them, but it was futile. As the flames spread, they ultimately became fuel that further intensified the flames.

The fire grew larger and larger. As the entire ship was about to become engulfed in flames, the flames disappeared rapidly. Time seemed to rewind like a tape as the charred wooden boards reverted to their original color. Eerily enough, the bronze incense cauldron, which had been split into two by Li Huowang actually returned to its original state.

A creaking noise echoed, and a nearby hatch opened.

A man dressed in tattered clothes with a leash around his neck crawled out slowly from the hatch. The rusty chain that linked his neck to the cabin rubbed against the ground, creating a harsh scraping sound.

He wasn't alone. Someone else crawled out of the hatch; more and more people crawled out until there were five of them outside.

They all looked normal, but they had identical pupils.

Li Huowang's expression turned solemn, and he clenched his fists. At last, the mastermind was here.

“Stand up.” An aged voice echoed from the pitch-black cabin. The expression of the five people became dull, and they stood up to repeat the aged voice's words.

“Stand up.”

“Stand up.”

“Stand up.”

“Stand up.”

“Stand up.”

Li Huowang remained calm as he faced the five strange individuals. He stared at the pitch-black cabin behind them and asked, “Are you the Twisted One hidden by Doulao?”

Just then, Li Huowang heard the sound of horse hooves on his left. He turned and saw waves of yellow dust rising from the pier in the distance.

It seemed that someone was coming to the pier. Unfortunately, their efforts were useless, as the ship was already quite a bit distant from the pier.

Li Huowang looked away and stared into the darkness. “Come out. I'm already here, so is there any point in hiding?”

Thump!

The headless Peng Longteng landed heavily next to Li Huowang. She took big strides forward and charged at the five people.

“Break their legs.” The aged voice sounded once again.

The five strange individuals repeated the aged voice's words, and the legs of the charging Peng Longteng were abruptly severed, causing her to slam heavily onto the wooden floor.

Li Huowang swept his gaze across the five people, and he suddenly felt creeped out. The other party's ability to make their words come true made him think of something ominous. *Strayed Ones? These five people are Strayed Ones?!*

If Li Huowang's assumption was right, then it finally made

sense how the walls had healed themselves. Li Huowang knew that the 'Truth' of Strayed Ones could do something like that.

The person hiding in the cabin seemed like they didn't want to answer Li Huowang's question.

When the Strayed Ones spoke in unison once again, the deck cracked open, and Li Huowang fell straight down into the lower hold.

Li Huowang recovered his balance and looked up to see the five Strayed Ones getting dragged away by the iron chains around their necks. Eventually, they were hung on the wall, making them look like five hanging ghosts.

As a Strayed One himself, Li Huowang could empathize with them. He found it disgusting how the other party was using these Strayed Ones as tools to fight for him.

The other party had transformed five living people into puppets.

Fortunately, Li Huowang was extremely familiar with Strayed Ones, and he had his own way of dealing with them as well.

When the other party opened their mouth to say something once again, Li Huowang took out an awl and pierced his eardrums without any hesitation.

The next moment, he closed his eyes and charged at the wall where the five Strayed Ones were hanging.

Li Sui watched as her father charged at the wall despite stepping on the fallen objects on the ground. The wooden boards that made up the lower hold were liquifying rapidly, but Li Huowang didn't seem to care as he continued his charge.

A giant wall covered with barbs, and a bucket of boiling molten iron fell toward Li Huowang, but he easily knocked them aside.

"Die!" Two spacetime rifts that led straight to the Great Qi flew toward the five Strayed Ones.

When Li Huowang opened his eyes once again, he saw that the

Strayed Ones were dragged away by the chains on their necks, so they managed to dodge the attack.

However, Li Huowang was not disappointed at all. He already knew what he was going to do if his attack failed.

The opponent hiding in the darkness of the cabin was about to open their mouth when Li Huowang took out a bronze bell and shook it vigorously.

He had no intention of summoning the Wandering Gods; he just wanted to use the piercing sound of the bell to interrupt the other party's commands to the Strayed Ones.

Strayed Ones were difficult opponents, so Li Huowang decided to disrupt his opponent's commands instead.

The five Strayed Ones stopped moving. Li Huowang saw that, so he swung his left hand toward the cabin door, hurling two slender tentacles that wrapped around the cabin door itself.

Li Huowang tugged forcefully, propelling himself into the dark cabin next door as if he were a stone leaving a slingshot. He moved so fast that he left behind a trail of afterimages.

Chapter 606 - Truths Or Lies

The cabin next door was made entirely out of wood and was only as big as a classroom, but it resembled more like a chamber of an ant's nest.

The walls were filled with engravings, and the tiny engraved people on the walls were moving and pointing at Li Huowang, making the entire cabin quite lively.

Li Huowang finally saw the true body of Yinyang Doulao's Twisted One.

The Twisted One was a bare-chested man sitting on a brown chair. The man was also wearing a mask similar to the mask in front of the Sitting Oblivion Dao's entrance.

The only difference was that this particular mask boasted tusks that made the mask appear even more menacing.

The man was skinny, but his abdomen was abnormally large. A tattoo of two fishes representing Yin and Yang was on the man's abdomen. Shockingly, the two fishes were alive and swimming!

The chains connected to the five Strayed Ones were in the left hand of the Twisted One.

Clearly, he was the owner of the aged voice. Li Huowang also noticed that the Twisted One didn't have legs—no, his legs had fused with the brown chair.

Li Huowang opened his mouth to start asking questions, but it seemed that the other party didn't want to talk to Li Huowang right now.

The bare-chested man tugged at the chains, and the five Strayed Ones were dragged into the cabin.

They wasted no time and charged at Li Huowang from behind.

The five Strayed Ones said something, and the wooden boards on the ground flew toward Li Huowang.

"Can you guys stop?!" Li Huowang was furious. He gripped his spine sword tightly and ignored the Strayed Ones behind him before charging at the bare-chested man.

Li Huowang had just swung his sword when his supposedly deaf ears heard something from behind the Twisted One's mask.

"One obtains Dao at Mount Tian Tai and becomes Immortal at Mount Ge Zao. The Jade Capital's Golden Gates opens within the Tai Chi. Great Compassion, Great Aspirations, Great Holiness, and Great Mercy. The Supreme Jade Capital hidden within the mechanisms of the Heavens. The Jade Void and Purple Spirit transforms into profound tranquility. The Eternal Dao blends harmoniously," the bare-chested man sang along with the five Strayed Ones behind Li Huowang.

As they sang, Li Huowang and the illusions around him flickered. It appeared like something was disappearing from them.

Rumble!

A spacetime rift came to life and struck the bare-chested man's face. However, the spacetime rift dissipated like a gentle breeze instead of bisecting the man.

It's useless on him? Is he another Dragon Vein?! Li Huowang was stupefied, but he refused to give up.

Peng Longteng's massive figure appeared beside him, and she hurled him toward the bare-chested man.

Li Huowang crashed into the man's mask. The purple-tasseled sword in his hand and the bronze coin sword gripped by Li Sui's tentacles were thrust into the man's enlarged abdomen at the same time.

Shockingly, both swords phased through the man and struck the brown chair instead.

Li Huowang was so surprised that he froze, but he snapped back to reality in the blink of an eye and thrust his swords forward once again.

Unfortunately, his swords were indeed phasing through the bare-chested man. To make matters worse, even the brown chair was unharmed.

“Something’s wrong here!” Li Huowang exclaimed. He raised his sword and stabbed his thigh.

The sharp sword pierced his thigh, but he felt no pain at all. Eerily enough, his sword did not get stained in his blood as well.

Seeing that, Li Huowang realized that the bare-chested man wasn't a Dragon Vein. The issue was with him; something was happening to him!

It felt like he had ceased to exist the moment Yinyang Doulao's Twisted One clapped his eyes on him.

Li Huowang felt like he had become a ghost, as he couldn't touch anything, including himself.

“What’s going on?” Li Huowang asked, sounding confused.

“You’ve become a ‘Lie’! Quick, think of a plan while I distract Doulao!” A familiar voice exclaimed.

Just then, the ceiling of the cabin opened, and Doulao's Twisted One took the five Strayed Ones to kneel toward the skies.

“Not existing, yet not empty. Such is the true void, manifesting its traces in the world. Guard the sage’s chariot in Yanfu. Great Compassion, Great Aspirations, Great Holiness, and Great Mercy. Of a saintly virtue with immense radiance. O’ golden revered one, the Great Sage of Marici, Yuanming Doulao Tianzun!”

The starry sky was blotted out by a clump of darkness. It felt like something was about to emerge.

“Not existing yet not empty? Did I become fake? Did I really become a ‘Lie’?”

Li Huowang's actions couldn't influence reality at all, and it

seemed like he had truly lost against his opponent.

No! There must be some other way! As a Twisted One, he can use Doulao's Heavenly Daos of Truth and Lies! And I'm Ji Zai's Twisted One, so I can definitely use his Heavenly Dao!

"But how am I supposed to use 'Bewilderment'?" Li Huowang roared in anger.

He was badly injured and was in a bad spot. His weapon was nothing but a knife, and he couldn't defeat Xu Shou's guard dogs. To make matters worse, Xu Shou's men were even equipped with guns!

Boom!

Something exploded up ahead. It was a wooden frame, and its explosion forced him into a corner.

"Woof! Woof! Woof!" Furious barks echoed, reminding Li Huowang of the five pit bulls chasing after him.

Those dogs seemed to have been trained to fight. They were brave and fearless; they were also difficult to shake off once they had latched onto someone.

The pit bulls seemed immune to pain as well, which made Li Huowang's knife useless.

One of them had latched onto him, so he sacrificed his left arm to kill it, but he didn't expect to see more!

Li Huowang heard approaching footsteps, and his expression changed drastically, revealing his unwillingness to lose. "Is this how it ends? No! I need to do something to eliminate their weapons!"

Thankfully, he had a contingency plan in mind for a scenario like this.

Li Huowang took out a bottle of pills and opened it. Then, he dumped every single pill into his mouth.

He chewed on them once and swallowed them with great difficulty.

Moments later, Li Huowang's surroundings changed drastically.

The white walls of the yacht transformed into brown wooden panels. Earlier, Li Huowang had been thinking frantically about how he could use the special Heavenly Dao of Bewilderment, but now, he was no longer worried as he could touch his head once again! He was no longer a spirit that couldn't influence reality!

Chapter 607 - Xu Shou

Li Huowang had no idea what happened, but he knew that it was a good thing that he was real once again.

Li Huowang attacked immediately, afraid that he'd become fake once again.

“Father, my bronze coin sword is missing,” Li Sui said.

However, Li Huowang was focused on the bare-chested man kneeling on the ground as well as the five Strayed Ones. He had no idea what Li Sui was talking about.

“Die!” Li Huowang swung his spine sword toward the five Strayed Ones.

The praying Strayed Ones didn't expect that Li Huowang would become real once again.

The heads of the five Strayed Ones were sent to the Qi Kingdom.

“Touch your head! Your head is missing!” Li Huowang exclaimed.

The five Strayed Ones heard him and tried to touch their head to no avail. They went limp and fell to the ground the moment they realized that they were dead. They never got up again.

Li Huowang then pointed his sword at the Twisted One.

Their gazes met in mid-air, and that was when the deck split open like a monstrous maw. The sharp edges of the wooden floor engulfed the two and shut tight.

The wooden spikes were like jagged teeth as they closed up.

The cabin became silent and devoid of any living being.

The dark clouds in the skies expanded as time ticked by. From the darkest part of the clouds appeared a single eyeball. It was the Sacred Mountain Ghost Eye that Doulao had taken from the Liang

Kingdom.

Just then, a blood-red maggot chewed through the wooden floorboards and consumed everything around it.

However, it was just the beginning; more and more maggots chewed through the wooden boards.

Soon, the wooden boards were riddled with holes, and Li Huowang could see the skies once more.

Li Huowang's chest was hollow, and the cavity was filled with wriggling maggots. He didn't hesitate to sacrifice his organs to use Five Elements Intercalation against the Twisted One of Doulao.

Li Huowang obtained a tremendous amount of power in exchange for his life. A whistling sound echoed; the air itself screeched as Li Huowang thrust his spine sword into the Twisted One's bulging belly, pinning the latter to the wooden boards.

Li Huowang twisted his sword, and the dark clouds spread even faster.

It was useless, but the Twisted One extended his arms and tried pushing the spine sword upward.

"You refuse to die?" Li Huowang asked. His tentacles launched the Twisted One into the air, and he thrust his sword into the Twisted One's chest once again.

The sword sunk deeper, and Li Huowang pinned the Twisted One into the wooden board once again.

At last, Li Huowang had fulfilled Ji Zai's request.

Rumble!

The dark skies abruptly changed, and Li Huowang phased through the spine sword!

The spine sword was sticking out of him, but he felt no pain.

Li Huowang instantly realized that he had become a "Lie," but it wasn't just him. The massive wooden ship and the stretch of the ocean around them were vanishing in real time. These "Truths" were vanishing and were being replaced by "Lies."

However, it didn't last long.

The "Truth" reappeared as fast as it disappeared, replacing the "Lie."

Qiu Chibao, the old monk, and Jin Shanzhao suddenly realized that they had fleshly bodies.

"I'm alive? Have I really been resurrected? I can do good deeds again?!" the old monk exclaimed, jumping around on the spot.

What's happening? Li Huowang unknowingly looked up. "Is this how Natural Disasters occur?"

Doulao's Twisted One had been dealt with, so Ji Zai was most likely in the middle of snatching away Yinyang Doulao's Heavenly Daos of Truth and Lies.

Natural Disasters occurred whenever a Siming was in the middle of robbing another Siming's Heavenly Dao.

Realizing that she had a fleshly body once again, Peng Longteng decisively abandoned Li Huowang and ran toward the gunwale.

She was about to climb the gunwale and jump overboard, but her figure phased through it—she was an illusion once more.

"Ah~ I'm an illusion again?" the old monk said, sounding disappointed upon sensing the change.

"Is it over?" Li Huowang muttered. He closed his eyes and felt his surroundings.

The Natural Disaster was over, which meant his Siming, Ji Zai, had completely taken over Doulao's Heavenly Daos of Truth and Lies.

It was a good thing to have control over two Heavenly Daos, but Li Huowang felt nothing.

Just then, a strange whirling sound echoed from above him.

Li Huowang looked up, and the strong wind blowing across the scene sent Li Huowang's hair flying backward.

The red lights up above revealed that Li Huowang was staring

at a helicopter.

Li Huowang smiled when he saw the words painted on the underside of the helicopter.

“So Old Liu still called the police.”

The situation was out of control, and Li Huowang knew that it wouldn't be easy to deal with the aftermath, especially when there was an entire yacht of corpses around him.

He looked down indifferently at the dying Xu Shou.

At least my parents and Yang Na will be safe now.

Li Huowang stared at the mastermind and felt extremely repulsed. He bent down and grabbed the man's sunglasses for himself.

“I'm not blaming you for anything, even though you've put me in such a tight spot. You even made me lose an arm. Anyway, be careful in your next life.”

Xu Shou's lip quivered as if he wanted to say something. His hands, saddled with rings, were pressing on the wound that the bronze coin sword had made.

“*Hm?* What did you say?” Li Huowang got closer, and his pupils constricted.

He realized that Xu Shou without the sunglasses looked extremely familiar to him!

A strange face appeared in his mind. He soon recalled the nuns covered in filth. He had seen Xu Shou in the Benevolent Nunnery!

“Xu'er? Are you Xu'er?!” Li Huowang hurriedly asked, “Are you really the son of Abbess Jing Xin?!”

Li Huowang closely examined Xu Shou and became even more certain that Xu Shuo resembled the shriveled man hidden in the Abbess' folds of fat.

The man was none other than the son of the Abbess, and he was a Strayed One as well!

Li Huowang felt his hair standing on end. He felt like his skull

itself was expanding uncontrollably as a torrent of information surged into his brain like a deluge. He was fine just a few seconds ago, but now, he was filled with many different thoughts.

Chapter 608 - Lies And Truth

“Xu’er...”

It had been a long time, but Li Huowang could still remember the name that Abbess Jing Xin had given to her son.

However, he had never imagined that Xu Shou was actually Xu’er!

The Abbess’ son was a Strayed One, but to think that he’d have another body on this side!

The implications were unmistakable, and Li Huowang felt overwhelmed by the deluge of information inundating his mind.

However, all of it could wait...

Li Huowang needed to ask what Xu Shou was trying to do with him.

“Xu Shou! Why did you do this to me?! What are you planning on doing to me?!” Li Huowang exclaimed, staring at the old man.

“Cough, cough...” Xu Shou coughed up blood as Li Huowang helped him up. Xu Shou then stared at Li Huowang with his glazed but determined eyes.

His pale lips quivered to say something, but...

“... “

Li Huowang looked up and glared at the helicopter, “Scram! You are too noisy! I can’t hear him!”

With that, he pulled Xu Shou closer to him and pressed his left ear against Xu Shou’s mouth to hear what the latter had to say.

Xu Shou parted his mouth once again, and a familiar voice entered his ears.

“Huowang? Huowang, focus now. It’s your turn.”

Li Huowang snapped back to reality and looked around him. His surroundings had changed.

The boat, Xu Shou, and even the helicopter had disappeared.

The chaotic surroundings had been replaced by a tranquil one. The shift was so drastic that he found it extremely uncomfortable.

He looked down at himself and saw that his wounds, even his missing arm, had vanished. It seemed like he had traveled back in time to just a few days ago.

Li Huowang realized that he was back on his plastic chair. He was sitting in a circle along with the other patients back in Kangning Hospital.

The hall was quiet and peaceful.

“Li Huowang? What’s wrong?” Wu Cheng asked. He was in his white robes and was staring at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang stared at Wu Cheng and saw that the latter's face was unscathed. Li Huowang could still remember how he had bitten off a chunk of Wu Cheng's face, but now, there wasn't even a scar left.

Li Huowang had tortured Wu Cheng, but the latter's eyes reflected no emotions except for concern. It seemed like nothing had happened between him and Li Huowang.

“Have you discovered anything strange with your illness? I'm your doctor, so feel free to talk to me. I will do my best to help you while you're here.”

Li Huowang looked at him with a conflicted feeling before opening his mouth, saying, “Doctor Wu, I feel like something has happened just now.”

Then, Li Huowang recounted what had happened to him.

After listening to Li Huowang's recount, Wu Cheng crossed his arms and frowned. “It’s normal for you to have hallucinations since it’s written on the report, but usually, only those with autism suffer from fragmented perception. Actually, it's strange that your

fragmented perception happened in your hallucination."

Autism? Fragmented thoughts? Li Huowang looked around in confusion before looking at the autistic boy nearby.

The boy smiled, but he froze all of a sudden and stared out into space. He looked just like Li Huowang earlier, seemingly stuck in an endless cycle.

Was everything fake just now? Was it all my imagination? Impossible! It was too real to be fake! A hallucination couldn't be that real!

Li Huowang knew that there was something wrong going on here, so he needed to investigate it.

"Doctor Wu, lend me your phone. I need to call Doctor Yi."

"All right. The rules actually don't allow me to do so, but I'll make an exception today," Wu Cheng said. He unlocked his phone and passed it to Li Huowang.

Li Huowang's suspicion vanished at Wu Cheng's reply. *Wu Cheng has actually changed...*

Li Huowang took out the slip of paper that Yi Donglai had given him and called the number written on it.

The phone was ringing, but no one was picking it up.

The tiny pond in front of him looked familiar. It was a certain pond in Cowheart Village.

The battle with Doulao's Twisted One, the boat, and even his belly full of maggots were gone. It truly felt like he had gone back in time and entered a timeline where the Imperial Preceptor hadn't done anything to him.

The ringing of a phone vanished. Li Huowang turned to the skies and exclaimed, "Come out here! Did you do this to me?! What did you do to me?"

And that was when something bizarre happened...

Li Huowang watched as his own reflection emerged from the pond before him.

“What’s wrong? Isn’t this great? Everything is back to normal.”

“Good? What do you mean 'good'? What happened? What happened to the boat? Why did it disappear? Are my thoughts fragmented?!” Li Huowang shouted at Ji Zai.

Ji Zai pondered over his answer before replying, “I’ve taken the Heavenly Dao of Truth and Lies from Yinyang Doulao. And I turned everything that had happened into a ‘Lie.’”

Li Huowang was frustrated. “What are you talking about?”

“I told you that everything you care for might become fake, while everything that is fake might become real. Did you think I was lying?”

Li Huowang’s frustration intensified at Ji Zai’s words, “But what happened just now was real! How could it just disappear?”

“What is real and what is fake? Are you sure that everything you’re touching is real? What about everything you’ve experienced so far? Are you sure they’re real? If so, then how are you going to prove it?” Ji Zai asked; his questions stumped Li Huowang. “Stop thinking about the past. What’s done is done. Start looking forward.”

Ji Zai returned to the water and merged with Li Huowang’s reflection.

“I forgot to inform you of a good news. I’ve taken control of three and a half Heavenly Daos—Bewilderment, Truth, Lies, and the Heavenly Dao of Chaos from the Sacred Mountain Ghost. You don’t have to worry about anything else. I can finally defend myself.”

“Stop talking in riddles! You have to tell me what happened just now! I still have no idea what happened!”

“Great. Just keep moving forward,” Ji Zai replied, refusing to answer Li Huowang’s question.

“Screw you!” Li Huowang swung his spine sword at Ji Zai upon realizing that the latter had made a fool of him.

This was the first time Li Huowang detested his future self.

Unfortunately, the reflection of himself in the water sustained no injuries, no matter how many times he slashed his sword at the pond.

“You should be happy as my Twisted One. Since I’ve gotten stronger, you should have reaped some profits as well.”

“I don’t want any of those!” Li Huowang exclaimed and swung the spine sword, parting the water in the pond.

Once the parted water returned to normal, Li Huowang shouted, “I’ve done all of your requests! You better stop bothering me from now on! Scram! I feel irritated just looking at you!”

Surprisingly, the reflection in the water replied, “You know that one day, you’ll stand here and listen to yourself saying those words. You know that, right?”

The reflection in the water disappeared afterward.

Li Huowang stared deeply at the water, and he couldn’t shake off the feeling that Ji Zai was still looking at him.

Chapter 609 - Yang Na

The families of the patients and the workers of Kangning Hospital were all looking at a young lady sitting in the corner.

The young lady had a gorgeous, slender figure and was good looking overall.

Someone as pretty as her was a rare sight here, so everyone couldn't help but look at her.

Yang Na was wearing a white sweater beneath her red jacket, and she had on a small sling bag as well. Her hands were on her thighs as she waited impatiently for someone.

Yang Na had dressed herself up today, and her makeup was heavier than usual to hide her exhaustion. A jade earring was hanging from her left ear, and it jiggled as she looked left and right.

Yang Na looked at the time on her phone before taking out a small mirror and lipstick from her bag.

She redid her lipstick and pursed her lips.

Soon, someone called her name; she picked up the white bag beside her and ran toward a hospital staffer.

Yang Na smiled as she entered a certain room, but her expression froze upon seeing Li Huowang behind a wire fence.

“Wait, why is he locked up when I'm visiting him? The other hospitals are not like this! And this isn't a prison!” Yang Na exclaimed upon seeing Li Huowang's condition.

“Nana, it's fine,” Li Huowang replied.

Yang Na ignored the staffer and walked up to the wire fence. She grabbed Li Huowang's hands, and her eyes became wet with tears upon seeing the handcuffs on him.

Li Huowang hurriedly consoled her, saying, “Stop crying, Nana. I'm really fine. No need to feel bad for me. This is a great hospital,

and the doctors are great here. The food isn't that bad, and the patients are much more docile here. I even made some friends. Also, I'm getting better. It's only a matter of time before I get discharged! Once I'm discharged, we can finally meet outside."

Thanks to Li Huowang, Yang Na managed to hold back her tears.

"Nana, why are you here? Who told you that I'm here?"

Li Huowang was surprised by Yang Na's visit. He thought that their next meeting would be outside.

Yang Na lowered her head and pressed Li Huowang's palm on her cheek. "Auntie told me that you're here. She said that your illness has been cured and that you won't become crazy again. She said that you can tell people apart now. Did you know that I couldn't sleep for two nights after I got that phone call? I was so happy to hear that you're finally cured."

Li Huowang couldn't do anything about that. His mother was a worrywart and had the tendency to do unnecessary things.

Li Huowang was planning on calling Yang Na the moment he was discharged, but it seemed that his mother was even more impatient than him.

"Nana, I heard that you're sick. Are you feeling okay now?" asked Li Huowang. He was worried about her.

"I'm fine. I can manage it through medicine," Yang Na smiled and said, "Did you know how happy I was when the doctor told me that I was sick? I thought I could get admitted to the same hospital as you."

Yang Na was lying that she was fine, and Li Huowang saw through her. An illness that needed medicine to manage was serious.

A mild case of depression required no medicine, and there was a massive difference between mild depression and major depression.

A mild case of depression was just like having a cloud above one's head that would go away over time.

However, major depression was like having a dog that would steal someone's ability to feel joy.

The dog, known as major depression, would always follow the individual, and it would grow larger over time.

The dog would vary in size, but it would never leave one's side.

The dog would keep following Yang Na until she was cured. In other words, she'd never be able to feel joy until she was cured.

Someone in the darkness with no light at the end of it would eventually plunge into despair.

It wouldn't be a surprise if Yang Na was already entertaining thoughts of self-harm.

To make matters worse, the patient could relapse after a period of improvement. A relapse was basically guaranteed if the patient went through a traumatic experience.

"Nana," Li Huowang said, looking into Yang Na's eyes. "Once I'm out here, I'll stay with you and face whatever you have to face."

Yang Na bit her lips and nodded. Then, she remembered something and let go of Li Huowang's hands. She picked up the plastic bag on the ground and explained, "Huowang, take a look at these. These are your favorite snacks. I bought many of them. There's liqueur-filled chocolate, crackers, and tomato-flavored chips. Hide these snacks, and don't let the other patients steal them. Also, I bought you some essential daily items."

The atmosphere between the two became better as Yang Na gradually relaxed.

Yang Na smiled often throughout their conversation as well.

Li Huowang was already cured, so their meeting today had a different meaning compared to their previous meetings.

Li Huowang was no longer plagued by those hallucinations, so they could finally see a future for themselves.

Yang Na never let go of Li Huowang's hands as she spoke about her plans with him once he was discharged.

Once he was discharged, Yang Na planned on bringing him with her to explore and eat good food. She wanted to make up for the torture he had gone through over the past few years.

Time flew by, and the visitation hours were up.

"Did your chest get scarred?" Li Huowang looked at her white sweater.

Yang Na's smile gradually disappeared. "Well, there are six stitches, so there's some scarring."

"Nana, I'm so sorry. I was..." Li Huowang muttered.

"It's fine," Yang Na interrupted with a smile. "Plus, you're the only one who's going to see that place, so it's fine as long as you don't find it repulsive."

"Anyway, look. I still have the present you gave me for my birthday," Yang Na said. She parted her hair and revealed the jade earring.

"Oh, but where did you get it? My friends said that it's worth a lot. Did you spend a lot of money on it?" Yang Na asked casually. She then realized something important and looked at Li Huowang behind the wire fence. "Aren't you always in the hospital? How did you get out to buy this thing? There's also the jade pendant."

Li Huowang's pupils constricted. "Huh?"

"Yeah, the jade pendant is apparently worth four hundred thousand."

Chapter 610 - Jade Pendant

“Is that so? Senior Li, where’s the jade pendant, then?” Bai Lingmiao asked, casting a confused gaze at Li Huowang. She had no idea what he was talking about.

Li Huowang was stunned when he heard her say that. *How come she doesn't know when I gave it to her?*

Even though it was a long time ago, Li Huowang could still remember the jade pendant that represented the Imperial family of the Liang Kingdom, and it was inside Xuan Yang’s quarters within the Zephyr Temple.

However, Bai Lingmiao had actually forgotten it—no, she thought that it didn’t exist.

Something’s wrong here! If Ji Zai had turned everything he had experienced on that huge wooden ship into a “Lie,” then there was definitely something strange here!

Why did Ji Zai turn that into a “Lie”? Why did Ji Zai make it so that he never obtained the jade pendant?

This meant that quite a few more memories were altered, or worse, some past events were altered after Doulao lost those Heavenly Daos.

Li Huowang looked at Bai Lingmiao’s eyes covered in white silk. “Miaomiao, go and summon those who had traveled with us from the Zephyr Temple. I need to talk to them.”

Bai Lingmiao was confused, but she nodded. “All right.”

Soon, those who had been with him in the Zephyr Temple. They were all equally confused as to why Li Huowang had called for them.

Li Huowang swept his gaze across them before showing them a drawing of a jade pendant.

“Have any of you seen me bringing this jade pendant out of Zephyr Temple? Do you remember anything about it?”

“What is that? A jade pendant? I've never seen anything like that. I don't think it's something we'll obtain throughout our lifetime.”

“Yeah, and even if we had that jade pendant, we would have sold it long ago to fund our travels.”

Li Huowang realized just then that everyone had also forgotten about the jade pendant's existence. Bai Lingmiao wasn't the only one affected.

“Master, is that jade pendant important? Where did you lose it? I can go and help you find it,” Lu Xiucan said, wanting to show his worth.

Li Huowang shook his head and dismissed them. “It's fine. You can go now.”

Ji Zai hadn't said anything about it, so Li Huowang found it suspicious.

However, it was just a guess on his end. He still needed to take further action to confirm it.

The others thought that Li Huowang was purposely being mysterious toward them, but they still obliged and left.

Bai Lingmiao wasn't sure what Li Huowang was planning on doing, and she was worried that the lotus root was losing its effectiveness.

“Miaomiao, bring me a messenger pigeon. I need to contact someone,” Li Huowang took out a bamboo slip with the moon engraved on it.

Li Huowang was planning to find none other than Liu Zongyuan from Moongate.

He thought it would take several days for Liu Zongyuan to

arrive, but the latter actually arrived at midnight on the same day.

It seemed that Liu Zongyuan was incredibly motivated these days.

“Aiya, Senior Er Jiu, long time no see. Your status has been elevated, and I truly couldn't have seen that you're related to the emperor. I was wondering why you weren't really active in the Surveillance Bureau, so your relationship with the emperor is the reason behind it,” Liu Zongyuan praised, sounding more respectful than usual.

The Surveillance Bureau was outside the jurisdiction of the emperor, and the former never really cared about the emperor's identity.

However, Liu Zongyuan's rank was low—low enough that the friend of the emperor had a higher status than him.

“Sit. It's been a long time since we saw each other, and I need your help as well.”

“Say no more. We survived a mission together, so I will definitely do you a favor,” Liu Zongyuan said, patting his chest with pride.

Staring at Liu Zongyuan's wooden mask, Li Huowang pondered over his questions before asking, “Do you still remember how the Sitting Oblivion Dao wrecked the Sacred Mountain Ghost Eye in Shangjing?”

“Of course. It was such a large-scale event. It would be hard to forget it.”

“Good, now tell me everything you remember about it. Don't leave out a single word!”

“All right, I can tell you that much at least. It was just half a year ago, after all...” Liu Zongyuan proceeded with his recount.

Li Huowang was finally convinced that something was wrong.

It was one thing for his comrades to forget about the jade pendant, but Liu Zongyuan's recount was drastically different from

the truth as well.

It seemed that upon losing the two Heavenly Daos, everything about Doulao and its history was altered. Li Huowang suddenly remembered Ji Zai's words.

"What is real and what is fake? Are you sure that everything you're touching is real? What about everything you've experienced so far? Are you sure they're real? If so, then how are you going to prove it?"

The side effects of a Heavenly Dao changing hands from one Siming to another were far more serious than he had imagined.

He thought that such an event would only bring about the manifestation of Natural Disasters, but he couldn't have been more mistaken.

Does that mean that history changes itself every time there's a Natural Disaster? How come I never noticed that until now? Li Huowang suddenly discovered something extremely important about the world.

The past of this bizarre and crazy world was not set in stone. They would change whenever there was a change in the controllers of the Heavenly Daos.

Simings and Twisted Ones... Li Huowang ignored Liu Zongyuan and paced in the room. The cogs in his mind turned rapidly as he recalled every single detail in his past. Li Huowang then remembered what they had written on the walls of the Surveillance Bureau.

"Find the Surveillance Bureau to purchase almanacs. Those who had printed it themselves would be exiled along with the three generations of their family."

Li Huowang unsheathed his spine sword and examined it carefully.

"Uh... Senior Er Jiu, is everything alright?" Liu Zongyuan couldn't help but ask. He found Li Huowang's behavior to be quite erratic and odd. He wanted to approach Li Huowang, but he

hesitated and remained frozen in the end.

Li Huowang ignored Liu Zongyuan and talked to the hilt of the sword. More specifically, he was staring at the shrunken head of Zhuge Yuan as he asked, “Senior Zhuge, do you think it’s possible that the Qi Kingdom that you saved was just a part of a changed history that was brought about by the swapping of the Heavenly Daos between the Simings?”

Chapter 611 - Li Sui

“People are good by nature at birth. Their natures are similar, but their habits will inevitably diverge. If not taught the right way, their nature will deteriorate. The right way of teaching is to attach importance to thoroughness..” [1]

Li Sui sat at the front of the classroom and happily nodded along with the teacher’s lesson. Her voice was the clearest and loudest in the entire Cowheart Mountain private school.

While the teacher was in the middle of a tea break, Li Sui proudly proclaimed to a village soldier learning to read beside her. “I’ve learned this passage. Father taught me what this means!”

However, the village soldier didn’t pay attention to what Li Sui was saying at all, and his attention was on Li Sui’s face, which seemed to be shining.

It wasn't just him; everyone in the private school stole glances at her nonstop.

Compared to them, who had spent the majority of their lives working in the fields, the young girl in a flowing dress was like a fairy from the heavens.

Some of the young men looked like they couldn't care less about reading, and their eyes were almost always glued to Li Sui.

Thus, the private school was densely packed with people, even though it usually had quite a few empty seats.

Master Wu, the teacher of the class, was dumbfounded as well. “*Ahem*, young lady, can you cover your face a little?”

Master Wu had no idea where the beautiful young girl had come from, but the white-haired lady boss had told him not to neglect her.

Master Wu was confused. Li Sui's appearance and demeanor

suggested that she knew how to read.

Li Sui looked confused as she asked, "Why would I cover my face? Don't I look human right now?"

Master Wu was stumped, and then his face darkened as he turned away before teaching the class using the textbook in his hand.

Soon, the moon rose, and the class came to an end. The large group of people dispersed and returned to their own homes.

However, quite a few of them decided to follow Li Sui toward the Bai Family Estate. Even if they couldn't talk to her, staring at her graceful figure from afar was enough pleasure for them.

Li Sui was delighted by the revelation. At last, the people were no longer afraid of her, and she didn't have to wear a straw cloak every day.

Li Sui was already planning on chatting with the people in the village the next morning.

"Mother, I'm back!" Li Sui charged toward Bai Lingmiao, who was standing at the door.

Li Sui was about to drag her inside the house to look for Li Huowang, but Bai Lingmiao stopped her, saying, "Wait, your father is discussing something important with an esteemed guest."

"Something important? What is it?" Li Sui asked, blinking her large eyes.

Bai Lingmiao glanced at the window on the second floor; she didn't say anything as she pulled Li Sui into one of the doors to an inner room.

"You've been wearing these clothes for a while," Bai Lingmiao said, "It's about time you start wearing new clothes."

"Why should I start wearing new clothes?"

"Because these clothes easily get dirty. Li Sui, you're a young lady, so you can't be so dirty."

"Is that so? What's a young lady?" Li Sui asked curiously as she

followed Bai Lingmiao inside one of the inner rooms.

Bai Lingmiao remained patient as she explained many things to Li Sui, allowing the latter to learn about many things that Li Huowang had never taught her.

Soon, Li Sui was naked and was thrown into a large wooden tub by Bai Lingmiao.

The new clothes that Li Sui was going to wear were brought outside by Bai Lingmiao, who scrubbed them clean diligently.

Li Sui copied her and rubbed her own human skin.

Bai Lingmiao chuckled upon seeing Li Sui's actions, and she patiently taught Li Sui how to wash clothes.

"Li Sui, I'm actually really happy that you're willing to call me 'Mother,'" Bai Lingmiao said. Li Sui's head was being propped up by her tentacles as she stared at the white-haired girl with some confusion.

"I really want to have a child with Senior Li, but... I can't," Bai Lingmiao said with a hint of sadness on her face. "If my child ends up like Puppy's daughter or covered in white fur like me, then... it's going to be bad for both the child and Senior Li. I've suffered that kind of pain before, though. I know that even if others say good things about us, we are ultimately different from others. I don't want my children to suffer like me."

Bai Lingmiao reached out and untied Li Sui's long hair before washing it gently in the water.

"Your appearance is a bit strange. I was a bit disgusted at first, but then I realized that Senior Li and I don't look much better, so I didn't care anymore."

"Mom, what are you talking about? I don't understand."

"It's good that you don't understand. Sometimes, I really envy you, not having to think about so many complex things every day."

Like a real mother and daughter, Bai Lingmiao helped Li Sui wash her hair while talking about many things to her.

Although Li Sui didn't quite understand what Bai Lingmiao was saying, she was still happy to be with her mother.

Her mother would listen patiently to her, and she told her about many things, including topics that her father wasn't willing to discuss with her.

After the comfortable bath, Li Sui put on her human skin, attached her human head, and tied up her hair. Then, she finally put on Bai Lingmiao's clothes.

"Not bad. Our bodies are the same in some parts, so we can wear each other's clothes," Bai Lingmiao said, staring at Li Sui with satisfaction.

"Wait, don't move; let me apply some rouge on you," Bai Lingmiao said. She was about to turn around when she stopped and looked toward the window on the left, "Didn't you promise that you wouldn't get too close to Cowheart Village?"

"Saintess, the Chief wants to see you. He wants to have a good talk with our White Lotus Sect." A deep voice came from outside the window.

Bai Lingmiao sighed softly, "I'll go, but not now."

"And due to the rumors, many of the hidden White Lotus followers had decided to emerge from hiding and pay us a visit."

"How annoying. I'm finally back at the village after a long time, so why are you rushing me like that? What if I end up running away?" Bai Lingmiao asked. Her tone changed drastically, and the figure outside the window dared not respond.

"Li Sui, let's go find your father!" Bai Lingmiao exclaimed, looking a bit impatient as she pulled Li Sui toward the bedroom.

Just as the two of them arrived at the bedroom door, Liu Zongyuan stepped out from the inside while bowing repeatedly toward the bedroom.

When he turned around, he caught a glimpse of a black tentacle slipping back under Li Sui's skirt. His expression changed

drastically at the sight, and he immediately reached into his arms, exclaiming, “What kind of evil spirit are you?!”

Li Sui’s new clothes were torn apart as black tentacles sprang up in the air. A figure with a skinned beastly face and a mouth full of sharp teeth stood before Bai Lingmiao, growling at Liu Zongyuan.

However, Liu Zongyuan was familiar with Li Sui’s true face, and he realized just then that he had made a mistake.

“What’s wrong?”

Liu Zongyuan smiled and hurriedly said, “Oh, Brother Er Jiu, your... your spirit beast is amazing; it can even shapeshift. I almost failed to recognize it.”

He rushed to the stairs and glanced behind him to see Li Sui and Bai Lingmiao entering the bedroom together. He shuddered with horror and hurriedly walked downstairs.

1. Three Character classic, a classic text used to teach basic literacy in the past 📖

Chapter 612 - Cowheart Village

“Ah~ Let me tell you, the Shangjing capital is huge! You can walk on foot for days and nights without being able to go to the other side of it!”

“Do you know how big the road to the capital is? It’s wide enough for more than twenty carriages to run side by side!”

“And the girls in the capital... *Tsk, tsk*, I don't even have to talk about their appearance. Their voice alone is enough to make your bones go weak.”

“The people in the capital eat like it’s New Year’s Eve every day. Even the vagrant dogs raised by the roadside can eat meat every day!”

Puppy was sitting proudly on a large boulder beneath the big tree in the middle of Cowheart Village. He bragged about his journey to the capital unabashedly toward the villagers.

These villagers had never been a hundred miles away from the village throughout their lives, so Puppy’s words were truly astounding to them. They couldn’t even focus on eating the food in their bowls, as they imagined the capital described by Puppy.

Puppy was pleased by their shocked reactions, and a sense of superiority rose in his heart. He waved his hand like a commanding general and said, “*Hmph*, the capital really is just like that, and I'm actually looking down on it. If we're talking about extravagance, then nothing beats the Imperial Palace!”

“Even the pillars and roof edges of the palace are lined with gold, while the ground is covered with jade stones. Imagine how much money they spent to build the entire thing.”

“Hey, listen. The Imperial Palace is a forbidden place for many people, but I can enter it freely. Do you know why? Remember that simpleton? I'm talking about the head of our Cowheart Village's militia. He's become the Emperor of the Great Liang. I hope you guys haven't forgotten that he's my senior. In other words, I, Cao Cao, am considered a relative of the emperor.”

“*Hmph!* What a load of bullshit. The more you talk, the more outrageous it gets!” Master Wu exclaimed. He had been eavesdropping and couldn't beat it anymore. In Master Wu's eyes, the emperor couldn't be blasphemed. After all, he might end up passing the imperial exams and become a disciple of the emperor.

“You brat, watch your mouth! You can say this here, but your head will go flying if the authorities somehow hear what you're saying!”

“Ah~! You're just a teacher, so you must be thinking that you know everything just because you have some ink in your belly. Well, guess what? You know nothing!”

“This is absurd! Hey, brat! You better not come to my school in the future!”

“*Heh*, what a joke. When did I, Lord Cao Cao, ever participate in your class? I wouldn't go, even if you beg me to go.”

The people nearby quickly intervened in the heated argument, and the two soon stopped fighting.

“Hey, Puppy, if your senior is already the emperor and the Shangjing capital is so great, why did you return?”

Puppy took a mouthful of food, and his expression was tinged with contempt as he said, “Gao Zhijian begged me to stay there with him. He said the Shangjing capital was too big, but there was no one for him to talk to.”

“But am I someone who forgets my roots? I told that fool—Simpleton, don't blame your junior for being indifferent to fame and wealth. Even if you are the emperor or an angel from the

heavens, I'm not going to go somewhere if I don't want to go there!" Puppy exclaimed, feeling a bit pleased upon seeing the looks of admiration that the crowd directed toward him. He had already figured it out. His appearance meant that everyone in the capital would look down on him; Puppy knew very well that he was a freak compared to ordinary people.

Puppy's skin had always been thick, so it would have been fine for him to stay in the capital despite the potential bullying.

However, his daughter would inevitably become an outcast and the target of everyone's gossiping once she grew up.

Knowing that, why would Puppy stay in the capital?

Zhao Wu and Xiaoman had no intention of staying in the capital either. Puppy assumed that they shared the same sentiment as him.

At least, Cowheart Village was their territory as disabled people; no one dared to look down on them here.

After his boasting to the villagers, Puppy felt relaxed and refreshed. He walked toward the Bai Family Mansion with an empty bowl in his hand.

When he entered the courtyard, he saw Lu Xiucan walking out of the mansion with oil stains at the corners of his mouth.

"Good morning, Xiucan. Have you eaten anything yet?"

Lu Xiucan's eyes were full of disdain at Puppy's free-spirited attitude. Puppy had never really strived for progress. Whenever he was free, he'd go run and brag to the others. Lu Xiucan believed that he'd soon leave Puppy in the dust.

Puppy would certainly regret his actions once Lu Xiucan became an expert as strong as his master in the future!

Puppy didn't take Lu Xiucan's actions to heart. He hummed a tune as he walked into the hall.

He saw Yang Xiaohai and his wife tidying up the bowls and chopsticks.

After a year, Yang Xiaohai had grown a head taller, and it was probably due to the good food in Cowheart Village.

Puppy noticed that Yang Xiaohai had become almost as tall as him, and he looked even more energetic, too.

Puppy threw the bowls and chopsticks onto the table, asking, "How's it going? Has Simpleton helped you find your parents yet?"

Yang Xiaohai shook his head and replied, "The eunuch told me to go back and wait. They'll send someone to inform me once they've found them. However, it might take a while."

"It's been so long, and he still can't find two people? It seems that this emperor isn't very capable," Puppy said smugly, and then he left with his hands behind his back.

After Puppy's departure, the pear-faced woman said, "It's okay, don't be impatient. They will eventually be found."

"Yeah, I'm not in a hurry," Yang Xiaohai said.

And that was when he felt a pair of hands wrapping him from behind, pulling him into a soft embrace.

Yang Xiaohai struggled and broke free. He cast a guilty gaze at the ceiling and blushed before saying, "What are you trying to do here?! Senior Li is upstairs!"

The pear-faced woman smiled innocently, "Don't blush; I haven't even done anything yet."

Yang Xiaohai glared at her, and then he carried the pile of bowls and chopsticks to the kitchen.

"What's with that reaction? Am I not your wife?" the pear-faced woman asked, carrying a bucket of water into the kitchen.

"No! I never said that you're my wife," Yang Xiaohai said. He threw the bowls and chopsticks into the pot of boiling water to clean them.

Yang Xiaohai received no response and noticed that the kitchen had become too quiet.

He turned around and saw that the pear-faced woman was

leaning against the kitchen door and was silently shedding tears.

“Are you... are you disgusted with me? Do you find me disgusting because I was rescued from a bandit's den? If that's the case, then just tell me. I'm not going to stop you.”

Yang Xiaohai was at a loss for words. He realized that he didn't want to see her being so sad.

“No.... no, I just... I just don't... I just don't know what to do.”

The pear-faced woman smiled and wiped away the tears on her face. She then walked into the kitchen and casually closed the door. "Ignorance is fine; I'm going to teach you everything that you need to know.”

Chapter 613 - Yang Xiaohai

Clang~

The trembling sound of the gong echoed from afar. The kitchen door was suddenly pushed open, and Yang Xiaohai rushed toward the direction of the sound while pulling up his pants in a hurry.

The long gong attracted everyone's attention in Cowheart Village. When Yang Xiaohai arrived at where the sound was coming from, he saw a group of eunuchs in front of a neat convoy.

They were in the middle of delivering various goods to the village.

There were live pigs, cows, sheep, bolts of silk and satin, as well as piles of gold and silver.

The other villagers were amazed, and they started whispering among themselves.

“Did I hear it correctly? Are these gifts from the emperor to us?”

“No, they’re not for you; they’re for the Daoist master.”

“Wow, could it be that Puppy wasn’t lying? Is the emperor really his senior? Wouldn’t that mean that we’re related to the emperor, too?”

“What’s going on? What’s happening?”

Yang Xiaohai squeezed through the crowd and saw Senior Li talking to an old eunuch with a golden whisk. “Go back and tell Gao Zhijian not to worry about Cowheart Village. I’m here, and everything is fine. Cowheart Village isn’t that poor as well, so tell him to spend his time learning to become a competent emperor rather than mulling over what to send here. After all, his subjects

will have a better life if he gets better at his job.”

“Yes, I’ll convey the message to His Majesty.” The old eunuch with a powdered face bowed respectfully to Li Huowang.

The old eunuch noticed Yang Xiaohai’s glance, so he excused himself from Li Huowang and walked up to Yang Xiaohai.

“Kid, you’re Yang Xiaohai, right?” asked the old eunuch with a kind smile.

Yang Xiaohai nodded in confusion.

The old eunuch glanced at the bustling crowd. “It’s crowded here. Let’s find a place to talk about your parents.”

Yang Xiaohai’s mind buzzed. He was suddenly overwhelmed with fear at the idea that he was about to face the truth.

“Let’s go.” The pear-faced woman appeared and followed the old eunuch somewhere else.

It hadn’t been that long since New Year’s Eve, so the fields were still frozen. The old eunuch stopped between the field ridges and extended over a piece of paper from his pocket. “Here, take a look for yourself.”

Yang Xiaohai retrieved the paper with trembling hands, and he hesitated for a moment before he handed it back to the old eunuch, “Can you read it for me, please? I’m too scared to read it.”

“Oh, what’s there to be afraid of?” the old eunuch asked. However, he still reached out his hand with long nails and grabbed the piece of paper. Then, he said, “The letter says that your parents are not from Great Liang but from Hou Shu. That’s why it took us so long to track them. We investigated the three generations of your family and found out that your family are all boat people.”

“Sir, what are boat people?”

“Boat people are those who live permanently on the sea without their own land. The women gather pearls while the men fish with nets. Do you understand what I’m saying?”

“Yes... I understand,” Yang Xiaohai said, but he looked

confused as he nodded.

“Then... how did my parents lose me?” Yang Xiaohai asked. The pear-faced woman beside him rubbed his arm gently.

The old eunuch glanced at Yang Xiaohai's face before looking down at the paper in his hands. “There was a shortage of fish and pearls a few years after you were born. Your father couldn't feed you, so he decided to sell you.”

Yang Xiaohai's face turned pale, and he would have fallen to the ground if the pear-faced woman next to him hadn't supported him. “Sir, is that really the truth? They sold me just like that?”

Yang Xiaohai had been thinking about many different scenarios while waiting for the results of the investigation. However, he didn't expect that the truth would be so brutally simple.

“What do you think your father could have done? Your family had nine children, and it's normal to sell a child to ease the burden on everyone. My family couldn't support all of us either, so we were castrated and sent to the palace as eunuchs,” the old eunuch said, and then he stuffed the paper into Yang Xiaohai's hands. “Your mother has been pearl diving her entire life, so she's already deaf and weak. She's probably going to die soon. Your father is still out fishing at sea. Out of your father's nine children, two were sold, three have died, so only four are remaining. Half a year ago, your elder brother went out to fish, but he never came back.

“Anyway, they are all boat people and are fishing and diving in a certain region. The location is written on the paper. If you want to find them, find someone literate to help you. We have other things to do, so we'll be leaving first.”

With that, the old eunuch left with his golden whisk, leaving Yang Xiaohai and the pear-faced woman by themselves between the field ridges.

Yang Xiaohai stared deeply at the piece of paper, even though he couldn't read the majority of it.

After a while, he folded the paper neatly and put it away. He then looked up at the woman and smiled wryly. "You see, I thought I was the descendant of someone important, just like Senior Gao. It turns out that I was wrong, and my parents sold me away to ease some of the burden on them."

Yang Xiaohai then turned around and was about to return to the village when the pear-faced woman pulled him from behind.

"Don't hold it in. Cry it out."

The pear-faced woman's words had just fallen, but Yang Xiaohai was already squatting on the ground, crying in frustration.

Yang Xiaohai had always been a steady and sensible individual in the eyes of his seniors, but Yang Xiaohai had never really wanted to be that kind of person all this while.

However, none of his seniors noticed that fact—no, no one noticed it except for the pear-faced woman.

The pear-faced woman hugged Yang Xiaohai and patted his back gently to comfort him.

Yang Xiaohai vented for a long time before standing up once again and walking toward the village with the pear-faced woman.

"Hey! Xiaohai, where are you going? Look at these fat sheep; let's roast one tonight!"

"I can't forget the taste of that roast lamb back when we were in Qing Qiu. I had no idea that sheep is so delicious once it's roasted."

"All right! Senior Cao, there are so many people of us, so you should roast a few sheep rather than just one!"

Yang Xiaohai smiled along with everyone else. When he arrived at the kitchen, he took out his butchering tool and started sharpening the blade with a whetstone.

"Ah." He accidentally cut his finger, and blood flowed profusely out of the wound.

"What's wrong?" the pear-faced woman asked upon hearing

Yang Xiaohai's cry. "Don't move; I'll go get some medicine for you."

The pear-faced woman turned around and was about to leave, but Yang Xiaohai stopped her by raising his bleeding finger. "I want to go see my family."

The pear-faced woman nodded gently and said, "Okay. I'll go wherever you go."

Chapter 614 - People

"Xiaohai, are you really going to leave? It hasn't been that long since we returned, and you're leaving again? Isn't that kind of unnecessary?"

"Xiaohai, Hou Shu is *really* far. There's also the sea to the south of it. The journey and return trip will probably take you at least a year."

When the others who had come out of Zephyr Temple together with Yang Xiaohai heard his plans to visit his parents, they all tried to dissuade him.

They had endured hardships together, so they were aware of the risks that one would have to take by traveling such a massive distance.

They were all concerned, as the journey was lengthy, and no one could say what Yang Xiaohai would experience on the way.

Yang Xiaohai remained silent, but his belongings were already on his back. In the end, he stared at Li Huowang sitting nearby and asked, "Senior Li, what do you think? Should I go or not?"

"Your limbs belong to you, so it's not up to me to decide whether you want to go or not. Puppy, give him your scepter so he can protect himself on the road."

" *Huh?* "

"Hurry up. Also, bring a carriage over for him. It's such a long way, and his shoes will wear out with all that walking."

Soon, Yang Xiaohai's luggage for the journey had increased significantly. The carriage was filled with so much dried food that it would last them all the way to Hou Shu.

"Take this bag of silver. You can use it to fund your journey as well as to handle certain issues on the road."

Yang Xiaohai was at a loss for words upon feeling the weight of the bag of silver. "Senior Li, I can't take these. I..."

"Just take it. The village is not going to run out of money anytime soon. Unfortunately, I'm still recovering from my injuries, so I can't go with you. Since you want to go, then go. The world has become more peaceful these days, but you should still protect yourself with the talismans you've learned to draw. Don't forget to practice using that scepter, too."

Yang Xiaohai knelt and kowtowed toward Li Huowang a few times before he jumped onto the carriage with the pear-faced woman.

Soon, the carriage started moving away from the village.

Puppy was holding his daughter in his arms; he took a step forward and shouted, "Xiaohai! Don't forget to visit Sun Baolu once you're in Qing Qiu! Tell him I got married and that I have a daughter now!"

"All right, Senior Puppy!" Yang Xiaohai exclaimed.

When Yang Xiaohai could no longer be seen, everyone dispersed in groups.

On the way, Puppy couldn't help but grumble, "Who's going to cook for us now that Xiaohai is gone? Zhao Wu, how's your cooking?"

"Look at my legs. Do you really think that I can cook?" Zhao Wu asked, leaning on his crutches. He glared at Puppy as if he were worthy of disdain.

"That's too bad. What should we do now that no one can cook? Xiaoman, can you cook?"

"Get lost."

"Since no one is going to cook for all of us anymore, we should stop the communal pot from now on," Li Huowang said. His words attracted everyone's attention. Eating together was an old habit that was made from their arduous journey, but Gao Zhijian had become

the emperor, Sun Baolu had back at home, and the Lu family had already settled down in Shangjing; several people had died along the way as well, which meant that they no longer had enough people to fill up the table with dishes.

“We have our own families now, and we don’t lack money anymore. From now on, let’s cook our own meals and stop going to the Bai Family Estate to eat.”

Bai Lingmiao smiled slightly at Li Huowang's words.

“No, Senior Li...” Puppy said, sounding anguished. He wasn't willing to part with the days when they could just open their mouths to eat. Those days were just too comfortable for Puppy to let go.

“Stop talking nonsense and just do it,” Li Huowang said. With that, he led Li Sui toward the Bai Family Estate.

Puppy scratched his head and looked at Zhao Wu beside him. “Hey, you’re still single, so no one is going to cook for you in the future. You better try and persuade Senior Li to change his mind.”

“Don’t count on me to back you up. I can cook for myself,” Zhao Wu said. He then ignored Puppy’s astonishment and limped his way toward the warehouse.

Although it was called a warehouse, it was actually an uninhabited house that was cleared out to store the things that Gao Zhijian had sent over to the village.

Gold, silver, cloth, and various gifts filled up the house.

Zhao Wu placed the abacus on the table and began taking accounts.

This was Zhao Wu’s job, and he was the only one who could do something like this throughout the village. His family's business was selling rice, so he grew up around abacuses. In other words, no one could match him when it came to calculations and taking accounts. When they were still in the middle of their arduous journey, they barely had any money, so Zhao Wu didn't really have to do any

calculations and accounting.

However, Cowheart Village's population had exploded, and they had also received an influx of money and grain. Zhao Wu's talent could finally be shown to the world.

Zhao Wu used an abacus to keep track of everything—the village's expenditures, purchases, and what was purchased. Of course, Zhao Wu also tracked the amount of old rice available for consumption and how much new rice they needed to replace the old rice. He was just one person, so his job was extremely exhausting. However, Zhao Wu was more than happy to do it, as he didn't feel like a useless person incapable of lifting even a finger.

Five hundred pearls? Why did Gao Zhijian send so many pearls? There's no one in the village who needs them. Zhao Wu shook his head gently and made a comment with his pen.

It took Zhao Wu an entire day to take everything into account. When it was nightfall, he felt his stomach rumbling, but he still hadn't heard Yang Xiaohai calling them for dinner.

Zhao Wu stiffened and realized that he actually had to cook for himself from now on.

Yang Xiaohai had left the village, after all. *Ah, it really feels strange for someone to leave all of a sudden.*

Zhao Wu picked up his crutch and limped toward the kitchen. He was planning on grabbing something edible to eat so he wouldn't be late for Master Wu's evening class.

Zhao Wu's heart burned with pride when he recalled Master Wu's evaluation of himself yesterday. Master Wu had told him that he had the highest aptitude for literacy in the entire Cowheart Village.

Master Wu hadn't lied. Zhao Wu could recognize eight hundred words, so he could be considered somewhat literate.

It's really dark. Where's the oil lamp? Zhao Wu fumbled around in the kitchen. His hands found a cool, soft spindle-shaped object.

He picked it up and stuffed it into his arms. *Sweet potatoes will do. I'm going to eat them on the way, so I won't be late.*

Zhao Wu picked up the pace. When he reached out for the fourth sweet potato in the steamer, he ended up touching a bony hand in the darkness.

“Ghost!”

Bang!

The wooden door to the kitchen was blown apart.

Li Huowang, covered in wriggling black tentacles, stood by the door with a spine sword in his hand. His face was filled with killing intent as he scanned the kitchen.

“Senior Li! There’s a ghost in here! There’s a ghost in this room!” Zhao Wu exclaimed. He didn’t even pick up his crutch as he frantically crawled behind Li Huowang.

“Quiet down!” Li Huowang warned. He took out a green glowing stone from his pocket and threw it into the dim kitchen.

Soon, he saw a man dressed in tattered clothes. The man was cowering in a corner, and his shoulders were trembling as if he was eating something.

”Turn around!” Li Huowang exclaimed, holding his sword horizontally.

The man turned around and froze. The sweet potato that he was about to shove into his mouth fell to the ground. Then, he trembled all over and prostrated on the ground. He kowtowed nonstop to Li Huowang, pleading, “Master, spare my life!”

Chapter 615 - Newcomer

Li Huowang found it suspicious that someone had suddenly appeared in Cowheart Village.

“Li Sui, help me find out his background.”

“All right, Father.”

Li Sui’s tentacles flew out and quickly dragged the ragged man out of the kitchen.

The tentacles pierced the man's seven apertures and probed his innards thoroughly.

The moonlight rose just then, allowing Li Huowang to see the man's face. The man's face was unshaven, and he looked extremely emaciated. Every single one of his ribs was clearly visible under his tattered clothes; he was hugging a small pumpkin and two sweet potatoes.

“*Bleck!*” The man bent over and vomited as soon as Li Sui’s tentacles were outside of him

“Father, he's human. There’s nothing else but a lump inside his belly. I think he's just an ordinary person.”

Li Huowang stared at the miserable-looking man and finally dropped his guard. Still, he found it difficult to believe that someone would go to great lengths to sneak into Cowheart Village just to steal a few sweet potatoes.

Li Huowang put away the spine sword and asked, “Why did you come to our Cowheart Village?”

“I-I’ve been running away! I’m starving. Master, please spare. I really am about to starve to death. I won’t dare to steal again,” the man said, trembling on the ground. He was so scared that he dared not lift his head.

Li Huowang saw that others were converging on his location.

He took a few breaths and pointed at Puppy, saying, “You go ahead and handle this. Feed him and let him decide whether to stay or not.”

Without waiting for Puppy's reply, Li Huowang retracted the tentacles and returned to the Bai Family Estate.

Puppy's courage grew, as Li Huowang had already confirmed that the man was no threat.

With his hands behind his back, he walked up to the man. The white and black patches on his face frightened the man.

“Fleeing, huh? You've suffered a lot on the road, right?” Puppy asked.

“Yes, yes!” The man nodded repeatedly. He took out a sweet potato from his arms and was about to put it into his mouth when Puppy snatched it away.

“*Hmph*, you obviously haven't been hungry before. Are you trying to kill yourself by stuffing yourself like that? You can only eat porridge for now! After two days of porridge, you can then transition to eating dried food.”

Puppy pointed at the two village soldiers and said arrogantly, “You two, yes, you two. Go and cook him some porridge. Didn't you hear what your godfather just said? This matter is under my jurisdiction.”

Everyone soon heard about a refugee's arrival in the village, so they curiously gathered around.

Under the gaze of the villagers, the man devoured three bowls of porridge. He wanted to eat more, but Puppy stopped him.

“Enough, you're going to die if you drink more,” Puppy said, forcibly taking away his bowl. Then, he sat down on a stool and asked, “Now that you're done eating, you better start talking. Where are you from?”

The man seemed afraid as he looked around, but he instinctively licked his lips when he saw the pork gel candy in the

hands of Puppy's daughter. "I... I'm from Xi County."

"Xi County? Where is that? I've never heard of that place. What disaster has befallen your home? Why are you fleeing?"

The man's expression suddenly twisted in fear, and his figure trembled violently as he exclaimed, "A Natural... Natural Disaster! The Heavenly Dog devoured the sun, so the demons and ghosts from the eighteen layers of hell came out. They... they kill people on sight! I hid in a temple and barely managed to escape with my life. However, I could barely find any survivors after the Natural Disaster, and there was a three-year drought prior to that, so there was no food left for the survivors to consume.

"I had no choice but to flee and look for a way to survive."

Puppy nodded in understanding and said, "Oh~ So that's how it is, a Natural Disaster, *huh?* I know that. We encountered one before, and it was really scary. Fortunately, it didn't last long."

"It didn't last long?" The man's voice changed, and his eyes became filled with indignation as he exclaimed, "Why did we have to suffer that Natural Disaster for dozens of days?! How come it didn't last long for you guys?!"

The people nearby sucked in a cold breath. A Natural Disaster lasting for dozens of days would indeed be extremely devastating. It was no wonder that the man had to flee.

"Are you not from the Great Liang? Natural Disasters in the Great Liang don't last long," Zhao Wu said, frowning.

"What? Great Liang? Where's Great Liang? I haven't been running for that long, so how come I'm already in a different territory?" the man muttered, looking bewildered.

"You're not from Great Liang?"

"No, I'm from Great Qi."

The crowd broke out in discussions.

"Great Qi? Where's the Great Qi? Isn't Qing Qiu to the left of Great Liang and the sea to the right? Where's Great Qi?"

“Is it above or below?”

“I have no idea, but it’s impossible for him to be from the Great Qi. However, I heard that there was a dynasty called the Great Qi a thousand years ago.”

Li Sui in her human skin memorized their words. She lifted her skirt and went home.

“Father! Father!” Li Sui exclaimed as soon as she entered the house. She eventually found her father cutting open his scalp to check its healing progress. “Father, there’s a man from Great Qi here. Did we go there before?”

“What? A man from Great Qi? Are you sure you heard him right?” Li Huowang couldn't even wipe away the blood on his head. He jumped over the window and rushed toward the kitchen.

Under the coercion of the torture instruments that Li Huowang showcased to the man, the latter dared not conceal anything and told him everything he knew.

Li Huowang compared the man's words to what he knew about the Great Qi and confirmed that the man was indeed from the Great Qi. He hadn't lied to them at all!

Someone from the Great Qi suddenly found themselves in the Great Liang, Li Huowang thought for a while before saying, “How did you get here?! Are there any Twisted Ones around here?”

“What Twisted One? I... I-I just walked down the road,” said the man with a pale face.

“Take me to that road!” Li Huowang urged. He dragged the man away toward the dirt road at the village entrance.

Soon, Li Huowang found himself at a fork in the road at the foot of Cowheart Mountain.

“I-I walked down that road. I saw that the woods here were denser, so I followed the wheel tracks and found your village.”

“Come, let’s keep going,” Li Huowang said. He had no idea what was going on, but he felt that things weren't so simple.

They hadn't walked far before they came to a halt. There was no road up ahead; it was just a dead end.

The man was so scared of Li Huowang's torture instruments that he looked like he was about to cry as he frantically explained, "I-I swear to the mountain spirits! I didn't lie to you at all. I really walked down this road."

Just as the man was about to continue speaking, Li Huowang heard a slight movement from his left ear. He shoved the man away and rushed into the woods on his left.

Soon, he saw an old man with ragged clothes and an unusually large belly standing beneath a big tree. The ragged old man was holding a sharp stone and was swinging it at the bark of the tree before him.

A large piece of bark was peeled away, and the ragged old man carefully peeled off the soft and moist green inner layer of the bark.

Tears streamed down the ragged old man's face as his trembling fingers shoved the tender bark into his mouth, which only had a few teeth remaining.

Chapter 616 - Refugees

Niu San squatted down in the middle of the crowd to slurp up the congee in his bowl.

The congee was watery, but there were wild vegetables, radish leaves, and sweet potatoes inside of it.

Niu San was crying as he ate. The congee tasted delicious—it was so delicious that he could swear that he had never eaten something as delicious as this before.

He licked the bowl clean and walked out from the crowd to make his way toward the food tent.

Niu San was skinny, but his tall figure attracted the militia's attention.

"What are you doing? Stand there!" a few militia members shouted at Niu San while pointing their spears at him.

"Good sirs, didn't they say that we can have two bowls to eat? Can I have another?" Niu San asked gingerly.

They gave him another serving of congee. Niu San bowed and thanked them before returning back to the crowd to eat.

Niu San used to have a decent position in the military, but he was more than ready to lower his ego just to eat something.

He licked the bowl clean again. It was a good meal overall.

Having eaten his fill, Niu San's mind cleared up, and he swept his gaze across Cowheart Village.

The village was pristine and brimming with life. It was a fresh scene compared to the scenes of destruction that the Natural Disaster had left in its wake.

Niu San found it strange. As far as he could remember, less than ten percent of the Qi Kingdom's population survived the Natural Disaster.

There was no way everyone could have escaped the Natural Disaster, so how come Cowheart Village seemed unscathed? *That's strange. Is there someone strong protecting this place?*

Just then, he saw a strange "crack" appearing out of nowhere in the middle of the fields.

A man in a red Daoist robe popped out of the "crack," and Niu San became certain of his suspicions at the sight.

The Daoist glanced at them before entering the fenced-up village. The Daoist then started talking to a young man with vitiligo.

The bizarre-looking young man then walked toward him and pointed at the few people around him, "You, you, you, and you. Come here!"

The bizarre-looking young man pointed at four people with bigger figures than the average people, including Niu San.

"Listen here, Senior Li is a magnanimous man, and he hates seeing people who are suffering! That is the reason he decided to feed you here for free! But there are too many of you for us to manage, so he told me to choose four people from your group to help supervise everyone in your group! The four of you better manage your people properly! If you need to use the toilet, go to the woods and do your business there! You better not harm anyone, too! If anyone disagrees with you, pull them to the side, and we'll reduce their congee ration by half!"

"Yes!" the four people exclaimed at once.

Puppy was overjoyed by their obedience. He nodded to dismiss them, and the four returned to their group.

Puppy then looked at Li Huowang and said, "Senior Li, we're committing good deeds here, and we don't have a shortage of food, but can we really sustain this? More and more people are coming here."

Li Huowang looked at the refugees and whispered, "There

aren't going to be that many of them. The majority of the Qi Kingdom's population has already perished."

Li Huowang knew, as he had gone into the Qi Kingdom and noticed only a few survivors in a ten Li radius.

Just then, the sound of horse hooves came from a distance. Li Huowang turned and saw Chun Xiaoman with several other people on horseback. She was holding the reins with her remaining arm, and she jumped down the horse upon spotting Li Huowang. "Senior Li, you're right. We've also seen refugees in the other villages and counties."

"Did you see anyone wearing a white cloth on their head?"

"Yes, but there aren't that many of them. I think there are only about five of them."

Li Huowang's heart sank. It was not a coincidence that the Qi Kingdom's people had appeared here. Gao Zhijian was the Emperor of the Qi Kingdom, after all, but he was now connected to the Dragon Vein of the Liang Kingdom.

The Qi Kingdom's past had disappeared, but its people still found their way into the Liang Kingdom

Zhuge Yuan's method saved the lives of the Qi Kingdom's people, but Li Huowang didn't expect that they would be saved like this.

It would have been great if only the civilians were transported here, but people with supernatural powers were transported as well. Li Huowang knew that he had to inform Gao Zhijian of these changes as soon as possible.

Li Huowang pondered over his next course of action. After a while, he nodded and took out a letter. "Take this to Shangjing. Give it to either Gao Zhijian or the Surveillance Bureau."

"Understood," Chun Xiaoman said. She put away the letter and disappeared into the woods.

Li Huowang sighed. The majority of the Qi Kingdom's

population had died, so the Dharma Sect from the other side had to have suffered a similar fate. Otherwise, they'd become a plague for the Liang Kingdom.

Regardless, the fact that there were survivors from the Qi Kingdom's Dharma Sect was problematic. After all, they could become a massive headache later down the road.

“Senior Li, are you thinking about dealing with them?” Bai Lingmiao asked softly as she walked up to Li Huowang.

Li Huowang crossed his arms in front of his chest and swept his gaze across the refugees. “Yes. Even though there aren't that many of them, they're desperate and hungry. These survivors are fit and powerful as well, so if we let them be, the Liang Kingdom might fall into chaos once again. After all, these refugees will most likely start committing crimes to survive, or they might join the Dharma Sect of the Liang Kingdom.”

Bai Lingmiao bit her fingernails as she thought. Moments later, she suggested, “Senior Li, what do you think about this? I have some authority in the White Lotus Sect. I can absorb some of the refugees into the White Lotus Sect. What do you think?”

Li Huowang was surprised. “White Lotus Sect? Is that your own idea, or is it the idea of your higher ups in the White Lotus Sect?”

“Senior Li, I'm the Saintess of the White Lotus Sect. I'm the higher-up.”

Li Huowang stared deeply at Bai Lingmiao and concluded that it was about time they discussed the White Lotus Sect.

Bai Lingmiao's suggestion was a great idea. The White Lotus Sect was much more amiable than the Dharma Sect, which tried to summon God Yu'er.

“All right, but tell your people to work double time. I think the Dharma Sect is already trying to recruit these refugees.”

“Okay!” Bai Lingmiao nodded and ran into the village.

After a while, she returned to the entrance, but Li Huowang

was nowhere to be found. In the end, she decided to return to the Bai Family Estate.

Upon entering the estate, she immediately saw Li Huowang sitting on a bench.

It seemed that he had been waiting for her.

"Sit, let's talk." Li Huowang patted the empty space next to him.

Bai Lingmiao sat down and leaned her head on his shoulder.

"Tell me honestly. Are you hiding anything concerning the White Lotus Sect from me?"

Chapter 617 - White Lotus

Bai Lingmiao was taken aback by Li Huowang's question.

“Senior Li, I haven't lied to you. We've been through such a tough journey, and you know how well I've been treating you. Is there any reason for you to be suspicious about me?”

“I know, but there have been times when the people close to me had lied, either out of ill will or good will. I'm sensitive to such things at this point.”

Bai Lingmiao sighed, “Senior Li, what do you want to know? I will tell you everything, but can you please stop being suspicious of me? It feels uncomfortable.”

Li Huowang held her hands gently and pulled her closer, “Are there any hidden dangers to becoming the Saintess?”

“None.”

“Is that so? Then why were you chosen to become the Saintess? Did the Heavenly Mater choose you to become her Twisted One?”

Bai Lingmiao was confused, “Senior Li, what's a Twisted One? I don't think the Heavenly Mater needs something like that.”

“No! She needs one. She's a Siming, so she definitely has a Twisted One! Tell me everything that happened without leaving out any details. We will face any troubles together.”

Bai Lingmiao remained silent for a very long time before she began. “When Senior Lian took me away on that day, we met with the leader of the White Lotus Sect's branch. They saw me and were thrilled upon seeing me because I was exuding the aura of the Heavenly Mater. They all kneeled and worshiped me.”

“I thought I'd met some liars, but I suddenly felt the presence of the Heavenly Master after they drew some runes and texts on me,” Bai Lingmiao said with a devout expression.

“Senior Li, I'm not sure if you know, but it turns out that my family was wrong. Those worshipping the Heavenly Mater do not need to sacrifice humans. The Heavenly Mater is a good God.”

Hmph! Li Huowang did not believe it at all. The Heavenly Mater had probably gotten robbed of her Heavenly Dao related to human sacrifice, which is why she no longer needs human sacrifice. It's not related to whether she's good or not.

While Li Huowang was thinking about the Heavenly Mater's motive, Bai Lingmiao continued with her recount. “She's a really good God, and She even told me that you were in trouble. The Heavenly Mater also said that She could teach me some techniques; She also allowed me to teach them to the White Lotus Sect members so that we can save you.”

“Senior Li, I'm sure you know that we owe Her at this point. If it hadn't been for Her, you would have been in a lot of trouble.”

“You were the one who saved me, so I owe you not Her.”

“But my powers are from the Heavenly Mater. I couldn't have saved you if it hadn't been for her.”

Li Huowang knew that it was useless to argue, so he changed the topic, saying, “Tell Her that regardless of Her goal, we're allies fighting against God Yu'er. We can form an alliance for now. Once the issue is over, we can talk about the terms.”

Li Huowang was no longer naive. Bai Lingmiao was praising the Heavenly Mater a lot, but he knew that the Simings were nothing but trouble. He didn't want to place Bai Lingmiao's life under the Heavenly Mater's control.

Bai Lingmiao nodded and said, “Don't worry, Senior Li. I think that our situation is fine right now. I'm happy, and my parents are also happy living in the Void Home of the Heavenly Mater. Once I die, I'll return to the Void Home and meet them again!”

Li Huowang couldn't bear it anymore. He wanted to correct her, but he realized that Bai Lingmiao's expression had changed.

The familiar presence reminded him of the Second Deity. The Second Deity was still alive!

Li Huowang wanted to say something when the Second Deity spoke first, "Why are you so annoying? Do you really like to see Miaomiao shrouded in pain and despair?"

"But it's fake!"

"So what? We believe it! Also, who lets you dictate what is real and what is fake? How do you differentiate between the two?"

Li Huowang was stunned as several thoughts popped into his mind.

Bai Lingmiao's expression returned to normal, and she apologized to the silent Li Huowang. "I actually wanted to tell you that the Second Deity is still alive, but she didn't want me to do so. We're technically two people but in one body. Our upper half is separated, but our lower half is fused."

"Wait, let me ask someone about this," Li Huowang said. He stood up and retrieved his phone from his pocket. Li Huowang soon reached the pond, and he stared at his reflection, shouting, "Ji Zai! I need your help! The future is ever-changing, and this world is still alive, so can you revive Bai Lingmiao's family for me?"

"I cannot."

"Why?"

"I cannot do it directly, or everything will change. Also, it was your doing. If I invalidated what you had done, everything that had happened afterward would change, and even..." Ji Zai trailed off.

"Even what?"

"Good. Carry on," Ji Zai said, staying silent afterward.

"Screw you!" Li Huowang scolded. Ji Zai was his future self, but Li Huowang hated the former. He really wanted to use his cultivation base to manifest Ji Zai's physical body and punch the latter in the face.

"Senior Li, what's wrong?" Bai Lingmiao hurried over in a

panic. She panicked upon seeing Li Huowang shouting at his own reflection in the pond.

“Don’t worry. I really am cured,” Li Huowang said, patting Bai Lingmiao's shoulder.

“Really?”

“Yes, but there's an issue, and it's a bit confusing. Anyway, let's focus on the refugees first. I think that their issue is a bit more pressing than mine.”

Bai Lingmao nodded and said, “All right.”

They were afraid that the refugees would attack Cowheart Village, but they soon realized that the refugees couldn't possibly attack the village with their malnourished figures. They wouldn't even be able to breach the city walls of Shangjing.

Cowheart Village and its surroundings remained peaceful. Cowheart Village provided the refugees with some straws, tattered clothes, and wood, allowing them to build simple houses around Cowheart Village.

The houses were ugly and crude, but they'd keep the wind out.

Soon, no more refugees were appearing around Cowheart Village. Li Huowang pondered over it and was convinced that the refugees were finally popping up somewhere else instead of around Cowheart Village.

On that same night, a noise woke him up in the middle of the night.

The noise was faint, but he heard it clearly. It was the sound of a wooden fish—a wooden fish that monks usually played.

Chapter 618 - Mercy

Dak, dak, dak~

The wooden fish noises annoyed Li Huowang.

“Li Sui, let’s go! Let’s see what kind of evil entity has come here!” Li Huowang exclaimed. He grabbed his swords and Li Sui before jumping onto the roof to head toward where the sound was coming from.

Li Huowang soon found the source of the sound. It was a group of monks; the monks were so skinny that their bones were visible under their skin.

The monks were sitting near the entrance of the village, playing with their wooden fish.

The refugees woke up from the noise, but they dared not to even take a peek.

They buried their heads deep in the fields and trembled in fear.

When Li Huowang appeared, the monks stared at him at the same time. Some of the monks used the eyestalks sticking out of the scars on their heads to stare at Li Huowang rather than their eyes.

“Amitabha. This humble monk meets the benefactor.”

Li Huowang stared at the old monk in front of him. The old monk was skinny, but he could still recognize the monk.

The monk’s face was similar to the illusion by his side. He was the Abbot of the Great Qi’s Righteous Monastery!

“Amitabha. We are here seeking alms. We hope that the benefactor will help us,” said the old monk. He then showed his bronze alms bowl, and the noises being produced by the wooden fish abruptly came to a halt.

“Alms? No, I don’t want to give any alms. What are you going to do about it?” Li Huowang asked. Li Sui’s tentacles burst out of

him, and every single tentacle was either holding a talisman or a torture tool. They were clearly trying to intimidate the monks.

A few moments later, footsteps echoed from behind Li Huowang.

Bai Lingmiao led a group of believers from the White Lotus Sect to stand behind Li Huowang.

In addition, the able-bodied people in Cowheart Village rushed out as well

Li Huowang held the numbers advantage against the monks.

Just as Li Huowang thought the Righteous Monastery would fight them, the Abbot stared alternately between Bai Lingmiao and the White Lotus Sect before putting away the alms bowl and praying in front of Li Huowang. The monks then left with the Abbot at the helm.

“Senior Li, what’s wrong with those monks? And they just left like that, too,” Puppy said, sounding confused.

Li Huowang frowned at the backs of the departing monks. Then, he turned to Bai Lingmiao and said, “Tell your people to guard the Cowheart Village’s perimeter. I’ll go and check what those monks are up to.”

Li Huowang was afraid that the monks were plotting something. A thief harboring ill intention was worse than a thief stealing something once.

“Senior Li, be careful. They have many people on their side.”

“Don’t worry. I’m confident that I can still escape even if I can’t beat them,” Li Huowang said. He projected his image into the ground and tailed the monks in his invisible state.

Li Huowang couldn’t help but admit that he had made a mistake. Since the civilians and the Dharma Sect members of the Qi Kingdom were transported here, then it wouldn’t be strange if the other sects throughout the Qi Kingdom were transported here as well.

The monks weren't wearing shoes, so their footprints were visible on the muddy ground.

Li Huowang slowed down and followed them carefully.

Li Huowang walked for two Lis straight, and just as he was thinking that the old monks were planning on circling back and attacking Cowheart Village, he suddenly caught a whiff of roasted meat—roasted human meat. Li Huowang's eyes flashed with killing intent. He looked around before climbing up a giant tree with the aid of Li Sui's tentacles.

Soon, he discovered where the smell of roasted meat was coming from.

There was a tiny clay Buddha on an earthen altar in the woods not too far away from Li Huowang.

A group of refugees in tattered clothes were kowtowing and praying to the Buddha.

However, what sent chills down Li Huowang's spine was the thing beside the Buddha's statue. Several monks with swollen abdomens were sprawled out on the ground. Their legs were high up in the air as blood and amniotic fluid flowed down the ground. Shockingly, the monks with swollen abdomens were giving birth to bony lumps of meat covered in hair!

The lumps of meat still had their umbilical cords, and they'd pulse from time to time as if they were alive.

The other monks carried the meat and placed it into a large cauldron.

The scent of cooked meat wafted into the air as the lumps of meat were tossed into the boiling water.

The praying refugees lined up with broken bowls in their hands. They frantically scooped the meat from the cauldron before eating it with relish.

Li Huowang was absolutely disgusted by the sight.

"Benefactor, this humble Abbot wishes to speak to you." A

voice echoed from beneath Li Huowang, and he felt his nape going cold upon hearing it. He had been spotted!

Li Huowang decisively swung his spine sword.

The old monk beneath the tree was split in half, but the flesh fused together rapidly, and the monk returned to normal.

Li Huowang's attack was ineffective against the old monk!

Li Huowang glared at the old monk beneath him, who had the same face as the old monk's illusion next to him.

"What is this disgusting thing that you're doing here?! What are you feeding the refugees?!"

The Abbot looked up and put his hands together along with the prayer beads before saying, "Benefactor, saving one life is better than building a seven-story pagoda. We're saving the people here. We can't save everyone in the world, but we still can save those in front of us."

"By feeding them those disgusting things? Would you even eat what you're feeding them?!"

"Amitabha. Benefactor, we are monks. We cannot eat meat. Anyway, they do not have a choice. It goes against the teaching, but it's the only thing that the refugees can eat right now. Otherwise, they'd starve."

Li Huowang was stunned, and he had no idea what to say.

The Righteous Monastery is trying to save the refugees by using such a strange method to produce food?

"Benefactor, the world is ending, and we really cannot find food anywhere. We could only borrow the powers of Buddha to save the people," said the Abbot with a face that was the epitome of mercy. His emaciated face radiated an aura of compassion.

"Ah! He's a kind and merciful person!" the old monk's illusion beside Li Huowang praised the Abbot. "Daoist, he looks like me, and he's a good monk!"

Li Huowang glared at him before turning to the Abbot and

saying, "Does that mean that you approached my village to find food? You don't have any ulterior motives at all? You really don't have any food left?"

"Benefactor, this humble monk, and the others were really looking for alms. Benefactor, may I ask why you are hostile toward us? We've been kind toward you, and I do believe that we haven't wronged you at all."

Li Huowang disagreed and retorted, "Kind? Why didn't you say that you were kind when you stuffed those girls into those vases?"

"Benefactor, why are you bringing them up? They were abandoned by their family. If we hadn't saved them, they would've been drowned or buried alive. We simply found a way for them to survive. We're doing kind deeds here."

"Is helping the eunuchs give birth to children a kind deed as well?"

"Of course! Why wouldn't it be? Helping others to have children when they cannot have one is a kind deed indeed."

Li Huowang went silent. He had seen enough. The monks were indeed doing kind deeds—deeds that were kind in their eyes.

Li Huowang was convinced that they'd murder without hesitation if they judged that the action was "kind" overall.

Chapter 619 - Visitors

In the dark woods, Li Huowang and the Abbot were still talking, but the atmosphere had become much calmer.

“Who’s your Siming?” Li Huowang asked the Abbot.

“Siming? We’re monks. We believe in the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas. We do not believe in Simings.”

Li Huowang rephrased his question, asking, “Then, which Buddha do you worship?”

“Amitabha. We pray to Vaicorana from Vajradhatu, the Diamond Realm; Akshobhya from Abhirati, the Eastern Pure Land; Ratnasambhava from Śrīmat, the Southern Pure Land; Amitābha from Sukhavati, the Western Pure Land; and Amoghasiddhi from Prakuta, the Northern Pure Land. Together, they’re called the Five Dhyani Buddhas.”

Five Dhyani Buddhas? Do they control the Heavenly Dao of Flesh? Or is it Life?

Staring at Li Huowang’s horrifying visage, the Abbot placed his palms together and bowed to Li Huowang. “Benefactor, saving one’s life is better than building a seven-story pagoda. Please do give us some alms. Even if you have a history of enmity with us, I don’t think you have any history of enmity with the refugees. Can you really watch them starve to death?”

Li Huowang looked at the Abbot and warned, “I will give you food, but you must leave afterward. Do not approach Cowheart Village!”

The old Abbot immediately broke out into a smile upon hearing that Li Huowang was going to provide them with food. “Thank you for your kindness, Benefactor! I will ask the disciples to chant some sutra so that the Buddha will record the great merit and mercy

you've bestowed upon us today!"

"No need. I don't think I can withstand the great merit of your Buddha."

Li Huowang didn't trust the Righteous Monastery of the Qi Kingdom. He just wanted to send them away using a bit of food.

Li Huowang passed down his orders and bags of heavy food were soon pushed toward the entrance of the village.

The monks had been putting up a front, but the way they shoved raw rice into their mouths to eat betrayed their facade.

Li Huowang was starting to have some faith in the Abbot's words upon witnessing the monk's desperation.

Li Huowang looked at the Abbot beside him and asked, "You do know that this is not the Great Qi anymore, don't you?"

The Abbot was not surprised. "Amitabha. This old monk knows that, but no matter where we are, Buddha will still be around. Everywhere is the land of Buddha, and everywhere is the land of freedom."

Li Huowang couldn't stand listening to the difficult terms. "I don't care, but you need to know that the members of the Dharma Sect, which caused the end of the Great Qi, have come here as well. If you're as kind as you said, go ahead and kill them whenever you meet any one of them."

The Abbot's eyes widened with shock, and his mustache quivered even though there was no wind. However, he soon calmed down and said, "Amitabha, this old monk understands."

"If you meet the other sects from the Qi Kingdom, remember to tell them that, too. I'm sure that you don't want this world to meet the same fate as the Qi Kingdom, right?"

"Benefactor is right." The Abbot nodded and looked toward the left side of Cowheart Village. Someone was there.

When the moonlight revealed the face of the newcomer, Li Huowang let go of his sword. The face of the newcomer was

familiar to him. The newcomer was none other than the former owner of his spine sword, Fo Yulu.

Li Huowang finally relaxed upon seeing Liu Zongyuan and Hong Da walking behind Fo Yulu. The Surveillance Bureau surely reacted swiftly this time.

“Don’t worry. They’re from the Surveillance Bureau. They probably won’t do anything to you if you just talk to them properly,” Li Huowang said to the Abbot.

Fo Yulu approached them but ignored the Abbot. She stared at Li Huowang and asked, “Er Jiu, what is happening here? Where did you get these monks?”

Li Huowang had actually instructed Chun Xiaoman to send a letter to the Surveillance Bureau, but since they were here, things had become more convenient for him. After all, he could just tell them directly.

Li Huowang quickly described what had happened. He originally thought that they would question him further, but they accepted it without any hesitation.

“You knew that the people of the Qi Kingdom would eventually appear here?” Li Huowang asked, sounding perplexed.

“The Chief gave us such orders a long time ago,” Fo Yulu said. Then, she turned to the Abbot and started talking with the latter.

Li Huowang had just realized that the Surveillance Bureau knew that something like this would happen, but they didn’t tell him in advance.

Li Huowang approached Fo Yulu and the others before asking them, “Is the Surveillance Bureau planning to do something big? If they need help, me and my people can help.”

The Qi Kingdom’s current plight could become the Liang Kingdom’s future plight. Li Huowang called the Liang Kingdom his home, so he would do anything in his power to prevent the Liang Kingdom from meeting the same horrible fate.

In other words, he would be helping himself by helping the Surveillance Bureau.

“You?” Fo Yulu scoffed and asked, “Aren’t you acquainted with the Emperor? Why do you still care about the Surveillance Bureau?”

Li Huowang was too lazy to explain to her and simply came up with a random reason. “His Majesty has ordered me to help the Surveillance Bureau.”

Fo Yulu could still remember how Li Huowang had stolen her weapon, so she was wary of him.

However, she was a Ji Xiang as well, so the Surveillance Bureau took precedence over her personal grudge. In other words, she had to set aside her reservations for now.

“The Chief has personally given us the order to kill members of the Qi Kingdom's Dharma Sect on sight. Three heads are equivalent to one lifespan pill. Also, we have to befriend as many sects from the Qi Kingdom as possible.”

“What about the refugees? Did the Chief say anything about them?”

“They are under the jurisdiction of the Imperial Palace. There is no need for us to care about them.”

Li Huowang nodded in understanding. The Chief had indeed known what would happen if they connected an Emperor from the Qi Kingdom to the Dragon Vein of the Liang Kingdom. Li Huowang was sure that they were already thinking about this scene a long time ago. However, it was great news for Li Huowang. After all, the Surveillance Bureau wasn't going to ignore them, which would minimize the possible damage that this phenomenon would inflict on the Liang Kingdom.

“Amitabha. Benefactor, are you really from the Surveillance Bureau?” the Abbot asked Fo Yulu.

The Abbot was talking to her, so Fo Yulu’s expression became respectful. She showed her identity token and bowed to the Abbot,

saying, “I greet the Abbot. I have not renounced my worldly attachments, but I can still be considered as a follower of Buddhism.”

“Benefactor, since you're from the Surveillance Bureau, I should let you know about one crucial piece of information. The high-ranking members of the Dharma Sect are still alive, and they must be here, too. We need to find Taishan Shi first. He's the key. He's adept at deceiving and misleading others. If we leave him alone, he will soon gather a large group of devotees who worship Sir Arrogant Stone.”

“Sir Arrogant Stone?” Fo Yulu was confused.

Li Huowang frowned and whispered, “Arrogant Stone is just another name for God Yu'er. He's a threat that must be eliminated as soon as possible.”

Chapter 620 - Gather

Li Sui was wearing her human skin while sitting on the mossy stairs of the Bai Family Estate.

A child was in front of her, and Li Sui's gaze was on the lard candy in the child's hands.

"Is that delicious?" Li Sui asked, sounding intrigued.

The child was wearing a hat and shoes resembling a tiger. Li Sui wasn't familiar with the child nor his parents, but she could see that the child was interested in her based on how he seemed transfixed on her pretty face.

After a while, the child snapped back to reality and nodded. Then, he pulled Li Sui toward his house.

He brought Li Sui into the kitchen and imitated his mother. He used a pair of chopsticks to scoop out a glob of lard before tossing the lard into the jar of coarse sugar.

He rolled the lard around and coated it with a thick layer of sugar.

And just like that, a lard candy was made...

The child handed it over to Li Sui.

"Is it delicious?" Li Sui swallowed it whole and savored it before nodding. "Not bad. It has a porky flavor. I love pork, but I prefer bones with blood and flesh on them, especially those bones covered in white stuff.[\[1\]](#) Those are very chewy. Second Mother actually loves to eat it, too."

Just then, Li Sui's ears perked up. "Sorry, my father is calling me, and I need to go back. Thank you for the candy. I will treat you to some bloody bones next time."

The tentacles under Li Sui's skirt moved swiftly, propelling her toward the Bai Family Estate.

“Father, did you call me?” Li Sui asked.

Li Huowang was busy organizing talisman papers when he heard Li Sui's voice.

“Yes, let's go. We are going to be busy,” Li Huowang said. Then, he placed all of his three swords on his back.

“Where are we going?” Li Sui asked. She took off the human skin on her and placed it in a jar full of salt.

“We need to find someone called Taishan Shi. He's very annoying, and we need to kill him,” Li Huowang replied. He then opened his mouth, and Li Sui shoved herself into Li Huowang through the latter's mouth.

Her tentacles made Li Huowang's neck bulge, but Li Huowang didn't mind it. He walked out of the door and saw Bai Lingmiao.

“Tell your people to protect the village while I'm not here. Be careful of people luring you out so that they can attack the village.”

Bai Lingmiao nodded quietly.

Li Huowang hugged her gently before exiting the village.

Li Huowang had just left when a pair of white shoes appeared at the doorstep. “Saintess.”

“Alright. I was just about to leave for Shangjing. Anyway, I want you to protect this place properly.”

There were nine people hunting Taishan Shi—Li Huowang, the Abbot, two other monks, Fo Yulu, and her four subordinates.

Once they were ready for the hunt, Fo Yulu said, “Don't act rashly once we find Taishan Shi. We need to observe him first. We can also retreat and request backup if we think he's too strong for us to defeat.”

Li Huowang heard that and frowned. He wasn't a fan of Fo Yulu's conservative approach.

“Stop talking nonsense. Let's just find him first. Have you heard anything from the informants of the Surveillance Bureau?” Li Huowang asked. He clearly favored a more direct approach.

The Surveillance Bureau, the Righteous Monastery, and he were hunting down just one person. Li Huowang thought that they could easily defeat Taishan Shi with their numbers. It didn't matter how strong Taishan Shi was, as they were in the Liang Kingdom rather than the Qi Kingdom. Moreover, Taishan Shi didn't have that many members of the Dharma Sect here.

Fo Yulu hated Li Huowang's rashness, and she glared at him to express that.

"We'll go to Li County, which is fifty Li away from here. The informant told me that the members of the Dharma Sect are in the middle of gathering there. We should interrogate some of them to find Taishan Shi's whereabouts."

Everyone hopped onto their horses and made a beeline for Li County. They wanted to waste no time.

Fo Yulu approached Li Huowang's flank and asked, "Er Jiu! How's my ancient sword? Is it powerful?"

"Why? Do you want to take it back?" Li Huowang asked. He didn't even look at her, as he had nothing to say to her.

"No, but since you have an incredibly powerful ancient sword, you're not going to be a coward and stand at the rear once we find Taishan Shi, right?"

"What are you trying to say?"

"*Hehe*, nothing. If you don't want to be one of the vanguards, then return my sword to me. I'll let you hide at the back of the group so you can just watch us fight," Fo Yulu said, smiling.

Li Huowang made his horse approach Fo Yulu's horse. He got extremely close to Fo Yulu before saying, "Fo Yulu, I don't care about what you're trying to do here, but don't forget that I have a connection with His Majesty. Do something stupid here, and I will make sure that you will regret it in the future."

Fo Yulu scowled and went silent. She didn't expect that Li Huowang would use that card against her.

Sensing something amiss, the Abbot approached them and said, "Benefactors, I am willing to go up first and fight Taishan Shi as one of the vanguard the moment we find him. I'm willing to do that for the sake of the world."

The Abbot clearly didn't want internal strife, so Fo Yulu steered away from Li Huowang and got closer to the Abbot.

"May I know your name? We're all following the teachings of Buddha, so I don't think it's good to keep calling you 'Abbot.' I also don't want you to keep calling us 'benefactors'."

"This humble monk's given name is Chan Du."

"I greet Master Chan Du. My given name is Yu Se."

Li Huowang guided his horse close to Liu Zongyuan. "How's the new Ji Xiang? Is she good?"

"Brother Er Jiu, you can relax. She knows where to draw the line, so she's not going to do anything stupid."

Li Huowang lowered his guard slightly as they continued on their journey.

Fifty Li sounded far, but they were fast on horseback. Soon, they reached the entrance of Li County's main city.

Li Huowang pulled his reins, and his horse raised its front legs high up in the air. A large pile of metal pots was blocking their path into the city.

Li Sui's swept across the pots, sending them flying.

Metal pots, boiling water, and rocks took to the sky.

Li Huowang immediately unsheathed his sword upon seeing the steam rising from the rocks.

No one would be stupid enough to cook stones and drink its soup except for the members of the Qi Kingdom's Dharma Sect.

"Careful! There are probably traps here. I'll search the perimeter!"

Fo Yulu stared deeply at the empty city. Moments later, her figure trembled, and several thumb-sized golden Buddhas jumped

over the big pile of metal pots to enter the city.

Fifteen minutes passed by in a flash. Li Huowang wanted to take matters into his own hands when Fo Yulu took out red prayer beads and made a seal with the prayer beads between her palms. Then, she started chanting a strange sutra.

“Prince Vipassi witnessed the passing of the person with great wisdom, the one foremost among men; there were eighty thousand of such individuals. They followed Prince Vipassi to renounce their worldly desires and practice the Brahman. The honored one, Prince Vipassi, preached the Dharma in the Deer Park at Isipatana, and they all came to the presence of the Buddha.”

1. Cartilage, but Li Sui doesn't know the word for it. 

Chapter 621 - Dharma Sect

Fo Yulu was chanting Buddhist scriptures outside the deserted county town.

As time ticked by amidst Fo Yulu's chanting, a cacophony of noises soon pervaded the county town, shattering its silence.

The Abbot of the Righteous Monastery and the two other monks took out a wooden fish. They started tapping it and singing with the beat. Soon, the chanting of the Buddhist scriptures sounded like there was something else mixed into it.

As the chanting of the Buddhist scriptures continued, Li Huowang felt every cell inside of him pulsate as if they were about to leave him at any moment.

Fo Yulu's clothes squirmed, and many different tiny Buddhas fell out of her clothes. They all sat cross-legged on the ground and chanted along with Fo Yulu and the monks.

When the chanting reached its peak, the ground abruptly cracked open.

A tall figure wearing a witch's hood jumped out of the crack with two obsidian daggers in both hands. The tall figure was clearly here to ambush Fo Yulu, who was chanting the Buddhist scriptures.

However, Hong Da was prepared for any sudden turn of events. He promptly leaped from his horse and blocked the attacker.

Hong Da's rusty knife pierced the tall figure's chest, but the tall figure's arms holding the two obsidian daggers split into two and made a beeline for Fo Yulu.

It turned out that the tall figure wasn't a living person. The two dwarves disguised as arms were the real people.

Just as one of the dwarves thought that he'd hit his target, a Daoist priest in a red robe stood in his way.

The dwarf's eyes were focused on the Daoist's bronze coin sword when the Daoist opened his mouth, releasing black tentacles that instantly engulfed the dwarf's face.

The suction cups of the black tentacles clung tightly to the dwarf's skin. At first, it was painful, and then he no longer felt anything.

Having made quick work of the dwarf, Li Huowang turned toward the other dwarf; the bloody tentacles hanging from his chin swayed as he moved.

Peng Longteng had grabbed the other dwarf and was squeezing the latter until the dwarf collapsed into a ball. Peng Longteng then raised the dwarf above her head and exerted force. Crimson blood spurted and flowed down Peng Longteng's stump.

At first, Li Huowang thought that the matter was resolved, but it seemed that things were only getting started as a slender black sword pierced Peng Longteng's heavy armor.

Soon, commoners wearing white scarves emerged from the county town, charging at Li Huowang and the others.

The Buddhist scriptures seemed effective against the commoners as parts of themselves—like their eyes, ears, etc—would abruptly fall to the ground from time to time.

However, the commoners' zeal seemed unending despite losing so many parts of them in the process.

There were skinny people from the Great Qi among them, but the majority of them were the people of the Great Liang.

The propagation of the Dharma Sect's teaching was much faster than Li Huowang had imagined.

These zealots weren't afraid of death, but the difference in strength between the two factions was still too great. They weren't Li Huowang nor Peng Longteng's match.

The tall Peng Longteng plowed through the crowd, carving open a bloody path. She seemed to be enjoying the slaughter, and her figure was trembling incessantly as she used two corpses as her weapons.

“Don’t kill them all! Leave some of them alive! I want to interrogate them!”

The slaughter continued, and Liu Zongyuan's white mist soon enveloped the entire county town. Once the county town was thoroughly enveloped by Liu Zongyuan's white mist, the battle quickly came to an end.

Thump!

The last remaining dwarf fell weakly to the ground and took his final breath.

“This place must be their temporary base. It seems that they really don’t know the whereabouts of Taishan Shi,” Li Huowang said as he put away the bloody torture tools into his bag.

They were still facing the same problem as earlier. Even if they could defeat Taishan Shi, it was useless if they couldn’t find the latter.

If the Dharma Sect were allowed to absorb the masses, the people of Great Liang would eventually become their enemy.

Fo Yulu emerged from her contemplation just then and said, “Let’s go. Let’s go to Yinling City. There’s an expert there that can figure out Taishan Shi’s location.”

“Lord Ji Xiang, who are they? Can they really do that? Taishan Shi is from the Great Qi, after all,” Hong Da reminded.

“His name is Blind Chen. And if he can’t do it, then no one else can.”

Li Huowang was surprised to hear a familiar name. “The Blind Chen with a stall outside the City God Temple?”

“Do you know him?”

“I guess so; we’ve encountered each other before. However,

that guy isn't really that great. He was even deceived by the Sitting Oblivion Dao."

Back then, Li Huowang had made a deal with Blind Chen about a complete talisman collection.

"Fortune tellers can't tell their own fortune. He may not be able to do much else, but he's better at fortune-telling than the majority of the people in the Surveillance Bureau. If he can't do it, then what he worships can definitely do it," Fo Yulu said, mounting her horse.

What he worships? Is there a Siming in charge of fortune telling? The past and future are changing constantly. Can that guy still figure out what's going on? Li Huowang pondered.

Soon, everyone left the corpse-littered town.

The crows and vultures in the air eventually gathered to enjoy the unexpected feast.

A crow opened its beak and repeatedly pecked at an eyeball when a bare foot stepped on it; the crow let out an agonized shriek as it vomited its entrails to the ground.

"What did I say? Taishan, this isn't the right time to cause chaos. The Surveillance Bureau will instantly come sniffing around like a dog looking for shit to eat at the tiniest commotion."

A man wearing a robe adorned with colored cloth strips was strolling leisurely amidst the corpses.

A jet-black cloth was draped over his left shoulder.

The man named Taishan was a short, ugly guy with ears covered in black hair. He looked brutish, but he was wearing an exceptionally elegant white robe. The white headscarf on his head complemented the black cloth on the man's shoulder.

"*Hmm...* Indeed. However, the Dharma Sect doesn't have enough followers yet. If we lay low, wouldn't the descent of our divine army be delayed?"

"Calm down. I'm more familiar with this place than you are. Although you and I both believe in different aspects of God Yu'er,

we still are fellow witches. Why would I, He Xinlai, harm you? Anyway, tell your people to lie low and disguise themselves as refugees from the Great Qi. Then, tell them to scatter and gather the other followers.”

“The Great Liang is the strongest kingdom in the world. Our Dharma Sect just has to take down the Great Liang, and it will be much easier for us to take control over the other regions.”

The witch Taishan came to a halt and nodded. “All right, you have more people than me, so I’ll follow your lead. Before that, I need our people to team up and steal that guy’s sword.”

“Whose sword?”

“The bone sword of that brat in the red Daoist robe. He’s wielding the spine of one of the Three Pure Ones’ Twisted Ones. It will prove immensely useful to me.”

“All right, it seems like they’re looking for you as well. You’ll be the bait, and we’ll set a trap to ambush them.”

“We can’t be careless about this; there’s something wrong with him. Also, I think it’s best if we hide our identity as members of the Dharma Sect; that way, we will be able to avoid unnecessary trouble.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll bring in a few experts. In fact, our Dharma Sect isn’t universally despised in the Great Liang. We have quite a few like-minded friends.”

Chapter 622 - Buddha

“Something has gone extremely wrong! I’m about to be discharged from the hospital, but then something like that happened!” A phone was pressed to Li Huowang’s ear as he paced anxiously in the empty corridor. “Don’t talk to me about fragmented thoughts and perception. I’m not autistic; my thoughts and perception aren’t fragmented! I’m not having hallucinations, either. I was cured a long time ago!”

Li Huowang sighed as he heard the reply, and then his voice instantly became much calmer as he said, “I do want to be discharged. I really don’t want to be considered mentally ill for the rest of my life, but...”

A look of struggle and pain suffused Li Huowang’s face. “Everything that happened on that ship was too real as if I had really experienced it! I did indeed get the bronze coin sword! I did indeed have one arm bitten off by the opponent’s dog! But they all... they all disappeared!”

At the end of the corridor, several people from Li Huowang’s group secretly peeked at him.

“You see, this guy still claims he’s not sick. I’ve seen plenty of this in the hospital. This is a typical case of schizophrenia,” a young guard with a buzz cut speculated.

“It doesn’t seem like it. Look at how he talks in circles. People with schizophrenia don’t take their medication, and their minds aren’t that sharp. I feel like it’s more like a personality disorder; I had a neighbor with that disorder.”

Many people were curious about Li Huowang’s illness, and some even secretly bet their snacks on it. Li Huowang’s presence provided a bit of relief from the boredom of the monotonous

hospital.

“Doctor Yi, I’m really afraid that everything that had happened before will become meaningless. I-I’m really confused right now; I don’t know whether it’s real or not, and it’s making me hesitate.”

“Okay, then, come over when you have the time. Thank you,” Li Huowang said. He ended the call and frowned while pacing back and forth in the corridor.

At first, Li Huowang thought that everything going smoothly, but the inexplicable experience at sea was truly bewildering to him.

If it were fake, then wouldn’t that mean that what he had experienced at sea was just a hallucination produced by his fragmented thoughts and perception?

If that were the case, what kind of mental illness was he suffering from? Was there even any cure for it?

If it was real... Li Huowang hesitated, sensing that he was in big trouble and that he had to handle it properly.

It had to be handled properly, as making the wrong choice meant that he’d end up digging a bigger hole in the ground for himself.

Li Huowang felt hopeless. He truly had no idea what to do at this point.

Dak, dak, dak~

A strange noise echoed from outside the window. Li Huowang walked over and saw the vast army of the Great Liang beyond the window.

The cacophony of hooves and the overwhelming aura from the soldiers made Li Huowang feel extremely tense.

The sight was the exact meaning of the word "endless."

The powerful officials were with the troops as well, which added to the intimidating scene.

“Where are these soldiers going?” Li Huowang asked in a low voice.

“They’re not going anywhere. The followers of the Dharma Sect will not dare to rebel as long as they are intimidated.”

“Hehe, we don't have to be afraid of their rebellion. The Flying Leopard troops can completely annihilate such sects,” Liu Zongyuan said with a hint of pride.

“Don’t worry; it seems that the higher-ups also attach importance to the changes in the Great Qi. The spies and paws of the Surveillance Bureau are here along with the higher-ups, so we should be safe.”

Li Huowang finally understood the reason behind the army's presence here, and he finally had a clear understanding of Gao Zhijian’s capability.

The Emperor of Great Liang was the type of person to keep his word.

A general sensed Li Huowang and the others' gazes; he looked over but immediately looked away upon seeing the badges attached to Li Huowang and the others' waists.

Once the soldiers of the Great Liang had passed by them, Li Huowang turned to Fo Yulu beside him and said, “Don’t worry about them. Let’s just focus on our task at hand.”

The Great Qi’s Dharma Sect had to be handled properly. Otherwise, the entire Great Liang would become chaotic once again.

Everyone mounted their horses and galloped toward Yinling City; they were going to contribute to the resistance against the Great Qi’s Dharma Sect.

They had spent just a few days on the road, but the three monks from the Righteous Monastery had already changed drastically.

When Li Huowang first met them, the Abbot of Righteous Monastery, Chan Du, was as thin as a skeleton. After a few days of vegetarian meals, Chan Du's flesh and skin had returned to normal.

The incredible sight made Li Huowang look at the divine powers of the Righteous Monastery in a different light.

“Abbot, what other divine powers did your Buddha grant you in addition to the ability to transform into a thousand-arm Buddha? You should tell me because we're working together against the Dharma Sect.”

Chan Du released the reins with both hands and clasped them together. “Amitabha, this humble monk has been meditating for sixty years and has already transcended the realm of heavenly freedom.”

Li Huowang was completely puzzled. *What did it mean to transcend the realm of heavenly freedom?*

“Abbot, can you keep it simple? I'm a bit confused—”

A black vulture swooped down from the sky before Li Huowang could finish his sentence. When Li Huowang's gaze met with the vulture, he saw a black-robed Lama through the vulture's eyes.

Then, Li Huowang saw the Lama point his finger toward his own forehead with his right hand, which was covered with age spots and was holding a vajra.

“Respected one, reveal your true nature!”

Li Huowang's heart went numb, and he felt empty as if he had lost something important.

However, he didn't feel anything abnormal, which was contrary to his expectations.

Swoosh!

Li Huowang slashed out with his purple-tasseled sword, splitting the vulture in half.

“An ambush!” Li Huowang exclaimed.

And that was when a rain of vultures plummeted toward the others.

The Abbot of the Righteous Monastery put his hands together, and his figure phased through the saddle, merging with the horse.

It didn't end there. When the three monks were finally merged with their horses, their flesh and blood began to merge with each other as well.

Finally, a fleshy creature that resembled a Buddha appeared before everyone.

It was a Buddha that Li Huowang had seen in the Righteous Monastery.

The Buddha had roughly eight pairs of arms. Each hand was holding a different seal—the vajra, lotus, or lion seal. Soon, more than ten mouths chanted sutras at the same time.

“In the heavens, the true Dharma was preached. Abandon the heavenly palace; descend from the mother's womb. Born from the right side of the body, walk as a Buddha; open the gate of Dharma, cleanse impurities...”

The sutras were in different volumes, but they were in harmony with each other, which made the sutras sound extremely sacred and solemn.

As the Buddha's voice pervaded the air, the vultures' wings abruptly stuck to their bodies, and their eyes were eventually stuck to their eyelids as well. Then, they fell from the sky like rocks thrown into the ocean.

Li Huowang looked up at the Buddha—no, at the compassionate face of the abbot. It was then that he finally understood the meaning of the realm of heavenly freedom.

Chapter 623 - Chess

“These birds... I seem to have seen them somewhere before...” Li Huowang muttered with furrowed brows while staring at the vultures on the ground. He was trying his best to remember where he had seen these vultures.

Li Huowang's expression froze. A few years ago, he had encountered a Lama with a vulture just as he left Qing Qiu.

Is it them? Those Lamas from Qing Qiu infamous for conducting sacrificial rituals? Why would they want to ambush the Surveillance Bureau?

Li Huowang suddenly noticed something amiss. He reached behind him, and his heart sank. His spine sword was missing! These vultures were here to serve as a distraction, and their target was his spine sword!

“My sword is missing!” Li Huowang exclaimed. Peng Longteng appeared next to Li Huowang, and she hurled the latter into the air.

Having been thrown into the air, Li Huowang now had a bird's eye view of everything around him. He looked around frantically, scanning his surroundings.

He wouldn't have been so angry if the other party had come to ambush him, but they had actually come to steal his spine sword.

Li Huowang swore to crush them to dust!

“Daoist! Look, your sword's there!” The old monk behind Li Huowang exclaimed, pointing at somewhere in the distance.

The next moment, the old monk's figure solidified. Li Huowang grabbed the old monk's robes, and the two headed into the distance.

When they got close enough, Li Huowang saw a mandrill wearing a Buddha mask. The mandrill was holding his spine sword and was running frantically through the forest.

The mandrill seemed to have mastered a movement technique that allowed it to move so swiftly through the forest.

“Stop running!” Li Huowang exclaimed. He gouged out his left eye and crushed it. The monkey was instantly enveloped in a strange light, and its movement became as slow as a snail.

Li Sui’s tentacles then reached out to retrieve the spine sword, but a cold light flashed, severing those tentacles.

A strange drumming rhythm echoed immediately afterward. Then, an old Lama wearing a black sheepskin stood between Li Huowang and the spine sword.

He was beating the bone drum at his waist, and there was a bone sutra in his hand.

“The Venerable Uruvilva-Kasyapa, Venerable Gaya Kasyapa, Venerable Nadi Kasyapa, Venerable Mahakasyapa, Venerable Sariputra, Venerable Maudgalyayana...” the old Lama chanted.

Strange cries pervaded the air as he chanted, and the vultures gathered at their location, orbiting the skies above them.

“There is no enmity between us, so why are you doing this to me?! Do you really think I haven't changed at all?!” Li Huowang roared at the old Lama as blood streamed down his eye socket.

The vultures in the air swooped down toward Li Huowang.

“Horse jumps, eat your cannon[1].”

Li Huowang was sitting on a plastic red stool and was dressed in blue and white clothes. His brows were furrowed as he stared at the chessboard placed before him.

He was playing chess against his attending physician Wu Cheng. He was playing chess while listening to something with his Bluetooth earpiece.

Li Huowang picked up his left chariot with two fingers and slammed it down on his opponent’s pawn.

Smack!

Li Huowang’s bronze coin sword struck the old Lama,

shattering the latter's bone drum.

The spine sword was in Li Huowang's hands once again, and he breathed a sigh of relief at its familiar coldness.

Li Huowang looked up, and he found that he was surrounded by people.

In addition to the old Lama wearing clothes made of black sheepskin, people wearing white headscarves and black armbands stood around Li Huowang as well. Their outfit told Li Huowang everything he had to know, and he became certain of it as well. These people were followers of the Dharma Sect!

“We're not wearing any disguise. Won't this kid recognize us?”

“We're going to kill him, so it doesn't matter. Let's wrap this up.”

“General[2].”

Li Huowang looked up slowly at Wu Cheng, who was smiling slightly.

“Are you secretly using a grandmaster-level AI to cheat against me? I heard people can do that.”

“Calm down, Little Li. It's just a game of chess. You don't need to worry about winning or losing, and losing isn't that big of a deal.”

“I really can't figure out how playing chess is related to my condition.”

“Don't burden yourself with so many thoughts. Just think about it as me finding someone to play chess with because I like playing chess.”

Li Huowang took a deep breath and continued with the game. He struggled as hard as he could to make a comeback.

“Take the horse.” Li Sui's bloody burrowed out of Li Huowang's abdomen and gouged out his opponent's intestines.

“Advisor.” Li Huowang's last eye was covered in a black layer.

“Hey! They're playing chess here!” someone exclaimed. The

nearby patients heard that, and they crowded around Li Huowang out of curiosity as well as to help him against Wu Cheng.

“Er Jiu! We’re here to help you!”

Li Huowang was annoyed at the cacophony of voices around him.

“Shut up!!” Li Huowang roared.

The patients immediately went silent. Li Huowang's roar had reminded them of his identity, and they dared not speak against him.

Li Huowang continued with the game, even though it was getting more and more difficult to stand his ground.

If Wu Cheng hadn't been going easy on him, he would have lost long ago.

Li Huowang's temper grew as he looked at the chessboard before him. He suddenly grabbed the chessboard and was about to flip it out of fury, but Wu Cheng grabbed his hand and pushed it down firmly.

“Little Li, you should stop flipping the table whenever you're losing. Some things can be resolved through flipping the table, but there are many things that cannot be resolved through that alone.”

Li Huowang stared deeply at Wu Cheng.

Just then, a hand reached out from behind Li Huowang's shoulder, and the hand's five fingers grabbed a chariot before moving it forward three squares.

Li Huowang tilted his head slightly and was surprised to see that the autistic chubby boy was the one who had made the move.

The autistic chubby boy was drooling, but his eyes were transfixed on the chessboard.

Li Huowang let go of the chessboard and allowed the chubby boy to fight Wu Cheng.

The chubby boy's play was incredibly slow, but it was incredibly effective against Wu Cheng's moves.

As time went on, the chubby boy was capturing more and more of Wu Cheng's pieces. It started with just the pawns, but things escalated slowly until the tides were starting to reverse in the chubby boy's favor.

Li Huowang forcefully tore off the old man's loose skin on his face and looked daggers at the old Lama, who was the perpetrator behind all this.

The old Lama had transformed, and he was sporting heads and six arms. Each head represented a unique death—drowning, hanging, and stabbing.

Just as the old Lama's bone sutra was about to start spinning, Li Huowang pulled out his spine sword and thrust himself into Great Qi.

He located the old Lama's position within the Great Qi and carved open another spacetime rift. However, Li Huowang wasn't planning on returning to the Great Liang to ambush the old Lama through this spacetime rift. Instead, he opened the spacetime rift directly on top of the old Lama so the spacetime rift would sever the old Lama's figure into two.

When Wu Cheng moved his final advisor, Li Huowang's lips curled slightly upward. He moved his general and blocked the opponent's general.

“General versus general!”

The old Lama's bizarre and aged figure swelled up. The next moment, tentacles of a variety of sizes emerged from his every orifice, and they writhed as they streaked through the air.

Bang!

The old Lama exploded into a bloody mess of flesh and tentacles.

Li Huowang emerged from the old Lama and turned to the Dharma Sect members, shouting, “General! Checkmate!”

1. Chinese chess terms. A few phrases later on that refer to chess as well 🤔

2. If it's not obvious yet, this is Chess in Chinese 🤔

Chapter 624 - Ambush

“Wu Cheng! Again!”

Smack!

“Pawn retreat!”

Smack!

“Elephant takes cannon!”

Smack!

“Pawn advances!”

Clang!

The purple-tasseled sword collided with a black obsidian dagger. Sparks flew as the tip of the dagger was severed. It spun like a top in mid-air before piercing the bloody ground.

The Dharma Sect witch hurriedly twisted his hand to avoid making any contact with the purple-tasseled sword. Then, he viciously thrust the broken dagger into Li Huowang’s left chest.

It seemed like a great move, but he had unknowingly put himself in danger, as getting so close to Li Huowang was a death sentence.

The next moment, the Dharma Sect witch felt a sharp pain in his chest. He looked down and saw something covered in tentacles protruding from Li Huowang's chest. Shockingly, it had burrowed into his own abdomen!

“No, no, no!” The Dharma Sect witch frantically clawed at his stomach and fearfully scoured his messy insides.

“Yu...er...” The Dharma Sect witch muttered before his neck jerked upward; the tentacles inside of him had stirred his brain until it became mush.

The man was dead, but his corpse was still standing. Moments later, he grabbed his broken dagger and charged at a Dharma Sect

disciple attempting to ambush Li Huowang.

Li Sui had taken complete control over his body.

Li Huowang stood still, panting heavily as he surveyed the battlefield. The old Lama had been dealt with, but the situation was far from over. He still had to deal with these Dharma Sect followers.

However, he wasn't too worried about losing, as Fo Yulu and the Abbot of the Righteous Monastery were there to help him.

He was more concerned about the Great Liang, as his assumption ended up being correct! The Dharma Sect of the Great Liang and the Dharma Sect of the Great Qi had somehow created an alliance in such a short period of time.

The Dharma Sect of the Great Liang was strong enough to throw the Great Liang into chaos, and with the addition of the Great Qi's Dharma Sect, the consequences were unpredictable.

Unbeknownst to Li Huowang, quite a few people were staring at him from the shadows.

"Taishan! We have to retreat now! The military families will catch up to us if we wait any further!" He Xinlai exclaimed at the Great Qi witch.

"All right!" Taishan Shi grunted and nodded. The Dharma Sect followers didn't hesitate to take out round stones and swallow them whole. Their eyes then turned red, and they charged forward to cover Taishan Shi and He Xinlai's retreat.

"Trying to escape? Li Sui, chase them!"

Li Huowang took out two pieces of turmeric paper and drew two talismans using his own blood. He then pressed them firmly on his leg before chasing after the retreating pair. He moved so fast that he left a trail of afterimages.

The others were surrounded, but Li Huowang encountered little to no resistance.

"He's really chasing us."

"I know," He Xinlai replied with a smile.

The scenery rapidly peeled away as Li Huowang chased after He Xinlai and Taishan Shi.

Just then, the surroundings brightened, and a field beyond the forest was revealed. Stacks of yellow rice straw were piled between the fields, and smoke was rising from the distant village just beyond the fields.

“You’re not getting away!” Li Huowang sliced off a large piece of his own flesh and hurled it toward the fleeing pair.

The tattered piece of flesh spun rapidly in the air as if it was sentient, and it headed straight for Taishan Shi's back.

Taishan Shi was struck, and Li Huowang's flesh inundated his back. He collapsed to the ground and squirmed violently.

Li Huowang kicked off of the ground and jumped high into the air before bringing down his purple-tasseled sword toward the wriggling figure on the ground.

The feedback was unexpectedly light, and it wasn't the familiar sensation of cutting through flesh.

All of a sudden, a pair of calloused hands emerged from the earth and grabbed Li Huowang's ankles before yanking him downward.

He can burrow into the ground?! Just as the thought flashed through Li Huowang's mind, he was dragged neck-deep into the soil.

It wasn't over yet. Intense pain erupted from Li Huowang's chest and back as something seemed to burrow inside of him.

Li Sui was desperately trying to stop the intrusion with her tentacles.

Li Huowang gnashed his teeth and closed his lone eye. *I'm underwater! I'm underwater! I have to hold my breath!*

The soil immobilized Li Huowang, and he was starting to suffocate.

Just then, he could feel icy cold water permeating his exposed

wounds; the water was so cold that its coldness pierced his bones.

Li Huowang shivered as he struggled to draw out the spine sword. He swung it ahead and behind him, and the pain immediately vanished.

Li Huowang raised both hands and swam upward with all his might. He was powerless in the water. He had to get back to land as soon as possible!

Just as he was about to emerge from the waters, Li Huowang pushed his both hands against the soil and pulled himself out as if he were a radish being harvested from the ground.

He gasped for air and opened his eyes to look around, but all he saw was darkness.

Li Huowang trembled and reached out to touch his right eye socket. Three thorns were sticking out of his right eye socket. It seemed that the enemy had blinded him.

Li Huowang thought that they would take advantage of his blindness, but he couldn't hear anything at all. It seemed like there was no one around him.

He Xinlai was several yards away from Li Huowang. A wooden sword was in his hand as he walked toward Taishan Shi, who had just emerged from the ground.

"What do we do now? That kid is blind. Are you not going to deal with him?" He Xinlai asked.

Despite the fact that Li Huowang was blind, Taishan Shi's cautious face showed no signs of joy. As a witch under Arrogant Stone, he had discerned some strange clues.

"Something's wrong with this kid. I think he still has some cards up his sleeve. I need to consult Sir Arrogant Stone," Taishan Shi said. He took out two crescent-shaped stones and knelt down before hugging them close. He shook them in his arms and tossed them to the ground.

"What did God Yu'er say?" He Xinlai asked while staring at the

stones on the ground.

“Kill! He must die! And we must take his sword away, too!” Taishan Shi roared, and his figure burrowed into the soil once more.

He Xinlai’s face changed drastically. He had been a witch for a long time, but he had never expected God Yu’er to issue such a straightforward oracle.

Of course, He Xinlai was going to follow the oracle without any hesitation. He had to show his loyalty to God Yu’er, who was about to descend to the mortal realm.

He Xinlai formed seals with one hand, and then he bit his fingertip to smear his own blood on the black cloth draped over his shoulder.

He then used the black blood on his hand to draw peach talismans on his wooden sword.

“Since it has been decided, then we’re going for the kill!” He Xinlai charged at Li Huowang with the black sword in hand.

All of a sudden, two hands emerged from the ground and grabbed Li Huowang’s ankles before yanking him downward.

However, something strange happened just then. Taishan Shi’s hands phased through Li Huowang’s ankles, and he ended up grabbing nothing but air.

The next moment, Li Huowang thrust his sword toward his left, which had no enemies.

He Xinlai was on Li Huowang’s right, but he felt a sharp pain radiating from his back.

Chapter 625 - Join

For some reason, He Xinlai's back was hurting.

He Xinlai felt something amiss. He turned to look behind him but found nothing.

Taishan Shi was sitting cross-legged in the soil, and his hands were clasped tightly together.

Dust billowed out from the ground around him.

The outline of an invisible figure was in the swirling dust; the figure belonged to Li Huowang, who had just projected his image.

The ground trembled slightly as a bulky fleshy figure emerged from the nearby forest. It resembled a bloated flesh-and-blood Buddha with limbs.

“Amitabha! Two benefactors! In the boundless sea of suffering! Return to the shore!”

“Quick! His reinforcements are here! Stop hiding! Take advantage of his blindness and kill him now!”

He Xinlai reached to his shoulder and removed the black cloth on his sleeve. He threw it forcefully toward the sun in the sky.

The black cloth blotted out the sunlight, and the massive area was instantly shrouded in darkness.

Just like that, a tiny Natural Disaster was formed.

“Divine soldiers, ah!” Taishan Shi exclaimed.

Li Huowang suddenly felt a million gazes all over him, and then he could feel Li Sui writhing inside of him.

“Father, I... I feel so happy!” Li Sui's tentacles rapidly propagated inside Li Huowang. Li Sui was trying to assimilate him.

This issue had to be resolved immediately, or Li Huowang would end up like Bun and be assimilated by Li Sui!

Thump!

The towering Peng Longteng stood on Li Huowang's left side as the latter inwardly roared, *"Suisui! Hang in there! Don't yield to your instincts! We're about to get out!"*

The ground sank as Li Huowang plummeted into the depths of the earth. Some entities hiding in the darkness within made their move; their swaying figures closing in on Li Huowang looked both illusory and real.

Li Huowang brandished the bronze coin sword and purple-tasseled sword to protect himself.

Meanwhile, He Xinlai was waiting for the right moment to strike.

It didn't take him long to find an opportunity, as Li Huowang was blind. He used a sword technique and charged at Li Huowang as soon as the latter stepped on his own shadow on the ground.

Right as his sword was about to pierce Li Huowang's throat, He Xinlai's vision blurred. Then, Li Huowang reached out and accurately grabbed the blade of his sword.

"Huh?!" He Xinlai was stupefied.

Li Huowang looked up just then. Li Huowang's eyeballs were supposed to be on the ground as they had been gouged out. However, a strange eyeball with double pupils was in one of his empty eye sockets.

"Who did you say was blind?" Li Huowang asked. It was true that he was blind, but he could borrow his daughter's eyeball.

He hadn't revealed that fact earlier to deceive his enemies. Fortunately, it worked.

He Xinlai's heart sank, and then he decisively let go of the weapon in his hand before retreating into the darkness behind him.

Unfortunately, he was so close to Li Huowang that there was no way he could escape.

Peng Longteng's towering figure stood before him while Li Huowang's tentacles surged from behind him, appearing like a tidal

wave.

“Taishan! Taishan Shi!” He Xinlai shouted, asking for his ally's help, but nothing happened.

Taishan Shi had decided to run away upon sensing that there was something amiss.

When the black cloth in the sky was slashed into pieces by Hong Da's flying knife, everything returned to normal.

Unfortunately, Taishan Shi had escaped.

Everyone surrounded He Xinlai, who was being held down by Li Huowang.

Li Huowang looked at He Xinlai. He had just given He Xinlai a taste of his knuckle sandwiches, so the latter's teeth were missing, and his face was black and blue.

However, Li Huowang wasn't done just yet as he whipped out his bag of torture tools and said, “My turn.”

“Wait!” Fo Yulu chimed in, “Capturing a Grand Witch of the Dharma Sect is incredibly difficult. What if you end up killing him accidentally? I need to take him back to the Bureau and have someone interrogate him.”

“*Heh*, are you looking down on me? I'm from the Ao Jing Sect!”

“Everything must be done according to the rules.”

“Stop the nonsense! When did the Surveillance Bureau ever care about rules? Aren't you just after the reward of lifespan pills? I used to work in the Bureau! You shouldn't have let Taishan escape just for the sake of such a small profit!”

Li Huowang wanted to act tough, but he discovered that even Hong Da and Liu Zongyuan were on Fo Yulu's side.

“Brother Er, you can't be like this. The Dharma Sect of the Great Qi has just arrived here. We wouldn't have been able to obtain much information from him. However, this guy is different. We can dig out some important information about the Dharma Sect

from his brain, and then we might be able to annihilate the Dharma Sect in one fell swoop.”

“Er Jiu, I know the methods of the Ao Jing Sect are terrifying. However, the Bureau has people that are better than you when it comes to interrogation.”

Li Huowang frowned as he scanned their faces. It seemed that He Xinlai had a high bounty in the Surveillance Bureau.

In other words, it was highly unlikely that he'd get to interrogate He Xinlai unless he killed all of them.

“It seems that it was my mistake when I thought that I'd be able to save Great Liang with you guys. You people are the same—prioritizing your own profits!” Li Huowang was enraged.

He bent down and placed his head in the soil to look for traces of Taishan Shi. After a while, Li Huowang managed to find some clues. He ignored the members of the Surveillance Bureau and meticulously felt the minute changes in the soil to chase after Taishan Shi. However, he had no choice but to stop, as a towering mountain was standing before him. It seemed that Taishan Shi knew that someone would follow him, so he decided to burrow into a mountain as a precaution. There was nothing Li Huowang could do about it unless he could somehow move the mountain aside.

“Brother Er, don't be angry, okay? *Hehehe~* ” Li Huowang heard the laughter behind him.

However, he didn't even turn his head and simply said, “If you have something to say, then spit it out.”

“We've known each other for so long. Do you really have to treat me like this?? Do you still remember how we went through life and death together against that Muddled One back then?” Liu Zongyuan asked, smiling as he walked up to Li Huowang while wearing a wooden mask. “This turn of events is great for us, so why do you look so unhappy? We managed to capture a Grand Witch alive. This is a major blow to the Dharma Sect! There aren't many

Grand Witches in the Dharma Sect, after all.”

At that, Li Huowang’s face lightened up.

Liu Zongyuan added, “Don’t be in a hurry~ We have to take things one step at a time. We’ll definitely annihilate the Dharma Sect in due time. Anyway, can you stop being mad at Lord Ji Xiang? Just treat it as giving me some face.”

Li Huowang took a deep breath and exhaled. “Did you know? If it weren’t for the fact that I’d waste time, I really wanted to kill you guys.”

“ *Hahaha*~ Brother Er really knows how to crack jokes,” Liu Zongyuan said, laughing. He was about to put his arm around Li Huowang’s shoulder, but the tentacles blocked him. “Brother Er, shouldn’t you withdraw your supernatural powers?”

“Suisui, retract your tentacles.”

“...”

“Suisui?”

“I can’t retract them, Father. It’s been like this since the sun was blotted out earlier...” Li Sui sounded aggrieved.

Translator's Thoughts

Here's that bastard He Xinlai. Credits to 格子的
乱七八糟on douyin!



Chapter 626 - Treatment

In a dense forest, a tentacle with spikes and suction cups burst out of Li Huowang's left arm and hooked around a tree. Moments later, another tentacle burst out of his right abdomen and hooked around another tree.

"Hold tight!" Li Huowang took out a short knife and placed it at the base of the tentacles. After a moment of silence, he slashed at the tentacles, withstanding the pain as blood spurted out haphazardly into the air.

He dared not get distracted as sweat ran down his face. He wanted to free himself from Li Sui.

The Natural Disaster at the time had made Li Sui assimilate Bun. Li Huowang knew that it could happen, but he was still caught off guard by the fact that it happened to him.

Li Sui was so smart and obedient that Li Huowang had completely forgotten that she was an evil entity capable of robbing someone else's body—a Black Taisui!

Li Huowang could not let her stay inside of him for too long, or she could instinctively devour him and take over his body.

"Urgh..." Li Huowang trembled. The pain was akin to being sliced by a thousand blades at once.

Li Sui had completely fused to him. Not only were there tentacles outside him, but there were tentacles around his organs as well.

To make matters worse, he'd have to shave his bones as well.

"Father, are you in pain? Do you want to stop?" Li Sui's voice echoed from inside his mind.

"No need!" Li Huowang shook his head and continued. Bai-Hui's blessing of increased regeneration rate was working against

him. He had to gouge out his flesh in one go, or it would regenerate before he could remove it.

“Sorry, Father... It’s all my fault!” Li Sui exclaimed, blaming herself.

“No, this isn’t your fault! Don’t say something like that. Now wrap your tentacles tighter! This is just a small issue, and I’m not going to stumble over this. We can easily solve this!”

Unfortunately, Li Huowang was attempting something similar to separating a conjoined twin, which was an incredibly difficult feat.

“Amitabha. Benefactor, what are you doing?” the Abbot asked upon seeing the bizarre scene in the forest.

An unfriendly-looking Daoist was hanging between trees using his tentacles and was gouging out his own flesh using a knife. It was a bizarre sight indeed.

The blood flowing down Li Huowang dyed the ground red.

After learning about Li Huowang’s predicament, the Abbot placed his hands together and bowed slightly to him. “Amitabha. Benefactor Er, you should’ve told me earlier. I can help you with this.”

Li Huowang stopped cutting off his flesh and stared at the old monk. “You? Really? Do you even know what kind of trouble I’m having here?”

“Amitabha. Ratnasambhava from Śrīmat of the Southern Pure Land enlightens the masses. The flesh on their body is limitless, signifying their unbounded kindness. Our body is just a vessel, and since our benefactor is a kind person, Ratnasambhava will bless and protect you.”

“Ratnasambhava?” Li Huowang frowned. He didn’t trust the Abbot completely, but he still said, “Are you thinking of making me give birth to Li Sui like the eunuchs?”

“Ah~ We won’t. Benefactor, please wear your clothes and

follow me,” Chan Du said.

Li Huowang wore his clothes and allowed Chan Du to guide the way for him.

They met up with the two other monks, and Chan Du discussed the problem with them. Chan Du then asked Li Huowang to sit on the ground. Afterward, the three monks orbited Li Huowang while playing the wooden fish at a specific speed.

“Xi luo seng he mu ke ye du lu du lu fa she ye de... yi xi li...” As the three chanted a bizarre and complicated mantra, Li Huowang felt his scalp becoming itchy.

He scratched his head and was surprised to find that he had scratched off a chunk of his scalp! Moreover, he could feel himself sloughing away slowly.

He looked down at himself and finally understood how those girls in vases were made.

Li Huowang and Li Sui were separating slowly. At the sight, Chan Du took off the prayer beads around his neck and hurled them to the mass of flesh composed of both Li Huowang and Li Sui.

A reverse swastika made out of golden light appeared on Li Huowang.

Li Sui rapidly separated from Li Huowang until she was out!

The chanting slowed down, and Li Huowang soon found himself in his original body. However, Li Sui was no longer inside of him.

The blind Li Huowang looked around with his empty eye sockets. “Suisui, give me an eyeball!”

Li Sui obliged.

Li Huowang accepted the eyeball and shoved it into his eye socket. He could finally see again.

He looked down at himself once again and saw that he was unharmed.

It seems that the techniques of the Righteous Monastery can be

incredibly useful, Li Huowang thought before saying, "Thank you. I owe you one."

"Amitabha, no need to thank us. We are simply repaying your kindness in kindness. You gave us alms, so think of this as repaying what you gave us last time."

Li Huowang approached Li Sui and looked down at the skinless dog sporting some tentacles. "Are you okay? Do you feel anything missing from you?"

"Father, I'm fine!" Li Sui hugged Li Huowang and smiled happily.

"Benefactor Er, is this the evil entity that you're rearing? It's a meritorious deed. Back in the Righteous Monastery, we have many evil entities following the Buddha's teachings."

"They're following the Buddha's teachings?" Li Huowang asked, frowning. "Do they become like those pigs and cows that helped your monks cultivate?"

Chan Du wasn't angry at Li Huowang's provocation. He merely smiled and rotated the prayer beads in his hands. "Your body is still unstable. Try not to move around too much these days."

"I understand." Li Huowang picked up his belongings and left the forest. Chan Du and the two monks followed suit. Since they were willing to help him, Li Huowang was now looking at them in a brand-new light. "Abbot, I apologize for my rudeness. There's another Righteous Monastery here in the Liang Kingdom, and I had a fight with them last time, so I don't really have a good impression of the Righteous Monastery."

"Oh? Why is that?"

"I had a Strayed One friend, but the monks wanted to stop my friend from leaving with his life. They were really despicable—much more despicable than you."

Chan Du shook his head lightly and said, "Benefactor, you're wrong. I'd do the same if I were in their shoes."

Li Huowang's expression froze. "Why? Aren't Strayed Ones human beings as well? Why kill them without any hesitation?"

"Amitabha. A Strayed One is a human being, but they have to be removed for the sake of the world, or they'd harm many people. Also, a Strayed One's body is a natural treasure. We can refine them into artifacts or weapons that we can either use or exchange for other goods that will allow us to save even more people. Benefactor Er, what do you think? Isn't that a kind deed?"

Li Huowang wordlessly stared at Chan Du before looking away and walking away.

Translator's Thoughts

Can't forget his accomplice Taishan Shi. Credits to 格子的乱七八糟on douyin!



Chapter 627 - Strike Tree Flowers

The sunset was so red that it was like a fire that had set the skies ablaze.

It was so red that it made Li Sui appear as if she were blushing.

She was sitting on horseback just behind her father, and she was examining her new body. She was in another woman's body, and it was a slightly older and uglier body than the body she usually wore.

The black cloth on her shoulder indicated that the deceased woman was a Dharma Sect follower. She was one of Li Huowang's ambushers.

Li Sui chose this body, as the body had a skirt that she could use to hide her true form, which was a skinless dog.

Li Sui could have just traveled while staying inside Li Huowang, but she had become afraid of staying inside her father for an extended period of time, especially after what had transpired last time. She didn't want her father to go through that procedure again, as she didn't want to hurt him.

The horse stopped just then, prompting Li Sui to peek out from her father's back.

There were many houses ahead of them.

"It's getting dark. Let's rest at this station. We can travel tomorrow to Yinling City!" [\[1\]](#)

Fo Yulu showed her identity plate to the station master and his subordinate, and they immediately snapped to attention. They made sure to give Fo Yulu the hospitality they deserved as members of the Surveillance Bureau.

The Surveillance Bureau was even more important than regular soldiers around here.

Night fell, and they brought out food for Fo Yulu and her group to eat. They even made vegetarian meals for the monks.

Li Sui was sitting on a bench with a pair of chopsticks in hand. She swept her gaze across the others to try and imitate how they were using two wooden sticks to grab food.

Li Sui had never really bothered attempting to learn how to use a chopstick, as she'd either use her tentacles to eat her food or simply use her mouth.

"Here, eat the egg. You don't need the chopsticks for it," Li Huowang said. He drank a mouthful of the lamb soup and tore off the black cloth on Li Sui's shoulder.

Li Sui nodded and took the bowl with eggs in it. Beneath the shocked gaze of the station master, Li Sui devoured the eggs with their shells. She devoured tens of eggs in one go as if she were a snake.

Li Sui disliked the eggs, as she thought they were tasteless. After filling up her stomach, she stood up and looked around curiously like a child, but nothing attracted her attention.

She walked around and approached the window.

Looking out the window, she saw the city next to the station. She also saw people walking down the streets, and she became curious about what they were doing.

The city was evidently lively with many people going about on their own business.

She looked back and saw her father talking to the bald woman. At the sight, Li Sui secretly made up her mind.

Since her father was going to sleep here, she decided to visit the city and return back before her father woke up.

Li Sui soon made her way into the city, and the city's lively atmosphere made her feel excited and happy. She loved the

excitement here.

“Is it going to be the New Year soon? I love the New Year.”

“The New Year celebrations have just ended, so this is just a regular festival,” a pedestrian chimed in.

“Festival? Festivals are fun too!” Li Sui exclaimed. She walked with the crowd and took in the scenery.

There were many people at night, as there were performances all over the place.

Li Sui saw people standing on high stilts while others were spitting fire out of their mouths.

Li Sui followed the crowd until everyone stopped right in front of the city walls. Li Sui looked around and saw that the people seemed to be waiting for something.

“What’s happening?” Li Sui asked.

“*Shhh...* they're about to strike the tree flowers. Be quiet.”

While Li Sui was wondering about what was about to happen, she saw an old man walking toward the edge of the city wall.

The old man was frowning and was wearing a straw hat with an overall made from lamb fur. He was holding a hot bucket filled with molten metal.

The old man scooped a small portion of the molten metal and threw it forcefully at the city walls. Drops of red and orange exploded upon impact, showering the sky with sparks.

The molten metal emitted a yellow and orange light as it splattered into the air. It looked like a canopy of flowers had appeared in the sky.

The old man hurled the molten metal nonstop, so the dazzling shower was nonstop. [2]

“Wow... It’s so pretty!” Li Sui exclaimed with her eyes glued to the beautiful scene, just like everyone else.

The beautiful flowers appeared again and again in the night sky, and Li Sui enjoyed it a lot.

She had never seen anything so pretty before.

When the performance was over, the people sighed and left the city wall.

“Striking Tree Flowers is pretty, but it’s a shame that they don’t have any music and performers to go along with it. Its true beauty will only appear by then. The fiery sparks lit up the dark skies~ The scent of molten steel~ The instruments going along with the beat~ The performers singing and aligning the chorus with the flowers~” a scholar lamented while shaking his head. Then, he sighed and walked past Li Sui.

Li Sui didn’t care what the scholar was talking about, as she only cared about one thing—learning it. She wanted to learn it to show it to her father and mother. Li Sui was sure that they had never seen something like that before.

“Can you tell me how to Strike Tree Flowers? I want to show it to my father!” Li Sui exclaimed, rushing at the old man to stop him from leaving.

However, the old man didn’t even look at her. “We don’t teach girls!”

The old man walked past Li Sui, but she stopped him again, asking, “Why? Why can’t you teach me?”

“Because you’re a girl! You—” the old man stopped upon seeing Li Sui’s face, which was finally illuminated by the faint moonlight.

“Ni’er? Ni’er?!” the old man exclaimed. His trembling hands covered in scars and boils grabbed Li Sui’s shoulders.

“Teach me. It was so pretty. My father will definitely like it.”

The old man cried, seemingly unable to hold back his tears.

The old man nodded vigorously, and his voice was trembling as he said, “Sure! I’ll teach you! I will teach you everything!”

“Really? That’s great! How do I learn it? Do I need to read books to learn it?” Li Sui asked.

“Come! Come here! Follow me!” the old man exclaimed,

pulling Li Sui to his house.

Li Sui soon arrived at the old man's house, which was made out of clay. The old man excitedly pushed the door open and shouted, “My wife! My dear wife! Look who’s back!”

An old woman inside the house was painstakingly trying to thread a needle under the weak flames of a small candle. Upon hearing the old man's words, she licked the needle and placed it in between her black-and-white hair. “Who is it?”

The old woman turned around and was stunned upon seeing Li Sui’s face. She even rubbed her eyes as if she couldn't believe what she was staring at.

Li Sui smiled and nodded. “I’m here to learn how to Strike Tree Flowers.”

The old woman smacked her knees and cried out loud before hugging Li Sui tightly. Her chest heaved strongly as she sobbed and cried, “ *Sob!* My Ni’er~ *Sob!* You must've had a hard life!”

Li Sui had no idea what she was talking about, but she found the old woman's actions to be quite similar to the Lu Family’s performance.

With that, Li Sui turned around and stared at the crying old man. “Do we have to do this to learn Strike Tree Flowers?”

1. A station in ancient times was a place where officials could exchange horses and rest for the night. Kinda like motels with a petrol station in modern times 🤔

2. Striking Tree Flowers is a performance where molten iron was flung against city walls to create a shower of sparks; a pseudo fireworks in a sense 🤔

Chapter 628 - Ni'Er

"Ni'er, come. Sit near the stove. Let's drink some sugar water and eat some dried persimmons. You loved eating sweet things when you were younger, so we made sure that sweets were always available for you."

"Maybe you want to eat meat instead? Didn't you like eating meat? Let me go get some for you; your mother will cook it for you."

The old man and old woman orbited Li Sui, frantically taking care of her. The smile on their lips never once disappeared as they offered anything they could offer.

"Wait, Ni'er, how did you manage to come back here? I heard that beast sold you—"

"We're having a festival here," the old man lightly kicked the old woman, interrupting her. "Don't even mention that beast today! We can just talk about it tomorrow."

Li Sui had no idea what the two were talking about, so she was starting to become impatient. "Didn't you say that you were going to teach me how to Strike Tree Flowers? I want to learn it."

"Of course! Come, I'll teach you now!" the old man said, nodding furiously. Then, he led Li Sui deeper into the house. He pulled open a curtain riddled with burnt holes and showed the back half of the house to Li Sui.

Li Sui was surprised to see that the back half of the house was a smithy. Clearly, the couple was only living in the front part of the house.

"Ni'er, only us blacksmiths can Strike Tree Flowers. Do you know why? It's because only we can have enough molten metal to do so."

The old man threw several charcoal biscuits into the forge, which was emitting a dim red color. Then, he took out the forge blower and used it to raise the temperature of the forge.

The charcoal gradually turned red beneath the wind, and the heat increased steadily. The old man turned to Li Sui while fanning the flames, saying, “Ni’er, we cannot charge less than two hundred coins to perform the Strike Tree Flower once. Molten metal is expensive. You must remember to charge at least two hundred coins for each performance.”

When the old man sensed that the temperature was right, he placed a crucible into the burning charcoal. A variety of metals was in the crucible, such as discarded horseshoes and rusted knives.

“We need to charge them for the metal we use, too. Of course, you can just grab some scrap metal instead of buying decent ones. That way, you’ll be able to save a lot of money.”

Li Sui’s gaze was fixed on the burning furnace, and she looked like she couldn’t hear the old man’s explanation.

The old man happily took off his lamb fur coat and smiled upon seeing that his daughter was seriously trying to learn how to Strike Tree Flowers. *She’s looking at me just like how she did in the past. Back then, she’d always sit there and watch me work throughout the entire day.*

However, the old woman noticed something amiss and approached the old man. “Husband, what’s going on? I feel like something is weird. I feel like Ni’er has become a different person.”

The old man glared at the old woman while fanning the flames. He glanced at Li Sui and whispered, “What do you mean ‘weird’? It’s already a miracle that she made it back alive in one piece. What else can we even wish for? Anyway, be quiet!”

The old man grabbed some good-quality charcoal and crushed it before tossing it into the crucible. “Ni’er, you need to remember to put some charcoal into the crucible. The metal will melt faster

that way.”

“I understand,” Li Sui said, sounding serious.

The metals inside the crucible turned red before melting altogether. Soon, Li Sui saw the same bucket of molten metal from the performance earlier.

“Move aside. I’ll pour the molten metal into that bucket. This isn’t a lot, but it’s surprisingly heavy.” The old man gritted his teeth and used two hands to carry the bucket of molten metal toward the city walls.

“Ni’er, you must toss it high up into the air, and you need to use a lot of force. Otherwise, the molten metal will fall on your head.”

The dazzling display of the Strike Tree Flowers appeared once more.

Li Sui’s eyes lit up in excitement at the sight. “It’s so pretty.”

The old man was energized upon seeing Li Sui’s excitement. He tossed goblet after goblet of molten metal toward the city wall.

Once the bucket no longer contained any molten metal, the panting old man walked up to Li Sui, asking, “Ni’er, how was it? Did you learn anything? I can do it again for you to see.”

“Yay! Do it again!” Li Sui happily nodded. She felt like she could watch it forever.

“All right! Then, let’s go back and melt another bucket of metal!” the old man exclaimed and led Li Sui back to his home.

However, he had just taken a few steps when a thug with a tattoo on his arm stood in their way. “Father-in-law, I saw you Striking Tree Flower from afar. It seems that you’ve profited quite a lot during this festival.”

The old man stood in front of Li Sui upon seeing the tattooed thug. Then, he raised the metal bucket up high and scolded, “You rascal! You already sold Ni’er once. Are you not satisfied yet?!”

The old man’s words made the tattooed thug realize the

identity of the woman standing next to the former.

The tattooed thug's eyes lit up when he saw Li Sui. "You actually managed to come back? Ni'er, did you come back here because you've been missing your husband?"

"Scram!" the old man roared and threw the metal bucket toward the tattooed thug. The latter retreated and avoided getting hit by it.

"How dare you attack me, old man!" The tattooed thug was furious. He rolled up his sleeves and started beating up the old man. "You better listen to what I'm about to say, old man! Ni'er is married to me, so she's no longer a part of your family! I can sell or pawn her off anytime I want! I have the right to do so, and it doesn't matter even if the guards have already captured me once!"

"Ni'er! Run! Run back to the house!" the old man shouted at Li Sui while defending himself against the tattooed thug.

However, Li Sui remained unmoving. She cast a puzzled gaze at the scene as she tried to understand what was going on.

Her father had never taught her anything like this, so she had no idea what was going on.

A dull thud echoed as the old man collapsed to the ground.

Li Sui saw that and stepped forward. "Why are you beating him? He taught me how to Strike Tree Flowers. Stop beating him."

The tattooed thug turned to Li Sui and replied, "Oh? So you've matured a bit after getting sold? Back then, you wouldn't even say anything while I was beating you up, but you've actually become daring enough to fight back?"

Smack!

The tattooed thug slapped Li Sui in the face. "What's up with that look? Do you want to get beaten up, too?"

Li Sui stared alternately between the injured old man and the tattooed thug. An unfamiliar feeling filled her chest; it was her first time experiencing this kind of emotion.

Smack!

The tattooed thug slapped her again and roared, “What are you doing standing here, you bitch! Go back home and wash my clothes! I want you to clean the house, too!”

Chapter 629 - Death

The two slaps made Li Sui's head jerk to the side, but she was in no pain because the head didn't belong to her.

Li Sui had no idea what was going on, but one thing was for sure. There was a brand-new emotion pervading her chest—anger.

Li Sui slowly raised her hand and mimicked the tattooed thug, giving him a slap.

The tattooed thug's lower jaw was dislocated, and his left cheek ballooned rapidly.

The tattooed thug held one of his cheeks in disbelief. Ni'er had not only gotten even stronger, but she could even fight back now!

"I'll kill you," Li Sui said, slapping him again. The tattooed thug's head started buzzing at the slap.

The next moment, he snapped back to reality and held his dislocated jaw in place before running away.

Li Sui didn't chase after the tattooed thug. She bent down and helped the old man up.

The old man ignored his wounds and looked at Li Sui. "Ni'er, are you alright? Is your face fine?"

Li Sui could now sense emotions, so she could sense the worry behind the old man's voice.

However, Li Sui was confused upon hearing the old man's words. "Who's Ni'er? My name is Li Sui, not Ni'er."

"Nonono! You are Ni'er! You are my daughter!" The old man shook his head furiously and pulled Li Sui toward his home.

Li Sui looked down at her clothes and realized what was happening. The old man had mistaken her for his deceased daughter.

Li Sui wanted to explain, but for some reason, she felt like she

wasn't supposed to explain anything.

Soon, they returned to the smithy part of the old man's house.

Li Sui sat near the furnace and stared at the old couple taking care of her.

She felt comfortable, but she didn't know what to do. This place was indeed familiar to her.

As she stared at the talking couple, a scene flashed by Li Sui's mind. It was a scene from the memories of the late Ni'er!

Li Sui felt like she had become Ni'er.

As the hustle and bustle of the streets disappeared, Li Sui knew that it was about time for her to leave, or Li Huowang would be worried sick.

However, Li Sui was feeling conflicted. Something rose in her heart, and it tried to stop her from leaving, but she knew that she had to go.

After all, she was Li Sui, not Ni'er.

Li Sui put down the bowl of sugar water and said, "I'm not Ni'er. Ni'er is dead. I'm sorry."

The elderly couple froze.

The old man frantically said, "Ni'er, don't say such inauspicious words! Did you hit your head on the way here? I'll go and find a doctor for you!"

Realizing that the old couple still wouldn't believe her, Li Sui lifted her skirt, revealing a writhing mass of black tentacles and Li Sui's skinless dog skull.

The next moment, "Ni'er" parted open like a flower, revealing Li Sui's true body.

Li Sui opened her mouth, revealing rows of sharp teeth to the couple. "I'm not Ni'er. I'm Li Sui. The real Ni'er is dead."

The elderly couple seemed frozen and was staring at Li Sui in disbelief.

"What's wrong?" Li Sui extended her tentacles to touch them.

To her surprise, the two fell backward to the ground.

Just then, Li Sui suddenly felt like she had made a mistake, and a torrent of fear inundated her heart. It was an emotion that she didn't want to feel, as she couldn't accept that she had made a mistake so easily.

Li Sui's expression changed into a helpless one as she stood frozen before the fallen elderly couple. She had seen many corpses before, but she had never been afraid of them like she was tonight.

The fear in her heart forced her to move. She smashed the door open and ran toward the station where Li Huowang was located.

Before she could travel far, she saw Li Huowang waiting for her at a corner.

Li Sui was crying tears of blood as she hugged Li Huowang tightly. Then, she opened up a slit in Li Huowang's abdomen and snuck inside. Afterward, she closed her eyes and refused to think or listen to anything.

Li Huowang said nothing. He pushed his hands slowly into his abdomen and patted Li Sui's head.

The emotionless Li Sui was no longer emotionless, and the fact made Li Huowang realize that she had truly matured.

"Come, let's go back," Li Huowang said. He turned around and walked toward the station.

After taking a few steps, he came to a halt and returned to the heart of the city. He had just remembered that he had something to do.

He followed a set of footprints and soon made his way to an old wooden house.

He kicked the wooden door open without even knocking.

"Fuck! Which bastard—" The tattooed thug exclaimed and slapped the table in fury. He was in the middle of applying medicine on himself, but Li Huowang's intrusion had interrupted him.

However, he dared not speak upon seeing Li Huowang's appearance.

Clanging noises echoed as Li Huowang revealed his bag of torture tools. "Choose one, or do you want me to choose for you? What's wrong? You don't like these? That's fine, too."

Li Huowang put away his bag of torture tools and pounced on the tattooed thug.

The tattooed thug let out an agonized scream as Li Huowang bit his ear and tore it apart.

"How dare you bully my daughter, you fucking scoundrel! Die!"

When Li Huowang opened his eyes in the station, it was already the next morning. He groped around and noticed that Li Sui had emerged from his abdomen.

He turned around and saw Li Sui sitting like a dog, staring at the sky outside.

"Are you alright?" Li Huowang asked as he stood up. He washed up at the copper basin in the corner.

However, Li Sui ignored him, which was quite rare. She sat still like a statue in the corner of the room.

After placing the towel on the rack, Li Huowang walked up to Li Sui and stared at her face.

He picked off a scab from his body and shook it in front of her. However, Li Sui didn't eat it.

Li Huowang then realized that last night's event had left a deep impression on Li Sui.

She was no longer the clueless Li Sui who had no idea that Li Huowang would die without a head.

Li Huowang sat on the chair and was about to say something to console her when he saw her looking at him.

"Father, don't die, okay?"

“Hm?” Li Huowang had no idea what she was talking about, but he still nodded after seeing her determined face.

“All right. I promise you that I won’t die.”

Li Sui hugged Li Huowang tightly using her two paws and tentacles.

“Father. I think I finally know what death means. I don’t want you to die, and I don’t want Mother and Second Mother to die, too. I will do my best to protect everyone!” Li Sui exclaimed, sounding emotional.

“Don’t worry. We’ve been through a lot. I’m not going to die so easily.”

Just then, Liu Zongyuan opened the door and entered.

However, he froze upon seeing that Li Huowang was wrapped in tentacles.

“What is it? Speak quickly.”

“It’s morning. Ji Xiang told us to move out now,” Liu Zongyuan said and immediately left the room.

Li Huowang’s expression turned solemn as he squeezed himself out of Li Sui’s embrace.

“Li Sui, follow me. We should be able to reach Yinling City by today!”

Li Sui hurried to follow him, but she also picked up the scab on the ground and ate it.

Her tentacles quivered and changed ever so slightly as she chewed on the scab.

Chapter 630 - Daoist

The sound of horse hooves faded gradually as Li Huowang looked up at the oppressive city wall.

It took them an entire day, but they finally reached Yinling City.

It wasn't Li Huowang's first visit to the city, as he had come here when Hong Da had vouched for him to enter the Surveillance Bureau.

The city was second only to Shangjing when it came to prosperity and liveliness.

It was evening, so the city gates were being closed.

Fo Yulu saw the closing gates and picked up the pace.

The horse raised up its forelegs and flung the door open. "Surveillance Bureau! Open up and let us through!"

Li Huowang pulled Li Sui closer to him as he followed closely behind Fo Yulu.

Li Sui had returned to wearing straws. No matter what Li Huowang said, Li Sui refused to wear another human skin again.

Meanwhile, their plan remained unchanged, which was to find Blind Chen at the City God Temple.

However, there was an informant near the city gates. They had just entered Yinling City when they were intercepted by the informant.

The informant was dressed like a Daoist apprentice. They leaped down from a nearby roof and landed on Fo Yulu's carriage.

The informant then whispered something into Fo Yulu's ears before turning around to leave.

Fo Yulu pulled the reins and moved in a direction that was completely opposite of the City God Temple.

“I thought we were going to look for Blind Chen? What's up with the change of plans?” Li Huowang chased after Fo Yulu and asked.

“That’s because Chief Zheng is looking for us. He has decided to personally oversee such an important matter. He’s also stronger than Blind Chen.”

“Chief Zheng? Who is that? Where will we be meeting him?”

“Inside the city. I thought you were a Surveillance Bureau member long ago? There's a secret entrance to the Surveillance Bureau in Yinling City. Don't tell me that you don't know where it is...”

Unfortunately, Li Huowang had no idea, as he dared not go there without the spindle made out of the Muddled One’s hair.

He didn’t want to expose his identity as a Strayed One, so he maintained a safe distance from anything related to the Surveillance Bureau.

“Where is it?” Li Huowang asked, sounding annoyed. He hated Fo Yulu's tendency to beat around the bush.

“At the Exquisite Pagoda.”

Li Huowang stared at the Exquisite Pagoda in the distance. He recalled that it was the specialty of Yinling City. The prostitutes with the blue porcelain tattoos could only be found here as well.

Li Huowang frowned, asking, “Is the Exquisite Pagoda part of the Surveillance Bureau’s businesses?”

He could still remember how they used the women of the Exquisite Pagoda. In order to prevent any information leak, they'd use deaf and mute prostitutes.

However, Li Huowang wasn't convinced that they'd find girls born deaf and mute.

“*Hoho*. Do you really think that the Surveillance Bureau will stoop so low? I really am surprised to know that you were once part of them.”

Li Huowang relaxed a bit until Fo Yulu explained, “The Exquisite Pagoda’s boss would pay tribute to the palace. He’s also a merchant who belongs to the royal family. So to be precise, the Exquisite Pagoda is the royal family’s business.”

“Fuck.”

Li Huowang looked at the Exquisite Pagoda with a complicated look on his face. He never thought that the human-eating pagoda belonged to Gao Zhijian!

Just then, Li Huowang ran past a bookshop. He jumped down and grabbed a brush from a scholar before writing down a letter.

After penning the letter, he chased after Fo Yulu and saw that she was dragging He Xinlai toward an inn next to the Exquisite Pagoda.

Li Huowang glanced at the girls inside the pagoda before chasing after Fo Yulu.

The mission was more important, but he still wrote a letter to Gao Zhijian. He wanted Gao Zhijian to deal with the Exquisite Pagoda.

The inn wasn’t large, but the security inside was tight. Li Huowang felt three sets of gazes looking at him the moment he entered the place.

They walked past the rooms and soon found an open door with a bronze mask that symbolized the Surveillance Bureau.

They walked down the steps, and Li Huowang noticed that the Surveillance Bureau here was also built underground just like Shangjing’s Surveillance Bureau.

“Is Chief Zheng better than me at interrogation? Who is he?” Li Huowang asked as they walked down the spiral corridor.

Fo Yulu didn’t say anything when He Xinlai spat coldly. He was still feisty, even though he had become a human stick.

“Palace dogs! Stop dreaming about trying to get information through me! I have the protection of God Yu’er, and we’d rather die

than concede to you!” He Xinlai exclaimed.

“Really? You’d rather die? Then why did that shortie run away? Wasn’t he from the Dharma Sect, too?”

The fearless He Xinlai scowled and resentfully said, “Taishan Shi is not loyal to God Yu’er! He will never go to where God Yu’er is after his death! He’ll go down to Hell and be boiled in a pot of burning oil for eternity!”

Fo Yulu extended her hands and placed several Buddhas the size of her finger into He Xinlai’s mouth.

“You’ll when you see him, and I think you’ll find him familiar,” Fo Yulu said.

“Really?” Li Huowang was confused. He combed through his memories and found nothing.

However, Li Huowang soon understood the meaning behind Fo Yulu’s words. It turned out that Chief Zheng was the Chief of Si Qi’s Surveillance Bureau, Zheng Boqiao.

It was the same Daoist who placed the lotus root on his head last time. Zheng Boqiao was sitting on a cushion as he faced the three statues in front of him with his eyes closed.

“Chief Zheng! We caught one of the grand witches of the Dharma Sect,” Fo Yulu said before doing a quick recount.

However, Zheng Boqiao didn’t even look at her. He remained seated, just like the statues depicting different deities around him.

Zheng Boqiao was patient, but Li Huowang was not. “What are you doing? Stop wasting time! The Dharma Sect of the Qi Kingdom has arrived in the Liang Kingdom! Do you want this place to end up like the Qi Kingdom?”

Zheng Boqiao opened his eyes and gulped. He took his horsetail whisk and turned around to stare at Li Huowang. “Daoist Li, we’re from the same discipline, so why can’t you hold in the Six Angers? Your cultivation is lacking.”

Li Huowang didn’t respond, but Zheng Boqiao was not angry at

all. He turned to the Abbot of the Righteous Monastery without sparing He Xinlai even a single glance.

"Abbot, it must've been a difficult journey."

"Amitabha. We had a pleasant journey."

"I'm sure that you need some time to adjust to the Liang Kingdom. I mean, this is your first time here, right? If you need anything, just tell us. The Surveillance Bureau will do its best to accommodate you. Anyway, I know an unoccupied place with decent Feng Shui. Why not rebuild your temple there for now?"

Chapter 631 - Answer

The Abbot quickly put his palms together. Chief Zheng was courteous to him, so he returned the gesture in kind, saying, "Amitabha. Benefactor, you are too kind, but I fear that I won't be able to accept such a grand gift."

"Don't worry, it's just a tiny gift. There's nobody living on that land to begin with." Zheng Boqiao was abnormally kind to the Abbot.

Li Huowang instantly realized what Zheng Boqiao was doing upon seeing his courteous demeanor. The Liang Kingdom's Surveillance Bureau was trying to recruit the sects of the Qi Kingdom.

It was a good plan, and it would increase the number of their allies against the Liang Kingdom's Dharma Sect.

"It's fine. We shall leave it at that. Since this is your first time here, I've booked a table at the Rainflower restaurant. I heard that their vegetarian dishes there are good, so I hope you will join me."

"Amitabha. You are too kind. I've already eaten today."

"Abbot, the food has been prepared. Don't you think it would be a shame to waste the food?"

Zheng Boqiao was about to pull Chan Du away when Li Huowang stood in their way.

"Chief Zheng, don't you think you've forgotten something here?" Li Huowang asked, sounding frustrated. "You haven't forgotten to interrogate this witch of the Dharma Sect because you can't wait to recruit a key figure of one of the Qi Kingdom's sects, right?"

In fact, Li Huowang had never seen Zheng Boqiao being so talkative.

“Daoist Li, there’s no reason to be hasty. How long can a meal take?”

“Can you do it or not? If you can't do it, then I will do it myself.”

Sensing Li Huowang's anger, Chan Du intervened. “Daoist, we can eat anytime. This matter is indeed more important.”

Seeing that even Chan Du thought that the interrogation was more important than a meal, Zheng Boqiao sighed and brandished his horsetail whisk before walking toward the human “stick” on the ground.

“Daoist Li, the Dharma Sect has long been a headache to us, and we know very well that we can't be too hasty when it comes to matters involving them. Do you really think that a single grand witch will give us enough information to destroy the entire Dharma Sect?”

Li Huowang understood that it wouldn't be that easy, but he was still angry that Zheng Boqiao had actually decided to postpone the issue.

Eventually, Li Huowang took a step back upon seeing that Zheng Boqiao had changed his mind.

Fo Yulu retrieved the golden Buddhas from He Xinlai's mouth. Before anyone could react, He Xinlai spat his saliva and blood at Zheng Boqiao.

Rather than avoiding it, Zheng Boqiao snatched the saliva out of midair and shoved it into his mouth.

Li Huowang frowned at the sight.

However, it wasn't over yet. Zheng Boqiao tore off some of He Xinlai's hair before consuming it with some white fibers that he had plucked from his horsetail whisk.

“What are you doing?” Li Huowang asked, repulsed by Zheng Boqiao's actions.

“I'm refining a pill.”

Zheng Boqiao prayed to the three clay deities in front of him before grabbing a fistful of ashes from the incense burner and eating it.

“Refining pills?”

Li Huowang knew how to refine pills. He had learned it from Dan Yangzi, but he had never seen such a method of refining pills.

“Using external objects to refine pills results in External Pills, and it's not the best method to refine pills. I'm using my body to refine pills. That way, I can turn anything into medicine, as every single refinement will result in Internal Pills. It's a superior method compared to using external objects to refine pills," Zheng Boqiao explained as he walked up to Li Huowang.

Before Li Huowang could react, Zheng Boqiao swept his horsetail whisk around Li Huowang before chanting something in a low voice.

When Li Huowang felt the air around him moving around, Zheng Boqiao made several hand seals and placed his face near Li Huowang. Then, he took in a deep breath, sucking in something invisible until his face turned purple, with veins bulging all over his forehead.

“What are you doing?”

Zheng Boqiao opened his mouth slightly and whispered in the lowest voice possible. “You are a Strayed One. What do you think I'm doing here?”

Zheng Boqiao then sat down with his legs crossed. A wisp of white smoke floated out of his head as he sat still like a statue.

Li Huowang finally realized what Zheng Boqiao was doing. He was actually refining pills! *I wonder what sect he's from. Using one's own body to refine pills is just too weird.*

An hour later, Zheng Boqiao opened his mouth and spat out the pill. The pill was a ball of pulsating meat covered in stomach acid.

Zheng Boqiao stood up with the pill in hand and started

walking toward He Xinlai.

He Xinlai panicked at the sight and hurriedly bit down. Unfortunately, Li Huowang had removed all of his teeth to ensure that he wouldn't be able to commit suicide by biting his tongue.

He Xinlai tried his best to resist, but it was to no avail.

Once the pill had made its way into He Xinlai's stomach, his eyes rolled up, and he started convulsing.

Li Huowang was eager to see what was going to happen next, but He Xinlai's figure abruptly became stiff. He was dead.

Before anyone could say anything, Zheng Boqiao took out a small fan and used one hand to make some seals while chanting.

"The head as Taiyi, and the feet as the Heavenly Pillar! The organs form the armor that protects the Heavenly Door! Summon the big dipper and roar! All souls shall follow the orders!"

He Xinlai's brain shrunk in an instant, and the meat pill that was fed to him forcefully suddenly jumped out of He Xinlai's shrunken mouth.

Zheng Boqiao grabbed it in midair and examined it.

The meat pill had gotten larger.

Zheng Boqiao swallowed the pill and closed his eyes as if he was trying to sense something.

Realizing that Zheng Boqiao was indeed a man of multiple talents, Li Huowang stopped panicking and waited patiently for the outcome.

Ten minutes later, Zheng Boqiao opened his eyes.

Li Huowang asked him, "How is it?"

"He's not the leader of the Dharma Sect. The leader is not going to be captured so easily. Still, there's some useful information hidden in his brain. He knows some of the secret bases of the Dharma Sect here in the Liang Kingdom. Moreover, it seems that they are biding their time and hiding, which means they have no intention of fighting us head-on."

“What about Taishan Shi? Anything about him?” Li Huowang asked.

Li Huowang could still remember Chan Du's words about Taishan Shi was the most dangerous among those who had inadvertently ended up in the Liang Kingdom.

“Taishan Shi... Hmm... Let me think.” Zheng Boqiao paced around. Soon, he stopped and said, “He doesn’t know anything. Taishan Shi was the one who found him, and Taishan Shi is a very careful and meticulous man. He never exposes any information about himself unless it's necessary. *Hmm...* A lone Taishan Shi shouldn’t be that dangerous. I think it’s more important to know how the Dharma Sect ended up becoming an ally of that old Lama from Qing Qiu. I think that matter requires our attention more than this issue.”

Translator's Thoughts

Checking my fanart stash and found out that I haven't introduced you guys to Fo Yulu yet! So here she is! Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin!



Chapter 632 - Antrabhara Temple

Qing Qiu's Lama?!

Li Huowang could still remember the black Lama with three heads and six arms, and he could still remember how each of the black Lama's heads represented a unique death.

"Are you saying that the Lama from Qing Qiu is working with the Dharma Sect?" Li Huowang asked, his expression becoming serious upon realizing the gravity of the situation.

"If God Yu'er's Heavenly Dao was darkness while the black-skinned[1] Lama worshiped death. There's a possibility that the Lama wanted to use the Natural Disaster caused by God Yu'er to bring everyone to death."

It made sense. Although the Dharma Sect was considered an evil sect by both the royal family and the Surveillance Bureau, there would always be people willing to work with such a ruthless sect. They were living in a crazy world, after all.

"That might not be the case. Many masters from the Antrabhara[2] Temple have decided to join the Surveillance Bureau of Qing Qiu."

This was Li Huowang's first time hearing of the Antrabhara Temple, and it was apparently the sect where the Lamas had come from.

"Antrabhara Temple... " Li Huowang recalled the half-man and half-sheep people being laid orderly on Qing Qiu's lush grass meadows.

A sect worshiping death meant nothing but bad news to Li Huowang.

“Could it be that the Antrabhara Temple has complete control over the Surveillance Bureau of Qing Qiu? Doesn’t that mean that the entire Qing Qiu is under the control of the Dharma Sect?” Li Huowang said unconsciously.

Fo Yulu trembled at the idea that Li Huowang had brought up. If it was true, the entire Liang Kingdom was in danger.

Attacks from the inside and the outside at the same time were incredibly dangerous and difficult to handle.

Zheng Boqiao swung his horsetail whisk, creating a crackling noise. “That’s not the case. The reason Xuan Pin was away for so long was that he was trying to convince the Surveillance Bureau to unite and work together. If there really were a problem with the Surveillance Bureau in Qing Qiu, he would have discovered it at that time.”

“Xuan Pin...” Li Huowang could still remember how Xuan Pin had left the city urgently at the time when Li Huowang wanted his help to deal with the Sitting Oblivion Dao before.

It was only when Shai Zi had taken control over the Dragon Vein that Xuan Pin came back. He had been wondering what business was more urgent than saving the city, but it turned out that Xuan Pin's task at the time was truly more important.

“Hm...” Zheng Boqiao muttered and stared at Li Huowang.

“Daoist Li, there’s no need for you to worry,” Zheng Boqiao said, “The Surveillance Bureau has sent someone to go and investigate this matter. You're right. Things are going to become dangerous if the Dharma Sect from the Qi Kingdom manages to make contact with the Dharma Sect from the Liang Kingdom. Through the pill that I’ve extracted from He Xinlai’s brain, I learned the location of some of their big bases. We might be able to find high-ranking officials of the Dharma Sect in those places. If you're free, how about you volunteer to raid those places and go see the results for yourselves?”

Li Huowang's face stiffened, and he proceeded to reevaluate Zheng Boqiao. It was true that he had come here to help the Surveillance Bureau eradicate the Dharma Sect and obtain some information as well, but now, he had a feeling that Zheng Boqiao was trying to distract him. Was there something wrong with the Antrabhara Temple?

“Chief Zheng, you know that I’m related to the Emperor. He has ordered me to go around the Liang Kingdom to observe the situation. And I’m sure you know that hiding something from him is treason.”

“Hehe, Daoist Li, that’s not true. This is a matter relating to the Surveillance Bureau. I fear that the Emperor doesn’t have any right to interfere in this.”

“The Emperor cannot do anything, but it doesn't mean that he has to remain ignorant,” Li Huowang said. He became even more suspicious of Zheng Boqiao's attempt to change the subject.

Zheng Boqiao sighed, and he looked as if he had decided to relent as he said, “Fine. Once the informants come back from Qing Qiu, we should be able to get some information about the Antrabhara Temple. We will then submit a report to the Emperor. What do you think? Will he help stop the invasion of the Dharma Sect by then?”

Looking at the people around him, Li Huowang decided not to pressure them any longer. Every single one of them was living in the Liang Kingdom, so the Dharma Sect was a problem that they had to resolve together.

“How can you say that, Chief Zheng? I live in the Liang Kingdom as well, and I am a member of the Surveillance Bureau. I will never refuse when it comes to eradicating the Dharma Sect.”

“ *Hehehe*, I guess I made a mistake. Anyway, let’s not waste more time. I will write down their exact location, and let's work together to make sure that they won't be able to run away.”

Zheng Boqiao approached the incense burner and grabbed another fistful of ashes. He used it to quickly write something on the ground. Soon, several addresses written appeared on the ground. Most of them were villages at the borders of the Liang Kingdom. It seemed that the Dharma Sect was operating just like the White Lotus Sect. They'd disguise themselves as regular people and hide in the border towns to avoid attracting any attention.

After writing the addresses, Zheng Boqiao swung his horsetail whisk toward the addresses. The ashes converged and transformed into a small pile of ashes on his palm.

Zheng Boqiao took the pile of ashes and handed it over to Li Huowang.

"I am versed in refining pills. Daoist Li, stay here for a bit. Let me give you some pills that will heal your wounds."

Li Huowang grabbed the pile of ashes and stashed it in his pocket before turning around to leave.

"No need. I don't like pills," he said

He wanted to do things by himself alone, and he did not want to team up with the Surveillance Bureau for this mission.

After all, there was a chance that they had an ulterior motive.

"The Bureau will send people to locate them. If you run into each other, just reveal your name to them, and they will show you the way!" Zheng Boqiao shouted at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang didn't respond and simply left with Li Sui.

Once Li Sui and Li Huowang were no longer in sight, Zheng Boqiao turned to Fo Yulu and said, "He doesn't have the same mission as us. We can recruit him, but be careful whenever you interact with him."

Fo Yulu nodded. "I understand. He is related to the royal family, and he doesn't belong to the Surveillance Bureau at all."

Zheng Boqiao shook his head and said, "No. I'm afraid that he's not affiliated with His Majesty."

They were discussing secrets here, but Zheng Boqiao had no intention of letting the Abbot out of the loop.

Fo Yulu was slightly taken aback. “He’s not affiliated with His Majesty? Then, who is he working with? Is he a spy from the Dharma Sect?”

“Calm down. There’s no need to talk about him for now. We still have more important matters to handle. Of course, it’s always good to be prudent. The next time you have to work with him, you must notify me as soon as possible.”

“I understand.”

With that, Zheng Boqiao bowed to the Abbot with a smile, saying, “Master Chan Du, these affairs have been settled, so let us proceed to have our meals.”

“Amitabha. Thank you for the meal, benefactor,” Chan Du said. He then put his palms together and bowed.

1. Black-skinned here doesn’t refer to the pigment but instead how the skin turns dark after a person dies and rots/mummified 🤝

2. In Buddhism, there is a period of 49 days before someone gets reincarnated after death. Think of it as a temporary Limbo 🤝

Chapter 633 - Hospital

Li Huowang was inside a clean ward with white walls. There was a cup of water in his hands, and he showed it to Wu Cheng. Then, he opened his other hand, revealing several yellow and green pills.

Moments later, he hurled the pills into his mouth and swallowed them with some water.

However, it wasn't over just yet. Li Huowang opened his mouth to reveal that he had swallowed every single pill.

With the checkup done, Wu Cheng was about to exit the room when Li Huowang stopped him, asking, "Aren't those pills expensive? I don't mind eating pills like these if it gives both you and Yi Donglai assurance, but I'm not an idiot who's going to take every expensive pill that you prescribe."

"*Hehe.*" Wu Cheng chuckled.

"I'm not kidding. I know that something like that happens frequently in private hospitals."

"If you're free, you should go outside and walk around. Walk under the sun and make some new friends while you're at it. You might get discharged sooner than you think that way."

Wu Cheng took out a key from his white robe and unlocked Li Huowang's leg cuffs.

Li Huowang smiled slightly at the sight, knowing that he was one step closer to getting discharged.

Soon, Li Huowang was left alone, and he started pacing around his room.

As much as he didn't want to listen to Wu Cheng, the latter was right. There was nothing in his room except for a bed.

Li Huowang wouldn't be able to do anything here other than

sleeping or daydreaming. He walked out of his room and found that the corridor was full of activity.

Even though most of the patients didn't want to get close to Li Huowang due to his reputation, their reaction toward him had improved significantly compared to last time.

The patients with regular intervention sessions with Li Huowang could greet him now.

"Bro, come here and watch TV with us in the hall. Titanic is playing, and a nude scene is coming up!" the man suffering from manic syndrome shouted at Li Huowang.

"I'm fine. I'm going out to get some sun," Li Huowang replied. Although he had refused, he could understand why the man suffering from manic syndrome was so excited; the latter's condition had stabilized, after all, and he'd soon get discharged.

In a mental hospital, the patients were only looking forward to two things—family visits and getting discharged.

Li Huowang made his way to the small garden behind the hospital. He sat on the ground and closed his eyes, enjoying the warm sunlight. He emptied his mind and refused to think about anything related to the hospital or mental disorders. Right now, Li Huowang wanted nothing more than to enjoy this brief respite.

At the time, he felt like the entire world was against him. He encountered problems and difficulties one after another. Fortunately, he had persevered, which brought him to where he was today.

Just then, a commotion erupted nearby, interrupting Li Huowang's moment of peace. He opened his eyes and saw several patients trying to grab something.

Li Huowang walked over and saw a skinny girl and a young man; they were trying to snatch the apple of another patient.

"This is mine! This is mine!" The patient tried his best to defend his apple.

Li Huowang was familiar with him. Everyone described him as the dullest patient in the hospital.

The young man grabbed the apple with both hands and pulled hard. Once the apple was in his hands, he turned around and ran into the building with the skinny girl next to him.

However, Li Huowang appeared in their way and said, "Give me that apple."

The youth was shocked upon seeing Li Huowang's cuffed hands, and then he was scared upon realizing that Li Huowang had murdered someone prior to getting admitted to this hospital.

"Okay, okay, it's yours!" the young man exclaimed, throwing the apple to Li Huowang before abandoning running away, abandoning his partner.

Li Huowang snatched the apple out of midair and read the name written on the paper pasted to it.

It turned out that the dullest patient in the hospital was named Gao Jingyun.

Li Huowang walked up to the crying Gao Jingyun and gave him the apple.

"Thank... Thank you!" Gao Jingyun exclaimed. He was naive and innocent, and he immediately stopped crying upon receiving his apple.

He looked at Li Huowang with gratitude in his eyes.

Li Huowang saw that and kindly advised, "The next time you get your own food, spit on it so others won't take it away from you. Do you understand?"

Gao Jingyun nodded.

Li Huowang turned around and entered the building. He coincidentally stumbled upon the depressed Zhao Ting. She had seen everything that had transpired.

"Thank you for taking pity on him. The others have been bullying him because of his condition."

“I’m not pitying him at all, but I think he’s going to get locked up in this private hospital for life. His parents must be rich, so they should be able to afford that. I did what I did because I hate bullies.”

“His family is rich? Then, how come they haven’t been visiting him?” Zhao Ting asked. She followed closely behind Li Huowang and asked more questions.

Everyone was afraid of Li Huowang, but Zhao Ting knew that Li Huowang was kind.

“Hahaha, it’s all because people like him are no better than those with mental illnesses. Those from rich families will be shoved into private hospitals, while those with little money are thrown into government hospitals. If their family thinks of them as their family members, then they’ll probably just chain them up in their own house. Otherwise, they’d throw them onto the streets. They would then have to live by rummaging around trash cans.”

Zhao Ting seemed to have recalled a painful memory upon hearing Li Huowang’s words. Her steps came to an abrupt halt, and her face twisted in agony.

Li Huowang didn’t notice that and continued walking down the corridor. He didn’t go to the hall, as it was most likely packed with people. He walked around, inspecting the many different facilities of the hospital to memorize the hospital’s layout.

Unfortunately, the regular wards looked the same as the other wards.

The kitchen and offices were off-limits to Li Huowang, but he walked around until he found the intensive care area.

The patients with severe illnesses and episodes were kept in isolation here.

The place was quite big, but the corridor was quiet.

Li Huowang also felt like he was entering a prison rather than a hospital floor.

Li Huowang walked up to a heavy-looking door and peeked into the room through the window.

He looked around and saw that it was empty.

Li Huowang looked into the second room and saw nothing too.

What's going on? Is the hospital only accepting those with mild issues? I guess that's an easy way to earn money.

Li Huowang was about to leave when he heard a faint knocking on the door at the end of the corridor.

Hm? There's actually someone here? Li Huowang stared at the room and approached it.

It was eerie; the knocking intensified the closer he got to the door.

Bam! Bam! Bam!

Chapter 634 - Qian Fu

Bam! Bam! Bam!

Li Huowang peeked into the room through the window reinforced with wire and saw where the noises were coming from.

The noises were coming from a patient in a straitjacket. The patient looked disheveled and had a chin covered with an untrimmed beard. The knocking noises were coming from the patient's head as he slammed it forcefully into the bed.

The noises had gotten significantly louder. However, the thin and flexible bed frame couldn't hurt him at all.

“W-what illness is he suffering from?” Li Huowang muttered with a frown while staring at the man with curious eyes.

The man was roughly one and a half meters tall. His face was twitching and was constantly shifting between crying and laughing.

It was Li Huowang's first time seeing such a patient.

He should be on some medicine, so the fact that he's here means that there's something going on behind the scenes. Is this a side effect of one of his medications?

Just then, the man inside the room came to a halt and stared right into Li Huowang. “

“It's you! Hahaha! You're here!”

Li Huowang decided to play along and nodded. “Yes. I'm here.”

“Good! I've been waiting for you! I never thought that you'd come and see me first!”

“ Oh? Have we met before?”

“Hahaha! Yes, and we know each other, too!”

After exchanging a few words with the bizarre patient, Li Huowang got bored and decided to leave.

“Li Huowang, you have to be careful! They're looking for you,

and there are too many of them! You can't defeat them by yourself! You need help!"

Li Huowang's heart skipped a beat, and he immediately turned around.

He peered into the room through the same window and saw that the bed was empty.

Before Li Huowang could realize what was going on, the patient's face shot up from underneath and was pressed against the window.

Unnervingly, the patient was staring at him without blinking.

Li Huowang was startled, but it only took him a moment to calm down. "You've seen me in the news, haven't you? Is that how you knew my name?"

Li Huowang had almost forgotten that he was pretty popular outside.

"No! I knew you way before that incident. I was one of them, and they told me to capture you and the others! But I didn't want to do it! Everything is over once all of you are captured!"

"What do you mean by 'them'?"

"Them! The family of darkness that was driven away a long time ago! They're working for the aliens from Leo[\[1\]](#)!"

Li Huowang almost burst out laughing at the reply. Sometimes, those with mental illnesses were incredibly funny. "I think you watched too much anime outside. Also, your story earlier is contradictory to what you're saying right now."

"I'm imprisoned, but my comrades were dispatched to find you! They're looking for you! They want to kill you! We don't have enough time! You need to let me out. We must work together so we can survive!"

Li Huowang smiled and shook his head. He was about to say something when a patrolling nurse saw them and exclaimed, "Hey! Which room are you from? This is the intensive care area! You're

not allowed here! Get out of here!”

“Bye. Just look for me once you've taken your medicine,” said Li Huowang. He waved his hand and left the intensive care area.

Li Huowang strolled around the hospital until he eventually made his way to the cafeteria for lunch.

Li Huowang took a tray and lined up for food.

The food here was much better compared to Li Huowang's previous hospital. He got himself some stir-fried pork liver with celery as well as a serving of stir-fried water spinach.

Li Huowang walked over to an empty seat and sat down to eat.

The strange incident earlier was already in the back of his eyes. After all, no one in their right mind would believe a mentally ill patient.

Moreover, he was just curious about the patient's condition and his illness.

Their conversation told Li Huowang that the man wasn't a psycho, as his words were somehow logical.

Just then, Wei Shili, the man suffering from manic syndrome, walked up to Li Huowang upon seeing that the latter was eating lunch by himself.

Wei Shili had decided to befriend Li Huowang after spending some time with the latter and becoming convinced that Li Huowang wasn't a psychopath.

At first, Wei Shili was skeptical when Li Huowang said that he wasn't ill, but he was starting to believe Li Huowang's claims.

Li Huowang looked normal, and his behavior was normal as well.

Moreover, he was kind and often shared his snacks with the other patients.

“I've passed my examinations! I'll be discharged in two days the soonest if my family comes by then,” Wei Shili said excitedly as he sat next to Li Huowang.

"I know. This isn't the first time you told me that. No need to keep telling me about it."

"Hehe, that's because I'm just too happy. I've been here for almost a year, and I can finally get out," Wei Shili said as he ate mouthful after mouthful of his rice mixed with a serving of chicken stew and mashed potato.

"Has it been one year? It's been a long time, then. Wait, since you've been here for such a long time, do you know anything about the man stuck in the intensive care area?" Li Huowang asked.

Wei Shili was confused. "Intensive care area? Who is it?"

"The man with the untrimmed beard."

"Oh, him? His name is Qian Fu. I think he's been here for a very long time. He was already here when I was just admitted."

"What illness does he have? And how come he's imprisoned there?"

"Illness?" Wei Shili put his spoon down and replied, "I think he has schizophrenia."

"Really? I don't think so. I've never seen a schizophrenic patient talk nonsense like he did."

Just then, the woman diagnosed with anxiety walked up to them and asked, "What are you guys gossiping about?"

"Nothing much. Just talking about Qian Fu's illness. Doesn't he have schizophrenia?"

"Ah, It's not schizophrenia. Don't talk about it when you don't know the answer. Actually, the doctors have yet to diagnose him of any illnesses."

"Wait, even the doctors don't know?" Li Huowang was shocked. This was unprecedented for him.

"Yes. The doctors aren't omniscient. They won't be able to diagnose someone with an illness if they have never heard of that illness before. Anyway, Qian Fu is really pitiful. The doctors can't prescribe medications for him to take, as they don't know his

illness, so they have no choice but to lock him up and wait for him to stabilize."

The curious voice in Li Huowang's mind went silent upon hearing the woman's explanation. He went on with his meal as if nothing had happened.

Li Huowang thought that the incident was over and decided to forget all about it.

Several days later, however, a familiar visitor walked up to Li Huowang while he was busy munching on his bamboo shoots during lunch.

The visitor was none other than Qian Fu!

Their gazes met in midair, and Qian Fu immediately walked over to Li Huowang instead of taking some dishes to eat before anything else.

Li Huowang thought that Qian Fu was going to kick up a fuss, but he was wrong.

Qian Fu had decided to apologize to him instead, saying, "I'm sorry. I think I spoke a bunch of nonsense to you the last time we met. It must've been disturbing for you. I'm sorry."

Li Huowang was presented by a calm and polite Qian Fu, which greatly contrasted with the crazed Qian Fu, whom he had met for the first time several days ago.

1. The constellation 📖

Chapter 635 - Beard

Li Huowang didn't immediately reply. He proceeded to take a mouthful of his pumpkin congee and a bite of his bamboo shoots before replying, "Split personality disorder?"

"I guess you can say that, but it's not exactly like that. Anyway, I have another illness on top of that, but it's on my other personality."

Split personality, but one of them is normal while the other has a different mental illness on top of everything? Li Huowang found it strange. *He probably has advanced-stage paranoia, too.*

"I'm here to apologize; that's it. I'm just glad that my other half didn't cause you any trouble. Please continue with your meal. I'm leaving now," Qian Fu said and bowed before leaving.

He's crazy. I shouldn't have gone to the intensive care area. Li Huowang shook his head and continued with his meal.

Thirty minutes after his lunch, Li Huowang took his medicine and proceeded to watch the news in the common area.

After a while, Li Huowang returned to his bed to sleep.

Regardless of their conditions, the patients still had a healthy daily schedule. No one was allowed to stay up late at night, and no one was allowed to eat junk food. The living conditions were noticeably better compared to outside.

Even so, Li Huowang still couldn't get used to sleeping so early. There was no entertainment in his room, and he could only sprawl out on his bed with his eyes wide open.

When he finally felt drowsy and closed his eyes to sleep, he felt something strange.

He tensed up as he turned to look at the window.

Qian Fu was standing outside the door; his face was pressed

firmly against the window as he stared deeply at Li Huowang.

It was a terrifying scene that would scare just about anyone, but Li Huowang felt nothing but frustration.

Li Huowang threw his blanket away and walked up to the window. He stared at Qian Fu's face and warned, "I don't want any trouble. Stop going up to me, or I won't show you any mercy next time."

Li Huowang didn't expect that his leisurely stroll would give him such a massive headache.

However, Qian Fu was not intimidated at all. He grinned and chuckled. "Little Li, let's work together. You can't defeat them on your own. You really need help. We need to help each other to survive. If we lose, it's all over!"

"Defeat them'? Who? The aliens from Leo?"

"Yes!" Qian Fu nodded.

"Stop pretending like you don't know me. I'm sure you know, but I'm even crazier than you. You've seen the news, so you should know what I'm capable of doing!"

Li Huowang closed the curtains and turned to the camera in the corner of the room.

"Are you guys a bunch of useless leeches?! You're getting paid to do your job, so why won't you guys do your job properly? A patient has escaped his room in the middle of the night! Why does it seem like you guys don't care about it at all?!"

With that, Li Huowang sprawled out on the bed and tried to sleep, but he couldn't sleep at all.

Thankfully, there weren't any more movements outside of the room.

Li Huowang tossed and turned before finally falling asleep.

Li Huowang found himself in school, and he was sitting right behind Yang Na.

There was a ribbon on Yang Na's nape.

Li Huowang tried to untie the ribbon with his pen when a dull thud entered his ears.

Bam!

The giant wooden hammer struck the steamed glutinous rice. An old man was standing next to the man pounding the rice.

The old man would use his wet hands to turn over the glutinous rice after each pounding.

Whenever the pounder was exhausted, someone else would take over the job.

The nearby crowd was in awe of the sight.

Everyone in the village was laughing as they stood around the mortar.

They watched as the hammer went up and down, hitting the white glutinous rice in the mortar.

Li Huowang was sitting on a tree branch as he stared at them with a frown.

Is it them? Are they really from the Dharma Sect? Li Huowang carefully observed.

The pounding went on for quite a while until the steaming rice became a white paste.

A man grabbed some of the steaming white paste and shaped it into a ball before throwing it into a bowl filled with black sesame and sugar.

He rolled it around, and a piece of mochi was complete!

For some reason, the sight reminded Li Huowang of the guiding drug. The guiding drug looked just like that mochi.

Dan Yangzi had crushed her into a paste by pounding her with a large pestle.

Everything seemed normal, but Li Huowang had to be meticulous. He was already here, so he had to make sure that there wouldn't be any mistakes.

Li Huowang jumped down. His tentacles burst out of him,

making him look like a giant spider falling from the sky.

He projected his image into the ground and gripped his sword tightly as he looked around. Then, he slowly and carefully made his way to the village.

The conversations of the villagers became clearer and clearer as he got closer and closer to the village.

Apparently, one of the villagers gave birth to twins—one boy and one girl. To celebrate, they decided to share their precious food and white sugar with everyone else.

The villagers rarely had white sugar, so the children were thrilled to know that they'd get to eat white sugar! Every single villager was all smiles as they consumed the mochi.

Li Huowang walked into the village and swept his gaze across their dirty and ordinary faces.

The majority of the villagers had shown up here to eat some mochi, so there were very few people in the other parts of the village.

Thus, Li Huowang didn't have any difficulties searching the entire village. He combed through the village but found nothing suspicious.

Li Huowang used his experience at Cowheart Village and found the village's ancestral hall, but he found zero hidden rooms.

Maybe the information in He Xinlai's head is fake? Maybe the Dharma Sect has already left this place?

While Li Huowang was busy engrossed in his own thoughts, a loud commotion erupted outside.

Li Huowang hopped onto a nearby roof and made a beeline for the village entrance.

A large-framed man swinging a monk spade was at the village entrance. Three heads would fall to the ground with every swing of his monk spade.

Soon, the ground was dyed crimson with the villagers' blood

blood.

The large-framed man was about to kill some children when Li Huowang appeared and blocked the large-framed man's attack.

Clang!

Sparks flew, and the two of them were blasted away by the impact.

Li Huowang was shocked by the large-framed man's brute strength, while the latter was shocked upon seeing a dent in his monk spade.

An identity plate from the Surveillance Bureau was hanging from the man's waist, so Li Huowang didn't unsheathe his spine sword.

“Are you from the Surveillance Bureau?” asked Li Huowang.

“*Hm?*” The large-framed man's eyes widened in shock. He sized up Li Huowang and thrust his monk spade into the ground upon realizing the latter's identity. “*Ah!* What a mistake! To think that we couldn't identify each other as soon as we met! You're Sir Er, aren't you?! I'm sorry for the confusion!”

“Why are you killing these people for no reason? You weren't even going to spare the children. What if they're innocent?” Li Huowang asked with a frown.

“It's going to be fine even if I'm wrong, but I'm right this time. I mean, just look at that.”

Li Huowang turned around and saw the surviving villagers glaring at them.

“Kill the palace dogs!”

They whipped out a black cloth from inside their clothes and tied it around their shoulders.

Translator's Thoughts

This is a monk spade



Chapter 636 - Dharma Sect

A single swing was enough to cut the man in front of Li Huowang in half.

Li Huowang couldn't even catch his breath as more and more Dharma Sect members charged at him.

They were regular villagers just a few moments ago, but they had become warriors unafraid of death in the blink of an eye,

The large-framed bearded man danced with his monk spade and charged into the fray.

Li Sui used the bronze coin sword and sliced a man's head in half while Li Huowang was busy staring at the chaos.

Li Huowang had fought with the Dharma Sect numerous times, so he knew that he couldn't waste any time on the cannon fodder.

He had to handle with their leader, or the cannon fodder would never stop attacking them.

Li Huowang reckoned that the leader was among the cannon fodder.

Six tentacles struck the ground, propelling Li Huowang high up into the air.

With a bird's eye view of the entire village, Li Huowang looked around for the leader. His pupils even split in half, allowing him to search more efficiently.

Li Huowang jumped a few more times until his pupils converged and focused on a mountain behind the village.

His eye had captured the word "Witch" over there. "No wonder I can't find the leader here! They're actually hiding in a mountain behind the village!"

Peng Longteng's massive figure appeared in front of Li Huowang, and she threw him toward the mountain.

Li Huowang's bag of torture tools flapped in the air as he fell toward the massive "Witch" word like a meteor.

Li Huowang was about to land when something pierced the character and pierced Li Huowang as well.

A hole the size of a forearm was in his stomach by the time he landed.

"Sui, sui! Are you okay?!" Li Huowang asked, looking around cautiously.

"Father, I'm fine. I managed to dodge it."

Li Huowang cast a wary gaze at the nearby trees. There was no follow-up attack, which surprised Li Huowang a bit.

The assailant seemed to have acknowledged Li Huowang's strength and proceeded to hide rather than risk their life to try and kill Li Huowang in the open.

"Do you really think that I can't find you?" Li Huowang asked. He then told Li Sui to pull out one of his bones.

Li Huowang proceeded to cast divination using his own bone. He stared at the pattern on the bone for quite a while before he shoved the bone inside of him.

Time ticked by, but Li Huowang found nothing. Just as he thought that his divination had failed, he suddenly noticed something. There was a suspicious part on a nearby mountain wall.

Li Huowang stared alternately between the pattern on the bone and the pattern on the growing vines on the wall.

Then, he charged at the wall and slashed out with his purple-tasseled sword.

The wall was cut in half, and a cave appeared in front of Li Huowang.

So they're hiding inside the mountain. It seems that the techniques of the Qi Kingdom's Dharma Sect are closely tied to the earth.

Li Huowang took a stance with his sword and was about to expand the size of the cave when a stone shot out from the depths of the cave.

The stone was heading for his head, but Li Sui easily caught it. Meanwhile, Li Huowang rushed down the cave to catch the attacker.

There was a constant rain of stones, arrows, and sharp objects, but Li Huowang remained unscathed.

Peng Longteng was standing in front of him, after all, and was acting like a massive shield.

Thanks to Peng Longteng, Li Huowang managed to reach the end of the cave.

It was extremely dark, and he couldn't even see his own hands, but he could sense a crowd of people around him.

"Die!" Li Huowang roared and charged into the darkness. He hacked and slashed out with his sword, painting the cave walls crimson.

Li Huowang's demeanor had changed drastically. He was like a tiger leaping into a herd of sheep, and he slaughtered every single sheep around him.

His eye glimmered with a murderous light. He knew that he needed to kill all of the Dharma Sect members, or they'd spread like the plague.

Li Huowang ripped off a man's head from his shoulder when the cave lit up just then, blinding his last remaining good eye.

Before he could adjust to the brightness, something tackled him from the left. He crashed into the wall and fell to the ground. He coughed violently, coughing out some tentacles and chunks of his organs.

Li Huowang grabbed the tentacles and ate them before standing up to see his assailant.

“Xu Nian?!” Li Huowang was shocked to see the familiar beast.

It was the very same Xu Nian that helped him fight against the Dragon Vein in the Qi Kingdom. Li Huowang could even see familiar scars on its figure.

The only difference was that the Xu Nian before him was missing its head. The woman’s head was nowhere to be found, so the Xu Nian only had the body of a beast.

A woman with a veil was riding the Xu Nian as if it were a horse. The veil had the character “Witch” on it, and the woman was staring deeply at Li Huowang.

The woman didn't make a move, seemingly waiting for something.

“Father, your hair is turning white," Li Sui warned.

Li Huowang instantly realized why his hair was turning white. He looked down at his hands and saw that they were covered in wrinkles and were shriveling up rapidly.

“Shit! Xu Nian has stolen my lifespan!” Li Huowang grabbed his gourd and poured the lifespan pills inside of it into his mouth.

After eating dozens of lifespan pills, the wrinkles on Li Huowang's hand disappeared, allowing him to sigh in relief.

Thankfully, he was a Strayed One, so he could take as many lifespan pills as he needed. If it hadn't been for his special identity, the attack just now would have killed him.

Still, Li Huowang was in a bad situation.

This wasn't his first time fighting a Xu Nian, as he had fought one as a result of Zhuge Yuan's scheme.

The attacks he had suffered at the time were devastating attacks that robbed him of his lifespan.

Li Huowang didn't expect that Zhuge Yuan’s friends would end up being controlled by the Dharma Sect's control.

Li Huowang looked around and noted that they were in a limestone cave. Stalactites and stalagmites covered the entire cave,

and the cave itself was tilted toward the left.

Just then, Li Huowang noticed something strange. He had definitely killed quite a few people just now, but there were no traces of his slaughter; there wasn't even blood on the cave walls.

Soon, Li Huowang saw a figure hiding in the distant darkness.

The darkness was bizarre as well. He strained hard, but he couldn't see what exactly was in the distance.

To make matters worse, the darkness was disappearing, plunging the cave into a pitch-black darkness again.

Footsteps echoed moments later; the Xu Nian and the figure in the darkness were slowly approaching Li Huowang.

Even more shocking was that the empty cave became crowded once again, and they all charged at Li Huowang from every direction.

Chapter 637 - Xu Nian

Realizing that the Xu Nian could attack him anytime, Li Huowang dared not let his guard down.

Li Huowang had no choice but to go all out. He only had a few lifespan pills left, so he'd definitely die if the Xu Nian managed to land just one hit on him.

Soon, the attacks became unbearable. Li Huowang decisively set his skin ablaze using the flint, filling up the cave with flames. The enemies in the darkness were melted away by flames.

Li Huowang turned and saw that Xu Nian hadn't actually moved.

However, he noticed quite a few flickering crimson afterimages around it.

Li Huowang had just sacrificed his skin to Ba-Hui in exchange for power, but his scalp still went numb at the sight.

The Xu Nian was channeling the same attack that she had used to defeat the Dragon Vein!

"No! I have to stop her!" Li Huowang exclaimed and charged at the Xu Nian.

Shadows jumped out from behind the stalactites, charging at Li Huowang. However, the flames melted them away.

Li Huowang unsheathed his spine sword and swung it toward the Xu Nian. A spacetime rift manifested, and it made a beeline for the woman.

The spacetime rift was about to hit the woman riding the Xu Nian when the ground sank. The Xu Nian inadvertently dropped down, and it accidentally dodged the attack.

The Xu Nian quickly climbed out of the hole, and an everlasting torrent of crimson afterimages manifested.

The situation had just taken a drastic turn!

Li Huowang tried his best to avoid every single attack. He didn't want to get his lifespan stolen or his time rewound. He retreated while defending himself and counterattacking with his spine sword.

Unfortunately, the crimson afterimages were truly everlasting. They soon filled up the entire cave amidst Li Huowang's slow retreat.

Just then, a black modao[1] tied with chains shot out from the darkness and pierced the Xu Nian's scales.

The chains went taut, and someone flew into the cave.

"Stop!" Li Huowang exclaimed. He didn't want the newcomer to get too close to Xu Nian, "Don't touch it!"

Shwik!

A modao was thrust into the ground, and the man stopped just ten meters away from the Xu Nian.

Li Huowang finally managed to take a good look at the newcomer. He thought the newcomer was the large-framed man with a monk spade, but it turned out to be a man wearing tattered armor.

The man looked like he was from the military. He looked pretty young, but his untrimmed beard and exhausted face made it look like he had experienced the many vicissitudes of life.

"Kill the rider!" Li Huowang exclaimed.

The man in black armor's fists trembled upon seeing the purple-tasseled sword on Li Huowang's back. He tugged at the chains and caught the two modaos before sheathing them on his back. "Give me the Tai'a Sword!"

Li Huowang had no idea what the man was talking about. He was about to respond when the Xu Nian charged at them.

Li Huowang retreated and shouted, "Help me immobilize it! I have a plan!"

The man jumped high into the air. He somersaulted and reached behind his back before throwing all four modaos on his back toward the Xu Nian.

The Xu Nian's feet were immobilized by the chains.

Li Huowang immediately swung his spine sword toward the woman on the Xu Nian's back.

The woman tried to dodge the attack, but Li Huowang tore off one of his ribs and stabbed it into his own chest.

A wave of pain erupted from him, and everyone felt the same sharp pain as him.

Swoosh!

The spacetime rift decapitated the woman, and her head vanished into the Qi Kingdom.

The crimson afterimages around the Xu Nian disappeared.

The jingling of chains echoed from behind. The man used his chain to unsheath Li Huowang's purple-tasseled sword before throwing it toward the Xu Nian's neck.

"Wait!" Li Huowang's face changed drastically. His figure blinked and reappeared in midair while Li Sui's tentacles grabbed the purple-tasseled sword. "Don't kill her. She's a friend, and she was just under someone else's control. That is no longer the case, so she's no longer an enemy. She also has no intentions of killing us."

The man took one look at the Xu Nian before retrieving his four modaos with a single flick of his hand. The modaos seemed to sheath themselves on his back.

Xu Nian regained its freedom and jumped into the darkness. After a while, it returned, and a woman's face was on its neck.

The face was still torn, and there were pages beneath it. There were texts on each page, and Li Huowang was familiar with the handwriting. It was Zhuge Yuan's penmanship!

"Is that you?" Xu Nian asked, staring at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang cast a complicated gaze at the woman. He wanted

to say something, but his mouth wouldn't move

“No. It’s not you. You are no longer here.” Xu Nian shook her head in disappointment before sprinting toward the entrance of the cave, startling the large-framed man, who was just about to enter the cave.

Li Huowang wanted to chase after the Xu Nian, but he saw that Li Sui was playing tug of war with the man in a black armor. “Li Sui, let go!”

“No! He wants to take our sword! This is our sword! It’s not his sword!” Li Sui exclaimed. She endured the flames as she wrapped the purple-tasseled sword tightly with her tentacles.

A chain and a tentacle were tugging at the purple-tasseled sword.

Li Huowang stared at the man in black armor, obviously asking for an explanation.

“Sir, can you please return this sword to me?” Li Huowang asked, extinguishing the flames around him, which revealed his figure that resembled a chunk of charcoal.

“Why would I return this to you?! This is my sword!” You Zixiong exclaimed, glaring at Li Huowang with bloodshot eyes.

“Zixiong, Sir Er, we’re all from the same team. Let’s not do this, okay? We can talk this out,” the large-framed man said, trying to calm them down.

Li Huowang didn't want to fight the man, as he had been helpful during the fight just now. “Sir, I’m not someone unreasonable. I can give you anything except for this sword. My senior gave it to me, so I can’t part with it.”

“Who’s your senior?”

“Benevolent Nunnery, Abbess Jingxin.”

You Zixiong’s eyes flashed in a peculiar light. He let go of the sword, and his chains returned to his robes.

Li Huowang cast a doubtful gaze at You Zixiong. “You know

Abbess Jingxin?”

“No, but I’m from Si Qi. I did give the Benevolent Nunnery my sword as collateral last time, but Si Qi has been destroyed. I was certain that she wouldn't exchange it for money, but... *hehe*, ” You Zixiong said. His killing intent vanished, and he looked defeated.

1. A weapon that’s a cross between a greatsword and a spear



Translator's Thoughts

You Zixiong, the original owner of the purple-tassel sword. Credits to 格子的乱七八糟 on douyin!

*The weapons he used are the modaos, a weapon that resembles a naginata but thicker and heavier



Chapter 638 - Change

The charred Li Huowang stared deeply at You Zixiong, listening to the latter's recount.

It turned out You Zixiong was from the military of Si Qi, and he became like floating duckweed after Si Qi's destruction. He had nowhere to go, so he decided to settle down in the Liang Kingdom.

As for his relationship with the Benevolent Nunnery... Li Huowang asked, and You Zixiong replied that he met the nuns from the Benevolent Nunnery halfway through his journey to the Liang Kingdom.

The front liners needed their salary, so You Zixiong used his own sword as collateral to exchange for silver from the nuns.

The silver that the Nuns were transporting at the time was the same silver that Li Huowang had looted from the water bandits in the reed field.

Back then, he had used that money to exchange for a method to deal with Dan Yangzi from Abbess Jingxin.

The Abbess then used the silver to exchange for You Zixiong's sword before gifting it to Li Huowang as a present so that he could defend himself.

With that, the loop was closed as if fate itself had willed it.

As Li Huowang listened to You Zixiong's explanation, a distant memory surfaced in his mind. He felt a complicated feeling bubbling from the depths of his heart.

After a while, Li Huowang stared at the silent You Zixiong and asked, "Then... do you know how the nuns died?"

You Zixiong shook his head and replied, "After exchanging the Tai'a Sword for silver, I returned to camp, and I couldn't get out for a long time. I have no idea what happened afterward. After the

Natural Disaster, we fought again with Hou Shu, and then..."

You Zixiong's expression distorted in agony as he said, "Si Qi perished... I wanted to die and drag a few more enemies down with me, but the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau said that it's better for us to retreat and reclaim the nation back day. He took us and several other survivors to the Liang Kingdom."

"Hou Shu's army is that strong? I didn't expect them to capture Si Qi."

"Bullshit!" You Zixiong was furious. "It's the fault of those corrupted officials! They embezzled everything! They gave us no food and money! They're a bunch of useless leeches! We had nothing to fight against the barbarians from Hou Shu! And they even dared to work with the eunuchs from the palace to sell off the entire nation to the Dharma Sect!"

"What?!" Li Huowang's pupil shrank at the remark. "What did you just say? The Dharma Sect is the reason behind the Si Qi Kingdom's fall?"

"Of course! Do you really think that Hou Shu's army can breach our borders? Even without food and money, they'd never be able to enter the kingdom as long as a member of the You Family is still alive!" You Zixiong roared. Then, he took a deep breath and sighed deeply. "If Hou Shu actually had the power to capture Si Qi, then we would have been more than happy to admit defeat. However, I cannot accept the fact that the Dharma Sect has reaped all the profits from behind the scenes while we were busy fighting at the border!"

The jingling of chains echoed as You Zixiong's modaos flew up high in the air. The four modaos descended and chopped the corpse of a Dharma Sect member into pieces.

"Wait, give me a moment to think." Li Huowang pondered seriously over something before asking, "I need to confirm something. Did Si Qi really lose to the Dharma Sect? Does that

mean they control the entire Si Qi now?”

“Of course. If it’s just a regular takeover by another nation, the Chief wouldn’t have to bring us all the way to the Liang Kingdom.”

Li Huowang was shocked to learn that the Dharma Sect was an even bigger issue than he thought.

Gao Zhijian had become the Emperor of the Great Liang, so Li Huowang could ask for the military and the Surveillance Bureau's help to eradicate the Dharma Sect.

With that in mind, he believed that the Dharma Sect's destruction was just a matter of time and that it wouldn't escalate into an all-out war.

However, the news of how Si Qi was taken down by the Dharma Sect shocked Li Huowang.

They were talking about the Dharma Sect here—the sect capable of transforming regular people into an army of fearless zealots!

The citizens of Si Qi were definitely members of the Dharma Sect by now.

The scenes that Li Huowang had seen in the Qi Kingdom made him realize that the Dharma Sect was indeed a formidable sect.

Li Huowang felt like a heavy boulder was on his shoulder.

Since the Dharma Sect had already taken over Si Qi, it was only a matter of time before they expanded their territory.

Afterward, they would definitely attack Hou Shu next. Then, Qing Qiu would come afterward.

Once the Dharma Sect had taken over Qing Qiu, then the Liang Kingdom would have to face a terrifying foe.

Li Huowang didn’t bother chasing after the Xu Nian and simply left the cave instead.

The large-framed bearded man turned to You Zixiong and said, “You should have been a bit more humble. That man has a nasty personality.”

“You think I fear death? You know that I should have died at the border!” You Zixiong exclaimed. He felt defeated as he walked out of the cave. “Si Qi has fallen. Why am I still alive? I'm living like a rat just so I can slaughter Dharma Sect!”

A wheel covered in steel slowly rolled down the road. Yang Xiaohai looked around the numerous footprints on the ground.

“My goodness. Why are there so many soldiers running here and there? Are they going to war?”

“Husband, what are you talking about? Why would we go to war for no reason?”

Yang Xiaohai ignored the footprints and focused on driving the carriage at the response from the inside. From time to time, he'd take out a map to confirm their current location.

“Xiumei, how much food do we have left? We're almost at Qing Qiu. There are very few people around there, so it would be hard for us to buy rations,” Yang Xiaohai asked his wife.

“We still have a few hundred taels of food left. It should be enough to last us weeks. Wait, what are we eating later?”

Zhao Xiumei felt that she had made the right decision by marrying a chef. They were camping outside, but Yang Xiaohai could still cook a variety of dishes for them to eat.

“I wonder what we're going to eat...” Yang Xiaohai pondered, and that was when he saw a food stall in the form of a tent in the distance. He read the sign and answered, “Let's eat some spicy wontons.”

Yang Xiaohai stopped the carriage and entered the tent. The majority of the seats were occupied, so he quickly pulled his wife to one of the few remaining seats and said, “Boss, give us a serving of spicy wontons, but split the serving into two bowls.”

“All right! Go ahead and take a seat. Your food will be served soon!”

It was a good thing that they were still quite near to civilization.

Yang Xiaohai looked around and saw some peddlers, a scholar, and a monkey trainer with three monkeys.

The three chained monkeys were licking the spicy red oil on the ground.

The customers ate voraciously as the fragrant scent of spicy oil filled the tent.

Yang Xiaohai and Zhao Xiumei gulped as they were starting to get hungry.

Chapter 639 - Wonton Stall

Soon, two bowls of spicy wonton were served in front of Yang Xiaohai and his wife.

Yang Xiaohai grabbed his chopsticks and picked out the snowy white wontons. He ate it with some spring onions and nodded in approval.

The wontons were clad in chili oil, but they weren't greasy at all. In addition, they were only a bit spicy and were full of fragrance.

As a chef, he approved of the wontons.

Eating a bowl of hot food on such a cold day was bliss, so the two were all smiles as they ate.

“Husband, do you know how to make these?”

“I do, but mine isn't as good as the owner of this stall. They're probably using a secret recipe.”

Yang Xiaohai stared at the stove and saw that the chef had placed some sticks into the pot while the wontons were being cooked.

Yang Xiaohai's curiosity was piqued; he wanted to know the identity of those sticks.

Yang Xiaohai was eating and deducing the recipe at the same time.

Just then, an old woman walked into the tent. The woman was so old that she had to rely on her cane to walk.

“Do you want a bowl of spicy wontons?” the stall owner asked with a smile.

The old woman licked her cracked lips and stared at the boiling

wontons in the pot. "I have my own things to eat. Can you please just give me a bowl of hot water? How much would that be?"

Yang Xiaohai glanced at the old woman and took note of her clothes. Her clothes had been mended many times, and the old woman herself looked so skinny that she could be compared to a twig.

"It's okay. There's no need to pay for a bowl of hot water. Just sit down, and I'll bring you a bowl of hot water."

The old woman thanked the kind stall owner, and then she sat down at the table next to Yang Xiaohai.

Soon, the bowl of hot water arrived. The old woman opened her cloth bag and took out a small black jar.

She drank a mouthful of the hot water before using the chopsticks to grab a tiny cobblestone from inside the black jar.

The cobblestone was dripping with black liquid.

"Husband, look. She's eating stones."

Yang Xiaohai turned and saw that the old woman was sucking on the cobblestone.

Having made quick work of the black liquid on the stone, she spat it into the jar and drank a mouthful of hot water.

Zhao Xiumai sighed when the old woman took another stone and sucked on it. "Husband, she's so pitiful. Let's buy her a bowl of wonton, okay? How can she relieve her hunger with just stones?"

Yang Xiaohai nodded. He couldn't bear to see someone go hungry, as he could still remember how bad hunger felt when he was still a beggar.

However, Yang Xiaohai dared not give her too much. He couldn't flaunt his wealth, as it would be too risky. He ordered another bowl of wonton and extended it to the old woman.

"Here, eat this instead, Maam. You won't be hungry for a while with this," Yang Xiaohai said.

The old woman was taken aback, and then she smiled. She

didn't have any teeth, so her gums formed two red lines when she smiled.

"Thank you, young man, but I don't need it because I have these," the old woman replied, "Do you see this stone? It tastes like braised ribs, while this one tastes like roasted duck. This one tastes like braised pork trotters."

With that, the old woman gave the bowl of wontons to the three chained monkeys next to the monkey trainer.

The three monkeys were visibly hungry, and they snatched the bowl away from the old woman's hand before making quick work of the wontons.

Bewildered, Yang Xiaohai had no idea what to do, so he simply went back to his seat.

The old woman was still sucking on her stones.

Before long, he sighed and turned to Zhao Xiumai, saying, "Do you think she's crazy like Senior Li?"

"Her family must be very unfilial. Otherwise, why would they let her run around when she's sick?" Zhao Xiumei said, sounding furious.

"What if she's like me? What if she doesn't have a family?" Yang Xiaohai asked.

The two went silent.

However, they had already done everything they could do for a stranger; they couldn't afford to take a mentally ill old woman with them on their journey.

The two were kind, but they weren't *that* kind.

The two continued their meal, but the wontons no longer tasted as delicious as earlier for some reason.

The wontons in their bowls disappeared slowly as they ate, and once there were no longer any wontons in their bowls, they stood up to leave.

Just then, an old man sitting on a black donkey entered the

little tent with his two disciples. The old man's long beard made him look like an Immortal.

“Master, let’s eat here today.”

“*Hm*~ Sure. I remember the last time I ate wontons was when I summoned the God of Thunder to punish the wicked being that was threatening the peace of a village.”

Everyone turned around and cast a look of reverence at the old man.

“Of course. Master is going to become an Immortal soon. And he hates evil people!” the two disciples exclaimed, praising their master.

One of the monkeys heard that, and it glanced at the monkey trainer. Upon seeing that its owner was busy eating his second bowl of wontons, it bit the chains on its neck and shouted, "Help! Jiji, help!"

The monkey even knelt as it begged the Daoist for help.

“*Hm?* ” The old Daoist slammed the table and frowned, seemingly getting angry.

Realizing that his trick was no longer a secret, the monkey trainer flipped the table and took out a dagger. He decided to fight to the death and pointed the dagger at the old man.

“Let's do this, then, you old bastard!” the monkey trainer roared.

The old Daoist’s figure shook, and his eyes rolled to the back of his skull. He sat frozen on the stool, unresponsive to the monkey trainer's challenge.

The old Daoist’s reaction shocked everyone, including the monkey trainer.

“Hahah! So you're just a fraud?!” The monkey trainer laughed boisterously. He then dragged the monkey that had decided to beg for help, and he kicked it until it was bleeding. “How dare you try and escape? Do it again! Show me how you did that!”

The monkey trainer slapped the monkey so many times that the monkey's face looked like it was sloughing off.

Yang Xiaohai hesitated at the sight. Just as he was going to make a move, a cobblestone streaked across the air and struck the monkey trainer's arms.

The monkey trainer's arms snapped with a grotesque crack.

The monkey trainer let out a shrill cry, but the old woman spat another cobblestone. The cobblestone flew into the monkey trainer's mouth, and the latter's head exploded into a bloody mist.

The old woman then walked toward the injured monkey and tore off its skin, revealing the head of a bleeding child.

It turned out that the monkeys were human children! They were made to wear monkey skin and were forced to act like monkeys.

"Ah... Poor children," the old woman muttered. She took out a white cloth and wrapped it around the injured child's head. "Come, this world is full of suffering. Worship Sir Arrogant Stone, and you will reincarnate into a better life."

Chapter 640 - Old Woman

The old woman took out a stone and used it to carefully tear open the monkey skin on the children.

Soon, the children were no longer wearing monkey skin.

Yang Xiaohai's eyes went wide in shock. The skinny old lady that loved sucking on stones had turned out to be an expert!

"Husband! He's dead! He's really dead! His brain is oozing out of his skull!" Zhao Xiumei exclaimed, hiding behind Yang Xiaohai in fear.

She had witnessed many deaths at the hands of that red-robed Daoist during their journey at the time, but she still couldn't get used to witnessing death.

"Don't worry. I think that old lady only kills evil people," Yang Xiaohai said, consoling his wife.

The old woman's action told him that they were not in danger. It wouldn't make sense for someone like the old woman to attack regular people. After all, she seemed to be out here to punish evil people.

Moreover, Yang Xiaohai even gave her a bowl of spicy wonton for free. She hadn't eaten it, but Yang Xiaohai believed that she'd acknowledge his kindness.

The others were visibly afraid of the old woman, which was in stark contrast to Yang Xiaohai's calm and composed demeanor.

They ran away in fear upon realizing that they had just witnessed the death of a human being. The old Daoist, who looked like a sage, ran the fastest along with his disciples.

However, the three monkeys—no, the three children weren't afraid of the old woman at all. "Mother! Jiji... Mother, Mother! Motheer!"

The remaining two children still had their monkey skin, but they were jumping and dancing around the old woman in joy.

“Come now. Don’t move. Let me take a look.”

Yang Xiaohai then saw the old woman tearing off the monkey skin on the children using just the stones in her hands.

“There really is a real, living child beneath the monkey skin!”

“Senior Bai has told me about them before. People would capture children and wrap them in monkey skin to perform tricks for them. Compared to real monkeys, children are easier to train. I thought she was lying, but I didn't expect to actually encounter one today. Anyway, let's go and help her,” Yang Xiaohai remarked. He wasn't brave enough to face dangers head-on, but he was more than happy to help once the danger had passed.

They took a pot of hot water and drenched some towels in the hot water. They cooled the towels down a bit before using them to wipe away the blood and pus from the children’s skin.

The wounds of the children looked painful, but they would survive such injuries. Thankfully, it hadn't been that long since they were kidnapped and wrapped in monkey skin.

Yang Xiaohai also grabbed some of his spare clothes and made the children wear them.

The three children looked just like normal people now that they were clean and were wearing normal clothes.

However, they were still acting like monkeys. It was highly likely that the man had conditioned them to act like monkeys for a very long time, so it would take some time for the children to start living like humans again.

The old woman wrapped a white cloth around the children's heads.

Yang Xiaohai's curiosity was piqued, so he asked, “What are you doing?”

“Once this cloth is wrapped around their head, they'll become

as robust and hard as a stone. No one would dare to bully them anymore.”

Yang Xiaohai nodded and thought that it was just a tradition from some random village. It was similar to how others would place a dot of cinnabar on a child's head to ward off evil. He used to believe it, but he was no longer a child.

He knew that a dot of cinnabar couldn't ward off evil. The only one capable of doing so was someone like Senior Li.

“*Hehehe*. Young man, you are very kind. You will be rewarded for your kindness.”

The old woman patted Yang Xiaohai's head before bringing away the three children.

Staring at their departing figures, Yang Xiaohai came up with a plan and proceeded to follow them with his carriage. “It looks like they're going in the same direction as us, so we should just bring them along with us.”

“I don't think that's a wise decision. She seems weird,” Zhao Xiumei said, sounding hesitant.

“Don't worry. She definitely has a few screws loose, but she's still a kind person. Also, I think it's safer for us to have an expert by our side.”

He could still remember how Troupe Leader Lu had used Senior Li as his bodyguard. He was simply imitating Lu Zhuangyuan.

Yang Xiaohai was also convinced that the old woman wasn't evil. After all, she had saved three children and even peeled off their monkey skin to return them to normal.

“Madam, come sit in our carriage. It must be hard walking around with a cane. Since it looks like we're going in the same direction, we can just travel together.”

At first, the old woman refused the offer, but Yang Xiaohai insisted again and again until she relented and hopped into the carriage.

The carriage now had four additional occupants, but all of them combined were still lighter than Gao Zhijian.

After all, the four additional occupants were just three children and a skinny old woman.

“Young man, how old are you?” the old woman asked, staring at Yang Xiaohai's back from inside the carriage.

“Me? I don't know. No one told me my age when I was young, so I have no idea how old I am. I'm probably thirteen or fourteen, though.”

The old woman seemed to reminisce about the past as she muttered, “Ah... If my grandchildren were still alive, they'd be around your age.”

“What happened to them?”

“My granddaughter was sold off for two pieces of bread, while my grandson was cooked and served as food. Ah... my poor grandson!” the old woman cried upon recalling the horrifying incident.

“Mother? Mother?” The children tried to wipe away her tears, and she spread her arms to hug them all.

“*Sigh.* Husband, she's been through many hardships,” Zhao Xiumei whispered. She then entered the carriage and shared her hardships with the old woman.

The three children and Zhao Xiumei consoled the old woman, and she eventually stopped crying. Wiping away her tears, she said, “Don't worry. I now have the blessing of Sir Arrogant Stone. He allowed me to see my grandchildren in a dream, and I saw that they were safe and sound. I'll be able to see them again in the afterlife, and all of us will reincarnate into a rich family.”

Zhao Xiumei was surprised. “Is Sir Arrogant Stone that strong? What Bodhisattva is he? Can he give me a son? I should really start praying to him.”

The old woman was thrilled upon realizing that Zhao Xiumei

was interested in Sir Arrogant Stone. She then proceeded to talk about Sir Arrogant Stone's greatness as well as the benefits of praying to him.

Yang Xiaohai merely listened to the old man. He didn't believe her at all.

The couple was still full from the wontons earlier, so they traveled nonstop for roughly four hours.

Fortunately, they managed to reach a county town before nightfall, which meant that they didn't have to camp outside tonight.

“Husband, what do you think about this?”

Yang Xiaohai turned and saw a white cloth wrapped around his wife's head.

Chapter 641 - Yamen

“How ugly! There’s nobody dead in the family, so why are you wearing white?” Yang Xiaohai recalled that people would only wear white cloths on their heads when there was a death in the family.

“You don’t understand. The old woman said that as long as we wear this, the Arrogant Stone Buddha will protect us. You should put on one too.”

“The Buddha will protect you just because you wrapped a piece of white cloth around your head? If it were that easy, there wouldn’t be any poor people in the world,” Yang Xiaohai said with a sigh. Sometimes, he really didn’t know who was the older one between the two of them.

Yang Xiaohai saw five people inside the carriage that also had white cloths wrapped around their heads. He then said, “Get off. We’ll stay at this inn for the night and set off tomorrow morning.”

An ordinary inn was to the left of their carriage, with tables and stools that appeared to be covered in a layer of starch. This was exactly what Yang Xiaohai wanted. They would avoid drawing unwanted attention by staying somewhere that wasn’t ostentatious.

The five of them sat around an eight-immortal table. When the meat and vegetable dishes were served, Yang Xiaohai and the monkey children ate heartily. Despite that, the old woman continued to suck on a stone.

“Auntie, have some food. You can’t fill up on that,” Zhao Xiumei urged.

The old woman replied, “You go ahead and eat your stuff. Mine is good stuff.”

Zhao Xiumei wanted to say more, but Yang Xiaohai kicked her under the table.

Yang Xiaohai had previously witnessed the old woman effortlessly smash someone's head with a stone. He figured it eating stones might be a method of cultivation, similar to Senior Li's method of cultivation.

Such personal matters were best left unspoken to avoid crossing any boundaries.

Yang Xiaohai quickly changed the subject. "Madam, where are you going? Perhaps we are headed the same way?"

"Where am I going? My intention was to come here. After finishing my business, who knows where I'll go. I'll take it one step at a time," the old woman replied as she looked around the inn, seemingly in search of something.

As they continued eating, the sound of someone sobbing rang out by the inn's entrance. Everyone looked up to see a long-haired woman in wooden shackles being paraded by several constables.

She cried pitifully, "Why? I was violated in broad daylight, yet the scoundrel counter-sued me! Oh heavens, open your eyes!"

As the woman passed by the inn, everyone, including the waiters and other patrons, turned away and sighed.

Their indignant conversations reached the ears of Yang Xiaohai and his companions.

"How could she win? That scoundrel is the county magistrate's son. So many people witnessed it, but no one dares to say a word."

"That greedy and chubby official is so detestable. He bullies both men and women and twists right from wrong!"

"I heard he bribed higher-ups and is about to be promoted. No wonder he's in a hurry to grab everything he can."

Yang Xiaohai and his group stopped eating and looked at the old woman in ragged clothes.

The old woman picked up a stone with her chopsticks and put it in her mouth and then another, until she had eaten all the stones in the pot. And yet, her cheeks were still sunken, as if she hadn't

eaten anything at all.

She then said, “Mmm, I’m full. Kid, help me put this pot away.”

The old woman stood up, grabbed her staff, and started to walk out of the inn.

Yang Xiaohai and Zhao Xiumei exchanged glances. The sound of blades being drawn and screams outside compelled them to follow her quickly.

When they got outside, they saw the constables who had been escorting the woman lying on the ground. Blood seeped from their heads and soaked the earth.

The old woman was holding the hand of the woman in shackles as they headed towards the yamen[1].

This scene drew a lot of attention. Soon after, many curious townsfolk followed them too.

Bang!

The old woman threw a stone, and it shattered the latch of the yamen’s gate. Then the entire gate collapsed together with the plaque above it.

“Great! Destroy it!”

“Finally, someone can stand up to them!”

The commotion quickly drew out everyone from inside the yamen, but it was all in vain. The old woman threw stone after stone at their heads until only a few people were left standing. She had killed everyone except the plump magistrate and his equally chubby son.

The father and son knelt and begged for their lives.

This time, the old woman turned to the crowd outside the yamen. “I’ll take charge here today. If you have a grudge, take revenge. If you have a complaint, seek amends!”

“Kill the corrupt official! Kill the corrupt official!” someone yelled.

Their powerful rallying voice led the crowd, getting everyone excited.

Under the old woman's orders, people found stones of various sizes and hurled them while cursing at the two men.

A sharp-edged stone flew over and struck the magistrate's mouth. Before his broken teeth even fell out, another stone flew over and smashed into his forehead.

No one could withstand such an assault. Shortly after, the two men were stoned to death.

The two corpses were battered and bloody, but this did little to appease the enraged mob.

Yang Xiaohai turned pale and swallowed hard. "Isn't killing a county magistrate a major capital offense?"

"Corrupt official! I'll eat your flesh and drink your blood! My daughter was only sixteen, and you turned her into a wax human!" yelled a single-legged old man with white hair.

He lunged forward and bit the official's corpse with his remaining teeth.

This set off a chain reaction. Anyone with a deep grudge against the official rushed forward and gnawed on the bodies. The people fought fiercely, as if being a little too late meant someone else would eat their share.

Though the magistrate and his son were meaty, they couldn't withstand such a cannibalistic rampage. Soon after, only two bloody skeletons were left on the ground, surrounded by over a hundred commoners with red eyes and mouths filled with blood.

"This isn't enough! Why should that corrupt official keep all our things? We should take them back!" someone yelled from amid the crowd.

"Yes, let's take them back! We deserve our dues!"

"Right! And the official's seven wives too! Why should he have seven when I have none?"

With this instigation, the crowd stormed into the yamen and started looting anything of value.

Greed overtook their hearts when they saw the chests of silver being carried out. Even the dog's bowls were made of gold, which caused their eyes to redden and their breathing to hasten.

"Ahhh!!" a beautiful woman screamed as she was dragged out.

The men quickly stripped her naked and violated her.

The woman in shackles stood in the hall and watched the chaos unfold. She saw the official's family suffer a fate worse than hers. However, she didn't look happy at all; she just stood there dispiritedly as if she had lost her soul.

1. the administrative office of a local bureaucrat 📌

Chapter 642 - Escape

Inside the county's yamen, the angry screams, shouts, and cries of agony continued relentlessly. The place had descended into utter chaos.

Everyone had forgotten the initial purpose they had gone there for. They were now charging inside one after another, behaving like beasts beyond anyone's wildest dreams.

"Grain! Grain! It's all white flour! No coarse grains!" someone shouted from the west wing.

Then the crowd surged in that direction.

The old man who had been the first to eat the magistrate's flesh also tried to follow, but he stumbled and fell to the ground.

He struggled to get up, but someone stomped on his raised right hand. There was a crunching sound, and an agonizing scream left his bloodstained mouth.

Yet, that scream was insignificant amid the surrounding clamor. More people trampled over the old man, bringing an end to his scream.

Those stepping over him just felt there was something a bit soft beneath their feet, and they paid no further attention to it.

Yang Xiaohai and his wife Zhao Xiumei had gotten caught in the crowd. They did not want to be there, but the crowd pushed them in.

He wanted to leave, but there were simply too many people everywhere, making it seemingly impossible for him and his wife to get out.

His face was very pale as he held tightly to Zhao Xiumei's hand and tried to break free from the crowd.

Yang Xiaohai told Zhao Xiumei, "Hold onto my hand tightly!

Don't let go, or we won't be able to find each other!"

After several attempts to get out, Yang Xiaohai suddenly remembered something. He pulled out the scepter that Senior Li had given him, which bore a human tongue.

He raised the scepter and waved it at those on his left. The previously frenzied crowd suddenly froze in place. Their eyes filled with confusion, as though they had forgotten what they were about to do.

"Follow me! Let's go this way," Yang Xiaohai said to Zhao Xiumei.

He maneuvered through the crowd, taking Zhao Xiumei towards the wall.

Yang Xiaohai struggled but managed to get himself and his wife out of the crowd thanks to the scepter.

Still shaken, he glanced at the chaotic scene before him and pulled Zhao Xiumei towards the inn.

"Xiaohai, what's going on? How did it turn out like this?" Zhao Xiumei asked, clearly frightened by the chaos.

An act of justice against a corrupt official had unexpectedly turned into utter mayhem.

"I don't know either. Let's just get out of here! It's too dangerous!"

Despite what he said, Yang Xiaohai, who had quite a lot of life experience, suspected that the old woman was behind it all. Without her, none of this would have happened.

Nevertheless, he didn't think that she had done anything wrong. She was indeed helping the oppressed and doing a good deed by seeking justice for them.

Yang Xiaohai wasn't much of an intellectual and could not figure out why things ended up this way. He just wanted to take his people away from this troubled place.

When Yang Xiaohai rushed back to the inn, he saw the three

monkey children squatting on the benches. They were guarding the old woman's ceramic jar.

"Quick, let's go! Follow me!" Yang Xiaohai shouted urgently and headed towards the stable at the back of the inn.

"Auntie?"

"Forget about her! She's powerful; she won't die! If we don't run now, we'll be dragged into this mess!"

They quickly got the horse-drawn carriage ready, and Yang Xiaohai led it back the way they came.

This isn't a peaceful place. I'll take a detour to avoid going through this town, he thought to himself.

Just as his carriage was about to leave the county, he saw a group of oddly-dressed people blocking the road with their horses.

Yang Xiaohai had initially assumed they were travelers like himself, but he saw the badges on their waists, and his face turned pale. Those badges indicated they were from the Surveillance Bureau.

He had learnt about the Surveillance Bureau and their way of doing things from Senior Li.

"I need to t-turn around!"

Yang Xiaohai quickly turned the carriage and frantically whipped the horses to escape in the opposite direction.

However, when he returned to the yamen's gate, he almost cried at the sight before him.

The people who had been looting had now come out and gathered in a large circle. They seemed to be listening to someone inside and shouted in agreement occasionally.

It was alright if they were just talking, but they happened to also be blocking the main road to the other exit.

"Sir Arrogant Stone! We are your personal servants and guards! We will follow you every step of the way and never leave your side!"

The crowd echoed this powerful shout. They then pulled out white cloths and tied them around their heads.

Yang Xiaohai looked angrily at the white cloths on their heads, then at the one on his wife's head. He tore the cloth off her head in frustration.

He now understood that everything was probably part of the old woman's scheme. He had blindly followed her, as he had assumed she was a good person.

Hmph, just as I thought. The more remote the place, the more trouble caused by the Dharma Sect!

Yang Xiaohai turned his head as he heard a sound on the other side. He saw a sinister-looking man on the ridge of a roof, crouching like a roof ornament.

Yang Xiaohai recognized him as one of the Surveillance Bureau members from earlier.

He watched the man reach into his robe and pull out the dried corpse of a child dressed in a red dudou[1]. The corpse had a red dot on its forehead and was tied to a red string.

The man threw the corpse off the roof.

In midair, the corpse moved its hand and moved with the pull of the string. The white-clothed people then started to move towards Yang Xiaohai, terrifying him

“Get off the carriage! We need to leave!”

Before the fighting could start, Yang Xiaohai led his group decisively into a nearby alley. He knew from his days as a beggar that nothing was more important than his life.

The sounds of fighting and shouting continued behind them as Yang Xiaohai led his group through the alleys.

After they scaled a wall to get into someone's yard, the noise finally diminished significantly.

“We'll stay here until the fighting stops outside,” Yang Xiaohai whispered to the others.

The three monkey children blinked, and one of them suddenly said, “Auntie.”

“Shh! No more Auntie talk! It’s because of her that we’re in this mess!”

Yang Xiaohai anxiously wiped his forehead with the back of his hand. He felt the temperature around them rising, though he wasn’t sure if it was due to his anxiety.

1. Ancient Chinese underwear for kids and women. It’s a diamond-shaped cloth that’s tied at the back. 

Chapter 643 - Goodwill

Why is it so hot?

As Yang Xiaohai pondered this, he smelled a familiar scent of burning wood. He was a cook, so he was very familiar with this smell thanks to his daily cooking.

His heart sank as the smell of burning wood grew stronger, mixed with the scent of roasting meat.

Using his wife as a step stool, he climbed up by stepping on his wife's thighs and peeked cautiously over the wall. He immediately felt the heat on his face, and his pupils dilated.

The distant inn and nearby shops were all engulfed in flames, collapsing and spreading the fire even further. Fire was being used as a weapon!

Regardless of who started the fire, it was a disaster for Yang Xiaohai and his companions, who were trapped inside the town.

If they didn't escape, they would be burned alive. If they ran, they would get caught in the battle.

Yang Xiaohai frantically paced in circles. "Senior Li, what should I do? Senior Li..."

Then he realized that Senior Li, who could do almost anything, wasn't here with him. He had to figure it out on his own.

Yang Xiaohai looked back at the high wall that he couldn't climb while he repeatedly relaxed and tightened his grip on the scepter.

He took out some painstakingly refined pills, counted them, and then drew several talismans. These were his only means of survival if he encountered enemies.

Seeing the fire approach, Yang Xiaohai steeled himself and said to Zhao Xiumei, "We need to get out. If I get held back, make sure

you get out of the county.”

The original route was blocked by fire, so they had to climb past walls and go through doors from the sides.

Fortunately, the three monkey children proved very useful. They were small, so they could crawl through small holes and open gates for the group to get into more yards.

After scrambling around for a while, the five of them were covered in dust and ash. The smell of burning wood had become less intense, which brought Yang Xiaohai a sense of relief. It seemed they had moved away from the center of the battle.

“They must be too busy fighting to notice us. Keep going!” Yang Xiaohai urged the others.

They climbed over a third yard and arrived at the edge of a field.

Yang Xiaohai suddenly sensed something looming over him from behind. He turned and saw a man with yellow hair on his chest, fish-scale tattoos on his neck, and a blood-stained wugou[1] in his hand.

This man had his gaze locked on Yang Xiaohai.

Yang Xiaohai froze, his mind turning blank. He was like a deer caught in the headlights; he completely forgot to defend himself.

The man glanced at the white scarves on the monkey children’s heads. He showed a look of disdain as he raised his wugou.

He said, “Another bunch of Dharma Sect cultists. Why do you always perform these villainous deeds?”

Seeing the wugou’s blade reflect the light of the fire, Yang Xiaohai snapped back to reality.

Yang Xiaohai exclaimed, “We’re not with them! My... my senior is the Liang Kingdom’s emperor!”

“Hahaha, the emperor’s junior dressed so poorly? Then I’m the Jade Emperor!”

The man swung his wugou at Yang Xiaohai’s neck.

“My other senior is Li—”

Before Yang Xiaohai could finish, he saw the blade coming at his neck. He closed his eyes and curled up instinctively as he braced for death.

However, Yang Xiaohai felt no pain. He opened his eyes and saw a shriveled figure standing before him. The attacker had been forced back three feet.

“Auntie!” the monkey children shouted excitedly.

It was the same old woman who had just caused an upheaval and gotten them into that situation, yet Yang Xiaohai thought she seemed different now.

“Kids, go quickly. I’ll hold him off,” she said calmly while facing the man.

Hearing that, Yang Xiaohai came to his senses. He glanced at the old woman again before grabbing the others and running towards the rice fields.

“Sir Arrogant Stone, please protect the children. May they survive and live well,” the old woman cried out.

Yang Xiaohai and the others ran desperately. They dared not stop, for fear that the man with the wugou would pursue them and catch up.

After fleeing for an hour, they finally collapsed by the roadside and gasped for breath. By that time, night had fallen, and the moon could be seen high in the sky.

As Yang Xiaohai lay there and gathered his thoughts, he heard the sound of hooves. He looked up in the direction of the sound and saw his carriage.

There were two people driving the carriage. One was the man with the wugou on his back—the one who had tried to kill him earlier. Yang Xiaohai recognized the second man too. They were both from the Surveillance Bureau. They had caught up with Yang Xiaohai’s group.

At that moment, Yang Xiaohai saw a wealthy-looking plump man who looked to be in his mid-thirties. The man was wearing a flowered headscarf and a purple-flowered robe. He jumped down from the carriage and walked towards them.

Yang Xiaohai was filled with desperation. He pulled out the scepter, aimed it towards them, and then shouted, “Xiumei! Run as far as you can!”

“I won’t leave without you!” Zhao Xiumei cried out, her eyes red.

“Don’t be silly! They’ll kill you! I’m a man, and I must protect my wife!”

Despite his brave words, tears streamed from Yang Xiaohai’s eyes.

As the plump man neared, Yang Xiaohai threw the scepter at him, but the plump man dodged it easily. He walked over to Yang Xiaohai, grabbed his hands, and shook them forcefully.

The plump man said, “Hehehe, young friend, sorry about earlier. My junior is uncivilized. I heard your senior is the Liang Kingdom’s emperor? And you have another senior...?”

Yang Xiaohai was at a loss about how to react to the man’s words.

The plump man continued, “I also heard your other senior is surnamed Li. May I ask what sect he’s from? How does he dress?”

Yang Xiaohai watched the plump man’s smile dissipate very slightly from his eyes, revealing the icy snake-like pupils within them.

This movement caused Yang Xiaohai to shudder. He quickly nodded and replied, “Yes! My senior is the Great Liang’s emperor, Gao Zhijian. My other senior is Li Huowang. He... he’s powerful! He wears red Daoist robes and carries three swords on his back. Do you know him?”

The stout man paused and then smiled broadly. His icy snake

pupils were once again concealed within his smile.

“Ah, so it’s Senior Li! Of course I know him. His father used to bring him to visit us during holidays.”

1. a curved type of sword 

Chapter 644 - Good Person

Yang Xiaohai was bewildered. *Does this guy know Senior Li or not?*

If he doesn't, why did he speak so decisively? If he does know Senior Li, then what he said sounds very out of character for Senior Li. He didn't seem like the type who enjoyed visiting others.

Before Yang Xiaohai could react, the plump man became even more enthusiastic. "Come. We must have frightened you earlier, my junior. Please, accept this as a small token of friendship."

A dense, heavy gold brick that had a blood-stained corner slipped from the man's sleeve and landed heavily in Yang Xiaohai's hand, hurting him.

"My junior, as soon as I saw you, I knew you must be related to Senior Li. Look, I even brought your carriage here. It's yours, right?"

The plump man had his companion bring over the carriage. He helped Zhao Xiumei and the three monkey children into it. He even straightened a white head scarf on one of the children.

Yang Xiaohai's lips trembled slightly. He wanted to ask if the plump man really knew Senior Li. Something seemed off to him.

In the end, he wisely kept his mouth shut. It didn't matter whether the plump man knew Senior Li as long as he was willing to let them go.

"Th-thank you," Yang Xiaohai said.

"Hehehe, no need to thank me. Safe travels, junior. I have my duties and can't see you off. When you see Senior Li, do give him my regards."

As the carriage disappeared into the night, the smile fell off the plump man's face. His eyes revealed their cold, snake-like pupils again.

"Serpent Lord, do you really believe them?" the man with fish-scale tattoos and the wugou asked with his arms crossed.

The plump man, the Serpent Lord, replied, "Why not? The boy seemed sincere. Besides, I've heard of a formidable fellow who likes to wear red Daoist robes. I thought his name was Er Jiu, though."

"Does sincere mean it's true? Can't it be a lie? Could it be a trick from the Sitting Oblivion Dao?"

"The Sitting Oblivion Dao is long gone. Besides, what do you gain from killing him? If he's fake, we just let a few Dharma Sect cultists escape."

"But if he's real, we have earned ourselves a big favor. Why not take the chance?"

A look of understanding appeared on the face of the tattooed man. "No wonder you've survived two sexagenary cycles. You don't take any risks."

The Serpent Lord didn't mind the words of the tattooed man. He just said, "Let's go. We've already eliminated four Dharma Sect cultists, which is a great boon. These rats have been harder to find since they went into hiding."

"I don't understand why these people come to such remote places to preach," the tattooed man yawned.

While they talked, one of their other companions from the Surveillance Bureau hurried over with a scroll.

He told them anxiously, "We must go! The Chief has ordered everyone in Hedong to gather! Dharma Sect is making a move!"

In the moonlight, Yang Xiaohai drove the carriage forward. His breath was visible in the cold air, his eyes staring blankly at the road.

He didn't know how long he had been in this state. Everything

had happened so fast, and his mind was still buzzing and chaotic.

Even after a while, Zhao Xiumei remained visibly shaken. Still, she gently wiped the dried sweat from Yang Xiaohai's forehead with a towel.

She glanced at the monkey children sleeping with a bag of guokuis and hesitantly asked, "Do you think that old woman was killed?"

Yang Xiaohai shook his head mechanically. "I don't know, perhaps."

"Those people are so hateful. She was such a good person."

"A good person..."

After wiping his sweat, Zhao Xiumei sat beside him for a while before she spoke again. "Who do you think are the good people and who are the bad ones?"

Yang Xiaohai was silent for a long time. Then he answered, "I don't know. I'm not smart enough to know. "

Zhao Xiumei folded the towel in her hands and said, "I think that old woman wasn't a truly bad person. I can tell she genuinely liked the children. I wouldn't mistake genuine love."

"Maybe no one thinks they're the bad guys. They all probably believe they're the good ones," Yang Xiaohai turned to look at Zhao Xiumei's profile.

What he learned from this incident was that he nearly got his wife hurt. He wasn't strong enough to protect her. He had underestimated the situation back when he was still in Cowheart Village. He needed to get stronger.

The morning sun broke through the fog and brightened the dark landscape.

"Xiaohai, look. We're back in Qing Qiu."

Yang Xiaohai saw patches of grass before them and remarked, "Why is the grass in Qing Qiu turning yellow?"

Li Huowang was in red robes by a pond as he paced under Li Sui's gaze. He looked as though he was waiting for something. He occasionally bit his fingers with a rather nervous expression.

Two hours passed. Just as his patience wore thin, he saw his reflection in the pond turn to face him.

"Yi Donglai, you've finally shown up," Li Huowang said with a hint of irritation.

"I have my own matters. I'm your future, not your nanny," Ji Zai replied.

"Cut the crap. Time is short. I don't care if you know what's happening, but I need your help!" Li Huowang demanded while he frowned.

"Help you? Why?"

"Don't tell me you, a Siming, didn't know about the Dharma Sect taking over the Si Qi Kingdom!"

"I really didn't know," Ji Zai said frankly.

"Say that again! The entire Si Qi Kingdom was taken over by the Dharma Sect! The god Yu'er's power has spread so widely, and you didn't know?!"

"I'm in charge of bewilderment. You are confused, and I am even more so. It's understandable for something like this to happen."

"F*ck!" Li Huowang cursed.

Chapter 645 - Help

Every conversation Li Huowang had with Ji Zai made him feel that his flames of anger could never be extinguished.

“I don’t care if you did or didn’t know! We can’t let the Great Liang repeat the fate of the Great Qi! I need your help! Don’t forget that when you asked for my help, I didn’t say any nonsense!” Li Huowang yelled.

“How should I help you, then?” Ji Zai asked.

Li Huowang clenched his fists. “Aren’t you a Siming? Make me stronger. Use your power to keep me in the elevated state of the Ba-Hui’s Cang-Qiang Ascension. This is all to deal with the god Yu’er!”

“I can’t do that. After all, I control bewilderment. You may not be aware of it, but I have helped you.”

“Helped me? Bullshit! How have you helped me? How come I’m not aware?”

“Exactly.”

“What do you mean! I’m asking how you helped!”

Li Huowang’s anger flared at Ji Zai’s nonsensical replies. “I should have chosen to be Ba-Hui’s Twisted One instead of yours!”

“Ba-Hui? That wouldn’t be good. Being her Twisted One is very painful,” Ji Zai said, remaining calm.

Li Huowang calmed down and glared at his reflection.

“Ji Zai, you claim to be my future self, but your actions and words make me doubt if your goals are the same as mine.”

“Would you believe me if I said otherwise? Ever since Zhuge Yuan deceived you, have you trusted anyone?” Ji Zai said, sighing lightly.

“Don’t mention Zhuge Yuan! Aren’t you a Siming? If you have the power, bring Zhuge Yuan back to life!”

“I can’t. In this world, the dead can’t be brought back to life. There’s no such Heavenly Dao in the Baiyu Capital.”

“.....”

A long silence ensued between them.

After a while, Li Huowang took a deep breath and said, “You can’t do this, you can’t do that. Fine. Then tell me, how are the others in the future? The people of Cowheart Village? The Great Liang? Have I really managed to protect them in the future?”

“The future depends on your present actions. You know this world is alive and constantly changing.”

Li Huowang looked seriously at Ji Zai. “Stop with the vague talk. I have no other demands. I’ve sacrificed myself to protect those I care about so that they can survive in this abnormal world. Can you promise me that you will protect them?”

Sensing the seriousness in Li Huowang’s words, Ji Zai nodded with certainty. “I can promise you that much, as long as you’re my Twisted One.”

Li Huowang finally relaxed a bit. If Ji Zai couldn’t guarantee anything, he would have to reconsider his options.

“Alright, enough of that. Let’s talk about the current problem. The crisis caused by the god Yu’er is imminent. I need to increase my strength. There were risks with cultivating the ‘Truth’ previously because the ‘Truth’ and ‘Lies’ Heavenly Daos were controlled by Doulao. Now that you’re in charge, can I continue my ‘Truth’ cultivation safely?”

“You don’t need to ask me about such things. If you think you can, then you can.”

Li Huowang’s heart sank. He suddenly felt like his thoughts were being manipulated by Ji Zai.

As he hesitated and prepared to ask something else, an eagle swooped down from the sky and dropped a scroll in front of him.

Li Huowang’s pupils trembled as he opened the scroll. Across

the Great Liang's six divisions, the Dharma Sect was instigating numerous uprisings in large cities and small villages. The Dharma Sect had rebelled.

"God Yu'er is using his power to cause chaos! You're a Siming too. Stop talking nonsense and do something!" Li Huowang said, urging Ji Zai to help.

"I have. I influenced things."

"What exactly have you done?!"

"Early on, I sent people to hunt down the Dharma Sect. I also informed my Twisted One that the Dharma Sect's actions are a diversion. Their real target is Shangjing."

Li Huowang's pupils dilated in alarm. "What?! Their target is Gao Zhijian?"

He rushed to his horse. On the way, he quickly contacted Liu Zongyuan, urging him to relay the message to Shangjing.

As Li Huowang rode off, Ji Zai's wavering inverted image in the water remained and watched Li Huowang leave. Ji Zai looked a little dazed as if he had recalled something.

Soon after, Shangjing contacted Li Huowang.

A black-feathered crow with one leg stood on Li Huowang's horse and said, "Lord Er, His Majesty is aware and assures you that everything will be handled properly."

"Forget His Majesty. Does the Surveillance Bureau know?" Li Huowang asked the crow.

Gao Zhijian said that things would be handled properly, but Li Huowang was uncertain about this. After all, Gao Zhijian had only been emperor for less than half a year, and it was doubtful how much power he actually held in the court.

"They do. Both the Imperial Preceptor and the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau are aware. They will be on guard."

Li Huowang felt slightly relieved.

If the other party wanted to cause a diversion, the biggest fear

would be falling into their trap. Since the enemy's plan was exposed, their scheme had already faced setbacks.

This was the first time Li Huowang had received help ever since becoming Ji Zai's Twisted One.

"Tell them to be vigilant. I'll head there myself to ensure everything is secure."

The crow replied, "No need, Lord Er. Please return. The Surveillance Bureau definitely won't allow a repeat of what happened last time."

"You know nothing. Get lost!"

Li Huowang waved the crow away and spurred his horse towards Shangjing.

After learning of the Dharma Sect's high-level plans from Ji Zai, Li Huowang decided he had to oversee the protection of Gao Zhijian himself. This was more important than dealing with the scattered remnants of the Dharma Sect.

He had to go even if it could be a wasted trip. The Great Liang couldn't end up like the Great Qi. The victims from the Great Qi could come over to the Great Liang, but there was nowhere those from the Great Liang could head to.

The one-legged crow circled overhead and repeated this message. "Lord Er, you really don't need to. Please return."

Li Huowang was lying on his ward bed as he shouted at the voice outside the window. "Enough! Get Lost!"

However, it didn't stop speaking.

"What is mental illness? Who defines it, and who gave them that right? I believe this label is wrong. Mental illness doesn't exist. It's a false label defined by external politics, economics, or culture! It's just a means to maintain the existing social order!"

Chapter 646 - Psychiatric Patient

Upon hearing the chatter outside the door, Li Huowang sprang up, angrily tearing off his blanket and striding towards the door.

As soon as he opened it, he saw two men in hospital gowns leaning against the wall and eating snacks while they debated about something.

One of them was tall, wore plastic-framed glasses, and had his hair swept back in a scholarly look. This man was the source of the nonsensical rambling that Li Huowang had heard from his room.

Li Huowang didn't care too much about it; he just felt that that newcomer's incessant chatter was very annoying.

Li Huowang snapped, "Get out of here! It's only seven in the morning. Why are you so noisy??"

"Hey! Young man, don't interrupt me! Do you know what I'm doing? I'm fighting for our special group's essential rights!" the bespectacled man replied.

Just as he was about to continue arguing, his companion noticed the handcuffs on Li Huowang's wrists and quickly pulled him away.

Although the people had left, Li Huowang was now wide awake. He sighed, went back inside, and put on his shoes.

Being a sane person enclosed together with these psychiatric patients was torture. He couldn't even vent his frustration on them without the doctors thinking he was having an episode, which would further delay his discharge.

Li Huowang had nothing else to do in his empty room, so he decided to head to the cafeteria for breakfast.

“Suisui, are you hungry?” he asked.

There were no surprises in the psychiatric hospital’s breakfast, just steamed buns and porridge.

Li Huowang took his tray to a corner and started to eat.

He pondered how much longer he had to stay there for before getting discharged. *The man with mania has already been discharged. I should be the next in line.*

Then, just as Li Huowang was about to resume eating his breakfast, he felt a chill run down his spine. He turned around to see Qian Fu, a schizophrenic patient looking at him from a distance.

Nevertheless, Qian Fu was just watching him, so Li Huowang ignored Qian Fu and continued eating.

Encounters like this were common in the psychiatric hospital, so Li Huowang just had to stay calm. With surveillance everywhere, he doubted Qian Fu would do anything extreme.

As for the conservation he had earlier, Li Huowang did not take them to heart. He could not be bothered with the ramblings of a stranger who was also a psychiatric patient.

After breakfast, it was time for the patients’ support group. Li Huowang doubted that this was effective in any way. If mutual encouragement could cure mental illnesses, medication would be unnecessary.

The plastic stool to Li Huowang’s left was empty, which didn’t surprise him since the guy who used to sit there had previously mentioned his imminent discharge. However, the schizophrenic Wang Wangsu’s stool was also empty, which puzzled Li Huowang.

“Where did Sister Wang go? Is she cured too?” he asked the depressed girl next to him.

Zhao Ting’s face looked pale as she shook her head. “No, she’s not cured. Her husband didn’t pay the bill, so she was discharged.”

“We shared a room and her condition was improving. But the doctor said the hospital isn’t a charity—there’s no treatment

without money.”

Li Huowang sighed.

Outsiders thought psychiatric patients would eagerly escape if given the chance to. But in reality, those with some rationality knew they were sick and wanted to be cured. Some even checked in alone voluntarily without telling their families.

Only people who were completely out of control, like those in television series, needed to be forcibly admitted. Psychiatric patients were just like any other patients. The illness was just affecting a different part of their body. Most preferred to be fully cured before leaving, just like a normal person walking out of a hospital healthily.

Nonetheless, reality was cruel. Hospitals needed to make money too, especially private ones. Even if the doctors knew a patient's condition was not optimistic, the patient would be emotionlessly asked to leave.

This often led patients into a vicious cycle where they couldn't get better without money. They couldn't earn money while they were sick, so that would eventually lead to a downward spiral that worsened their condition. Then, they would transition into disabled people or lunatics.

Li Huowang did not want to add to the psychological burden of this depressed patient, so he comforted her. “Sister Wang's condition was mild. As long as she keeps taking her medication, she should stabilize. Don't worry about her.”

While they talked, Li Huowang noticed Wu Cheng bringing two new patients over. One was the bespectacled newcomer from earlier, and the other was an emaciated old man.

Wu Cheng greeted the group. “Good morning, everyone. We have two new members in our group today. This gentleman here is Yuan Heping, and this is Wang Gang. Let's give them a warm welcome.”

The applause was sparse. Li Huowang didn't bother joining in. Instead, he thought about how to pass the time.

When the two new members were seated, Li Huowang noticed the bespectacled man looking at him. When he looked up, the person quickly averted his gaze.

Wu Cheng said, "Alright, how about the two of you introduce yourselves?"

The session dragged on slowly, tormenting Li Huowang as time passed. After what seemed like an entire year, the long support group session finally came to an end.

Nothing in the session had helped Li Huowang. His only takeaway was a glimpse into the illnesses of these two newcomers. The old man had an obsessive-compulsive disorder, while the bespectacled man had schizophrenia, which was nothing strange there.

The other people stood up separately and left with their stools.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang let out a deep breath, relieved that the tedious morning was over. He then headed to the cafeteria for lunch.

On the way there, Gao Jingyun, the simple-minded man he had helped in the past, approached him.

"Brother, for you. It's nice," Gao Jingyun said, holding out the small steamed bun in his hand.

Just as Li Huowang was about to thank Gao Jingyun, a figure brushed past and whispered urgently to Li Huowang, "Be careful! They're coming! Danger is approaching us!"

The figure quickly vanished.

Li Huowang had only seen the back of that person's head, but he recognized that person as Qian Fu—the schizophrenic man who had been staring at him.

Li Huowang frowned and pondered briefly about what Qian Fu had said. Then, he shook his head and walked to the cafeteria.

Chapter 647 - Needle

The lunch served at Kangning Hospital's cafeteria was decent. There was one meat dish, one vegetable dish, and soup. It wasn't bad even though it was cooked in large portions instead of single serves.

However, Li Huowang was rather distracted while eating.

Just a moment ago, Qian Fu had approached him again with more nonsensical words.

Initially, Li Huowang thought Qian Fu was just approaching him on a whim, but now it seemed like Qian Fu was focused on him specifically.

Since Qian Fu was not giving up, Li Huowang had to think of how to get rid of this fellow.

They were under surveillance everywhere, so he definitely could not kill Qian Fu here. Giving Qian Fu a violent beating to deter him was not an option either.

As Li Huowang continuously pondered on this problem, he picked up some vegetables with his chopsticks and bit into them forcefully.

He felt a sudden sharp pain and tasted blood in his mouth, causing his muscles to tense up. He opened his mouth and placed his finger inside tremblingly. Amidst the pain, he quickly found several needles embedded in his tongue.

A nearby nurse noticed Li Huowang's distress and walked towards him.

The nurse asked, "Are you okay?"

Seeing Li Huowang pull needles from his mouth, the nurse's face turned pale with shock as he grasped the severity of the situation. He immediately shouted for the patients around to stop

eating.

The discovery of needles in the food of the psychiatric hospital caused an uproar, and the entire hospital quickly descended into chaos. However, their inspection revealed that only Li Huowang's food was contaminated.

Such a serious safety breach couldn't be ignored. The hospital director and a team began to review the surveillance footage, while all patients were sent back to their rooms.

In his room, Li Huowang considered the suspicious aspects of the incident. He was more concerned about the meaning of this act than the pain, which was secondary.

Who did this? I haven't offended anyone here. Could it be... Li Huowang thought, recalling the cryptic warnings Qian Fu had given him.

At that moment, Wu Cheng entered Li Huowang's room alone. "How are you? This was clearly our hospital's fault. We will waive part of your hospital fees to express our apologies.

"Also, since you are an adult, can we refrain from informing your mother about this small incident?"

"Wait, does that mean you guys found the culprit?" Li Huowang asked in surprise.

"Yes, we did. The culprit's method wasn't very sophisticated. Here is the cafeteria's surveillance footage."

Wu Cheng placed his phone before Li Huowang and softly tapped it to play the video on the screen. Li Huowang quickly found out who had placed needles in his dish.

"Qian Fu? It's actually him?!"

"Yes," Wu Cheng said, confirming Qian Fu as the culprit. He then put his phone away. "From the surveillance footage, I noticed that he's been approaching you frequently lately. Have you had any conflicts with him?"

"What conflicts would I have with him!? Where is he now? I

need to confront him!”

Li Huowang was genuinely angry. *Qian Fu has gone too far. He actually fed me needles to try to make me believe his crazy talk.*

There were no Leotians[1] that were a threat to me. In the entire psychiatric hospital, it was likely Qian Fu's the biggest threat to me!

“Come on, Little Li. We need your help. Ask Qian Fu where he got those needles. Such items shouldn't have been brought into the hospital.”

Li Huowang was brought to the intensive restraint unit, where Qian Fu was bound in a straitjacket.

Li Huowang stepped on the soft floor and looked coldly at Qian Fu's excited face. “Why did you do this? How did I offend you?”

Qian Fu shouted, “No! I wasn't trying to hurt you! It's them! The Leotians!”

An orderly replied sternly, “The surveillance footage clearly shows you doing it! Now, tell us where you got those needles!”

Qian Fu ignored the orderly and stared intensely at Li Huowang. “Don't believe them! The footage was altered! Their technology is advanced, so they can edit it! It wasn't me, really!

“Do you know why they're doing this? They want to sow discord among us! They want us to kill each other so they can pick us off one by one! They've infiltrated us like the lizard people!”

Li Huowang felt insane for trying to get a lunatic to speak logically.

“Forget it. Just keep him restrained. Don't let him out to harm anyone else,” Li Huowang said to Wu Cheng and turned to leave.

Qian Fu called out desperately, “Little Li, do you understand? Only you can understand me! The Leo aliens are here! Danger is imminent! Hiding won't solve anything! We must strike first!”

Li Huowang ignored Qian Fu and headed back to his room. Since Qian Fu was now restrained, Li Huowang hoped for some peace.

He did not want anything else to happen; he just wanted to be discharged without complications. That way, he could leave with the status of a normal person.

As Li Huowang had been unable to have his meal, Wu Cheng arranged a roast duck takeaway for Li Huowang, in what seemed like an attempt to placate him.

Li Huowang grabbed a few green onion and cucumber strips and dipped them in the sweet sauce. Then he spread them on the bun and covered the bun with a few slices of the roast duck. Finally, he rolled it all up and took a big bite.

The taste was a welcome change from the usual hospital fare.

While Li Huowang was enjoying the meal alone, he suddenly felt someone watching him. He looked up sharply to find no one.

Li Huowang frowned. *Is someone spying on me?*

After a few minutes, two people carefully peeked through the window. However, Li Huowang was sitting by that window and noticed them straight away.

They jumped in fright and quickly backed away.

Li Huowang recognized the two people as the newcomers. They were the bespectacled Wang Gang and the old man Yuan Heping!

Seeing Li Huowang look at them unkindly, Wang Gang muttered indignantly to the older guy, "This is ridiculous. Why does he get roast duck?"

"Come on, don't make trouble. Maybe he has connections with the hospital."

"Unbelievable, using connections in a psychiatric hospital to get special treatment."

1. Previously "Leo aliens". Refers to the aliens from the Leo Constellation 📖

Chapter 648 - Discharge

The commotion at Kangning Hospital soon subsided. Qian Fu was locked up, and Li Huowang didn't find any needles in his food again. This pretty much confirmed that Qian Fu was the one who had put them there.

Life in the psychiatric hospital consisted of eating meals, taking medication, watching TV, support groups, therapy, outdoor time, and sleeping. Two months passed in the blink of an eye. Aside from feeling bored sometimes, everything was normal for Li Huowang.

During this time, his mother and Yang Na visited him, and they were both delighted to learn that he hadn't had any more episodes.

One morning, Li Huowang was sitting in his room as he waited for his cup noodles to soften. The psychiatric hospital didn't provide braised beef cup noodles, but Yang Na had brought a carton of them on her following visit after Li Huowang mentioned he wanted to eat them.

Li Huowang waited three minutes for the noodles to cook. Just as he was about to open the lid, a familiar face appeared at the door.

"Yi Donglai, you're finally here," Li Huowang said.

"I have a lot of things to deal with. I'm your former attending physician, not your nanny. Besides, I keep in touch with Junior Wu, so I'm regularly updated on your condition," Yi Donglai replied.

"Looks like you're recovering well."

He sat on the bed and watched Li Huowang eat his noodles with a folding fork.

Li Huowang sipped some soup before saying, "I'm alright. I've been here for three months now and have gotten used to things."

"You sounded rather anxious on the phone before. How about

now? Are you not anxious anymore?”

Li Huowang swallowed his noodles and pondered for a moment. Then he said with some hesitation, “Those memories are becoming blurry as time goes by. I’m not sure if those were delusions or real events.”

He had clearly done those things, but they hadn’t happened in reality. The only possible explanation seemed to be that the problem lay within himself.

Yet, Li Huowang knew he wasn’t ill.

Yi Donglai nodded approvingly. “Since you started the new medication, have those incidents occurred again?”

“No.”

Li Huowang continued to eat his noodles.

Since it had only happened once, Li Huowang decided to monitor the situation first. If it never happened again, he would consider it a bizarre dream.

At that moment, Wu Cheng walked in and whispered something to Yi Donglai. Then, they both stepped outside for a detailed conversation.

They talked for half an hour and made several phone calls.

When Yi Donglai returned, he held out a tablet to Li Huowang. “Here, Huowang. Please complete these questions.”

“Questions?”

Li Huowang took the tablet and saw multiple-choice questions.

[I always insist that others follow my ideas and get very angry when they don't.

Yes? No?

I never trust others to handle things and prefer to do them myself.

Yes? No?

I am often troubled by intrusive thoughts.

Yes? No?]

After reading through the questions, Li Huowang looked at Yi

Donglai and asked excitedly, “Is this the Minnesota Personality Inventory? Or SCL-90[1]? Does this mean I can be discharged if all the results are normal?”

Yi Donglai was surprised. “You know quite a bit about this. Just complete it first. It’s just the first test.”

Li Huowang gathered his focus and began to answer the questions seriously. His fingers even trembled slightly in anticipation. He was finally going to be discharged!

Once Li Huowang was done with the questions, the hospital staff conducted various tests on him. They even hooked him up to a few machines to have his brain activity monitored for any abnormalities.

After all the procedures, they asked Li Huowang to wait in his room. The wait felt extraordinarily long, and Li Huowang finally understood how slowly time could crawl.

Finally, when Wu Cheng came to remove Li Huowang’s restraints, Li Huowang was so overwhelmed that he almost cried. He was really going to be discharged.

As soon as the restraints were removed, Wu Cheng locked a black device that resembled an electronic watch around his left ankle.

“What’s this?” Li Huowang asked, feeling a little less happy.

Yi Donglai said, “Given your past actions, you’re lucky to only have electronic monitoring for a year.”

“Will this thing constantly track my location?”

“This device not only tracks your location but also restricts you. It’s fully connected to the internet and meant to keep you at least 500 meters away from all schools—be it a kindergarten, elementary school, junior high, or high school,” Yi Donglai explained. “If you stay near one of those for more than five seconds, it will alert the nearest station. No doctor’s clearance can change that.”

He continued, "This device can't be removed. If it's damaged or doesn't detect your pulse, it will trigger an alarm. After you go home, don't wander around. Technically, you still need two months of home treatment to stabilize your condition."

Li Huowang nodded in understanding. It seemed like all these restrictions were because of his past actions.

He would still face restrictions after being discharged, but he didn't mind them as long as he could leave with the identity of a normal person.

"Li Huowang, remember to take your medication regularly after your discharge. You mustn't stop taking it. You can go now. Your parents are waiting for you in the hall," Yi Donglai said.

"Yang Na didn't come?"

"We only notify immediate family for patient discharges. Hurry up, they're already here."

Li Huowang was accompanied by Yi Donglai and Wu Cheng. He changed out of his blue and white patient clothing into normal clothes.

Sun Xiaoqin wept with joy upon seeing Li Huowang in regular clothes for the first time in a very long time.

Beside her, Li Jiancheng was carrying Li Huowang's belongings. He struggled to control his emotions, as his trembling hands betrayed his inner turmoil.

Overcome with gratitude, Sun Xiaoqin tried to kneel before Yi Donglai, but Yi Donglai and Wu Cheng quickly stopped her.

"Ms. Sun, there's no need for this. Please stand up. I simply did my duty by helping your son," Yi Donglai said.

After the hectic discharge process, Li Huowang finally left the hospital.

He stepped outside and looked up at the sky. Li Huowang appreciated the beauty of the white clouds and the freshness of the air like never before.

1. the Symptom Checklist-90 (SCL90) is a 90-item questionnaire used to assess psychological problems 📖

Chapter 649 - Return

Li Huowang hadn't felt much before he stepped out of the hospital. However, the moment he walked outside, a belated sense of joy suddenly spread from within and washed over him.

He was free; he was no longer a psychiatric patient. He could go back to school and live a normal life!

Sun Xiaoqin said, "Come on, let's ride home. Your dad brought his old taxi just to pick you up."

Once in the car, the first thing Li Huowang did was take his mother's phone from her bag and log into his WeChat[1] account.

Then he hesitated for a moment as he held the phone with the cracked screen, seemingly lost in thought. Eventually, he opened the chat with the familiar rabbit avatar. He typed words and then deleted them, repeating this loop for half an hour.

Li Huowang looked at the hundreds of words he'd typed out and hovered his thumb over the send button for a long time before ultimately deleting all of them.

I want to surprise Yang Na. Telling her over WeChat won't do. I'll wait for her outside her school!

As he imagined the scene, his gaze fell on the "smartwatch" on his ankle.

I'll wait for her 500 meters from the school gate!

Li Huowang had made up his mind.

He rolled down the car window, and a smile gradually spread across his face as he looked at the unfamiliar scenery outside. He felt incredibly happy, happier than he had been in years.

As they passed an intersection, a fruit vendor on the roadside stared at Li Huowang, and Li Huowang waved gently at him.

Throughout the long journey from Kangning Hospital back to

his home, Li Huowang never stopped smiling.

It felt surreal to finally see the gate of his neighborhood again.
“Shangjing, I’m finally back.”

Li Huowang looked up at the imposing city walls, took a deep breath, and pulled on the reins.

Once inside, he slowed the horse’s pace and silently observed everything within the city. He was relieved to see that the bustling crowds and everyday life remained the same.

There was a bridal procession with music and fanfare nearby. It proved that people were still going through life events, celebrating as well as mourning.

Though the Dharma Sect caused great turmoil outside, it seemed it hadn’t affected the imperial city.

Li Huowang circled the inner and outer cities of Shangjing, finding no traces of the Dharma Sect. Then, he finally galloped towards the imperial palace.

Around ten meters from the palace, he felt a numbness between his brows and a sharp tingling sensation all over his body. He pulled on the reins sharply, causing the black horse beneath him to rear up before stopping.

Li Huowang realized that the palace guards might have attacked him if he had charged straight in.

“What’s going on!? It’s me! Have I been gone for so long you don’t recognize me?” Li Huowang shouted at the palace guards.

The guards, both inside and outside the walls, remained silent like statues.

“What kind of game are you guys playing!?”

As Li Huowang pondered how to bypass these brutes, an old eunuch wearing a purple robe and white shoes glided out from a side gate.

The eunuch said, “Lord Li, the emperor has summoned you to see him in the palace.”

Li Huowang was rather irritated as he dismounted. He was about to follow the eunuch when he glanced back at the bustling street, as if searching for something.

“Lord Li? What’s the matter?” the eunuch asked.

The eunuch’s voice caused Li Huowang to turn back. “Nothing, let’s go.”

Li Huowang had been to the imperial palace many times and had nothing more to say. He quickened his pace and followed the eunuch to see Gao Zhijian.

As Li Huowang walked, he could feel numerous gazes on him, from both obvious and hidden sources. It appeared that the security had been heightened since his last visit, perhaps due to the aftermath of Shai Zi’s incident.

“Imperial Preceptor, long time no see,” Li Huowang shouted to an old man inside the imperial palace.

Huangfu Tiangang did not say anything. He just stood there with hands behind his back and stared silently at Li Huowang.

“Father, he doesn’t look happy,” Li Sui said from behind Li Huowang.

“Ignore him. He’s never happy,” Li Huowang replied, holding onto Li Sui’s tentacle while they walked.

In the imperial bedchamber, Li Huowang was startled by Gao Zhijian’s appearance.

Gao Zhijian used to be a burly man who had been as sturdy as a wall. But now, he looked frail and pale, as though he was on the verge of death.

“What happened to you? Did the Dharma Sect send assassins to ambush you? Are you hurt?” Li Huowang asked.

Gao Zhijian waved off Li Huowang’s concern. “It’s nothing. Being emperor isn’t easy.”

Unlike before, Gao Zhijian spoke more fluently. He had made significant progress in overcoming his stutter.

“What’s going on? Give me more details. You’re the emperor now; you can’t afford any mishaps.”

Gao Zhijian’s face flushed with embarrassment, seemingly finding it difficult to speak. Eventually, he approached Li Huowang and whispered into his ear.

“Three a day? That many?” Li Huowang uttered in surprise.

With a sigh, Gao Zhijian pulled Li Huowang to the front of the hall and sat on the jade-white stairs.

“Senior Li, I’m going to be a father. Sixteen concubines are pregnant.”

After finding out that Gao Zhijian was fine, Li Huowang let out a sigh of relief. “Then that means there’s an heir to the Dragon Vein. You can rest a bit; you don’t need to overexert yourself.”

He had made it in time to prevent any threats the Dharma Sect would pose to Gao Zhijian.

“Senior Li, how is Cowheart Village? Is everyone alright?” Gao Zhijian asked wistfully.

“Everyone is fine. Thanks to your generous gifts, the village is now very wealthy.”

“That’s good to hear. Sometimes, I dream of returning to the village,” Gao Zhijian said as he stared at the empty courtyard.

“It’s not possible now, with the Dharma Sect causing so much trouble,” Li Huowang stated seriously. “Did you get my message from before?”

A voice came from behind. “Of course, but don’t worry. The Surveillance Bureau will protect the emperor from those with ill intentions.”

Li Huowang turned to see Xuan Pin, the towering Chief of the Surveillance Bureau, behind them.

1. a mobile messaging and social media app that is very popular in China 📱

Chapter 650 - Smoke Signals Rising

Li Huowang stared at the figure in the red robes. “Xuan Pin? Why are you here?”

Xuan Pin’s robes fluttered as he walked towards the two. “With the world in chaos, we need the combined strength of the Surveillance Bureau to get through these difficult times. As the Chief, why shouldn’t I be in the palace?”

Li Huowang scrutinized him for a moment and then turned back to Gao Zhijian. “The Dharma Sect is likely to make a move soon. I’m worried, so I came to check things out.”

Li Huowang suggested, “How about this? I’ll stay in the palace to protect you more closely.”

Before Gao Zhijian could respond, Xuan Pin interjected. “No.”

“I wasn’t asking you.”

“We’ve received your information. Rest assured. The Imperial Preceptor, the military, and the Surveillance Bureau protect the emperor's safety. You can leave.”

Li Huowang slapped his knees and stood up. He angrily said to Xuan Pin, “What are you worried about? I’m Ji Zai’s Twisted One. You learned your illusion techniques from him. Who exactly are you guarding against?”

The gazes he received when he entered the palace, the attention from the Imperial Preceptor, and the Chief’s sudden appearance all made Li Huowang realize they didn't trust him.

Li Huowang exclaimed, “If it weren’t for me, Shai Zi would have seized the Dragon Vein long ago! If I had ulterior motives, why would I have saved it? I could have just watched it all happen!

“And now you’re guarding against me? What does this mean? Aren’t you Ji Zai’s follower? Didn’t he say he’s hunting down the Dharma Sect? Doesn’t that include you?”

“First,” Xuan Pin said, pausing briefly. Then he continued, “I’ve confirmed that if it weren’t for you, Shai Zi wouldn’t have nearly seized the Dragon Vein. Saving it was the least you could do to offset your demerits.

“Secondly, my knowledge comes from enlightenment. I know someone named Ji Zai, and that person is you.”

Li Huowang almost laughed. “Xuan Pin, are you pretending to be confused, or do you genuinely not understand?

“In front of you, I used my ‘Truth’ cultivation method to conjure the Siming that controls bewilderment. Don’t tell me you didn’t see that!”

Xuan Pin said nothing. Instead, a strange gaze shot out at Li Huowang from beneath his robe.

What’s going on? Does he really not know? Is he deceiving me, or has the past changed again? Li Huowang thought.

Li Huowang was taken aback, and he looked up at the sky.

The Chief began to drift away, but Li Huowang grabbed him.

Li Huowang called out, “Wait, I need to confront Ji Zai with you! We need to clear this up.”

Both Li Huowang and Xuan Pin looked up at the sky beyond the layers of roof tiles.

As though startled, a flock of birds suddenly soared from the imperial gardens and circled in the air.

“Something seems wrong,” Li Huowang muttered.

His heart sank. He didn’t know what was happening, but he instinctively felt that the world was changing.

Xuan Pin’s six slender fingers emerged from his red robe as he pinched them together and began to calculate.

After a few breaths, he lowered his hand.

A deep voice then emanated from within Xuan Pin's robe. "A Natural Disaster."

"Natural Disaster? The sky is clear. What Natural Disaster?" Li Huowang said.

His eyes widened. He knew disasters weren't limited to just Sun-Devouring Heavenly Dogs.

At that moment, three black smoke columns rose swiftly in the sky to the east.

"What does that mean?" Li Huowang shouted as he pointed at the smoke.

"Enemy at the gates."

"What enemies?"

Three more black smoke columns rose from the south, west, and north.

Xuan Pin answered, "That's not from outside the city; it's inside. Someone has infiltrated the city."

Li Huowang forgot about questioning Xuan Pin and sprang into action. "I'll check it out. You and the Imperial Preceptor protect Gao Zhijian! Li Sui, let's go!"

Li Huowang widened his mouth and swallowed Li Sui. Two of her tentacles emerged from Li Huowang. Li Sui quickly drew talismans on yellow paper with his blood and slapped them onto Li Huowang's knees.

The moment the talismans were plastered to Li Huowang's knees, he became a blur as he dashed towards the palace gates like the wind.

Meanwhile, in Shangjing, Lu Juren held his daughter Xiu'er and walked into the inner courtyard through the back of the theater house. He carried a box of pastries wrapped in oil paper.

He entered the second door and saw his wife lounging on a chair. She was listening to the show being performed on the stage as she gently tapped her long nails.

Two young maids massaged her legs and shoulders beside her. Few people in Shangjing could enjoy such luxury.

Lu Juren said, “Juan’er, you should move around. You’ve gained weight since coming to Shangjing.”

“So what if I’m fat? Only the wealthy can afford to be fat,” Luo Juanhua retorted as she opened her eyes.

When she saw the pastries in Lu Juren’s hands, she asked with surprise, “Juren, what’s that?”

Embarrassed, Lu Juren dismissed the maids and sheepishly placed the pastries on Luo Juanhua’s slightly bulging belly.

Luo Juanhua was a little confused. Nevertheless, she opened the box and found the long, white cakes within.

Her face lit up with joy. “Wick cakes[1]!”

Luo Juanhua picked up two of them and placed them in her mouth, savoring their flavor.

She said, “Delicious, I haven’t seen these since we left Si Qi! You specially bought these for me?”

Lu Juren scratched his head. “I didn’t plan to. A new pastry shop run by a refugee from Si Qi opened in the market. I just saw them and bought some.”

Sweetness permeated Luo Juanhua’s mouth and heart. She knew that these things were not easily found in the Great Liang.

Back then, they couldn’t afford such treats, except for their wedding when they had scraped together six taels for them. She had eaten them all then.

Luo Juanhua had not expected her husband to remember that after all these years.

Lu Juren told his wife, “About the harsh words I said on the road, don’t take them to heart.”

Luo Juanhua tried to cover her laughter when she saw her husband’s embarrassed expression and recalled the young man who would blush as red as a monkey’s bottom.

Lu Juren blushed. “What’s so funny?”

He set his daughter down and headed towards the theater house.

1. a traditional Chinese snack of steamed rice cakes, typically filled with red bean paste 📖

Translator's Thoughts

This is the first time I've seen Wick Cakes. I should try them one day.



Chapter 651 - Theatre

“Alright, alright. I won’t laugh at you anymore. Don’t leave me, my dear.”

Lu Juren sat back down with Luo Juanhua pulling onto his sleeves.

It was a bit cramped with two people lying in a single chair, but they didn’t mind it.

“Husband, I never regretted marrying you. You might be a wimp at times, but you are very kind.”

Lu Juren said nothing as his wife opened up to him.

“If anyone else got rich, they would’ve immediately gone and gotten themselves a mistress, but you are different. When I first gave birth to Xiu’er, I remember how your father had been very upset since she was a girl, but I also remember how happy you looked. You looked just like a monkey dancing in joy.”

She suddenly remembered something when she said that. She lifted her head and revealed a sly expression.

“Hey, did he say that he would hand down the theater to you after his death? Maybe there’s some paper or document that details that.”

Lu Juren coughed out of surprise and turned around. “Why are you bringing my father into the equation?”

“Tsk. You have to be very careful with matters like these. Your brother might look careless and stupid on the outside, but he’s actually quite calculative. I just don’t want others to take advantage of your kindness.”

Lu Juren sat up and was confused.

Luo Juanhua thought he didn’t understand her and explained, “Wait, stop running away every time I’m trying to talk to you about

these things. Do you expect us to go beg for food when we are old if we don't have the theater?"

Lu Juren replied, "No, it's not about that. Listen, why did they stop performing?"

Luo Juanhua craned her neck and was confused by what she heard too. Rather than hearing the sound of a performance, she heard what seemed to be a commotion instead.

She asked, "What's going on? Is there trouble with the performers?"

"Take Xiu'er and don't leave this place. Let me go and take a look," Lu Juren said.

Lu Juren walked towards the door. Just as he placed his hand on the wooden door, someone kicked the entire door open. A group of people charged into the room. Some of them had a white cloth wrapped around their head, while others had black cloth wrapped over their shoulders.

The first person to enter the room was a beggar with sores on his face. Lu Zhuangyuan had seen him at the entrance of the market.

The beggar swung the cleaver and slashed at Lu Juren's chest, laughing happily when he heard Lu Juren's painful cries.

"To think that you know how to feel pain! You, who were born in opulence?! Do you know how painful being hungry was? Do you know what true suffering is? Do you know how it feels to be humiliated by others? If the Heavens were unjust towards us, then we shall change the Heavens today! I shall let you feel what being poor feels like!"

Lu Juren endured the pain and pushed the old beggar away. His usual cowardly self was gone.

He looked at the group of people and immediately shouted at Luo Juanhua, "Juan'er! Run!"

Lu Juren tried to block the people but was hit in the head by a

hammer.

Iron was harder than bone. Lu Juren didn't stand a chance.

His head immediately caved in, and he slumped onto the ground.

"Junren!" Luo Juanhua shouted in despair and rushed over to Lu Juren's corpse. She completely ignored the people from the Dharma Sect.

One of the old ladies ran out from the group and stabbed Luo Juanhua's neck with a pair of scissors.

The old lady's eyes were filled with hatred as she spat, "How dare you enjoy your wealth while others suffer?! We are all women, so why are you in bliss while I have to suffer?!"

Luo Juanhua's eyes glazed over as she died. The old lady then carried her bloodied scissors as she walked towards the crying Xiu'er.

She almost killed Xiu'er, but the old beggar pushed her away. He carried Xiu'er in his arms.

The old beggar exclaimed, "What are you doing?! The child is still young! Are you crazy?! How could you try to kill such a young child?!"

"Get lost!"

"No!"

As they were bickering, the others started rummaging around the rooms.

The two of them saw what the others were doing and immediately stopped. They quickly rummaged around too for fear that the others would take all of the valuables.

But it wasn't long before the group left the place with frustration. There weren't a lot of valuables in the theater.

"I know where their house is! Follow me!" someone shouted.

Hearing this, everyone followed the person who had spoken.

One of the gangsters with tattoos on his arms even threw a

torch and burned down the theater.

The old beggar was carrying Xiu'er as he tailed the group. He wasn't physically fit to begin with, and he was even slower now since he was carrying Xiu'er.

He wanted to place Xiu'er down, but he decided against it when he saw how chaotic everything around him was.

Just then, he heard someone shouting from the front.

"Monster!"

"He's a monster!"

"Don't be scared! God Yu'er is strong! We are not afraid of monsters! Go!! Kill him!"

Before the beggar could figure out what was happening, he saw the people in front exploding into a mist of blood.

All of them were cut down like grass in a field.

He finally saw what the monster was.

It was a Daoist wearing red robes with black tentacles sprouting out of his body. He wore a bronze coin veil and had only one remaining eye, which, curiously, had two pupils. Each of the tentacles was holding a weapon. It was no wonder others called him a monster.

The old beggar couldn't do anything but raise his cleaver. He put the child down so that he could kill the monster, but just as he placed Xiu'er onto the ground, the old beggar split apart.

Li Huowang suddenly realized the crying child in the pool of blood was Xiu'er. He never thought this was how he would meet the Lu family again.

Xiu'er was crying as she pulled on Li Huowang's sleeve and pointed at the theater. Li Huowang held her with one tentacle and immediately rushed towards the theater.

Soon, he saw the signage of the theater belonging to the Lu family.

The sign that had been wrapped in gold and silver was now

enveloped by flames.

Staring at the collapsing building, Li Huowang steeled himself and ran into the burning theater.

The stage itself was burning too. An old man was standing on the collapsing stage. He was crying and laughing hysterically as he loudly sang lines from the show.

Beside him were the corpses of his son and daughter-in-law.

“The bright moon rises early to the east as I think of my mother back at home! Accompanying you, I feel like a sheep accompanying a tiger! While I have fulfilled my loyalty to you, I have failed to be filial to my family! As the star shifts and the Big Dipper soars through the Heavens, I sit restlessly without being able to sleep as the second section of the night passes.

“I have never let the people of Gu County down, so why am I being summoned with the gold medallion? I listen to the bell tolling on the tower signaling the third section of the night, while my eyes dared not shift from the sight of the moon illuminating the hall.”

[1]

The deaths of his son and daughter-in-law had driven Lu Zhuangyuan mad.

1. A song that expresses the conflict of trying to balance being loyal to one's superior and being filial to their family. Gold medallion refers to the message of the highest urgency, meaning that any message with the gold medallion would be delivered the fastest. A famous story involving it is how General Yue Fei was recalled by the emperor with twelve golden medallions. 🙌

Chapter 652 - Death

The Lu family's theater was made of wood, so it burned down easily.

The red flames burned everything inside the theater. The smell of charred wood continued to assault Li Huowang's nose.

But the crazed Lu Zhuangyuan ignored everything around him as he stood on the stage and sang as loud as he could. He was performing one last time with his son and daughter-in-law.

Li Huowang burned the scene into his mind as his heart felt a pang of pain.

"Hahaha! Good! They died a good death!" Qiu Chibao laughed from Li Huowang's left.

She was holding the decaying corpse of her child. As if triggered by something, she stared at the corpses in the fire as she danced around happily.

"Uuuuuu..."

Someone was crying on Li Huowang's left. He turned and saw it was Jin Shanzhao[1] groveling on the ground and crying.

Just as the old monk started to chant, Li Huowang walked over and saved Lu Zhuangyuan.

He barely made it out of the building with Lu Zhuangyuan just before the entire theater collapsed. Li Huowang watched as Lu Juren's and Luo Juanhua's corpses were engulfed by the fire.

He wasn't close with the Lu family, and even though he knew they were using him as an escort throughout their journey, he chose not to reveal their plan and played along with it.

Still, he felt his heart hurt when he saw what had happened.

"Troupe Leader Lu! Snap out of it! Your granddaughter is alive! Don't give up!"

Li Huowang brought Lu Zhuangyuan and Xiu'er towards where the palace was. The entire Liang Kingdom was in chaos, and the only safe place was the palace.

The palace also came to life due to the invasion of the Dharma Sect.

The red palace walls were surrounded by six layers of soldiers, three on the outside and three on the inside. The security in the palace had increased substantially.

“Look after them!” Li Huowang pushed Lu Zhuangyuan and Xiu'er to the soldiers. “I will kill you if they are harmed when I come back!”

Peng Longteng appeared behind Li Huowang after he warned the soldiers. She grabbed one of Li Huowang's tentacles and threw him high up into the air.

As the wind soared past his head, he looked at the Liang Kingdom from above and saw the entire city was in chaos.

The Dharma Sect surged in from the outside like ants.

There were various battlefields forming inside the city as the Dharma Sect poured into the city.

The Dharma Sect people were chanting incomprehensible words as they released all of their resentment towards the people of the Liang Kingdom.

Thankfully, the city guards and the Surveillance Bureau were already moving in full force. They fought at different corners of the city as explosions and flames engulfed the city.

Li Huowang knew about how dangerous the Dharma Sect was. If they were given free rein, the entire world would be destroyed.

In his heart, he had always thought of defeating the Dharma Sect as an act to defend himself and his family. He didn't have a grudge against them—it was just something he had to do to protect himself and the people he cared about.

But now everything has changed. Hatred and anger filled his

heart when he looked at the Dharma Sect.

The Dharma Sect would not only destroy the world, but it would also cause suffering to the innocent!

Whatever god Yu'er was, it was spreading suffering and pain to everyone!

Li Huowang hated it. He knew what it felt like to go through such suffering. He would rather bear the brunt of it all alone if it meant the others would be at peace.

“Ji Zai! Do something! The Dharma Sect is attacking the city! Are you fucking blind?! So many people are dead!”

Li Huowang was soaring in the air as he shouted towards the sun. Upon getting no response, he gritted his teeth with resentment.

He could only rely on himself now.

Peng Longteng appeared beside him and threw him towards the most chaotic battlefield in the city.

Li Huowang sank into the earth as if it was water, then he swam upwards. He wielded all sorts of weapons as he charged into the mass of the Dharma Sect.

Li Huowang unleashed all of his rage on them. He feared that he would go crazy if he did not do so.

An explosion of blood happened everywhere he went. The usual Dharma Sect fodder were not his match, nor were the witches hidden in the darkness.

Li Huowang was undefeatable as he killed everything in his path, leaving nothing but blood and gore in his wake.

He had a single thought in his mind: killing the members of the Dharma Sect.

The more surviving Dharma Sect members there were, the more tragedies like the Lu family would occur.

When Li Huowang's body was completely coated in blood, the murderous aura on his baleful purple-tassel sword solidified and released a dragon's roar. The sword came alive and started pulsing

waves of hot energy into Li Huowang's body. He suddenly felt invigorated.

Li Huowang swung the sword and a blood-red sword energy flew forward before bisecting both people and houses.

He realized that he had been suppressing the true potential of the purple-tassel sword. He killed too little in the past!

Li Huowang held onto the sword as he killed the Dharma Sect fodders. He slaughtered from morning to midnight until even his eyes were covered in a dense veil of blood.

He finally stopped when all of the Dharma Sect members around him were dead. By then, Li Sui was already dragging her tentacles on the ground out of exhaustion.

The city became quiet. The people from the Surveillance Bureau stood on the roof like vultures as they looked around.

Each of them was enveloped in bloodlust and a murderous aura as they searched for the next Dharma Sect member to kill.

Li Huowang looked at his own body. He saw his robes were drenched in blood and gore.

Staring at the corpses lying around him, Li Huowang knew his side had won, but he felt no joy. Only exhaustion awaited him.

“Father, I’m hungry. Can I eat some of your flesh?”

Li Huowang nodded and sat on a stool. “Sure, eat some.”

“Thank you, Father.”

“Ji Zai,” Li Huowang called towards his shadow, but there was no reply.

He then looked at the palace. Xuan Pin, Zheng Boqiao, and the Imperial Preceptor didn’t appear.

It seems that they are protecting the Emperor. Gao Zhijian should be safe.

Why are they doing this?

Li Huowang stared at the corpses of the Dharma Sect members.

Even though the battle was intense, the only casualties on Li

Huowang's side were the civilians. No one from the royal family, military, or the Surveillance Bureau was killed.

It was as if the Dharma Sect was committing suicide instead.

1. Jin Shanzhao was a character that briefly traveled with Li Huowang and his companions. He was introduced in chapter 189 and was killed by Peng Longteng in chapter 208, becoming one of Li Huowang's illusions 🤞

Chapter 653 - Disappearance

The imperial family was not the only faction in Shangjing; the Surveillance Bureau was a significant force too.

The city was in ruins. Even though it appeared that many had died, the majority of the casualties were from the Dharma Sect.

The hidden danger within Shangjing had been completely removed thanks to today's incident. As horrific as it was, at least the Dharma Sect from the Liang Kingdom wouldn't be able to make any major moves in the near future.

Still, no matter how much he thought, Li Huowang couldn't figure out what the Dharma Sect's end goal was.

Wait, I thought there was a Natural Disaster? What happened to it? Which Heavenly Dao changed owners? I don't feel anything strange, Li Huowang remarked inwardly.

While thinking about that, he suddenly heard a faint rumbling. He looked up and saw a piece of green brick fall from the top of the wall. Then, more and more started falling down.

Before he could react, the city wall exploded. A massive stone statue with a tiger's head squeezed in from the hole in the wall. As it did, it smashed the ground with its paws. Yellow smoke erupted outwards from the impact.

Everything that came into contact with the yellow smoke turned into stone. Living humans, burning fire, and even black smoke all turned into stone without exception.

Just as the yellow smoke was about to engulf the entirety of Shangjing, a mysterious sound came from the palace. As the sound spread outwards, the yellow smoke suddenly stopped its advance. It

was as if a barrier had contained it, but the yellow smoke continued to build up inside.

When Li Huowang thought that the Surveillance Bureau's method was containing the threat, he suddenly heard a different sound. This time, it came from inside the yellow smoke. The sound of footsteps marching in unison filled the air as rows of stone soldiers emerged from within the smoke.

The soldiers held stone spears and wore stone armor. The yellow smoke and the stone soldiers reminded Li Huowang of something familiar.

Hm?! Isn't that the Terracotta Army?!

A war chariot emerged from the smoke, and one of the stone soldiers standing on it raised its right arm. The stone soldiers charged forward in unison the moment the command was given.

You Zixiong was the first one to attack the stone army. He leaped up in the air and threw four modaos[1] towards the stone soldiers. The four modaos pierced the stone soldiers without any difficulties. You Zixiong then swung his chain around and a large swathe of the stone soldiers were cut in half.

But no matter how many he cut down, an endless tide of stone soldiers kept marching out from the yellow smoke.

The primary threat was the tiger-like stone statue. If it was not taken down, the stone army would never stop marching out!

Li Huowang stood up and shook his throbbing head. Peng Longteng appeared and threw him towards the statue.

Once Li Huowang got close, he swung his spine sword.

A crack to the Qi Kingdom flew towards the statue, but something unexpected happened just as Li Huowang thought the statue's head would be cut in half.

A metallic fluid sprayed out from the crack!

What's happening?! What's happening to the Qi Kingdom?

Li Huowang had never seen this happen before. Something had

happened to the Qi Kingdom again!

However, Li Huowang was too busy dealing with the current situation and couldn't afford to think about it.

The black metallic liquid sprayed onto the stone statue. Flowers sprouted at every spot the liquid touched.

But the flowers looked wrong. Rather than having a single color, their color shifted like a rainbow on an oil slick. And as the color was changing, the flowers were rotting. The sight of the rotting flowers and their shimmering colors nauseated everyone who witnessed it.

Now that the statue was covered in those flowers, it looked even more horrifying.

“Retreat!” Li Huowang shouted.

Peng Longteng reappeared and threw Li Huowang backwards.

But Li Huowang refused to give up. He swung his purple-tassel sword, sending a beam of sword energy towards the stone statue. The murderous sword Qi crashed into the stone statue without any incident.

The shimmering flowers were cut and the liquid flowed down their stems.

The statue suddenly moved. As it did, more flowers continued to grow on its surface.

Just then, Si Qi's Chief Zheng Boqiao flew down from the sky.

He hovered midair and made a seal, then spat towards the statue. White smoke spilled forth from his mouth and covered the statue's head.

The Imperial Preceptor was also rushing over with his sword. Li Huowang knew this was a good chance so he quickly rushed towards the statue too.

“The Supreme Pure Jade King rules over the Thirty-Six Heavens and Universe. He manifests from all ten directions with his hair unbound as he rides the Qilin! He threads on a layer of ice with his

bare feet as he commands the winds and thunder with his Nine Heavens Whip!”

Purple lightning struck the statue again and again.

Despite this, the statue was still moving. It was as if the attacks barely did any damage to it.

As they distracted the statue, Li Huowang took advantage of the chaos and got near its body. But the statue could somehow sense Li Huowang. Every time he got close, the statue would always shift just enough to remain out of reach.

“Closer! I need to be closer!”

Li Huowang tiptoed as he tried to grab the balloon on the tree. When he saw his fingertips were close to the balloon’s string, he jumped up and grabbed it in his hands. Just as he held the balloon in his arms, the balloon suddenly popped.

Li Huowang scratched his head in embarrassment and looked at the students in front of him. “Erm... I’m sorry. I think I used too much strength. How much does the balloon cost? Let me pay you back.”

The students walked away in disappointment, and Li Huowang shook his head in shame. He picked up his portable game console to continue his game but saw that the game was over.

Back in Shangjing, everyone saw the statue’s head shattering to pieces and didn’t know what to say.

Li Huowang looked at the statue and asked tentatively, “Ji Zai?”

“Yes,” replied a familiar voice.

Li Huowang immediately got angry when he heard that.

“You still dare to show yourself here?! Where were you just now?!”

“I vanished.”

“Vanish?! What do you mean? The Dharma Sect invaded Shangjing and you disappeared? Do you know how many people

died because of you disappearing? The Lu family is gone!” Li Huowang shouted angrily.

Ji Zai replied, “I didn’t want to harm them. It’s all because of you.”

“Bullshit!”

“Think carefully. What did you tell the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau?”

“I said—”

Li Huowang stopped. He knew why Ji Zai disappeared. The Natural Disaster that occurred just now happened due to the disappearance of the Heavenly Dao of Bewilderment.

Ji Zai vanished because Li Huowang said that Ji Zai was born from his imagination.

1. A modao is a unique weapon that looks like a combination between a large sword and a spear 🗡️

Chapter 654 - Star

Li Huowang lowered his head and looked at his own shadow without knowing what to do after everything that had happened to Shangjing.

Ji Zai's existence depended entirely on Li Huowang. His presence was unstable, and he would disappear every time Li Huowang thought that he wasn't real.

Ji Zai controlled bewilderment, or perhaps it would be more accurate that he himself was an embodiment of bewilderment. He would appear and disappear from time to time. His existence all depended on the whims of a single person.

No wonder he kept telling me to carry on and not think about anything else.

"Are my thoughts right?" Li Huowang shouted to his shadow.

This time, Ji Zai did not answer him. His shadow remained as a shadow.

Li Huowang thought Ji Zai was off doing something else again, but this time he knew why. As Li Huowang was about to leave, he saw Shangguan Yuting floating out from the walls.

It was one of Xuan Pin's illusions. The ruckus caused by Li Huowang had compelled her to come over and check what was happening.

Li Huowang looked at her and said, "I now know what you were talking about. You were actually trying to ensure that his existence wouldn't get erased by me. No wonder you called him Unspeakable."

"What?" Shangguan Yuting uttered puzzledly.

"You were right. He really is Unspeakable."

Li Huowang left after that.

He walked past the corpse-littered street and found a well. Looking down the well, he saw two corpses beside his reflection. He also saw half of the moon peeking out from the clouds through the reflection.

Li Huowang stared at his reflection before he closed his eyes and murmured a chant.

Everything around him twisted and changed. Stones became soft, strings became oil, even the grass beside his feet uprooted and ran away.

After chanting, Li Huowang opened his eyes and saw that the grass had grown on a brick somewhere else.

Li Huowang asked, "Are you the only Siming that's so fragile, or are the others the same?"

"I don't know. Maybe. Sometimes I remember certain things, but I cannot tell you about them. You just need to remember what I told you last time. I am you, and you are me. Without you, there is no me. Now tell me, who am I?"

"You are Ji Zai," Li Huowang answered coldly.

Ji Zai replied, "How did I come into existence?"

"I don't know how you came into existence, but I only know you are useless! You can't be relied on when the situation calls for it! I would rather rely on myself! I won't look for you anymore, and I will figure everything out myself!"

"Good. Carry on. You will protect yourself well, and you will always have help."

Li Huowang glared at Ji Zai and turned to leave. Suddenly, Li Huowang felt something was staring at him.

He looked up into the night sky and extended his hand. He held onto the corner of the starry night and pulled it aside to reveal the scenery outside the window.

A short old lady with white hair and a ribbon on her sleeve was staring at him from the corner outside of his house. She tried to

peek into Li Huowang's room.

"What are you staring at?"

"Mom, there's someone staring at our home," Li Huowang said indignantly.

Sun Xiaoqin walked over and pulled on the dark blue curtain adorned with little stars. The room instantly lit up.

"Oh, it's Madam Qi. She's the president of the Neighborhood Office. She even held you when you were a baby."

"Why is she staring at our house? Does she have nothing to do?"

Li Huowang's tone was filled with a hint of hostility because Madam Qi kept staring at him.

He had always felt that someone had been staring at him for the past few days.

To think it was her.

"Oh, it's probably nothing. I think the hospital informed her about your discharge. Look at how many people worried about you!"

"Is she really? I fear that she actually thinks I'm a crazy serial murderer."

Li Huowang grabbed the curtains and pulled them shut.

He'd thought he would be free once he was discharged, but that was not the case. Everyone in the neighborhood avoided him like the plague, regardless of whether they were his neighbors or acquaintances.

There was also surveillance coming from Madam Qi. Even though Li Huowang was discharged, the others didn't trust him and looked at him with apprehensiveness. Being in the neighborhood was worse than being in the mental hospital.

Li Huowang turned on his table lamp and started studying. He needed to learn fast because being accepted to Yang Na's university would be extremely difficult. After going through so many

harrowing experiences, he had forgotten almost everything in the book.

But Sun Xiaoqin was horrified when she saw that Li Huowang was studying. She immediately grabbed the book out of his hands.

She asked, “Why are you studying? I thought you were having a good time playing games?”

“Mom, since I’m cured, I need to continue studying so that I can enter university.”

Li Huowang tried to take the book back but Sun Xiaoqin stepped out of his reach with the book in her clutches. “No, you cannot have any stress right now. Going into university is the least of your worries.”

“Mom, but I’ve been held back for two years in my final year of high school. What should I be worried about other than getting into university?”

“You don’t need to do anything. You just need to play and enjoy yourself. Here, this is some pocket money for you.” Sun Xiaoqin stuffed several hundred yuan into Li Huowang’s pocket. “Play as much as you want. Buy whatever you want. Eat whatever you want! You still have some friends in school, right? Ask them to come and play with you! Go and eat barbecue, or visit the anime street, or maybe even stay overnight in a cyber cafe!”

Sun Xiaoqin stopped momentarily and then said, “If you do want to stay overnight in a cyber cafe, you need to let me know which one it is so that I can bring your medicine over.”

She had researched a lot for Li Huowang’s recovery. She learned that most teenagers suffered from mental illnesses due to how strict their households were, as well as having a lot of stress from their studies.

Her son finally came back after suffering through a lot. She was adamant about making sure he didn’t get hospitalized again.

“Mom, mom. Let me think about it. I need some time alone,” Li

Huowang said, pushing her out of the room.

Even while being pushed, Sun Xiaoqin scrambled and grabbed all of Li Huowang's textbooks from his room. She didn't even leave a pen in there.

“Remember to play. Don't study! Do you want to buy those VR... or 3D glasses? I don't know what they are, but I think you would like them!”

Chapter 655 - Gaze

After chasing out his mom, Li Huowang sighed and sat on his chair. He stared at his messy room, then he checked his calendar and noticed that Yang Na's birthday was coming up.

Li Huowang silently thought about what to do for her birthday. *What gift should I prepare other than the fact that I've been discharged?*

"Wait, how much do I need to score in my final exams to get admitted into her university?"

Li Huowang checked his phone and hissed in surprise when he saw the astronomical number of points he had to achieve to even apply for that university. Still, he quickly recovered and grew resolute.

"I need to fight for this! I promised her that I would do it. I've gone through so much. I won't get intimidated by this!"

Li Huowang decided to study immediately, so he started studying on his phone.

The door of his room creaked, opening slowly.

It was Sun Xiaoqin, already in her pajamas. When she saw Li Huowang was on his phone, *Good. Young people like him should play on their phones more often.*

Sun Xiaoqin nodded in satisfaction and left.

Time slowly passed, and his neighborhood gradually grew silent. In the darkness of the night, Li Huowang massaged his temples as he stared at the phone.

It was close to one o'clock at night when he closed his eyes in despair and lay down on his bed. His head was buzzing.

"I was wrong. I'm really worried now. Why is it so complicated? I remember learning this in school, so why can't I understand it now?"

Sometimes things in life couldn't be done with just hard work. There was nothing he could do if it was too hard to comprehend. It was definitely not something he could learn on his own.

Li Huowang understood that he needed a systematic approach. He would never be able to enter Yang Na's university if he continued to study by himself in his room.

"What should I do? I need to find a way to keep up with her. Even if I can't catch up to her in the second year of university, I still need to find a way to catch up to her in the final year so we can graduate together."

Li Huowang closed his eyes and suddenly felt the money in his pocket. He had a great idea.

"Should I use the money to register for some courses online? The money from my mom and Yi Donglai should be enough."

Li Huowang perked up and started searching through his phone again. He ignored his fatigue even though it was already late at night.

While he was trying to come up with a plan to enter the university, he felt like someone was staring at him. He frowned at this familiar sensation.

"Seriously? Is Madam Qi still trying to keep an eye on me even though it's this late? Isn't she taking her job too seriously?"

Li Huowang lifted a small corner of his curtain and peeked outside, but he saw no one.

Am I too tired?

Li Huowang returned to his bed and lay down. He closed his eyes and tried forcing himself to sleep. He tried to ignore the sensation, but no matter how hard he tried, it was so intense that he couldn't sleep.

Li Huowang was now certain that someone was still watching him!

Fuck! Let's see who's the bastard that keeps looking at me!

He jumped out of his bed in anger. Then, he peeked through his window and slowly looked around outside. However, it was too dark, making it hard for him to find the person who was staring at his room.

After half an hour, Li Huowang finally found them. The person stood motionlessly on the corner of the street, where it was extremely dark.

Li Huowang thought that the person seemed very tall and skinny. It was too dark to make out their face though.

Li Huowang closed his eyes and shook his head. When he opened his eyes again, he saw the person's appearance had somehow changed a little. He thought his eyes were playing tricks on him due to how dark it was.

“Unless...”

Li Huowang recalled what Qian Fu had told him last time.

“Impossible! Why am I thinking of him? Am I crazy?”

Li Huowang needed to go and confirm who the person was, no matter who it was. Nevertheless, he was certain that the person was not Madam Qi.

Li Huowang quickly placed a pillow on the stool and stacked several things on top of it to make the figure at the window look like him.

He wanted to make sure that his disappearance did not alert the person. Li Huowang got on the floor and slowly crawled out of his room.

To prevent himself from making any sounds, Li Huowang made his way downstairs barefoot. Using the greenery and foliage for cover, he slowly approached the spot where the person was.

Li Huowang got close and could finally see the silhouette of the person.

“Huowang!”

Someone suddenly shouted his name, and Li Huowang raised

his head instinctively.

He looked at his room and saw Sun Xiaoqin peeking out of the window and looking around.

Li Huowang looked back at the corner where the person had been and realized they had disappeared. There was nothing in the darkness.

“They are gone? Where are they?”

Li Huowang quickly searched around the place.

“Huowang! Where are you? Don’t scare me!” Sun Xiaoqin yelled, pushing herself halfway out the window and looking around the neighborhood.

When Li Huowang saw how worried his mother was and how the lights of other homes were lighting up in response to her cries, he begrudgingly stood up. “Mom! I’m here! Don’t worry! Something fell, and I came here to pick it up!”

“Why are you picking it at night? You can do it tomorrow! Come up, quick!”

Li Huowang took one last look at the darkness before returning to his room. He couldn’t sleep a wink throughout the night afterward.

The next morning, he was still trying to figure out who that person was even as he ate his breakfast.

Firstly, no matter what their goal is, I am certain that they exist.

He felt that while Madam Qi had also been keeping an eye on him, the sensation of being watched had mostly been due to the mysterious person.

But why?

Li Huowang could not figure it out. He was not rich, nor did he have any valuables on him. Moreover, it would be expensive to hire someone to monitor him.

“What’s wrong? Do you like daydreaming now?” Sun Xiaoqin said as she washed the plates and wiped the table clean. “Why

aren't you playing your games? I've turned on your computer."

"Mom, I don't want to play."

Li Huowang held his forehead in pain. He couldn't tell his mother about the mysterious person. If he did, she would think that he had gone crazy again.

"Nonsense! You are still young, so there's no way you don't want to play! Hurry up and go! Don't live like an old man. I will slice some fruits for you later, so what fruit do you want?"

Li Huowang sighed and went back to his room.

Chapter 656 - Surveillance

“Don’t forget to take your medicine!” Sun Xiaoqin yelled.

Once Li Huowang was back in his room and could not hear his mother’s nagging anymore, he sighed and tried to remember what happened last night.

He couldn’t come to any conclusions yet because what he had seen yesterday was very unclear. He even thought that it could’ve been nothing but an illusion.

He needed proof that someone was following him. Otherwise, the others would think that he was going crazy again. What he saw was not what the others perceived.

More importantly, even Li Huowang himself could not fully believe what he had seen.

Li Huowang hesitated before typing on his phone.

Why do I feel like someone is constantly staring at me with ill intentions and trying to harm me?

He searched for his symptoms and quickly found something that might explain it: delusional disorder, persecutory type. [1]

Patients with this disorder always believe that someone, or an organization, is trying to harm them by committing acts of crime against them, such as assault, framing, murder, destruction, defamation, insults, poisoning, stalking, or other acts of oppression.

The illness warps the patient’s rationality and beliefs. They have assumptions that are not in line with either the situation they are in or their level of education. Their assumptions are usually very illogical, but they always firmly believe in them. It is impossible to convince them otherwise, as they are unwilling to accept the truth even when they are

confronted with irrefutable facts from their own personal experience.

Li Huowang's fingers trembled when he read the symptoms.
Am I mentally ill again?

He opened his contacts and scrolled to Yi Donglai's name. Li Huowang hesitated for a moment before closing the app.

He had finally gotten discharged. He refused to go back.

Li Huowang didn't want to worry the people around him. He knew his mother would be devastated if she learned that he was mentally ill again.

He continued to look up more information on the internet. Li Huowang checked different keywords such as stalking, surveillance, mental illness, and being harmed just to see if there was another possibility.

He found an interesting article.

Hai Mingwei's mental health deteriorated when he became older and complained to others about how he was being stalked by someone. He told others that his conversations were being wiretapped and that his mail was being intercepted. While eating his lunch one day, he pointed at two people across his table and told the others that the two were stalking him. Everyone thought he had persecutory-type delusional disorder.

Hai Mingwei's mental health soon deteriorated further, and everyone firmly believed that he was mentally ill. He got admitted into a mental hospital and accepted the electroconvulsive therapy that was popular back then.

He committed suicide one day, as everyone had expected. He was written off as being unable to endure the pressure and committed suicide. His case was recorded in books and journals.

However, fifty years later, someone managed to prove that Hai Mingwei had indeed been stalked. An organization had placed under him surveillance and had been tracking him all the time.

"Hah!"

Li Huowang closed his eyes and threw his phone onto the bed. Being in a difficult position was not scary, but not knowing what to do was. Whatever he decided to do might be wrong!

“What should I do? Is it real? Do I need to go and find out the truth?”

Li Huowang wasn't sure what he could do, but then he sensed the gaze again. This time, he didn't act because his window was open and it was daytime.

Li Huowang moved slowly and took out a handheld mirror from his drawer. He lowered his head and used the mirror's reflection to see outside the window.

He slowly moved the mirror and finally saw a pair of women's shoes. His heart started racing.

Li Huowang moved the mirror again, then he saw Madam Qi's face in the mirror.

“Fuck!”

Li Huowang turned around and looked out the window. “Madam Qi, aren't you tired from doing this all day? Is there no one to take over from your shift? Why don't you come to my house for a drink so you can stare at me all you want!”

Madam Qi left as if nothing happened.

At the same time, a phone rang inside Li Huowang's home. Li Huowang recalled that it was the ringtone of his mother's phone.

He walked out and found the phone on a cabinet. It had a cracked screen.

Li Huowang picked up the phone and held it next to his ear.

“Hello? Who is it?”

There was no response from the other end of the line.

“Who is it? Sun Xiaoqin is not here. I'm her son. Who are you looking for?”

—Li Huowang?

The caller's voice seemed weird, as if it had been altered

digitally.

Li Huowang frowned and suspicion arose in his heart. "I'm Li Huowang. Who are you?" However, there was no response, again. He adjusted the phone's position, trying to hear more clearly.

He could faintly hear the sound of someone wailing in the background. Li Huowang took out his own phone and slowly dialed the police's number.

Sun Xiaoqin walked into the house with a bag of fruit when she saw Li Huowang was using her phone.

She asked, "Huowang, what are you doing?"

"Someone called you. I think they had the wrong number," Li Huowang answered as he placed the phone down on the cabinet.

"What? But my phone is broken."

"What?"

Li Huowang quickly checked the phone and saw nothing on the cracked screen except for his shocked face reflected on it.

"What's wrong? Don't frighten me," Sun Xiaoqin said.

She walked over and hugged Li Huowang while stroking his head.

Li Huowang suddenly laughed. "Haha, how was my act? I fooled you, didn't I?"

Sun Xiaoqin released him and pushed him slightly. "You rascal. Don't make jokes like that! They scare me!"

"Haha, I thought you were worrying about something, so I thought I would lighten up the mood."

Li Huowang walked back towards his room.

When he entered his room, he snarled and howled quietly. "What the fuck is going on? Is someone surveilling me!?"

1. Sounds like a cool technique name. 

Chapter 657 - Answer

Li Huowang sat on the floor with a blank expression as he recalled what happened.

He picked up his mother's phone and the other party even told him his name, but then his mother told him that her phone was broken. The phone was clearly dead. Who was he talking to, then?

If this was his hallucination, then was the sensation of someone staring at him fake too? Was he actually mentally ill? Was he not cured?

Li Huowang closed his eyes in pain as he scratched his head forcefully.

He didn't want to deal with this problem, but he had no choice but to face it. He didn't even trust himself.

"I..."

Li Huowang hesitated a little before he called Yi Donglai. The phone rang for a long time before Yi Donglai picked up.

—Hello? Little Li? Why are you calling me? Is something wrong?

Li Huowang clenched his fist before he spoke in a trembling voice, "Doctor Yi, do you think that I have a delusional disorder?"

—What do you mean? Do you have a new symptom?

Yi Donglai's tone turned serious.

"I don't know, but I have the feeling that someone is constantly looking at me. I suspect they are planning something because this is not the first time I've felt their gaze."

—Did you have the feeling when you were in the hospital, or did you first notice it after you were discharged?"

"I never had it in the hospital. Wait, it's back again. Someone's staring at me."

Li Huowang used the mirror's reflection to see who was staring at him. This time it wasn't Madam Qi. Instead, it was a lady using an umbrella to hide her face.

It was spring, so seeing someone dressed like that was weird.

Is she real? Or is she an illusion? Li Huowang questioned himself.

Yi Donglai was still talking to him when Li Huowang hung up.

I'm willing to get admitted if it's an illusion, but first, I need to confirm whether it's an illusion or not!

Li Huowang placed his phone down and retrieved several items from his drawer. He then quickly went down and exited his unit. When he walked out of the fire exit, he saw that the woman was still there.

He stealthily went out through the left entrance and circled around to slowly approach the woman from behind.

The closer he got, the more he noticed about the woman. She wore high heels and very skimpy clothes, which seemed inappropriate for the season. This made Li Huowang even more suspicious. Li Huowang gradually grew fearful as he got closer to the woman.

When he was just a few steps away from the woman, a black car suddenly stopped beside him, and two people ran out of it.

One of the assailants covered Li Huowang's nose and mouth with a wet cloth while the second assailant restrained him and started dragging him into the car.

When Li Huowang smelled chemicals on the cloth, he felt excited rather than fearful. He finally got his answer.

I'm not crazy! Someone really is trying to harm me!

Li Huowang started losing consciousness due to the chemical on the cloth. He instinctively opened his mouth and bit his tongue. Intense pain and blood filled Li Huowang's mouth, waking him up.

Li Huowang then opened his mouth as wide as he could. The cloth and fingers of the first assailant were forced into his mouth.

He then bit down hard and tried to sever the first assailant's fingers.

"Yikes!" the assailant wailed,

They smacked Li Huowang's head in an attempt to get their fingers out of Li Huowang's mouth, but it was useless.

During the struggle, the assailants shoved Li Huowang into the car. Once they were all inside, Li Huowang released the first assailant's finger, and the first assailant, propelled by their own momentum, crashed against the window.

Li Huowang opened his bloody mouth and looked at the assailants.

"Want to know why I let you move me into the car? Because once I'm inside here, I can tell others that I was defending myself even if I kill or cripple you!"

Li Huowang took out a box cutter from his sleeves and stabbed it into the second assailant's legs.

In pain, the second assailant released Li Huowang. Li Huowang grabbed the box cutter firmly and started stabbing the first assailant, who was in front of him.

The black car started shaking wildly before the doors opened, and Li Huowang fell out. He was covered in blood by then.

Li Huowang saw the car speeding away and threw the bloody box cutter onto the ground before he took his phone and dialed the police.

"Hello? Police? Two people just tried to kidnap me. I killed one of the kidnappers and the other is probably going to die soon too. They were driving a black car when they departed from Wuyi Road."

Kidnapping was a serious crime, especially when the victim killed the kidnapper. Li Huowang was soon taken from the police station to record his statement.

As Li Huowang gave his statement, Sun Jianye felt a headache coming on. He looked at Li Huowang's information on the terminal

and then at Sun Xiaoqin, who was crying.

“Don’t worry, your son is fine. Wait here. Let me go find out what’s going on.”

Sun Jianye then brought his junior into the interrogation room to listen in on the questioning.

“Li Huowang, you’ve said that you were kidnapped? Do you know why? Have you angered anyone recently?”

Li Huowang was clutching onto the paper cup as he pondered. “I killed a few people in a previous incident. I think that the kidnappers could be their accomplices trying to take revenge on me. Maybe you can approach the case from that angle.”

The room was silent, and no one spoke.

Just then, another officer entered the room. “We’ve checked the security cameras. There’s no kidnappers on the video.”

Sun Jianye and his colleagues checked the footage too and then looked at Li Huowang with suspicion.

“What do you mean? That’s impossible! I have evidence here!” Li Huowang took out two dismembered fingers from his pocket and placed them on the table.

Chapter 658 - New

The fingers on the table had turned pale due to the loss of blood. Everyone, except for Li Huowang, was stunned and surprised.

Li Huowang was naturally handcuffed.

“Wait, I’m the victim here! Are you kidding me?! Why am I being handcuffed?!” Li Huowang shouted, but everyone ignored him.

Two officers stood guard while the others went outside.

Sun Jianye listened to Li Huowang shout as he read the information they had about the unusual youth.

He hated people with mental illnesses. Their statements could be false, and their way of thinking diverged so much from the norm that Sun Jianye’s interrogation techniques were useless.

If the suspect didn’t provide any leads, he could only investigate the case from another angle.

Sun Jianye picked up Li Huowang’s phone and checked the call log. He saw that Li Huowang had called a person today and dialed the number.

—Hello? Li Huowang? Why did you hang up on me just now? Oh, I’m sorry. How is he? Yes, I’m his doctor. Was there anything strange about him? He did call me to ask if he had a delusional disorder.

Sun Jianye nodded. He had gained a small lead.

He obtained more details from Yi Donglai before he returned to the interrogation room. He sat across from Li Huowang. “Can you tell me where you got the two fingers?”

“How many times must I say that the fingers came from the kidnappers inside the car?” Li Huowang explained as he tried to

remain patient.

Sun Jianye took out his phone and showed it to Li Huowang. “Is that so? There’s no car in the video footage, and no kidnappers either.”

“What? That’s impossible!” Li Huowang shouted and looked at the video.

He looked at the date and time on the top before confirming that the video was from today.

Li Huowang saw himself in the video. The footage was from when he tried to get close to the woman with the umbrella. But there was no woman in the video. Li Huowang was the only one in the video.

In the video, Li Huowang suddenly stopped and struggled in an empty place as if someone invisible had been pulling him. Then, he stumbled away from the camera’s surveillance range.

“Wait! That’s impossible! I really saw and felt them! I know I did!”

Sun Jianye sat in his chair with a headache. “Have you considered it could all be due to your hallucinations?”

“What are you talking about? You have my medical records, right? I’m cured and was discharged from the hospital! Also, there are many kinds of mental illnesses, and this is clearly different from the one I had!” Li Huowang stood up from his chair.

The two officers standing guard gently pressed Li Huowang’s shoulders, pushing him back down onto the seat.

Sun Jianye said, “Li Huowang, you are not crazy, and we know that, but we need evidence. There are no kidnappers in the video, and that’s the truth.

“Wait, is there a possibility they tampered with the footage?” Li Huowang asked. He then recalled something and froze from the realization.

“The time from your call to our inspection of the footage was

too short for that. It's impossible to tamper with the footage in such a short amount of time. How about you stay here for a few days so that we can protect you from the kidnappers?"

"Wait, don't you need evidence? What about the two fingers? They are evidence, and also"—he took off his bloodied shirt—"this is their blood. You can check their DNA and find them!"

Li Huowang was certain that the kidnappers were real. Someone really was trying to harm him! No matter what organization they came from, he knew he was in danger.

Since there was a first time, there would most certainly be a second time. The organization spent a lot of resources just to monitor him, so Li Huowang was certain that they would not stop if their goals weren't achieved. He was worried not because of the sudden threat, but rather because he realized that Qian Fu's warnings were coming true.

Who are you talking about?

The Leotians! They have very advanced technology and could easily place someone to observe you! I didn't place the needle in your food, they did! They are trying to separate us!

The carriage wheels slowly rolled across the yellow grass of Qing Qiu. Yang Xiaohai spurred the horses onward as he gazed at the large grass meadow.

He checked his map and hesitated. "It should be here, shouldn't it? I hope we're not going in the wrong direction."

Even though he had a map, there was nothing in the empty grassfield for him to get his bearings. He wasn't sure if he was going the right way.

Zhao Xiumei and Yang Xiaohai continued their journey, then Yang Xiaohai saw a small hill in the distance.

The small hill was covered in yellow grass and looked like a steamed bun from a distance. Yang Xiaohai had seen many of these

hills over the past few days. He remembered them because their shape was very special.

"I remember seeing something like this when I traveled with Senior Li last time. We should be close to Sun Baolu's house."

Just as he said that, he saw tents on the horizon, which got him excited.

"Go! Go! Run faster!" Yang Xiaohai shouted, using a horse whip to urge the horses to run.

Various Qing Qiu natives with tanned skin were walking in and out of the tents, but some of them had visibly lighter skin. Sun Baolu was one of them.

Sun Baolu was excited when he saw Yang Xiaohai. He never thought they would meet again.

"Sun Baolu! Gao Zhijian became the Emperor! Puppy got married and had a child! Senior Li's sickness is cured too!" Yang Xiaohai reported all of the joyful news that happened recently.

Sun Baolu listened to Yang Xiaohai and asked what happened to the group after they left Qing Qiu.

"Is that so? It's a blessing for everyone to live so happily now." Sun Baolu was very happy for them. They were once comrades who braved against death just to reach home.

"Wait, Xiaohai, why are you here in Qing Qiu?"

"Gao Zhijian helped me find my parents. They are boat people from Hou Shu. I want to go find them." Yang Xiaohai told him his goals.

"Hou Shu?" Sun Baolu panicked and held Yang Xiaohai's hands.

"No, you can't go! Hou Shu is now in a war with the new Yu'er Kingdom. The war is terrible and I don't want you to die there!"

Chapter 659 - Sun Baolu

“Yu’er Kingdom?” Yang Xiaohai was confused. He had never heard of the place when he was traveling with Senior Li.

Sun Baolu was confused too. “You never heard of it before? The Dharma Sect destroyed Si Qi. The Dharma Sect attacked different nations and absorbed them into their own land. They called it the Yu’er Kingdom, and their official religion is, naturally, the Dharma Sect’s. I’ve heard that the war was very intense, to the point that even Immortals descended from the Heavens. You will die if you go to Hou Shu right now.”

Yang Xiaohai frowned when he heard the news. He had finally made it to Qing Qiu and was about to reach Hou Shu, then something unfortunate like this happened.

He could've waited a few years if he had caught wind of these events while he was in Cowheart Village, but now he was already halfway through his journey. It was too dangerous to continue, but it would be a waste of time if he returned now. He didn't know what to do.

“Also, I’ve heard from the refugees from Hou Shu that Hou Shu could not win against the Yu’er Kingdom. Hou Shu forcefully conscripted any male taller than a carriage wheel. Xiaohai, you can’t go there now.”

Yang Xiaohai was worried, “They’ll be forced to fight in the war as long as they’re male...?? Then doesn’t that mean my father and brother will have to fight?”

“Are they from Hou Shu? If so, then I’m afraid they won’t be able to avoid being sent to war.”

Yang Xiaohai became even more anxious. *I finally received news about my family, and now they are going to be gone?*

He hesitated and looked at Zhao Xiumei for reassurance. He then looked at Sun Baolu. "Baolu, can you help me? Let my wife stay here for the moment. I want to go and check out Hou Shu myself."

"No!"

"No!"

Both Sun Baolu and Zhao Xiumei refused at the same time.

"I will follow you wherever you go. I'm your wife, so don't you dare try to leave me!"

"Xiaohai, I'm not trying to scare you, but you really can't go to Hou Shu. Even merchants with escorts were done in!"

"Listen to me!" Yang Xiaohai's eyes were red when he shouted over them. "Do you know how much I envied other children with caring parents back when I was a beggar?"

"Their parents would buy them candy and goods from peddlers while I was stuck scrounging for rainwater to drink with the other beggars! Their parents would buy them new clothes while I could only go to unmarked graves and take the clothes of the dead just to have something to wear!"

Yang Xiaohai sobbed, "Do you know just how much I wanted to see my parents at least once? I just want to let those who insulted me and called me a mongrel know that I still have my parents!"

Sun Baolu's mother walked in and heard their conversation.

Yang Xiaohai slowly calmed down and tried to reason with them. "Since my family is in danger, I must go and rescue them. Even if my brother and father have gone to war, I could go save my mother. She could live at Cowheart Village so she won't have to go hungry anymore. I was once a beggar. I know that the easiest targets to bully among the beggars are the old ladies."

Zhao Xiumei looked at Yang Xiaohai with a pained expression. Even though her husband had grown a little, he was still young, and he still missed his parents.

“Xiaohai, I know you are worried about your parents, but—” Sun Baolu was trying to persuade him when his mother whispered to him. “Alright, let me go and start the fire then.”

Sun Baolu got up.

His mother consoled Yang Xiaohai by hugging him. “Don’t worry. We’ll think of a way to solve this.”

Yang Xiaohai soon saw a bizarre scene. Sun Baolu lit a bonfire, and his fellow tribe members gathered around them. Sun Baolu pointed at Yang Xiaohai while explaining the situation in Qing Qiu's native language. Everyone discussed and talked in the same native language. Yang Xiaohai didn’t understand what they were talking about.

“This is a tradition of Qing Qiu. The gist is that if someone has a problem, they can start a fire to signal the others to come to help figure out a solution using the wisdom from the Immortal Heaven,” Sun Baolu explained to Yang Xiaohai.

“Will it work?” Yang Xiaohai asked.

He was anxious. He didn’t want to risk his life by going to Hou Shu, but if there was a way for him to meet his parents, he wasn’t going to give up so easily.

“We have many elders in the group. As they say, an elder is a treasure to the family. They have a lot of experience, so this method usually works well.”

The smoke from the bonfire slowly floated upwards. Since there wasn’t any wind, some of the smoke enveloped them.

“*Cough, cough!*” Yang Xiaohai coughed from inhaling the smoke, feeling dizzy.

He felt weird. He had never had this feeling when he inhaled smoke before. Borrowing the wisdom of the Heavenly Immortal seemed to be a unique experience.

The tribe members carried on with their discussion, their voices slowly quieting down as Yang Xiaohai listened to them.

“Hei!” They shouted in unison and clapped.

The smoke dispersed instantly.

Sun Baolu listened to some elders talking before explaining to Yang Xiaohai. “They have a method. You said your parents are boat people living on the sea, right?”

“Yes.”

“Then the elders have a plan for that. Rather than traveling on land, travel through the sea instead. The elderly remembered there was a boatman who operated on the border between Hou Shu and Qing Qiu. If you pay him money, he can send you to where your parents are. That way, you won’t encounter the soldiers.”

“Really?!” Yang Xiaohai said excitedly.

“Yeah. Their memory is probably accurate since they rode it ten years ago. Wait here. I will ask them to draw a map and write a letter. Make sure to give it to the captain so that he doesn’t try to rob you.”

Sun Baolu set to work.

Yang Xiaohai had finally found a way to return home. He looked at the map that showed the border between Qing Qiu and Hou Shu.

He looked at how close they were and he got excited. Soon, he could finally see his family.

“Thank you Sun Baolu. You’ve helped me greatly!” Yang Xiaohai gave him a dense gold bar.

“What are you trying to do? Are you looking down at me?” Sun Baolu refused the gold bar but then whispered to Yang Xiaohai, “Xiaohai, do you have empty rooms at Cowheart Village?”

Chapter 660 - Earth Dragon

Sun Baolu's words confused Yang Xiaohai.

"Senior Bai took in a lot of foster children, so they were almost full. What's wrong? Do you want to come and stay with us?" Yang Xiaohai asked.

Sun Baolu looked at his tribesmen and whispered, "Our leader thinks we are not in danger, but I disagree. If Hou Shu falls, Qing Qiu will be next. Even though the tribe leader said that they will help Hou Shu, I still think that we have a low chance of succeeding. The Yu'er Kingdom is strong, and if the Liang Kingdom doesn't help, we might not be able to win. I want a safe place that my fellow tribesmen can go to."

Sun Baolu frustratedly said, "I wonder what that useless Emperor of the Liang Kingdom is thinking. Doesn't he know that everyone needs to work together to defeat the Dharma Sect? If they don't help Qing Qiu and Hou Shu, the two nations will collapse and get taken by the Yu'er Kingdom. By then, they will have to face the massive army by themselves."

"Baolu, the Emperor you are scolding is Gao Zhijian."

Sun Baolu was shocked. "Is he really the emperor? I thought you were joking!"

"I don't lie nor joke."

Sun Baolu smacked his head with regret. "Jeez! What's happening to the Liang Kingdom? Why did they choose a mentally challenged person like Gao Zhijian to become the emperor? No wonder they haven't sent any soldiers to help us. Where else can we go if the Liang Kingdom falls?"

“Sun Baolu, don’t be so negative. Maybe the Yu’er Kingdom is not as strong as you think?” Yang Xiaohai was very optimistic since he didn’t know what happened in the Liang Kingdom.

“Qing Qiu’s grass has turned yellow. This means that the Immortal Heaven is angry. Ever since the last Natural Disaster, the Earth Dragon has moved numerous times in Qing Qiu. My mother is right in saying we need to prepare more. It doesn’t hurt to have backup plans. That said, just what is Senior Li doing?”

Even though Sun Baolu sometimes thought Senior Li might be crazy, he always solved their problems in the end.

Yang Xiaohai wasn’t sure what to say. “I don’t know. When I set out, Senior Li had a lotus root in place of his head. He was still receiving treatment in the village back then.”

“Alright. I hope I can contact him by letter. You have a safe journey, alright? If you can’t endure it, then you should return as soon as possible.”

Sun Baolu cheered him up and wished him a safe journey. Yang Xiaohai nodded, and his carriage soon started to move again.

Sun Baolu’s mother had actually hoped that Yang Xiaohai would stay for a meal, but having learned that his family was in danger, Yang Xiaohai set off as soon as he could.

When he and his wife left the tents, there were several goats attached to the back of their carriage. They were gifts from Sun Baolu and were meant to serve as food during their journey.

Yang Xiaohai naturally would not accept it without reciprocating. He asked Zhao Xiumei to silently place the gold bars from earlier into Sun Baolu’s tent.

They traveled for several days as Yang Xiaohai followed the map. Getting their bearings was challenging, as yellow grass stretched as far as the eye could see.

Sun Baolu was clear in his explanation, though. All he needed to do was to find the border wall between Qing Qiu and Hou Shu—

the landmark he could use to locate the sea

“We should be there soon,” Yang Xiaohai remarked when he saw jagged rocks in the distance amid the sea of yellow grass.

He stroked his newly grown beard a little apprehensively.

“Xiaohai, come and have some goat soup. The goats here are very nutritious.”

Zhao Xiumei handed him a warm bowl of soup.

Yang Xiaohai took the bowl and drank the soup. It warmed his cold body, and even though it was only seasoned with coarse salt and wild vegetables, the delicious goat meat of Qing Qiu still made the meal amazing.

“Carefully wrap the unfinished goat meat and drain the blood. Even though the weather is cold and it probably won’t spoil, the stench of blood might attract beasts,” Yang Xiaohai said.

“Alright.”

Zhao Xiumei was always impressed by Yang Xiaohai's cooking skills. That was why she chose him as her husband. She fell in love with how focused he looked when preparing his meals.

After finishing their simple meal, they resumed their journey again. However, they had only traveled a short distance when the horses began bucking wildly as they tried to run away. Even the goats that had been following their carriage without any issues tried to run away.

“What is happening?” Yang Xiaohai exclaimed, unsure of how to deal with the sudden chaos. He was about to say something when the ground started shaking violently.

“The Earth Dragon is moving! Get down!” Zhao Xiumei shouted, pushing Yang Xiaohai beneath her.

The weather changed. The two of them shrank in fear as they waited for this horrifying event to pass. Once the tremors subsided, Yang Xiaohai squirmed out from underneath Zhao Xiumei. He looked around and saw an incredible sight: the grass fields were

moving like the sea, and Qing Qiu was almost like a yellow ocean! Yang Xiaohai's gaze was fixed on this sight when suddenly, a large crack opened up towards them!

The crack split apart, and the two of them fell into the ravine—it was as if Qing Qiu had been split apart.

A long time passed before Yang Xiaohai woke up. The first thing he remembered was his wife, Zhao Xiumei. He tried to look around, but it was so dark that he couldn't even see his fingers.

“Xiumei! Xiumei!”

His voice echoed loudly, but the space around him was vast. Yang Xiaohai looked up and saw that it was completely dark. He suddenly realized he was underground.

Yang Xiaohai's voice trembled as he called out. “Xiumei, where are you?!”

He knew what was underneath Qing Qiu. He carefully reached into his shirt, only to find that the scepter Li Huowang had given him was gone.

Yang Xiaohai panicked. He learned from Sun Baolu that the Earth Dragon had recently moved a lot in Qing Qiu, but he had never imagined it would end up swallowing them!

As he fretted over what to do, Yang Xiaohai heard something from his left. He didn't even want to think about the kind of monstrosity that might be lurking underneath Qing Qiu.

He tried to scuttle backward when he heard a familiar voice. “I remember this voice. Are you Yang Xiaohai?”

Yang Xiaohai calmed down a little upon hearing that the other person had recognized him, but he didn't let his guard down.

Yang Xiaohao asked, “Who... Who are you?”

“It's me.”

The person approached Yang Xiaohai.

Yang Xiaohai soon saw the familiar face. It was Lu Juren! But his face was oddly greenish.

Chapter 661 - Someone Familiar

“Lu Juren?” Yang Xiaohai was shocked to see the man in front of him.

He recognized him as one of the troupe members who had followed him and Senior Li throughout their journey.

But didn't he follow Troupe Leader Lu to Shangjing to enjoy their lives? Senior Gao even gifted them a theater. Why is he here alone underneath Qing Qiu?

“Why... Why are you here?” Yang Xiaohai took a step back carefully. He wasn't sure if the Lu Juren in front of him was an illusion conjured by an evil entity.

“Why am I here?” Lu Juren was confused too. “I don't know. Yang Xiaohai, where am I?”

“How would I know?” Yang Xiaohai suddenly remembered something and panicked. “Wait, have you seen my wife? Zhao Xiumei, the woman that kept following me around.”

They had fallen into the hole together, but now he was alone. Yang Xiaohai was worried about her safety.

But Lu Juren stood still as he stared blankly at Yang Xiaohai and tried to think.

“Do you know how to get out of here? Where is the exit?” Yang Xiaohai scanned the darkness with fear.

Lu Juren remained still and couldn't provide an answer. However, Yang Xiaohai considered it good luck since the “Lu Juren” before him hadn't attacked him yet. At least “Lu Juren” wasn't an evil entity.

Even so, as happy as he was that “Lu Juren” was harmless,

Yang Xiaohai was still racking his brain to figure out how to escape the place.

“Wait, I remember Senior Li also got stuck here before. How did he get out last time?”

Yang Xiaohai stuck his thumb into his mouth, then raised it up high to feel the wind. He had to tiptoe before he felt a cold breeze coming from the south. He then started to make his way towards that direction.

He took a few steps and tore off a piece of his clothes. He wanted to leave a message for Zhao Xiumei in case she passed by, but then remembered she couldn't read, leaving him stumped.

I should find the exit and then find someone to help me locate her. Maybe she didn't fall in. Yang Xiaohai decided and walked towards where the wind was coming from.

He turned around and saw Lu Juren standing still. “Do you want to follow me?”

“Follow you? Where?”

“Out!” Yang Xiaohai felt that Lu Juren had turned into someone like Gao Zhijian. He didn't know what had happened to Lu Juren to make him act like a simpleton.

“Out? Alright.” Lu Juren nodded and followed him.

Yang Xiaohai took shallow breaths as he followed the direction of the wind using the saliva on his finger.

They stumbled through the dark cave and Yang Xiaohai felt that they were heading downwards.

He didn't know if this was good or bad news. He only knew that this was the same method Senior Li had once used to escape Qing Qiu's subterranean caves. He just had to follow suit.

The other thing that made him feel better was that even though the place was dark, no evil entities were harming him. He started to think that his wife might be alive after all.

Just as he felt that, a sound came from the distance. He

carefully made his way towards the direction of the sound. The closer he got, the louder the sound was. But he felt it was weird because those sounds were made by humans. *What is this place? Why are there so many people walking underneath Qing Qiu?*

Five minutes later, Yang Xiaohai finally saw what was making the sound. It was a group of people wearing various lengths of cloth.

They were very tall, to the point that Yang Xiaohai could only see the lower half of their bodies, with the upper halves hidden in the darkness above. They moved in unison in the darkness.

As Yang Xiaohai focused on the darkness above him, it somehow receded a little, revealing the silhouette of the strange giants. They were holding something that Yang Xiaohao could only describe as an umbrella. He still wasn't completely sure about what he was looking when he saw a horrific scene. The giants were dragging something...

Humans! The giants were dragging humans of all ages, but all of them were stabbed with a mourning staff[1] just like a kebab.

The giants dragged the mourning staves wrapped in white tassels as they walked. The humans wailed in pain every time the staves were dragged on the ground. Some of them planted their hands on the ground in pain and begged for mercy, but the giants ignored them even as the humans' fingers were ground from being dragged.

What is this?! What is going on?! Yang Xiaohai didn't know what to do.

Just then, Lu Juren suddenly regained his vigor and snapped out of his stupor when he saw one of the impaled humans was his wife, Luo Juanhua. "Juan'er! Run!"

The giants stopped when they heard Lu Juren shouting. They turned around and moved towards Yang Xiaohai and Lu Juren. Lu Juren charged towards the giants while Yang Xiaohai felt his entire

body had been plunged into icy water. *Fuck.*

Just as Lu Juren tried to free Luo Juanhua from the mourning staff, one of the giant's hands shook in the darkness. A new mourning staff was conjured from the darkness and then impaled Lu Juren's chest.

But it was not over. The mourning staff started flying towards Yang Xiaohai after it impaled Lu Juren.

Yang Xiaohai started running out of fear. The sound of whistling wind neared him, and he started to despair. Just as he thought he was going to end up like Lu Juren, a sudden gust blew from the back, and there was a loud thud. Yang Xiaohai was safe.

His entire body was trembling from fear when he slowly looked back. He saw a familiar face standing on top of the giant's corpse.

"Senior Li?!" Yang Xiaohai was dumbfounded when he saw the familiar face.

It was none other than the Senior Li he knew, who wore a red Daoist robe with a bronze coin veil.

"Yang Xiaohai? What a special treat." Li Huowang walked down the giant's corpse as if he was walking down a set of stairs. He stared at Yang Xiaohai with glee.

1. A wooden staff covered in white paper, feathers, or completely white in color. It's used to signify the holder's sadness during a funeral. Also helps the user to vent out their sadness and as a warning to passersby to not disturb the funeral 🙅

Chapter 662 - Feng Capital

“Senior Li, is that you? Did you come to save me?”

Yang Xiaohai knew he was safe when he saw Li Huowang appearing in front of him. He immediately told Li Huowang what had happened to him.

But when he finished his explanation, he saw Li Huowang staring at him with a weird gaze.

“Follow me.” After saying that, Li Huowang ignored Yang Xiaohai and started walking toward the west.

Yang Xiaohai hesitated, but Li Huowang had just killed the giant to save him, so he thought that Li Huowang wouldn’t hurt him. He quickly followed Li Huowang.

But what Yang Xiaohai had not noticed was Lu Juren struggling to stand up after getting impaled by the mourning staff.

The two of them walked in the darkness. With Li Huowang leading the way, Yang Xiaohai felt completely safe.

“Senior Li, where is this?”

“Where else? This is the bottom of Qing Qiu, the Feng Capital.”

“Feng Capital? Wait, Senior Li, is my wife down here too? Could you help me find her?”

“You have a wife already? That’s good!” Li Huowang smiled and nodded.

“Thank you, Senior Li!” Yang Xiaohai thanked him after Li Huowang agreed to help him find his wife.

“We are all companions. There’s no need to be polite. Be quiet now—we will reach it soon.”

The two of them continued walking and soon found themselves

in a rugged space.

There were various large pillars stabbing the darkness above, but there were also various dark pits around them. It was a bizarre yet horrifying sight.

There were even green candlelights coming from the bottom of the pits. Yang Xiaohai saw more giants dragging the mourning staff full of impaled humans before they jumped into the pit.

Yang Xiaohai sensed something was wrong as he hid behind one of the pillars. "Senior... Senior Li, this isn't the exit."

Li Huowang said, "This is your exit. Do you see the pits as well as the various mounds?"

Without waiting for Yang Xiaohai to answer, Li Huowang told him what it was. "This is actually Kui Lei, the Siming that controlled the Heavenly Dao of Death. As for why it's not moving... well, it's already dead since it controls the Heavenly Dao of Death! Hahaha!"

Li Huowang thought he had made a really good joke and laughed so hard that he almost cried.

"Senior Li, what are you talking about? I don't understand." Yang Xiaohai panicked.

"Do you not understand? You died when you fell down here. Since you are dead, Kui Lei will take care of you. Go ahead and merge yourself with it. I even took you here specially."

Yang Xiaohai slumped to the ground when he heard that. "I'm dead? Am I really dead?"

He pinched himself so hard he wounded himself, but no blood flowed. He cried, "I'm really dead?! I haven't seen my parents! I don't want to die! I want to live!"

Yang Xiaohai cried in despair, but Li Huowang suddenly clapped his hands and laughed heartily. "Hahaha! I tricked you! You're not dead yet! Your ten emotions and eight sufferings are still intact."

As he laughed, Li Huowang's face shifted into Hong Zhong's face, then back to his own.

Yang Xiaohai abruptly stopped crying out of shock and stared at Li Huowang. He didn't know what to feel right now.

"Come, let me show you the real way out." Li Huowang smiled and extended his hands to pull Yang Xiaohai up.

Yang Xiaohai didn't know if he should accept the hand because he felt that Li Huowang was acting weirdly. "Senior Li, you won't fool me again, right? This is not the time for jokes."

"Hahaha, relax. I know when to stop. I'm just messing with you just now." Li Huowang pulled Yang Xiaohai up. They then retraced their steps.

They soon encountered Lu Juren again. Lu Juren saw them and said in a daze, "Young Daoist? And you are Yang Xiaohai? Why are you here?"

"Juren, what happened to you? Didn't we meet just now?" Yang Xiaohai was confused.

"We did?" Lu Juren stared at Yang Xiaohai and tried his best to remember.

Li Huowang said, "No need to talk to him anymore. His ten emotions and eight sufferings are gone. Even his soul has dispersed. The only thing he has left is his death Qi. He's already a part of Kui Lei, and his memories will be reset after a certain time period has passed. He won't know what happened in the past and the present."

Yang Xiaohai looked at Lu Juren with pity. "Senior Li, why is he like this? Is he dead?"

"I don't know." Li Huowang continued to walk.

Yang Xiaohai hesitated before quickly following Li Huowang. This time, Lu Juren did not follow them but just stood there motionlessly.

Yang Xiaohai followed Li Huowang in the darkness as they started moving upwards.

Just as Yang Xiaohai thought he would get out for real this time, there was another earthquake. The sound of a mirror cracking came from both above and below them.

Li Huowang frowned and quickly turned around to look at the place they had escaped from. He saw that the area with the large pillars and pits was changing. Li Huowang cursed when he noticed that the pits were shrinking.

“Senior Li, what’s coming for us?” Yang Xiaohai was worried.

“Evil entities, and those that came from a different world! Someone is trying to revive Kui Lei! We need to run now or we will get affected!”

Li Huowang pulled on Yang Xiaohai and hastened their escape.

“Senior Li, what happens if Kui Lei gets revived?”

“Kui Lei controls the Heavenly Dao of Death. What do you think will happen if he comes back to life?”

The earthquake intensified. Yang Xiaohai suddenly heard the sound of crashing waves that came from the depths of the darkness.

“They are here! We need to go up!” Li Huowang stomped onto the ground and jumped onto the ceiling with Yang Xiaohai.

They hung upside down from the ceiling as they ran. Even though they were upside down, they showed no signs of falling downwards.

Yang Xiaohai soon noticed something had changed on the ground above him. He saw a dark, iridescent sea of water that resembled an oil slick.

The weird-looking water surged towards where the pits were. The vapor of the strange liquid started melting Yang Xiaohai!

He felt his body melting like a lit candle as the wax dripped upwards!

Chapter 663 - Qing Qiu

Yang Xiaohai looked up as he hung from the ceiling. He didn't know what the strange water was, but he felt his body melting and his consciousness fading.

“Quick! We need to run faster!” Li Huowang dragged Yang Xiaohai and ran even faster. Their bodies gradually shrank as the sea started to come alive. It howled and hissed at them.

The waves crashed upwards and became like tongues that lapped on everything that melted off the bodies of both Li Huowang and Yang Xiaohai. The sea was trying to consume them!

Yang Xiaohai felt his brain begin buzzing as he lost strength in his limbs. Just as he thought that he was going to collapse, he saw an upside-down temple in front of him.

The temple had golden Buddhist stone pillars[1] with treasure vases on the roof of the temple. It was built on a large mountain with various stalagmites that resembled spines.

The temple was as large as a mountain. The tip of some of the pagodas were submerged in the strange sea of water but the tips remained unaffected.

“Senior Li, there's a temple there!” Yang Xiaohai shouted excitedly.

“I see it! That's the Antrabhara Temple[2]! It's the exit, so quickly go there!” The closer they got, the larger the temple was. For some reason, the temple exuded an oppressive feeling.

Just as Yang Xiaohai entered the range of the Antrabhara Temple, the sound of a bell came from it. Li Huowang stopped just in front of the temple.

Li Huowang said, “Oh? Yang Xiaohai? What a rare guest.”

Yang Xiaohai saw that Li Huowang was staring at him while

smiling curiously. Li Huowang was acting just like Lu Juren.

“Yang Xiaohai, why are you here?” Li Huowang beckoned for Yang Xiaohai to come out of the range of the temple.

Yang Xiaohai hesitated and shook his head.

“Why are you standing there? Come here. Let me ask you something.”

Li Huowang had just raised his foot to walk toward the temple when the bell rang again. Li Huowang stood at the same spot and repeated, “Yang Xiaohai? Why are you here? What a rare guest.”

“Senior Li, are you dead too?” Yang Xiaohai stared at him in fear.

“Dead? Maybe, but I think it’s more correct to say I was abandoned. Come here, let me show you the way out.”

Yang Xiaohai ignored Li Huowang calling for him as he ran towards the upside-down Antrabhara Temple.

Senior Li is actually dead, just like Lu Juren! He’s not even a ghost now—he’s just a fragment of his previous self repeating for all eternity!

Yang Xiaohai had just stepped into the temple when everything behind him disappeared. The sounds of Li Huowang shouting and the churning water both disappeared.

Yang Xiaohai became nervous due to the silence. The temple was strange because there wasn’t a single monk there.

“What’s happening? Didn’t he say that this is the exit? Is he fooling me?”

Just then, Yang Xiaohai heard something from above. He looked up and saw that both the monks and the Buddhas’ statues were up there.

Rows of Lamas[3] were wearing red robes as they chanted in unison. They were also turning a prayer wheel in their hands.[4]

Yang Xiaohai realized that the reason he saw nothing when he first came in was because he was upside down!

Before he could react, the verses of the mantra forced their way

into his ears. Yang Xiaohai felt his body go numb before his consciousness faded.

“Weng Ni Yi ma Ha Yan Ah Mi Ah Niu...”

He lost consciousness and fell downwards as his body merged with the mantra scroll. Then, the Lamas spun their prayer wheels repeatedly with their skeletal hands.

“Xiaohai! Xiaohai! You can’t die!” Yang Xiaohai groggily heard a familiar voice calling for him.

“Xiaohai! How am I supposed to go on living if you’re gone?!” the person wailed.

As the voice got louder, Yang Xiaohai struggled to open his eyes, finding that they were sealed shut by his own coagulated blood. With some pain, he forced his eyelids to open slightly and saw Zhao Xiumei’s crying face.

“Husband! You are awake! You are finally awake!” Zhao Xiumei quickly took out some pills from her gourd and forced them into Yang Xiaohai’s mouth.

“Ugh, I can’t eat too many Blood Nourishing Pills, or all of my blood will get clotted.” Yang Xiaohai ate three and spat the rest out.

Zhao Xiumei placed a gourd filled with water near his mouth. Yang Xiaohai took some sips and felt his mind clear up. He struggled to stand up and saw that they were stuck in a ravine. The water had disappeared, and all he saw was the ground.

“Xiaohai, are you okay? Do you still remember me?”

Yang Xiaohai inspected his body. He realized that his left arm was twisted in a strange direction, and even his fingers were twisted.

He felt his head hurt. Apparently, he hit his head when he fell.

“Xiaohao, how are you feeling? Don’t scare me... Are you okay?” Zhao Xiumei saw Yang Xiaohai staring at her blankly and almost cried.

The three children were jumping around, scratching their ears

and cheeks like monkeys.

Yang Xiaohai touched the top of his head and felt a large blood clot on the top of his head. He checked the inside of his clothes and saw the scepter that Li Huowang gave him was there too.

“I think I had a strange dream. I dreamed that Lu Juren and Senior Li were dead.”

Even Yang Xiaohai wasn't about whether everything he saw had actually happened.

“Xiaohai, that's enough. Let's get out first.”

Zhao Xiumei tied him to herself with a rope before she climbed up the ravine. The three children had prepared a rope, which they tied to the top of the ravine.

“Xiumei, don't do this. Let me rest a bit first. We can't go up like this.”

“Don't worry. I'm not a weak damsel. I followed my father and worked in the fields ever since I was ten. I'm actually very strong.” Zhao Xiumei pulled herself and Yang Xiaohai upwards while holding onto the rope.

The three children climbed up like monkeys and didn't need a rope.

Zhao Xiumei was sweating buckets when they finally crawled out from the ravine.

Yang Xiaohai raised his head in pain and saw that Qing Qiu had completely changed. The hills had moved. Areas where hills once stood were now flat, while new hills had formed in other places.

1. Stone pillars inscribed with sutras 📖

2. This first came up in chapter 632. Antrabhara is a period of 49 days before someone gets reincarnated after death. 📖

3. Honorific title given to a spiritual leader in real-world Tibetan Buddhism. 📖

4. A device consisting of a hollow metal cylinder with a mantra scroll tightly wound onto it. Each rotation of the wheel by hand is equivalent in efficacy to the prayer's oral recitation multiplied by the number of times the mantra was printed on the scroll. 🙏

Chapter 664 - Dismiss

Li Huowang was wrapped in a dense murderous aura as he slowly walked into Shangjing with his horse. His red robes were now even redder. No one dared to get close to him.

His appearance naturally attracted the informants inside the city but they were already used to it.

The informants knew that Li Huowang was close to the Emperor. There was no reason to dig into Li Huowang's identity unless they wanted trouble.

Li Sui was currently wearing the skin of Princess Anping. She sat sideways on the horse as her head nodded in sync with the gait of the horse. She seemed tired.

Cowheart Village was quite far from Shangjing, but Li Huowang had gone back to clear out the bases of the Dharma Sect surrounding the village. Li Sui used this opportunity to take Princess Anping's skin. She also let them know she and Li Huowang were safe, and told them about the Lu family's tragedy.

Li Huowang went straight to the Surveillance Bureau, taking no detours.

"Where else are the Dharma Sect hiding? In which places are they instigating rebellions?" Li Huowang questioned the man behind the counter.

"Eeek... Dear Sir, please wait a moment." Nangong Yun was sweating as he checked his record.

Nangong Yun was a careful person. He knew that Li Huowang was now related to the Emperor and had a different position now.

"Dear Sir, most of the larger bases have been cleared out, all thanks to you. Also, let me calculate your rewards for all the missions you've completed."

Li Huowang waved his hand in dismissal. “No need.”

He didn’t accept the missions for the rewards—he did it because he really wanted to destroy the Dharma Sect. He needed to stop their expansion and prevent the Liang Kingdom from ending up like the Qi Kingdom.

Li Huowang exited the Surveillance Bureau and decided to go find Gao Zhijian. After working in the Surveillance Bureau for so long, he knew that the information disseminated by them was often incomplete.

Li Huowang would not rest until the Dharma Sect was completely eradicated.

He had just exited the Surveillance Bureau when he saw someone he didn’t expect. Lu Xiucui was standing in front of Li Huowang with a bronze coin sword behind his back. Lu Xiucui had stubble and his eyes were bloodshot as he held onto the reins of two horses. Both horses were foaming at their mouth and looked like they could collapse at any moment.

“Master, where is my father?” Lu Xiucui’s voice was hoarse, as if he already knew the answer.

Li Huowang said nothing and guided him to the small estate. Lu Xiucui hadn’t even entered the estate when he heard a familiar singing voice. Lu Xiucui trembled as he entered. He finally saw the crazed Lu Zhuangyuan behind a room with iron bars.

Lu Zhuangyuan was singing grandly like a general on the stage.

“I miss my mother and wife~ For there’s no one I can rely on here~ I looked in the direction of my home and saw how far away it was~ I fear that the distance has delayed our reunion~”

Even though there weren’t any instruments, his years of experience in performing still stirred the emotions of his listeners.

“Father!” Lu Xiucui held onto the iron bars and shouted.

But Lu Zhuangyuan didn’t react as he continued to sing.

Just then, an old eunuch came down from the second floor

with Xiu'er in his hands.

The eunuch knelt to Li Huowang. "I greet you, dear Sir. When you were away, Sir Lu was living well. He could eat and sleep."

Li Sui carried Xiu'er in her tentacles and played with her, but Xiu'er remained silent.

"Master, what about my brother? And my sister-in-law?" Lu Xiucan's eyes were red when he asked.

Li Huowang looked at the corner of the room. Lu Xiucan followed his gaze and saw the two urns on the cabinet. The urns were white and had red paper stuck onto them.

Lu Xiucan walked over and held onto the two urns as he cried.

He had a family. He didn't like his family because his father was stubborn, his brother was a wimp, and his sister-in-law was very calculative. But now he had lost all of them. He just didn't like them—he never wished for his family members to be gone.

He cried for a long time before he asked Li Huowang, "Master, where is my nephew? Where is Lu Tongsheng?"

"I don't know. He was supposed to be with your father. He was missing by the time your father became crazy. I tried divining but couldn't find him. I fear that he's dead in the war," Li Huowang answered simply.

Lu Xiucan stood up suddenly and pointed at Li Huowang as he cried. "You! It's all your fault! And also Gao Zhijian's! Why did you bring them here?! Why did you give them a theater? WHY DID YOU LET THEM ENJOY THEIR RICHES? IF THEY WERE STILL AT THE VILLAGE THEY WOULD STILL BE ALIVE!"

Li Huowang stood still and didn't react.

After he cursed Li Huowang and Gao Zhijian, Lu Xiucan crumpled to the ground while he cried. He kept slapping his own mouth out of frustration. He slapped again and again until his hands were swollen. Blood dribbled from his mouth without any

signs of stopping.

It wasn't until Lu Xiucui's cheeks were swelling due to his own slaps that Xiu'er jumped down from Li Sui's embrace and hugged him. Lu Xiucui stopped slapping himself and hugged his niece. Both of them cried together.

Li Huowang turned and made his way towards the palace when he saw them hugging. He wasn't cold-blooded. It was just that he had seen the same scene too many times. If he didn't deal with the Dharma Sect, these kinds of tragedies would happen again.

Li Huowang entered the palace without anyone stopping him, though he still felt a lot of people gazing at him from the dark.

However, Li Huowang was used to it.

Li Huowang entered the main palace and saw that Gao Zhijian was having his morning assembly. Li Huowang projected his body image into the ground and turned invisible as he waited for the morning assembly to be over.

"My Lord, Qing Shang is still having a drought without a single drop of water."

"My Lord, He Dong's granaries were burnt in a fire. The people don't have anything to eat."

Gao Zhijian was massaging his temple when he heard the reports. "These were already reported by someone else. Is there anything new?"

No sooner had he said that, a martial officer^[1] looked at Li Huowang before he reported, "My Lord, Hou Shu's envoy committed suicide yesterday by swallowing gold.^[2] Before he died, he had written a letter with his own blood and tears. My Lord, please dispatch the troops to save Hou Shu."

He had just said that when another martial officer stepped forward. "My Lord, the envoy from Qing Qiu brought the Khan's personal enamel gold blade to request for an audience."

Gao Zhijian sighed and waved his hands. "Dismissed."

1. An official who's in charge of the military 🤝

2. The gold here refers to unrefined gold ore which may contain arsenic 🤝

Chapter 665 - Gao Zhijian

After leaving the noisy hall and entering the peaceful inner palace, Gao Zhijian felt more relaxed. He looked at the greenery and flowers in the garden and sighed.

He entered the garden and sat down on a stone stool to enjoy the peace and quiet.

Suddenly, he stood up and approached a boulder in the garden before he lifted it up.

He threw the boulder up high and caught it with his bare hands. He then used the boulder to practice the martial techniques he had learned from the military cultivation manual. The eunuchs observing him from the darkness were frightened.

Gao Zhijian sighed when a thin film of sweat covered his body as he placed the boulder down.

Even though the palace had everything he wanted, he still preferred the days he lived in Cowheart Village. He could see the woman he loved, and he could use his strength to protect his comrades. More importantly, he was not as smart as he is now. He didn't have to worry about so many things.

"You are lacking as an emperor. What kind of emperor merely listens and does nothing?" Li Huowang appeared from a shrub.

Gao Zhijian sighed and sat on the boulder, seemingly unsurprised by Li Huowang's sudden appearance.

Gao Zhijian said, "The Dharma Sect is causing a lot of trouble, and the refugees from the Qi Kingdom as well as the war have drained the palace of much of its money. What else do you think I could do? I can't conjure money out of thin air. Senior Li, being the Emperor is not as simple as it looks. Still, it's reassuring that there are many officials in the palace who could deal with it, albeit

simply. The people would have to compromise.”

“Compromise? Deal with it simply? If those issues aren’t dealt with properly, people will die!”

“Then what do you think I should do? What would you do if you were in my position?” Gao Zhijian didn’t know what to do.

He continued, “Everyone says that the Liang Kingdom is the best kingdom in the world, but only the people working inside know that this ‘best’ is nothing but a sham. We have leaks everywhere, and all the Emperor can do is patch up some of the leaks here and there.”

Gao Zhijian took a deep breath before he said, “Senior Li, I’m so sorry. I know that I shouldn’t talk to you about this, but I have so many things to worry about.”

Li Huowang shook his head. “Don’t worry. I understand your predicament, and I don’t blame you, but the issue with Hou Shu and Qing Qiu is of utmost importance. You need to prioritize it. They are fighting the Dharma Sect directly. If we don’t help them and they get taken over, the Liang Kingdom will be in big trouble.”

“I know, I know. But the Dharma Sect in the Liang Kingdom hasn’t been dealt with yet. We haven’t even sorted out our own problems, so how could I have the strength to go help the others?”

Li Huowang suddenly pieced the news together and frowned. “Zhijian, do you think the reason why the Dharma Sect suddenly attacked the Liang Kingdom was so that they could distract and keep us here?”

Li Huowang had been perplexed as to why the Dharma Sect had suddenly attacked Shangjing with those cannon fodders. It was unrealistic for them to think that they would win.

But what if they didn’t want to win? What if they just wanted to stall the Liang Kingdom rather than kill Gao Zhijian?

Li Huowang then remembered how the cannon fodders of the Dharma Sect could, at best, catch their eye then die like flies,

without achieving any significant goals. Even though it was troublesome to deal with them, Li Huowang realized that they hadn't encountered any significant foes—even Taishan Shi was absent. All of this made Li Huowang think that this possibility was very plausible.

“And what if you know that they are using this tactic?” A voice came from the small forest to the left.

Li Huowang saw the Imperial Preceptor walking out from amongst the trees.

The Imperial Preceptor said, “Are you not afraid that they would attack us if we send out our forces? Do you really think the world would be at peace if the Dharma Sect is eradicated?”

“Then would you rather they expand without any restriction?”

“Of course not. We have our methods.” The Imperial Preceptor took a step back.

Gao Zhijian stood up and looked at Li Huowang. “Of course, we need to help. The Surveillance Bureau had sent people over there. We will see how many troops we can squeeze out to help them after the situation stabilizes here.”

“How much you can send?! Zhijian, we're talking about the Dharma Sect that worships god Yu'er! Do you understand how terrible it is to fall to them?! We need to fight to death against them! Do you know what happened to the Qi Kingdom when they were overtaken by god Yu'er?! Do you know what happened to the Qi Kingdom?!” Li Huowang unsheathed his spine sword and swung it at a vase.

A rift shot forward and a strange liquid poured out. The liquid splattered onto the flowers and grass. A strange sound arose as the flowers and grass started crawling around as they tainted the ground itself.

The Imperial Preceptor frowned and pointed his sword at the sky. Lightning fell from the sky and burned the mutated plants to a

crisp.

“I don’t know what that is, but the Qi Kingdom is gone.” Li Huowang sheathed his spine sword again.

“I know. I know that. But Senior Li, do the generals and officials know? Do the soldiers know? Do the people of the Liang Kingdom know? Will they gladly work for half a year without pay? Will they pay their taxes early? Will they join the military and fight? I might have the ability to command them since I’m the Emperor, but I cannot do so on a whim. Every decree I give out will affect a lot of people, and many might die. Senior Li, being the Emperor doesn’t mean I can do anything I want. Those are the actions of a tyrant.”

Gao Zhijian was silent before he worked himself up to console Li Huowang. “Don’t worry. The battle is not as bad as you think. We have our own expectations. Qing Qiu and Hou Shu are also strong, so they won’t get defeated so easily. Also, Xuan Pin brought Zheng Boqiao over. The Chiefs of Qing Qiu, Hou Shu, Si Qi, and the Liang Kingdom will work together so the Dharma Sect won’t be able to do much. Don’t worry. Once the Liang Kingdom stabilizes I will send out the troops.”

Li Huowang doubted his strategy. The Dharma Sect wasn’t an evil entity, but rather an endless army of civilians. The Surveillance Bureau might have a lot of members, but against an entire kingdom of people, they wouldn’t be able to do much. The Surveillance Bureau alone wouldn’t be able to go a long way.

Leaving aside how strong the higher-ranking officials of the Dharma Sect were, an endless amount of enemies was not something the Surveillance Bureau could deal with. More importantly, those who were contracted by the Surveillance Bureau were only working for the lifespan pills. Once danger came, they would abandon their loyalty and run away.

The only organization that could destroy the endless amount of

cannon fodder from the Dharma Sect was the military that craved blood and war.

Li Huowang looked at Gao Zhijian and nodded. “Fine, but be quick.”

Li Huowang was about to leave when Gao Zhijian stopped him. “Senior Li, where are you going?”

“Where else? I’m going to Qing Qiu to destroy the Dharma Sect!”

Chapter 666 - Confidant

“Senior Li, Senior Li, wait a moment!” Gao Zhijian hurriedly stopped him upon seeing Li Huowang’s determined expression.

“Senior Li, it’s too dangerous for you to go to Qing Qiu alone. Why don’t you stay here?”

“No need. I’m not that weak. Besides, if I stay by your side, some people might not sleep well at night,” Li Huowang said as he glanced at the Imperial Preceptor.

Since Li Huowang was about to head to Qing Qiu to confront the Dharma Sect, the Imperial Preceptor was naturally very pleased, “Good! Brother Li, you are truly righteous! I admire you!”

Li Huowang snorted coldly, said nothing more, and left Shanjing imperial city, which had been uncomfortable to stay in.

Qing Qiu was far away, and given the unknown state of the battles there, Li Huowang decided to depart that very day to prevent wasting more time.

As Li Huowang stepped out of the main gate, he saw Lu Xiucan standing there with his eyes wide open.

Suddenly, Lu Xiucan bent his knees and knelt in front of Li Huowang. He banged his forehead on the ground and gritted his teeth. “Master, I want revenge! I want to avenge my family!”

Li Huowang looked at him and asked, “Who do you want to seek revenge on?”

Lu Xiucan lifted his head, his eyes filled with extreme hatred. “The Dharma Sect! It was the people of the Dharma Sect who killed my elder brother and sister-in-law. They also drove my father insane!”

During the short time Li Huowang had been in the palace, Lu Xiucan seemed to have figured out some things.

“Against the Dharma Sect’s witches, can you survive with just your mediocre skills?”

“When the time comes to fight, don’t expect me to help you. If I have to take someone along, it will be someone useful and not a burden. Remember, I am not your master. We are done with each other.”

“I am not afraid of death! I am ready to give up my life! Killing one is breaking even. Killing two is a gain!” Lu Xiucan puffed out his chest and roared.

Li Huowang saw the fearlessness in his eyes and knew he was serious this time.

In Li Huowang’s memories, Lu Xiucan had always been carefree. This was the first time he was seeing this side of Lu Xiucan. It seemed the tragedy that befell the Lu family had finally made him mature. He was no longer the ignorant youth he once was.

Li Huowang looked at him for a while, then tossed the Surveillance Bureau’s waist badge and a gourd containing lifespan pills to him.

“If you dare to go through with this, take this to the inner vault of the Surveillance Bureau and exchange it for some life-preserving items. Just say that Er Jiu sent you.”

“Yes, Master!” Lu Xiucan took the items without hesitation and left. He seemed to have already made up his mind.

After returning to his residence, Li Huowang spoke to the eunuch who took care of Lu Zhuangyuan and Xiu’er. “I may have to leave for a while. Take good care of them until I return. If Xiu’er comes of age, find a scholar to teach her. If I die, ask His Majesty what to do with them.”

“Understood, your orders are as good as His Majesty’s. I will not delay in executing your orders!”

After settling his worries, Li Huowang took out a map of Shangjing city and began to plan his travel route.

“Dad, are we leaving again?” Li Sui asked while holding Xiu’er.
“Yes, we are. Go pack up. Once Lu Xiucan returns, we’ll set off.”
Li Sui nodded obediently and went to prepare.

These days, she had followed her father to many places and knew very well what to prepare. She was a great help to her father with these little things.

As Li Huowang replaced his tired horse with a much more energetic one from the inn, there was a knock at the door.

He opened the door and saw Lu Xiucan standing there, his eyes slightly red. “Back already? That was fast. What did you get?”

Lu Xiucan tremblingly pulled out a scroll of blood-red bamboo slips from his chest and handed it to Li Huowang.

“The Profound Records?”

“Yes.” Lu Xiucan nodded. “I didn’t recognize some things and wouldn’t be able to use the others, but I have seen Master use this before. It’s very useful, and it doesn’t require cultivating or breathing techniques. I can use it right away!”

“Do you know the price you have to pay to use this?” Li Huowang opened the scroll and looked at the various horrifying tortures and rituals depicted on it.

“I am not afraid of pain! I want revenge!” Lu Xiucan responded firmly, his eyes filled with a deep intensity.

“Maybe you should reconsider. You are the last male of the Lu family. If you die, your family line ends.”

Li Huowang’s heart had softened a bit, so he tried to persuade him to go lead a peaceful life.

However, Lu Xiucan’s attitude was resolute. “No! I want revenge! They killed my family! I must get back at them!”

“My family was destroyed! If I don’t pay them back tenfold or a hundredfold, what is the point of all the abilities I painstakingly cultivated? Should I just let it go to waste?”

Li Huowang stopped trying to persuade him. He tossed the

Profound Records back to Lu Xiucan and prepared to set off.

As he was about to open the door, someone knocked on the courtyard's gate again. *Someone else? Who could it be? I shouldn't know anyone else in Shangjing.*

When Li Huowang opened the door, a delicate and refined face appeared before him. Her bright, clear eyes looked at him excitedly. This was his confidante in this world.

"Huowang!" Yang Na couldn't contain her excitement and threw her arms around him.

Yang Na's body was very light. She almost jumped onto Li Huowang, who caught her steadily with both hands.

Li Huowang was momentarily dazed when he smelled the faint fragrance of her hair.

After a few seconds, Li Huowang came to his senses. Yang Na had come to find him, and he was seeing her again!

"Nana?" Li Huowang released her, looked at the girl in front of him carefully, and hugged her tightly once more.

"It's me! It's me!" Yang Na hugged him back as she jumped with joy.

After embracing for a while, Li Huowang suddenly felt something was amiss behind him. He turned around and saw Sun Xiaoqin holding a bowl of fruit, standing there with a knowing smile.

Yang Na blushed slightly, then pulled Li Huowang into his bedroom and closed the door.

The two of them looked at each other and then hugged tightly once again. They had waited too long for this moment and felt that no amount of time spent embracing would be enough.

Li Huowang's face moved closer, and he gently kissed her soft, lipstick-coated lips.

Chapter 667 - On The Way

The atmosphere in the room was just right. As Li Huowang was about to continue kissing her, Yang Na suddenly burst into laughter.

Why are you laughing?” Li Huowang was confused.

“I’m just happy. Huowang, I’m genuinely delighted that you’re really out of the hospital. I can’t help but laugh.” Yang Na gave him a heavy kiss on the cheek.

Upon seeing his expression, she coughed lightly and quickly straightened her face, then gently closed her eyes.

“Alright, let’s not talk about it. Let’s start over as if that didn’t happen.”

Li Huowang looked at her delicate face and moved closer. Suddenly, he felt a gaze from outside the window.

When he turned around, he saw Madam Qi holding a pair of binoculars and peering in their direction.

Li Huowang lost all interest. “Madam Qi! Are you enjoying the view? Care to join us? I don’t mind!”

Yang Na could not hold back her laughter as she playfully punched his chest. She walked over to the window and drew the star-patterned curtains.

“She’s so old. How can you joke like that with her?”

“If she weren’t that old, I’d be swearing at her. She’s been keeping an eye on me so closely that I can’t even leave the neighborhood,” Li Huowang said, pulling up his pants to reveal the electronic monitors on his ankles.

“Haven’t you recovered and been discharged? Why are there still so many restrictions?” Yang Na squatted down to curiously

inspect the devices on Li Huowang's ankles.

"It's because of what happened before," Li Huowang said. He sat down on a nearby chair as he recounted his experiences with a hint of irritation.

"I gave evidence that those two severed fingers must have belonged to the kidnappers. However, they said the blood on me was all my own, and the fingers had no DNA match. No injured people showed up to claim them either, so they still couldn't fully believe my story."

"I've clearly recovered, which even the doctors have certified, but they still don't believe me. They think I might still have episodes."

Yang Na leaned back on her hands on the bed as she patiently listened to Li Huowang.

"You saw the monitors on my ankles. They say it's to prevent me from being kidnapped again and that it's for my protection. But I know they're just doubling down on precautions."

"Huowang, was there really someone who kidnapped you? Who are they?" Yang Na was worried, and she tilted her head in thought.

Li Huowang recalled what the mad Qian Fu had said in the psychiatric hospital, which cast a shadow over his heart.

"How would I know? Who knows why those people went crazy and decided to kidnap me. Maybe people like me are just rare." Li Huowang changed the subject.

Whether it had to do with Qian Fu or the mysterious Leotians he mentioned, Li Huowang didn't want to drag Yang Na into it. Even more so since Yang Na had been mentally unwell before, as it would be a terrible loss if things got too complicated and caused a relapse.

Once he had a bit more freedom, he would personally go question Qian Fu.

Yang Na brushed a lock of hair behind her ear, revealing her exquisite green earrings, “Huowang, since that’s the case, you should stay home for now. It’s safer that way.”

“I wasn’t planning to go out. I’ve been taking online classes to catch up on the basics. It’s really tough.”

“Online classes? Why—”

Yang Na’s eyes started to well up. Even after all this time, he still remembered their promise to get into the same university together.

“Huowang, I really, really like you.” Yang Na felt touched and hugged him again. The two of them enjoyed the brief moment of warmth.

Soon, Li Huowang’s words broke the tranquility. “Nana, do your parents know you’re here?”

“They don’t. If they knew, they wouldn’t have let me come.”

Yang Na’s expression darkened, but it quickly brightened up again. “Never mind that. You said you’re taking online classes? Let me, the top scorer, help you!”

Li Huowang said, “Can you? I heard that once you get into college, you forget everything from high school faster than you learned it.”

“Don’t underestimate me. What are you studying?”

Yang Na picked up Li Huowang’s phone and skillfully entered her birthday as the password. She opened the newly downloaded educational app, and a series of videos popped up.

Having Yang Na’s help was much better than studying alone. At least, it wasn’t as hard as the previous days, where studying felt like a battle.

Li Huowang took a deep breath, shut off his senses, and concentrated. He pushed the inner sight between his eyes and wrapped it with his primordial breath.

Next, he painstakingly pushed the wrapped primordial breath

toward his abdomen.

The ‘Truth’ cultivation method had seven levels, and Li Huowang had already reached the third.

Although the method came from Doulao’s memory and seemed dubious, he didn’t mind.

Since all true and false Heavenly Daos were under Ji Zai, the method was genuine now, despite it being possibly either true or false before.

Li Huowang’s forehead dripped sweat as he struggled to control the wrapped primordial breath.

Each push felt like moving a mountain.

After what felt like an eternity, when he had no strength left, he released all his effort and slowly opened his eyes.

He was close, but there was still progress. He would soon break through the third level.

As he opened his eyes, various objects that floated in the air fell to the ground. Dawn was breaking.

He was almost at Qing Qiu. Since Ji Zai couldn’t help, the stronger he was, the better his chances against the Dharma Sect.

Not long after, Li Huowang saw a convoy, with most of the people having red lotus tattoos on their foreheads. Many had tattoos on their exposed skin, but their clothes obscured the details.

Li Huowang ignored their stares and walked straight into the largest carriage pulled by four horses.

As he entered, Bai Lingmiao handed him a steaming bowl of food.

While he ate, Bai Lingmiao removed his socks and shoes, and then brought over a basin of warm water to wash his feet.

After quickly finishing his meal, he wiped his face with a towel and lay down to rest.

Due to the unusual phenomena caused by his cultivation, he had been traveling at night and hiding by day. The only time he

could train was in the secluded spots where the convoy rested at night while they were on their way to Qing Qiu.

“Nana, thank you. You’ve been a great help,” Li Huowang whispered with his eyes closed.

“Senior Li, there’s no need for thanks between us.”

Chapter 668 - Li Sui

A gray wild rabbit hopped swiftly through the forest in the darkness before dawn. In the dim light, its dull fur made it nearly invisible and impossible to spot.

However, the rabbit seemed panicked, and it almost crashed into a tree at one point. The ground's trembling suggested that something was chasing it.

The leaves behind the rabbit were forcefully parted as a large bear charged out, frothing at its mouth and frantically chasing after the rabbit.

As the rabbit was about to be caught, several barbed tentacles suddenly emerged from the bushes and ensnared it like a net. The sudden appearance of these writhing tentacles in the dark forest frightened the bear, as it hastily turned and fled. The tentacles tightened and retracted, dragging a red-eyed gray rabbit to Li Sui's feet.

At this moment, Li Sui focused entirely on the rabbit, paying no mind to the fleeing bear. Li Sui grabbed the rabbit securely as the tentacles slowly retracted back under her skirt. Li Sui gently stroked the rabbit's furry head, then opened her small mouth and forced the upper half of the rabbit in.

Her cheeks bulged as she chewed, and her eyes squinted with pleasure. She enjoyed meat that had many bones. It was juicy and flavorful when she chewed. The only downside was having to spit out the fur before she swallowed.

After finishing the upper half of the rabbit, Li Sui didn't continue with the bottom half. She ran happily toward the nearby dirt road while she held onto the half-eaten rabbit.

"Mom, here you go. This is delicious." Li Sui presented the half-

eaten rabbit to Bai Lingmiao, who was trying to start a fire.

“A rabbit? Did you catch this? Such a good girl.” Bai Lingmiao received it, and then quickly skinned the rabbit with her long black nails.

She had gotten along well with Li Sui. Just like a child, some praise would delight her for a long time. As long as Bai Lingmiao treated her sincerely, Li Sui would genuinely regard her as her mother.

“Mom, why aren’t you eating? It’s really tasty and hard to catch.”

Bai Lingmiao smiled gently and shook her head, then cut the rabbit meat into small pieces to add to the white porridge later. “It’s almost dawn. I’ll prepare this for your Dad.”

“Oh.” Li Sui nodded, then jumped back into the nearby woods. “I’ll go see if Dad’s back and receive him.”

“Wait,” Bai Lingmiao stopped her and touched her exposed waist. “Look, your clothes are torn and frayed. If you keep wearing them, they’ll turn to rags. Take my clothes instead.”

After being pulled into the carriage, Li Sui emerged a while later when the sky had lightened. She was dressed in a crescent white outfit, and she dashed toward the woods.

Bai Lingmiao warned, “Suisui, don’t get too close! It’s dangerous when your Dad is cultivating!”

“I know. I’ll just watch from a distance.” Li Sui disappeared into the woods instantly.

Back in the woods, Li Sui didn’t hold back anymore. Various tentacles emerged from her clothes, substituting her feet and making her even faster.

As she neared her destination, she heard a noise from the woods and approached cautiously.

She soon found the source of the noise. It was Lu Xiucan, trembling as he held a red bamboo slip and raised his thumb.

Lu Xiucan gritted his teeth as he pierced three long needles into his nail bed, then pressed his thumb against the ground. “Ahhh!”

“What are you doing?” Li Sui asked curiously and came closer.

Lu Xiucan relaxed his guard when he saw who it was. He knew she was the evil spirit his master raised.

Despite the pain in his finger, Lu Xiucan took a deep breath and forced a response. “I wanted to test how to use this thing so that I don’t mess up when I actually need it.”

“Does it hurt?” Li Sui asked.

“No! Compared to my dad’s madness and my brother’s death, this pain is nothing!” Lu Xiucan gritted his teeth and replied fiercely.

“Oh, then you carry on. I’m leaving.” Li Sui was left confused. She turned and dived back into the forest.

Li Huowang’s cultivation spot was easy to find, as there were few places where trees flew in the sky.

Li Sui climbed to the top of a large tree and watched Li Huowang from afar. He was sitting cross-legged while upside-down, with his head buried in a rock. His body and everything around him floated erratically.

After a while, Li Huowang’s head emerged from the rock and collided with a flying tree, which shattered like bubbles. It was as if all of the world’s rules had ceased to exist around him.

Li Sui quietly observed Li Huowang’s strange cultivation. Though he rarely spoke to her, she understood some things through silent observation. Her father wanted to become stronger to protect them and prevent their deaths. Lu Xiucan had the same goal. He wanted to become stronger too.

Li Sui recalled her father’s opponents. If he wasn’t strong, he would have been killed. This thought made her anxious. She didn’t want her father to die, and she began to ponder how she could help him.

They all want to become more powerful. What should I do to help

Dad?

Usually, she burrowed into her dad and served as an extra hand for him, but she wanted to do more.

The question was complex, and Li Sui couldn't figure out what to do even after thinking for a long time.

She was only a year and a half old, and she had never seen how anyone became strong. Her father was an exception, but she couldn't understand his methods.

She saw Li Huowang's shadow float out from the ground along with his body. She quickly descended the tree and ran towards the carriage. She wanted to ask the others for advice.

"Why do you want to become more powerful?" Bai Lingmiao asked with surprise as she tested the porridge's saltiness with a careful sip from a spoon.

"I want to help my dad and protect him. I want to be useful too."

Bai Lingmiao thought hard, then gently shook her head.

"Suisui, I don't know either. You're an evil spirit and not human. Maybe... you could follow them and worship the Heavenly Mater? She's very compassionate. If you're fated, she might accept you."

Li Sui turned to look at the White Lotus Sect followers gathered by the carriages. They knelt and worshiped a glowing white jade lotus amidst white incense smoke.

Chapter 669 - Stronger

Will worshipping that lotus make me stronger? Li Sui was somewhat confused, and she followed the White Lotus Sect followers in their rituals.

However, after a while, she felt no change and became discouraged. At that moment, a small centipede crawled past her and burrowed into the clothes of a nearby follower.

Li Sui's skirt quickly bulged as the head of a skinned dog shot out. It bit the centipede with its sharp teeth and shook it violently.

Li Sui watched the centipede get torn apart, and she suddenly realized how she could become stronger. She had always imitated her father, but now she understood that she and her father were different.

What her father could do, she couldn't, but there were also things she could do that he couldn't.

Am I Li Sui or Bun? Li Sui didn't want to ponder this question. Instead, she focused on her unique abilities.

When she merged with Bun, she gained its sharp teeth and claws. If she merged with other creatures, wouldn't she become even stronger?

The more she thought about it, the more possible it seemed. Her father often said that Black Taisui was born to possess others. This was her innate ability.

She decided to test this, and she got up to hurry into the forest to find a suitable host.

There weren't many options in the forest, and even fewer that could enhance her power. Fortunately, she had recently encountered one.

As daylight broke, Bai Lingmiao waited for Li Huowang to join

her for breakfast. Suddenly, a bear covered in tentacles walked out of the forest, as the ground shook with each step.

“Protect the Saintess!”

Bai Lingmiao stepped out from the protective circle of followers, and looked up in surprise at the huge mass of flesh.

“Suisui?”

The bear opened its mouth, revealing Li Sui’s happy face.

“Mom! How did you know it was me? I thought you wouldn’t be able to guess it. Look at all the meat on me. I’m really strong now.”

Li Sui controlled the bear’s body and walked to a large tree, then shook it with her powerful paws.

The soil scattered, and as the roots loosened, she pulled the tree from the ground. “Mom! Look! I’m really strong now! Aren’t I powerful?”

Li Sui was not just thrilled by her strength, but also by her discovery of how to become stronger.

The Black Taisui’s ability to possess was innate. She could use the strength of more powerful beings by possessing them.

It was not just limited to a bear. As long as she possessed more powerful beings, she could better protect her dad in future.

“Alright, I know you’re strong. Now, get out of that bear skin. You’re getting your new clothes dirty again by burrowing into its belly.”

“Mom, I’m not inside it. It is me!”

Li Sui, Bai Lingmiao, and the nearby White Lotus followers suddenly felt a tugging sensation from deep in the forest, as if the whole world had become a piece of fabric that was being pulled.

“Dad?” Li Sui called out towards the direction of the sensation.

After a moment, a smiling Li Huowang emerged from the forest. Around him, bushes and tree trunks twisted and collapsed to clear his path.

“It’s at the Sacral Chakra! My ‘Truth’ cultivation has advanced

another step!” Li Huowang announced the piece of good news to Bai Lingmiao.

“Brother Li, that’s so quick! We haven’t even reached Qing Qiu yet!” Bai Lingmiao understood what he meant, since she had spent a lot of time living with Li Huowang.

According to Brother Li, there were seven chakras in his ‘Truth’ cultivation. His ‘Truth’ cultivation abilities were enhanced each time he advanced through a chakra.

“I don’t know why it was so fast this time. Maybe I’m talented.” Li Huowang knew that the stronger his cultivation, the better he could deal against the Dharma Sect when he went to Qing Qiu and Hou Shu.

This way, not only could he materialize things in a faster and simpler fashion, he could maintain them for a longer time as well.

Li Huowang noticed Li Sui inside the bear. “Suisui, what are you doing?”

“Dad, you became stronger! Look, I became stronger too! I can help you now!” Li Sui explained in excitement.

Li Huowang took the rabbit porridge from Bai Lingmiao then sat down to eat. As soon as he tasted it, his expression turned serious. Although the porridge looked delicious, it had no flavor.

Li Huowang handed the bowl to Bai Lingmiao to see if it was just him affected. “Taste this.”

Bai Lingmiao tasted it and was puzzled. “Strange, I added salt, but there’s no flavor.”

“It’s not just the salt. There’s no taste of meat or rice. This is a Natural Disaster!” Li Huowang looked up at the sky and wondered what was happening in Baiyu Capital.

Natural Disasters signified changes in the Heavenly Daos or problems with the Simings.

“Senior Li, it’s true! There’s no taste or smell at all!” Bai Lingmiao exclaimed in surprise.

Li Huowang conducted several tests. The disaster only affected taste and smell for now, and he did not know if this was good or bad news. It was not too scary to lose these two senses for now, but it could be just the beginning.

Ji Zai was also a Siming. If someone seized Ji Zai's Heavenly Dao, the previous troubles that had vanished could return. Doulao's fate showed that even Simings could die!

Is this related to god Yu'er expanding his influence? Is he seizing the Heavenly Daos of other Simings? Li Huowang pondered.

He didn't know which Siming governed taste and smell, nor whether that Siming had followers on earth.

"Let's go. We need to reach Qing Qiu as soon as possible!" Since the Surveillance Bureau existed to prevent Natural Disasters, they must know something.

As Ji Zai was useless now, the only way to gain more information was through the Surveillance Bureau.

Li Huowang wasn't sure how much he could contribute in this catastrophe, but he was determined to give his best.

He urged the horses forward and the carriage sped off, leaving trails of yellow dust behind.

Chapter 670 - Bintie City

The iron wheels of the carriage rolled slowly, leaving deep tracks in the yellowed grass.

Li Huowang sat in the carriage and gazed at the grasslands, recalling his last visit to this place.

He didn't know much about Qing Qiu other than that most of its people were nomads, generally lean, and dark-skinned.

He also remembered two unique factions in Qing Qiu: the Antrabhara Temple, which worshiped death, and the bizarre Lion Dance Palace.

The grass in Qing Qiu really has turned yellow. Is this some premonition? Li Huowang leaned slightly to the left and ran his fingers through the yellow grass.

He then thought about the recent Natural Disaster that caused loss of taste and smell, which had lasted only three days. This wasn't comforting. The recent Natural Disaster had been minor, but what if the next one was extremely severe?

Li Huowang wanted to understand what was happening, but nobody outside the Baiyu Capital would know what was happening in the heavens.

At this point, his sharp eyesight spotted a small black dot on the yellow horizon in the distance. As the carriage drew closer, the small black dot became larger as they approached and eventually revealed the outline of a city.

"This should be Qing Qiu's Bintie City?" Li Huowang muttered to himself.

He had made some preparations before he came. This was the only city in Qing Qiu and also the capital.

Building a city seemed impossible in a place without wood or

stone. Bintie City was an exception that rose starkly in the barren land.

The Great Khan of Qing Qiu and the Surveillance Bureau of Qing Qiu were also located here.

Since Hou Shu was battling the Dharma Sect, rushing into Hou Shu to kill the Dharma Sect members wasn't feasible. It would be inefficient and alert the enemies, resulting in minimal casualties to the Dharma Sect while harming some civilians. It was better to first contact Qing Qiu's Surveillance Bureau to gather more information.

Additionally, the Imperial Preceptor mentioned that the Chiefs of the Surveillance Bureau from the Great Liang and Si Qi should also be here.

As Li Huowang pondered, the distinctive smell of sheep and horse dung gradually filled his nostrils.

Perhaps due to Qing Qiu's suitability for breeding livestock, the outskirts of Bintie City were littered with cow and horse dung. Sparse patches of grass were interspersed with piles of dung from both livestock and humans.

When Bai Lingmiao saw the carriage wheels roll over a fresh pile of cow dung, smearing them greenish-brown, she frowned. "This place is filthy, almost as bad as the Benevolent Nunnery."

"Endure it. It's clear there's no sewage system here," Li Huowang said and lightly shook the reins.

The carriage sped up towards the city. They winded through cattle, sheep, and horses, then finally squeezed into the city. It wasn't much better inside.

There were buildings of all kinds inside—tents, wooden houses, and stone houses. They were haphazardly arranged without any signs of planning.

Countless feet trampled cow and sheep dung, which formed a dense black carpet that covered the roads, just like the stone pavements in the Great Liang city.

The streets were very crowded. Although there weren't many humans, almost everyone herded some livestock, which made it incredibly congested.

Children squatted and defecated by the roadside, which made the smell even more unbearable.

"Let's continue inward! The inner city should be better!"

The carriage slowly moved inward. The initially grim faces of the group gradually improved over time.

It was not because the environment improved—it was because their noses had slowly gotten used to it.

"Dad, what's that?" Li Sui pointed to a luxurious white building against the city wall in the distance.

The building was enormous and could be considered the largest in Bintie City. However, it didn't look like it belonged to royalty.

Li Huowang surmised that the Great Khan of Qing Qiu might not be the highest authority, as there were others who seemed to hold an even higher status.

"That should be a temple, right?" Li Huowang guessed as he saw the high spire and thought of the Antrabhara Temple.

He scanned the surroundings and noticed some Lamas wearing black sheepskins and cockscomb hats.

All the Lamas were elderly, frail, and had dark spots that covered their bodies, much like psoriasis.

Li Huowang noticed their bone ornaments, then gripped the reins and urged the carriage to move faster.

Despite the filth, security was tight. Before they could approach the royal palace, they were surrounded by light cavalry with bows and swords. There were even falcons on their shoulders and dogs following the horses' hooves.

Li Huowang did not want to waste time, especially when it came to potential communication issues. He directly tossed his Surveillance Bureau waist badge over. "Is Xuan Pin here? Tell him

I've arrived!"

Li Huowang was not brought to see Xuan Pin, but he was led through an underground tunnel.

Though Bintie City looked filthy outside, its inner city was surprisingly clean. For some reason, all Surveillance Bureaus were located underground.

The sheep oil lamps on the walls burned slowly and crackled. Li Huowang observed a peculiar woman remaining silent before him.

He couldn't discern her origins. Though he had seen many strange people, this was his first time seeing someone whose face was covered in white powder with red patterns.

This Qing Qiu lady dressed revealingly. Cloth was used to cover the important areas, but everything else was exposed and intricately painted with floral and complex designs.

A row of people wearing large bamboo hats stood behind her. The hats almost entirely covered them, and only their legs were visible.

They stood there silently, which added a layer of mystery in the dim environment.

"Why are you seeking the Surveillance Bureau of Great Liang?" The woman questioned Li Huowang coldly.

Li Huowang replied bluntly, "Send someone qualified to speak. You're not qualified."

The woman's response caught him off-guard. "I am the Chief of Qing Qiu's Surveillance Bureau. Am I qualified enough now?"

Chapter 671 - Trouble

“Are you the Chief of Qing Qiu?”

“I know who you are, Li Huowang. What are you doing in Qing Qiu?”

“Xuan Pin told you?” Li Huowang frowned. It seemed that the intelligence networks of the various Surveillance Bureaus were exchanging information.

The woman replied, “No matter who told me, you must answer my question now. What are you doing in Qing Qiu?”

“What am I doing in Qing Qiu? Of course, I’m here to help deal with the Dharma Sect! Isn’t that obvious?”

The woman sneered, “I heard you’re from the Emperor of Great Liang, who promptly refused the Great Khan’s request for troops and instead sent you here as if offering charity?”

Li Huowang’s frown deepened as he looked at the woman. Her attitude seemed quite off. *Is there a complicated history between Qing Qiu and Great Liang that I don’t know about?*

“You know me, so you should also know my abilities. Isn’t that enough?”

“Hehe, well, I would like to test whether you, Li Huowang, are as formidable as people say,” she said and stood up. “I am Bian Zhen, trained in unorthodox methods. Please instruct me.”

“Unorthodox methods?” Li Huowang sized up the woman before him and gripped the spine sword slowly with his right hand.

As the atmosphere grew tense, Li Huowang saw the woman’s body gradually melt and transform into the tall appearance of Xuan Pin.

“Xuan Pin, what do you mean by this? Do you really have the time to prank me at a time like this?”

Xuan Pin lightly inserted his slender finger into Li Huowang's forehead and then withdrew it. Li Huowang's forehead remained unscathed.

"I'm not actually here. I just received news of your arrival and hurried over. Bian Zhen, there's no need to test him. I know Li Huowang's capabilities."

Bian Zhen stepped out from the Chief's body, looked Li Huowang up and down, then turned on her heel to leave.

Since no one else was around, Li Huowang quickly said, "Alright, since we know each other, let's skip the formalities. What's the overall situation? How far has the Dharma Sect's influence spread?"

Li Huowang needed to quickly understand everything happening here to determine the best way to increase his side's chances of victory.

Xuan Pin did not answer Li Huowang's question and posed his own instead. "Did you bring the Saintess of the White Lotus Sect with you? Why?"

"Does that need to be asked? The Dharma Sect has spread so rapidly because the gullible masses believe their god Yu'er can save everyone. We need to counter that by promoting the belief in the Heavenly Mater. At least for now, the Heavenly Mater is on our side."

Xuan Pin nodded. "Correct, but you need to think several steps ahead. You must enlist multiple factions to undermine the Dharma Sect's foundation, and avoid replacing one problem with another."

"In fact, we have already spoken with other sects. Many disciples have descended from their mountains and have begun to move within Hou Shu."

"I don't care about that. I need the current situation in Hou Shu."

"The situation is dire. Although Hou Shu's troops are steadfast,

they are on the brink of collapse. The Dragon Vein of Hou Shu was severed yesterday right before noon,” Xuan Pin said, and the atmosphere in the room grew heavy.

Li Huowang knew the dire consequences of a severed Dragon Vein. It wouldn't be long before Hou Shu became a living hell.

“Weren't Hou Shu and the Dharma Sect locked in a fierce battle? How did the Dragon Vein get severed so quickly? What happened?”

“I don't know. We communicated with Hou Shu's Chief just the day before yesterday. The Dragon Vein was intact and protected by layers of traps. The Dharma Sect hadn't even approached Hou Shu's royal city at that time.”

“How did such a drastic change occur in just one day? I can't figure it out. There must be some significant underlying cause.”

Li Huowang frowned and paced the room, pondering how he could help now.

He recalled Gao Zhijian's experience and said, “Even a severed Dragon Vein can be reconnected. Can we find a way to reconnect Hou Shu's Dragon Vein?”

“Theoretically, yes, but where will we find a suitable hidden descendant? Moreover, the Dragon Vein is now in the hands of the Dharma Sect. How do we retrieve it?”

The Chief paused briefly and corrected himself. “Just now, news came from Zheng Boqiao in Hou Shu that the Dharma Sect is already using Hou Shu's Dragon Vein.”

Li Huowang frowned deeply and bit his lip as he considered the situation. He knew the power of the Dragon Vein. This situation would only worsen Hou Shu's predicament.

After a moment of contemplation, Li Huowang looked up at Xuan Pin. “I'll go to Hou Shu now and handle the Dragon Vein issue. Can you find a suitable descendant? For now, let's focus on reconnecting Hou Shu's Dragon Vein!”

Xuan Pin replied, “It’s difficult to find. Each royal bloodline is accounted for and one emperor can’t serve two lands, unless you can find another royal family from the Great Qi.”

“Does that mean we give up just because it’s difficult? Should we switch roles? You handle the Dragon Vein?”

Li Huowang pulled out a map from his pocket and spread it on the table. “Look closely. If we lose Hou Shu and add it to Si Qi and Nanping, the Dharma Sect’s domain will be larger than the Great Liang’s!”

Xuan Pin looked at the map on the table, thought for a moment, and then nodded lightly. “Alright, you retrieve Hou Shu’s Dragon Vein. I’ll find a descendant, even if it’s not a royal. This will prevent the Dharma Sect from using the Dragon Vein.”

“Good. First, tell me the Dragon Vein’s location, and I’ll set off immediately!”

Shangguan Yuting emerged from Xuan Pin’s large red robe and bowed to Li Huowang shyly.

“She will inform you of the Dragon Vein’s approximate location. I will also command those remaining in Hou Shu to give you as much assistance as possible.”

“Alright.” Li Huowang turned to leave the dimly lit inner city.

Xuan Pin’s words made him pause. “Be careful. The Dharma Sect will surely guard the Dragon Vein heavily, and many people will be around it. Moreover...”

“Moreover, what? Spit it out. Why do you always speak in incomplete sentences?” Li Huowang replied impatiently.

“Moreover, I always felt there was something suspicious about the loss of control over the Hou Shu’s Dragon Vein. Although negligence previously occurred due to the distraction of Shai Zi from the Sitting Oblivion Dao, the Surveillance Bureaus of other countries are not to be trifled with. The strength of the followers of the Dharma Sect seems to have increased too rapidly.”

“What do you mean by that?” Li Huowang’s frown deepened.

“I suspect we’re not just dealing with god Yu’er. Perhaps one or even two more hidden figures are aiding the Dharma Sect.”

Chapter 672 - Boat People

“Not just god Yu’er?” Li Huowang felt a chill run down his spine. He had been in Great Liang all this time and hadn’t paid much attention to what was happening here.

Now, thinking back, Xuan Pin was right. When the Dharma Sect first appeared, the various Chiefs of the Surveillance Bureaus pursued and blocked them, and even the military was employed to deal with them.

Yet, despite such circumstances, they managed to destroy Si Qi and Nanping and then advance into Hou Shu.

Even if these countries were not in good condition, plagued by constant war and corrupt governments, the expansion of the Dharma Sect was unusually rapid.

“Does this mean there’s another Siming opposing us along with god Yu’er?” Li Huowang asked Xuan Pin, his expression extremely grave.

Regardless of which power was responsible, the root problem seemed to lie with the Dharma Sect.

Xuan Pin shook his head slightly, “Opposing us? Why do you think all Simings would be on our side? Can you guess what a Siming thinks? Do you truly believe them even if they say they will help you?”

These words left Li Huowang feeling unsettled. A terrifying thought crossed his mind, “Are you suggesting that all the Simings in the Baiyu Capital are actually allied with god Yu’er?”

“The Surveillance Bureaus are meant to observe the heavens. No matter what, don’t rely on others, and don’t place your lifeline in someone else’s hands,” Xuan Pin said, then his enormous red robe gradually began to turn transparent.

“No matter what is helping the Dharma Sect behind the scenes, be careful when you reach Hou Shu. There are still many things in this world that can kill you.”

“Though I can’t trust you, we are allies in dealing with god Yu’er. I’ve informed the Chief, and they will assist you with anything you need.”

Xuan Pin’s body completely disappeared and left Li Huowang alone.

In the dim underground room, Li Huowang stood in deep contemplation for a long time. Finally, he turned and strode out of the dark chamber.

Li Sui and Bai Lingmiao had been waiting for him, and they immediately approached him. “Senior Li, how did it go? Did they give you a hard time?”

Li Huowang shook his head slightly and replied, “No, it’s fine. Have your people resupply quickly. We’re leaving this city.”

“We’re leaving already? Where are we heading?”

“Hou Shu.”

“Hou Shu? Really? That place is currently at war. In recent times, people have only been fleeing from there, not going in,” the boatman with a missing incisor said.

He was barefoot and squatted on the deck as he eyed the two young people before him. One was a teenager, and the other a young woman in her twenties or thirties. Their age gap didn’t seem like they were mother and child. They looked like they could be siblings, but their interactions suggested otherwise.

“It’s fine. We’re not going deep into Hou Shu. We just need a boat to the edge of Zhenhai Cape. Boatman, please accommodate us.”

As the boatman hesitated, Yang Xiaohai handed him a letter written by Sun Baolu’s clan members. “I don’t want to travel aimlessly in these chaotic times, but I’m part of the boat people. My

parents are still there, and I need to save them. I have no choice.”

“Boat people? You don’t look like one,” the boatman said, quickly glancing through the letter.

After reading it, the boatman lowered his guard slightly. “It’s good to be filial, but using such a big boat just to fetch you is...”

The boatman saw that Yang Xiaohai was about to hand him some silver. He accepted it and stuffed the letter and silver into his pocket.

“Alright, since I’m a filial son myself, we’ll take this trip for your parents’ sake.”

Yang Xiaohai expressed his gratitude repeatedly. He was finally going to see his family!

The sails unfurled while Yang Xiaohai’s group boarded the sizable, old, flat-bottomed boat with their carriage.

As the boat moved away from the harbor, Yang Xiaohai was excited, but he remained cautious of the boatman. He had prepared enough fresh water and provisions to avoid being drugged.

He had not forgotten how he and Senior Li were previously forced by river bandits to choose between sliced noodles and dumpling soup.

The boatman noticed Yang Xiaohai’s wariness but was equally cautious of him. In these chaotic times, a young man and a woman traveling alone must have some means to protect themselves.

As the days passed and they neared their destination, the initial wariness between them had lessened.

When Yang Xiaohai learned they were close to their destination, he approached the boatman, who was fishing, and asked, “Boatman, how many years have you been sailing?”

“Heh, twenty or thirty years. It’s been even longer if you count my dad and grandpa. This is our old trade. Some things and some people are hard to transport by land, so we go by sea.”

“That long? Have you dealt with boat people before?”

“Of course. Anyone that makes a living at sea has interacted with them.” The boatman suddenly sat up straight and reeled in his line.

“How are they? Are they easy to get along with?” Yang Xiaohai asked nervously.

He knew his family were boat people and lived at sea, but he knew nothing else about them.

The boatman was occasionally reeling and releasing the line. Then, he glanced at Yang Xiaohai. “Aren’t you of the boat people? Don’t you know what your own family is like?”

“I... I was taken ashore right after I was born, so I don’t know what it’s like.”

The boatman didn’t prod him on his poor excuse, and he said, “Boat people? They’re just like those living on land. The men fish while the women dive for pearls. If they have a good harvest, things are fine. If not, times are tough.”

Yang Xiaohai’s expression dimmed slightly. He had been sold during hard times.

“The poorer they are, the more rules they have. I generally avoid dealing with them,” the boatman said as he continued to reel in his line.

Chapter 673 - Boat

“What rules?” Yang Xiaohai couldn’t help but become curious. Farmers on land didn’t have so many rules.

“What rules? Sea rules, of course. We boatmen have a few, like certain surnames can’t board the boat or certain words can’t be said on the boat. The boat people have even more rules than we do, even down to where they can relieve themselves.”

“I don’t know all the details. When you get home, make sure to ask your family so you don’t accidentally break any taboos.”

“Alright.” Yang Xiaohai tried to piece together an image of the boat people in his mind with the boatman’s description.

“But there’s one good thing about the boat people. Whenever there’s anything floating on the water, be it alive or dead, they have to fish it out for a look. If they don’t, their ancestors will be angry.”

With that, the boatman strongly tugged on his fishing rod and pulled up a blue-green fish glistening with seawater. The boatman nodded with satisfaction at his catch, then pulled out a knife from his waist and gutted the fish. He sliced it into thin and translucent pieces. As he poured some soy sauce over the fish, the flesh seemed to tremble as if it were still responsive.

The boatman picked up a few pieces with his fingers and put them into his mouth, chewing on them contentedly. “Want to try? The freshest fish is always the best. Anything that has been out of the water for more than fifteen minutes is sold to those clueless people on land.”

“No, thank you. I don’t eat raw fish,” Yang Xiaohai said, shaking his head lightly.

“Then you’re missing out. This fish is at its fattest now.” the boatman popped another piece into his mouth.

He continued, "Aren't you looking for the boat people? We're here. See those boats clustered together? That's the place you're looking for."

Yang Xiaohai widened his eyes and looked in the direction the boatman was pointing.

He saw houses standing on stilts near the water's edge. They were surrounded by a mix of old and new wooden boats.

"Is that my home? The place where I was born?" Yang Xiaohai felt a surge of emotion. He had endured countless hardships and traveled from Great Liang back to Hou Shu just for this day!

As the flat-bottomed boat approached the wooden island, he began to understand why the boatman had doubted he was from the boat people.

Years of exposure to the elements had given the boat people dark and weathered skin. They wore loose blue-black clothes, with the men often bare-chested and barefoot.

Their dark, smooth skin was adorned with scale tattoos, which covered some even on their faces. Both the men and women had similar tattoos.

Though the boat people looked at him with hostility, Yang Xiaohai felt an inexplicable sense of kinship.

"Excuse me, do you know someone called Chi Baishui?" Yang Xiaohai cautiously asked an old boatman on a nearby boat about his father's name.

The old man just slammed his window shut with a stern face and shut off Yang Xiaohai's friendly gaze.

With no response, Yang Xiaohai moved on to the next person. However, each one ignored him, and their hostility was evident in their expressions.

When he was starting to feel anxious, someone finally spoke to him, "What do you want with Chi Baishui?"

The speaker was a middle-aged man with a wet beard, which

suggested he had just come out of the water.

Yang Xiaohai excitedly gestured, "I'm Chi Baishui's son! I'm his son!"

"Son?" The man scrutinized Yang Xiaohai. "I don't recall Chi Baishui having a son."

"Can you take me to see him? He'll recognize me once he sees me. I really am his son."

The middle-aged man glanced at the flat-bottomed boat then waved his hand. "Come on, I'll take you to him."

Yang Xiaohai nodded, gave some instructions to Zhao Xiumei, then jumped into the water and swam over.

Under the man's guidance, Yang Xiaohai leaped quickly between various boats. Most were old and patched up, but they felt strangely familiar to him. After some time, the middle-aged man brought Yang Xiaohai to an old, worn boat.

An elderly woman with graying hair and blue-scaled facial tattoos was sitting at the bow. Her tattoos mingled with her wrinkles, which gave her a bizarre appearance.

She looked confusedly at the middle-aged man. "What's going on, Jiang Erlang? Who is this boy?"

"Is Uncle Baishui here? This boy says he's your son," Jiang Erlang signed to the elderly woman.

When she understood what he was trying to convey, her eyes widened and she looked at Yang Xiaohai. "You... you...you're...Fifth Child?"

Yang Xiaohai was in a daze as he stepped forward, his body trembling slightly. He recalled hearing that his mother had become deaf, and this woman fit the description.

"Mom?" Yang Xiaohai asked hesitantly.

The elderly woman seemed to understand what he said, and she stumbled forward to embrace him.

She rolled up his left sleeve to reveal a faint birthmark on his

elbow.

Tears welled up in her eyes as she exclaimed, "Fifth Child, it really is you! I never thought I'd see you again!"

Yang Xiaohai realized this woman was indeed his mother, then threw himself into her arms and hugged her tightly.

When he felt the sense of familiarity and warmth he had only dreamed of before, Yang Xiaohai felt that all the hardships he had endured were worth it. He finally had a mother.

He could proudly defend himself if anyone dared to insult him again!

"Fifth Child, I'm so sorry! I'm so sorry!" The elderly woman cried as she hugged Yang Xiaohai tightly.

The lost son that the Chi Family had sold off had now returned. Once his identity was confirmed, the other boat people softened their attitudes towards him.

When Yang Xiaohai was worried about how to get his cart from the flat-bottomed boat to his home, many boat people brought their boats to help.

After a flurry of action, Yang Xiaohai brought Zhao Xiumei, the three monkey children, and their carriage onto the Chi Family's boat.

"Mom! This is my wife, Zhao Xiumei." Yang Xiaohai gestured to make his deaf mother understand.

"Good! You're so capable, being married at such a young age!"

"Mom, this is mutton from Qing Qiu. Try it. It's very tasty!"

As Yang Xiaohai spoke with his mother emotionally, the other boat people gathered around and watched the warm reunion with smiles and occasional whispers.

Jiang Erlang saw that Yang Xiaohai was genuinely looking for his family, and his expression grew much gentler.

He whispered to a small boy beside him, "Where did Uncle Baishui go? This is so important, and he's not here."

“Uncle Baishui took his son to the Dragon King Temple.”

“Go inform him that the fifth child he sold in the past has found his way back.”

Chapter 674 - Water Banquet

“Mom, this is delicious too. Try this; I brought it especially for you from the Great Liang.

“Oh, and here are some honey dates. I happened to see them on the way and thought they tasted good, so I bought you two pounds.

“Mom, do you like sour things? I brought you a jar of something sour too.”

Yang Xiaohai finally didn't have to pretend anymore in front of his biological mother. He reverted to how a child his age should've been.

“Oh, and this too!” Yang Xiaohai handed a large bag of silver to his mother.

His mom replied, “Oh my, this is too much! No more, it's enough!”

Yang Xiaohai became even more enthusiastic, as though he wanted to empty the entire carriage. After his mother stopped him, Yang Xiaohai finally ceased unloading things.

He started telling his mother about the hardships and longing he had experienced over the years. However, she was deaf and had a confused look, and she was clearly unable to hear much. This left Yang Xiaohai with a lot to say but no way to express it.

“Come, you just got home. You don't know the family yet. Let me introduce them to you.” His mother stood up and pulled Yang Xiaohai towards the other boat people who had gathered around.

“This is your Second Brother.”

“Hello, Second Brother!” Yang Xiaohai greeted the man shorter

than him.

Second Brother seemed more reserved and mumbled awkwardly, "Uh... Hey, you're back? Have you eaten?"

"This is your Third Brother."

Yang Xiaohai greeted him, "Hello, Third Brother."

He seemed more mature compared to Second Brother. He patted Yang Xiaohai on the shoulder. "You've grown so big. Good to see you. You were as small as a chick when you were little."

"This is your little sister. Her marriage has been arranged for after the new year, so you must come and celebrate as her brother."

"Definitely."

Aside from his immediate family, his mother introduced him to the surrounding boat people one by one. These were his numerous aunts and uncles.

Through her introductions, Yang Xiaohai realized that all the boat people he had encountered along the way were actually his relatives. The family hierarchy was also very confusing. He even had to call a girl younger than him as Grand Aunt.

Yang Xiaohai didn't mind at all. On the contrary, he was delighted to know he wasn't alone and had so many family members in the world.

After introducing the elders, his mother pulled him towards the back of the boat to introduce the younger generation.

"These two are your Second Brother's kids, so they are your nephews," she said and pointed to two children wearing only dudous.

The two nephews seemed fine apart from being a bit thin. However, the ropes that tied them up made Yang Xiaohai uncomfortable. It looked as if they were raising dogs rather than children.

Yang Xiaohai couldn't help but glance at the three monkey kids near the carriage. They were also tied up similarly when he first

met them.

“Mom, why are my nephews tied up?” Yang Xiaohai couldn’t help but ask.

However, his mother was deaf and couldn’t hear him. She continued to pull him along.

At this moment, Jiang Erlang came over to explain, “You’ve been on land too long to understand. We have to raise kids this way on the water. If they’re not tied up, they might fall into the water. That’s how your Second Uncle died.”

“Is that so? But surely they won’t be tied up forever, right?”

“Of course not. Once they are past the childhood age, they can go to the Dragon King Temple and burn incense. They will then be registered as dragon household members, and can be released.”

“Dragon household? What’s that?”

Jiang Erlang touched his scale tattoo and said, “Those like us are the dragon household, which is like registering in an ancestral hall on land.”

“Oh,” Yang Xiaohai said, nodding in understanding. The rules the boatman mentioned earlier had real reasons behind them.

“Dad! Guess who’s here? Fifth Brother is back!” His Second Brother’s voice sounded from the bow. Yang Xiaohai felt a sudden tension. *Dad?*

Yang Xiaohai and his mother returned to the bow, where he saw a stern old man. He looked a bit younger than Lu Zhuangyuan, with a thick neck and fish scale tattoos on his hands and body.

“...Dad?” Yang Xiaohai stepped forward nervously.

He saw his father jump over from the other boat, then rolled up his sleeve to check his faint birthmark.

The sleeve was rolled back down, and Yang Xiaohai’s father turned to the surrounding boat people and shouted, “Today, my Fifth Child is back! Great news! No one cooks tonight! The Chi family is hosting a water banquet!”

Amidst the boat people's cheers, Yang Xiaohai felt moved as he looked at the small old man beside him. His nervousness disappeared instantly.

That night, Yang Xiaohai finally saw what a water banquet was like. The boats spread out and carved out a waterway.

Two small wooden boats laden with dishes moved back and forth along the edge of the waterway, allowing everyone to take food.

Perhaps because the boat people rarely went ashore, there weren't many seasonings in their food. The dishes mainly consisted of various raw and blanched items.

There were also some dishes from the shore, which were consumed the fastest. These included the hard guokuis that Yang Xiaohai had used as rations on the road.

That night, Yang Xiaohai ate more fish than he had in his entire life. There were all kinds of fish and seafood he had never seen before.

Yang Xiaohai didn't care what these things were and just stuffed them into his mouth. He felt nothing but joy.

He picked up a long sea snail, sucked from one end, then followed his Third Brother's example and sucked from the other end. The meat from both ends tasted different, which gave a unique flavor.

He glanced at his father, who was drinking with his uncles in the cabin. Yang Xiaohai turned to his brother beside him. "Third Brother, I remember hearing that our family has four children. Where's the other one?"

He remembered clearly that the old man had told him there were four siblings.

His Second Brother was eating a bloody shellfish. He answered, "We have an amazing older sister. Our family's success is all thanks to her."

“Our older sister was married as a child bride to a wealthy family and often sends money home. Otherwise, your Second Brother and I wouldn’t have been able to get wives.”

“Oh, I see.” Yang Xiaohai felt a bit disappointed since he had not met one family member on this trip back.

“Where does our sister live? I want to visit her,” Yang Xiaohai said, thinking he could make a detour if it wasn’t too far.

“No need! Our sister is coming home in a few days!” His little sister said.

The little girl had been slightly reserved, but she had warmed up to Yang Xiaohai when she saw that he was good-tempered.

His little sister continued, “She said she would bring me something too!”

Coming home? To avoid trouble? Yang Xiaohai thought to himself, as he was aware of the current situation in Hou Shu.

Chapter 675 - Dragon Household

Yang Xiaohai felt somewhat relieved when he heard that his elder sister was coming home soon. In these troubled times, being on the sea was relatively safer than being on land.

“Fifth Child! Your father wants you to come over.”

Yang Xiaohai quickly acknowledged his Second Brother. He crouched down to wash his hands in the water, then stood up and headed into the cabin.

The cabin was just big enough for Yang Xiaohai to enter without bending down.

“Come on, Fifth Child, have a drink!” His father, Chi Baishui, pulled him over and thrust a cup of wine into his hand.

Although Yang Xiaohai didn’t drink, he glanced at the elders looking at him, then downed the wine in one gulp.

The wine had a strange fishy taste, which made him want to vomit. Everyone else burst into laughter at his reaction.

“How is it, Fifth Child? Not used to it, huh? This is white fish wine. It’s good stuff, it can be both drunk and used as medicine! You’ll get used to it after a while.” Chi Baishui patted Yang Xiaohai hard on the back and laughed along with the others.

“Fish... fish wine? Can you really make wine from fish?” Yang Xiaohai had never encountered such a thing before, even as a cook.

“Of course, you can make wine from fish! Come on, have a seat!” Chi Baishui pulled him to the table.

After several rounds of drinks and dishes, they began to discuss serious matters. Chi Baishui was a little tipsy, as he took a sip of wine and said, “Fifth Child, now that you’re back, go to the Dragon

King Temple tomorrow morning to register into the dragon household. I'll buy you a boat, and you can fish and live with your wife from now on."

Yang Xiaohai was momentarily stunned. *Buying a boat? Fishing? Settling down?* These things hadn't been part of his plans.

Chi Baishui's face darkened when he noticed Yang Xiaohai's reaction, "Why? Are you planning to leave again? Why did you come back then?"

Yang Xiaohai felt a little panicked at his long-lost father's anger. "Dad, no, that's not it, really."

"Alright, that's settled then. You can go."

Zhao Xiumei saw her husband walk out of the cabin looking puzzled. She stopped shelling the crabs, then quickly stood up and ran over.

"Xiaohai, what's wrong? Weren't you feasting in the banquet?"

Yang Xiaohai was a little dazed. "Xiumei, my father wants me to stay and live here. What do you think?"

Zhao Xiumei turned to look at the swaying oil lamps on the distant boats and the families on them. "I'm fine with whatever you decide. I'll follow you since we're married."

Yang Xiaohai said nothing more and returned to sit with his siblings as they continued to eat at the feast.

After the water banquet, Yang Xiaohai lay in the hammock, but he couldn't sleep. On one hand, he had just met his family. On the other hand, he thought about the fellow disciples who had gone through life and death with him.

He wished he could have both, but it was impossible. He could only choose one side.

Yang Xiaohai finally fell asleep amidst his drowsiness. When he woke again, he saw his mother gently watching him. Her expression showed a fear that he might run away again.

Yang Xiaohai felt a warmth in his heart. He had never

experienced such concern from his family before.

“Fifth Child, you’re awake? I’ll take you to the Dragon King Temple. Your father is waiting for you.”

Yang Xiaohai nodded, then got up and helped his mother up the steps of the cabin.

Whether he stayed or left, he needed to be recorded in the ancestral hall, since he was part of this family.

Yang Xiaohai and his mother made their way through the wooden boats on the sea. The uneven paths were tricky, and he occasionally bumped into others’ belongings.

The residents were very welcoming and gave Yang Xiaohai friendly looks.

During the walk, Yang Xiaohai wanted to ask his mother if they should move the family to Cowheart Village, where life was better than fishing out at sea. When he didn’t get a response despite talking for a while, he was quickly reminded that his mother was deaf.

Forget it. I’ll talk to Dad about it after registering in the ancestral records.

After a while, they arrived at a temple with wide eaves. The eaves blocked all the light, making Yang Xiaohai feel a bit oppressed.

“Come on, don’t keep your father waiting. He’s got a bad temper,” his mother said and pulled him inside.

Once inside, Yang Xiaohai was awe-struck by a giant painting in the distance. The dark-toned painting was shrouded in incense smoke and looked especially mysterious.

“Mom, what’s that?” Yang Xiaohai was about to point, but his mother quickly pulled his hand down.

“Don’t point. It’s disrespectful to the Dragon King.”

“Dragon King? But isn’t that a black snake?” The painting depicted a coiled giant black snake without pupils.

“Our Dragon King looks like that. Quickly offer incense. The Dragon King used to be more unreliable, but he’s very effective now!”

Under his mother’s urging, Yang Xiaohai solemnly offered incense, then performed three bows and nine kowtows to the Dragon King’s painting.

While he was kowtowing, a group of people came out, including Chi Baishui and the elders from last night’s dinner.

They were dressed in a brown top and a skirt, with outer ceremonial robes, which made them seem very grand.

Yang Xiaohai looked closely and realized the robes had fish scales, and they seemed to be made of fish skin.

As Yang Xiaohai wondered whether he was now officially part of the dragon household, he saw an elderly man with white hair step forward. This man took out a bamboo scroll and started to chant towards the painting.

Yang Xiaohai couldn’t understand a word. The man’s speech had a heavy accent that made it sound like singing.

However, one name was repeated several times, which Yang Xiaohai barely made out as Ao Wuzhi.

“Kneel~”

Yang Xiaohai heard this and knelt before the giant painting again.

After another round of three bows and nine kowtows, he saw the elders in fish skin robes surround and look at him solemnly.

Before Yang Xiaohai could understand what was happening, Chi Baishui stepped forward and removed Yang Xiaohai’s shirt.

Then, fish spines dipped in ink pricked his skin, causing excruciating pain. He tried to get up instinctively but found he couldn’t move. The fish spines contained more than just ink.

Yang Xiaohai just kept kneeling like that as he glanced sideways at his anxious parents. He endured the pain as the fish

spines left scale tattoos on his body, just like the other boat people.

Chapter 676 - Big Sister

“Ouch.” Yang Xiaohai only felt pain and no other sensations as the fish spines stabbed into his skin. The pain was so deep that he could feel it in his bone marrow, but no matter how bad it got, he couldn’t faint at all.

Yang Xiaohai’s consciousness started to fade in and out as time dragged on. As his consciousness wavered, Yang Xiaohai saw the Dragon King slowly move.

It wasn’t until the mural moved that Yang Xiaohai realized the black snake was not the Dragon King—it was his shadow! The real Dragon King was behind the shadow.

As time passed, the shadow moved faster. The Dragon King’s whiskers stretched out like the legs of centipedes from the shadow.

At the very least, Yang Xiaohai thought those were whiskers since they were the only thing that resembles that shape on a dragon. But on closer inspection, he thought it looked more like antennas of numerous insects, or some kind of thread.

The dragon’s whiskers wriggled in the air along with the smoke and incense. As they wriggled, Yang Xiaohai’s eyes widened—he felt an oppressive feeling on his chest that he couldn’t shake, no matter how hard he breathed.

In between the space of the dragon’s whiskers, Yang Xiaohai saw a small section of the Dragon King’s real body covered in scales.

The scales were swimming in water as they slid easily back, revealing a gray eye.

The moment Yang Xiaohai locked eyes with the Dragon King, his consciousness faded immediately and he was drowned in the abyss.

He didn't know how much time had passed when he was woken up by an ancient voice. "Kowtow~"

Yang Xiaohai shivered and quickly looked at the mural to find that the Dragon King was back to normal again. He was no longer suffocating, and nothing had changed.

He quickly looked around and saw his parents were signaling him frantically for him to kowtow.

He looked down on his body and saw the bloody tattoos resembling dragon scales before he realized what was going on. It was part of the procedure to enter the family and not them trying to harm him.

Yang Xiaohai quickly followed their instructions and kowtowed to the mural again.

The ceremony passed without any issues. Ten minutes later, Yang Xiaohai exited from the temple with the scent of incense stuck to his body.

"Mom, why didn't you tell me they were going to do that? It hurts so much," Yang Xiaohai said as he touched the bloody tattoos on his body.

He also wanted to tell his mother about how the Dragon King moved but he didn't know what to say.

"You are so weak. You are already an adult, so why are you so afraid of being in pain?" Chi Baishui scoffed at his own son with disgust before he walked away.

Yang Xiaohai felt humiliated when he saw how his father had reacted.

He wasn't afraid of pain, but he hated how his feelings had been invalidated. Even though it was his own father, he knew that it was not right. He had seen how Lu Zhuangyuan acted as a father.

Yang Xiaohai suddenly felt a cold sensation on his arm. He looked down and saw his mother carefully scattering some incense ash onto his arm.

“Fifth Child, don’t cry. The ashes will stop your bleeding. I will cook two eggs for you to recover later.”

Yang Xiaohai felt a warmth entering his heart. Even though his father was cold, his mother was as kind as he had imagined.

“Mother, I’m not in pain.” Yang Xiaohai shook his head and helped her out.

Even though the process was painful, he felt that it was worth it since he finally joined the family properly.

Back in his boat house, he saw his own father was already in the water. Without waiting for him to react, Chi Baishui pulled Yang Xiaohai into the sea without any warning. Yang Xiaohai struggled to swim up, but Chi Baishui continued to push him down in the water.

Yang Xiaohai struggled until he felt tired, but for some reason, he was not struggling to breathe. He quickly reacted and moved his arm into the water. He then saw his father swimming in the water effortlessly.

Yang Xiaohai finally understood what the teacher in Cowheart Village was trying to explain about the phrase “like a fish in water.”

He felt that he had truly become a fish, swimming without any difficulties. He played in the water until he felt his breath running out. He surfaced and took deep breaths afterward.

Yang Xiaohai was treading on water as he looked at his tattoo with surprise. He knew that the reason why he could swim so fast underwater was due to the tattoo.

“Hmph! Did you really think that your own father would harm you?” Chi Baishui was looking at him with pride before he crawled up onto the boat.

“Father, can everyone swim this fast once they join the family?” Yang Xiaohai swam to the side of the boat and climbed up too.

“Of course. The blessing of the Dragon King is a good thing. We

don't let outsiders know about this and will only give it to the family.”

Yang Xiaohai touched his swollen tattoos and didn't know what to say. Still, he thought that his father should have let him know earlier.

“Father! Father!” Both Yang Xiaohai and Chi Baishui turned to see who it was. Yang Xiaohai saw that it was his own sister as she sprinted at them with happiness.

“Father! Guess who just came back?”

She was going to excitedly tell the answer when a woman with short legs pushed her to the side gently. “Father, I am back. Are you doing well?”

The woman looked like Yang Xiaohai's mother. He guessed her age and deduced that she was his elder sister.

But to his horror, he saw the black cloth wrapped on her shoulder!

Dharma Sect! Yang Xiaohai remembered them attacking Cowheart Village! They were even more evil than bandits. To think that his elder sister had joined them!

Yang Xiaohai was caught in a daze when he saw his father staring at her black cloth too.

But instead of being disgusted or angry, he was surprisingly happy. “Oh? You weren't lying? Are you really working for the palace now? To think that they would accept women with bound feet^[1] too!”

“Father, I just gave them some silver. They would accept anyone, regardless of whether they are elderly or children!”

The two of them laughed and entered the tent on the boat.

1. Footbinding was a custom in late imperial China where women would have their feet broken and tightly bound to change their shape and size. It was considered a status symbol and mark of

feminine beauty, but it was very painful and resulted in physical impairments. 🤖

Chapter 677 - Father

“Oh, I almost forgot. This is your Fifth Brother. He came back yesterday.” Chi Baishui introduced Yang Xiaohai to his Eldest Sister.

The Eldest Sister looked at Yang Xiaohai’s scale tattoo and nodded satisfactorily. “Fifth Brother, it’s good that you are back. Have you gotten married? Do you need my help finding a wife?”

“Hahahaha, that won’t be necessary. He’s so amazing that he found someone old enough to be his mother as his wife.”

The two of them entered the boat tent. It was only then that Zhao Xiumei rushed towards Yang Xiaohai and held his hands.

“Xiaohai! She’s one of the Dharma Sect! We need to run now!”

Yang Xiaohai hesitated before he reassured her by gently patting her hands. He then walked into the boat tent. “Let me see if I can convince her.”

No matter what, she was his family, and he could not let his family be.

Their lunch that day was more luxurious to celebrate the return of Yang Xiaohai’s Eldest Sister. Even though the dishes were delicious, Yang Xiaohai couldn’t fully enjoy them. He was thinking about how to convince his sister.

“Father, how much silver do we have in our house? Give it to me, and I will try my best to give everyone in our family a position in the palace.”

Yang Xiaohai immediately panicked and stood up. “You cannot do so! The Dharma Sect is an evil sect that kills others! You are pushing everyone in our family into the fire if you do so!”

Yang Xiaohai then explained to them what happened to Cowheart Village, how the Dharma Sect attacked them, and what the old lady from the Dharma Sect had done in the county.

But just as he finished his story, he saw his Eldest Sister and father laughing at him.

His Eldest Sister said, "Fifth Brother, you are still young. Of course, we know they are an evil sect for staging a rebellion, but what if they won?"

She then looked at Yang Xiaohai before taking a sip of the fish liquor. "If their rebellion is a success, then it's not considered a rebellion but a revolution! The Dharma Sect would then become the official religion! Do you know what that would mean for us?"

"I don't know!" Yang Xiaohai shook his head and said adamantly, "An evil sect is an evil sect. They treat human lives as insignificant and have killed a lot of people!"

"What a joke!" Chi Baishui slammed the table in anger. "And do you think the previous officials of Hou Shu valued people's lives? They are all the same! If it wasn't because of us trying to harvest pearls for them, your mother wouldn't have become deaf! It's better if they are eradicated instead."

He continued, "They need manpower now that the new palace and governors are being set up. If you don't become an official now, you will have to rely on harvesting pearls to maintain your livelihood. Do you want that?!"

Looking at Yang Xiaohai clenching his fists on the other side of the table, Chi Baishui waved his hand with frustration. "Nevermind. You haven't even grown all of your hair yet. You won't understand what I'm talking about, so just listen to me and follow my orders."

Chi Baishui looked at his Eldest Daughter. "Then we will do as you said. We didn't spend the money you sent back and your fifth brother brought back a lot of silver, so you can use all of it."

Both father and daughter were temperamental, so they acted immediately after lunch. They took the money and silver from the bottom of the carriage.

Even Yang Xiaohai's carriage was stripped of its valuables as

everything he had brought from Cowheart Village was being taken out.

“Don’t worry about the silvers. Give them to your sister and she’ll exchange them for positions in the palace for us. It’s much better than letting the silver rot away in storage.” Chi Baishui was pleased with his plan.

Yang Xiaohai held his wife’s hands and stared blankly at the items being transported out of the carriage. He wasn’t worried about the silver, but he had the revelation that his family wasn’t what he had imagined. He had thought all families were loving and caring, just like the Lu family.

“Father! You can’t do that! The Dharma Sect murders people without a single thought! You will turn all of us into fugitives!” Yang Xiaohai tried to persuade them one last time. He couldn’t let his family die a meaningless death.

“You are still a brat and know nothing! There’s no good or bad person here! Do you think you’re playing house?”

They took out everything and even sold off the carriage and the horse without Yang Xiaohai’s permission.

As if sensing something, the monkey children and Zhao Xiumei stood beside Yang Xiaohai. They were upset too.

“Xiaohai, let’s go back to Cowheart Village. This isn’t how a family should function,” Zhao Xiumei consoled and persuaded Yang Xiaohai.

Yang Xiaohai saw his mother was fetching a bowl of food for him and forced a smile. “Wait, let me think of a plan.”

Yang Xiaohai was busy trying to figure out a way to stop his family. He thought of doing it physically, but he was surrounded by his cousins and relatives. It was a bad idea to resort to physical violence since he couldn’t kill them either.

Yang Xiaohai was still formulating a plan as he lay in the hammock.

The monkey children are very nimble. Should I ask them to steal all the silver from my Eldest Sister? Then they won't be able to join the Dharma Sect anymore.

Yang Xiaohai was still trying to figure out the perfect plan when he heard the chittering of monkeys. Those noises were unique to children trained to be monkeys, and regular people could not emulate them.

“What’s happening?” Yang Xiaohai jumped down from his hammock and carefully tiptoed past his Third Brother. He exited the boat and saw a horrific scene.

His father and Second Brother had tied up the monkey children and were walking further away.

“Father! What are you doing?!” Yang Xiaohai’s voice was trembling when he shouted.

Chi Baishui looked up without a hint of panic. “I don’t know why you picked up these three children. Since they are useless, I might as well sell them for money.” He said it matter-of-factly without a hint of remorse.

Yang Xiaohai felt extreme pain in his heart as he stopped him. “Father, I’ve already given you the silver and the carriage. Why are you also selling them?”

“Since when do you think we have enough money? These three children look like monkeys, so I assume they’ve been trained before. We can sell them for a good price and then give the money to your Eldest Sister to exchange for some positions for us in the palace. We can earn back the money in two to three months anyway.”

Yang Xiaohai had never felt so estranged from his father before. A frightening thought suddenly crossed his mind. *Did he really sell me last time just because they didn't have food? Why is he selling people so easily?*

Chi Baishui ignored Yang Xiaohai and motioned for his Second Son to continue pulling the monkey children away.

“Wait! Stop!” Yang Xiaohai blocked both of them without hesitation and took out his scepter, “Let them go.”

“Hey, how could you talk to our father like that? Do you want to get a beating?”

“Why? Why did you sell me last time?” Yang Xiaohai shouted at them with tears in his eyes.

“Why? It’s because I’m your father! Kneel!” Chi Baishui rolled up his sleeves.

Their shouting woke the other people. All of them tried to break up the fight.

“Fifth Son from the Chi family, you can’t act like this. He’s your father and you should listen to him. You cannot be so unfilial.”

“Yeah, plus the three children aren’t from our family anyways so we can just sell them.”

“Alright, enough fighting. Just kneel and apologize to your father. We are all family so don’t fight anymore.”

Chapter 678 - Family

“What are you staring at? Hurry up and apologize to your father. Don’t interrupt our sleep.”

“I would’ve tied you and beaten you up if you were my son.”

Yang Xiaohai looked around and couldn’t believe that they were his family and relatives. To them, the three monkey children weren’t humans but rather goods to be sold.

He looked around before staring at his own father as he felt bitterness in his heart.

No, not just the monkey children. He even looked at his own sons as goods to be exchanged for silver.

Chi Baishui saw Yang Xiaohai didn’t kneel even after some time had passed. He felt humiliated by Yang Xiaohai’s disobedience.

He rolled up his sleeves and slapped Yang Xiaohai. “Kneel down!”

Sensing the pain on his cheeks, the bitterness in his heart receded and was replaced by anger. Yang Xiaohai was pissed at his own father!

“I will not! Why should I kneel?! You are not qualified to be my father!” Yang Xiaohai pushed Chi Baishui and shouted at him.

“You fucker!” Chu Baishui was angered too. He looked around and immediately picked up a piece of wood with nails. He swung it at Yang Xiaohai’s head.

Yang Xiaohai’s mother, Second Brother, and Third Brother tried to stop Chi Baishui. The entire place was in chaos when Yang Xiaohai’s Eldest Sister stood up to diffuse the situation.

“It’s fine, father. There’s no need to sell the three children. We are at war and children are worth very little. We have enough silver for now.”

Chi Baishui threw down the wood and scolded Yang Xiaohai.

"I am your father! I will sell the three children, and you must listen to me! If you defy me again, I will sell your wife too!"

Yang Xiaohai's gaze changed when he looked at Chi Baishui. Before this, he didn't understand why Chun Xiaoman would kill her own father. But now he did.

There were evil people in his family too, and they were worse than strangers!

"Alright, father. There's no need to keep scolding him like this." The eldest sister gestured for her Second Brother and Third Brother to pull their father into the boat tent.

"Everything is settled now. Please go back to sleep. I'm sorry for interrupting everyone's sleep due to our quarrel."

After they left, she approached Yang Xiaohai and grumbled, "What's wrong with you? We are all family, so why can't you choose to be softer?"

Yang Xiaohai lowered his head and grumbled, too. His fists trembled as if he had made up his mind.

His eldest sister sighed when she saw how thick-headed Yang Xiaohai was. "We should just let it be for tonight. Our Third Uncle is out in the sea to fish. You can sleep on his old boat and wait till tomorrow to talk about anything else."

She then pointed at the single lonely boat in the distance.

Yang Xiaohai nodded. He held the pale-looking Zhao Xiumei and the scared monkey children towards the boat.

The boat was small and leaking, but Yang Xiaohai just sat disappointedly, like a statue.

"Husband, what should we do?" Zhao Xiumei trembled as she huddled with Yang Xiaohai. It was clear that she was afraid too. The situation here reminded her of the bandit cave.

"This is not my house, and they are not my family! Our home is in Cowheart Village!"

Zhao Xiumei saw that Yang Xiaohai slowly changed from a statue to a living human. His gaze was filled with determination.

“Cowheart Village is our real home, and my Senior Brothers and Sisters are our real family!”

When he was a beggar last time, he had imagined what his family looked like numerous times while cold and hungry. He kept thinking about how well they would treat him.

But now he knew that his family was cold-hearted. If they had been truly good to him, they never would’ve sold him. It was just his wishful thinking, after all!

“How should we leave? They took our carriage and silver,” Zhao Xiumei said with a frown.

“We will just take them back. Those belong to us, so how can they just take them without asking me?”

Yang Xiaohai clenched his fists and said to the monkey children, “The silver is with my eldest sister. You three go and steal the silver while I distract my eldest sister.”

He continued, “Once we have the money, we can buy back our carriage and horse. We will steal the silver while they are sleeping and go back to Qing Qiu!”

Yang Xiaohai didn’t tell the others that without the silver, his family also wouldn’t be able to join the Dharma Sect.

He was discussing the plan with Zhao Xiumei when a sound from outside the boat hull made the both of them shut up.

“Fifth Son, it’s cold, so I brought you and your wife a blanket.” It was his mother’s voice. Yang Xiaohao smiled gently because the only warmth he had felt from his family came from his mother.

He brought her into the boat.

“Haiya, how could someone live here? It’s leaking everywhere, and it’s so humid.”

Yang Xiaohai’s mother was complaining when Yang Xiaohai looked at her. “Mother, I’m leaving now. Do you want to come with

me? We can go to Cowheart Village, where you can enjoy a better life."

"What? I'm deaf and I can't hear you. What are you saying?"

Yang Xiaohai pulled his mother out from the boat and pointed at the land far on the horizon. It took some time for her to understand.

"Fifth Son, why are you leaving? We've just met again, and now you're going away again?" Yang Xiaohai's mother cried and begged for him to stay.

Yang Xiaohai shook his head. He didn't want to leave his mother because she was the only one who treated him well.

"Is it because of your father? We are all family, so we should discuss this first."

Yang Xiaohai tried to persuade her to leave, but she wouldn't. The only thing he could do was persuade her not to tell his father.

"Alright, I won't tell him. Fifth Son, remember to write letters for us once you reach land. Come visit us whenever you are nearby."

He saw his mother walking back to the other boat while constantly looking back. There were some lights on the shore as if there were boats, but Yang Xiaohai ignored them. He had more important things to do. In the darkness of the night, he walked towards his sister's boat.

Chapter 679 - Departure

“Sister, can you come out? I need to ask you something,” Yang Xiaohai shouted to the boat as he stood on the platform opposite it.

Yang Xiaohai saw his sister walking out from the boat and led her away from it before he feigned hesitation. “Sister, do they still need workers in the palace?”

“Why? Are you saying you don’t want to see our father anymore and want to come with me? You’re not a kid anymore, so don’t be childish.”

As Yang Xiaohai remained quiet, the monkey children quickly ran into the boat with several stones. They planned to use the stones as a decoy for the silver they were stealing. Their agile and silent nature made it clear that they were used to the work.

The sister looked at Yang Xiaohai before she sighed and said, “You can come if you want, but you have to kowtow and apologize to our father. I know you’re still angry, but no matter how harsh his words are, he’s still your father. I will only take you with me if he forgives you. You’re my brother and you probably can’t be an official for now, but I think I can find some work for you to do. Don’t complain about it, alright? The Dharma Sect is still at war with Hou Shu. Everyone knows that Hou Shu is losing, so once we are victorious, you will also get a piece of the cake.”

Yang Xiaohai saw that the monkey children had stolen all of the silver, nodded, and walked toward his boat.

Back in his boat, he saw the silver in the monkey children’s clutches and sighed, “Alright, let’s pack up and leave now!”

There wasn’t much to pack up since most of it had been sold by Chi Baishui.

Taking advantage of the darkness of the night, they quickly

moved toward the shore. It wasn't a smooth journey.

Whenever someone woke up, Yang Xiaohai would swing the scepter so they wouldn't make a sound. By the time they snapped out of it, Yang Xiaohai would be long gone and they would think that they were dreaming.

They finally escaped the wooden huts built on the sea and quickly up the path towards Hou Shu.

Even though he was tired and it was a cold night, Yang Xiaohai felt as if he had revived. He wanted to go back to his true home!

Zhao Xiumei said, "Xiaohai, let's rest a bit. Even the children can't keep up."

Yang Xiaohai turned around and saw the monkey children panting as they carried the silver. The silver was too heavy to be transported by hand without a carriage. Yang Xiaohai looked at the dirt path, took the silver from the children, and placed it in his own stash.

"Alright, let's rest for now, but we cannot sleep. The Dharma Sect is still fighting against Hou Shu, so we need to return to Qing Qiu as soon as possible."

They were resting for a bit when he suddenly saw the path leading to the sea was lit up with torches, as if a fire dragon was slithering up the path.

"Oh no! They are awake!" Yang Xiaohai took the silver and prepared to run when he saw the path in front of him was also lit up. They were surrounded.

Yang Xiaohai soon saw the faces of those holding the torches. They were none other than his family and relatives with his father leading them.

But to his surprise, he saw his mother hiding behind his father. Yang Xiaohai felt as if his head had been hit by a hammer. Being discovered was one thing, but he never would've expected his own mother to betray him!

“You have guts to try and run with the silver!” Chi Baishui was abnormally angry and veins covered his forehead.

Yang Xiaohai’s eldest sister was also upset. She now knew why Yang Xiaohai spoken with her. It was so they could take the silver!

“Shit, beat him up! Don’t hold back and just kill him!” Chi Baishui shouted and Yang Xiaohai saw his own brothers approaching him menacingly.

“Scram!” Yang Xiaohai swung his scepter and the group was caught in a daze.

The other people shuffled backward from fear as they looked at the scepter in Yang Xiaohai’s hands.

“What is that?”

“It’s something used to harvest the souls of others! The Chi family’s Fifth Child knows how to do that!”

While they were discussing that, Yang Xiaohai’s eldest sister suddenly shouted, “It’s an artifact! It can be used to harvest the souls of others! It’s a treasure! The county magistrate told me that if we gave it to him, we could exchange it for an eighth-ranked[1] official position. The better the treasure, the higher the position we can get!”

The moment they heard that, everyone’s eyes lit up with greed. Yang Xiaohai knew they were in deep trouble when his family wasn’t intimidated by his actions.

“Follow me into the forest, then scatter! One of us must escape!” Yang Xiaohai waved the scepter to the group of people to the left, stupifying them temporarily.

“Now!”

Yang Xiaohai and the others quickly ran past the dazed people and rushed forward.

He waved the scepter repeatedly, so many of them were caught in bewilderment. Just as Yang Xiaohai almost escaped their encirclement, something metallic flew past in the air.

A fish harpoon with barbed hooks stabbed Yang Xiaohai's hands. Due to the intense pain, Yang Xiaohai let go of the scepter. He endured the pain so he could pick it up, but another harpoon nailed his left leg.

Chi Baishui picked up the scepter with glee before slapping Yang Xiaohai. "How dare you keep a treasure like this to yourself?!"

"Xiaohai!" Zhao Xiumei shielded Yang Xiaohai and looked at Chi Baishui with despair. "We are all family! There's no reason to do this!"

"Family? You are not one of us!" Chi Baishui slapped her too.

Chi Baishui chuckled when he saw Yang Xiaohai enduring the pain to shield Zhao Xiumei instead. "Fifth Child, your wife is excellent. We should be able to sell her for more money than the monkey children."

"What are you trying to do?!" Yang Xiaohai glared back.

"Aiyo! You are acting as if we are causing an inconvenience to you! Look at what you did! You lied to your mother and father, and you also stole the silver in our family! You even hid this treasure from us! Are you still human?"

"Xiaohai?" A foreign voice interrupted them.

Everyone looked at the direction of the voice to find a Daoist in red robes with three swords on his back.

Li Huowang approached Yang Xiaohai. He saw Yang Xiaohai's wounded hands and feet as well as the scepter in Chi Baishui's hands. He also saw Yang Xiaohai's sister had a black cloth wrapped around her shoulder. He understood what was happening.

"Are you his friend?" Chi Baishui scoffed and pushed Li Huowang away.

"You are already old. Aren't you embarrassed that you are mingling with a child? Scram! This is our business and you have no say in this."

Li Huowang looked at Chi Baishui before he grabbed his

purple-tasseled sword. “And who the fuck are you?”

A glimmer of steel flashed in the night before Chi Baishui’s head flew up high in the air.

1. Officials were separated by rank. There are Nine Ranks and Eighteen Tiers to be exact. 

Chapter 680 - Kill

Bam! Chi Baishui's head hit the ground and rolled over to Yang Xiaohai's sister.

Her icy expression melted into shock and fear. She started crying. "Father!"

Her scream flipped a hidden switch as everyone exploded into action. Curses and harpoons flew towards Li Huowang.

The harpoons phased through Li Huowang without harming him. Li Huowang rushed forward with the purple-tasseled sword in his hand. He was busy and didn't have time to talk to the people.

He also saw Yang Xiaohai being wounded and the old man taking the scepter. The girl from the Dharma Sect had solidified his suspicions, so there was no reason to hold back. It was faster to kill them all.

Li Huowang was alone while the young boat people used fishing tactics to take down Li Huowang. They moved in sync while encircling Li Huowang.

However, when Li Huowang became serious, he slaughtered them all without difficulty. The stench of blood filled the air.

The fish scale tattoos were useless here. Li Huowang's sword cut through their bodies easily.

Zhao Xiumei and Yang Xiaohai stood on the side and saw the bodies piling up. The corpses were Yang Xiaohai's relatives.

Yang Xiaohai wanted to shout at Li Huowang, but he didn't know what to say.

The battle ended before it even began. The boat people's anger quickly dissipated when they saw how fearsome Li Huowang was.

They immediately ran towards the sea, but this made them easy targets since Li Huowang would then attack them freely.

“Senior Li! Enough!” Yang Xiaohai finally shouted.

Li Huowang did not stop, but he didn’t continue his chase. Instead, he ran towards Yang Xiaohai’s eldest sister. *She’s the only Dharma Sect member here.*

Li Huowang raised his sword but then Yang Xiaohai stopped him. “Senior Li! No!”

Li Huowang changed his trajectory and cut off her left leg instead.

With blood on his sword, Li Huowang turned around and asked Yang Xiaohai, “Why? Do you know her?”

“I... I...” Yang Xiaohai looked at the decapitated Chi Baishui and the corpses of the boat people before his lips quivered. He hesitated while in pain. “I don’t know her.”

Li Huowang swung the sword, and Yang Xiaohai saw his sister get bisected vertically.

Yang Xiaohai slumped to the ground.

Did Senior Li do the wrong thing? No, he came to save me, but I don’t think this is the right answer...

“Father,” Li Sui said, appearing from the path in front of them. The carriages of the White Lotus Sect were following Li Sui.

Bai Lingmiao walked towards Yang Xiaohai with a complicated look on her face, as if she had heard what was happening. She looked at Yang Xiaohai, Li Huowang, and Chi Baishui’s corpse. The relic in her body sharpened her hearing, so she could hear sounds from farther away than others.

Is the Dharma Sect in Hou Shu this weak? Did they expand too fast? Li Huowang kicked the bloody foot of Yang Xiaohai’s sister as he pondered.

He had fought with the Dharma Sect before. They never ran away when only a few of them had died. Li Huowang wiped the blood from his sword and sheathed it.

He approached Yang Xiaohai and frowned. He said, “What’s

wrong with you? You knew that Hou Shu was being besieged by the Dharma Sect, so why are you here? Do you not value your life? You should've returned to Cowheart Village immediately and set out again after everything calmed down!"

Yang Xiaohai sniffled as he held his tears back. "Senior Li, why are you here?"

"I came here to deal with some business. I crossed paths with Sun Baolu and he told me you were coming here. Luckily, I knew where you were and ran as fast as I could. If I had arrived any later, you and your wife would've died."

Li Huowang removed the harpoon from Yang Xiaohai's hand and foot before he took out the Fiery Scripture to heal him. The bloody holes were cauterized, and Yang Xiaohai shouted amidst the sizzling sound. Once he was done, Bai Lingmiao came over and started bandaging Yang Xiaohai.

Li Huowang looked at the dark sky and sea before he frowned and said, "I'm worried about you returning right now, so just follow me. I will ask someone to escort you back once we reach the Surveillance Bureau of Hou Shu."

Yang Xiaohai held his injured hands and nodded. "I understand."

"What are those three?" Li Huowang then noticed the three monkey children.

Even though they were human children, they acted like monkeys. Their demeanor made Li Huowang think that they were evil entities instead.

"We rescued them while on our way here. They are as pitiful as us." Yang Xiaohai then explained their circumstances to Li Huowang. As he did, Yang Xiaohai slowly calmed down.

Even though his father was dead, he still couldn't bring himself to mourn it since his father wanted to sell his wife.

Chi Baishui was not his father, nor were they his family. Senior

Li and the others were his true family.

However, he was a little sad over the death of his sister and relatives. They did hurt him, but it didn't warrant their death.

"Let's go." Li Huowang led the way to bring them away from there.

Since he had hurt his leg, Yang Xiaohai hobbled as he walked. It hurt a lot even though he was given first aid.

Li Huowang turned around and shouted at one of the carriages, "Xiucai! Carry Xiaohai onto the carriage."

"Alright, Master!" Lu Xiucai picked Yang Xiaohai up to put him in the carriage.

Yang Xiaohai saw Lu Xiucai's haggard face and remembered something. He hesitated and asked carefully, "Xiucai, is your brother alright?"

Chapter 681 - Touch

Lu Xiucan's face stiffened as the painful memories surged into his mind. He quickly suppressed them and said casually, "He's dead. He was killed by the Dharma Sect."

"What?! Juren is really dead?" Yang Xiaohai's eyes widened in shock.

Lu Xiucan turned slowly and glared at Yang Xiaohai. "What do you mean by that? What do you mean 'really dead'?"

Li Huowang also turned to look. He knew that when Yang Xiaohai left, Lu Juren was still enjoying his life in Shangjing. How did Yang Xiaohai know that Lu Juren had died?

"No, don't misunderstand. When I was in Qing Qiu, I encountered the Earth Dragon while it was moving. I came across something strange, which I thought was a dream at the time. I saw Brother Juren there, but he looked somewhat odd."

Yang Xiaohai quickly recounted his encounter with Lu Juren, "It wasn't just him. There was also another strange Senior Li in that place called the Feng Capital."

He saw Senior Li frown at him. "What did you say? Another me? Tell me what you experienced again."

Yang Xiaohai repeated his strange experience in Qing Qiu, this time focusing on the peculiar version of Li Huowang.

"Hong Zhong? Li Huowang? Hong Zhong Li Huowang hasn't disappeared?!" Li Huowang's pupils instantly shrank.

In the past, Douluo had bestowed upon him a segment of the Sitting Oblivion Dao's past, which had led to the creation of Hong Zhong Li Huowang.

Li Huowang always thought that with that past disappearing, the period of Hong Zhong Li Huowang should have also

disappeared.

But now it seemed that wasn't the case at all. Hong Zhong Li Huowang had left his side but hadn't disappeared. He had only been hidden, just like the Great Qi!

But... why? Why was he trapped in the Feng Capital and not somewhere else? Li Huowang's brows knitted tightly. *And this other Siming mentioned by Hong Zhong...*

He had never imagined that the Siming in control of death was truly dead and hidden beneath Qing Qiu.

"Xiaohai, you said there was seawater with a strange color flowing into that cave?" Li Huowang clarified.

"Yes! That seawater was very strange. Even from a distance, it felt like my body was being pulled in. If I hadn't eventually run into the upside-down Antrabhara Temple, I wouldn't have made it back."

Yang Xiaohai couldn't help but feel scared as he thought about his previous experience. It seemed that the experience was indeed real judging by Senior Li's attitude, and he had barely managed to return.

"Was the seawater this color?" Li Huowang asked. He pulled out the spine sword and slashed forcefully towards the distance.

The rift leading to the Great Qi opened, and those dark, metallic, multicolored substances gushed out. They fell to the ground and writhed like living creatures. Anything they touched would mutate. Lifeless objects regained life, and living things grew increasingly distorted.

"Yes! That's it! That's what I saw, but there was much more of it! As much as the sea!" Yang Xiaohai said and backed away. He was afraid that those things might approach him again.

"God Yu'er... it's really god Yu'er." Li Huowang's face was very grim. The Dharma Sect, which worshiped god Yu'er, was conquering cities in Hou Shu. Meanwhile, god Yu'er was attacking

the Siming in charge of death. “

What does god Yu'er want? Does it want to seize even the Heavenly Dao of Death?

Li Huowang was lost in thought, and his attention was diverted by a soft touch on his right hand. He looked down and saw Bai Lingmiao holding his hand.

“Senior Li, what’s wrong?”

Li Huowang shook his head out of habit. “Nothing, let’s go.”

As he was about to leave, he felt Bai Lingmiao’s hands pull him back with a soft but firm grip.

He turned to look at Bai Lingmiao, whose eyes were covered with a white silk band. “Senior Li, I am now the Saintess of the White Lotus Sect. The White Lotus Sect is spreading widely in Great Liang. I can help you now.”

“If you encounter trouble, there’s no need to endure it alone like you did before. Tell me what’s going on and we can figure it out together.”

He looked at Bai Lingmiao’s delicate face, then reached out and gently stroked her face. He could feel her genuine concern for him.

After a moment of hesitation, he said, “This is a long story. You know the god Yu’er that is worshiped by the Dharma Sect?”

“Yes, I know. The Heavenly Mater mentioned that god Yu’er is a betrayer.”

“The actual events are like this,” Li Huowang started to explain the whole story, but suddenly stopped mid-sentence. He frowned and looked at the dark sea in the distance.

A line of torches formed a long dragon that approached them. “Hmm?”

“Xiaohai, what’s going on? Have those people been bewitched by the Dharma Sect?”

Yang Xiaohai’s face instantly turned pale. He said anxiously, “Senior Li, they are not from the Dharma Sect. They worship the

Dragon King. Let's go quickly! Hurry!"

His father and elder sister were already dead. He didn't want to lose more family members, even if they hadn't treated him well.

"Are you hiding something from me?" Li Huowang glanced at him but didn't press further. He turned and led the others to leave.

He hadn't forgotten his purpose for coming to Hou Shu, which was to find the Dragon Vein of Hou Shu. He couldn't be bothered to delve into whatever Yang Xiaohai had in mind.

After only a few steps, he saw the light of fire on the dirt road in the distance. Clearly, these people had already surrounded them during their conversation and had not intended to let them leave.

"Heh, this is interesting. I wasn't looking for trouble, but trouble found me. Li Sui!"

Li Huowang opened his mouth and Li Sui entered his body. The squirming tentacles protruded from his body and danced wildly.

"Master! Let me go this time! I want to seek revenge from the Dharma Sect!" Lu Xiucan said firmly. His eyes were filled with hatred as he stepped forward.

Li Huowang glanced at him. "Alright, you take care of yourself. As I've always said, I don't want a burden."

"I'm not a burden!" Lu Xiucan said. He took off his shirt to reveal his paper dudou, which was covered in curses.

He pulled out two serrated swords, then stomped his right foot and knocked the sword against his forehead while chanting incessantly.

Chapter 682 - Water

After a while, the blood flowing from Lu Xiucan's forehead covered his entire face as he rapidly recited an incantation.

“Disciple sincerely comes to worship. May the deity of this altar descend swiftly. Transform the body into the spirit, and the spirit into the body, and open the path of enlightenment! Guide us, step by step! Support the medium, inch by inch! Awaken the medium with divine light, speak clearly with a golden mouth, command the urgently divine soldiers and fire!”

While Lu Xiucan was invoking the spirit, the torches had already approached Li Huowang and his companions. The figures were now clearly visible.

They were the same people who had fled before. They had dared to return despite losing so many of their own. Li Huowang quickly noticed the source of their confidence—several elders dressed in fish-skin Daoist robes that stood at the front of the crowd.

These elders were unlike the others in both appearance and attire. They solemnly held thick incense sticks and offered sacrifices in all directions while murmuring incantations.

It was in a dialect that Li Huowang could hear but not understand.

The white incense smoke did not disperse. Instead, it gathered, forming densely around them.

The crowd carried a large mural behind them. No, to be precise, they had dismantled an entire wall.

“What kind of evil spirit is this?”

When Li Huowang saw these fishermen with dragon scale tattoos, he couldn't help but be reminded of the water bandits he

had encountered on the lake before.

“Forget it, whatever!” Li Huowang didn’t care anymore. He lunged forward and charged at them with his sword, while the blood-covered Lu Xiucai followed closely behind.

As Li Huowang approached, the elder boat people in fish-skin robes raised their giant incense sticks and thrust them into the ground. The smoke above them instantly formed a dragon’s head that lunged towards Li Huowang.

Li Huowang didn’t flinch. He gripped the purple-tassel sword in one hand and the bronze coin sword in the other. As the dragon-shaped smoke contacted him, he crossed the two swords, which could dispel evil, and pushed them forward.

The dragon-head-shaped smoke was instantly split into a cross. Li Huowang did not hesitate as he pounced on the boat people. The mural and the entire wall behind it came crashing down towards him.

Boom! The wall shattered into pieces and buried Li Huowang underneath.

As the dust settled, Li Huowang emerged from behind the towering figure of Peng Longteng, who had acted as a shield at the critical moment.

He held his two swords and glanced at the shattered mural on the ground, then at the boat people kneeling and bowing towards the sea. “Is that all? Just like that?”

He noticed the distant dark sea seemed to grow even darker, as if an oppressive mountain range had risen there.

Mountains? The thought barely appeared in Li Huowang’s mind before cold sweat broke out on his body. *No! That’s not a mountain, it’s a tsunami!*

The next moment, the tsunami carried the boat people’s boats and their stilt houses, and it surged towards Li Huowang with overwhelming force.

“Watch out!” Li Huowang quickly grabbed the bucket from Yang Na’s hands as she staggered. Fortunately, the dirty water inside was barely prevented from spilling.

“Hey, young lady, can you just stay put? Stop trying to help.” Li Huowang carried the bucket to the toilet and emptied it.

Yang Na pouted and said, “I... I just wanted to help. Why are you being so harsh on me? I didn’t do anything wrong.”

“Look, I’m just casually saying. Why are you so upset?” Li Huowang put down the bucket, then walked over and gently hugged her.

“It’s okay! Everything’s okay! You all need to leave this place. Something’s not right here!” Li Huowang shouted to the others in the pouring rain.

“Senior Li, you should come too!”

Half of his body was in the water as he wiped his face with his hand and shouted again, “Stop talking nonsense! This rain is too strange! I’ll cover the rear! You all leave now!”

Suddenly, Li Huowang felt a sharp pain in his legs. There was something in the water!

He threw several glowing stones into the water. The faint light dispersed and scattered the surrounding shadows. He saw some shadows move towards the carriage, then reached into the water and pulled hard.

The rainwater, which reached up to their waists, rolled up like a blanket and was unable to approach the carriage.

Li Huowang’s ‘Truth’ cultivation had advanced to the third level, and naturally allowed him to learn new techniques.

Although his abilities had improved, they were ineffective if he could not pinpoint the enemy’s location.

What are these things? Li Huowang frowned while he scanned the surroundings, unable to figure out the enemy’s tactics.

The situation seemed too intense for them to be ordinary evil

spirits. *Could the Dragon King really be the one causing the heavy rain?*

From the light of the glowing stones, he saw several shadows that crept along the bottom and headed towards him again.

“Suisui! Ribs!” Li Huowang crossed his arms, and inserted his rib bones into his chest. The shadows stopped advancing and they writhed in place.

A tentacle pulled out the bronze coin sword and flung it at a shadow in the water. The bronze coins pulled further apart, and finally dragged a man out from within the water.

The tattoos on his bare upper body showed he was with the previous group, but he was now wearing a wooden dragon mask.

“Who’s behind this? Where are they?!” Li Huowang choked and questioned him.

The man retorted angrily, “The Dragon King has appeared! You dare offend the Dragon King, so you’re dead meat!”

“Damn you!” Li Huowang roared. His throat released a barbed tentacle that tore out a chunk of the man’s neck.

“You Dharma Sect scum! Come out!” Lu Xiucui stood in the water and shouted angrily.

At that moment, the boat people climbed out of the water, and stood scattered in the rain as they cursed Li Huowang and Lu Xiucui.

The pouring rain mixed with their curses only fueled Li Huowang’s rage. All he could think of was killing these scumbags. He tightened his grip on his sword and prepared to charge forward while the rhythmic sound of drums began.

The rhythmic drumbeat began to overpower the rain and curses. Bai Lingmiao, who was beating on a drum, came to stand back-to-back with him.

“Li Huowang! What the hell is going on?! I told you to leave! Why are you still wasting time?”

Li Huowang’s heart sank at Bai Lingmiao’s scolding. He

realized something was wrong.

At some point, everyone's hearts, including his own, were overtaken by rage. It felt as if this emotion controlled them. Something was manipulating their ten emotions and eight sufferings!

Chapter 683 - Ten Emotions

Li Huowang stood in the seawater as he realized his emotions were being manipulated. He closed his eyes firmly and mentally repeated to himself. *No! I am not angry. I am not mad!*

As he continued chanting, the overwhelming rage in his heart gradually stabilized. However, this feeling did not last long. When he reopened his eyes and the rainwater hit them again, the intense anger surged back uncontrollably.

He could think clearly, but his emotions were beyond his control.

By this time, the boat people had disappeared again by submerging themselves in the dark and ghostly water.

Li Huowang and Lu Xiucan slaughtered them frantically, but with each person Li Huowang killed, the rage in his heart intensified and nearly consumed his remaining sanity.

Li Huowang knew this couldn't continue. If he became a mindless, raging lunatic, it would be over.

He suppressed his anger against this unknown enemy and their elusive presence. *This seems related to the water. A wise man should avoid danger. I must get away from the water!*

"Go! Everyone, go!" Li Huowang shouted to his companions, who were all soaking wet in the torrential rain.

The boat people tried to block their way, but their strength was no match for Li Huowang.

Li Huowang and his group quickly fled the shore with their carriage. Finally, they got their lower bodies out of the seawater and headed inland towards Hou Shu.

However, their anger did not diminish. Their rage accumulated, making them suspect each other of having the worst intentions.

It should have been dawn by now, but the sky remained gray and gloomy.

Why is the effect still there? Is that thing following us? Where is it? Enraged, Li Huowang looked up at the raining sky and then angrily stabbed a dagger into his thigh.

His fury dulled the pain so much that he almost didn't feel it.

Yet suddenly, the rage vanished. Before he could feel happy about it, the anger was replaced by a profound sadness. Unlike the blazing anger, this sorrow was like the black water in a gutter, subtle but long-lasting.

As they continued to walk, this new emotion drew out their past sorrows. This was unlike anything Li Huowang had experienced before. The enemy was unseen and intangible, tormenting them with the ten emotions and eight sufferings.

Past sorrows filled Li Huowang's mind, which left him mentally exhausted and unable to think clearly.

It was the same for the others. Even the horses that pulled the carriage stopped to shed silent tears.

"Waah... Dad... Mom..."

Li Huowang heard a woman's sorrowful cries and turned to see Yang Na curled up by the washing machine, tears streaming down her face.

"What's wrong? We just emptied the bucket of water. Why are you so sad?" Li Huowang crouched beside her with concern and asked gently.

Yang Na's eyes were red from crying. She shook her head slightly as tears dripped off her face. "I... I don't know... I just feel so..."

Li Huowang paused in confusion, then seemed to realize

something.

“Nana! Is your depression acting up? Have you been taking your meds recently?”

“Since being with you, I’ve been so happy, I thought...” Yang Na sobbed.

“You can’t skip your meds!” Li Huowang panicked. It was a serious matter if one did not take their medication for mental illnesses. He stood up, grabbed Yang Na’s bag, and quickly rummaged through it.

After a moment, he found the bottle of pills. He rushed back to her and urgently persuaded, “Nana! Be good, take your meds! You’ll feel better.”

“I don’t want to take them. They make me feel worse... I don’t want to...” Yang Na lay on the ground with overwhelming sadness. She cried helplessly like a child who was incapable of rational thought.

“Nana! Nana!” Li Huowang hugged her close. “Look at me! Don’t be scared. I’ll take them with you!”

With that, he took a few pills from the bottle, then chewed and swallowed them.

“These are for depression. Why are you taking them?” Yang Na’s crying intensified.

Li Huowang took a few more pills, put them in his mouth, then kissed her and gently transferred the pills with his tongue.

When he finally withdrew his tongue, he saw that Bai Lingmiao in his arms had calmed down. Her sorrow had dissipated, and he also felt normal again.

“How do you feel? Are you better?” Li Huowang asked softly.

Bai Lingmiao nodded, then suddenly looked at the sky. “Senior Li, there’s something up there!”

Li Huowang also looked up. The clouds were extremely low, and faint thunder rumbled within them.

But unlike earlier, there was now a fleeting sense of being watched. They had come again!

“Finally found you!” Li Huowang’s expression turned ferocious as a fire ignited within him. This time, it was from his own emotions, not manipulated.

Peng Longteng appeared beside him, grabbed him, and hurled him towards the low-hanging clouds.

Bai Lingmiao flicked her sleeves and wrapped two white ribbons around Li Huowang’s legs and followed him up.

Li Huowang couldn’t see within the dark clouds, but Bai Lingmiao’s mind’s eye was very helpful as she guided him toward the target.

Peng Longteng repeatedly threw him high up, and Li Huowang finally pierced through the thick rain layers. He spotted a transparent, smoke-formed entity swirling in the air.

It wasn’t a dragon, or at least not like any dragon he had seen.

With another powerful throw from Peng Longteng, Li Huowang was hurled towards the entity. The incense figure didn’t dodge and allowed Li Huowang to phase through it.

“Again!” Peng Longteng grabbed Li Huowang’s left foot in mid-air and threw him again. Li Huowang closed his eyes tightly. *I can touch it, I can reach that creature!*

The next moment, he felt himself crash into something soft like cotton. Without hesitation, he raised his sword and stabbed forcefully.

“Die!”

With a squelch, long tendrils with sticky liquid stuck on them sprayed over Li Huowang’s face.

Chapter 684 - Eight Sufferings

With his eyes shut tightly, Li Huowang sensed that he had wounded his opponent. He decisively drew a flint across his skin, and flames enveloped his entire body.

Whatever this creature was, he needed to go all out given its immense size.

He controlled his two arms and a dozen tentacles, then grasped the wound's edges and tore it open further with a fierce roar.

Li Huowang plunged into the wound, accompanied by a ripping sound. He wielded three swords in his three hands, then charged through the creature's body while engulfed in flames.

He repaid the frustration they had suffered back to this unknown creature by a thousandfold.

He soon heard the sizzle of burning flesh interspersed with anguished roars resembling the agonized cries of a dragon. The intense trembling nearly made him open his eyes.

The more the creature struggled, the deeper he burrowed. When the pressure eased, Li Huowang realized he had pierced right through the creature.

The sizzling sound of burning flesh gave way to the sound of intense flames, and Li Huowang felt himself falling.

Just as he hit the ground, he opened his eyes and saw the storm clouds turning into burning clouds that quickly dissipated. He had won.

Water! Li Huowang landed in the mud with a splash. Moments later, he spat out the mud and crawled out of the soil.

When he stood up again, the rain had stopped. The thin rays of

the morning sunlight shone on his charred face.

The air after the rain was fresh, and everything seemed finally over, regardless of whether the creature was dead or just wounded.

The three monkey children had never witnessed such things before. They regarded Li Huowang as a god, and they kowtowed to him with utmost reverence.

Li Huowang didn't care about their reactions. Instead, he gazed at the sky as he contemplated other matters.

That creature was not an ordinary evil spirit. However, it didn't feel strong enough to be a Siming.

If he had to define it, he thought the creature resembled a God of Happiness, or something similar to the beings outside Baiyu Capital.

The world was not simply black and white, nor were there only mortals and Simings. There was a vast spectrum in between.

Has god Yu'er started to recruit those things? This realization darkened Li Huowang's mood, and the extent of the enemy's influence increased again in his mind.

If these creatures were present even in such remote areas, what guarded the Dragon Vein of Hou Shu?

Li Huowang saw everyone look at him and shook his head. "It's all over now. Let's rest. We've been through a lot tonight, and everyone's exhausted."

Everyone felt more reassured and began to tend to their tasks. Some tended to wounds, while others started to cook.

Their fear and anxiety quickly dissipated as the piping-hot food entered their mouths.

Li Huowang gently unwrapped the bandages on Yang Xiaohai's wound, examined it, then rewrapped it. "Have your wife change the bandage. It got wet, and the wound is turning pale."

"Senior Li, my injury is minor, but your wounds..." Yang Xiaohai hesitated, looking at Li Huowang's charred body.

“Take care of yourself. This is also a minor injury,” Li Huowang replied. He moved back to the campfire and began to eat a bowl of noodles with grilled salted fish.

“Senior Li, don’t move. I’ll get the Bai Family to treat your injuries,” Bai Lingmiao said and began to drum.

“I don’t have any lifespan pills left. Don’t summon the Immortal families.”

“Senior Li, they are quite accommodating now; they don’t need lifespan as payment anymore,” she said as she beat her drums.

As Li Huowang ate, he sensed something approaching that was watching him.

Though he was tense, he pretended to be calm, removed the long bones from a piece of braised fish belly, and then placed it into Yang Na’s bowl.

Glancing out of the corner of his eye, he saw Madam Qi and then relaxed a bit. It wasn’t them this time.

Yang Na had now recovered. She noticed Li Huowang’s actions but said nothing, praising Sun Xiaoqin’s cooking instead.

After the meal, Li Huowang walked to his bedroom and sat on the stool with a serious expression.

This couldn’t continue. Yang Na had just taken her medication when those people’s gazes had returned. He had briefly confronted them last time, but he hadn’t managed to take a photo of them with his phone.

He didn’t care about himself, but he was concerned about Yang Na and his mother.

Li Huowang opened his phone and dialed a number. “Hello, it’s me. Have you found the source of those two severed fingers?”

“It’s been so long, and you still haven’t found anything? Is your database comprehensive or not? You can’t even trace two severed fingers.”

“What do you mean there are more important matters than two

fingers? Once again, I am not crazy! Someone is actually trying to kidnap me!”

He heard the door open behind him, then hung up and turned to see Yang Na holding a fruit platter. He asked gently, “How are you feeling?”

Yang Na shook her head slightly and placed the fruit platter on the table. She held his hands and asked, “Huowang, what’s wrong? Is it the side effects of the medicine?”

“Of course not, haha, I’m fine. Just thinking about some things.” He hesitated for a while, then said, “Nana, can you do me a favor?”

“Sure, what do you need?” Yang Na nodded.

“I need to visit Kangning Hospital to see an old friend, but I don’t want my mother to come along. Can you go with me?”

The enemy was still around and he needed to see Qian Fu, even if the man was mad and incoherent.

His words had proven true. The surveillance had been tampered with, and someone was indeed after him. Li Huowang couldn’t ignore this.

Yang Na didn’t ask further because Li Huowang needed her help. She hugged him gently and nodded. “Okay.”

Li Huowang and Yang Na set off while Sun Xiaoqin was away.

Before they could leave the complex, Madam Qi and two elderly men blocked them at the gate. “Little Li, where are you going? Where’s your family?”

“I’m going to Kangning Hospital,” Li Huowang replied honestly.

“Why are you going to the psychiatric hospital? Do you have a valid reason?” Madam Qi asked suspiciously.

Li Huowang faced her scrutinizing gaze and retorted, “You know I have a mental illness. Why else would I go to a psychiatric hospital? Of course, it’s for a follow-up. What, is that not allowed?”

Chapter 685 - Kangning

Although Li Huowang was a key target of assistance and visitation by the Neighborhood Office, he was generally not allowed to leave the small district.

However, going to a psychiatric hospital for a follow-up was very reasonable. There was no excuse to refuse, as preventing a follow-up could lead to serious issues if he had another episode.

“You should have said earlier you were going for a follow-up. Here, fill out this form. Young lady, are you his caregiver? What is your relationship with him?”

After Li Huowang filled out some forms under Madam Qi’s supervision, a ride-sharing car was waiting at the community gate.

Before Li Huowang and Yang Na could get in, Madam Qi stuck her head into the front passenger seat and instructed the driver, “Mister Wang! Is the tank full? Remember, only drop them off at Kangning Hospital, and don’t stop midway. Keep your phone on the whole time!”

“I need to go to the fruit stall to buy some things,” Li Huowang interjected.

“Aren’t you going for a follow-up? What do you need fruit for at a psychiatric hospital?” Madam Qi eyed him suspiciously, as if afraid he might use this as an opportunity to escape.

“I have a lot of friends there. Can’t I visit them while I’m at the hospital?”

“Friends from the psychiatric hospital? They must be psychiatric patients too, right?”

After some back-and-forth, it was finally resolved by Yang Na going to the neighborhood supermarket to buy the fruits.

Though the ride-sharing driver looked somewhat like the

previous police officer, Li Huowang didn't overthink it. It didn't matter whether he was being monitored or protected—he didn't want any trouble on the way.

Once Li Huowang and Yang Na got into the car, it started heading onto the road. Li Huowang rested his head against the window as the car sped up, his eyes unfocused as he thought about everything that had happened.

What are those people? What do they want from me? What do I have that they are so interested in?

There were no answers to these questions, and even the police couldn't help. In any case, they didn't trust him. His only clue now was Qian Fu at Kangning Hospital.

Since they could alter surveillance footage, it was highly likely they were also the ones who placed needles in his food.

But... why? If they wanted to kill me, they could have poisoned my food. Why put needles in it? The needles merely caused pain and nothing else.

Hold on. Could Qian Fu have been right? Maybe they were trying to drive a wedge between me and him. That way, I would suspect and stay away from him.

This thought solidified Li Huowang's determination to meet Qian Fu again.

Yang Na sensed Li Huowang's anxiety and clasped his hand. They interlocked their fingers in silent comfort.

Li Huowang turned to her and smiled reassuringly. "It's nothing. I'm just going to the hospital to ask some questions. I'll be back soon."

"Alright. No matter what happens, don't bear it alone. I'm here with you."

"Sure." Li Huowang closed his eyes and hugged her gently, just like that night on the rooftop.

The car sped along the road. As they got closer to Kangning

Hospital, Li Huowang grew increasingly anxious.

After what felt like a long time, the car finally stopped. Li Huowang and Yang Na walked towards the hospital with white walls and green windows.

His attending physician, Wu Cheng, greeted him. It was clear that Li Huowang was being treated much better than before.

In Wu Cheng's office, Li Huowang casually chatted with him while holding a disposable cup.

"I heard you were kidnapped?" Wu Cheng asked while holding his tea cup.

"It wasn't an episode. Someone really tried to kidnap me," Li Huowang explained.

"Of course. Don't worry, I didn't say you were having an episode. Since you have two severed fingers as evidence, there must be real people involved. What did the police say?"

"They told me to wait. They even put a tracker on me. It's not easy for me to even leave my neighborhood now," Li Huowang said, lifting his left foot.

"Don't worry. They'll find something with so much surveillance around. So, why are you back this time?"

"Nothing much, just a follow-up to check if there's any change in my condition," Li Huowang naturally didn't mention he was there to see Qian Fu.

"If you're aware of that, it means you're mostly fine. Since you're here, let's do some tests."

When Li Huowang held the tablet with the test questions, he felt a bit nervous. Perhaps he didn't fully trust his own perception, and he wondered if he was actually still insane due to his previous experiences.

Li Huowang sometimes doubted his own senses after having gone through so much.

He focused on the test questions and completed them one by

one.

After he discussed the results with the doctor and he saw Wu Cheng's relaxed expression, he sighed in relief. He wasn't crazy. Everything he experienced was real and not hallucinations caused by his illness.

"Don't be too stressed. If there were really an issue, we wouldn't have let you leave the hospital. Relax at home and take your medicine on time."

Li Huowang heard him and knew his follow-up was over. He should be heading home, but he had something else to do.

He stood up and looked towards the inpatient ward, then he hesitantly asked, "Doctor, can I visit some other patients? I made some friends during my stay here."

"Sure, go ahead. You know your way around the hospital. Most of them are still here."

When Li Huowang entered the visitation area, he felt a strange sense of familiarity. He had always exited from the inside door before. This was his first time entering from the outside door.

He couldn't go directly to Qian Fu since that would be too conspicuous. He visited several acquaintances and handed them the fruits he had bought.

Everyone else was fine, but when he saw Zhao Ting, the girl with depression, he immediately felt a resentful gaze.

Li Huowang patted Yang Na lightly. "I have nothing with her. I'll explain when we get back. I just got one more friend to see."

Li Huowang took a deep breath and anxiously waited for Qian Fu, but he never showed up. Instead, he received bad news.

"Qian Fu had an episode and is in the seclusion room. You can visit him next time."

Li Huowang's heart sank, and a bad premonition arose.

What's going on? Did I come too late? Did those people get to him?

Chapter 686 - Qian Fu

Li Huowang was not satisfied with the answer. The more the nurse insisted that Qian Fu's illness had worsened and made them limit visitations, the more suspicious Li Huowang became. He was determined to meet Qian Fu.

Instead of pushing it, he chose to remain silent. He was still in the mental hospital, and if he displayed any aggressiveness, he could get caught.

Thanks to Wu Cheng's help, Li Huowang managed to get a short meeting with Qian Fu.

Li Huowang sighed. *At least the people outside haven't infiltrated this place yet. Otherwise, they would've used all kinds of tactics to stop me from meeting Qian Fu.*

Because he had to enter the hospital, Li Huowang asked Yang Na to wait outside while he followed a nurse into the building.

Li Huowang soon reached the place where Qian Fu was locked up. He opened the small window on the door and saw that Qian Fu was wrapped in a straitjacket. He was wriggling on the floor like a maggot as he spewed nonsense from his mouth.

"Qian Fu!" Li Huowang wanted to get close, but the nurse stopped him.

"What are you doing? I thought you were only here to look at him. Are you trying to talk to that crazy patient?"

Li Huowang came up with a random lie. "Please let me go. His family asked me to give him a message."

"No! This is the rule! Why didn't you say so just now?"

"All rules can be bent a little, plus this is a private hospital and not a government-funded one." Li Huowang stuffed the money that Sun Xiaoqin had given him into the nurse's hands.

Li Huowang knew that even though the doctors profited greatly, the nurses were not paid well despite handling most of the physical work.

The nurse's reaction confirmed his thoughts. "Be quick, then. He's very crazy right now. Don't blame me if he ignores you."

Li Huowang got close to the door and shouted, "Qian Fu! Qian Fu!"

Hearing his voice, Qian Fu crawled towards the door with his straitjacket on.

Eight minutes had passed by the time he plastered his sweaty face on the small opening of the door.

Qian Fu looked weird as he glared at Li Huowang with bloodshot eyes. His eyes were fearful, excited, and on the verge of collapse. "You finally came to look for me! I knew you would see through their tricks!"

Qian Fu cried happily.

"Quiet! Don't alert the doctors!" Li Huowang looked towards the corridor and whispered harshly.

Qian Fu sniffled and swallowed his snot. "I've waited for you too long! Did you know how they tortured me while you weren't here?"

"Tortured you? Are they here in the hospital?" Li Huowang panicked when he heard that.

Qian Fu whispered as he stared at the nurse standing guard in the corridor, "They are here, but there's not many of them. You need to be careful!"

"Who are they?" Li Huowang needed answers.

Looking wide-eyed at Li Huowang, Qian Fu asked, "What? You still don't know who you are dealing with?"

"You know who they are?" Li Huowang recalled the woman with the umbrella and the people who tried kidnapping him. He really didn't know who they were.

“Of course! Didn’t I tell you? They are the Leotians!”

“Fuck!” Li Huowang would’ve beaten Qian Fu up if it wasn’t because of the door. He thought that Qian Fu was tricking him.

Li Huowang calmed himself down. He had to accept the fact that his ally was a patient. Even though Qian Fu might know something, he’s still a patient in the hospital right now.

Thankfully, Li Huowang had experience in dealing with people with mental illnesses. “Where is the spaceship of the aliens that came from Leo?”

“Their spaceship is still in space. They can’t come down for now, but some aliens could reach Earth first. Some humans coveted their technology and bowed down to the aliens! They became traitors!”

Li Huowang had to reconsider his approach even though he was here to get some information from Qian Fu.

Li Huowang had no choice but to believe only half of the ramblings of a patient.

After some time, Li Huowang frowned and spoke, “Where did you get this information?”

If he couldn’t verify the information from Qian Fu, he had no choice but to find the source of the information itself.

“Where did I get it? Isn’t it obvious? I saw it myself! Don’t tell me you saw nothing even after so many things had happened!” Qian Fu glared at Li Huowang.

Suddenly, Qian Fu’s hands passed through the small opening and grabbed Li Huowang’s shirt collar. “Li Huowang! You need to save me! You’re the only one who can do it!”

“Let go!” Li Huowang tried to escape his grip, but Qian Fu’s hands held on like iron vises.

“Save me! Take me outside! Only then can we defeat the Leotians together! They are too strong! They will dismantle us one by one! They are afraid of us working together, so they chose to

separate us first!”

Qian Fu’s words were annoying, but Li Huowang understood something from his ramblings. “Wait, you know how to defeat them? What does a crazy person like you have that could threaten them? If you tell me, I will find a way to save you!”

“I’m crazy? You’re crazy too! We are on the same side!”

The nurse saw something was wrong and immediately ran towards them. “Hey! Let go of him! Let him go!”

Li Huowang escaped Qian Fu’s grip thanks to the nurse’s help.

She asked, “What’s going on? Why is he pulling on your collar? Nothing serious has happened yet, so let’s leave now! I’ll be in trouble if there’s an accident!”

Li Huowang hesitated as he looked at Qian Fu before he left. Numerous thoughts clouded his mind, and he needed time to sort them out.

Qian Fu panicked when he saw Li Huowang leaving. “Wait! Don’t go! Save me!”

Li Huowang was at the end of the corridor when Qian Fu plastered his face on the opening and shouted as loud as he could, “Ji Zai! Save me!”

Li Huowang stopped and looked back. “What did you call me?”

“Ji Zai! You are Ji Zai!”

Chapter 687 - Plan

In Kangning's Hospital men's bathroom, Li Huowang was panting as he let the cold water from the tap flow down his head.

Ji Zai! You are Ji Zai!

Those words rang again in Li Huowang's mind as he closed his eyes in pain.

His head hurt as if his brain was bulging outwards. Only the cold water calmed his head down.

Li Huowang raised his head and saw his wet hair. He looked into the mirror and saw his soaked face, which became unfamiliar as time passed.

Who is Ji Zai? I thought Ji Zai was the fake name Zhuge Yuan gave me in the hallucination. Why did he call me that? Unless that world...

Some of his forgotten memories started to resurface. Li Huowang felt a growing pain in his head and ducked under the running water again.

After some time, he raised his head and saw a bizarre scene. The reflection in the mirror did not get up, and he saw how the water was still running down the back of his head.

Li Huowang started to get afraid. Not only was his reflection not following his own body, but the back of his reflection's head had a face! It was his own face. The reflection had faces on both sides of the head!

"AH!" Li Huowang shouted and retreated. When he looked into the mirror again, he saw that his reflection had returned to normal. There was nothing else other than the scared Li Huowang. It was just an illusion.

What's going on? Is that world real? Then what about here? A strange fear filled his heart as he instinctively wanted to hold

something.

He then became angry, and his fear turned into wrath. *Fuck! Are they trying to trick me?! They've tried doing this so many times! I won't believe it! I'm not a crazy person or an idiot!*

Since Qian Fu had read Yi Donglai's thesis, it was possible for him to know Ji Zai's name.

Also, Yi Donglai's treatment had been successful in preventing Li Huowang's hallucinations until now. It was clear that whatever he saw just now was merely an illusion.

Li Huowang clenched his right fist and smashed the mirror out of rage. He looked at his reflection shattering and felt better.

What bad luck! I really can't enter this place too many times. I didn't manage to solve my problems and I nearly got tricked by Qian Fu!

Li Huowang placed his injured hands under the tap, washing the blood away. He saw the glass and blood flowing out of his wounds and remembered Qian Fu again.

No matter what Qian Fu had called him, Li Huowang still needed his help.

If I save him, he might be the one who could deal with the organization behind my kidnapping.

But should I do it? Li Huowang hesitated. Qian Fu was a patient, and Li Huowang couldn't determine how much of it was the truth.

Still, no matter how crazy Qian Fu was, those threats were real.

The organization would continue to target him. If Li Huowang did not deal with them soon, he would never be able to find peace.

Will Qian Fu really help me if I rescue him? Or was he lying? Did he lie just so he could escape the hospital?

"Holy shit! What happened to you?!" Someone shouted from his back.

Li Huowang turned around. A janitor was staring at the cracked mirror and Li Huowang's bloodied hands.

"And how do I know? The quality of the mirrors here is

terrible! I was washing my hands when it suddenly exploded!” Li Huowang scolded the janitor.

The mirror exploded and injured the guest’s hands. It was indeed a clever lie and a terrible day for the hospital’s customer service.

Fortunately, bandaging Li Huowang’s hands was a simple task since he was still technically in a hospital. Once his hands were bandaged, he walked out of the hospital with Yang Na. At this point, Li Huowang already made a decision to rescue Qian Fu.

No matter how crazy Qian Fu was, Li Huowang was certain that Qian Fu was still on his side. It was clear that someone had tried to separate them by placing needles in his food last time.

Since the opposing party was trying to separate them, Li Huowang decided to try and ally himself with Qian Fu. There might be some unexpected gains there.

However, helping a patient to escape the hospital was a monumental task. Qian Fu hadn’t killed anyone before, which was a relief.

“Huowang, look! The weather today is so clear! There’s not a single cloud in the sky.”

Li Huowang looked up and saw the clear blue skies. The warm sunlight gently caressed his face and made him feel good.

Li Huowang then thought about how funny the incident in the toilet was. *How could this world be fake?*

“Yes, today’s weather is so good. Unfortunately, the weather cannot be this good every day.” Li Huowang walked towards the car at the entrance of the hospital.

Even though he didn’t know which organization was monitoring him and why they were doing so, Li Huowang was determined to fight back. Since someone was targeting him, he would bring the fight to them no matter what!

The car started moving. While in the car, Li Huowang was

thinking about his identity and how to rescue Qian Fu.

To his knowledge, it was very hard to move a patient without alerting anyone. By the time he reached his neighborhood, he had a good idea.

It was both simple and hard. Since Kangning Hospital was a private hospital, as long as Li Huowang cut off Qian Fu's source of money to stop his treatment fees, then the hospital would send Qian Fu out.

"Little Li, you're back back? How was your treatment?" Madam Qi sighed when she saw Li Huowang was back.

Staring at the lady in front of him, he thought about it before he said, "Madam Qi, I need to go to the hospital again."

"Again? Why?"

"To get medicine. I don't have a lot left and I might relapse if I don't take my medicine."

Chapter 688 - Guacang City

The differences between Hou Shu, Qing Qiu, and Si Qi were vast. Si Qi had many rivers and lakes, while Qing Qiu had lots of livestock.

Hou Shu, on the other hand, was very impoverished. The land was dry, and various crags and stones were present. There was some vegetation, but not a lot. Most of the plants here were resistant to drought.

Li Huowang was used to seeing this. After killing the thing in the sky, they finally left the seaside.

Li Huowang and the others had changed their appearance to mimic refugees instead. Hou Shu and the Dharma Sect were still at war, so it was not wise to alert the others who they were.

But even so, there were various incidents since soldiers ran amok.

Ding ding! Dang! Two swords clashed in the air as Li Huowang opened his mouth. A large tentacle shot out and tore off the bandit's face.

Lu Xiucan held his serrated blade and charged at the enemy. He didn't even hesitate when he used a bamboo slip to peel off his fingernails before shooting them forward.

Several arrows landed on his dudou inscribed with runes, but there were only sounds of clinking metal as the arrows deflected off his body.

Lu Xiucan wasn't afraid as he faced the bandits. His eyes were filled with hatred.

Li Huowang had seen how much Lu Xiucan had changed. It was

clear that the latter wanted to take revenge for his family.

Every time they encountered the Dharma Sect, Lu Xiucan was the first one to charge at them.

Several bandits dipped their arrows into the blood of a black dog. They aimed the arrows at Lu Xiucan, but Li Huowang swung his spine sword. A rift flew forward at extreme speed.

The rift not only split the bandits apart but also glued them together with the strange liquid that poured out from it.

Even though he couldn't use the spine sword to travel to the Qi Kingdom right now, it was still more than enough to kill others.

The bandits used to be in the military. Hou Shu and the Dharma Sect were at war while several smaller factions were fighting for the crumbs.

But all of them were no match for Li Huowang. The battle soon ended, and after clearing up the corpses, Li Huowang's group started their journey again.

This was not the first time something like this had happened, so no one panicked. It was clear Hou Shu had fallen so far that bandits now roamed just outside the cities.

Li Huowang had sent some of the White Lotus Sect followers and their carriages away to recruit more followers into the White Lotus Sect.

"With our speed, we will reach the city in six hours!" Li Huowang's words made everyone else move faster.

The closer they got to the city, the more animal feces and footprints could be seen. However, there were also more corpses the closer they got.

The corpses were thrown onto the side of the road like garbage.

Bai Lingmiao was hesitant, but she knew she couldn't bury all of the dead. This was the reality of war. During times of strife, the most worthless thing was life, whether it belonged to Hou Shu's civilians or the Dharma Sect's followers.

Dong Dong Dong~ Her black fingernails rapped on the drum as she sang a sad song.

“Hold some incense in your hands~ May the smoke rise up to the Nine Heavens~ Hang up paper on the front gate~ And hang white banners on the second door~ May the wind clear the smoke and guide the spirit back to their home~”

As she drummed, the wind blew past and made everyone feel uneasy.

“Amitabha... Amitabha... Amitabha...”

Li Huowang sighed when he heard the old monk repeating it again and again. There were times when Li Huowang hoped that ghosts existed.

If there were ghosts, then kind people could take revenge for the victims after they were killed by evil people. If there were ghosts, they could complain to the King of Hell to seek justice. If there were ghosts, they could be reincarnated again.

Everyone was afraid of ghosts, but they were actually the world's true beauty. It was a beautiful lie.

Bai Lingmiao's singing never stopped because the corpses never stopped appearing.

As she sang, they soon reached a massive stone city. The entire city was built on a mountain, making it easy to defend against attacks.

Li Huowang looked up and saw that they were reaching their destination, Guacang City. It was the capital of Hou Shu, and also the location of Hou Shu's Surveillance Bureau.

Staring at the marking on the city walls and the wooden barricades, it was clear that the city had been assaulted before this.

Even though the city hadn't been breached, the situation was still dire if the Dharma Sect had managed to reach the front of it.

Li Huowang and the others entered the city safely after he flashed his identification.

Dressed in his signature red Daoist robes, Li Huowang chose not to hide. The Surveillance Bureau of Hou Shu immediately knew who was coming.

What surprised Li Huowang was that Hou Shu's officials completely ignored Li Huowang while they welcomed Bai Lingmiao and her White Lotus Sect.

Before long, someone escorted them to the Surveillance Bureau.

The Surveillance Bureau of Hou Shu was also underground, but it was built directly into the mountain.

"Where's Xuan Pin?" Li Huowang asked Shangguan Yuting. He had learned how dangerous the situation was.

"Wait here. Let me find him," she said, then phased into the walls.

Li Huowang sat on the stone stool and waited patiently. He was thinking about what to do if the worst-case scenario happened.

"You've arrived? A bit later than I'd imagined." Xuan Pin appeared and sat on the other side. His red robes parted, and a gaze from the darkness within focused on Li Huowang.

Li Huowang ignored Xuan Pin's remarks and said, "If you want me to be faster, you should call me when you first come here instead."

"You were busy that time. I was worried you wouldn't come even if I called you." Xuan Pin moved to the side and revealed someone else.

The person was wearing a bronze mask with two snarling faces.

The faces were complete with whiskers, fangs, and angry eyes. They were positioned in a vertical line and appeared to be attempting to take each other's position.

At the top of the mask was a hat made from a skull ring.

Chapter 689 - Chief

Li Huowang looked at the oversized mask that covered half of the person's body. Only a pair of green pants could be seen beneath the mask.

"This is the Chief of Hou Shu's Surveillance Bureau. His name is Zhang Tan. Since you are here to help, I think it's beneficial you get to know each other."

Xuan Pin then pointed at Li Huowang and spoke to Zhang Tan. "This is the one I told you about."

Li Huowang looked at Zhang Tan before he greeted the Chief. "The disciple of Zephyr Temple, Li Huowang, greets the senior. May I know which sect you are from?"

Zhang Tan uttered a single word, "Nuo."

"Nuo? As in the Nuo Opera?" Li Huowang was surprised. To his knowledge, Da Nuo was the crazy world itself.

If Da Nuo was crazy, why was someone still worshipping him? It's one thing to worship Da Nuo, but how did someone from their sect become the Chief of Hou Shu's Surveillance Bureau?

Is Da Nuo a Siming? Or is he a Greater Siming in the legends? Or is he an imaginary God like the Immortal Heaven of Qing Qiu?

Li Huowang pondered and asked, "Is Da Nuo still granting you powers?"

Zhang Tan shook his head lightly.

Just then, Xuan Pin's voice came from beside Li Huowang. "It's best if you don't ask that. No matter where you came from, it's very rude to ask such a question, especially when this is also your first time meeting him."

Li Huowang nodded. He was asking out of curiosity, but he was more worried about the situation in Hou Shu. "How is the war

going? How strong is the Dharma Sect?”

“We are losing. The Dragon Vein of Hou Shu has been seized. The trail of corpses you saw was the aftermath. To be honest, since the Dragon Vein was taken, the kingdom’s ‘luck’ has been affected too. That’s why we’ve been losing a lot. If you had come any later, Hou Shu would have really fallen.”

Li Huowang frowned. He knew the situation was dire, but he didn’t think it would be this bad.

“Then what are we waiting for? We need to take the Dragon Vein back! Where is it?”

Xuan Pin and Zhang Tan looked at each other and sighed. “We might’ve been able to do so last time, but the situation has worsened to the point where it would be difficult.”

“What do you mean?” Li Huowang realized something else had gone wrong.

“The war is constantly changing. We cannot expect the enemy to wait for us to fight back. Last month, the Dharma Sect of Nanping, Si Qi, and even Hou Shu found an unknown method to merge all three Dragon Veins into one. They then told everyone that they established the Li[1] Kingdom and also had a Dragon Vein. ”

Li Huowang had a terrifying image in his mind. He imagined the three Dragon Veins bundled together like a thread. A single Dragon Vein was already very hard to defeat, much less three.

The Dharma Sect will surely guard the three Dragon Veins as if they were their life!

Li Huowang suddenly felt a pressure on his heart. Ji Zai was so useless that a single thought from Li Huowang would wipe him out of existence.

He pondered a bit before he asked again, “I’ve just arrived here, and you guys have been here for longer. You should have a better understanding of the situation than me, so what countermeasures does the palace of Hou Shu and the Surveillance

Bureau have?”

Xuan Pin remained quiet before he said, “We’ve tried a lot of things before you came. Even though we caused some inconveniences for the Dharma Sect, we still didn’t manage to get the Dragon Veins back. The palace of Hou Shu decided to abandon the kingdom and retreat to Qing Qiu.”

“What? That’s it? We give up on Hou Shu?” Li Huowang was stunned at how easily they gave up. How could they be the rulers of Hou Shu like this?

“The Dragon Vein has been lost and our luck has run out. That’s why they came to that conclusion. But don’t worry, not all has been lost. Even though we can’t recover the Dragon Vein, we can retreat to Qing Qiu to regroup our troops. Qing Qiu is also closer to the Liang Kingdom so it’s easier for us and the Emperor to rally the troops there.”

Li Huowang frowned and paced around the room. He didn’t want to give up now. He was here to take back the Dragon Vein, not to retreat back to Qing Qiu.

“Wait, what if we still have a chance?” Li Huowang had an idea. “How much primordial breath do you still have? Give it to me and I can use it!”

He was already here, so it was worth a shot. As long as he had enough primordial breath, Li Huowang could fight against even a Dragon Vein.

Xuan Pin’s answer was brief. “I don’t have any left.”

“What? How come?”

“Because I’ve extracted everything from the Strayed Ones that we’ve caught. It’s not easy to find fresh Strayed Ones with how chaotic the world has become.”

“Wait, you mean that the primordial breath you had was harvested from Strayed Ones?” Li Huowang’s pupils shrank from shock when he heard that.

“Of course. Strayed Ones are the only ones who possess primordial breath. Where else would you find it? Regular people think that a Strayed One’s organs or sense of bewilderment are what make them valuable, but what they don’t know is that the valuable part of a Strayed One is their primordial breath.”

Li Huowang couldn’t accept it. He never would’ve imagined the primordial breath that allowed him to become so strong had been extracted from live Strayed Ones.

Just then, someone floated down from the ceiling and whispered to Xuan Pin.

The person was also one of Xuan Pin’s illusions. When he was done, Xuan Pin said, “It seems that we might actually have a chance.”

“Huh?” Zhang Tan finally spoke after being quiet all this time.

“Qing Qiu’s tribal leader is here. He wishes to fight the Dharma Sect head-on rather than wait for them to invade Qing Qiu.”

Just as Xuan Pin finished speaking, all three of them sensed something was wrong and looked up.

Xuan Pin extended a slender hand from beneath his robes and pointed at the ceiling. The ceiling turned invisible and revealed the cloudy skies. Rain fell as thunder roared in the heavens.

Xuan Pin felt something was wrong and quickly did calculations with his fingers. “Wait, the time doesn’t match. We are missing half a division[2].”

“Wait, what did you say?” Li Huowang was shocked.

“We should have eleven divisions in a day, but we’ve lost half a division.”

“Half a division?” Li Huowang recalled something similar had happened before.

“Xuan Pin, what if the Dharma Sect didn’t want to keep the Dragon Vein? What if they wanted to destroy them?”

Li Huowang had just said that when an earthquake happened.

The Earth Dragon was moving again.

1. The character for Li here means Black. 

2. A division = two hours. So half a division means one hour.



Chapter 690 - Earth Dragon Moving

“Remember to follow my chant. If you do it right, I will give you some candy.” A devotee of the White Lotus Sect squatted in front of a group of child beggars and said, “Little god Yu’er pisses itself in front of the Heavenly Mater~”

“Little god Yu’er pisses itself in front of the Heavenly Mater~”

“Good! Come, everyone have a lick and go repeat what I’ve taught you to the masses. Come back after a division and you will each get a candy.”

As the child beggars ran away, they spread propaganda throughout the city to defame the Dharma Sect and praise the White Lotus Sect. Some of the other children even copied them on their own.

The White Lotus Sect used both children and adults to do their bidding.

“Offer tribute to the White Lotus Sect and pray to the Heavenly Mater, for she shall bless your life for a hundred years! She shall bless your afterlife for ten thousand years!”

“Pray to the White Lotus Sect and you are guaranteed to have a son!”

“The Heavenly Mater has descended into the mortal realm! She shall bless everyone! Those who join us will automatically become our sworn brothers. Everyone is welcome to join us. We shall not distinguish between the poor and the rich, the men and the women, or the old and the young.”

As the White Lotus Sect spread their influence, numerous posters of a white lotus were plastered all around the city.

Instead of targeting regular civilians, the White Lotus Sect intended to absorb some of the Dharma Sect members to reduce their strength.

Instead of suppressing the White Lotus Sect's high-profile recruitment campaign, the city officials were actively supporting it.

The city officials' higher-ups had given the order that those who opposed the Dharma Sect were allies.

As the Saintess of the White Lotus Sect, Bai Lingmiao sat in a massive hall and waited for the palace of Hou Shu to come and meet her.

"Senior Bai, where is Senior Li?" Yang Xiaohai was nervous because he didn't see Li Huowang around.

"Senior Li has something to do and will return shortly." Bai Lingmiao knew where he went, but she thought there was no reason to tell Yang Xiaohai about it.

Bai Lingmiao was nervous as she waited for the officials. She didn't know how she should conduct herself in front of them.

An old woman with a lotus engraving on her forehead sensed Bai Lingmiao's worries and bowed. "Saintess, please do not worry. Hou Shu is in danger, so rather than making it difficult for us, they will instead politely ask for your help."

Bai Lingmiao nodded and calmed down a little. She used her mind's eye[1] to sense everything in the hall.

The beautiful decorations in the hall indicated that the palace of Hou Shu intended to treat her as a guest.

She then saw Lu Xiucui was reading the Profound Records intently. She took a cup of tea and walked over to him.

Seeing her approaching him, Lu Xiucui put down the Profound Records, stood up, and bowed. "Mistress!"

Bai Lingmiao took the Profound Records and traced her fingers across the words. Various bloody and self-mutilation techniques appeared in her mind. She knew what it was.

Senior Li used this a lot in the past. It's very evil.

Bai Lingmiao sighed and put the *Profound Records* down. "Xiucai, I know you are upset. Please pray more to the Heavenly Mater and you will feel better. Also, if you want to take revenge against the Dharma Sect, we have a lot of techniques in the White Lotus Sect. There's no need to use this."

"Thank you, Mistress!" Lu Xiucai was grateful, but he had no intention of giving up the *Profound Records*. He wanted to cultivate both the techniques of the White Lotus Sect and the *Ao Jing Sect*.

The White Lotus Sect's techniques required talent, humility, and training, while the *Profound Records* required none of that. He could use it immediately.

Bai Lingmiao knew what Lu Xiucai was thinking. She wanted to persuade him, but the ground started shaking before she could. Everything in the hall began falling left and right.

"The Earth Dragon is moving! Quick! Get out of the hall!"

As the ground shook, everyone evacuated outside to avoid getting crushed if the building collapsed.

Bai Lingmiao composed herself and saw the chaos outside.

"The Earth Dragon is moving!" Gongs, bells, and people shouting could be heard everywhere. Many houses collapsed, and several people fell into the ravines.

Thankfully the situation ended soon. The ground stopped shaking after five minutes.

They looked down from the city built into the face of the mountain. The barren land below was cracked to the point it almost split apart.

Before Bai Lingmiao could understand what was happening, she saw Li Huowang approaching her quickly.

"Miaomiao! How many fighters do you have in the White Lotus Sect? Mobilize all of them!"

Bai Lingmiao had never seen Li Huowang so agitated before.

“Senior Li, what’s wrong?”

“The Dharma Sect are not capturing the Dragon Veins to use them for themselves—they’re destroying them!” Li Huowang’s words made everyone else panic too.

God Yu’er was waiting. If the Dragon Veins were to be destroyed, the Liang Kingdom would end up like the Qi Kingdom.

Aside from the members who excelled at spreading the dogma, the stronger members of the White Lotus Sect, marked by white donkeys tattooed behind their backs, were mobilized. They accompanied Bai Lingmiao as she ran towards Hou Shu’s Surveillance Bureau.

Due to the quaking, everyone in Hou Shu’s Surveillance Bureau ran out. Li Huowang only recognized the three people at the front.

Hou Shu’s Surveillance Bureau Chief, Zhang Tan, Liang Kingdom’s Surveillance Bureau Chief, Xuan Pin, and Si Qi’s Surveillance Bureau Chief, Zheng Boqiao. It was clear that the threat was so dire that all of them had to mobilize together.

Li Huowang felt a lot of gazes trained on him. Some of them were even staring at him in broad daylight. Li Huowang felt that the Surveillance Bureau wasn’t that friendly to him.

Li Huowang approached them when Zhang Tan took out a horn tied with a red rope. He placed it on the mouth of his mask and blew it.

Bwooooooooooooooh~

The sound of the horn echoed far and wide, covering everyone like a cloud of mist.

After the sound of the horn dissipated, the hundreds of people scattered. They all ran in different directions as they rushed to carry out their assigned missions.

Li Huowang turned to Xuan Pin and asked, “Where are they going? The Dragon Veins are at risk of getting destroyed and we need to get them back.”

“Don’t worry. We are not asking them to take on futile missions. We have some time since the Dharma Sect will find it difficult to destroy the Dragon Veins. We need to retrieve them before they are destroyed completely.”

“How do you know that the Dragon Veins haven’t been destroyed yet?”

“Time,” Xuan Pin said, raising a single skeletal finger. “A Dragon Vein represents a single division. We have currently lost half of a division.”

“A Dragon Vein represents a single division? There are twelve divisions in a day, so does that mean we had twelve Dragon Veins?”

“Wrong. There are sixteen divisions in a day, so we had sixteen Dragon Veins. The reason why there’s so little time in a day now was because some of the Dragon Veins were destroyed in the past.”[\[2\]](#)

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1. The mind’s eye is the relic that restored her eyesight 🤞
 2. The world has 32 hours apparently. 🤞

Chapter 691 - Cloud Swamp

“Sixteen divisions? So a day in this world originally had thirty-two hours?”

Li Huowang felt his mind spinning. What he assumed was basic common knowledge here turned out to be wrong.

“Yes, Dragon Veins vary in size. But, according to the records, there were indeed sixteen divisions in a day.”

“Why didn’t you tell me this earlier?”

“What? Haven’t you read the almanacs sold for a couple of silver coins on the street? Aren’t you a Daoist? Have you not even read the Four Books and Five Classics[1]?”

Li Huowang didn’t know how to respond. After thinking it over, it seemed pretty logical. If this entire world was mad, what did a few extra divisions in a day matter?

At this moment, an idea popped into Li Huowang’s mind.

If all the remaining Dragon Veins disappeared, what would happen? Would a world without divisions exist? What kind of world would that be?

Li Huowang vigorously shook his head and tried to shake off these thoughts. “Let’s forget about how many divisions there are in a day for now. Where are those three Dragon Veins? That’s the most critical thing now!”

“Cloud Swamp.”

Li Huowang quickly found a map of Hou Shu and examined it closely.

The terrain of Hou Shu was barren, but it wasn’t devoid of water. Cloud Swamp was a swamp filled with miasma, and various

legends spoke of it.

Li Huowang looked at the map and gritted his teeth. “Things have come to this. There’s no time to waste. Let’s go and retrieve the Dragon Veins! Eleven divisions in a day is already too few.”

The situation was critical, so Li Huowang and his group set out.

They weren’t the only ones. All the military forces within Hou Shu and the reinforcements from Qing Qiu were also moving to counterattack the areas occupied by the Dharma Sect. No matter their motives, they were allies in dealing with the Dharma Sect.

The Dharma Sect wouldn’t sit idly by with such significant movements. In an instant, the entire Hou Shu was thrown into chaos.

Everyone rode horses across the barren desert, rushing towards Cloud Swamp. As they charged into a low-lying area, the ground suddenly cracked open and revealed a bottomless black chasm.

A strange scene unfolded before anything from below could react. The riders seemed to lose their footing and were suspended in mid-air.

A pale hand with a jade ring on its thumb pierced into Li Huowang’s head and slid out from the back of his skull as he moved. “Shen, this is the work of Xuan Pin. They aren’t here.”

Meanwhile, the real Li Huowang and his companions had already arrived on the outskirts of Cloud Swamp.

The Dharma Sect obviously wouldn’t let them approach easily. The area around Cloud Swamp had become a battlefield, with the Dharma Sect defending against the attacks from Hou Shu and Qing Qiu.

It was like a massive millstone that swallowed people whole and spat out death and dismembered limbs. Even the heavens seemed to weep at the sight as a fine drizzle began to fall.

As the rain intensified, the number of deaths also increased.

The rain mingled with blood, shrouding the battlefield in a layer of red mist.

“DIE!” Li Huowang roared. Covered in tentacles, he charged through the crowd and left a trail of corpses in his wake.

No matter how many Dharma Sect followers Li Huowang killed, they kept on coming with no end in sight. They swarmed him like insects, ready to sacrifice their lives.

Li Huowang and his group persevered through and finally reached the edge of Cloud Swamp. He saw the other Chiefs enter Cloud Swamp and didn’t linger outside as he led his group into the swamp.

“This way! Follow me!” Xuan Pin’s Shangguan Yuting called out and guided Li Huowang through the muddy swamp.

When they moved away from the battlefield, the noise faded. It was replaced by an eerie silence, but this didn’t mean safety. In fact, the danger only increased.

Two hidden arrows shot out from a nearby pond and pierced Li Huowang’s back, emerging through his chest.

Li Huowang held his purple-tassel sword, turned around, and coldly glared at the pond. Peng Longteng’s large figure crashed into it and caused a large splash. The water soon turned blood-red.

A small bump rose on the back of Li Huowang’s head and split open. Li Sui’s eyes emerged to help him watch his blind spot and avoid further ambushes.

Li Huowang gripped the invisible arrows in his chest and yanked them out. He walked to the pond’s edge and looked at his reflection with a hesitant expression.

“Ji Zai, what are you doing? With three Dragon Veins gone, are you just going to watch? What happened to the preparations you mentioned you were making earlier?”

There was still no response from Ji Zai. Disappointment flickered across Li Huowang’s face. He really wanted to know what

Ji Zai was up to. *Could there be anything more important than dealing with the Dharma Sect right now?*

Xuan Pin's figure appeared beside Li Huowang and said, "Be careful, Zheng Boqiao's group has encountered some tough opponents."

Li Huowang looked around at the reactions of others, then understood that this was merely Xuan Pin's illusion. His real self was somewhere else.

"Even if we tie up the Dharma Sect's cannon fodder with soldiers, the Dharma Sect has many skilled fighters."

"You're saying this a bit too late. Gather everyone to avoid being picked off by the Dharma Sect one by one."

"You underestimate the Chiefs. They're fine. If they're surrounded, I'll send others to reinforce them. I'm telling you this to keep you alert. Here," Xuan Pin said as he extended a hand, offering an old wooden box to Li Huowang.

"What's this?" Li Huowang took the box. While Xuan Pin's body was ethereal, the box was actually real.

"Some primordial breath found in Hou Shu. Use it when you see the Dragon Veins. There's not much this time, as there's very little Strayed Ones left. Many people have wasted it."

Li Huowang looked at the red box with a complex expression. He took it and tucked it into his robe.

Suddenly, Li Huowang tilted his head and dodged a flying stone shot from behind. He turned around and saw a motionless stone statue nearby.

Li Huowang frowned and drew his bronze coin sword, then swung it forcefully and shattered the statue. Dark green worms flew out and scattered everywhere.

It looked like stone, but it was more like a human-shaped cocoon.

Bai Lingmiao suddenly said, "Senior Li, there are many more of

those things ahead.”

Li Huowang turned to Xuan Pin and said, “Tell everyone to be careful. It seems the Dharma Sect has prepared a banquet for our arrival.”

1. Confucian classics. 

Chapter 692 - Soldiers

In the extremely muddy Cloud Swamp, the rain continued to fall relentlessly as Li Huowang led his group and struggled through barely passable paths.

The deeper they went, the more perilous it became. There was a constant stream of Dharma Sect followers emerging from unexpected places.

Besides these people, Li Huowang also saw crooked human statues, each one filled with wriggling green worms.

More peculiarly, these statues were not solitary. They were connected by root-like tendrils that intertwined beneath the soil.

As the number of these statues increased, Li Huowang felt as though he was trapped in the Dharma Sect's web. Although the statues didn't move, he had the nagging feeling they could spring to life at any moment.

Li Huowang came to an abrupt halt as his legs sank into the mud. It was clear this was a trap, and he would walk right into it if he continued onward.

"Are you sure the Dragon Veins are in the Cloud Swamp? Could this be a trick by the Dharma Sect?" Li Huowang asked Xuan Pin.

"Not even the Sitting Oblivion Dao could deceive me. I don't think they can either. Three Dragon Veins can indeed alter the feng shui of a place. This is a known fact."

Xuan Pin's words did little to improve Li Huowang's mood. It was not good to knowingly walk right into a trap.

Li Huowang pressed his temples, and materialized Peng Longteng, the monk, Qiu Chibao, and Jin Shanzhao.

Under his orders, they took the lead and forged a path forward. The rain intensified, shrouding the swamp in mist and reducing

visibility.

Dong dong dong~ The drum at Bai Lingmiao's waist was beat steadily, and the sound extended outwards through the rain.

Everything around Li Huowang gradually became clear in Bai Lingmiao's mind, allowing her to thwart several ambush attempts by the Dharma Sect.

Li Huowang had assumed that the enemies would become stronger, but the Dharma Sect's attacks suddenly ceased.

"Senior Li, there's an attack happening a mile to our left!"

"Let's go! Help them!" Li Huowang led his group swiftly towards the source of the commotion. He couldn't allow the Dharma Sect to defeat them one by one.

When he arrived, Li Huowang saw the Chief of Hou Shu's Surveillance Bureau, Zhang Tan, under attack. The statues seemed to come to life in the pouring rain, appearing and vanishing in the mist.

Sharp fangs extended from beneath Zhang Tan's mask, which clashed and vibrated rapidly as they made a clicking sound. The same sound echoed from the mist and responded in kind.

The ground suddenly cracked open. Five statues emerged like fingers from the earth and, grasping Zhang Tan like a hand.

Li Huowang gave some instructions, then immediately charged into the mist without hesitation, wielding his bronze coin sword to assist him.

Li Huowang initially thought he was merely helping an ally. However, as he stepped over a fallen statue, it suddenly exploded. A gleaming long sword was revealed from within, slashing towards his face.

Clang! The collision sent sparks flying. He saw that his purple-tassel sword left no mark on the opponent's weapon, making him realize he was facing a tough adversary.

A figure slowly emerged from the mist, dressed in a matador

outfit and wearing tall shoes. His head was bowed and his drenched black hair covered his face. Seven or eight long swords were protruding from his chest.

“What is this?” Li Huowang frowned.

“Be careful. This is a Si Qi Immortal Soldier,” Xuan Pin’s illusion answered.

“Immortal? What is an Immortal Soldier?” Li Huowang wanted to ask this question, but the Immortal Soldier twirled its sword and lunged at him before he could.

As Li Huowang prepared to defend, his body instinctively moved an inch to the left to narrowly avoid a scimitar from behind.

Peng Longteng’s massive body shielded Li Huowang from the Immortal Soldier in front. Li Huowang turned to see another Immortal Soldier emerge behind him, wielding a strange curved blade.

It had been a close call, and he would probably have been killed if not for Li Sui’s eyes on the back of his head spotting the ambush.

Two of them? As the thought crossed his mind, a spear burst from the ground and impaled Li Huowang’s left foot. They were also underground.

Another Immortal Soldier descended from above, ready to strike. At this moment, he understood that these people had targeted and encircled him!

He took a direct hit from the curved blade with his body while swinging the spine sword upward with his right hand. The crack forced the Immortal Soldier above to retreat.

Li Huowang used his six tentacles and pushed firmly to propel himself into the air. The Immortal Soldier who had retreated temporarily was not too far away. Li Huowang’s body flashed as he shifted his body above the Immortal Soldier and swung his bronze coin sword to decapitate that Immortal Soldier.

Flashes of cold light surrounded Li Huowang from all directions.

Swoosh! The rain halted in mid-air as all the Immortal Soldiers lunged at him with phantom images behind. “Break!”

The weapons of the four Immortal Soldiers collided with Li Huowang’s body, producing a grating metallic sound. The rain resumed its heavy downpour.

Li Huowang was suspended in mid-air by the various weapons. He endured the searing pain, took a deep breath, and roared, “You hurt my daughter!”

He scooped out his eyeball and squeezed it tightly. A strange color enveloped everyone.

Boom! Flames erupted from Li Huowang’s body and spread to the Immortal Soldiers, scorching them and turning them into charred figures resembling Li Huowang.

The fire burned Li Huowang’s skin and caused the falling rain to evaporate into steam.

The Immortal Soldiers attempted to retreat, but they moved extremely slowly due to Li Huowang’s eyeball sacrifice.

Since they were unable to withdraw, the Immortal Soldiers launched a desperate counterattack, which was exactly what Li Huowang wanted.

Despite being called Immortal Soldiers, Li Huowang believed they weren’t true immortals. Genuine immortals wouldn’t fear fire.

Soon, the four Immortal Soldiers fell onto the ground. Only their charred weapons were left behind as the flames devoured them.

Chapter 693 - Open

These Immortal Soldiers didn't seem to belong to the Dharma Sect—they appeared to be military creations.

This suggested that with the Dragon Veins' ownership changing, the military factions of Nanping and Si Qi had also switched allegiances.

Li Huowang didn't bother anymore with these people. While still engulfed in flames, he prepared to join the battle and help rescue the others.

He assumed the situation would resolve quickly, but the statues continued to emerge from the mist. Although they were no match for those like Li Huowang, they still kept everyone else busy.

Li Huowang realized what the enemy's strategy was. *They're stalling for time!*

Right then, the ground shook violently. The Earth Dragon was moving again.

The earthquake caused water in the swamp to flood out. As it shook, the expanded swamp quickly swallowed up anyone who couldn't find solid footing.

Despite the chaos, more Dharma Sect followers emerged from the mist, determined to drag someone down with them regardless of the risk of being consumed by the swamp.

Li Huowang had experienced the tremors caused by the Earth Dragon moving many times, and he knew what they signified.

"How many divisions have we lost?" Li Huowang shouted to Xuan Pin.

Xuan Pin showed him one finger in response.

Li Huowang muttered, "One division... That means one of the three Dragon Veins has been destroyed!"

This bad news stressed him out even more.

In such dire circumstances, there was no point in discussing any further. He gritted his teeth and led the others against the Dharma Sect's onslaught, advancing toward the center of Cloud Swamp.

As they neared the center, the number of worm-infested statues decreased. They were replaced by living and formidable Dharma Sect members.

The opponents didn't just consist of Dharma Sect members from Great Liang and Great Qi. There were also various sects that had pledged allegiance to the Dharma Sect, identifiable by the black cloths on their shoulders.

Li Huowang was still engulfed in flames and did not want to waste this opportunity. He charged at the front and used the fire burning him to dry the ground, kill the Dharma Sect followers, and pave the way for his allies.

They made swift progress with his lead. After two hours, they reached their destination—the deepest part of Cloud Swamp, which was unexpectedly a parched area.

A formidable stone fortress had been erected, and only Dharma Sect followers were visible behind the spiked defenses. The continuous rain and ominous dark sky added to the tense atmosphere.

Peng Longteng threw Li Huowang high into the air so that he could catch a glimpse of what lay behind the fortress.

There was a Dragon Vein formed from stacked emperors. It was pinned in a triangular quagmire by some massive stone pillars. As the Dragon Vein struggled, the mud shook violently, and a noxious mist filled the air.

Dharma Sect witches in wide robes circled and danced around the quagmire. They formed a writhing chain and used their human bodies to draw a living curse aimed at destroying the Dragon Vein.

Li Huowang wanted to observe more details, but he felt his body start to stiffen and turn to stone. The Dharma Sect had noticed him.

When Li Huowang landed back on the ground, he found everyone had gathered around him. Since both sides had revealed their cards, it was time to strategize.

“I’ll leave everything else to you. The Dragon Vein is mine,” Li Huowang said.

The Dragon Vein could resist most supernatural attacks, and he was the most experienced in dealing with it.

“That was my plan,” Xuan Pin replied. His form dissipated like smoke, and he quickly reappeared before Li Huowang. “Remember, our utmost goal is to reclaim the Dragon Vein.”

“But there’ll definitely be some high-ranking Dharma Sect members in a place like this. Don’t get entangled with them too much. I will assist you. We win if we take back the Dragon Vein.”

“Understood.”

Li Huowang glanced around at the unfamiliar faces and asked, “Who are they? What’s your plan?”

Though he didn’t recognize them, it was clear they weren’t from the Surveillance Bureau.

“Li Huowang, this is not the time for such trivialities. Focus on the bigger picture,” Xuan Pin said.

Li Huowang could sense the underlying tension in Xuan Pin’s words.

Despite being forced allies against the Dharma Sect, Xuan Pin still didn’t fully trust Li Huowang. Xuan Pin hid many things from Li Huowang just because he was Ji Zai’s Twisted One.

But Li Huowang didn’t fully trust them either.

He turned to Bai Lingmiao and instructed, “Stay back and be ready to retreat if things go wrong!”

The heads of Bai Lingmiao’s two upper bodies, clad in red veils,

gently moved up and down in unison.

Hou Shu's Chief sounded the horn, and everyone began to advance.

Armored cavalry charged forward, their murderous aura enveloping them like a giant sword that was aimed at the fortress.

"Kill!"

The fight erupted with a battle cry. Both sides unleashed their abilities against each other.

Li Huowang ignored the chaos around him and burrowed into the ground instead. He moved his tentacles like an octopus as he moved towards the fortress.

He knew the Dharma Sect had experts, so he did not advance by himself. Li Huowang was accompanied by his allies as they waited for the right moment. He knew that they shouldn't be impatient, especially at a time like this.

Two hours later, the fortress was breached. The entire heart of the Cloud Swamp was thrust into chaos as incantations and battle cries filled the air.

Li Huowang spotted Zheng Boqiao of the Fangxian Sect chanting a spell that turned a Dharma Sect witch into a ball of flesh and swallowed him whole. He knew his opportunity had arrived.

He took out a box he carried and stuffed it into his mouth. Li Sui watched a bulge in her dad's throat slide downwards.

Suddenly, the surrounding mud turned to transparent water, and Li Huowang's charred skin began to heal rapidly.

"Li Sui! Let's go!" Li Huowang said, leaping upward as a spring gushed from the ground.

The mysterious appearance of the spring drew the attention of the people on the battlefield, and Li Huowang, hidden from view, swiftly approached the Dragon Vein. As he moved closer, the agonized roars from the Dragon Vein assaulted his mind.

Li Huowang clenched his fists when he was near the edge of

the quagmire. He watched the churning mud solidify while the stone pillars that pinned the Dragon Vein's body liquefied.

Just as he started to make his move, an unexpected change occurred. The colors of the stone pillars and mud all faded to black and white. Only the golden dragon robes on the Dragon Vein retained their hue, providing a stark contrast.

Who's there? What sect's technique is this? This thought had barely formed when Li Huowang noticed the colors on his body fading.

It was like he was transforming into a figure from a grayscale landscape painting.

Chapter 694 - Scholar

Li Huowang had lost all hue.

He looked down at his now grayscale self, then he drew a dagger and slashed his palm. Black blood flowed out instead of red.

This wasn't just an illusion but rather some strange supernatural power from a sect.

An elderly voice rang in Li Huowang's ears. "Yu Qing captures the essence, Da Fan divides the spirit, Yuan Gang flows and evolves, Xing Zhu stabilizes the realm, Chang Yang dispels Yin, Zhong Yuan conceals shadows!"

Then even the black and gray shades on Li Huowang gradually faded, turning an eerie white. His facial features blurred and distorted as the colors drained away.

Li Huowang turned towards the voice and saw an old scholar with a black beard. He wore a silk hat and a purple robe embroidered with green patterns.

One of his hands rested near a sword at his waist, another hand held a feather fan, and a third painted quickly on a scroll suspended in mid-air.

Li Huowang didn't know which sect or faction this three-handed scholar belonged to, but the black cloth on his shoulder made it clear whose side he was on. There was no need for conversation.

The Dragon Vein was evidently guarded, which was as expected.

Swoosh!

Li Huowang raised his spine sword and swung it forcefully, sending a rift flying towards the scholar.

The rift was spraying a strange liquid from the Great Qi.

Clang!

Nevertheless, a massive guandao[1] with a black tassel swiftly sliced the rift apart.

It was the act of an eight-foot-tall general. He stood imposingly as he pointed menacingly at Li Huowang with two fingers.

“Ha! You rogue, you dare to provoke me?! Shameless scoundrel, do you think a crow can occupy a phoenix’s nest? Who do you think you are, pushing forward with all your schemes?”

Li Huowang thought this was an Immortal Soldier at first, but when the general moved, Li Huowang noticed he was as thin as paper. It was as if the general had just stepped out of a painting. Furthermore, his body only had black and white colors.

Li Huowang studied the scholar’s brush and understood the general’s origin.

“Sink!” Li Huowang roared.

The ground beneath the scholar and general turned to quicksand and dragged them down.

The three-handed scholar was unfazed by Li Huowang’s attack. He lifted his feather fan and waved it at Li Huowang. A gust blew over and lifted the burly general off the ground. He floated towards Li Huowang like a kite.

When the general was close, he unfurled like a massive flag and raised his guandao to strike at Li Huowang’s head.

“Fire!” Li Huowang yelled.

With a click, Li Jiancheng’s thumb turned the gear of the plastic lighter. It sparked, and an orange-blue flame ignited, reflecting in Li Huowang’s eyes.

Boom!

The paper general burst into flames in midair.

Li Huowang crashed through the general’s disintegrating body, with the red flames giving Li Huowang a new color. He looked like

a fiery comet as he lunged at the scholar.

The old scholar realized he had met a formidable opponent. He pulled out his trump card and drew rapidly on his feather fan.

He exclaimed, "Supreme of the supreme, the sky within the sky! Mysterious primal energy, chaos before all! Three realms of enlightenment transforming all heavens, Grand Luo Yu Qing, void and natural!"

Li Huowang's fire quickly faded, turning into a grayish color.

Very quickly after, even the gray was erased. It seemed he was going to lose all color.

Li Huowang didn't know which Siming's power the scholar was borrowing, but it was clear to him that he would disappear forever once all of his colors were erased.

Right before he turned utterly transparent, Li Huowang chanted inwardly, *I have color! My body has color! My hair is black! My blood is red!*

Li Huowang started to regain color. However, the scholar countered, and Li Huowang's colors quickly faded again. They reached a deadlock.

Then Li Sui's voice echoed in Li Huowang's mind, *My father has color! His body has color! His hair is black! His blood is red!*

Surprisingly, this helped Li Huowang slowly regain his colors. Li Sui was able to help him under such circumstances.

This was a new experience for Li Huowang. No, it was actually the second time. The first was when Dan Yangzi borrowed his Strayed One's power within his stomach.

Li Huowang focused on dealing with the opponent first. The old scholar saw his hidden abilities were useful and knew he was about to lose.

In despair, the old scholar watched Li Huowang raise his spine sword. Then Xuan Pin suddenly appeared beside the scholar and swiftly waved his sleeve across, taking off the scholar's head.

The scholar's body crumpled to the ground. This left Li Huowang feeling frustrated, like he was punching air.

"Go deal with the Dragon Vein. Leave the rest to us," Xuan Pin said.

Li Huowang barked, "Where were you!? I had almost finished him off by the time you showed up!"

He was reminded of his classmate stealing a win from him back in a game.

"Don't think I wasn't busy. The fact you could duel leisurely with this scholar of Minglun Hall meant we blocked the other troubles for you."

Li Huowang looked at the chaos around him and had no time to argue. He turned back towards the distant quagmire.

With the old scholar dead, the colors near the pit returned to normal. Li Huowang made haste. He drew his bronze coin sword and hurled it at the stone pillars pinning the Dragon Vein.

The sword extended like a whip and coiled around a pillar.

"Rise!" Li Huowang bellowed and yanked the massive pillar free.

Accompanied by the dragon's roar, the Dragon Vein struggled even more violently.

Li Huowang saw hope, and he continued to pull out the remaining pillars.

One by one, the pillars were uprooted, and the first Dragon Vein began to rise from the mud.

He noticed the panicked expression of the emperor atop the Dragon Vein. Li Huowang was rather stumped. Did the Dharma Sect not control the Dragon Vein like Shai Zi had previously? Was it because they couldn't control it?

Nevertheless, it was a piece of good news. They had rescued the Dragon Vein, and the Dharma Sect hadn't found a way to control it yet.

It made Li Huowang happy to witness this, as he did not need to battle the Dragon Vein.

Li Huowang was about to speak to the chubby emperor. However, the frightened emperor was dragged along the Dragon Vein and then sent flying into the sky in terror.

1. A Chinese polearm. 🤖

Chapter 695 - Natural Disaster

Amidst the chaotic battlefield, just as Li Huowang was trying to understand what the freed Dragon Vein intended to do, he saw the emperor shouting excitedly to the surrounding warriors.

“Run! Run quickly! This is a trap! The Dharma Sect is using the Dragon Vein as bait to catch you all!”

An earth-shaking rumble erupted suddenly and caused the ground to tremble violently.

The clearing at the center of Cloud Swamp shook intensely, as if the entire fortress, or rather, the entire ground, had come to life.

It turned out that destroying the Dragon Vein was just a ruse. The Dharma Sect’s plan wasn’t merely to destroy the Dragon Vein. They wanted to use the pretext of destroying it as a trap to capture all the Surveillance Bureau Chiefs in one fell swoop!

At that moment, the sky suddenly darkened. It was a Natural Disaster.

Li Huowang felt the gaze in the sky fixed on him, and a cold sweat trickled down his face. He realized he was in serious trouble.

He had initially thought that no matter how many experts the Dharma Sect deployed, they couldn’t possibly defeat the three Chiefs and the top experts from the Surveillance Bureau.

Even if there was an ambush, he was confident he could escape with Miaomiao. But no one expected that god Yu’er would intervene directly!

This wasn’t the Dharma Sect’s conspiracy—it was God Yu’er’s scheme! He was pulling out all the stops to eliminate the mortal obstacles.

Li Huowang knew that although god Yu'er couldn't descend yet, it didn't mean he couldn't act in other ways. Since he had set this trap personally, more trouble was surely on the way.

"Run! Miaomiao, retreat quickly!"

Peng Longteng suddenly appeared beside Li Huowang, grabbed him with one hand, and threw him towards the distant swamp.

From a great distance, a crane's cry echoed, causing their hair to stand up. The ground of Cloud Swamp shook even more violently.

Suddenly, stone fangs resembling pillars rose from the surrounding marsh and blocked Li Huowang's path in mid-air. Before he could turn, giant spikes rose around the entire fortress.

These spikes interlocked and shook violently, then formed a gigantic mouth that swallowed the entire fortress at the center of the Cloud Swamp.

Everything went silent as they were plunged into darkness.

Xuan Pin raised a light to illuminate the surroundings, causing the crowd to erupt in chaos. Both sides ignored everything else and scattered in all directions.

The panic on their faces was genuine. Clearly, the Dharma Sect hadn't informed its members that this was a trap.

Li Huowang forced himself to stay calm. He approached Xuan Pin and asked, "What method did god Yu'er use? What kind of stomach are we in now?"

Xuan Pin answered him concisely, "Earth Dragon."

"What? Earth Dragons are real?" Li Huowang's pupils contracted. He had always thought the so-called Earth Dragon turning was just a metaphor for earthquakes, but it was real!

The dark surroundings trembled slightly, suggesting that the Earth Dragon was burrowing deeper into the ground. They would be trapped forever if they didn't find a way out soon.

Li Huowang walked towards the side. He had to escape from

this place, even if he had to bust a hole in this so-called Earth Dragon.

Soon, he reached the boundary and began melting the iron-hard walls to create a large gap, despite their hardness.

However, as he continued, an unexpected itching sensation struck him. He reached into his abdominal wound and pulled out several wriggling worms.

Li Huowang was reminded of the human statues in Cloud Swamp.

“Dad, there are a lot of worms in your stomach, and they’re growing in number. I’ll throw them all out.”

Li Sui’s tentacles kept removing the worms from Li Huowang’s stomach, but Li Huowang noticed that the smooth skin of Li Sui’s tentacles was also crawling with worms. His heart sank.

The Earth Dragon was digesting both humans and Li Sui too.

His expression became even grimmer as he realized that the digestion was happening internally and externally.

“Ahhh!” Lu Xiucui’s scream pierced the air. When Li Huowang turned, he saw all sorts of evil spirits wrapped in black smoke emerging from his shadow.

Inside this Earth Dragon’s belly, everyone’s shadow had become a door that could not be closed, and evil spirits were summoned endlessly.

Though these spirits were only about as strong as the Wandering Gods, their numbers were endless, continually emerging no matter how many were killed.

“Xuan Pin! Do something!” Li Huowang shouted.

“Sorry, I can’t. I had already escaped when the Earth Dragon opened its mouth. It’s just an illusion beside you,” Xuan Pin said as his body began to melt.

“What did you say?” Li Huowang looked at him in disbelief.

“I covered all my bases. Since I came to Hou Shu to rescue the

Dragon Vein, I naturally had a backup plan. Don't tell me you didn't have one too?"

Li Huowang reached into his stomach and pulled out a palm-sized piece of human skin as he gritted his teeth. Of course, he had prepared a backup plan. He had secretly peeled two layers of his skin while traveling and made two life-saving artifacts, one for himself and one for Miaomiao. But in this situation, his backup plan was useless!

Li Huowang looked around quickly and saw that Xuan Pin wasn't the only one who got away—Hou Shu's Chief Zhang Tan and many others had escaped too.

The only consolation was that Si Qi's Chief Zheng Boqiao hadn't escaped either. He looked around with a stern face, seemingly calculating his next move. It seemed his prepared backup plan didn't work either.

"No matter, just wait a bit. The version of myself outside is definitely working on a way to get you all out. Rest assured, I won't abandon you. After all, the two Dragon Veins are here too."

"Wait!?! Do you think we can afford to wait?" Li Huowang shouted as he sliced through an approaching evil spirit with his sword and pointed at the chaos around them.

In a short time, the various evil spirits had crowded the surroundings. Those with weaker cultivation bases had already fallen to the worms and spirits, and the situation was becoming increasingly dire.

"Don't panic. My other self will find a way. Besides, you won't die so easily," Xuan Pin said, and then his body completely melted away.

At that moment, Li Sui's voice emerged in Li Huowang's mind, filled with fear and terror for the first time. "Dad, there are a lot of worms in my stomach too. They're eating my flesh. Am I going to die?"

Chapter 696 - Stomach

Li Huowang stopped his daughter from thinking such negative thoughts. “Don’t think about it! You won’t die!”

He continued, “Come! Follow me and repeat after me! I don’t have any worms in my body! I don’t have any worms in my body!”

As Li Huowang used his primordial breath, the worms in his body slowly transformed into his flesh.

Even though the problem had been dealt with temporarily, they were still in danger. Li Huowang was not afraid of evil entities, but rather of the endless number of them.

As they shouted and growled, the evil entities all pounced towards Li Huowang.

Shua! The bronze coin sword whipped at the evil entities, and they were all sliced in half. The dead evil entities were reduced to a cloud of black smoke.

Right after the smoke had just dispersed, a new wave of evil entities lunged at Li Huowang.

“Miaomiao!” Li Huowang raised the glowing stone in his hand to find Bai Lingmiao.

“Senior Li, I’m here!”

Li Huowang followed the voice and soon found the members of the White Lotus Sect sitting cross-legged in a lotus pattern.

Their bodies were naked from the top and had a tattoo of a white donkey. They chanted in unison, “Formless yet complete, born before the creation of Heaven and Earth. Silent and boundless, yet standing alone without change. It goes without peril, for it could be the Mother of the world.”

Li Huowang was surprised that none of the sitting figures, including Bai Lingmiao in the middle, had worms on their bodies.

The evil entities also refused to step close to them.

Bai Lingmiao's upper body was divided in half. She sat with her legs crossed and chanted with both mouths, while the conjoined lotus engraving on her forehead glowed softly.

Li Huowang slammed his tentacles down and jumped forward. He appeared in front of Bai Lingmiao. "So? Is there a way for the White Lotus Sect to break out of here?"

Both of Bai Lingmiao's heads shook simultaneously. "No. This is a strange space."

Li Huowang understood that if they didn't get out soon, they would all be in mortal danger.

How should I escape?

When Li Huowang saw the others fighting off the evil entities, he had an idea. *There might be a chance.*

"Everyone, come here!" Li Huowang shouted. "We cannot fight alone. Let's all work together to escape! The worms and evil entities won't get near the White Lotus Sect!"

Those who survived up until now were competent and strong. They saw the White Lotus Sect was doing well and understood what might be happening.

Under Li Huowang's lead, the survivors started to move towards the White Lotus Sect.

Li Huowang never forgot the two Dragon Veins. He rescued one of them during the chaos. The Dragon Veins had been bait all along, but Li Huowang had no choice but to bite into them if he wanted to save the world.

As they grouped where the White Lotus Sect was, the members of the White Lotus Sect started to face difficulties in their chant. Worms began growing out of their bodies.

Their burden increased as the amount of people they had to protect increased.

"Can you ask your people to move towards the wall?" Li

Huowang was agitated by how serious the situation was.

Bai Lingmiao nodded with difficulty. “Yes.”

Everyone followed the White Lotus Sect members as they slowly moved towards the south. Li Huowang extended several tentacles to carry Bai Lingmiao above his head as he quickly followed them.

The White Lotus Sect members moved slowly because it was difficult to chant while walking, but thankfully they arrived at the wall without any issues.

Li Huowang got to the point. “Everyone, we need to dig here if we want to survive! We need to dig out a hole from inside the Earth Dragon’s stomach!”

Li Huowang then used his purple-tassel sword to draw a large circle on the stomach lining of the Earth Dragon. “Do not think that it’s impossible! I just tried digging, and the walls were soft! Everyone, start digging so we can get out of here alive!”

Without the worms and evil entities attacking them, they all heeded Li Huowang’s words and started using their individual techniques to dig out a path.

Zheng Boqiao did not stand idly either. He spat out numerous pills and gave them to everyone.

Under their relentless attacks, the circle that Li Huowang had drawn on the stomach lining disappeared as a large hole formed.

It’s working! Li Huowang saw that they had hope of escaping the place.

“Go! Get inside!” Li Huowang shouted, and they started digging deeper. The hole got larger and larger.

“Senior Li! Faster! Everyone is at their limits!” The members of the White Lotus Sect were already pale from overexertion as they almost toppled over.

Bai Lingmiao’s red veil was already drenched in sweat. Li Huowang glared at the hole and willed it to widen faster.

The hole grew wider as if it had become as soft as rubber, allowing them to dig through it more quickly.

Sensing Li Huowang's strange powers, Zheng Boqiao brought out the ace in his sleeve. He rolled up his sleeve and revealed his arms covered in large warts. He cut open one of the warts with his fingernail and took out something from the inside.

"Here!" he threw a writhing ball of flesh to Li Huowang. "Eat it! It's the pill that I've been preserving for years! It will temporarily grant you the strength of a half-Immortal!"

Li Huowang quickly swallowed it.

The moment he did, he felt his stomach turning and churning.

He barely held his stomach with his hands when a strong force shot upwards and split his head apart. At the base of where his head was split in half was another fist-sized head.

The small head started growing until it reached the average size of a head. The two halves of his original head grew out too. Soon, Li Huowang had three heads on his shoulders.

Splat. Two pairs of bloody arms sprouted from Li Huowang's back. Zheng Boqiao's pill had turned Li Huowang into a monstrosity with three heads and six arms!

Li Huowang felt a profound sensation: the amount of his primordial breath had tripled, just like his head.

Li Huowang raised his right hand, and the Earth Dragon's stomach hole grew wider.

"Go!" All three of Li Huowang's mouths shouted in unison as they ran into the hole.

With Li Huowang's guidance, everyone started moving quickly, but the tunnel was endless, as if the Earth Dragon's stomach was incredibly thick.

"Faster! Faster!" Li Huowang ran as fast as he could. The pressure in his three heads started to make his brain pulse in pain.

Just then, Li Huowang heard something chasing them from

behind. The head on his left turned around and saw a wall heading towards them—an entire wall of evil entities!

“Ack!” One of the members from the White Lotus Sect spat out blood and fell to the ground. The air started to quiver as Li Huowang felt worms emerging from the depths of his stomach once more.

But they had no choice but to continue to run forward. He led everyone as they ran like an arrow shot out of the bow.

As the first devotee fell, the second and third soon followed—more and more devotees of the White Lotus Sect fell. Everyone felt the worms growing in their body while the wall of evil entities closed in on them.

“Faster! We need to be faster!” Just as the evil entities almost devoured all of them, Li Huowang suddenly felt no resistance in front of him. They escaped!

Chapter 697 - New

As Li Huowang opened up the hole, everyone ran forward and saw that they were in a very open space. They were overjoyed upon realizing they had escaped.

Contrary to their expectations, the Earth Dragon wasn't underground. They escaped from its stomach and were now on the surface. The skies were dark, as though the Natural Disaster was still ongoing.

Li Huowang dared not look up at god Yu'er. He wasn't sure where he was, but he was sure he was no longer at Cloud Swamp.

A piercing scream rang out, followed by the sight of the evil entities dragging those too close to the hole back into the darkness.

"Quick! We need to run away now! The Earth Dragon is still influencing us because the worms in our stomachs aren't gone yet!"

Li Huowang quickly dragged Bai Lingmiao and the others away from the hole.

As they walked away, they saw that the evil entities had left them alone, and everyone sighed in relief.

Suddenly, Li Huowang stopped and looked at a shimmering illusion in the darkness. The illusion wore a blue Daoist robe and a Daoist crown, with leprosy evident on his balding head. He flashed a toothy grin, exposing his yellow teeth.

"Hohoho~ My dear disciple, you did a great job!"

"Scram!" Li Huowang ignored Dan Yangzi and swung his spine sword at him. The rift flew quickly, destroying Dan Yangzi without leaving a trace.

"Senior Li? What's wrong?" Bai Lingmiao looked at him with worry.

"Huh? Did you not see Dan Yangzi just now?"

“Where? There wasn’t anyone there. What happened to you? I thought you said your illness had been cured?” Bai Lingmiao held his hand with worry.

She can’t see it? Is it just me? Did my illness—

He suddenly looked at the illusion of the old monk and urgently asked, “Monk! Did you see that just now? Did you see that balding Daoist?”

Someone from the crowd suddenly interrupted him as the monk was going to answer.

“Li Huowang, what’s wrong with you?” Zheng Boqiao approached and looked at all of Li Huowang’s three heads. “Move faster! The Earth Dragon is too powerful. The worms in our bodies are still alive!”

“Father... There’s more and more worms in my stomach,” Li Sui said, her voice tinged with worry and sadness.

Li Huowang continued moving forward as he looked at the spot where Dan Yangzi had disappeared. He didn’t have the luxury to dwell on it right now.

Everyone moved faster to distance themselves from the Earth Dragon in hopes that the worms would die off.

After fifteen minutes, Li Huowang saw another unexpected person.

It was Shai Zi, dressed in the emperor's dragon robes. “Hohoho, Hong Zhong? Long time no see. Don’t you think it’s time to wake up after getting imprisoned in my illusion for so long?”

“What the fuck is wrong with me?” This time, he ignored the illusion and continued moving forward.

But this time, he was not the only one who saw an illusion.

“Father? Mother?” Tears streamed down from Bai Lingmiao’s red veil as she stood there silently. She stared into the darkness as if she saw her parents. Her face was a mixture of sadness and longing.

Li Huowang followed her gaze but saw nothing.

“Miaomiao! What did you see?” As Li Huowang asked, he realized that the others were staring into the darkness, too.

“I didn’t kill them! Scram! Go find someone else!”

“Master! Your disciple has been unfilial to you!”

“Chun Xiang? Why are you here? Xuan Pin, where are you? Come out!”

Li Huowang realized that he was not going crazy. The space around them was actually making them see things!

“Wait, don’t panic! It’s an illusion! Everything is fake!” Li Huowang warned them.

When they heard Li Huowang shouting, most of them tried to break free from the illusions, but they all failed. Some even attacked the illusions, which was also fruitless.

“We need to get out of the range of the Earth Dragon’s corpse!” No matter how many illusions there were, they posed no threat. The actual danger lay in the worms in their stomachs.

The others quickly followed Li Huowang, seeing him as their undisputed leader and savior.

Everyone ignored the illusions and walked forward, but just a few minutes later, they all encountered something unexpected. Another wall of stomach lining appeared in front of them. They were still trapped inside of the Earth Dragon.

“Impossible!” Li Huowang gouged out one of his six eyes and threw it into the air along with two glowing rocks.

Only then did he see what was happening. They had not escaped the Earth Dragon’s corpse—they had walked into another one of its stomachs!

“Hahahaha! You must be stupefied, right?” Shai Zi appeared again to taunt Li Huowang.

Is this the ability of the Earth Dragon’s stomach? What exactly is an Earth Dragon?! Li Huowang tried to figure out another way to escape.

“Father... It hurts... There are way too many worms. I can’t hold on any longer.” The pale green worms started to burrow out of Li Huowang as they shaved off his flesh.

Just then, a tsunami of evil entities surged towards them. All of them despaired, knowing it was a death sentence.

“I don’t want to die like this! I refuse!” An old man holding a Soul Calling Banner[1] fell backward and exploded into a clump of green worms.

Li Huowang tried to rally everyone to break through the stomach lining again. However, he failed to do so as the worms, evil entities, and illusions made it impossible for everyone to cooperate.

As they were infested with even more worms, they saw more illusions and evil entities.

Li Huowang refused to give up. He used all of his techniques to save Bai Lingmiao and Li Sui. He couldn’t let them die here.

As the situation became more chaotic, more and more people died. Despite this, Bai Lingmiao stood still, listening to the cursing of her family’s illusion.

“You bitch! He’s the one who killed your father! Why haven’t you taken revenge for me? Are you still human?”

“I really didn’t think you were someone like this. How could you be like this? Why did you become so heartless?”

“Sister, are you a bitch?”

Bai Lingmiao cried. She saw Li Huowang struggling and noticed that he was on the verge of collapsing—more than half of his body had turned into worms.

“Senior Li, you can use the Cang-Qiang Ascension to escape.” Bai Lingmiao pointed at the Profound Records being held by Lu Xiucui.

“I want to, but I can’t!” Li Huowang howled in anger. He knew that the Cang-Qiang Ascension could rescue all of them, but where

could he find the most intense mental pain right now?

Bai Lingmiao pursed her lips and shook her head, then smiled softly. “Don’t worry, Senior Li. Let me help you.”

Bai Lingmiao turned around. She gave a Flesh Book[2] to one of her followers before she leaped into the crowd of evil entities.

1. A flag that attracts spirits. 📖
2. A message written on one’s own skin. 📖

Chapter 698 - Ascension

When the illusion of the Bai family appeared, the Second Deity immediately sensed how unstable her other self's emotions had become.

They are fake! They are illusions! We are still in the stomach of the Earth Dragon. This place can conjure up hallucinations! The Second Deity knew what Bai Lingmiao was thinking and tried to persuade her.

Do not doubt the Heavenly Mater! Have you forgotten that she guided everyone to the Void Home? Your family is waiting for you there! These are merely illusions!

But Bai Lingmiao's sorrowful voice came from beside the Second Deity. "I know. I know they are fake, but..."

The Second Deity then sensed the intense sadness flooding over from her other half.

I can't believe you're still so useless despite becoming the Saintess of the White Lotus Sect! The Second Deity looked through her red veil at the chaos around them.

She pressed her red fingernails on her belly and felt the wriggling worms inside.

The Second Deity then looked at Li Huowang. She understood how dire the situation was when even Li Huowang didn't have a plan to deal with it.

There was no time to think things through. If they didn't come up with a plan now, everyone would die right there and then.

The Second Deity had one last hope. She quickly made a lotus seal with both hands and positioned it in front of her stomach. Her mouth was filled with rows of sharp teeth as she chanted quickly.

"In the beginning, when there was nothing but chaos, a divine

light burst forth. From the formless void came the Heavens. The void gave birth to the One, and the One gave birth to Two. The Two formed Yin and Yang, forming the Four Symbols, and from there the Five Elements and Eight Trigrams were created.”

As she chanted, the conjoined lotus engraved on their foreheads flashed. The Second Deity was trying to invite the Heavenly Mater to possess their body, but there was a thin barrier interfering and preventing the Heavenly Mater from manifesting.

As time passed, the Second Deity felt her link to the Heavenly Mater weakening.

Bai Lingmiao felt the same. Her voice trembled as she said, “I have a plan.”

The Second Deity huffed indignantly and said, “Then why didn’t you say so?!”

“Because we might need to die.”

“Then what’s the point?! Might as well not say it!”

“But then at least Senior Li and Suisui can live. I don’t want them to die.”

“Fine!”

Pain. Unbearable pain. It hurt so much that the Second Deity even winced at her own thoughts.

She felt the evil entities gnawing off her hair and fingernails. They gouged out her eyeballs and bit into her body. Did she regret it? The Second Deity didn’t think so. She didn’t regret her actions, regardless of their cost.

“Miaomiao!” She heard Li Huowang faintly, his voice coming from outside the wave of evil entities.

“What are you shouting for? Hurry up and use the Cang-Qiang Ascension to escape! You deserve to die if you waste my life and don’t use the Cang-Qiang Ascension!”

The Second Deity opened her mouth and bit into one of the evil entities. Her sharp teeth ripped apart the evil entity’s head.

But her other half, Bai Lingmiao, had already lost both of her eyes as she cried tears of blood. She felt her body dissipating slowly, and for some reason, the pain in her heart made her feel better.

Li Huowang had run into a group of evil entities. He ignored their attacks as he tried to find Bai Lingmiao.

After searching around, he only found her two eyeballs and tattered clothes. He howled as intense pain came from the deepest recesses of his heart.

Memories of Bai Lingmiao accompanying him when they escaped the Zephyr Temple surfaced in his mind. He vividly recalled everything they had endured together.

Li Huowang felt as if his heart had been put through a blender. Bai Lingmiao was dead. Bai Lingmiao, the girl he had sworn to bring back and marry, was dead.

Even at the very end, she still thought that Li Huowang's life was more important than her own.

Li Huowang placed the Profound Records onto the ground as his arms trembled. His emotions collapsed as he chattered his teeth uncontrollably.

He stabbed two stakes into his abdomen and tore his body open.

A giant clump of worms fell forward from the sudden opening in his body.

“AAAH!”

Li Huowang raised the stakes covered in his flesh and stabbed into the Profound Records, which were glowing in red light.

Swoosh! Black flames sprayed forth everywhere.

Several tentacles wielding different torture tools stabbed into Li Huowang's body again and again.

Blood, flesh, and worms flew into the air.

When the most intense mental and physical pain merged in Li

Huowang's body, he felt a familiar gaze coming from below him.

Li Huowang's organs rearranged and converged onto themselves. Suddenly, his skin burst open like fish scales as his flaps of skin vibrated intensely like the wings of an insect.

Facing the unexpected change in his body, Li Huowang once again felt Ba-Hui's gaze coming from the depths of the ground and noticed a bewitching scent.

Under Ba-Hui's influence, Li Huowang's physical and mental pain changed into something else.

The pain he had inflicted on himself started to affect everything around him. Worms, evil entities, and even the other survivors fell onto the ground as they shouted in despair.

The stomach lining of the Earth Dragon came to life. It cracked, with contorted faces crying out in pain appearing on the walls.

The entire ground shook, and a low groan could be heard. The Earth Dragon was also affected by the intense pain.

"AAAAAH!" Li Huowang stood up and stabbed both hands into the ground, right where he felt the gaze of Ba-Hui coming from.

Pop! One of Li Huowang's heads blew apart, followed by the second one shortly after.

When the third head in the middle was on the verge of popping, the ground suddenly split open, making everyone fall through it.

They fell very quickly and soon heard the wind howling around them. Li Huowang looked down and saw the night sky.

He didn't know what happened. Somehow, they had been inverted in the Earth Dragon's stomach.

Li Huowang and the others didn't slow down as they fell towards the dark sky. Just then, he smelled Ba-Hui's voice and also a strange voice. It was the bizarre call of a crane.

Chapter 699 - Above The Heavens

No, it's not the cry of a crane! Li Huowang used his melded senses to feel the sound of the crane. He realized what the crane's cry really was.

It wasn't a voice—it was one of god Yu'er's hands, or rather, something that resembled a tree branch from god Yu'er. God Yu'er was formless and shapeless. When someone heard these cries, it meant that god Yu'er had touched them.

The sound of the crying crane resonated once again, and Li Huowang felt that god Yu'er had taken over his vocal cords and hijacked his voice!

Despite the intense pain, Li Huowang gripped his neck with his bloody hands to prevent himself from making any noise.

They fell further and further into the dark sky. Li Huowang felt that if he kept falling, he would eventually reach the Baiyu Capital again!

However, he was not planning to run away. As the cries of the crane grew louder, Li Huowang snarled and stuffed his hands into his throat.

Li Huowang tore out his vocal cords and threw them into the heavens below him with all his might. He saw his vocal cords spreading apart like butterflies as they released the crane's call.

As if on cue, everything around his vocal chord grew a mouth, and gradually, the crane's voice grew louder.

The crane's cry reached a crescendo as a female voice filled with sympathy interjected. The voice was filled with sadness and boundless kindness.

“I cried as my son left the village—his whereabouts are now unknown to us. I cry as I don’t know where he is, for there are no letters from him. I cry when I cannot see him—when will he come back and see us again? I cried when I realized it would be difficult for him to come back, for how would his sins be tolerated? I cried when I approached the end of my life, as I knew he wouldn’t be able to see his mother again.

The crane’s voice grew quieter as the screaming voices of the people and evil entities around Li Huowang were audible again.

As the darkness transformed into a lotus, Li Huowang used his melded five senses to look into it.

He pulled open the curtains and revealed the darkness outside. His neighborhood was dark due to a power outage. “Huowang, look! The electricity is coming back!”

The next instant, the heavens and earth inverted as Li Huowang and everyone else fell downwards. They once again saw the night sky painted with stars. Li Huowang knew that the Natural Disaster had ended.

The wind blew past them as they fell from the skies. A tentacle sprouted out of Li Huowang’s throat and grabbed his vocal cords in the air before quickly retracting back into his throat.

Bam! Li Huowang fell into an inn. He lay on the ground and stared into the skies as blood and corpses rained down around him, painting the inn red in the process.

Li Huowang’s vibrating flesh scales had turned back to normal wounds.

He felt his body was on the verge of collapsing. He used the last of his strength to stand up, and then shouted to his reflection in his pool of blood, “Ji Zai! Get the fuck over here! I don’t care what you are doing right now!”

“What’s wrong? What’s happening?” His reflection moved. “Sorry, I was busy saving someone, I think?”

Li Huowang clenched his fist and punched his reflection as he cried out, "Miaomiao is dead! Bai Lingmiao is dead! Why did I become your Twisted One? Why do you think I entrusted my fate to someone like you? That's because I wanted to protect Miaomiao and the others! But where were you? Is this how you repay me?! Why?! Why are the other Simings so strong while you are so useless?! You have three and a half Heavenly Daos, but you can't even protect a single girl! I had to borrow Ba-Hui's strength through the Cang-Qiang Ascension to escape the Earth Dragon's stomach. You are useless!"

"You have to rely on yourself. Only then can we win together."

"Stop giving me such bullshit!" With the support of the tentacles, Li Huowang staggered back upwards and pointed at his reflection.

"Miaomiao is dead! Revive her! Find a way to give her back her life! Or I will let someone else become your Twisted One instead!"

"Hm..." His reflection in the pool of blood thought about it. "She's not dead, though."

"She's not dead?" A glimmer of hope lit up in Li Huowang's heart. He looked around and checked the corpses around him.

"Wait, let me think about it... Oh, right. Extend both of your arms."

"Extend my arms?" Li Huowang extended his arms and a body promptly fell from the sky, breaking them.

He looked down and saw that it was none other than Bai Lingmiao, or rather, half of her. Her body had been bitten to pieces, and her usual clean look was nowhere to be seen. She was covered in blood and gore, with pieces of flesh hanging from her body.

There is supposed to be another half of her upper body, but she's already so tattered. Wait, what if...? Just then, the second half of her upper body fell from the sky.

This time, he was prepared. He quickly caught the second half using his numerous tentacles.

Li Huowang used his teeth to remove the red veil, revealing the bestial face underneath it. With barely any life left in her gaze, Bai Lingmiao looked at Li Huowang.

She opened her mouth, revealing her sharp fangs. Her forked tongue drooped out when she saw Li Huowang's shocked face. "I wanted you to use the Cang-Qiang Ascension to escape, but that didn't mean I had to die. I haven't lived a full life yet!"

Li Huowang was crying tears of joy as he hugged her.

He quickly checked the other Bai Lingmiao and saw she was still alive despite being badly injured.

"Miaomiao, stay still! You need to endure this!" Li Huowang brought out the Fiery Scripture and placed Bai Lingmiao's body together.

He started chanting while the Second Deity used the drum to call for the White Immortal Family.

Chapter 700 - Savior

“Even though we lost a lot of men this time, we technically won. The Dharma Sect tried to ambush us but lost two Dragon Veins instead.”

Xuan Pin was talking to Li Huowang in a rather simple room.

The Liang Kingdom’s Surveillance Bureau Chief, Xuan Pin, was satisfied and praised Li Huowang. “Entering the Earth Dragon’s stomach and emerging unscathed is a miraculous feat. I knew you were very strong when I first saw you. If you help us continuously like this, the Dharma Sect will be destroyed easily.”

Li Huowang ignored Xuan Pin as he shaved off his flesh to feed Li Sui. She had suffered grave injuries this time.

“But you have to be careful next time. Now that you’ve foiled the plans of the Dharma Sect, they won’t let you off so easily.”

Li Huowang twined Li Sui’s tentacles around his fingers before stuffing the tentacles back into his stomach. “Where were you and the others when we were trapped in the Earth Dragon’s stomach? Why didn’t you come and rescue us?”

“We managed to escape the Earth Dragon but didn’t have time to come rescue you. We were entrapped by the Dharma Sect when we made our escape.”

Li Huowang said nothing. He didn’t want to know whether Xuan Pin was lying or not.

He resolved not to rely on anyone.

Xuan Pin continued, “I’ve heard that... the Saintess of the White Lotus Sect was injured?”

Li Huowang frowned when Xuan Pin said that. Miaomiao was still alive, but her condition was bad.

Since most of her flesh had been bitten off, they had to use

some flesh from the Immortal Family to replace hers, even after the White Immortal Family's efforts to heal her. She now looked more like a beast than a human.

Even so, she was very weak right now and required a lot of rest.

"You say he's saving some? Who is he saving?" Li Huowang suddenly said something random.

"Hm? What are you talking about?" Xuan Pin was confused.

"I'm asking who he's saving."

"Help! Save me! You need to get me out of here! What's the point of asking me so many questions and recording our conversation?"

"Qian Fu, if you want to get out, you must follow my orders," Li Huowang said firmly as he stood outside the room.

Li Huowang was using his phone to record his conversation with Qian Fu, but he was interrupted when a nurse came by and shooed him away.

Li Huowang checked his phone while walking out of the hospital. He stared at the recordings and decided that it was time to visit Qian Fu's family.

Li Huowang knew that the organization was waiting to ambush him. They were biding for time, and he was confident they would not let him go when the opportunity arose. Li Huowang refused to be passive in this situation.

He couldn't sit still without doing anything. He needed to rescue Qian Fu from the hospital now.

However, Li Huowang knew it would be a monumental task when he saw a police officer disguised as his driver. Due to his identity, it wouldn't be easy to rescue Qian Fu on his own, so he needed a helper.

"Nana, I need your help," Li Huowang whispered to Yang Na, who was beside him.

“Do you want to rescue the crazy guy from the hospital?” After spending so much time with him, Yang Na naturally knew what Li Huowang was thinking.

“Huowang, I can help you, but can I ask you a question first? Why do you want to get him out of the hospital?” Yang Na spoke softly as she looked at Li Huowang.

He hesitated. He was confident that Yang Na would faint from shock if he told her about Qian Fu and the aliens.

“He has insider information about the people assaulting me. I need to rescue him because I refuse to get ambushed by them!”

Yang Na wanted to say something, but she held back.

“I know he’s a patient, but he also knows about the organization! Yang Na, you have to trust me! I’m telling you the truth!” Li Huowang held her hands and stared at her beautiful face.

She hesitated. She looked at the car at the entrance of the hospital and clutched Li Huowang’s hands. “Then what should I do?”

Li Huowang sighed and said, “It’s simple. You don’t need to take risks. Just go to a certain place and find a certain someone. Once you meet her, just call me and let me talk to her.”

Li Huowang had learned from Qian Fu that his daughter was paying the monthly hospital fee. If he wanted to get Qian Fu out, he needed to stop the money.

“Alright.” Yang Na nodded. “Then let’s split up here. You head back first, and I’ll go find the person you’ve mentioned.”

Yang Na walked towards the bus stop. She waved her hands when she was on the bus and Li Huowang quickly messaged her. *Turn on your GPS and voice recorder. Do not turn them off.*

Even though finding someone in the city wasn't dangerous, Li Huowang decided to play it safe.

Yang Na replied to him shortly. *Ok. Are you worried for my safety?* (‘▽“)

Li Huowang checked his phone occasionally to check her location through the GPS. Yang Na also messaged him from time to time to update him on her whereabouts.

Huowang, I'm on the train now. ☆:.o(≡▽≡)o.:*☆*

?(?∇?)? Ah, there's no place to sit, so I have to stand. You owe me an ice cream when we get back.

?(?∇?)? Huh? I just got off the train. I'm taking another bus now.

By the time Li Huowang reached his home, Yang Na finally video-called him

Li Huowang accepted the call and saw Yang Na's confused face. "Huowang, are you sure this is the place? I feel like I came to the wrong place."

"Show me the place using your camera."

Yang Na raised her phone, and Li Huowang saw where she was. She was in the middle of a poorly maintained street. The buildings were close to each other, and the balconies were full of wet clothes that the residents had hung. The walls were yellow and the houses were uneven. It appeared that the place was a village in the middle of a city.

Li Huowang had stayed in Kangning Hospital before, so he knew that the fees were quite high. *Qian Fu's daughter shouldn't be able to afford the costs if she lives there.*

Chapter 701 - Freedom

“Yang Na, go to the address Qian Fu gave us and see if you can find anything.”

“Okay, but the houses here are built in a very disorganized way,” Yang Na said.

The camera shook as she moved. After searching for a while, Yang Na quickly found the address Qian Fu had given them in a small alley.

At the end of the alley, there was a two-story cement house. The cement was roughly applied, and there was colorful graffiti drawn by children.

The door on the second floor was locked, which was the address indicated.

Smack! The sound of a bowl breaking came from inside the house, followed by the crisp sound of a slap.

Yang Na stepped back in fright, but then cautiously moved forward.

“Money, money, money! All you care about is money! How much do I earn in a month?!” A man’s rough shouting came from inside.

A woman could be heard sobbing, “You promised when you married me! You said you’d take care of Dad’s medical expenses!”

“And you still dare mention your father! No wonder he loves money so much! How much has he swallowed over the years?! Why isn’t he dead yet?! How long is he going to keep tormenting our family?!”

The sound of bowls breaking and furniture falling echoed from inside, mixed with a girl’s suppressed cries.

Li Huowang heard their argument and realized they had found

the right place. He quickly thought it over and had an idea. "Excuse me, is Qian Peiling here?"

"Who is it?" A scruffy man with a beard wearing a yellow scooter helmet came out, looking displeased.

His face showed a trace of impatience when he saw the face of a young student on the phone screen.

If it weren't for the fact that the person holding the phone was a beautiful woman, he would have started cursing immediately. "What do you want?"

"Hello, Mister Qian has asked me to tell you he doesn't want to stay at Kangning Hospital anymore. He wants to leave. Nana, I sent you a video. Play it for them."

Soon, Qian Fu's thin face appeared on the screen as he complained miserably. After his daughter and son-in-law watched the video, their argument became even more heated.

As the argument grew louder, their neighbors started peeking out to watch. The couple felt embarrassed, and they shut the door to resume their argument inside.

Yang Na did not leave. She quietly waited as instructed by Li Huowang.

After lunch, when he saw the man leave on his scooter, Li Huowang quickly told her to follow him.

"Did you know that there's a hospital better than Kangning Hospital? It's cheaper and treats patients well, so it would burden you less."

"But, there's one downside. There are fewer surveillance cameras."

Li Huowang quickly engaged in conversation, but the man remained indifferent.

"Huowang, it's useless," Yang Na said. From her expression, it was unclear if she was disappointed or relieved.

"No, it's useful. If it weren't, he wouldn't have listened to my

nonsense just now.”

“But he didn’t agree to anything in the end.”

Li Huowang smiled slightly and said, “It’s our first meeting, and he doesn’t know us well. How could he share his true thoughts with us? Look at him just now. Does he really want Qian Fu to keep wasting money at Kangning Hospital?”

He continued, “He doesn’t want to be the bad guy or be seen as an unfilial son. He needs us to give him a push.”

“How do we give him a push?” Yang Na asked.

Li Huowang opened his mouth to speak but then shook his head. “Never mind. You should come back. We’ll revisit Kangning Hospital tomorrow.”

Three days later, Qian Fu had to undergo gastric lavage after he swallowed a foreign object. His daughter and son-in-law also conveniently found out about it.

The issue was quickly resolved, and Qian Fu was transferred to the hospital Li Huowang had mentioned.

Li Huowang chose this place, and not just because it was cheaper. He was familiar with it since he had stayed there before, plus it was close to his neighborhood.

After the transfer, Qian Fu’s condition seemed to improve. He no longer had to stay in a locked ward.

Time passed and the surveillance around Li Huowang eased up. One night, Li Huowang climbed over the neighborhood wall with his prepared supplies.

He rode the scooter Yang Na had arranged and went to the psychiatric hospital where Qian Fu was staying.

Li Huowang skillfully climbed the wall, avoided the cameras, and quietly sneaked Qian Fu out of the hospital.

Qian Fu changed from the striped hospital gowns into the clothes Li Huowang had prepared.

Qian Fu was finally free. Tears welled up in his eyes as he

looked around and breathed in the fresh air of freedom. Suddenly, he rushed to a garbage heap, picked up some leftover food, and ate ravenously.

“Stop eating that!” Li Huowang pulled him away forcibly and led him into a secluded alley.

After nervously checking that no one was around, Li Huowang asked urgently, “I’ve set you free, so it’s time for you to help me. How can we deal with those people?”

“Don’t worry. You were alone before, which was inconvenient. Now we’re on the same side, so I can help you fight them!”

“Stop with the nonsense! I asked how to deal with them. Don’t tell me that you have no way. If you say that, I’ll throw you back in the psychiatric hospital right now!”

“No, there is a way.” Qian Fu quickly waved his hands, seemingly frightened. “They are watching you, but not me or my friends.”

“I’ll go find our friends now. You saved me, so my friends are your friends. You can be the bait once we have enough people, and we’ll catch them all. Don’t worry—they’re not as powerful as you think!”

Li Huowang was somewhat skeptical but decided to meet Qian Fu’s friends out of curiosity. He wondered if Qian Fu’s friends could also see those people.

“Alright, here’s my old phone and an unregistered SIM card,” Li Huowang said, handing him the phone. “Contact me through this phone from now on.”

Li Huowang was about to let him go when Qian Fu grabbed him tightly with a terrified expression on his face. “No! They’re targeting me now! They’re trying to turn me into one of them! Help me, please!”

“What?” Li Huowang was baffled. He saw Qian Fu suddenly change and look at him in surprise.

“Li Huowang? Where is this? What’s going on? Why am I not in the hospital?”

“Damn it!” Li Huowang almost spat out blood in frustration at this sudden change. He had forgotten that Qian Fu had a split personality!

“No! I need to go back! I need to go back to the psychiatric hospital! I need to receive treatment!”

Qian Fu struggled to leave but was tackled by Li Huowang. A sharp knife was pressed against his throat. “Don’t move!”

Qian Fu was clearly terrified by Li Huowang’s actions. “Li... Li Huowang, calm down. You need to calm down. Did you not take your medication today? Be good. Take your medicine first.”

Qian Fu continued, “We may be psychiatric patients, but we can’t give up on ourselves! If we persist with treatment, we’ll get better.”

“Shut up! Get up!”

With a fierce expression, Li Huowang dragged Qian Fu deeper into the alley by the neck.

Qian Fu was visibly scared of Li Huowang, and his face had turned ashen.

Chapter 702 - Believe You

Qian Fu felt his hands and feet tied securely to the chair, and his face turned pale with fear. His eyes widened and his lips lost all color.

If I had been kidnapped by an ordinary person, there would at least be a reason—money or something else. But this guy's just a lunatic!

He had heard Li Huowang's story and knew this guy had taken several lives. Now that Qian Fu had been tied up by him, he didn't even dare to imagine what he wanted.

Qian Fu glanced around fearfully to look for some hope.

This place seemed to be an abandoned house, possibly an unfinished building. Regardless, it seemed impossible to seek help from others. He could only find a way out through this lunatic.

“Li—” Qian Fu had barely uttered a word when he felt Li Huowang's five fingers clamped tightly around his neck. “Quiet!”

Li Huowang continued with his work when he saw Qian Fu sensibly fall silent.

After making sure Qian Fu was completely tied up, with no chance of escaping his restraints, Li Huowang finally breathed a sigh of relief. He stood up and looked at the man in front of him again.

Qian Fu pleaded, “Li Huowang, calm down. You need to calm down. Don't do something you'll regret for the rest of your life.”

“Shut up!” Li Huowang grabbed a piece of cloth and stuffed it into Qian Fu's mouth, finally bringing some silence to the room.

Li Huowang felt a headache coming on. Of all times, he had to switch to his second personality now.

Fortunately, he had brought some equipment just in case. Otherwise, it would have been tricky to handle.

Li Huowang stared at Qian Fu and was at a loss about what to do next.

Having an ally with a mental illness was already troublesome enough, but this one even had episodes from time to time. It was genuinely tormenting.

After some thought, Li Huowang reached out and pulled the cloth from Qian Fu's mouth. "Let me ask you, how often does your personality switch? Are there any triggers for the switch?"

Qian Fu was stunned by the question and suddenly understood what was going on. "Did he ask you to save him? Did he instruct you to do all this?"

Then, Qian Fu leaned forward excitedly. "Li Huowang, he's a lunatic! How can you believe the nonsense of a madman? Everything he said is a lie that he made up!"

Qian Fu pressed on, "You still have a long life to live, so don't let that lunatic deceive you! If this continues, your condition will only get worse! Think about your worried family, your classmates, and your teachers!"

Swish! Li Huowang pressed his knife against Qian Fu's neck. The blade cut into his skin, and a drop of blood slowly oozed out. He stared fiercely at the bearded man. "I don't need your lectures! I'm not sick! I've recovered!"

"Also, don't avoid my questions! Answer me! How often does your personality switch?! What triggers the switch?!"

Qian Fu felt the sting on his neck and dared not provoke Li Huowang further. He quickly replied, "I don't know. After a personality switch, I just lose large chunks of memory and find myself in different places for no reason. If there was a pattern, I wouldn't have been in the psychiatric hospital for so long."

"No pattern? No triggers?" Li Huowang looked at him skeptically, finding it hard to believe. After all, they were enemies—Qian Fu could be lying to him.

Should I torture him? The thought made Li Huowang shake his head violently. He wondered why he would have such thoughts.

There's no good solution for now. Forget it. I better find a safe place to tie him up and wait for his personality to change back. Li Huowang grabbed the cloth to gag him again.

He needed to hurry back to his neighborhood. If his mom found out he had sneaked out, there would be big trouble.

Just as the cloth was about to cover Qian Fu's mouth, Qian Fu suddenly became frantic and shouted to someone behind Li Huowang, "Miss, don't come over! Run! This guy is a lunatic! Call the police quickly!"

Li Huowang felt a chill down his spine. *Damn! Someone saw me tying up Qian Fu!*

He turned with his knife raised, only to freeze in place as he locked eyes with the newcomer.

"I know what you're thinking. I've been watching all your moves recently. I'm not that naive." Yang Na used her phone as a flashlight and slowly entered the room. A complex expression crossed her face when she saw Qian Fu bound to the chair.

After opening and closing his mouth several times, Li Huowang finally sighed deeply. "Yang Na, you have to believe me. I'm not crazy!"

"Call the police! Quickly! This guy is a lunatic! He's killed people! More than one!" Qian Fu continued to shout frantically.

Angered by his outburst, Li Huowang punched Qian Fu in the face, silencing him.

Yang Na set down her phone and walked over to Li Huowang. She gently leaned her head against his chest.

Her voice was soft and a little aggrieved. "Huowang, I believe you, but can you tell me what's going on? No matter what it is, I don't want you to hide it from me."

"Also, why are you carrying a knife? Don't do such things."

Yang Na gently placed her hands around Li Huowang's hand as he tightly held onto the knife.

Li Huowang sensed her warm touch. He struggled internally for a while before explaining everything to Yang Na.

“He has multiple personalities. The other personality is my ally, but this one isn’t. That’s why he’s struggling and trying to escape, so I had to tie him up. As for the knife, I need it for self-defense. I don’t know when those people will come after me. I can’t be careless.”

After he finished his explanation, he felt a bit anxious. He was unsure how Yang Na would react.

Then, Yang Na moved. She took the piece of cloth from Li Huowang’s hand. To Qian Fu’s shock, she stuffed it back into his mouth.

She saw Li Huowang’s astonished expression, and she smiled. She wrapped her arms around him and pecked him on the lips.

She smiled even more as she looked into his eyes. “I told you. I believe you, Li Huowang. No matter what you say, I believe you!”

Chapter 703 - Two Sides

Li Huowang's heart trembled when he heard Yang Na's words. He looked into her pure eyes, at a loss for how to express his emotions.

Finally, he cupped her face and kissed her passionately.

Yang Na felt awkward since they were in front of Qian Fu. "Let's go home. Auntie wakes up early. She'll notice if we don't return soon."

She saw Li Huowang glance at Qian Fu again and said, "You don't need to worry during the day. I'll keep an eye on him, and we can stay in touch by phone."

"Alright," Li Huowang nodded. Things would be much easier with Yang Na's help, and he wouldn't have to worry about Qian Fu escaping.

Li Huowang got home and lay down in his bed. When he thought about what had just happened, he found himself restless and unable to sleep.

He had desperately longed for Yang Na to believe him, but a persistent thought kept surfacing in his mind.

It was understandable if Yang Na didn't want to trust him. He would find such a ridiculous explanation hard to believe if he were in her position.

But... Li Huowang hesitated. He was caught in a dilemma.

The bedroom door gently opened while he pondered this.

As he was about to get out of bed to see who it was, he felt a warm, soft body slip into his arms.

"Miaomiao, what's wrong?" Li Huowang recognized the familiar scent of her hair. He stroked the hairpin and felt smooth scales under her white fur slide across his body.

When her actions became increasingly inappropriate, he quickly restrained her hands. “No, Miaomiao, you’re still injured.”

Bai Lingmiao’s body went limp, and her bloody tears soaked through the silk covering her eyes. “Li Huowang, do you dislike me now? Do you think I’m ugly?”

Li Huowang sensed the sadness in her tone, and he gently embraced her, then kissed the scales beneath her fur.

“No. When I left Zephyr Temple in a manic state, you never disliked me. How could I ever dislike you?”

“Besides—” Li Huowang fell silent as Bai Lingmiao kissed him again. Her forked tongue flicked out between her sharp teeth, wrapping around his tongue like a nimble rope.

Li Huowang was about to struggle when he felt another body lean lightly against his back. It was also Bai Lingmiao.

The oil lamp was knocked to the floor, and the room was plunged into darkness.

Li Huowang could still see clearly. “Besides, Miaomiao, you are simply beautiful now.”

“.....”

“.....”

As the dark night slowly faded into the soft light of dawn, a slender, pale arm emerged from under the quilt to lift a corner of the starry curtain. Sunlight flooded in, causing both of them to squint against it.

“I’ll get up first to watch that crazy uncle. You sleep a bit more,” Yang Na said as she covered her chest and reached for the white sweater on the floor.

Li Huowang’s exposed back rested against the headboard as he silently watched the fantastic scene before him.

His gaze made Yang Na blush. “Get some sleep. You didn’t sleep at all last night.”

Fearing he might have improper thoughts, Yang Na quickly

clarified, "I mean, you ran out to save that lunatic from the psychiatric hospital."

"Why?" Li Huowang asked.

"Because we are childhood sweethearts, and I truly believe what you say. I'm not just trying to keep you calm and call the police secretly."

Li Huowang took Yang Na's hand. He was ashamed for doubting her. Why had he suspected her?

Yang Na kissed him lightly and turned to leave. It was obvious she was a little uncomfortable, as she clutched her stomach and moved slowly.

Li Huowang was left alone in the room. He sighed deeply and felt a rare sense of contentment.

Unlike before, he was no longer alone in facing anything. Yang Na would always be by his side, and this companionship felt terrific.

Knock, knock, knock. Someone was at the door. Yang Na had just left, so it couldn't be her.

"Son, I heard Nana has been accompanying you to the hospital lately?"

"I'm not saying anything, but it's good for young people to play together. You both should go together. I promise not to interfere."

After that, there was silence. When Li Huowang thought his mother had left, she continued softly, "You two should be careful. Don't cause any accidents."

Li Huowang buried his head under the covers. He did not want to discuss this topic with his mother.

Time passed slowly. During the day, Li Huowang had to be cautious of Madam Qi and others watching him, so he stayed in the neighborhood.

He only dared to venture out at night to check on Qian Fu.

After about ten days, Qian Fu's personality finally switched

back.

“Not bad, tying me up was a good idea, Ji Zai. Thank you,” Qian Fu said.

He continued, “Without your help, the Leotians would have used their advanced technology to control my body from afar and trap me again!”

After ten days of waiting, Li Huowang’s patience was wearing thin.

“Weren’t you supposed to find allies to deal with them together? Now that you’re clear-headed, can we go find them?”

“Yes, yes!” Qian Fu nodded and massaged the marks on his wrists. “Don’t worry. We can’t just sit and wait for them to attack us. We need to take the initiative! I’ll go find our allies now!”

Li Huowang stopped him as he was about to leave. “Wait, tell me who your friends are and where they are now.”

“Uh...” Qian Fu hesitated. “I know the place, but I don’t know how to explain it.”

“How can you not know? There’s a location app here. Point out the exact location,” Li Huowang said as he handed his phone to Qian Fu.

After some clumsy gesturing, a location appeared on Li Huowang’s screen—Sixth People’s Hospital.

“Are you sure your allies are here?” Li Huowang’s brows furrowed. From what he knew, the Sixth People’s Hospital was also a public psychiatric hospital.

“Your friends aren’t also mentally ill, are they?” Li Huowang wasn’t surprised by this possibility.

“Yes, my friends live there. No need to worry since it’s their territory.”

After thinking it over, Li Huowang said, “Alright, go wait at the entrance of the Sixth People’s Hospital. We’ll go together during the day.”

“Huowang, you can’t go. You’re being watched by many people.”

Li Huowang shook his head confidently. “It’s fine. I can’t freely go to other places, but I can definitely go to a psychiatric hospital.”

Chapter 704 - Chen Hongyu

Li Huowang looked up at the massive main building of the hospital before him. Large red words denoted its name—Sixth People's Hospital.

This was the address Qian Fu had mentioned, where his supposed friend who could help resided.

It was ten o'clock in the morning, the agreed-upon time for their meeting.

Li Huowang glanced around and saw Qian Fu looking around and standing nervously in the sunlight. He had clearly arrived early, carrying a few things in a black bag.

Li Huowang led Yang Na over without speaking. He only stopped briefly in front of Qian Fu before heading straight into the hospital.

Qian Fu understood Li Huowang's intent and quickly followed.

Once they were in the hospital lobby, Li Huowang said, "Go visit your helper."

Qian Fu nodded calmly, "Don't worry, I know this place better than you. Lend me your identification card. I didn't bring mine."

After following the visitation procedure, Li Huowang learned the name of Qian Fu's so-called helper. It was Chen Hongyu.

"Sounds like a girl's name. Huowang, do you think it's his girlfriend?" Yang Na asked curiously.

"If there's any relationship, it could only be a wife. At his age, it wouldn't be a girlfriend."

Li Huowang felt a bit worried. It was not because the helper might be mentally ill, but because he was uncertain if Chen Hongyu

would provide any real assistance.

Considering how erratic Qian Fu was, it was already optimistic to trust half of what he said.

While they were talking, the door opened. A tall, overweight woman walked out.

This woman was very large and looked to be in her forties or fifties. She had dull eyes and looked listless. Her forehead and cheeks were covered in red pimples, and her sleeves and collar were dirty. Her scalp was visible through her thin hair.

Her overall appearance was undeniably shabby.

“Hongyu! Hongyu! It’s been years, hasn’t it?” Qian Fu rushed over excitedly. “Look what I brought you!”

He proudly opened the black plastic bag and revealed its contents: half a yellowed apple, a roasted eggplant wrapped in foil, and two half-empty soda bottles.

“Did you dig these out of the trash?” Chen Hongyu asked disdainfully. “Do you think I’m meant to eat garbage?”

“Don’t be ungrateful. When we were homeless, finding these would have been a feast.”

Li Huowang glanced at the surveillance cameras, then quickly grabbed Qian Fu’s bag and threw it into a nearby trash can.

He leaned close to Qian Fu’s ear and said sternly, “Do you want to get caught? Behave normally!”

Qian Fu saw Li Huowang’s serious look and stopped trying to retrieve the garbage.

Li Huowang pushed Qian Fu aside and sat in the visitation area. He looked at the woman before him. “Hello, I’m Li Huowang. Your parents asked me to check on you. How have you been lately? How’s your condition?”

She smiled sarcastically, her eyes drooping. “Just say what you need to. There’s no need for an act. They can’t hear us.”

Li Huowang relaxed, decided to be straightforward, and

quickly recounted everything that had happened to him. This old woman seemed much more reliable than Qian Fu.

However, after he finished, the woman mocked him and chuckled. She said, “Qian Fu is a lunatic, and yet you believe him?”

“Uh, Hongyu.” Qian Fu looked up, his face filled with desire. “Stop kidding. You must have sensed it too, right? They’re coming, and they’re not just after Li Huowang. Once he’s gone, they’ll come for us. The Leotians are greedy.”

Chen Hongyu ignored Qian Fu and turned back to Li Huowang. She said lazily, “He’s crazy. Those people you encountered aren’t aliens. They’re just ordinary people with some schemes. It’s a highly organized group hiding in the shadows.”

“Oh?” Li Huowang felt a glimmer of hope. He finally met someone who seemed sane and informed. “Tell me more. How much do you know about them?”

Chen Hongyu hesitated, but Qian Fu interjected and said, “It’s fine. You can tell him. He’s on our side. He got me out.”

Chen Hongyu finally said, “They aren’t just targeting you. They’re also going after others. I was once captured by them but managed to escape.”

“Why? Why are they doing this? Who exactly are they?”

“They’re doing this because they want to steal my special powers! Those who possess valuable things should act responsibly. They are an underground group trying to seize supernatural abilities!”

“...” Li Huowang was at a loss for words. He turned to look at Qian Fu, feeling foolish for ever trusting him.

Li Huowang looked at Chen Hongyu with a complex expression on his face. “Schizophrenia?”

“What? You don’t believe me? Don’t you have any supernatural abilities? Don’t tell me you don’t know. If you hadn’t shown any abilities, why would they target you?”

“Supernatural abilities? I don’t—” Li Huowang suddenly remembered something and shook his head vigorously. “No, that’s not it. Absolutely not.”

At this moment, Qian Fu chimed in again. “Hongyu, you see, I’m out now. You should come out too. Let’s take care of those troubles together.”

“No way, it’s too exhausting. I’m fine here. You can fight outside while I stay here. They can’t do anything to me while I’m in here,” Chen Hongyu said before turning to leave.

Qian Fu panicked. He quickly grabbed Bai Lingmiao’s bag and rummaged through it. “I’ll give you money! Look, it’s all red bills! Help us, and this money is yours! Also, how can you be sure they can’t get in? Are you really safe?”

Chen Hongyu saw the cash in Qian Fu’s hand and stopped. As she turned around, her chubby face showed a hint of greed.

She extended her dirty, black-nailed fingers toward Li Huowang and the others. “Fifty thousand! If you want me to help, give me fifty thousand each, then I’ll deal with them.”

Chapter 705 - Take Action

“Deal!” Qian Fu immediately agreed to Chen Hongyu’s demand.

“Where are you going to get fifty thousand?” Li Huowang looked at him.

Qian Fu quickly leaned in and whispered, “Shhh, just pretend I have it! Right now, we just need to figure out how to get through this mess. We’ll worry about everything else later! Better to owe money than lose our lives!”

Li Huowang fell silent and watched Qian Fu hand the money to Chen Hongyu.

Yang Na looked conflicted, not by the money but by the weight of their recent conversation. She said, “Huowang, are you sure what this woman says is true? About supernatural abilities... is it really...?”

“I...” Li Huowang hesitated, glancing between Qian Fu and Chen Hongyu. “I don’t know... But since we’re here, let’s give it a try. Don’t just listen to what they say—watch what they do.”

Despite saying this, Li Huowang wouldn’t have chosen this option if he had another way. Yang Na still looked conflicted, but she finally nodded without saying anything.

“How do we get you out?” Li Huowang asked Chen Hongyu.

“No need! She doesn’t need us to rescue her. She’s very capable, and she can get out by herself,” Qian Fu said confidently.

“I’m different from Qian Fu. I wasn’t brought here against my will—I paid to get in. For me, leaving is as simple as saying a word. I have a lot of stuff, so come on and help me pack,” Chen Hongyu said and turned to leave the visitation room.

“Come on, Li Huowang, let’s help with the luggage! See, we

already have a helper!” Qian Fu said as they headed toward the inpatient area.

Li Huowang thought for a moment and then said to Yang Na, “Let’s go. Let’s get her out first.”

Yang Na nodded and followed Li Huowang toward the inpatient area.

Since they were helping a voluntarily admitted patient pack her belongings, the three easily got inside the Sixth People’s Hospital.

This place was no different from the other psychiatric hospitals, with some people behaving oddly and speaking nonsense. Li Huowang was used to it.

As they walked, various absurd remarks reached Li Huowang’s ears.

“I don’t eat eggplant. Not because I’m picky, but because the eggplants given to me all look shifty-eyed. If you give me a different bowl of eggplants, I’ll definitely eat it.”

“I’ll tell you a secret, the world we live in might just be a holographic projection left by another higher world in space. The things around us seem real but are actually images. We can move because that higher world is moving, and we think because the entities in that higher world are thinking! This is a physics model I proposed in 1997, but it has never been academically recognized. I’m telling you, what I’m saying is true! The whole world is fake!”

“What higher world? Let me check your pulse. Oh my, you’re very ill. Did you take the medicine I prescribed earlier?”

Li Huowang sensed Yang Na’s tension and softly reassured her, “Don’t worry. The patients who can move freely are not violent. They’re mild cases that pose no danger.”

They soon reached Chen Hongyu’s room. Li Huowang saw the pile of luggage under her bed. There were plastic tubs and basins among other things, which Li Huowang couldn’t identify.

Everything, from the luggage to the snakeskin bags, was dirty.

Yang Na valued cleanliness, so she frowned when she saw this.

“Just take that bag of snacks. I’ll get the rest later,” Li Huowang said. He grabbed a snakeskin bag full of clothes and headed out.

Carrying all this stuff was tiring. Fortunately, Li Huowang and Qian Fu were not weak. After two trips, they finally finished moving everything.

Li Huowang carried a suitcase and led Chen Hongyu, who had changed into new clothes, outside.

“You encountered them? Fought with them?” Chen Hongyu suddenly asked.

Li Huowang nodded. “Yes, I even killed one of them and bit off some fingers. Unfortunately, the police couldn’t find the culprits even after the incident was reported.”

“*Hmph*, how naive. You actually thought reporting to the police would help? They have people on their side, and one of them is very powerful. They’ll wipe out all the evidence cleanly and leave nothing behind.”

Li Huowang looked at her and her three chins seriously. “Is what you’re saying really true?”

“What? You’ve been targeted, and you still don’t believe it?”

Li Huowang replied, “Believe it or not, I just want to solve this problem. I want to live a normal life. I don’t care about anything else.”

“Don’t hope for that. You can’t avoid some things even if you don’t want to deal with them. If you want to solve this problem, you have to face it.”

With that, Chen Hongyu lifted her luggage and quickened her pace.

Suddenly, a figure dashed behind Li Huowang. He grabbed a clothes hanger and wrapped it tightly around his neck.

The plastic-covered wire squeezed his windpipe, which made it

hard for Li Huowang to breathe. His head started to fill with blood uncontrollably. He grabbed the hanger and struggled to look behind.

He soon saw a familiar face inverted above him. It was Wang Wei, his former doctor!

Wang Wei's foot stepped heavily onto Li Huowang's back, preventing him from escaping. His expression was ferocious as he glared at Li Huowang.

"How long are you going to deceive yourself?! Remember! That world is not fake! Everything that happened there is real! Wake up!"

"Cough, cough..." The suffocation intensified. Li Huowang's eyes rolled back, and he soon saw strange circles and various changing snowflake patterns.

Thump! Chen Hongyu punched Wang Wei on the head and knocked him out. He fell to the ground, motionless.

Li Huowang quickly removed the hanger, coughing violently while he clutched his neck.

"Are you okay?" Chen Hongyu patted Li Huowang's back. She looked at the unconscious Wang Wei with a serious expression. "I never thought their people could infiltrate here. What did you do to make them watch you so closely?"

Once he could breathe again, Li Huowang felt lingering fear as he replayed what just happened in his mind. Wang Wei's strength was astonishing. Without Chen Hongyu's help, Wang Wei's ambush might have succeeded.

He looked at Chen Hongyu gratefully. "Thank you."

Regardless of whether she was mentally ill, she had proven her goodwill towards him. Even if she was indeed mentally ill, at least she was the good kind.

Chapter 706 - New Helper

Following this major incident, the nurses quickly arrived and hurriedly took the unconscious Wang Wei away. Several managers immediately came forward to apologize.

The fact that a patient attempted to murder someone and nearly succeeded was a serious matter. If this were to get out, it would severely damage the reputation of the psychiatric hospital.

The staff became increasingly nervous upon learning Li Huowang's identity.

Although he had almost been killed, Li Huowang did not demand compensation. He only had one request—to meet with Wang Wei. This guy was crucial.

The individuals trying to harm Li Huowang had been lying low for a long time, and now they had finally sent someone to strike again. Since they had encountered him, it wouldn't make sense not to extract any useful information from Wang Wei.

The people at the Sixth People's Hospital naturally agreed to this small request. It was a trivial matter compared with the potential negative impact of this incident becoming public.

Shortly after, Li Huowang met Wang Wei again. This time, Wang Wei was in a straitjacket with a muzzle to prevent him from biting.

"It's fine, you can leave. I want to talk to him alone," Li Huowang said to the hospital staff nearby.

The staff were caught in a dilemma, considering that this man had just attempted murder.

However, they quickly thought of a compromise. Wang Wei was placed in a restraint room, allowing Li Huowang to talk to him through the iron bars. There would be no chance of another

incident under such circumstances.

Li Huowang looked at Wang Wei again after everyone left. Wang Wei now seemed even more deranged. His eyes were wide open and bloodshot, reflecting the madness within him. He drooled from the corners of his mouth, which twitched slightly.

“Are you one of them?” Li Huowang asked.

Wang Wei stared back at Li Huowang but said nothing.

“What do they want? I want to talk to them,” Li Huowang said.

This was a probe. Li Huowang first needed to know their identity, regardless of their intentions.

He found it rather hard to believe they were the Leotians that Qian Fu mentioned, or the group plundering supernatural abilities Chen Hongyu spoke of. He wanted to meet them personally and see them with his own eyes.

Of course, Li Huowang was recording their conversation. If he could gather crucial evidence, the best outcome would be reporting it to the police and eradicating them with the help of others.

Wang Wei merely stared at him without saying anything.

“It’s useless. He’s just a pawn. You won’t get anything out of him,” Qian Fu said from the side. He didn’t seem like his usual crazy self.

“Leotians are masters at bewitching people. Some of us have been bewitched by them, turned into their puppets, and manipulated at will. You’re mistaken if you think you can get any clues from him.”

Despite this, Li Huowang refused to give up. “Wang Wei, do you remember me? You used to be my doctor. What happened to you after we parted? If you tell me, maybe I can help you.

“I didn’t quite hear what you said. Can you repeat it?

“You tried to kill me, but I don’t hate you. I just want to know why.”

Li Huowang asked several questions and even shared some of

his past in an attempt to get Wang Wei to respond. And yet, no matter what Li Huowang said, Wang Wei remained silent. He was just like a puppet, as Qian Fu described.

Their roles had reversed compared to a few years ago. It was very ironic.

After he asked many questions and elicited no reaction, Li Huowang finally decided to leave.

As Li Huowang was leaving, Wang Wei finally spoke, “Li Huowang, you are running away.”

Li Huowang stopped and slowly turned back to Wang Wei. “What did you say?”

“I said you are running away. You know it, and you always knew it. You can link to that world. Your potential is limitless!”

Li Huowang’s pupils dilated slightly. *Is that their goal? They think I can take things from hallucinations, so they want to abduct me?*

He quickly remembered something and said, “So the experiences on the ship weren’t just my hallucinations? There really are people like that?”

Chen Hongyu interjected, “See? I told you. They are after our supernatural abilities. You must have one too, or they wouldn’t come for you.”

“Sister Chen, let me ask more questions first,” Li Huowang turned back to Wang Wei. “Answer me. Is everything I just said true?”

Wang Wei did not respond directly but instead said, “You answer my question first. When did you stop believing in these possibilities? Are those your true thoughts? Or is it because someone made you think that way?”

He raised his voice. “Li Huowang, don’t trust Yi Donglai! He’s actually harming you!”

“Think about it! What has Yi Donglai done? If he truly cared about you, why wasn’t he by your side when you were in trouble?”

“That world exists! Yi Donglai is harming you! He has sealed your abilities! You need to remember to become whole!

“You are not sick! You have extraordinary talents! You don’t need treatment or medication!”

“Not good!” Qian Fu quickly covered Li Huowang’s ears. “Don’t listen to him! The Leotians are bewitching you. Don’t stop, don’t look, don’t think!”

Qian Fu forcefully dragged Li Huowang out. Actually, Li Huowang was about to leave on his own. There was no valuable information they could gain from Wang Wei.

“Alright, stop covering my ears. My mind isn’t so fragile that I’ll be shaken by a few words,” Li Huowang said in the hospital lobby as he shook off Qian Fu’s hands.

He glanced at Chen Hongyu beside him and asked, “What are you planning to do now?”

“Why are you asking me? Aren’t you the ones who invited me to come out of retirement?” Chen Hongyu said and picked her nose.

“We need others besides her, right?” Li Huowang asked Qian Fu.

In any case, Chen Hongyu had just saved his life—making more friends like her was worth it. She might be mentally ill, but she was still helpful.

Qian Fu replied, “Yes, we need to find Qing Wanglai next.”

“Qing Wanglai?” Li Huowang frowned. “Sounds like a man’s name. Is he also mentally ill?”

“No, he’s not mentally ill. He’s a scholar.”

“A scholar? A student?” Li Huowang almost thought he had misheard. There was actually a normal person among Qian Fu’s helpers.

“No. Qing Wanglai is a graduate student,” Chen Hongyu added.

Chapter 707 - Qing Wanglai

Finally, someone who wasn't mentally ill would join them. Li Huowang was eager to meet a normal person who could help him learn more about the people targeting him.

However, Qing Wanglai was a graduate student and Li Huowang was strictly prohibited from approaching schools due to his ankle monitor. He had to delegate the task to Yang Na, who would go with Chen Hongyu and Qian Fu.

Li Huowang did consider Yang Na's safety, but he wasn't too worried since it was broad daylight with many people around, and the destination was a well-known university.

Huowang, I'm on the subway. Have you had dinner? 吃了吗？

It's so crowded during the evening rush. Thankfully, Madam Chen is strong. (谢谢)

为什么你不回复我的消息？这个坏习惯需要改变。我怎么知道你在想什么如果你什么都不说？

Li Huowang felt nervous when he saw Yang Na send over another text. He quickly typed back. *Nana! They're here! They're watching me again!*

After sending the message, he anxiously peered out the window and spotted several shadowy figures under the trees at dusk.

Although he could not see them clearly, Li Huowang felt confident they were looking in his direction.

A notification chimed, and he glanced at his screen to see Yang Na's reply. *Could it be Madam Qi?*

Impossible! Madam Qi is off work at this time. I've been behaving

well lately, so the Neighborhood Office isn't monitoring me closely.

What should we do? Should we call the police?

It's fine. They seem to be hesitant now. Besides, I'm not a pushover!

Li Huowang opened a drawer and revealed a gleaming knife.

In fact, Li Huowang found the appearance of these people somewhat reassuring. It meant Yang Na and the others were temporarily safe.

"Huowang, come out for dinner!"

"Coming!" LI Huowang drew the starry curtains and blocked the view from outside, making him feel more at ease.

Meals had always been just him and his mother. His father was a taxi driver, and the evening rush was the most lucrative time for him.

Today's meal featured braised chicken with mushrooms, scrambled eggs with tomatoes, and stir-fried snail meat with leeks, accompanied by seaweed and shrimp soup. The aroma alone was mouth-watering.

Sun Xiaoqin was a good cook, but Li Huowang wasn't enjoying it much. He kept checking his phone and glancing toward the balcony.

"Son, where's Nana?" Sun Xiaoqin noticed someone was missing.

"She... she had something come up," Li Huowang made up an excuse.

Sun Xiaoqin struggled to understand young people's matters, so she only offered her perspective. "Son, you need to be responsible to Nana. I'm not rushing you, but good girls like her are hard to find nowadays."

"Take Brother Li next door, for example. His son Li Changnan, who you used to play with, went on a blind date with a girl born in 1993. I've met her, and she's not as good as Nana. Do you know how much they spent on the betrothal gifts alone?"

Li Huowang would usually respond to such remarks. However, he received a video call, then quickly shoveled the remaining food into his mouth and rushed to his room. “Mom, I have something to do. We’ll talk later.”

Back in his room, Li Huowang took a deep breath, composed himself, and tapped the green button. Yang Na’s face appeared on the screen. “Huowang! Look, we’ve arrived!”

The screen shifted to show the main road of the university. As it was evening, it was bustling with people.

Li Huowang brought his phone closer to the screen and said softly, “Qian Fu, find that person.”

“We’re already here now. What’s the hurry?” Qian Fu’s voice sounded as the screen began to shake. They were on the move.

With the changing sounds in the video, Li Huowang knew they had entered a building, got into an elevator, and were going to ask someone for directions.

When the screen steadied, they were in a lively cafeteria. A thin man with rectangular rimless glasses appeared before Li Huowang.

He seemed to be in his twenties, with short hair and an open-collared white shirt.

He was eating quietly, contrasting with others who were chatting or on their phones. He seemed very quiet and ate unhurriedly from his bowl using chopsticks.

If Li Huowang guessed correctly, this was Qing Wanglai.

“Wow, Huowang! Look, he’s so handsome!” Yang Na exclaimed.

Li Huowang frowned, and his impression of Qing Wanglai instantly dropped.

At that moment, Qing Wanglai looked their way, put down his bowl, stood up, and walked towards them. “Long time no see. How have you been?”

“Little Qing! I got locked up again. I tried to send you a message for help, but I couldn’t get through! You wouldn’t believe how they tortured me there!” Qian Fu started to complain, leaving no room for Chen Hongyu to speak.

“Shut up!” Chen Hongyu snapped and covered Qian Fu’s mouth. She directly addressed Qing Wanglai, “Give me your meal card. I’m hungry!”

Qing Wanglai curiously glanced at Yang Na before handing over a meal card from his left pocket with two fingers. “Our cafeteria’s spicy frog pot and sweet and sour pork are quite good. You should try them.”

Chen Hongyu soon returned with two large trays of food, and the four of them sat down together.

Both Chen Hongyu and Qian Fu were clearly more focused on eating than talking, devouring their meals with gusto.

When Li Huowang saw that they were not talking, he said, “Hello, Qing Wanglai. Let me introduce myself. I’m Li Huowang.”

Qing Wanglai put down his bowl, took Yang Na’s phone, and scrutinized Li Huowang through the screen.

His reaction puzzled Li Huowang, so he introduced himself again.

Qing Wanglai replied, “There’s no need to repeat yourself. I know you’re Li Huowang. Have you eaten?”

Chapter 708 - Projection

Li Huowang was speechless when this guy asked if he had eaten at a time like this. “Mr. Qing, I’ve finished my meal. Can we discuss the matter at hand now?”

“Please wait a moment. I haven’t finished eating yet.” Qing Wanglai picked up his bowl.

Li Huowang frowned at this response. *What is this guy’s deal ?*

“Can’t you talk while eating?”

“The ancients said not to talk while eating or sleeping. Besides, talking while eating leads to improper chewing, which can cause indigestion and an increased risk of biting your tongue or choking,” Qing Wanglai said and handed the phone back to Yang Na.

Since Qing Wanglai had refused, Li Huowang had no choice but to wait. He was the one who needed Qing Wanglai’s help.

Li Huowang saw his girlfriend Yang Na looking hesitant and said, “Don’t just stand there. Eat while they’re eating. Don’t let yourself go hungry.”

“Alright then, Huowang, I’ll hang up the video call for now. We’ll talk after eating,” Yang Na said and ended the call.

Li Huowang sighed at the static screen. Why were all the people Qian Fu found so weird? Even though Qing Wanglai wasn’t mentally ill, he didn’t seem very reliable either.

Li Huowang stood up and walked to the window, lifting a corner of the starry curtain to peek outside. The sky was already dark, but he could still feel those eyes on him. They were still there!

Whoosh! The starry curtain was pulled open again, and Li Huowang was exposed to their gaze.

If you have the guts, come in! I’ll make sure you won’t leave here in one piece! Li Huowang gripped his knife tightly, his teeth clenched

and his eyes filled with hostility.

However, it was clear that due to Wang Wei's previous actions, these people didn't plan to act immediately again.

They were just watching for now, and they didn't do anything even when the video call alert sounded again.

Li Huowang quickly closed the curtain and answered the phone. On the screen, a new environment appeared. It seemed like a small, single-person dorm room.

Unlike typical male dorms, this one was remarkably clean and tidy. Most items were white, and the walls were bare except for a single calligraphy painting. It gave off an immaculate impression.

Qing Wanglai took a sip from a cup of green tea and said, "Hello, Li Huowang. Let me reintroduce myself. I'm Qing Wanglai. I've been informed about your situation."

He continued, "Here's what I think: First of all, you're under severe restrictions and can't accomplish anything while being surveilled like this. We need to find a way to temporarily restore some of your freedom."

"Wait, hold on," Li Huowang interrupted.

"What? You don't want to regain your freedom? Would you prefer being confined to your neighborhood?"

"No, before we proceed with anything, I need to confirm something first. What's your opinion about those who are trying to kidnap me?"

"Do you think they are Leotians, or an underground group spying on people with supernatural abilities?"

Qing Wanglai chuckled and said, "Why would you think I would believe that? Do I look like a lunatic?"

"Then what do you think? What's the truth behind this? Who are they?" Li Huowang could feel his palms sweating. He was finally getting a rational person's explanation.

Qing Wanglai slowly drank some tea and said, "Physicist Julian

Madacena proposed a hypothesis that our universe might be a holographic image. Everything you see and perceive is a projection. I agree with this hypothesis.”

“Huh?!” Li Huowang was momentarily stunned. *What did this guy mean? Had he heard this somewhere before?*

“What do you think is real? What do you think is fake?” Qing Wanglai asked.

“Is it possible that our world is a vast phantom or a reflection of some existence? Like our shadows. We are their shadows.”

Li Huowang wordlessly stared at the screen. *This guy might also be mentally ill, just undiagnosed.*

“I don’t agree with your view,” Yang Na said.

She seemed like a different person, far from the gentle girl when she was with Li Huowang. She came off as being quite assertive.

Her gaze sharpened as she clutched her cup tightly. “Science is about bold hypotheses and careful verification. All hypotheses are merely hypotheses until they are proven right. Do you have any critical evidence to support your words?”

Qing Wanglai smiled smugly. “Of course I do.”

“Then prove it. I don’t believe you can,” Yang Na replied skeptically. “If you had decisive evidence, you could win a Nobel Prize. Why would you be here?”

“I can’t show you. My shadow can’t express what our world is like. They don’t even have thoughts. They move because we move. How could I explain?”

“Nonsense! How are you different from pseudo-scientists spouting nonsense online? I can’t believe you are a graduate student!” Yang Na stood up angrily. Her initially favorable impression of Qing Wanglai had vanished completely.

“Imagine our shadows compared to us. They’re so simple. If we as living beings are shadows of some existence, can you imagine

what they might be like?”

Qing Wanlai saw Yang Na’s confusion and continued, “What if their projection isn’t just a single person, but rather our entire world? If our entire world is merely their projection, what kind of existence would that be?”

Yang Na opened her mouth and then closed it, unable to refute.

“You can’t conceive it because you don’t even have the organs to imagine it.”

Qing Wanglai’s expression became dreamy. “But I’ve seen it once. Even though I quickly forgot, I still remember how insignificant I felt at that moment.”

“Our thoughts are just the reflection of their breathing. We exist only because they exist. Even our...” Qing Wanglai trailed off and then clutched his head in pain.

He turned to open a drawer, took out some capsules, and swallowed them with his now-cooled tea.

The room fell silent as no one spoke.

After a while, Qian Fu said, “What a load of nonsense. You’re making this up. I think it’s just Leotians.”

Chapter 709 - Help

The conversation continued. Surprisingly, despite their differing viewpoints, they didn't get into an argument.

Qing Wanglai turned back to Li Huowang. "This is our first meeting, but since Qian Fu said he would help you, I assume we are allies. He has a talent in this area."

Li Huowang scratched his head. He was even more confused by the conversation. "I'm curious, how did you end up discussing things with him? Your worldview is completely different from theirs!"

"Because we are not real. Although we have flesh and blood, we are projections and are truly false. Absolute reality and absolute truth do exist, but the truth in question exceeds our understanding and perception."

"If everything is fake, why care about what others think?"

"Hehe, I don't believe things are as they say, but everyone's ideas are unique. There's no need to impose my thoughts on others. I respect their views," Qing Wanglai said and raised his tea cup toward Qian Fu and Chen Hongyu.

Li Huowang looked at Qing Wanglai's profile through the screen. He was pondering Qing Wanglai's words, and was highly skeptical of them.

Even though it was just for a moment, he noticed that Qing Wanglai had taken some kind of psychiatric medication.

This guy might seem knowledgeable, but mental illness had nothing to do with intelligence.

In fact, from his years of observation, Li Huowang had noticed that intelligent people were more likely to suffer from mental illness than ordinary people. The less intelligent someone was, the less

likely they were to have mental issues.

“This is our first meeting, and I understand your concerns. Don’t worry, I am indeed trying to help you. Moreover, you’re the one in trouble, not us, isn’t that right? Regardless of who those people are projecting.”

Li Huowang was temporarily convinced. It was true. Since Qing Wanglai was offering his help, it would be imprudent to display open suspicion, regardless of his intentions. He decided to remain cautious internally without revealing it outwardly.

“I apologize. This situation is too strange, so I have to ask more questions. What method do you have to get me out of this predicament?”

Qing Wanglai replied, “In today’s world, you need connections to get things done. I know many people who can help. Your situation isn’t too serious.”

He continued, “You just need to wait at home. We will find someone to help you, and you’ll have an answer soon. Once you’re out, we can discuss our next steps.”

Find someone? Is he looking for another mental patient? Li Huowang thought and frowned silently.

He wanted to ask for more details, but Qing Wanglai seemed unwilling to reveal too much.

“That’s all for today. I have some things to do later. Right, add me on WeChat so we can keep in touch,” Qing Wanglai said and stood up.

After exchanging contact information with Qing Wanglai, Li Huowang felt that they had at least made some progress. Their efforts hadn’t been in vain.

Qing Wanglai escorted them to the university gate before he turned back. As Li Huowang was about to end the video call, he saw Qian Fu rush to a trash can, stick his arm in, and lick his lips as he rummaged through it. This attracted strange looks from a few

passersby.

“Qian Fu! What are you doing? Act normal!”

Qian Fu held a half-full cup of milk tea as he turned around and retorted, “How am I crazy? This stuff is still edible. Why waste it? I’m just picking it up to eat. What’s crazy about that? Many people in the world still can’t get enough to eat. I think those who waste food are the real lunatics!”

Li Huowang was at a loss for words. This guy's way of thinking was really different from that of normal people.

After Chen Hongyu forcibly dragged Qian Fu away, Li Huowang ended the video call.

Li Huowang sat alone in his bedroom, reflecting on everything he had just heard and wondering if he had missed anything.

Ding! His phone buzzed. Li Huowang swiped to unlock it and saw a message from Yang Na.

Huowang, didn't Auntie Chen say she has special abilities? I was curious and asked her what they were. Guess what she said? (๖㉚๖)

What did she say?

He quickly received a video from Yang Na.

Chen Hongyu stood lazily by the roadside, her expression solemn as she looked into the camera.

“Huowang, watch closely.”

Li Huowang was puzzled. *Watch what?*

The camera zoomed in on Chen Hongyu’s forehead.

However, Li Huowang saw nothing apart from some pimples on her face.

“Mmm...” Chen Hongyu’s expression became serious. She made a low sound as if she was channeling inner energy.

As Li Huowang wondered what she was up to, Chen Hongyu let out a low shout, and two pimples on her forehead burst open.

Yellow pus mixed with tiny bits of flesh oozed out onto her greasy face, making Li Huowang feel nauseous.

The video ended abruptly, and Yang Na quickly sent another message. *What a disgusting superpower...*

Li Huowang threw his phone onto the bed and sighed. What kind of people had he gotten involved with?

“We need to take the initiative. Those worthless people from the Dharma Sect think they can ambush and kill us whenever they want! Do they think we’re easy targets?” A burly man in a black coat roared angrily inside a military tent.

No one inside the tent argued with him. This was the Great Khan, the tribal leader and Dragon Vein of Qing Qiu. As the emperor of Great Liang was absent, he was now the most esteemed person present.

“Khan, you are right. We must counterattack. I have a skill that could be useful, but may I borrow your country’s tiger tally first?

[1]” Xuan Pin said.

The Great Khan clutched his sleeve warily. “Are you joking? The tiger tally that commands the Qing Qiu army can’t be given to an outsider! Do you know how short on troops we are right now? Go ask your stingy emperor of Great Liang if you have the guts!”

He continued, “He sure has a good plan. We’re fighting for our lives here while he reaps all the benefits!”

“Khan, the emperor has already dispatched troops,” an old eunuch reported and bowed respectfully.

“What good is that now? The Great Liang is so far from Hou Shu! It will be too late by the time they arrive!”

The Chief of Qing Qiu sensed the tense atmosphere and stood up to mediate. “Xuan Pin, just state your plan clearly. If it makes sense, our Khan will naturally send troops to assist you.”

1. The tiger tally is a special token that military commanders carry as a sign of authority. 🐾

Chapter 710 - Danger

It was night in Hou Shu.

While the others discussed important military matters, Li Huowang and Bai Lingmiao stood silently in the corner as though they were transparent. Bai Lingmiao was wearing her red veil.

They listened to the disputes between the various forces, the compromises made during the crisis, and their subsequent plans.

The acquisition of the Dragon Vein from Hou Shu and Si Qi had evidently boosted the spirits of everyone there, including the Chief and the royal family. The atmosphere in the military tent had noticeably improved.

By the time they finalized the procedures, it was already late at night. Xuan Pin waved his hand gently, causing the entire tent and some of the people inside to dissipate like smoke.

“Now that we have the Dragon Vein of Hou Shu, the soldiers of Hou Shu will surely defect once their emperor surrenders. The forces of the Dharma Sect will likely retreat to Si Qi, but we can’t pursue them there.”

“Oh,” Li Huowang responded simply.

“Li Huowang, this isn’t like you.” Xuan Pin sensed that Li Huowang was behaving unusually.

Li Huowang ignored him and asked, “You’ve been plotting a lot within the mortal realm, but you are more familiar with the origins of the Dharma Sect than I am. Don’t you have any plans regarding that?”

Xuan Pin understood what Li Huowang was implying. “We are, after all, mere mortals. We have no knowledge of what the Simings in the Baiyu Capital are doing, let alone any means to interfere.”

“That’s not right. Isn’t the job of the Surveillance Bureau to

monitor the heavens? Don't say you have no means. Didn't you once try to use the palace to set up an array and seize the Sacred Mountain Ghost's Eye to prevent a Natural Disaster? This time, the trouble is even greater, and you're telling me you have no plans?"

Li Huowang tilted his head slightly and looked at the darkness within Xuan Pin's red robes.

"You must be doing something, but you don't intend to tell me."

Xuan Pin showed no reaction, but Li Huowang felt that he was right.

"There are some matters you cannot help with. Telling you would only make you overthink, which is not beneficial. Each person has their role. I am the Chief and have my duties, just as you have yours."

Li Huowang curled his lips into a self-mocking smile, then turned and left with Bai Lingmiao.

After a few steps, Xuan Pin appeared before him again. "What are your plans next? And what about the Saintess of the White Lotus Sect?"

"Why should I tell you when you won't tell me anything? Besides, our previous cooperation hasn't improved our results. Since that's the case, we should act separately."

Li Huowang walked right through Xuan Pin's body and headed toward his quarters.

"Are you holding a grudge? I truly was entangled during the incident with the Earth Dragon. It wasn't that I didn't want to save you."

Li Huowang didn't stop. He didn't want to be anyone's pawn, even if their goals aligned for the moment.

After spending so much time together, Li Huowang understood that Xuan Pin was crafty. Despite his seemingly kind demeanor, he was always using the people around him.

“How is the expansion of the White Lotus Sect in Hou Shu going?” Li Huowang asked Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang never expected that the only force he could truly control would be the White Lotus Sect, whose village he had once slaughtered. Life was indeed unpredictable.

“The expansion has been rapid, especially after we retrieved the Dragon Vein.”

Li Huowang wasn’t surprised. The Dharma Sect had many followers, but a lot of them were fair-weathered followers who quickly switched to the stronger side.

Bai Lingmiao continued, “The White Lotus followers from the Great Liang and Qing Qiu are gradually coming to establish the White Lotus society.”

Li Huowang asked, “How many can we recruit to fight? What’s their strength like?”

Since the Dharma Sect could recruit people, the White Lotus Sect should also be able to.

“Senior Li, it’s not feasible yet. It’s too soon. We can rally people, but these commoners would only be sent to their deaths. We need time to select those who are genuinely devout believers of the Heavenly Mater, and perceptive enough to incorporate into the White Lotus Sect.

“However, if you need people to fight the Dharma Sect, I can summon the seventy-two Protectors.”

“Seventy-two people aren’t enough,” Li Huowang said. He had witnessed the strength of the White Lotus followers. They had improved, but they were still not very effective.

Bai Lingmiao hesitated before she said, “Senior Li, as the Saintess of the White Lotus, I can sense that the Heavenly Mater has grown much stronger.”

Stronger again? Has she seized another Siming’s Heavenly Dao? Li Huowang looked up at the sky. He was really curious about what

was happening in the Baiyu Capital.

“Let them come then. Ideally, bring all the skilled fighters of the White Lotus Sect. If the Dharma Sect wins, nobody benefits.”

“Alright. Senior Li, what are your plans next?”

“What else can I do? We finally have an advantage, so we need to expand it. I’ll follow if they make a move.”

“I’ll handle it if they encounter tough resistance.”

Though he no longer trusted Xuan Pin, they weren’t enemies yet.

As Li Huowang was about to say something else, he suddenly clutched his arm in pain. Blood quickly soaked through his red Daoist robe.

“Senior Li, what’s happening to you? Don’t move!” Bai Lingmiao shouted. Her long, sharp nails tapped rapidly on a drum, and she began to chant familiar incantations from the Divine Summons.

“Chaos split into black and yellow, opening heaven and establishing Yin and Yang. The earth is Yin and the sky is Yang. The moon is Yin and the sun is Yang. The north is Yin and the south is Yang. Yin is black and Yang is yellow...”

As Bai Lingmiao chanted and drummed, various faces of beasts bulged from the red veil on her head. These faces pushed up the veil and leaped away from Bai Lingmiao's face.

Each of them tore off the red veil as they leaped away, yet it seemed there was an endless supply of veils.

The Immortal families all wore the red veils. They stepped away from Bai Lingmiao and cautiously approached the now agonizing Li Huowang. Then, they circled Li Huowang warily amidst the drumming and chanting. They were clearly frightened.

As the drumbeats intensified and the chanting grew harsher, one of the Immortals was finally compelled to approach Li Huowang. Its nose, covered by the red veil, lightly touched his red

Daoist robe. The next moment, it let out a sharp and beastly scream while the veil was instantly torn to shreds.

This destruction spread as if it was contagious, ripping apart the veils of all the surrounding creatures. Soon, the area was littered with nothing but small bits of red cloth.

“It’s... it’s okay!” Li Huowang finally straightened up, but then the skin on his face opened and closed lightly like fish scales.

Each time a scale opened, it brought him excruciating pain. It almost caused him to faint despite his endurance through many battles.

Li Huowang took a deep breath and said, “It’s fine! It’s just... this occasionally happens ever since the last ascension. I’ll get used to it.”

Chapter 711 - Devotees

Li Huowang was panting, his chest exposed to the air.

He looked at his body splitting apart and healing itself uncontrollably. His sweat flowed into his wounds, making the pain even worse.

Li Huowang had felt more intense pain than this, but it had only lasted a moment. This time, it was long-lasting pain that only got worse as time passed.

Bai Lingmiao tried to help by calling for the Immortal families, but it was useless. Li Huowang knew it wouldn't work since the pain came from Ba-Hui, and the Immortal families were too weak to go against Ba-Hui.

The more times he used the Cang-Qiang Ascension, the more sensitive his senses became, and the stronger his regeneration grew.

Ba-Hui clearly couldn't wait for Li Huowang to mutilate himself anymore, deciding to inflict pain directly on Li Huowang instead.

He was close to becoming Ba-Hui's Twisted One since he used the Cang-Qiang Ascension several times. Based on the current situation, if he really became Ba-Hui's Twisted One, the pain in his body would never stop, ever.

Ba-Hui, you want to try and make me your Twisted One? You want to compete with Ji Zai? Li Huowang asked about the pain in his body.

The pain didn't have a life of its own, so nobody answered. Li Huowang continued his questions, but his consciousness was fading from being tormented by the pain. Thankfully, the pain stopped after ten minutes as his wounds began to heal rapidly.

"Let me... Let me rest first." Li Huowang lay down and fell asleep after getting tormented by the pain. He was too tired.

Bai Lingmiao inspected him and felt sorry for him. She took a basin of warm water and dipped a towel in it, then wrung out the excess water and carefully wiped Li Huowang's body.

Li Huowang's wounds soon scabbed over. The scabs fell off as she wiped his body, and Li Sui extended her tentacles to pick up the scabs carefully. Bai Lingmiao soon heard crunching noises behind her.

After washing Li Huowang's feet, Bai Lingmiao carefully covered him with a blanket and walked out.

"Suisui, your father is very tired. You can sleep with him tonight. Take care of him and make sure no one disturbs him."

"Alright." Li Sui opened her mouth, and her tentacles slithered out. She then quickly slid under Li Huowang's blanket.

Li Sui didn't forget to fold up her human skin, placing it on the top of the bed. Bai Lingmiao made sure everything was fine before she left the room.

Li Huowang is in trouble now. If he doesn't get rid of Ba-Hui's influence, the pain will accompany him for life.

Bai Lingmiao heard the Second Deity's voice in her mind but remained silent as she walked.

She soon entered a fairly narrow alley. The doors inside the alley were all carved with a lotus motif, while various banners depicting the white lotus hung on the eaves. This was the territory of the White Lotus Sect.

The White Lotus Sect was fair to everyone. There were no rich or poor people here, only earnest ones.

Bai Lingmiao looked through the cracks of a door and saw a group of devotees kneeling on the ground as they prayed.

Everyone stood and greeted Bai Lingmiao as she passed them. She soon reached a hall lit with candles. In the middle of the hall was a glowing conjoined lotus that illuminated the space as brightly as daylight.

Bai Lingmiao knelt on a cushion and prayed silently. *Oh merciful and kind Heavenly Mater, your devotee prays for Senior Li to escape his torture soon.*

The white glow from the conjoined lotus shifted slightly, as if something had happened. But in reality, nothing happened.

She prayed silently for a long time before she opened her eyes and said softly, “Your devotee will abandon everything to serve you for eternity. I pray that you will accept me. I will recite the scriptures a million times as a sign of devotion, but you must remember what you promised me. If you go back on your word, I will make you pay for it.”

After saying this, she prayed once more to the conjoined lotus.

The white glow suddenly expanded, and a ray of light shot towards her forehead. A merciful feeling enveloped her and purged all of her other emotions.

Bai Lingmiao saw an abstract version of Li Huowang in the white light.

There was a pool of red to his left, while another Li Huowang was on his right. The second Li Huowang appeared to be connected to the first Li Huowang’s palm. However, the second Li Huowang was bizarre—he didn’t have a back. Both his front and back were identical.

The bizarre Li Huowang and the pool of blood were both pulling on Li Huowang. They pulled so hard that Li Huowang’s body was split in half.

Bai Lingmiao woke up from her dream. She understood what the Heavenly Mater was trying to tell her.

It was a prophecy of sorts. Li Huowang couldn’t use the Cang-Qiang Ascension anymore—if he did, he would be torn in half!

“I thank the Heavenly Mater for the guidance.” Bai Lingmiao thanked earnestly as she prayed and kowtowed before heading back to where Li Huowang was.

She had just exited the hall when she saw the haggard-looking Lu Xiucan.

He lowered his head. "Mistress."

She saw the two missing fingers on his left hand and warned him not to use the Profound Records anymore.

After Lu Xiucan saw her leave, he entered one of the houses in the alley. He lit up three incense sticks earnestly before bowing and kneeling in front of the white lotus motif on the wall.

"This devotee, Lu Xiucan, has made his decision. I will not marry or sire children in this life. I will not eat any meat nor will I touch any money. I wish to devote my body to face the threats faced by the Heavenly Mother."

He had just said that when a woman appeared from the corner of the room. It was Lian Zhibei.

She removed Lu Xiucan's shirt and revealed his scarred back, then started tattooing his back in front of the white lotus motif.

The needles stabbing into his back made his face pale, but he stayed still and bit his lips, enduring the pain.

Chapter 712 - Division

Lu Xiucan endured the pain. He knew the white donkeys that protected Bai Lingmiao were now dead, and he also knew the Heavenly Mother required six white donkeys to revive herself.

Once the tattoo on his back was completed, he would become the Heavenly Mother's mount. He would no longer be a regular person who everyone could bully.

This was a chance that he needed to seize, even if he needed to endure excruciating pain. He refused to give up on any opportunity to become stronger.

Soon after, the tattoo of the white donkey was completed.

Lu Xiucan felt something in his body. It was a strange sensation that he had only experienced once before when he was possessed, but this time it was more long-lasting.

"You are now one step closer to the Heavenly Mother than the other devotees. Be proud of yourself and don't break your bows," Lian Zhibei said.

Sensing the changes in his body, Lu Xiucan nodded and was itching for a fight with the Dharma Sect to test his new powers.

Just then, a commotion occurred outside of the room. Lu Xiucan walked out and squinted his eyes.

The sun was already rising. The other devotees were busy clearing up their belongings to load them into the carriages.

There were fewer divisions in a day now, so the sun rose much earlier than before.

"Everyone, time to move! We need to continue spreading the kindness of the Heavenly Mother to everyone in Hou Shu. We won't be eating breakfast, so just have some rations to hold off your hunger first."

Lu Xiucan realized they were departing earlier than expected and immediately started moving.

He ran out to sort his belongings. He was always the first one rushing to fight if it meant he could kill members of the Dharma Sect.

Lu Xiucan was surprised when he saw that the White Lotus Sect was following his Master, Li Huowang, rather than the palace guards or Surveillance Bureau. He was confused about why they weren't working with the Surveillance Bureau, but he decided to keep his mouth shut when he saw Li Huowang's frowning face.

As Lu Xiucan was thinking they would have to march for a long time, Li Huowang sensed something. "I smell the scent of blood. Everyone, go south!"

The carriages started moving with Li Huowang leading them.

No one protested—they realized the stench of blood was growing stronger.

The smell of blood and rot hung in the air like a dense mist. It was clear that a massacre involving a lot of people had happened.

They climbed past a small hill and found the source of the stench. It was an entire wall made from the decapitated heads of people—a wall of death and rot.

The city wall was built using numerous skulls and heads. The air was filled with the stench of rot and blood. Everyone froze in silence at the sight of this monstrous construction. It was too much for them to take in.

Tens of thousands of people had died just to make a wall.

Li Huowang was the first person to start moving. As he got closer, he noticed more and more details from the wall.

He realized that every head belonged to a male, and most of them wore helmets. *These heads are from Hou Shu's soldiers!*

The closer he got, the stronger the stench became. He frowned as the smell assaulted his nostrils.

The Dharma Sect's intention was clear. *After their surrender, the Dharma Sect most likely had no use for Hou Shu's military, so they killed all of the soldiers and turned them into this wall.*

Li Huowang looked at the pale faces. All of them looked calm at the time of their death.

They were most likely killed in a gentle way rather than a brutal one. Did the Dharma Sect kill them to remove any potential threat? Or to warn us? Maybe both.

All Li Huowang could say for sure was that Hou Shu had been crippled. Their military forces had collapsed, and their civilians had joined the Dharma Sect. There was no one else in Hou Shu.

Li Huowang found himself entertaining a strange thought: with so many people dead, Qing Qiu's Siming of Death would most likely have indigestion.

Just then, the weather changed. A great tremor occurred, and the entire wall started to collapse. The innumerable heads began to fall on Li Huowang.

At first, Li Huowang thought something was hiding in the wall, but he soon realized the tremor came from deep below. The Earth Dragon was moving again.

"Xuan Pin, I know you are observing me! What's going on?" Li Huowang shouted at his surroundings.

As he expected, Xuan Pin's illusion floated out from the ground. "Another division is gone. The Dharma Sect has destroyed another Dragon Vein."

Li Huowang frowned at the news. "I thought we got all of them back? How did they destroy another one?"

"I told you that we had sixteen Dragon Veins that were given to sixteen kingdoms for safekeeping. The Dharma Sect must've destroyed the Dragon Vein in another kingdom."

Just as Xuan Pin finished speaking, several rotten heads started chanting in unison, "Death came from the west. An Xi."

Li Huowang unsheathed his sword and was ready to put the heads to rest again.

Xuan Pin blocked Li Huowang. “Wait, calm down. This is the elder of the Antrabhara Temple. He’s with us.

Xuan Pin continued, “What he meant is that the Dragon Vein that was destroyed came from the west. To the east of Nan Ping is Si Qi, while An Xi lies to the west. There’s also a Dragon Vein there. The Dharma Sect must’ve realized that we were too hard to destroy, so they attacked the west first.”

The tremor intensified, and the weather shifted again. Everyone saw the sun moving across the sky rapidly.

Xuan Pin was shocked. “Another division is gone.”

“Sorry, I have urgent business to attend to. Grand elder, please come visit us if you have the time.”

Xuan Pin’s illusion disappeared afterward.

There was no reason for Li Huowang to find out which Dragon Vein was destroyed this time. No matter where it was, the reality was undeniable—in just a single day, the Dharma Sect destroyed two Dragon Veins.

“We don’t have any time to lose! Let’s go to Si Qi now!”

Li Huowang and Li Sui both took out a talisman, slapping them onto the horses’ backs.

The horses ran with explosive speed as the carriage crushed the human heads.

Right after they departed, two people appeared from underneath the mound of heads.

“Was that Li Huowang?”

“Yes, that was Li Huowang.”

Chapter 713 - Courtesy

“Kill them!” Li Huowang pasted yellow talismans on his knee as he charged into the group of people. The bloodbath made his robes even redder than usual.

Even though Li Huowang was surrounded by enemies, he still held the upper hand. With his keen sense of hearing, Li Huowang noticed the ground shaking slightly.

He looked back and saw a war chariot pulled by four horses charging towards him. Li Huowang turned his wrist and a rift shot out, cutting the chariot in half.

Suddenly, a dark figure shot out from Li Huowang’s shadow. Using a dagger crafted from black stone, the figure attempted to stab Li Huowang’s waist.

Li Huowang had seen this trick one too many times and had prepared countermeasures to prevent it. He asked Li Sui to grow an eyeball behind his head.

Li Huowang twisted himself to dodge the attack before using his sword to cut the Witch down.

Suddenly, Li Huowang was thrust into complete darkness. Something affected the Dharma Sect surrounding him. An invisible call unified them, and they all jumped towards Li Huowang.

They covered the sky and blotted out the sun above Li Huowang as they raised their weapons high to stab him.

The Witch that was cut in half by Li Huowang refused to die and restrained Li Huowang’s arms using her legs.

Two hooks burst from beneath the ground and stabbed into Li Huowang’s feet to prevent him from running.

They realized Li Huowang was not someone they could fight with their strength, so they laid out traps with their own lives just

to kill Li Huowang.

The weapons stabbed Li Huowang without mercy. Li Huowang clenched his fist and howled angrily, his skin and flesh opening up like fish scales. Numerous tentacles holding torture tools burst forth from his body and started decimating the people around him.

Li Huowang twisted his body so hard that he snapped his own spine. His tentacles started spinning, too.

With the torture tools and his three swords, Li Huowang turned into a deadly spinning top as he spun and mowed down everyone.

The sun shone brightly above him by the time the sound of tearing flesh and agonized cries had vanished.

He stomped on one of the corpses with his right foot, barely catching his breath before noticing Lu Xiucui was in danger. Li Huowang ran forward to rescue him.

Minor skirmishes like these were easy for him to handle—the battle ended in ten minutes. Afterward, Li Huowang washed his swords and hands in a nearby creek.

He remembered being here before, back when they escaped from Zephyr Temple. At the time, he had set up a fireplace and stove to cook their meals. Li Huowang sighed when he thought about what he had become.

Suddenly, something flew past his head and landed in the water. Several tentacles danced happily in the water.

“Suisui, stop playing now. It’s time to go,” Li Huowang said, walking towards the shore.

Li Sui’s, or rather, Princess Anping’s alluring skin, walked up the shore with her wet clothes stuck to her body. She also had a carp in her mouth.

On the road, Li Huowang frowned as he stared at the corpses strewn everywhere. Many of the corpses were dressed in the uniform of officials.

Si Qi differed from Hou Shu. Hou Shu was still fighting against

the Dharma Sect, but Si Qi had completely fallen.

In Hou Shu, they only had to worry about getting stuck in the crossfire between the Dharma Sect and the army. But in Si Qi, Li Huowang felt that he was wading through thick mud—there were only enemies here.

They experienced too many minor skirmishes after entering Si Qi.

“I’m struggling even though there are not that many Dharma Sect members here. I imagine things are tougher on your side,” Li Huowang said to Xuan Pin.

“Correct.”

“How’s the frontline? Is it alright?”

Xuan Pin shook his head and remained silent. Li Huowang was unsure whether Xuan Pin didn’t want to tell him or didn’t know.

“What are you scheming? I doubt you think of me as a friend. Why can’t you tell me anything?”

“Li Huowang, successful people ignore the minor details. Don’t be too anxious.”

Li Huowang glared at Xuan Pin and saw the illusion start to waver. “Bullshit. I don’t want to be successful. I just want to live peacefully.”

As long as Li Huowang willed it and focused his thoughts, he could make Xuan Pin’s illusion actually disappear.

“Wait. I have a gift for you.”

All six of Xuan Pin’s arms gestured at his own stomach before producing a mirror and giving it to Li Huowang.

The monk’s illusion was confused, picking it up to inspect it under the sun.

“Wait, don’t touch it!” Li Huowang pushed the monk away and checked the mirror in the air and its contents.

He wasn’t sure what it was at first. There were lines, flags, banners, and several blinking red dots.

But Li Huowang soon realized what it was. It was a map of Si Qi.

“This is... A map of Si Qi? Are the red dots the battles occurring right now?” Li Huowang asked, pointing at the red dots in the mirror.

“That’s not all. This artifact I refined has other uses. Try reaching your arm into it.”

Li Huowang hesitantly touched the mirror with one finger.

When he touched one of the red dots, he felt as if he had been transported into the war zone. Screaming and crying could be heard everywhere, with a murderous area permeating the surroundings.

The deep sound of a horn came from afar, making Li Huowang’s skin tingle. Then, the ground began to tremble, and the vibrations grew stronger and stronger.

The cavalry from Qing Qiu charged towards the Dharma Sect, who was carrying a massive statue.

Li Huowang felt his blood boiling. He took a deep breath and retracted his finger before realizing he was back in his original location.

He looked at Xuan Pin and placed his finger on one of the flags. This time, he saw several generals from Qing Qiu discussing in a war tent.

Hearing their discussions, Li Huowang realized they were giving out orders and strategizing. Li Huowang understood how powerful the artifact was.

“How is it?” Xuan Pin asked. “With this, you can understand the situation on the battlefield and locate our forces.”

Xuan Pin’s arm extended from his red robes and patted Li Huowang lightly. “We are allies, so... How about you forgive me for the incident with the Earth Dragon?”

Chapter 714 - Breakthrough

Li Huowang now understood why Xuan Pin had given him this gift, but he didn't buy Xuan Pin's explanation.

"Allies? Then why did you wait until now to give it to me?"

"You think this is a lifespan pill that we can find everywhere? This is an artifact that I had to refine using numerous other rare treasures."

"Bullshit. This is just an illusion. What kind of treasure would you have to use?"

Li Huowang walked towards the carriage while the mirror floated by his side.

"Everything has a form in this profound world, including illusions. In fact, one could even refine them. Honestly, you are not as good at using illusions as I am," Xuan Pin said.

In the end, Li Huowang never said anything about letting the incident regarding the Earth Dragon go, but Xuan Pin didn't need him to say it out loud. Xuan Pin knew his goal had been achieved based on Li Huowang's tone.

He refused to say it out loud, but Li Huowang had to admit that the mirror Xuan Pin gave him was very useful.

With the artifact, he could see the battlefield easily and even save some strength. At the very least, he could follow the path the soldiers had walked past.

Even though the path was covered in corpses, wild dogs, and vultures, they no longer had to worry about any ambushes since the soldiers had killed everything in their path. The White Lotus Sect members following Li Huowang sighed in relief.

Thanks to the artifact, they were able to walk through a path without enemies and reach the frontline faster than expected.

Sensing that they were close to the front lines, their dinner for the night was more extravagant than usual.

It was soon nighttime, but Li Huowang was woken up by Bai Lingmiao.

“There’s fish?” Li Huowang stared at the wild vegetable fish soup in his bowl. The milky white soup looked delicious.

“There’s a lot more rivers in Si Qi. Suisui was the one who hunted the fish. She’s really skillful underwater and chose the larger ones.”

Li Huowang nodded and ate his meal quickly. He also occasionally glanced at the battlefield covered in corpses.

Bai Lingmiao saw the scab that resembled fish scales on Li Huowang's face and frowned. “Senior Li, what do you intend to do once we are at the frontlines?”

“Oh, we are not going to the frontlines. That’s a place for the soldiers, not us,” Li Huowang said as he chewed on the fish.

“Huh? But aren’t we heading...”

“We won’t achieve anything by going to the front lines to kill the Dharma Sect with the soldiers. They already have enough people doing that. To help in large-scale battles like that, we can kill the leaders instead.”

No matter how small each army of the Dharma Sect was, it was bound to have a leader. Li Huowang intended to kill the leaders to destroy the Dharma Sect from the inside.

The Surveillance Bureau’s informants and spies should have infiltrated their ranks by now. I should be able to get some information soon.

Li Huowang didn’t know where the Dharma Sect's base was. He needed to get the information quickly to kill the Dharma Sect’s leaders and destroy their army.

“But won’t the Dharma Sect have a lot of strong individuals in their base?”

“That’s true. That’s why I need to hasten my cultivation of the ‘Truth’ to increase our chances of winning.”

Li Huowang emptied his bowl, wiped his mouth, and entered the dark forest.

Bai Lingmiao did not follow him. By now, she was used to his schedule—resting during the day and cultivating at night.

Li Huowang sat on a smooth boulder in the forest and started his cultivation. He focused and shut off his senses.

Everything around Li Huowang disappeared as he carefully used his inner sight to envelop his primordial breath and push it closer to his Heart Chakra. It was a slow process that made him feel as if he was pushing a boulder up a mountain.

Li Huowang soon lost himself in his cultivation and forgot everything. He directed all of his attention and thoughts towards pushing the primordial breath.

It was a profound feeling. He felt that he was close to completion, yet just a single step away.

He didn’t know how much time had passed by the time he opened his eyes again. He sensed no changes in his body and sighed. This was something only he knew how to do. He couldn’t look for someone else to teach him.

“Dad, it’s daytime!” Li Huowang heard Li Sui’s voice, then hopped off the boulder and approached Li Sui.

“Dad, look at what I’ve caught! There’s so much delicious food here!” Li Sui held several vultures and showed them off to Li Huowang.

“The flesh of these birds is foul. Throw them away,” Li Huowang said and discreetly looked at Bai Lingmiao.

“Suisui, we will leave secretly. Don’t tell your Mom or Second Mom.”

“Why? Mom and Second Mom are very strong.” Li Sui was confused.

“Because the battle later will be very intense. I don’t want to get them involved.”

Li Huowang didn’t know how many experts were in the Dharma Sect or how many Simings were working together. He only knew that the Dharma Sect was very dangerous.

Bai Lingmiao survived last time, but she had to pay a terrible price, causing her to look like an amalgamation of beast and human. He knew that it would be dangerous later, so he didn’t want her to risk her life anymore.

Even though Bai Lingmiao would hate him for this, it would be better than losing her life.

Li Sui nodded. “Alright.”

“We need to be quiet now. Your Mom might not be able to see with her eyes, but her ears are very sharp.” Li Huowang held onto Li Sui’s hand and walked away.

He had just entered the forest when he heard someone above him.

“Dad? Who were you talking to?”

Li Huowang paused and looked up. He suddenly realized that the sky was not the same anymore. It was a reflection of the surface he was walking on!

Li Sui was jumping on top of a tree in an attempt to reach Li Huowang.

Li Huowang looked at the inverted Li Sui and then looked at the Li Sui whose hand he was holding.

He looked around and saw that everything had been reflected. The Li Sui beside Li Huowang held his hands tighter as she looked at Li Huowang with confusion and fear. “Dad?”

Then, her body disappeared.

Li Huowang looked at the Li Sui above him and then at his

now-empty right hand, realization dawning on him.

Everything around him started to become fake, and Li Huowang started falling “upwards.”

He quickly landed on the ground. When he landed, he looked up and saw the reflection of the land above him gradually disappearing.

He checked his body and realized that his cultivation had progressed. His primordial breath was now sitting in his Heart Chakra!

Chapter 715 - City Wall

A woman's corpse cut in half was laid over a well with putrid water. Her body was twitching and her eyeball was dangling out of her eye socket.

The twitching stopped abruptly. The rats that were nibbling on her corpse sensed something and stopped, then burrowed out of her body and scattered.

Li Huowang soon walked past the corpse as they continued forward.

He frowned and looked around the destroyed village. Everything lay in ruins, devoid of any survivors. The ground had been razed, and death permeated the entire village.

Li Huowang remembered this place. He had stayed here for the night when he first escaped Zephyr Temple. It had once been a lively place, but now there wasn't a single person alive.

Everyone had been butchered.

The place was already close to the front lines. To the people of Si Qi, the army and the Dharma Sect were one and the same.

By assessing the freshness of the corpses, Li Huowang determined that the village had been destroyed recently.

"Suisui, rest a bit for now. We'll be arriving soon," Li Huowang suggested, settling down on the bench and munching on his rations.

With sadness in her eyes, Li Sui looked at the lifeless bodies. "Dad, so many people died."

She now understood the meaning of death.

"Right. As the saying goes, it's better to be a dog in times of peace than a human in times of chaos."

Li Huowang felt nothing in his heart when he looked at the old monk's illusion trying to appease the souls of the dead. The monk

had tried this with every corpse along the way, so Li Huowang had grown used to it.

Li Huowang was actually focused on himself right now. He couldn't stop thinking about what had happened.

What's going on? How did I conjure up another Suisui?

While he was happy his cultivation had advanced, he was now feeling uneasy.

The more he cultivated the 'Truth,' the stronger it became. Initially, he experienced intense headaches and nosebleeds whenever he attempted to materialize something. But now that he was at the Heart Chakra, or the fourth stage, he could easily materialize anything.

Still, are there really no side effects to Doulao's cultivation method?

Li Huowang was worried.

He suddenly remembered something. *Wait, I've asked Ji Zai before! He didn't answer, so I've continued my cultivation, but what if...*

Ji Zai was his own Siming, but he was constantly stuck in a state of bewilderment. *Does Ji Zai mean no harm despite not helping?*

Li Huowang couldn't use the techniques of the Ao Jing Sect for now. Without his ability to utilize the power of 'Truth,' he would only have his swords and physical abilities at his disposal.

Li Huowang had his own plans. *No, I cannot trust Ji Zai completely. I should still use Profound Records. I cannot let him think that I have full trust in him.*

His lack of knowledge about the Simings made him refuse to believe their words wholeheartedly, even if the Siming in question was his future self.

Li Huowang needed to ensure that Ji Zai was wary of him to prevent himself from being reduced to a mere pawn.

Li Huowang lifted the water-filled gourd to his lips and took a sip, washing down his dry rations. As he did, he saw the red glow of

sunlight towards his left. There were smoke signals there.

“I recall where that place is...” Li Huowang touched the mirror that Xuan Pin had given him.

Through the mirror, he saw what was happening. The unified soldiers were besieging a city occupied by the Dharma Sect.

It was an important city, and both sides were unwilling to back down. Disregarding it would have dire consequences for either side—losing the city meant losing essential supply lines.

Li Huowang removed his finger and took Li Sui with him. They sprinted towards the city.

After passing through the forest, Li Huowang reached the gruesome front line. He saw boiling oil pouring down from the top of the city wall. Some of the stronger soldiers endured the boiling oil and reached the top even as their skin was burned off.

Many of the soldiers managed to make their way into the city, where countless battles were waged inside and out.

Li Huowang circled to the other side instead. Realizing that the security on the eastern side was slightly weaker, he quickly projected his body downwards and turned invisible before moving.

When he reached the city wall, he placed his palm on it rather than climbing it. He closed his eyes and pushed forward, letting his body sink into the wall.

When he reached the other side, he placed his palm on the wall again and felt its solid surface. His cultivation had finally paid off!

“Time to go!” A tentacle sprouted out of Li Huowang and hooked itself onto the roof. Li Sui pulled Li Huowang onto the top of the roof.

Li Huowang steadied himself before realizing the City God Temple had been replaced with a massive stone statue depicting some unknown deity.

The black statue was making a Vajra Seal with its left hand and holding onto a vase with its right hand. Even though the statue’s

face depicted it as merciful, Li Huowang felt that the statue was perversely twisted.

No matter what it was, he was certain that the statue was not god Yu'er. God Yu'er dwelled in the darkness and couldn't be portrayed with just clay and stones.

Did god Yu'er gain a new body to trick even more people? It seemed plausible to Li Huowang. He doubted anyone would join if they saw the true form of god Yu'er.

Li Huowang ran on the roof, quickly pinpointing the area where the leaders of the Dharma Sect in the area were most likely hiding in. Only the county's magistrate's office could have stone lions placed in front of the door.

Suddenly, a spear pierced through the roof tile that Li Huowang was standing on and stabbed into his feet. *An ambush? I've been spotted!*

Li Huowang tried to escape, but the spear was faster. The roof collapsed from the attack, and Li Huowang fell down into a dark house.

Before long, he saw the person who attacked him. It was a man standing on stilts while holding onto two spears.

The man chuckled at Li Huowang and said, "You think you can launch a surprise attack at our base camp with your lousy footing? My spears are coated in—"

Li Huowang stabbed his purple-tassel sword into the man's throat without waiting for the man to finish his sentence.

"Who cares what you've coated your spears in? I just need to kill you."

Li Huowang understood his powers well. He wouldn't be in danger if he didn't hear what the spears were coated in. He twisted his sword and cut off the man's head, then jumped out of the house before the man's lifeless body even hit the ground.

Chapter 716 - Door Gods

The Dharma Sect had expected the possibility of someone targeting their leaders instead.

Li Huowang had just exited the house when three more figures pounced towards him.

Bam! They crashed into Peng Longteng's sturdy armor.

Peng Longteng lowered her body. Li Huowang used his imagination and grew another head for her. Her halberd also reappeared in her hands.

At last, Peng Longteng felt free. Revealing a bloodthirsty smile, she charged towards the Dharma Sect's witches and finally broke her silence. "Kill them all!"

As soon as she had her weapon back, she transformed into a merciless killing machine. None of the people from the Dharma Sect could approach her.

"Give me a horse!"

A warhorse appeared, and Peng Longteng quickly mounted it. She crashed into the door of the county magistrate's office with a deafening boom, crushing the hinges, part of the wall, and even the people standing behind it.

Peng Longteng continued her charge. As if trying to vent her frustration, she charged without dodging. She relied on her massive, sturdy frame to crush everything beneath her horse. The old buildings collapsed without any resistance.

As Peng Longteng was attracting the attention of the Dharma Sect, Li Huowang circled around from the courtyard. To avoid detection, Li Huowang kept his body hidden, swimming underground through the earth instead.

The guards attempted to stab him by plunging their swords

into the ground, but were unsuccessful. Li Huowang had to admit that the more he used his primordial breath, the better he got at controlling it.

He easily disposed of the hidden guards and entered one of the houses.

Li Huowang found the people he needed. Several officials wearing black cloths on their shoulders and white cloths wrapped around their heads were huddled around a big sand table. They were constantly directing the troops on how to attack.

Are they the leaders?

Li Huowang didn't attack directly. Instead, he pressed his fingers to his temples and focused.

The ground suddenly turned into liquid, causing everything in the house to sink and bury them alive.

The room became deadly silent.

Wait, that's it? Li Huowang never thought it would be over so soon.

How could the leaders get killed so easily?

Li Huowang thought that there was a trap nearby. He heard the commotion outside caused by Peng Longteng, but nothing happened. He realized that he was no longer the Li Huowang he once was.

He submerged himself into the ground and was about to swim away when he felt someone stomping the ground above him and chuckling.

"You already killed them. Are you planning to leave without telling us?"

The ground split apart as Li Huowang thrust all three swords above, but he frowned when he realized none of his swords were covered in blood. He resurfaced and looked around, only to hear a voice say, "No need to look around. We are here."

Li Huowang looked in the direction of the voice and saw that it

came from the door gods[1] in the wall. They were just like the ones he saw pasted on doors during the Chinese New Year.

They were tall and sturdy, with sideburns, bushy beards, and horns protruding from their heads. Clad in armor, each had a sword on their hip and gripped a cherry-wood sword in their hands.

The only thing different about the door gods here was the black cloth on their shoulders. Even the door gods in Si Qi belonged to god Yu'er.

"You can call me Shenshu.[2] I had been wanting to recruit you." One of the door gods stared at Li Huowang.

"Recruit me? The Dharma Sect wants to recruit *me*?" Li Huowang thought he had misheard.

"That's right. Even though you've foiled a lot of our plans, our Imperial Preceptor still thinks that you are someone who could understand the bigger picture."

Li Huowang almost laughed. "You've killed so many people and committed so many crimes, yet you're thinking of recruiting me?"

"Did any of your family members die during the war? If you join us, the Imperial Preceptor can revive them."

Li Huowang stabbed the door without thinking twice. "You think I would believe you? Even the Simings can't do that, so what makes you think you can do it?"

"The Simings of this realm cannot do so, but the Simings from the other realms can. We are humbly requesting you to surrender to us."

Li Huowang frowned and removed his sword. "What did you say?"

He wasn't trying to stab them anymore. He wanted to see if he could fish out more information from the door gods.

"The Simings control the Heavenly Daos. They are gods in a sense, but there are only fifty Heavenly Daos. They cannot do

everything, and reviving the dead is one of those things.”

“So god Yu’er can do what the Simings can’t? Isn’t he also controlling a Heavenly Dao?” Li Huowang scoffed and tried to trick Shenshu into telling him more.

“God Yu’er can do so because he controls a special Heavenly Dao. The Heavenly Daos of Da Nuo cannot achieve that, but Heavenly Daos beyond this realm can.”

“Beyond... Beyond this realm?” Li Huowang was confused. If Da Nuo was this world, what was the realm beyond this?

“Looks like you really don’t know anything. Even Xuan Pin didn’t tell you about it. It seems that he’s wary of you,” The door god remarked. “You think you know a lot because you’ve learned about the Baiyu Capital and the Simings, but there’s still much to learn. The Heavenly Daos of Da Nuo have clearly separated Life and Death. One cannot go beyond the other. But this is not the case in the other realms where they can return to life. In their world, life and the afterlife are not as clearly separated. Da Nuo is where you live and all you know, just like a frog beneath a well. You do not know how special the Heavenly Daos of the other realms are.”

Li Huowang stared at the door gods. Given how much they had explained, it appeared that they really wanted to recruit him.

“Think carefully. I am telling the truth. Do you not want to revive Zhuge Yuan and Bai Lingmiao’s family?”

Li Huowang was perturbed for the first time throughout their conversation. *They know about them too?!*

“Didn’t you say that you want to save the world? Once god Yu’er descends, everyone who died will be brought back to life. Isn’t this the salvation you seek?”

“Bullshit!” Li Huowang shouted. “Do you think I’m blind? The Qi Kingdom has been occupied by god Yu’er! Look at what happened over there!”

Li Huowang could still remember the strange liquid flowing out

from the Qi Kingdom. The Qi Kingdom had long since submerged in the strange liquid that turned humans into monsters.

“Foolish. Have you been to the Qi Kingdom today? You’ve only listened to rumors. God Yu’er revived everyone in the Qi Kingdom and eliminated famine! Now, people can enjoy a peaceful era where everyone looks out for each other! Everyone is now equal to each other!”

1. Divine guardians of doors from Chinese folklore who ward off evil influences. 🙌

2. A deity that suppresses and hunts down evil entities. One of the door gods, with the other being called Yulu. 🙌

Chapter 717 - Ambush

The Qi Kingdom is saved? Everyone is equal? Li Huowang never thought he would hear something like that from the Dharma Sect.

He swung his spine sword towards the door. A rift flew out and red liquid spilled out from it, tainting and mutating everything it touched.

Li Huowang pointed at the liquid and snarled, “Is this what you meant by saving the people? The Qi Kingdom is still covered in that crappy stuff! How dare you claim that the people of the Qi Kingdom have been revived and are living in peace!”

“Li Huowang, it seems that I overestimated how much you know about the world. I thought you would easily understand it as a Twisted One, but I was mistaken. It looks like Xuan Pin hid a lot of things from you.”

Before Li Huowang could even answer, a lump of flesh plopped out from the closing rift. It was white, sticky, and looked like a deformed body.

Due to the rift closing, only half of the organism’s body managed to reach the Liang Kingdom. Even so, it tried to crawl on the ground as it expanded and contracted without any signs of dying.

Several short pink tentacles sprouted from the organism's forehead, and it let out a baby’s cry. Its body lacked a fixed shape and continuously changed.

Shenshu looked at the organism and said, “Both kindness and evil are illusions. Our bodies are like bubbles, yet our hearts are like the wind. Everything is an illusion.”

“What the fuck are you talking about? Explain clearly!” Li Huowang said as he stared at the weird organism. He felt unsettled

because the organism still had the vague shape of a human.

“All kind acts are illusions, just as all evil acts are. Our bodies are like bubbles that gather together, having form but no essence. Our hearts are like the wind, shapeless and traceless but capable of being felt. In a sense, everything we feel is an illusion.”

Shenshu pointed at the organism that was trying to escape into the courtyard. “But now, things are different. God Yu’er allows us to break free from such illusions and become real. We are no longer like bubbles or the wind!

“As long as you submit to god Yu’er, we will no longer be false! Think about this, Li Huowang. This is what an Immortal looks like. Aren’t you a Daoist too? If you worship god Yu’er, you too can become an Immortal!”

“Immortal?” Li Huowang stared at the organism before realizing what it was and why the people of the Qi Kingdom no longer died.

The people in the Qi Kingdom had indeed revived, but it was a fate worse than death.

Shenshu refused to give up on persuading Li Huowang. “How about it?”

“No.”

“No?” Shenshu stared at Li Huowang in disbelief. “Do you not want to revive the people close to you? Do you not want to become an Immortal?”

“Of course I want to,” Li Huowang said, tightening his grip on his swords, “but I don’t like begging people for it. Since you’ve said that god Yu’er has the Heavenly Dao to revive people, I do not need to negotiate with him. I can just kill him and take it for myself. Isn’t that better?”

To the Dharma Sect, this was nothing short of heresy.

“You dare besmirch the name of god Yu’er?!”

Bam! The doors slammed shut. The red armor of both door

gods gradually turned green.

Li Huowang wasn't surprised that there was an ambush. He shot another rift towards the door gods and dashed towards it.

The door gods had to open the door to let the rift fly out. By the time they closed the doors again, Li Huowang was nowhere to be seen.

The two door gods looked at each other before nodding. They clapped their palms together and chanted, "The Dharma itself is without Dharma, but it is still the Dharma. When facing the lack of Dharma, how can the Dharma not be the Dharma?"

Their consciousness expanded and covered the entire place. Nothing escaped their senses. "Be careful. He knows how to burrow into the ground."

Without warning, Li Huowang burst out from the ground and cut one of the door gods in half, splitting the wooden door into two.

He was about to attack the second door god when Li Sui shouted in his ears.

"Dad! He's on your body!"

"What?" Li Huowang looked down and saw the door god in his red robes.

The door god swung his sword and cut Li Huowang's arm in half, but countless black tentacles sprouted and grafted it back to Li Huowang.

"Scram!" Li Sui gave Li Huowang his ribs, and he stabbed them into his torso. The pain from his chest was transmitted to the door god.

The door god suffered intense pain and tried to escape. It slid onto the ground, but Li Huowang didn't let it go.

Li Huowang stomped the door god with his right foot and swung his sword downwards.

Suddenly, everything around Li Huowang turned dark. He looked up and saw that the other door god was trying to crush his

body with the door itself!

Just as the door god had almost crushed Li Huowang, Peng Longteng crashed into it with the warhorse and destroyed the door into pieces. She then laughed ecstatically as she battered the left wall with her bloody body.

Li Huowang looked at the door god on the ground and grabbed it with both arms. He pulled the door god's body in two opposing directions and stretched its body long.

In the end, the door god cried in pain as Li Huowang tore it in half. At the same time, the walls and roof collapsed.

By the time the dust settled, Li Huowang had walked out from the rubble. He looked at the army breaching the city wall and mumbled, "Is that it? It looks like the Dharma Sect is fighting a losing battle."

He didn't know if it was because his abilities were growing rapidly, but he felt that it had been too easy.

A strange female voice chuckled from behind Li Huowang. "Is that so? Well, I don't think so."

He slowly turned around and saw a woman wearing a large porcelain doll's head. She was sitting on a roof and holding two dolls of door god in her hands.

One was torn in half, while the other was torn into several pieces—just like the door gods that had just perished.

Chapter 718 - Bring It On

She threw the dolls away. “Are you Li Huowang? Let me ask you again. Will you really not join us?”

Li Huowang didn’t bother answering her. Several tentacles slammed the ground and propelled him forward as he raised his sword.

Li Huowang was about to cut down the woman when the animal ornaments on the roof ridge came to life and tried to bite Li Huowang.

Li Sui’s tentacles burst forth from his abdomen and bound all of the ornaments. Li Huowang didn’t even need to use his energy to take care of the things below him.

His sword was now less than three inches away from the lady’s head.

Pa! The doll’s head suddenly flew upwards as if it had grown wings, revealing the middle-aged woman beneath it.

The woman stared at Li Huowang blankly when he was about to kill her. They locked gazes, and Li Huowang suddenly felt a chill in his spine.

He didn’t know who she was, but he was certain she was dangerous.

Li Huowang then realized what was happening. *She’s a Muddled One!*

It was a trap!

“Close your eyes!” Li Huowang shouted, and the woman complied.

Li Huowang stared at the woman and used his cultivation. Her eyelids rapidly merged with her face, giving her no chance to open eyes once more.

“Hahaha!” The doll’s head rolling on the ground laughed. “Li Huowang, do you think that it’s over? We’ve prepared so many traps for you today! You will die here!”

Bam! A horse hoof slammed downwards and crushed the doll’s head.

“Bring it on then! Show me everything!” Peng Longteng swung her halberd and hollered.

While Peng Longteng taunted them, Li Huowang realized he was in danger and didn’t dare risk it. He immediately ran towards the place where the city wall had fallen.

There was no reason not to run now that they had declared they had a trap for him.

Li Huowang jumped from roof to roof as he escaped.

But then he saw something unexpected. A Lama in black clothes was sitting on one of the roofs with his back facing towards Li Huowang. The Lama also had a black cloth on his shoulder.

A Lama? Just as Li Huowang realized this, the Lama took out a prayer wheel and started spinning it, chanting in a strange language.

As the wheel spun faster, Li Huowang felt it was pulling him towards it. He lost control of his eyes as they gradually looked towards the spinning wheel.

It’s the Lama from the Antrabhara Temple! What’s the Siming of Death doing? Is it working for both sides?! Li Huowang swung his spine sword and sent a rift towards the Lama.

The tiles split apart as the rift shot forward. A strong wind suddenly surged downwards as numerous white shadows flew down. Every time they brushed past Li Huowang’s body, they left laceration wounds so deep that they revealed Li Huowang’s bones.

When one of the white shadows swooped down again, Li Huowang whipped his bronze coin sword around, cutting the white shadows in the process.

But Li Huowang was caught off-guard when the bronze coin sword easily cut through the white shadows. They were surprisingly fragile.

As he whipped the bronze coin sword ferociously, numerous white shadows were cut into pieces of paper.

Li Huowang finally realized who was ambushing him upon seeing two scholars blocking him from the front and back. The scholars had three arms instead of two.

But it was clear they were not the only ones. Li Huowang quickly glanced around and saw people from different sects that had joined the Dharma Sect.

He was completely surrounded.

Someone stepped forward, and Li Huowang immediately recognized who it was. The familiar face with a white towel on his forehead belonged to Taishan Shi, a devotee of the Dharma Sect in the Qi Kingdom.

Li Huowang tried to delay them as he looked around for an opportunity. "I was curious as to why there were no news about you. It seems that you had escaped to this place."

He was completely surrounded and had no choice but to break through the encirclement with brute force.

"Do you really think you can stop me with so few people?" Li Huowang said slowly.

"Stop lying. The only reason you managed to escape the Earth Dragon's stomach was the Cang-Qiang Ascension. You are alone today, and you will die."

Taishan Shi raised his chin and everyone launched themselves toward Li Huowang.

Bam! Peng Longteng fell from the sky with her war horse and crushed two people beneath her. She then charged forward into the crowd.

"Fire!" Li Huowang sacrificed his skin and was quickly

engulfed by flames.

But the pain was not enough. Ba-Hui needed more.

Li Huowang's flesh burst open like fish scales, and the fire slithered inside.

Sensing that something was wrong, Li Huowang immediately spat Li Sui out.

His blood was being burned by the fire as it boiled. Li Huowang had never felt pain this severe before. He burned, both inside and out.

And thanks to the price he paid, the fire on his body intensified many times over.

"Ba-Hui, you fucking bitch!" Li Huowang cursed at the sky before he charged toward Taishan Shi with his burning body.

Li Huowang was both the fuel and the flames. Everything around him burned up regardless of whether they were flammable or not. The very air distorted from the intense heat.

"Charge!" Peng Longteng charged into the fire.

Her armor, halberd, and even her war horse were covered in the very same flames from Li Huowang's body.

This was the most excited she had ever been since becoming Li Huowang's illusion.

"Bring it on!"

Peng Longteng stabbed her halberd backward and hooked Li Huowang's body. She swung it forcefully and launched the burning Li Huowang like a catapult towards the crowd!

Chapter 719 - Array

Li Huowang crashed into the group after being thrown by Peng Longteng.

The fire on Li Huowang's body radiated outward, turning him into a human torch. The flames burned everything, including inflammable objects.

At the same time, the burning Peng Longteng reached the crowd too as she swung her halberd at the Dharma Sect.

Her armor was already a dull red from the flames. She was like a god of massacre as she cut down everyone in her path.

The Dharma Sect landed numerous attacks on Peng Longteng, including several fatal ones, but she refused to fall down. Li Huowang had removed the one weakness that those from the military had: their mortality.

“Die! Everyone must die!”

Peng Longteng felt alive again. She felt as if she had returned to the days when she led crusades and raids across the sandy plains. She loved this feeling, and she loved killing people. She relished the feeling of stomping humans beneath her horse.

The Dharma Sect was clearly at a disadvantage with Peng Longteng and Li Huowang attacking them. Many of them burned up without being able to do anything.

Even so, the Dharma Sect had plans to fight against the unyielding Li Huowang.

“To the east of Qianjing Yao's Jade Pool is the Qingtong, commanded by the Sacred One! Fire is thrown from ten thousand miles away as it shakes the palace but the rain riders bring the overwhelming mist swiftly! Mulang and Taiyi are the strongest in the three mountains, while thunder breaks through the source of

springs! A single shout changed the darkness into light across the four seas, and wherever the rainstorm reaches, the rivers overflow!”

Three cherrywood swords with purple talismans pointed at the sky. Dark clouds gathered, and rain showered down on Li Huowang.

Even though the rain couldn't extinguish the fire given by Ba-Hui, it still suppressed it.

As it rained heavily, a witch jumped out of Li Huowang's shadow to stab his calves.

A tentacle shot out and restrained the witch's hand. “Don't you dare touch my father!”

The witch saw several more black tentacles shooting towards her.

The tentacles became smooth as they were exposed in the rain. Li Sui slid her tentacles past the witch's veil and into her orifices.

After Li Sui got used to the new body, she turned around and started stabbing the black dagger at the other Dharma Sect members.

Many Dharma Sect members fell under Li Huowang and Peng Longteng's assault, but Taishan Shi showed no hints of panic. Instead, he was counting something using his fingers.

As he quickly calculated, the Dharma Sect surrounding Li Huowang moved rhythmically.

Taishan Shi is still their leader! I didn't think he would be able to adapt so well after several months! I need to kill him instead, or there will be no end to this! Li Huowang then gave Peng Longteng a knowing look.

The experienced Peng Longteng knew what he wanted. She spun her halberd before hurling it at Taishan Shi.

The heavy weapon flew towards Taishan Shi, but an old man beside him tried to block it. The old man waved his sleeve, and several dark shadows shot out towards the halberd.

Just as the shadows almost crashed into the halberd, Li Huowang focused his gaze on the halberd. It turned back into an illusion and phased through the shadows.

The halberd never stopped as it continued to fly towards Taishan Shi.

But now that it had changed back into an illusion, only Li Huowang could see it.

Before the halberd crashed into Taishan Shi, Li Huowang focused, and the halberd materialized back into reality.

Even Taishan Shi couldn't dodge when the halberd was so close to him. The halberd landed squarely on his body.

But Taishan Shi was unharmed. As the halberd struck his body, the sound of metal clashing into stone reverberated throughout the area.

Taishan Shi then grabbed the halberd and snapped it in half, much to the shock of Li Huowang and Peng Longteng.

Taishan Shi threw the halberd onto the ground before he looked at Li Huowang. "Formation!"

The Dharma Sect around Li Huowang removed their clothes and revealed their tattoos.

The tattoos were written in a strange language resembling circles.

Amidst the heavy rain, the witches started rapidly shaking and twisting their bodies.

The tattoos on their bodies linked with one another as they formed a large-scale living array. Li Huowang was in the middle of the array. This time, the array was even more complex than the one the Dharma Sect had laid in the swamp!

A strange voice escaped from the witches' mouth. It resembled the chanting of a scripture, but some of their words were almost impossible to be spoken with a human's vocal chord.

"Yan na li luo mi duo ma shu, the Heavenly Door opens, yan

ma li duo dou luo sha shu, may the Doors of the Damned remain open, yan tuo su li luo ma ji sha shu, may we surpass life and death...”

As they chanted in unison, Li Huowang heard the faintest trace of a crane’s cry.

Li Huowang didn’t know what they were trying to do, but he knew that if he didn’t stop them now, he would die!

He shot out several rifts using the spine sword towards the witches. To his surprise, none of them made any attempts to dodge it.

After they perished, the tattoos on their body detached and floated in the air as the array continued to activate.

The faint voice of a crane’s cry could be heard, and Li Huowang felt something staring at him from above.

The familiar feeling made Li Huowang realize what was going on. “Are they trying to summon god Yu’er just to deal with me!?”

Li Huowang still remembered how strong Yinyang Doulao was, even though it had just been part of it. Even Zhuge Yuan hadn’t been able to fight against Doulao.

If god Yu’er descended, Li Huowang was certain he would die. He was Ji Zai’s Twisted One, but he would still die.

Even Peng Longteng and Suisui knew this. They quickly killed the people in the array, but the crane’s cry continued to grow stronger.

Li Huowang swung his sword at the tattoos floating in the middle of the air. Even though he managed to cut them, the tattoos glued back together in the next instant.

“Li Huowang, today is the day you die!” Taishan Shi glared at him. “You should be proud! Not everyone gets to meet Sir Arrogant Stone!”

“You want me to die? Dream on!” Li Huowang threw his sword upwards. He then stomped on Peng Longteng’s hands as she flung

him upwards.

High up in the air, Li Huowang looked down. His eyes were already white from being burned, but he still saw what the array looked like.

The twisting array formed the massive character “滇.”[\[1\]](#)

The crane’s cry became louder by the second. Li Huowang snarled and imagined himself grabbing the entire array. He grabbed the top and bottom parts with his hands.

1. 滇 is the old name for Yunnan Province. I can’t find any other meaning for it. 

Chapter 720 - Taishan Shi

Veins popped in Li Huowang's charred forehead. His blood literally boiled from the intense heat but was cooled down by the rain.

Come on! Didn't I turn an entire land into reality? I need to show them the strength of my cultivation! Tear it apart!

Li Huowang forcefully tore apart the array on the ground along with the land itself.

Veins burst open in his head as he fell weakly from the air. He stared at the being retreating into the clouds and laughed.

“HAHAHA! This is so fun! Ba-Hui, did you see that?! Look at what others have given me compared to what you've given me! You are a disgrace!”

Li Huowang was just inches away from the ground when he swiftly twisted his body and landed on the soft earth.

Everyone had stopped moving as they stared at Li Huowang with shock. They saw Li Huowang forcefully tearing apart the entire array.

The Dharma Sect members wavered, including even the most zealous devotees of god Yu'er. All of them hesitated when it came to defeating Li Huowang. They began asking themselves whether they could actually defeat Li Huowang.

Even Taishan Shi was not in a good mood. He had never expected something like this to happen. He knew Li Huowang was the Twisted One of Ji Zai, but he never expected him to be that strong.

Taishan Shi knew he needed to call the Imperial Preceptor if he wanted to kill Li Huowang, as the latter had improved dramatically in a short time. He had to eliminate Li Huowang quickly, or Li

Huowang might actually destroy the Dharma Sect's plan.

Even though Li Huowang used up almost all of his strength to tear the array apart, he refused to fall despite being surrounded by the Dharma Sect. At this point, his head was still buzzing from overexertion.

Still, that did not stop Li Huowang from attacking them. Li Huowang raised his hand and made a crushing gesture towards one of the Dharma Sect's witches. The witch's head exploded just like that.

"I didn't really understand what you told me just now, but I do think that you all are right in certain aspects. The human body can really be like bubbles. For example, your bodies are just like bubbles in my hands."

Li Huowang raised his arm and crushed another Dharma Sect member's head. He then pointed his arm at Taishan Shi.

Taishan Shi looked at Li Huowang and then at the soldiers swarming into the city. Without any hesitation, he made a seal with his hands and immediately tunneled into the ground.

Taishan Shi had failed. He had underestimated how strong Li Huowang was. Thankfully, he didn't reveal the spy they planted in the Surveillance Bureau, or else they would've suffered some major losses.

Taishan Shi's voice came from below. "Go! Kill him! He's on his last legs!"

Upon hearing this, the remaining Dharma Sect members charged at Li Huowang with madness in their eyes, all while the rain continued to pour down.

They weren't a match for Li Huowang before, and they naturally couldn't win now either.

Li Huowang realized that Taishan Shi and the others were trying to escape. *I can't let him get away! He's definitely in the upper ranks of the Dharma Sect!*

It was difficult to track Taishan Shi since he had been tunneling underground. Li Huowang hadn't learned any tracking methods, so he didn't know where Taishan Shi was.

Li Huowang also knew his divination was too weak to be effective on Taishan Shi. He would just embarrass himself if he tried.

The other Dharma Sect members were throwing themselves at Li Huowang, disregarding their lives as they tried to secure time for Taishan Shi to escape.

The Dharma Sect had many members. Even if they didn't move, Li Huowang would still need quite some time to kill them all. Thankfully, the soldiers from outside managed to breach the wall and enter the city.

Li Huowang ignored the soldiers and crouched as he tried to find the traces of Taishan Shi tunneling underground.

He refused to give up on Taishan Shi just like that. Li Huowang fully intended to pay back the personal grudge he had towards Taishan Shi. He refused to give up until there were no traces left.

"There's still some traces here. Li Sui, let's go!" Li Huowang jumped onto Peng Longteng's horse and ran out of the eastern city gates. He was hoping that he could catch up to Taishan Shi.

Time passed, and the traces on the ground gradually turned faint. Li Huowang was getting anxious.

He finally stopped in front of a swamp. Li Huowang looked at the mangrove forest by the river. The running water had already washed away most of the traces.

"Ah..." Li Huowang sighed and plunged into the river to extinguish the flames on his body.

His body sizzled in the water as the flames slowly died out. His body was already charred black by then.

Instead of the usual charred skin he had before, Li Huowang now had charred, fleshy scales since the fire seared him from the

inside out.

It was a relief that his regenerative ability had increased a lot. The flesh scales gradually healed and merged back into his body.

The intense pain slowly changed into itchiness as his body healed. LI Huowang gritted his teeth, finding the sensation far from comfortable. The itchiness was so overwhelming that Li Huowang would have preferred pain instead.

Standing in the river, he endured the itch and pondered his situation.

It's clear that the Dharma Sect is paying attention to me now—their trap wasn't a coincidence. I have to be careful or they will ambush me again.

Li Huowang had used his strongest abilities in front of them today. It would be difficult if he was ambushed again.

It would've been good if I managed to capture Taishan Shi. I could've gotten a lot of information out of him.

Li Huowang was still thinking when he noticed a presence. He looked at the mangrove forest and unsheathed his sword. “Who’s there?!”

A figure slowly appeared from the shadows of the trees. Li Huowang was shocked to see that it was Taishan Shi, the very person he was chasing.

Taishan Shi was injured—both of his arms were twisted off, his right leg was broken, and his scalp was nowhere to be seen. Blood was flowing down his body.

Someone pushed Taishan Shi from behind, causing him to stumble across the river towards Li Huowang.

Li Huowang saw who it was. It was Bai Lingmiao! Her upper body was split in half, and red veils covered both of her heads. “Senior Li, look. I’m useful, so please don’t abandon me next time, okay?”

Li Huowang ignored Taishan Shi as he walked towards Bai

Lingmiao with gratitude. He suddenly remembered something and stopped in front of Bai Lingmiao. He had a bad feeling. "Wait, don't move."

"Senior Li?" Bai Lingmiao was confused.

"I need to ask a question first. Are you the real Bai Lingmiao or a fake one I've conjured?"

Chapter 721 - Method

‘Truth’ cultivation significantly enhanced Li Huowang’s strength, but the side effects were equally severe.

“Is it real? Or fake?” Li Huowang breathed heavily and looked doubtfully at Bai Lingmiao.

“Senior Li, what’s happening to you—” Bai Lingmiao began, but Li Huowang quickly interrupted, “Don’t come closer!”

“Let me ask you! Back at Zephyr Temple... No, that’s not the right question. If she’s truly part of my ‘Truth’ cultivation, then she would definitely know!”

Li Huowang paced anxiously in the river. Despite his advanced cultivation, he couldn’t distinguish reality from illusion. Everything could be real if he willed it.

“Hehehe...” Taishan Shi chuckled mockingly at this sight. “As expected of Ji Zai’s Twisted One.”

Smack! Li Huowang’s palm landed on Taishan Shi’s cheek, causing it to swell instantly. “Shut up! Your turn to cry will come soon!”

After some thought, Li Huowang said, “Miaomiao, don’t worry. We will... we’ll do this.”

“We’ll go back now, the same way we came.” This was a stupid method, but also an effective one.

If there wasn’t another Bai Lingmiao on the way back, this one was real. If there was, then she was the fake one.

Bai Lingmiao neither agreed nor disagreed. Instead, she questioned him directly, “Senior Li, can you tell me what’s happening? Are you having another episode?”

Li Huowang’s erratic behavior worried her greatly.

“I’m not—” Li Huowang didn’t want to explain too much to

this Bai Lingmiao. “Fine, maybe.”

He also didn’t want to invest too much emotion. What if she turned out to be fake? What would he do in that case? Would he make her disappear, or would he live with two Bai Lingmiao’s?

Li Huowang turned around and took out his tools to interrogate Taishan Shi. Suddenly, he noticed something strange about Bai Lingmiao’s reflection in the water.

Initially, he thought it was a mistake. Upon closer inspection, the reflection remained still. The water’s surface had turned into a mirror.

Li Huowang turned around slowly. He was shocked to see Bai Lingmiao’s body swaying like a shadow submerged in water!

“So you really are fake?” Li Huowang said, and Bai Lingmiao’s body began to flicker and gradually fade into nothingness.

“Senior Li! Li Huowang! What are you doing? Help me!” Bai Lingmiao was panicking. She began to drum and chant the White Lotus Sect’s incantations.

As her body was about to vanish, the lotus mark on her forehead glowed softly and blocked Li Huowang’s sight.

The light obscured his vision, and at that moment, he felt something familiar—the presence of the Heavenly Mater.

The feeling came and went quickly. However, Li Huowang realized something critical from it. He rushed forward and fearfully embraced Bai Lingmiao.

Despite facing numerous trials in the past, he had never been afraid. But just now, he felt utterly afraid. If not for the Heavenly Mater’s brief reminder, he might have erased Bai Lingmiao entirely!

With his current abilities, he could restore her. However, would she truly be the same Bai Lingmiao?

Bai Lingmiao tried to push him away, but his embrace was incredibly tight. “Li Huowang, what’s going on? Explain yourself! Are you having another episode? Just tell me if you are!”

A group of White Lotus followers ignored the Saintess's orders and rushed forward. "How dare you be disrespectful to the Saintess!"

After calming down, Li Huowang released Bai Lingmiao and lifted her red veil. He gently stroked her hair, scales, spikes, and numerous eyes.

Through this experience, Li Huowang understood the gravity of his situation. He knew he couldn't ignore the side effects of his 'Truth' cultivation any longer.

If left unchecked, the people he created would affect his sanity, and he could also unknowingly erase people around him. It was a serious threat.

Bai Lingmiao had the Heavenly Mater's protection, but what about the others? What if it had been Suisui?

His heart tightened when he recalled a false Suisui that appeared briefly during his training in the forest.

"What happened? What have you been through while I was gone? Explain!" Bai Lingmiao demanded.

Li Huowang had discerned the truth for now, and he began to explain everything to her.

An hour later, they were by a campfire. Li Huowang donned the red Daoist robe she handed him. "That's the story. I'm not sick. I've achieved advanced 'Truth' cultivation. I knew there would be a price, but I didn't expect it to be this steep."

This issue would likely worsen as his cultivation progressed. It was dangerous now, and he dared not imagine what the future would hold.

Bai Lingmiao nodded as she finally understood his previous strange behavior. "Senior Li, do you have a plan to solve this problem?"

Li Huowang sighed. "I wish I knew, but the solution can't come from just idle thinking."

He decided to ask Ji Zai first.

Bai Lingmiao frowned and tried to think of a solution alongside him. The surroundings fell silent.

Li Sui also wanted to help her father, but she didn't fully grasp what he said about the truth and lies.

Li Huowang returned from the river after calling for Ji Zai to no avail. Bai Lingmiao asked, "Senior Li, do you remember that person? The one who sold breakfast?"

"Sold breakfast? Who?"

"The chubby one who made fried dough sticks wrapped in glutinous rice."

"Shai Zi?" Li Huowang immediately remembered. Shai Zi had targeted him to achieve his own goals.

"When you left the city, he shouted something to you."

"You will go mad by cultivating 'Truth' but not 'Lies.'"

"I will go mad by cultivating 'Truth' but now 'Lies.'"

The two of them said simultaneously.

"Right, Senior Li, he was referring to this. Given your current state, it seems like you've gone mad, right?"

Li Huowang's face darkened. The logic made sense, but the source was questionable. Shai Zi was the leader of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. Was there another hidden motive behind his words? Even in death, could the Sitting Oblivion Dao deceive them?

Chapter 722 - Remove

A drop of brown sauce slowly slid down the plump chicken drumstick, landing on the heap of steaming white rice.

Qian Fu didn't care about that. He held a drumstick in each hand and took a big bite of the braised chicken. He savored the delicious taste as the rich flavor filled his mouth, leaving him very satisfied.

This wasn't enough for him. While eating, he kept eyeing the plate, worried that Chen Hongyu might snatch it away.

Li Huowang sat across from them and watched in exasperation as they ate. He regretted inviting them to his home.

"Come, eat more. There's plenty left." Sun Xiaoqin smiled and brought another plate of drumsticks from the kitchen. Her hair was freshly curled.

"Mom, we already have enough."

Sun Xiaoqin didn't respond. Yang Na reached under the table and pinched Li Huowang hard.

"Why are you pinching me?" Li Huowang asked. Yang Na looked at him with some dissatisfaction.

Qian Fu loudly burped, interrupting them.

"You're already full. Don't overeat. It's not just about money. Don't upset your stomach."

Qian Fu took two more drumsticks from the plate, shoved them into the rice, and then glared at Li Huowang.

"You don't understand! It's a hunger burp!" he said, then picked up his chopsticks and devoured the food.

Chen Hongyu was not to be outdone. She grabbed a braised drumstick and tore it apart with her teeth. When she pulled it out, only a clean bone remained.

This seemed almost like a special ability compared to her disgusting pus-filled boils.

Sun Xiaoqin leaned close to Li Huowang and whispered, “How can you talk like that? They’re guests who came to help you. Besides, a big bag of frozen drumsticks from the supermarket isn’t that expensive. It’s even cheaper than some vegetables.”

Li Huowang sighed and stopped talking as he watched them continue to wolf down the food.

“Do you want some?”

“No, thanks. Watching them eat has filled me up.”

Li Huowang watched as their bellies swelled after three plates. He was amazed at the sight, which he had only seen in cartoons as a child.

After lunch, the two reclined in their chairs and rubbed their bellies contentedly.

Li Huowang glanced at the kitchen, then leaned forward and asked quietly, “Have you two not eaten lately? How are you so hungry?”

“You can’t carry yesterday’s meal over to today. We have to eat every day. What a funny guy,” Qian Fu said just as a knock came from the door.

“Coming,” Yang Na said as she put on her slippers and walked over. “Qing Wanglai? Come in. Those two behind you are...”

Li Huowang turned to see Qing Wanglai, dressed in white and blue, entering with two other people.

The two didn’t speak to Li Huowang. They simply lifted his foot and removed the device around his ankle.

After they left, Li Huowang turned to Qing Wanglai. “What’s this about?”

“The Neighborhood Office surveillance is gone, but they’ll still check in periodically. Also, you can’t leave the province or the

city.”

“You’re free to move around now, but there’s still one device on your leg. It’s best to avoid crowded places to avoid provoking them.”

Li Huowang was stunned. He rushed to the window to look outside, where he saw Madam Qi and some others gesturing towards him before leaving the neighborhood.

Li Huowang was astonished. “Are they really gone? How did you do it?”

Though they hadn’t known each other long, Qing Wanglai seemed far more reliable than the other two mentally unstable individuals.

“Simple. I got a lawyer to check. The extended surveillance and house arrest were infringing on your personal freedom.

“You should have regained your freedom last month since you passed the doctor’s check, but you know how it is. Higher-ups say one thing, and those below exaggerate to avoid trouble. I also pulled some strings.”

“I see.”

Qing Wanglai chuckled and said, “I don’t think you fully understand.”

Li Huowang frowned. This guy had a strange way of speaking.

“Anyway, thanks for your help. Now that I’m free, let’s go somewhere to talk.” Li Huowang headed eagerly for the door.

Qing Wanglai stopped Li Huowang. “Don’t be in such a rush. If you start wandering around right after the restrictions are lifted, it’ll raise suspicions.”

Qing Wanglai saw Sun Xiaoqin bring fruit to the table and patted Li Huowang’s shoulder. “I’ll pick you up at nine tonight. I’ve found a safe place where you can meet some new friends.”

“New friends?” Li Huowang felt curious. Were there more allies out there?

Soon, Qing Wanglai left with Qian Fu and Chen Hongyu, who took some fruit with them. Sun Xiaoqin looked happier than Li Huowang at the news of his regained freedom.

“Are you actually free now? Can you go out now?” Sun Xiaoqin was overjoyed.

“Yes.” Li Huowang nodded. He was deep in thought about what to do next.

“Stay here. I’ll go buy groceries and call your dad to skip his night shift. We’ll celebrate tonight!”

Only Yang Na and Li Huowang remained after she left.

“Huowang, do you believe Qing Wanglai? I’m still suspicious of him.”

“I don’t fully trust him, but if I want to shake these people off, I need their help. Their surveillance is tightening,” Li Huowang said, turning and looking at the building outside.

“They’re watching now?” Yang Na pulled the curtain and peeked out. “Where? Which one?”

“They’re not in the neighborhood. They’re using binoculars from a distance!” Li Huowang stared at the distant high-rise buildings.

“Really?” Yang Na squinted, then studied Li Huowang’s face. “Can you really feel their gazes?”

“Yes, it’s a distinct feeling. Their hostile gazes are getting stronger!”

Li Huowang continued, “I guess it won’t be long before they make a move. I need to act first.”

Time flew by and evening quickly arrived. Despite the celebratory dinner for his freedom, Li Huowang had little appetite. He was preoccupied with thoughts of the new friends Qing Wanglai had mentioned and how to collaborate against their common enemy.

By nightfall, Li Huowang said goodbye to Sun Xiaoqin and

prepared to leave with Yang Na.

His mother didn't ask much, and his father even slipped him some money. Li Huowang judged that they might have misunderstood the situation.

As he stepped out of the neighborhood without surveillance for the first time, a four-seater white sports car pulled up before him.

"Get in," Qing Wanglai said with one hand on the steering wheel.

Chapter 723 - Car

“Is this car very expensive?” Li Huowang asked. He ran his hand along the red leather interior and glanced at Qing Wanglai in the driver’s seat.

The car sped along, where the engine’s hum rose and fell as they drove. Li Huowang didn’t know much about cars, but the sound of the engine and the sleek design made it clear that it was beyond his own family’s means.

At that moment, Yang Na gasped in surprise—she had checked the price on her phone. She whispered the price to Li Huowang, making him slowly withdraw his hand from the leather.

Judging from Qing Wanglai’s poor appearance in the cafeteria, Li Huowang never would have thought that Qing Wanglai could afford such an expensive car.

”So what if it’s expensive or cheap? It’s just a projection anyway. I’m more curious about what exactly this car is a projection of,” Qing Wanglai said, adopting his usual philosophical viewpoint.

Li Huowang changed the topic. “Where are we going? What’s the exact location?”

“Orange Isle,” Qing Wanglai replied. He tapped a few times on the screen in front of him, causing soft piano music to fill the car.

“Orange Isle? Why are we going there?” Yang Na was more familiar with the local spots than Li Huowang, who had been hospitalized for a long time.

She continued, “I heard the houses with river views were abandoned because of unpaid debts. There’s no one there at night.”

“That’s the point. No people, no gossip. Also, turn off your phones to avoid being tracked. I’m not sure what our electronic

devices are projections of.”

Li Huowang pulled out his phone and sent a quick message to Sun Xiaoqin to let her know he was safe. After sending the message, he turned off his phone.

As the shutdown jingle played, he looked at Qing Wanglai’s profile, illuminated intermittently by neon lights. “Can you tell us now who we’re meeting tonight? If they’re on our side, do they also believe in your projection hypothesis of the world?”

Qing Wanglai shook his head. “No, it’s not the same. Let me start from the beginning. Our world is a projection of some existence. It’s not just me who knows this. Others know this, including you.”

Li Huowang became more attentive. This was good news. The more allies he had, the better his chances against their enemies.

“I’ve searched for such people, but they’re rare, and most have mental issues. Due to superstition or lack of education, they don’t understand the true nature of the world. They’re often stubborn and create their own worldviews to explain unexplainable events.”

“I’ve found them, tried to unify them, and conducted various tests and experiments.”

“Experiments?”

“Yes. Once I gather enough solid evidence, I plan to publish it and prove the universal projection hypothesis.”

“If you already have evidence, you must publish it! This could make you famous. Could I take a look?” Yang Na said excitedly.

Qing Wanglai glanced at Yang Na through the rearview mirror. “It’s not that simple. Do you know about the observer effect? I observed this phenomenon in my 31st experiment and 52nd control experiment.

“It’s like Pandora’s box if we don’t fully understand it. If this gets out, what will be the result of the observer effect from seven billion people? No one knows.

“If something goes wrong, we might not even exist as projections anymore.”

Li Huowang interrupted their conversation, “Ahem, Qing Wanglai, you’re off-topic. I asked who we’re meeting tonight.”

Qing Wanglai thought momentarily and replied, “They’re friends on our side. If you can sense them, then you’re with us. Since they pose a threat to you and Qian Fu, I thought we could work together to solve this problem.”

“How many friends are we talking about?”

“I’ve found thirteen people for now. Five refused or couldn’t communicate, so there are eight, including you.”

“What do you know about the people who tried to kidnap me?”

“Not much more than you. I asked around, and some of them also felt something was wrong, but it hasn’t affected them much yet. Is there anything else I need to clarify?”

“No.” Li Huowang began to calculate in his head. In addition to himself, Qian Fu, Chen Hongyu, and Qing Wanglai, four others would be coming tonight.

He didn’t know how much help these strangers could provide. It was hard to say how things would unfold without knowing the motives of those who wanted to kidnap him. He could only take things one step at a time.

The car fell silent as each of them got lost in their own thoughts.

The lights gradually dimmed as Qing Wanglai’s car entered Orange Isle. The area was desolate, with half-completed infrastructure.

The intersections had no working traffic lights, and the only car on the road was Qing Wanglai’s.

The rows of unfinished townhouses in the distance looked like tombstones.

This place seemed abandoned and overgrown with weeds

compared to the bustling landscape they had left. Yang Na looked worried and hugged herself as goosebumps rose on her arms.

Li Huowang pulled her close and said to Qing Wanglai, “Turn up the air conditioner. It’s a bit cold.”

“Alright.”

Li Huowang suddenly sensed something and looked sharply at the dark intersection to the left. “Enemy attack!”

A truck with no lights and covered license plates barreled toward them from that direction.

Li Huowang instinctively shielded Yang Na with his body. The screeching sound of brakes filled the air as the car started to roll violently.

Amid the chaos, Li Huowang felt pain everywhere, but he couldn’t afford to lose focus. The intense danger heightened his awareness.

As his surroundings stabilized slightly, Li Huowang tried to open the door, but he found it was stuck. He was pinned by the seat, so he gritted his teeth and slammed his head against the window.

Bang!

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Several blows later, blood trickled down the cracked glass.

Through the bloodstained window, Li Huowang saw two men brandishing long weapons get out of the truck.

Chapter 724 - Sister Wu

Li Huowang was trapped inside the overturned sports car, struggling to move.

He watched in panic as the figures approached. He knew he had to escape immediately, or else he'd be at their mercy.

He pounded on the glass several times, striking it multiple times until his bloodied head finally broke through. His enraged eyes locked onto the two men armed with various tools.

The sight of Li Huowang's grotesque appearance frightened them, prompting them to quickly retreat.

"Oh my god, it's a sports car! Run! We'll never be able to pay for this!"

"I told you not to take this road! Look at the mess we're in just to save a bit on toll fees!"

"Stop talking and get in the truck! There's no surveillance here. They won't find us!"

As they scrambled away, Li Huowang managed to crawl out of the car. He gritted his teeth and charged at the truck that had just hit him.

He wouldn't let them get away scot-free after what they did.

By the time the truck started, he had already brandished a knife and dashed to the front.

He climbed up the ladder, grabbed onto the mirror, and then slashed at the window, leaving a mark. "Get out!"

When they saw his bloody face rise up from the window, the two men screamed and floored the accelerator.

The sudden acceleration caused Li Huowang to lose his grip on the mirror and tumble towards the wheels.

He quickly rolled away to narrowly avoid being crushed. He

used all his strength and stabbed at the tire, but the blade snapped under the pressure. His hand was also injured, but he had carved a long gash in the tire.

Li Huowang panted heavily and got up.

Previously, it was just kidnapping and surveillance, with Wang Wei using ropes at most. But now, they're even using trucks to ram us.

Li Huowang's expression grew grimmer as he watched the truck's tail lights fade into the distance.

If not for his sharp senses, they would have been dead. Their actions were getting more outrageous. They had to fight back soon.

"It's okay, I recorded everything. They committed a hit-and-run, and they're fully responsible for the crash," Qing Wanglai said and stopped the video he was recording on his phone.

"How did you get out?" Li Huowang asked.

Qing Wanglai held up a safety hammer.

"Turning off our phones didn't work. They still have other methods to track us, which is how they ambushed us."

"Let's not dwell on that now. Your head injury is more urgent," Qing Wanglai said. He removed his shirt and used it to apply pressure to Li Huowang's wound. The white fabric quickly turned red with blood.

"It's just a scratch. Let's get going and regroup. I'm worried about the others."

"Are you kidding? Stay put. I'll get help." Qing Wanglai swiftly dialed a number.

"Are you okay, Nana?" Li Huowang asked Yang Na. She was teary-eyed, watching him with deep concern.

Qing Wanglai's friend arrived faster than expected. A shabby RV pulled up.

A cheerful woman with a blue headscarf, dreadlocks, and eyebrow piercings leaned out the window. "Junior! What happened? A car accident?"

“I told you before. This car is fast but not as sturdy as my third-hand RV,” she said.

“Sister Wu, stop joking around. Can’t you see there are injured people?”

Qing Wanglai and Yang Na helped the bleeding Li Huowang into the RV. The inside was messy but cozy.

Sister Wu quickly pulled out a first aid kit, and she expertly cleaned and stitched Li Huowang’s wounds. She stabilized his broken hand with a splint and even gave him a couple of injections.

“Young people heal fast. Looks like you won’t need a blood transfusion. Think of it as a donation in advance,” she patted his shoulder, her hand adorned with colorful nails.

“Thanks, Sister Wu,” Li Huowang said. He stood up to leave the RV.

“Where are you going?” Qing Wanglai asked.

“Now that I’m patched up, we should regroup with the others,” Li Huowang replied.

“She’s one of the eight people we’re meeting. We’ll take her RV.” Qing Wanglai pointed at Sister Wu, who was drinking water.

“So you’re Li Huowang? I’m Wu Qi. Nice to meet you,” she said. She shook his hand and then headed for the driver’s seat.

“She’s one of them?” Li Huowang looked at her broad shoulders in surprise. This woman, who seemed to be in her twenties, didn’t look crazy at all.

“Thank you, Sister Wu, for helping Huowang stop his bleeding quickly. You’re amazing,” Yang Na said, expressing her gratitude.

“It was nothing. I’ve dealt with far worse in the emergency room and brought people back from the brink of death countless times,” Wu Qi replied.

Yang Na glanced at Li Huowang, then continued, “You used to work in a hospital?”

Wu Qi became excited. “Yeah. They said that heaven would

strike those who persuade others to do medicine with lightning. It was absolutely right.”

“I learned that the hard way. We’re always busy, have low pay, and there’s no time off. Why did I even choose this career? Sometimes several people die in front of me in a single day.”

Li Huowang looked around the RV. He noticed travel photos held by magnets on the fridge, including one of Wu Qi at Leshan Giant Buddha. There was also a long string of prayer beads hanging on the wall.

The conversation continued while Li Huowang studied this arrangement.

“The negativity was overwhelming. One day, I realized I was so stressed that I almost missed my period. I asked myself, what’s the point of life? We only live for a few decades. Are we really going to work ourselves to death just for some money?

“I finally understood. I decided to live for myself and be happy. Houses, cars, money. They are all meaningless.

“From then on, I knew what it meant to be free. I’m much happier now, without those constraints.

“You should try it too. That’s what it means to really live.”

Chapter 725 - Unfinished Building

Wu Qi's RV headed deeper into Orange Isle. Li Huowang bent over and looked out the window at the dark, unfinished buildings surrounding them.

Puddles and randomly placed construction materials on the road slowed the RV, and its headlights cast a white glow on the road ahead.

Li Huowang thought he saw a figure flash past one of the unfinished buildings, but he didn't sense anyone watching him.

After about five minutes, the rolling tires gradually came to a stop.

"Look at the place you found. It's a nightmare to drive through. My car's paint is all scratched up," Wu Qi complained as she opened the driver's door.

"Sister Wu, how many times has this RV changed hands? Does it even have any paint left to scratch?" Qing Wanglai joked, sidestepping Wu Qi's kick when he got out.

Li Huowang also got out of the RV with the support of Yang Na.

He looked up at the unfinished building in front of them and asked Qing Wanglai, "Which floor?"

Before he could respond, a flashlight flashed towards them from the sixth floor. Li Huowang walked towards the unfinished building and started walking up the stairs, which were missing their railings.

When he reached the sixth floor, he saw complete darkness with no sign of any light.

What's going on? There was just light here. Did I get the wrong floor?

He moved towards the window to count the floors. Suddenly, a pale man's face appeared before him, and he shouted, "Wake up! It's all fake!"

"..."

Li Huowang saw a young man with dyed yellow hair. He used a flashlight to illuminate his own face in a mock ghost impression. Li Huowang had never seen any ghost wearing a tongue stud before

"Is it just you? Shouldn't Qian Fu and Chen Hongyu be here too?" he asked.

"I told you this wouldn't scare him. Eh, Li Huowang, what happened to your head?" Chen Hongyu's voice came from the darkness.

Chen Hongyu and Qian Fu emerged. Under the flashlight, they were sharing a bag of spicy strips, and their mouths were smeared with red oil.

The young man laughed nervously and set the flashlight on the ground as a makeshift light source.

As Qing Wanglai and Wu Qi arrived, the abandoned building began to feel more lively.

"What happened to your head?" Qian Fu asked Li Huowang.

"It's a long story. Something happened on the way here. I'll explain later," Li Huowang said while he looked at the young man who had tried to scare him.

The man wore heavy black eye makeup and strange leather clothing. His exceptionally pale face suggested a lack of sunlight.

Perhaps because of Sun Xiaoqin's teachings, Li Huowang felt an inexplicable aversion to his appearance.

Qing Wanglai cleared his throat and introduced the young man. "This is Zhao Lei. Zhao Lei, this is Li Huowang, the one I told you about."

“You can call me Steven,” Zhao Lei said, extending his hand with a black ring on it.

Li Huowang shook his hand. “Hello, Zhao Lei. I’m Li Huowang.”

Zhao Lei rocked back and forth. “Hehe, I said my English name, but you still followed the standard process.”

What’s with him? He’s so odd.

Li Huowang frowned. He had almost thought there wouldn’t be any more eccentrics in this group.

He had assumed that others would step out of the darkness. To his surprise, he realized that no one else was coming.

“Weren’t there supposed to be eight people? Why are there only six?” Li Huowang asked Qing Wanglai.

“Maybe something came up and they couldn’t make it,” Qing Wanglai replied.

“Do you have their numbers? Call them and check.” Li Huowang felt somewhat uneasy. They had an accident, and it was too coincidental for two people not to show up.

If their luck hadn’t been good earlier, wouldn’t four people be missing from this meeting now?

Qing Wanglai said seriously, “They don’t use phones. They’re afraid of being monitored.”

He clapped to get everyone’s attention. “Have any of you contacted Brother Bone or Aunt Yan recently? Or met them?”

Qing Wanglai knew something was wrong when he saw their confused reactions. “I brought you all here to announce something. We might have a problem with the projection side. Brother Bone and Aunt Yan are late and possibly in trouble. Do you guys see Li Huowang’s injury? Our previous encounter is proof of this.”

“We can’t handle this alone. We need to work together to stay safe and deal with any threats, no matter what their projections are.”

Everyone stood silently and absorbed his words instead of questioning them. It was unclear if they already suspected something or simply didn't care.

Li Huowang coughed and broke the silence. "What's your plan in this situation?"

Qing Wanglai replied, "From the truck incident, it seems that you are very sensitive to their presence?"

"No, it's not sensitivity. I can feel them watching me. When they watch me, I can feel it!" Li Huowang said firmly.

"Can you sense them now?"

Li Huowang closed his eyes and breathed deeply. After five minutes, he shook his head. "No, this place is safe. They can't find us here."

Before Qing Wanglai could respond, Qian Fu stood up. "Listen to me! Everyone, listen to me!"

He continued excitedly, "The two are not just missing, but they're dead! If not, they're imprisoned like I was! It's all a conspiracy by the Leotians! We must thwart their plans!"

He grabbed Li Huowang's arm. "I have a plan! The Leotians are interested in his genes. We can use him as bait to capture their UFO!"

The others turned to Qian Fu as they listened to his outlandish claims.

Chapter 726 - Act

“What?! You actually acknowledged Qian Fu’s plan? Don’t you know that he’s crazy?” Li Huowang stared wide-eyed at Qing Wanglai.

“I don’t mean for you to become bait, but rather the trap that catches the rat.”

“Isn’t that the same thing?!”

“Of course it’s not the same thing. We won’t cast you aside as bait. Since you can sense them, you will be our eyes. We would never cast away our eyes, would we?”

Li Huowang knew Qing Wanglai was right. Their enemy was no longer just after him—they were targeting everyone around him.

Li Huowang was certain that they wouldn’t betray him with the external threats they were facing.

But Li Huowang also knew he couldn’t become their pawn. Everyone here had previously met and worked together before, except for Li Huowang himself.

After consoling Li Huowang, Qing Wanglai continued his explanation. “Since we are all projections, we first need to confirm what they’ve become after they projected themselves here. As projections, they must also conform to the rules of this world. As long as we can identify them, we can use the rules of this world to help us. More importantly, it might allow us to communicate and negotiate with them to solve this crisis. If you think about it, we could solve many things through communication.”

“Fine!” Li Huowang nodded. *I don’t care if he’s speaking gibberish right now. I want to bring the fight to them since they used a truck to ram me.*

It would be best if he could get definitive proof to show that

someone had the intention to harm them, or other people would think Li Huowang and the others were crazy.

Only then would anyone believe him if he reported it to the police.

“Hehe... It’s useless... Everything is fake. Everything is fake...” Zhao Lei’s voice resounded in the room. “There’s no projection. There’s no danger. You guys are terrible at making up stories.”

Li Huowang frowned at the weird man, Zhao Lei. *What’s his deal? Why does he keep saying that everything is fake?*”

As if sensing Li Huowang’s confusion, Wu Qi said, “Ignore him. He’s very nihilistic. You can just ignore him.”

Li Huowang ignored Zhao Lei and asked Qing Wanglai, “Then how about we move at night? They are becoming more and more daring. If we continue to drag things on, they might attack us when we least expect it.”

Li Huowang was anxious. They had already tried ramming him with a lorry, and they might do something more drastic in the future.

“I don’t have any objections. What about the others?” Qing Wanglai said.

After asking everyone, Qing Wanglai looked at his watch. “It will be dawn in a few more hours. We have to act now if we want to do anything.”

After coming to a consensus, they went down the stairs.

Everyone entered Wu Qi’s RV except for Zhao Lei, who rode his own motorcycle.

“Wu Qi, please stop in front of the university gates. I need to go to my hostel to grab something.”

“You’re rich, aren’t you? I’m driving now, so shouldn’t you show some appreciation towards me? Maybe by paying for the fuel if I pass by a gas station?”

“I never thought someone was still driving their RV around

using stolen gas.”

“Fine. I will pay for your refueling later.”

“Hehe! Thank you very much!” Wu Qi stepped on the pedal and drove as fast as she could.

Wu Qi’s RV was cumbersome, but she somehow managed to drive faster than Qing Wanglai’s sports car, reaching the university gates in record time.

“Hehe... Everything is fake... The hostel’s gates should’ve been closed at this hour... What else can you take? All of you are lying to me.” Zhao Lei stopped beside the RV and looked at Qing Wanglai entering the university.

Li Huowang was nervous. He clenched his fists and pondered what might happen next.

I might run into them later. I need a weapon!

Li Huowang looked around and found a drawer underneath the induction cooker. He opened it and grabbed a cleaver. He felt much calmer afterward.

I don’t believe that the police would dismiss me if I cut off their heads!

Twenty minutes later, Qing Wanglai returned to the RV. They drove for a short moment before they stopped.

“Wait, they are here!” Li Huowang tensed up and glared at the silent city. “I can feel them looking at me!”

“No need to go back to my neighborhood! We will settle this outside!” Li Huowang decided not to invite trouble back to his house.

It wasn’t a good idea to involve his parents in this.

“How many?” Qing Wanglai asked.

“Three... No, four!”

Soon, Li Huowang walked down the RV with his head still covered in bandages. Yang Na carefully assisted him down.

Yang Na lowered her head, nervous. Only she knew that the

person next to her was actually Wu Qi.

The real Li Huowang was driving the RV to circle around and catch the people.

“Is he your boyfriend?” Wu Qi whispered.

“Mmm...”

“You’re suffering a lot right now just to be with him. With your background, you are technically marrying someone of a lower status.”

As Wu Qi had just said this, they heard someone shouting to the alley on their left. Wu Qi told Yang Na to wait as she ran towards the alley.

Wu Qi rounded the corner and saw Li Huowang raising a cleaver up high as he chased after three people. “Stop! Don’t move!”

Li Huowang was panicking! He had finally found them and had no intention of letting them escape.

A motorcycle revved up, and Zhao Lei blocked the three people with his motorbike.

The three people scattered, two to the right and one to the left.

Zhao Lei chased after the single person on the left while Li Huowang ducked into the alley on the right to chase after the two people.

Li Huowang refused to give up even though his left arm was in a splint. However, his injuries slowed him down as the two people ran further and further away.

Li Huowang thought they had failed, but then the two people in front of him froze.

Li Huowang panted and approached them carefully with his cleaver when he saw Qing Wanglai pointing a gun at the two people.

Li Huowang saw the faces of the two people and realized who they were.

One of them used to work in Kangning Hospital! They had been monitoring Li Huowang since the beginning!

Chapter 727 - Captive

Li Huowang held his cleaver tightly and glared at the tall man with glasses.

Even though Li Huowang had only seen him once, he still recognized the man. The man was in the same group as Li Huowang at Kangning Hospital. He recalled the man's name—Yuan Heping.

“It's you?! You were one of them?” Li Huowang's breathing quickened as he gripped his cleaver.

Yuan Heping swallowed his saliva nervously when he saw Li Huowang's cleaver and Qing Wanglai's gun. “Wait, don't be rash. Murder is a crime, and we didn't do anything!”

Qing Wanglai walked towards Li Huowang and pushed the cleaver down. “We've surrounded them. There's no need to use your cleaver for now.”

Qian Fu and Chen Hongyu then appeared with a rope. They tied the two people's hands together.

Li Huowang finally put down his knife when the two were tied up. He only focused on the gun after they had been subdued.

“Where did you get a gun? Those are harder to come by than knives.”

Li Huowang started to doubt Qing Wanglai and his background.

Qing Wanglai laughed and pointed the gun at Wu Qi's head before pulling the trigger. Everyone froze up due to his unexpected actions.

A small fire lit up from the muzzle of the gun.

Wu Qi took out a cigarette and lit it up.

“It's fake?”

“Of course this is a fake gun. This is a world with laws and

regulations, so how could I get a real gun? I bought it online during a sale.” Qing Wanglai released the trigger and placed the gun-shaped lighter into his pocket.

“AAAAH!” Someone screamed from the other alley. The familiar voice made Li Huowang’s heart jump.

“Oh no! It’s Yang Na!”

Li Huowang ran down the alley and quickly counted the gazes he had sensed just now. *There were four, but we only found three! One of them must’ve been hiding to ambush us!*

Li Huowang thought the situation was dire, but he was stunned when he reached Yang Na.

Yang Na was indeed screaming, but she was using a taser to shock an old man as she did.

The old man’s mouth was already foaming, but Yang Na continued to press her taser into the old man.

“Nana, wait, that’s enough. Let go of the trigger. If you keep going, he’ll die from electrocution.”

Yang Na only let go after Li Huowang reassured her repeatedly. She released the taser and hugged him as she cried. “Huowang, I’m scared.”

Li Huowang calmed her down and looked at the taser on the ground. “Nana, where did you get it?”

Li Huowang was both shocked and surprised.

Yang Na sobbed and said, “I... I bought it online with my friends. We were worried about our safety when we walked at night, so I... I... also bought some other personal safety devices.”

Li Huowang opened her bag and saw she had indeed prepared many other tools. There were pepper sprays, spare tasers, a recording device in the shape of a pen, and a phone with a big red button on the back.

Li Huowang took out the phone, and Yang Na explained as she sobbed, “My grandmother bought this phone before. If you press

the red button, it will automatically call the police. You can press the button even from outside the bag.”

“Have you been carrying all this stuff ever since I met Qing Wanglai?” Li Huowang was touched. He knew Yang Na might not believe him, but she was still willing to risk her life to accompany him.

Everyone else finally caught up to Li Huowang. They quickly exchanged words, but soon noticed that Yang Na's shout had drawn in some of the residents.

“Quick! We need to move now! We won't be able to explain ourselves if they capture a video of us and upload it online!” Zhao Lei grabbed the unconscious old man and placed him on the back of his motorcycle.

Li Huowang nodded as he sensed more and more people staring at them. He quickly pulled the startled Yang Na into the RV.

The RV snaked around the roads as they tried to shake off any pursuers. It wasn't until they reached the main road that they sighed in relief.

Qing Wanglai was driving the RV while Wu Qi was looking after the old man who had been electrocuted by Yang Na. She was worried that the old man would die.

“Don't worry, he's still doing fine. The electrocution won't kill him.” Wu Qi looked at Wang Gang lying on the bed as she reported.

Li Huowang finally had the time to look at the three people they had captured. One of them was Yuan Heping, while the old man Yang Na had electrocuted was also familiar. Li Huowang had also met this man at Kangning Hospital—his name was Wang Gang.

It was clear that they had been the ones who placed the needles in his food.

Li Huowang pointed the cleaver at them. “Who wants to talk

first?”

“There’s no need for that. Let’s find another place to interrogate them. My RV is already a third-hand car. I don’t want you to destroy it.”

The RV wasn’t large to begin with, and it felt cramped after so many people entered it. Qian Fu had to sit on the induction stove while Chen Hongyu was forced to sit in the toilet.

“Let’s go to my place. There’s no one there.” Zhao Lei’s voice came from outside.

“Is it remote and safe?” Li Huowang asked.

No matter who the three people were, Li Huowang was technically kidnapping them. It would be hard to explain to other people if they saw what they were doing.

“Don’t worry, he lives somewhere very remote.” Chen Hongyu stretched out from the toilet as she opened the fridge.

The RV bounced along the road until they stopped near the city’s outskirts. It was already starting to get bright outside when they entered an old home. Li Huowang finally understood what they meant by Zhao Lei staying somewhere remote. Zhao Lei was actually staying in an underground basement on the outskirts of the city.

Li Huowang pushed Yuan Heping underground before he caught the scent of mold. The basement was huge but covered in many objects. There were bottles and cans of various sizes, as well as organs preserved in formalin. Li Huowang saw a kneecap and a single eye in the jars. He wasn’t sure if they were real.

A strange moldy smell came from the takeout boxes and trash near his feet.

There was a shelf on the wall lined up with various toy models. Some of them were incomplete, with only their heads.

Zhao Lei’s fashion was weird, and his place was weird too.

“Is this place soundproof?” Li Huowang walked to the table and

tapped the bottles on the table. There were wooden boat models inside the bottles. *It seems that Zhao Lei sells these for money. It's so real. He even carved out the sailors inside the boat.*

“Yes, it's soundproof.”

“Good.” Li Huowang approached Yuan Heping and pinned him to the wall before bringing the cleaver down on Yuan Heping's right hand.

“AH! MMGH!” Yuan Heping tried to scream, but Li Huowang covered his mouth.

“Stop! Your arm is still intact! You can scream later!”

Yuan Heping almost fainted from shock when he saw Li Huowang's cleaver planted on the ground right beside his hands.

Just as he managed to catch his breath, he saw Li Huowang swinging the cleaver sideways onto four of his fingers.

Chapter 728 - Model

Yuan Heping tried to pull his hand back, but Li Huowang stomped on his wrist. He couldn't move his hands at all!

“Wait! Stop, stop!”

The sharp knife cut open his skin. Li Huowang looked at Yuan Heping. “Talk. Who are you people? What's your objective?”

“I... I don't know!” Yuan Heping innocently said. “We escaped together from the hospital and wanted to find something nice to eat when there was no one around at night.”

“Bullshit! Do you really think I would believe that? Why did you run from us then?”

“You... You chased after us with a cleaver like a madman. Who wouldn't run away?”

Qian Fu suddenly glared at Yuan Heping. “Stop lying! We already saw through your tricks! You are Leotians! You came to conquer Earth! We already know who you are!”

Yuan Heping was stunned. He looked at Qian Fu and then at Li Huowang before quickly nodding.

“Yes! That's right! We are the Leotians! We came here to conquer Earth!”

Li Huowang's face twitched. He pushed the cleaver down until Yuan Heping's fingertips were bleeding. “Are you going to talk or not?”

“What do you want me to say?!” Yuan Heping was already on the brink of tears.

“Why did you follow me? Why did you put needles in my food? Don't tell me you weren't the one who did it!”

“Fine! You are right! I placed the needles and followed you!”

“Why? What's your goal? Why are you following and

monitoring me?!”

“Because... Because...” Yuan Heping tried to come up with a reason.

As Yuan Heping stayed silent and unsure of how to respond, Qing Wanglai helped him to his feet.

“Don’t arbitrarily decide that he’s the culprit. It’s possible that he was being used.”

Yuan Heping hid behind Qing Wanglai and trembled.

“Come, drink some water. Don’t be nervous.”

Li Huowang wanted to rebuke Qing Wanglai before he realized they were playing good cop, bad cop. His role was over.

Qing Wanglai might be able to coax out the truth.

To increase their chances of success, Li Huowang copied a drama he had seen before, raising his cleaver and licking the blood on it.

Li Huowang’s act worked. Yuan Heping shivered and tried to distance himself from Qing Wanglai.

“I’m just putting up an act to scare him,” Li Huowang whispered to Yang Na.

Yang Na worriedly looked at Qing Wanglai as he was talking to Yuan Heping. “Maybe he really doesn’t know anything?”

“Impossible. It might’ve been a coincidence the first time, but it cannot be a coincidence the second time. The world is vast, and yet he still managed to find me? He’s just stubborn! He must have some kind of connection with the organization. Let’s see what kind of method Qing Wanglai has. I will have to use force if Qing Wanglai can’t get any information from Yuan Heping.”

Li Huowang then started looking for tools around Zhao Lei’s messy house.

Maybe it was because Zhao Lei’s job involved creating models, but there were several knives in the place. Li Huowang thought that despite the limited variety, these knives would suffice.

As Li Huowang was grinding some of the knives using the edge of the sink, Qing Wanglai finished his interrogation.

Qing Wanglai took out a large wad of cash and gave it to Yuan Heping, significantly reducing the latter's fear.

"He's just a pawn that follows orders blindly. He doesn't even know the people that were projected here."

Li Huowang was tired of the excuses. "Then did he give us a name? Who's the one giving out orders?"

Qing Wanglai didn't answer but instead looked at Wang Gang lying motionlessly on the ground.

Wang Gang was the main culprit here.

Li Huowang grabbed the knives and approached Wang Gang before he saw the latter smiling at him bitterly.

In contrast with Yuan Heping, Wang Gang had no intention of lying.

"I never thought I would lose to a little lady. I thought she would be easy to deal with, but I never imagined she would be super tough."

Li Huowang became excited when he heard this. *Is he finally telling the truth?*

The conversation visibly intrigued the others, who promptly circled them.

"I know what you want to ask, but can you let me go afterward?"

"Fine. Talk."

Wang Gang shook his head. "Not you. I'm talking to him." Wang Gang pointed at Qing Wanglai.

Qing Wanglai nodded. "I accept your request. If you tell us the truth, I will send you out of this country."

Wang Gang nodded and finally said, "You are right. We are here to monitor Li Huowang. This is our job."

"Who sent you?" Li Huowang's heart was thumping.

“My higher-ups. I never saw their faces before, and they always gave us the orders through paper memos.”

“What’s their goal? Why are they targeting me?”

“I don’t know. They just said something along the lines of you being hard to deal with.”

Li Huowang clenched his teeth when he heard that. “I knew it!”

Bam! Just then, the sound of cloth smacking onto the table could be heard. Li Huowang turned around and saw Zhao Lei frantically looking for something.

“What’s going on with you?” Wu Qi was confused.

“My things! They are gone! It was here just now! Everything is visibly fake, so why did you take it?!”

Li Huowang ignored him and continued to interrogate Wang Gang.

“What else do you know?”

Wang Gang looked at Zhao Lei before he stammered, “I a-also know... One of you has been bought off by them.”

“What? Who is it?!”

Li Huowang was looking at Wang Gang when he saw the reflection in Wang Gang’s eyes.

Li Huowang swiftly turned around. Zhao Lei was swinging one of the large glass bottles towards his head!

“Why are you stealing my things?! They’re mine!”

Before the glass bottle hit Li Huowang’s head, the wooden boat model in the bottle swayed vigorously with the water. One of the wooden figurines in the glass bottle had a sword that pierced the glass bottle.

Crack. The glass bottle shattered as the water splashed onto Li Huowang’s face.

Li Huowang let go of his cleaver and grabbed the wooden boat instead. “You dare attack me?!”

Li Huowang gripped the wooden boat model and smashed it

into Zhao Lei's face. The entire wooden boat model cracked into pieces.

The wooden figurines with swords were also stabbed into Zhao Lei's eyes.

Chapter 729 - Zhao Lei

“AAAAAAH!” Zhao Lei shouted and held his injured eyes as he squatted down.

In the chaotic basement, Li Huowang glared at Zhao Lei mercilessly, holding a cleaver as he blocked the entrance.

Just as Li Huowang had asked Wang Gang who was the traitor, Zhao Lei attacked him from behind.

He didn't need the answer from Wang Gang anymore—he knew Zhao Lei was the traitor.

Zhao Lei also knew that they were supposed to meet up at Orange Isle last time.

That was how Li Huowang was almost hit by the truck when they were halfway to Orange Isle. Zhao Lei had informed them!

The other two people that promised to come didn't show up either. Maybe they had met some dangers along their way. Li Huowang hated traitors more than enemies.

“Zhao Lei, I never thought it would be you. What did they give you? Do you really think you can live happily after becoming their dog? Didn't they take your special powers too?” Chen Hongyu approached him with a pained expression on her face. She blocked Zhao Lei's escape path using her massive frame.

The others surrounded Zhao Lei too. Zhao Lei looked at them with dilated eyes. “You can't blame me! Why are you guys only blaming me?! All of you let me down first! I had to protect myself!”

“Let you down?” Li Huowang laughed. “I've just met you today. Tell me, how did I let you down?”

“Fake! Everything's fake!” Zhao Lei saw the blood in his palms and continued to press on his injured eyes.

“What's fake? Stop trying to push the responsibility away here!

I can see through you and know whether you are actually crazy or not!" Li Huowang shouted and pointed his cleaver at Zhao Lei.

"You don't understand! We've met before! You took my stuff first! Don't blame me for it!"

"Let's talk it out! No need to fight against each other. We've known each other for so long." Wu Qi tried to stop them from quarreling.

"Stop trying to fool me!" Zhao Lei shouted. "If it wasn't because of the common threat coming from outside, you all would've never worked together! I still remember what each and every one of you did to me last time! Do you really think that we are a loving family? What's wrong? Cat got your tongue? If you don't want to admit it, I will say it out loud!"

"Qian Fu, do you have the guts to say who caused you to become crazy?"

"Wu Qi, why do you not return home but instead choose to stay outside and wander around?"

"And you, Qing Wanglai, stop trying to be a good person! You always disparage others while praising your own virtue and intelligence! You think everyone else is stupid enough not to see through you?"

Zhao Lei's outburst made everyone shut up. Li Huowang looked at their expressions and had a vague realization.

Zhao Lei's words might've been real. Even though everyone looked amicable on the outside, they might've had a grudge against each other in the past.

"All of you ignored me every time I was in danger, and now you blame me for selling you out? *Hmph!* If any of you had been approached and enticed with rewards too, you would've done the same!"

Li Huowang had heard enough. He stepped up. "I don't know what you are talking about, but you should understand that their

goal is us. Do you really think they'll let you live after surrendering to them?"

Zhao Lei's hands were trembling when he lowered them. He glared at Li Huowang with his blinded eyes. "I can only take a gamble. I can't trust them, but I can't trust you either. At the very least, they have a better chance at succeeding."

Li Huowang lowered his cleaver and picked up a roll of yellow tape from the table. He bound Zhao Lei's arms and feet tightly.

"I don't have time to listen to your ramblings. Let's just talk about who we are facing. Since they bought you off, that means that you also know who they are. Tell me their names and identities."

Zhao Lei chuckled and said, "Fake. Everything's fake. Do you really not know who they are?"

"Shut up and listen!" Li Huowang grabbed Zhao Lei's collar and pulled him up. "You better tell us what we want to know! I don't want to resort to force, but I will if I have to pry the information out of you!"

Zhao Lei chuckled. "You want to know who they are? There's no need to interrogate me. You will know soon enough."

As everyone was still trying to figure out what he meant, they heard someone knock on the door.

Zhao Lei chuckled again. "Do you really think I'm useless? I faked it! Why do you think I brought everyone to this remote basement?"

Bam! The door was kicked open as three metal orbs were thrown into the basement. The orbs were releasing white fumes.

As the fumes filled up the room, everyone in the room began coughing and struggling to see.

"Nana!" Li Huowang quickly moved towards Yang Na. He felt her soft body and pulled her down as they moved towards the corner of the basement.

Li Huowang coughed and said, “Quick, give me your taser! Squat down near the corner of the wall and don’t raise your head!”

“Mmm!”

Li Huowang remained composed, holding the cleaver and taser. He freed one hand to pinch his nose.

When the smoke thinned out a little, Li Huowang gritted his teeth and charged towards the people descending into the basement.

Zap! Li Huowang tased one of the people entering the basement.

He saw the person falling down and twitching on the ground before he charged at the other people. He wasn’t sure how many enemies there were. He focused on the one in front of him, bringing down one after another.

The fumes were dissipating. Li Huowang’s taser ran out of battery as he placed it on the neck of the next intruder. By then, he had already knocked many of them unconscious.

Crack! The intruder aimed the crossbow at Li Huowang’s thigh.

Li Huowang had no intention of dodging. He wanted to trade his injuries for the life of the intruder as he swung his cleaver towards the man’s neck.

“Huowang! Be careful!” Yang Na shouted.

He turned around and saw another man aiming a crossbow at the back of his head just two meters away!

The man had almost pressed the trigger, but then, there was the sound of a gunshot.

The man cried as his wrists were hit by the bullet. The crossbow in his hands also broke apart.

Li Huowang tried to find the source of the gunshot. He saw Qing Wanglai pinching his nose as he shot at the intruders with his gun. *Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam!*

Chapter 730 - Rest

Qing Wanglai unleashed a continuous barrage of gunshots, the sound echoing without pause.

The bullets hit some of the men and scared the rest, making them retreat.

After several rounds, Qing Wanglai ejected the magazine and reloaded the gun with a new one. Chen Hongyu and Qian Fu pushed one of the shelves towards the men to buy him time.

Behind Chen Hongyu was Li Huowang. He punched forward like a leopard, raising his cleaver and stabbing an intruder's neck. Yang Na was also fighting. She shouted incessantly as she sprayed pepper spray towards the intruders.

The chaotic battle didn't last long. By the time Qing Wanglai shot his gun again, the situation was under their control.

The other intruders retreated since the struggle put up by Li Huowang and the others was too strong.

They never thought Li Huowang and the others would fight back so hard. They came in ill-prepared.

By the time the white smoke completely dissipated, the chaotic room was back to its usual calmness.

Li Huowang panted as he touched the blood on his neck. He checked the corpses and saw four of them belonged to the intruder, while the fifth one was Wang Gang.

The two other people they had caught escaped during the chaos.

Li Huowang ignored them. He was still figuring out what had happened to them. He knew they would fight one day, but he never thought it would be so soon.

He approached Yang Na and checked if she was injured.

Thankfully, she was unharmed, although she was crying. He quickly calmed her down before he approached Qing Wanglai, who was inspecting the corpses.

“You actually had a real gun?” Li Huowang was surprised. He never expected Qing Wanglai to hide his true strength so deeply. Even Li Huowang was fooled by Qing Wanglai.

“Do I?” Qing Wanglai asked.

“Do you take me for a blind man?”

Li Huowang thought Qing Wanglai was joking when Qing Wanglai asked Wu Qi, “Wu Qi, do I have a real gun?”

“No, of course not. How could you have a real gun? It’s illegal.”

Li Huowang realized what they meant and nodded. “Fine, you don’t have a real gun. So... Who are they?”

Qing Wanglai checked the corpses and said, “They don’t look like amateurs to me.”

“What?”

“This means that their real body is very complicated. We need to prepare for the worst.”

“No! No more!” Yang Na stood up as she cried. “We need to report this to the police! Don’t you see how many people have died?! Five! Five people died!”

She looked around and found her bag. She wanted to call the police using her phone.

She reached for her bag, but Wu Qi snatched it away.

“Wu Qi?” Yang Na looked at Wu Qi in disbelief as the latter shook her head.

“We can’t call the police.”

“Why not?”

Wu Qi shook her head. She didn’t want to explain and instead gestured towards Qing Wanglai.

“Because now is not the time. Do you remember what I’ve said? This is the observer effect.” Qing Wanglai strapped his gun

behind his back.

“When everyone realizes it, the outcome will change too. We cannot determine what the others will think of us if we reveal this to the public.”

“Are you crazy?! Don’t you see the dead people on the ground?!” Yang Na took a step back in disbelief.

Qing Wanglai stared at Yang Na seriously and pondered.

“I agree about reporting to the police.” Li Huowang raised his arm in agreement.

He stepped on a corpse’s head as he said, “They didn’t believe me when I showed them the two fingers last time. I refuse to believe that they would dismiss me now. They will have to believe that someone is trying to kidnap me. I don’t think they would regard me as someone crazy after we killed five people.”

Wu Qi looked at the black security anklet on Li Huowang’s foot. “Do you really want to do that? Don’t forget you killed three of them. Even if you convince them that they came for you, they will still lock you up for good in the mental hospital. You won’t be jailed since it’s not a crime for a mentally ill person to kill someone, but that doesn’t mean you’ll be free from any repercussions.”

Yang Na lowered her head and sobbed. She stopped talking about reporting to the police.

“Hehehe... Fake! Everything is fake! Reporting to the police won’t work!” Zhao Lei wriggled on the ground with his limbs tied up.

“Everyone, listen to me,” Qing Wanglai said. “I’m not trying to scare everyone, but this is a serious matter. If you don’t believe me, I will show you the data from my experiments after we deal with the issue.”

Li Huowang knew that things wouldn’t be as simple as they seemed. “I doubt it will be that simple. How are you going to deal with five corpses if you don’t report to the police?”

The sportscar and the gun had already made Li Huowang suspicious of Qing Wanglai. If Qing Wanglai could really deal with five corpses discreetly, Li Huowang would have to reconsider their cooperation. *What kind of background does he have?*

“I don’t have any background, and I don’t need to deal with the corpses. They will come and clean it up themselves. I’m sure they don’t want the public to learn what they were up to. For now, we need to ask how many people they’ve sent after us and what kind of plans they have for us.”

“Everyone is dead. Who are you going to ask?”

“Who said everyone is dead?” Qing Wanglai pointed at Zhao Lei.

Qing Wanglai picked up Zhao Lei and patted the dust off Zhao Lei’s shirt. “You should know that I’m very trustworthy. We are all friends here. If you tell us what you know, I will forgive you.”

Qing Wanglai chose a different method to deal with Zhao Lei since the latter wouldn’t succumb to force or coaxing.

Li Huowang frowned. He wanted to say something but decided to remain silent.

Zhao Lei stared at the corpses on the ground and remained silent.

After a while, he made his request. “Give me back my stuff or I won’t cooperate.”

Li Huowang was angered and approached Zhao Lei. “What did I steal?! Wake up!”

Zhao Lei glared at him. “Stop trying to weasel your way out of this! Are you just faking it?!”

“Go take some medicine if you are crazy! Stop trying to act crazy here!”

Chapter 731 - Them

“Enough! Now is not the time to fight.”

Qing Wanglai stopped the two of them. He gave Li Huowang a knowing look before turning to Zhao Lei.

“Zhao Lei, what did Li Huowang take from you? We can give it back as long as we have it.”

“Two... Two magnets and my eyes!”

Li Huowang was furious. Zhao Lei was the one at fault for attacking him in the first place!

And now, Zhao Lei wanted Li Huowang to give him back an eye. It was clear that Zhao Lei didn't want to cooperate.

Zhao Lei suddenly straightened his neck and glared at Li Huowang. “You think you don't have to return them to me after you forgot about them? Think carefully! Think carefully about what is real and what is not! Don't you think everything around you is too random? Don't you think it's too fake?”

Li Huowang frowned as his frustration grew. He then gripped Zhao Lei's neck with his hands.

“You want to kill me? Fine! You are a murderer to begin with! What else wouldn't you do? All of you are the same! No need to pretend to be kind! How dare you all call me a traitor!”

Li Huowang moved his hands to Zhao Lei's shirt collar and held him up. “What the fuck do you mean? Just tell me the truth and stop talking in circles!”

“I've already said it clearly! It's just that you don't understand me. You call me sick? The one who's sick is you!”

“I'm not sick! I've been cured!”

Li Huowang took out a sharp pike and stabbed Zhao Lei's abdomen. Everyone else failed to react to Li Huowang's sudden

actions.

Zhao Lei did not relent even though his abdomen hurt. He continued to shout at Li Huowang, “Fake! Everything is fake! Can’t you differentiate it?! Everything is fake! Even your illness being cured is fake!”

Li Huowang glared at Zhao Lei’s single remaining good eye, and a strange memory surfaced in his mind—something about a boat.

“Why... Why did I go onto the boat last time?” Li Huowang tried to recall but couldn’t remember anything.

Zhao Lei saw the bewilderment in Li Huowang’s eyes and immediately smiled. “You remembered? You remembered, right? Think carefully! You were the one who attacked first! Give everything back or I won’t help you!”

“I attacked first?” Li Huowang chuckled as he paced in front of Zhao Lei rapidly.

He suddenly stopped and pointed at Zhao Lei’s head. “Stop bullshitting us! I was the one who attacked first? It was you! You were...”

Li Huowang suddenly forgot what he was trying to say and paced in front of Zhao Lei again.

His breathing quickened as he tried to remember. Everything around him shimmered.

He suddenly stopped and pointed at Zhao Lei again. “You! You were the one...”

The words lingered in his throat, but he couldn’t say anything. Li Huowang was very frustrated by how close he was to remembering everything.

He snarled and stabbed the pike into his abdomen instead.

“AAAAAAAAAH!”

“Huowang!” Yang Na and the others rushed forward to stop Li Huowang.

“Wait! Don’t interfere! Let him remember what happened!”
Zhao Lei stood at the side as he looked at Li Huowang.

“Just rest for now. Don’t let your old illness relapse. I will handle this.” Qing Wanglai patted Li Huowang’s shoulder before he walked towards Zhao Lei.

Li Huowang breathed rapidly in Yang Na’s embrace. His eyes darted around, taking in his surroundings. He was searching for something—he sensed something had changed in the air, and yet there were no visible changes around him.

Yang Na took out several pills from Li Huowang’s pocket. Chen Hongyu gave her a cup of water so that Li Huowang could take his medicine.

After taking the pills, Li Huowang’s visibly calmed down a lot. Only then did the rest give them space.

Before returning it to Li Huowang, Wu Qi examined the ingredients listed on the medicine’s label.

“Wait.” Li Huowang shook his head and stood up. “Let me talk to Zhao Lei!”

“That’s enough. Rest for now. No need to overexert yourself.” Wu Qi supported him and slowly sat him down. “You’re mentally unwell, so don’t overdo it. Let Qing Wanglai do it instead.”

“I’m not mentally unwell!”

“Sure you are not,” Chen Hongyu chirped.

Just then, someone shouted from the entrance, “Hey! Now is not the time to be chatting. Someone is coming. The gunshot just now was too loud!”

Qian Fu ran down the stairs and alerted everyone.

Qing Wanglai didn’t waste any time. He grabbed Zhao Lei and walked towards the entrance.

The others followed him and locked the door. They all entered Wu Qi’s RV before leaving the place.

Wu Qi whispered something to Qing Wanglai before the latter

explained, “The scuffle just now was too loud. To prevent the police from suspecting us, we will send you back first. I will message you once we have more information.”

Li Huowang nodded as he looked at Zhao Lei.

Qing Wanglai patted Li Huowang’s shoulder. “Don’t worry. Since they are trying to do something secretly, they won’t dare do anything to you in broad daylight.”

Li Huowang lost interest in melee weapons after seeing the gun. He looked at Qing Wanglai. “Give me a gun.”

“Here.” Qing Wanglai gave him one.

Li Huowang took it and threw it to the side. “I don’t want the lighter[1].”

Qing Wanglai chuckled and kept the lighter. “You’ve never used the gun before. It’s easy to injure yourself if you are untrained. I will teach you when we have time.”

Instead of dropping them off directly at the residential area, Wu Qi let them off just one street away. Li Huowang and Yang Na walked back while holding hands.

Yang Na was worried. “Huowang, are you alright?”

“Don’t worry. I’m fine.” Li Huowang increased his pace.

“Even though we are allies, we cannot trust them completely. We have to leave some room for doubt.”

“Why?”

“Zhao Lei was right. Qing Wanglai is a smart man. I fear he has his own agenda. Also, I don’t know anything about their previous conflicts. All I know is that even patients in mental hospitals can have their own agendas.”

1. This is referring to the gun-shaped lighter that Qing Wanglai showed to Li Huowang in chapter 727. Basically, he just gave him a fake gun 🗑️

Chapter 732 - Illusion

Si Qi, Xuantai Mountain, Luminous Temple, Grand Courage Hall

Li Huowang looked at the black-skinned monk cut in half as his sword cut into the monk's flesh. The black water flowing out of the monk splashed towards his face.

Sensing the oddness of the water, Li Huowang used the four tentacles on his back to pull himself backward, narrowly avoiding the black water.

"Hoh..." Li Huowang exhaled as he felt the murderous aura in the hall.

He had already lost an arm, but still held onto his three swords with his tentacles. A vast expanse of corpses lay behind him, all of them monks.

Li Huowang snarled at the golden Buddha statue to the back.

The golden Buddha had a black cloth on its shoulders. The Buddha's face was neither sad nor happy, but the most terrifying aspect was the human flesh and blood offerings in front of it.

It was one thing for the entire temple to defect to the Dharma Sect, but it was another matter for them to make a statue of god Yu'er! The warrior monks here had even learned military techniques. It was a dangerous place that Li Huowang had to eliminate immediately.

He took a deep breath and ran towards the Buddha statue. He jumped in the air when he had almost reached the altar.

Using his cultivation, he jumped continuously in the air as if there were invisible stairs.

He reached the top of the Buddha's head and swung down his purple-tassel sword.

Just then, the golden coating of the Buddha statue burst open, revealing black cracks in its body. Li Huowang saw living beings through the cracks.

The Buddha statue glared at Li Huowang, grabbed him with both hands, and bit him with its black mouth. Its black teeth sunk into Li Huowang's body, but for some reason, it couldn't crush his bones.

Li Huowang stepped on the lower jaw of the Buddha statue while using his upper body to force its mouth open. This way, he wouldn't get swallowed.

"You want to eat me? Let me give you a taste then!" Li Huowang opened his mouth and vomited Li Sui out.

The tentacles quickly shrunk into his body as Li Sui fell into the Buddha's gullet. "Li Sui, eat that bastard!"

Li Huowang forced the Buddha to keep its mouth open by wedging the purple-tassel sword inside. He leaped outside with his spine sword, only to find the Buddha's hands waiting for him.

Just then, a halberd spun in the air and chopped off all of the Buddha's fingers.

"Are you trying to kill a Buddha? Good! I've always hated that bald bastard!" Peng caught her halberd midair while riding her horse, then charged towards the Buddha's statue.

Even though the Buddha's statue was humongous, it continued to retreat against Li Huowang's and Peng Longteng's attacks.

The situation was under control for now, but Li Huowang was worried about Suisui. She had been inside the Buddha for a long time and still hadn't emerged.

I should've jumped down with her. I need to deal with this as soon as possible.

Li Huowang was about to end it when he saw half of a dog's face forcing itself out from the Buddha's belly.

Li Huowang heard a soft voice coming out from the belly

button. “Dad! Help! They... ate... my... head...”

Li Huowang panicked when he heard that. He rushed forward without any care as he endured the attacks from the Buddha statue. He used his sword to cut open the Buddha’s stomach.

Li Huowang saw the mangled limbs and broken tentacles pouring out of the Buddha’s statue. He felt his heart go cold. Suddenly, a skinned dog’s skull appeared out of the hole with some of the Buddha’s intestines. “Dad, whose limbs are those?”

Li Sui was fine. The voice from before wasn’t hers.

Immediately after, the tentacles and limbs disappeared. It was just Li Huowang’s cultivation of the ‘Truth.’ The tentacles and the voice from before were not the original Li Sui.

“What?”

As Li Huowang was stunned, the Buddha’s palm slammed down. The sound of bones cracking could be heard as he was crushed into the ground.

Ten minutes later, Li Huowang grunted as he dragged the massive Buddha’s head out of the temple. His body was covered in blood.

He looked down from the top of the hall and saw the warrior monks still desperately fighting against the soldiers. Li Huowang kicked the Buddha’s head down the steps.

The warrior monks lost their will to fight when they saw their Buddha’s head rolling down. The soldiers made short work of them and ended the fight.

Li Huowang panted and sat on a cushion. He continued to monitor the other fights through the mirror that Xuan Pin had given him.

The soldiers saw what he was doing and thought he was weird, but Li Huowang had long disregarded how others perceived him. He only needed to know he wasn’t crazy—that was all that mattered.

Li Sui was dirty and tired. She leaned on Li Huowang's back and nudged her skull towards him. "Dad, you are so strong. You killed so many bad people."

Li Huowang sighed and kept the mirror. He knew how strong he was now. In fact, he was even stronger than the half-immortal Dan Yangzi.

As his cultivation improved, it became easier for him to unwittingly change his surroundings according to his thoughts.

It didn't have to be a thought that he was focusing on. It could be a random intrusive thought, but his cultivation would still turn it into reality.

He remembered Li Sui's shout for help and the version of her that he had accidentally turned into reality. Just thinking about it for a moment had been enough for it to become real.

It wasn't a good sign and was impacting his daily life. Thankfully, the enemies he faced today hadn't been too strong, or he would've actually died.

Nothing was real when nothing was fake in front of him.

It wasn't the first time this had happened. This was the fourth since the time he accidentally materialized Bai Lingmiao from his thoughts.

Instead of fighting against the Dharma Sect, he was now fighting against himself.

Chapter 733 - Real

Li Huowang wanted to deal with these complications as soon as he could. Thankfully, despite how difficult the situation seemed, there were still ways to remedy it.

He remembered what Shai Zi had told him last time. Cultivating ‘Truth’ without cultivating ‘Lies’ would cause him to become a demon.

It was a reasonable suggestion too. As long as he cultivated ‘Lies,’ they would balance out his cultivation of ‘Truth.’

But the problem was that he didn’t believe in the words of Shai Zi. Who would believe the Sitting Oblivion Dao?

Shai Zi once said he never lied to anyone to trick them, but he also once mocked Li Huowang for believing the words of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. It was contradictory.

Li Huowang judged the situation before deciding to give it a try.

It wasn’t that bad to cultivate ‘Lies.’ Rather than being tricked by the Sitting Oblivion Dao, Li Huowang had to turn himself into a Sitting Oblivion Dao member to trick others.

The Heavenly Dao of Lies was also in Ji Zai’s hands. Li Huowang was certain that it was safer than it was in Doulao’s hands.

Since Ji Zai held both the Heavenly Dao of Lies and the Heavenly Dao of Truth, it was natural for him to be able to use both powers.

“The situation here has stabilized for now. I have to leave this place for a moment.”

He murmured alone while Xuan Pin’s illusion floated out from a wooden fish.

“We are now at an important juncture of the war. People are constantly dying on the frontline. Without you, I’m afraid most of the soldiers will have to sacrifice themselves in a battle of attrition.”

“Stop trying to threaten me like that. If you really thought their lives were that precious, you would’ve given me some secret artifacts to fight back.”

Li Huowang had always aimed to destroy the Dharma Sect and save the world, but he knew he needed to address his problem as soon as possible. Otherwise, he would be too worried to fight.

Li Huowang wasted no time, patting Li Sui’s head before standing up and walking out of the hall.

“This is a tricky matter. What do you intend to do?” Xuan Pin asked, somehow knowing Li Huowang’s problems.

“Do you have a solution?”

“Maybe for a regular person, but it won’t work on you. You are both a Strayed One and a Twisted One.”

“I knew you wouldn’t have the solution. If you had it, you wouldn’t have kept it a secret until now.”

Li Huowang walked down the blood-stained stairs and reached the bottom of the mountain.

He saw that the stable had been crushed by the Buddha’s head, killing both of his horses. He had no choice but to take off the reins.

“Senior Li?” Li Huowang didn’t even turn around when he heard the familiar voice. “Stop! Don’t come close to me! Let’s talk after I deal with my problem!”

He could no longer differentiate the real Bai Lingmiao from the one he materialized, so he chose to ignore all of them.

He heard the sound of footsteps stopping at a distance before he sighed. “How’s Taishan Shi? Is he still refusing to speak?”

He had hoped to extract information from Taishan Shi after Bai Lingmiao caught him, but even after using all of his techniques, Taishan Shi still refused to leak any information.

Taishan Shi's body was as tough as stone, and his mouth was even tougher. Li Huowang had no choice but to send Taishan Shi to the barracks in hopes that the Surveillance Bureau had a method to interrogate him.

Bai Lingmiao replied, "No. We tried all sorts of methods, but he refused to say anything. Do you think he actually doesn't know anything?"

"Impossible. He must have key information about the Dharma Sect. Did the Chiefs come and visit him?"

"No. We tried to contact them, but all of them were busy dealing with the Dharma Sect, so they couldn't make time."

"Bullshit. I don't even see them in the mirror. Xuan Pin, what are you up to now? Can't you even spare some time to interrogate him?"

"I've sent some men, but it'll take some time for them to get there since they can't fly."

"Hurry up. Taishan Shi is a key figure in the Dharma Sect, so he must have some vital information, especially since he came from the Qi Kingdom."

Li Huowang sat on a horse he materialized and prepared to leave.

"Senior Li, I won't follow you, but at least tell me where you are heading."

Li Huowang pondered and answered Bai Lingmiao's question, "Qing Qiu."

"Qing Qiu? Why?"

"I know how to cultivate 'Truth,' but only the Sitting Oblivion Dao knows how to cultivate 'Lies.' Unfortunately, everyone in the Sitting Oblivion Dao has been killed. I can only find them in the Feng Capital of Qing Qiu's underground."

Xuan Pin exclaimed in surprise before Bai Lingmiao even said anything, "What a genius idea! To cultivate both 'Truth' and 'Lies'!"

to balance each other out.”

“Hm?” Li Huowang stared at Xuan Pin’s illusion.

“Shai Zi is correct. This method would work.” Xuan Pin was certain of it.

“Really? How can you be so sure?” Li Huowang was suspicious of how supportive Xuan Pin was. *Does he have ulterior motives?*

“Don’t worry, this is definitely going to work. Yin counters Yang, and truth counters lies. Cultivating ‘Lies’ will balance out your cultivation of ‘Truth’”.

After hearing Xuan Pin reassuring him, Li Huowang said nothing else. He urged the horse to run towards Qing Qiu as fast as possible.

Li Sui drew two talismans and pasted them onto the horse’s back.

Bai Lingmiao thought about their conversation. She was both surprised and curious when she asked Xuan Pin, “Master Xuan Pin, are you telling the truth? Will it really work?”

Xuan Pin’s voice came from the black hole beneath the red robes. “It doesn’t matter if I think it will work or not. The most important thing is for him to believe that it will.”

Bai Lingmiao now understood what Xuan Pin was trying to do.

It was the right choice. Even if it was Shai Zi’s trap, as long as Li Huowang thought it would work, it would work.

Bai Lingmiao bowed to Xuan Pin, knowing that he was trying to help Li Huowang. “Thank you, Master Xuan Pin. Senior Li is rash, but he’s kind. He will understand your kindness.”

“I don’t need him to understand. I just don’t want to die.”

Xuan Pin then looked at Bai Lingmiao and stared at her red veil.

“I’m sure that your body made from the evil entity is uncomfortable. If you want, I can refer you to the abbot of the Righteous Monastery. He can make another body for you.”

“Really?” Bai Lingmiao was excited. She didn’t really care for her appearance since Li Huowang didn’t mind, but she was still excited at the prospect of getting her original look back.

“Of course. We are allies now, so I can do this much. It’s also just a small favor. The more important thing is for us to help each other.”

Chapter 734 - Mahakala

A soft wind blew past the shriveled grass plains.

The skies were dark and the clouds were like lead, hanging low in the sky. Li Huowang was feeling down too.

After rushing for several days, he finally reached Qing Qiu. However, it was no longer the same one he knew.

The emerald green grass plains were gone, replaced by yellowish dried grass that was barely clinging to life. It was even worse than he had expected.

He was worried for Sun Baolu, but he had no time to address Qing Qiu's situation because his own issues had yet to be resolved.

Li Huowang urged his horse with the talisman towards the city.

He recalled someone telling him the city's name once, but he had forgotten about it. The only thing he remembered was the solidified poop of the livestock there.

Qing Qiu's tribal leader had gone to battle, but someone was still managing its disgusting city.

Li Huowang had just entered the city when several guards with tall red hats blocked him.

The guard's mouth didn't move, but a low voice came from their abdomen. "Where are you from? Where are you going?"

Li Huowang revealed his identity plate and pointed at the temple. "To the Antrabhara Temple. I have business with the masters there."

The guards checked his identity plate while the other Qing Qiu residents groveled on the ground.

Soon after, two rows of Lamas wearing black overalls approached Li Huowang as they clapped their hands together.

The Lamas were also people from Qing Qiu. Their skin was tanned and their bodies were skinny. All of them were old, with faces covered in wrinkles or age spots.

Li Huowang had seen them once. *It seems that the Antrabhara Temple knows that I'm coming.*

They said nothing. They simply bowed to Li Huowang and walked towards the temple.

Li Huowang jumped down from his horse and followed them on foot. The guards dared not stop him.

A black tentacle slid out from his red robes and took back the identity plate from the guards.

Li Huowang followed the Lamas from behind and walked past the groveling people. He walked up the stairs and entered the temple.

The Antrabhara Temple was grand and solemn on the outside but empty on the inside. There weren't many Buddha statues here. Instead, the space was decorated by art drawn on leather and several pagodas that resembled pikes.

The leather art was strange, as there was a lot of it. Each depicted a different scene connected to the Immortal Heaven.

But Li Huowang had not forgotten what he was here for. He asked the Lama before him, "I'm here to seek help from the masters of this place. There is something that only you can do."

The Lamas said nothing, as if they had expected it. They continued to guide Li Huowang into the temple. He walked past a lively hall where discussions were taking place until he reached the innermost room of the temple.

The Lamas talked, and a reply came from inside the room, but Li Huowang didn't understand them since they were talking in the language of Qing Qiu.

Suddenly, the voice inside the room said, "Daoist... Li... I've heard... of you."

The door slowly opened and revealed a completely dark room. The faint voice came from inside.

Li Huowang had just entered when he saw several dried corpses with feathered crowns hanging on the rafters. They were hanging by their necks.

Even though their faces were like skeletons grafted with a piece of skin, their elaborate overalls and the various intricate bone ornaments revealed that they were in the upper ranks of the Antrabhara Temple.

The room wasn't as smelly as Li Huowang had expected. It was filled with various scents instead.

Li Huowang looked up and paid no attention to whether the Lamas were dead or alive. Instead, he proceeded to explain the purpose of his visit.

"I will keep it short since you've heard of me. I have a problem that requires a certain guiding drug ingredient located in the Feng Capital. One of my disciples said you are familiar with that area, so I was hoping you would guide me there."

The Feng Capital was the land governed by the Siming of Death, Kui Lei. Li Huowang had no intention of risking his life. He almost died after facing the Lion Dance Palace last time.

Since the Antrabhara Temple worshiped death and was also fighting against the Dharma Sect, Li Huowang figured that there was no reason for them not to help him.

Right after he explained, he saw a dried corpse to his left sway slightly.

Li Huowang asked, "What do you mean you can't?"

"It's not that we can't. Daoist Li, do you not know that the Feng Capital is not a living person's Kali?" Li Huowang didn't understand what the Lama was talking about.

"Of course I know. If I needed to find someone who was alive, I wouldn't have looked for you."

“It’s easy to enter the Feng Capital, but it's difficult to leave.”

“No, my friend entered it once. You can just use those spinning wheels to fetch me out later.”

Li Huowang remembered how Yang Xiaohai entered and exited the place safely. He refused to believe that he would fail, even though Yang Xiaohai had escaped with the help of Hong Zhong.

“Daoist Li, the times have changed. We are saying this for your own sake. Go back.”

Li Huowang frowned. “Did something happen there?”

Another Lama replied, “The Mahakala^[1] has moved. It should’ve been dead and motionless under Qing Qiu.”

“What?” Li Huowang had a bad feeling. *The Mahakala they spoke of probably refers to Kui Lei, the Siming of Death.*

“We have conducted regular sacrifices to appease the Mahakala and allow it to rest in peace, but I fear time is up since the Mahakala has moved. It’s no longer in the original location.”

“And what does that have to do with the Feng Capital?”

Li Huowang refused to leave empty-handed after coming here from so far away.

“Daoist Li, you do not understand. Every time Mahakala moves, an entire village must die. With every step it takes, an entire town must die. Every time it moves, an entire city must die.”

1. Another name for Kui Lei. 

Chapter 735 - Enter

Li Huowang finally had a good understanding of what would happen if the Siming of Death moved.

“That is why the grass in Qing Qiu is all dead. After that, the livestock will die. And once they’re gone, humans will be next.

“If things continue to die like this, Qing Qiu will become the land of the dead.

“Death should’ve been the final stop, but now that Mahakala has started moving, more and more people will die early deaths.”

Li Huowang was confused. The reason so many people were dying was supposed to be the aftermath of god Yu’er’s invasion and the war initiated by the Dharma Sect.

Why are they saying that the deaths are due to Mahakala?

Li Huowang didn’t believe them completely.

“Master, I’m very saddened by the death of the grass, but how does it relate to the Feng Capital? I just need to go there and find someone. I can’t help you with the grass. You need to find Xuan Pin for help.”

No matter what they said, Li Huowang hadn’t forgotten why he was there. His issue was more pressing.

Suddenly, one of the ropes snapped, and a corpse fell down in front of Li Huowang.

The corpse had a snarling expression on his wrinkled face. He was angry.

“The Mahakala is moving! Where do you think it is? It’s at the Feng Capital now! Mahakala has regained his senses! You don’t even need to touch it! You only need to take a single look, and it’s over! You would wish you were dead!”

Li Huowang frowned and recalled everything he had seen

about the Simings in the Baiyu Capital.

Li Huowang had forgotten most of it, but some of the fragmented memories in his mind still made him tremble.

He had felt insignificant every time he had met a Siming, except for Ji Zai.

The Simings, like Doulao or Ba-Hui, never had to descend into the mortal realm to make him shudder in fear. They had either appeared as projections or looked at him from afar.

The Siming of Death. Can I really take what I need from it?

But if I don't, I will eventually kill someone with my powers.

There were no other methods that he could think of now. The Dharma Sect was constantly getting closer, and Li Huowang had no time to figure out another way.

Li Huowang thought carefully before looking at the dried corpse before him. "Since you know a lot about Mahakala, that means you know how to avoid it, right?"

The dried corpse's eyes moved slightly.

Li Huowang continued, "Xuan Pin has told you before. You should know about me and the situation outside regarding the Dharma Sect. How long can the Antrabhara Temple last when the Dharma Sect invades? I don't want to fight Mahakala. All I need is the guiding drug ingredient in the Feng Capital. We have a common enemy. Helping me is equivalent to helping yourself."

The room of dried corpses said nothing, as if they were pondering.

Just then, the temple started shaking. Li Huowang looked outside and said in a panic, "What are you hesitating for? Another division is gone. Do you really want to wait for all eleven divisions to be completely destroyed before you take action?"

The Lamas nodded when they sensed the quaking. "Fine, we shall let you try once. But you need to know that the Feng Capital is exceedingly dangerous even with our help. Do not let your guard

down.”

“Fine, we’re already short on time, so let’s start now!” Li Huowang released the primordial breath in his body and removed the fake scenario he had made just now.

The division did not actually disappear. It was a fake created by Li Huowang to convince the Lamas to help him.

If the cultivation of ‘Truth’ had no side effects, it would’ve been an extremely strong ability.

Li Huowang was soon brought into a prayer room with many candles.

When the dried corpses gestured for him to sit, he thought the place was the entrance to the Feng Capital.

Li Huowang sat in the middle while the Lamas sat around him.

“Once you enter the Feng Capital, you will only have three divisions of time, regardless of whether you find the guiding drug ingredient or not. You must come back once you hear the sound of the prayer wheels! Do not delay your departure.”

“Alright!” Li Huowang placed both hands on his knees and closed his eyes.

The Lamas slowly chanted. Li Huowang noticed that their mantras were extremely complicated.

“Po Luo Po Bing Da Ni Yin Na Li Ye~”

The Lamas took out a transparent knife from their robes and sliced the air above Li Huowang’s head.

Li Huowang opened his eyes and shouted angrily, “What are you doing?!”

However, the Lamas didn’t move.

Li Huowang extended his arms, but his hands phased through their bodies.

Chapter 736 - Soul

Li Huowang saw his arm pass effortlessly through the Lama's hand. He instantly understood and looked up, then felt his whole body plummet. He landed directly on the ceiling below.

Li Huowang looked up at the Lamas and his own body surrounded by them. The Feng Capital was clearly not a place the physical body could reach.

He could still hear the Lamas chanting, but the sound was faint and distant, as though muffled by a veil.

The sensation was peculiar—it was as if he was weightless and floating on air. *Is this the soul leaving the body? So there really are souls in this world? Why aren't there any ghosts, then?*

Li Huowang recalled the Lama's words and didn't tarry. He clenched his fists and walked towards the door.

When he exited the inverted Antrabhara Temple, the outside world had transformed into a vast and desolate desert.

He was not surprised since Yang Xiaohai had warned him. After contemplating momentarily, he headed in the direction Yang Xiaohai had mentioned, where he had bumped into Hong Zhong.

Li Huowang only had three divisions and had to find the Sitting Oblivion Dao's Hong Zhong quickly. If he didn't find him here, he'd have to search in circles around the Antrabhara Temple.

Li Huowang walked through the bleak landscape and constantly looked around his surroundings.

Yang Xiaohai said there's no more of that bizarre seawater from god Yu'er here. What does that mean? Does that mean the Siming responsible for death managed to fend off god Yu'er?

God Yu'er likely hadn't taken over the Siming of Death. A change in the Heavenly Dao should've caused a Natural Disaster.

This might be a good thing for them. Any setback for god Yu'er was good news.

Li Huowang was puzzled after walking for some time. He hadn't found Hong Zhong or any of the souls of the dead, which Yang Xiaohai had claimed were everywhere.

There were no souls, no strange, giant ghosts, and no bottomless pits. None of the things described by Yang Xiaohai were here.

As he started to doubt if he was on the correct path, he suddenly sensed something emerging from the distant black fog.

"What is that...?" Li Huowang leaned forward and looked at the shadow forming in the mist.

As the shadow became larger, it eventually exceeded his field of vision. He realized what it was—it was Mahakala, the Siming of Death. *I must not look!*

Li Huowang lowered his head. He focused on the uneven ground and then moved aside.

The next moment, a terrifyingly low growl echoed, paralyzing him with fear. He couldn't even lift his feet.

All he could do was close his eyes, cover his ears, and curl up into a ball. He chanted to himself, "You can't see me... you can't see me!"

Another low growl sounded, and the immense pressure made Li Huowang feel as if he was on the brink of death.

It felt like a mountain was crushing him.

After an unknown amount of time, the feeling finally dissipated. Li Huowang gasped for breath and got up, then saw that his body had partially melted like a candle.

This had happened just from passing by, without even touching him.

He stared at the distant black fog. *So this is Mahakala? This is Kui Lei.*

Ba-Hui governed pain, and Doulao governed truth and falsehood. Compared to them, meeting Kui Lei, who governed death, was an entirely different experience. It was like facing eternal silence itself.

He understood why this place was so empty after this recent experience.

Li Huowang was more concerned about whether Hong Zhong's memory was still alive than about whether Shai Zi had lied to him.

If this happened a few more times, Li Huowang wouldn't make it even with the Lamas' protection, let alone Hong Zhong from the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

Could he really have been reincarnated? Does reincarnation exist in this world? Li Huowang began to consider the worst possibilities.

As he thought about this, he looked up and saw something dart into the black fog from the southeast corner of the ceiling.

"Wait!" Li Huowang sprinted towards the ceiling.

When his feet made contact with the uneven ceiling, he chased after the commotion.

It was the first moving thing he had seen in this desolate world of death. He needed to catch it and find out what was going on.

He ran as fast as he could and soon caught a glimpse of its back. It was a child glowing with white light.

"Wait! Don't run!"

The figure only ran faster after he shouted. As he followed the child's steps, his surroundings changed. Gigantic pillars began to appear, dividing the sky and earth. The child vanished behind one of these pillars.

Li Huowang sighed in frustration when a mocking voice came from above. "Why are you chasing it?"

He looked up to see another Li Huowang hanging upside down from the ceiling.

It was Hong Zhong from the Sitting Oblivion Dao. Li Huowang

could tell with one look since his own face would never have such an expression.

“Great, you’re not dead!” Li Huowang exclaimed, relieved at his luck in finding him so quickly.

“What, you wanted me dead? That makes sense. To you, I’m just a memory created by Doulao.” The upside-down Li Huowang wiped his face, which turned into a Hong Zhong mahjong tile.

He continued, “Let me guess, you came all the way to the Feng Capital to find me because you’re in trouble? What kind of trouble brings the famous Li Huowang to seek help from a mere memory?”

“You know I’m just a memory, right?” The flesh-and-blood Hong Zhong jumped down and laughed maniacally. “Do you know what that means? It means I reset every hour and start over, which repeats endlessly! Do you understand how that feels? Do you?!”

As he shouted, Hong Zhong began to disintegrate and eventually turn into a pool of writhing blood.

Chapter 737 - Hong Zhong

Li Huowang stood by a giant slanted column and listened to Hong Zhong explain his thoughts.

Once Hong Zhong finished, Li Huowang paused expressionlessly. “You’re pretending, aren’t you? Why do that at this point?”

Hong Zhong was stunned momentarily. He wiped his face, which reverted to its mahjong tile appearance. His previous agitation was completely gone.

“Impressive, Li Huowang. You saw through it. You’re not that dumb, after all.”

Everything Hong Zhong had said was an act, meant to toy with him just like before.

Despite all he had been through, Li Huowang hadn’t forgotten that this guy was from the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

Even though he was also Li Huowang, he was still from the Sitting Oblivion Dao, and anything he said could be a lie.

“I figured it out by putting myself in your shoes. If I were you, I wouldn’t break down over something so trivial. Besides, if you reset every hour, why fear breaking down?”

Hong Zhong chuckled. “True enough. So, tell me, what’s happening outside? I’m dying of boredom here.”

Li Huowang’s brows furrowed. This Hong Zhong, though still Li Huowang, was a different entity created by Doulao.

Since his experiences had been stripped away and made incomplete, his personality had become more extreme.

Seeing that Li Huowang did not respond, Hong Zhong carried on with a proud expression on his face. “Aren’t you surprised I still exist, even though Doulao’s Heavenly Daos of Truth and Lies were

seized? Do you want to know how I achieved that?”

“I was supposed to disappear, but I refused to accept that. Do you know why?” Hong Zhong leaned closer.

Li Huowang stepped back. “I don’t care how you exist, and I don’t want to know. Time is short, so I’ll be brief. I’m here because of a troublesome matter, and I need—”

“Wait, wait, wait. Can you let me finish first? Do you think I’m some irrelevant NPC you can skip over? Is this how you ask others for help?”

Li Huowang remained silent, and Hong Zhong nodded with satisfaction. “Good. Now, let me show you my story.”

He turned and led Li Huowang to the other side of the column. There was a dense array of carved words on the colossal column.

Li Huowang approached and recognized his own handwriting. Clearly, Hong Zhong had written here to record events beyond the hour.

Li Huowang read the carvings carefully. When he finished, he turned to Hong Zhong. “You survived by relying on Kui Lei’s Heavenly Dao of Death?”

Hong Zhong smugly answered, “Yes. The Heavenly Daos of Truth and Lies are gone, but a part of the Heavenly Dao of Death remains in me. I use this fragment to survive.”

“Though I’m stuck in an hour-long loop, it’s better than nothing. And as long as I exist, there’s hope,” Hong Zhong said. “Now, I’ve waited long enough for my chance, haven’t I? What do you need from me? And what do you offer?”

“I can take you out,” Li Huowang said and observed Hong Zhong closely. However, this massive enticement didn’t elicit any reaction, as though Hong Zhong was simply hearing about someone else’s business.

“Take me out? Is this for you or for me?”

“For both of us. A win-win.”

As long as he obtained Hong Zhong's memories, he could fully grasp Sitting Oblivion Dao's technique to cultivate 'Lies.'

"Why should I leave? I'm fine here. I don't see it as a win-win," Hong Zhong said indifferently.

Both of them were Li Huowang, so Hong Zhong had considered the very same things. "Without a physical body, I'd just be a memory even if I leave. What's the difference from being here?"

"So you're just going to keep waiting like that? Forever?"

Hong Zhong looked at Li Huowang with a mocking gaze. "No problem. I can wait. In any case, I only have an hour of memories, so I won't go mad from waiting."

He continued, "I can wait, but can you? Your situation seems more urgent. You need to offer more."

"Stop joking around! There's a huge problem outside! Think of Bai Lingmiao and Li Sui! Do you want to endanger them?"

Hong Zhong's smile faded. "What's happening outside?"

Li Huowang quickly recounted the recent events, noticing that Hong Zhong had finally become serious.

"Now, I'm cultivating 'Truth' but not 'Lies.' It's like having a ticking time bomb around me, and I could harm those around me anytime. I need to solve this quickly."

Hong Zhong fell silent in contemplation.

"What's there to hesitate about? Why are you hesitating?"

"*Hmph*, why are you in such a rush? I'm not hesitating about leaving. Cultivating 'Truth' but not 'Lies' leads to madness. That's what Shai Zi said. We need to think this through." Hong Zhong was evidently suspicious.

"I've thought it over. Even in the worst case, cultivating 'Lies' is better than my current state." Li Huowang had indeed hated and despised the deceitful members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao before. But compared to the Dharma Sect, which seemed bent on

destroying the world, the Sitting Oblivion Dao's deceit was less detestable.

Hong Zhong shook his head. "You don't understand the Sitting Oblivion Dao or Shai Zi. I'm Hong Zhong, so I know them well. If this was planned by Shai Zi, it won't be just a minor scheme. Don't drop your guard just because he's dead.

"A Sitting Oblivion Dao member isn't truly dead if any of their schemes remain."

Li Huowang frowned. "So you suspect..."

"I suspect this is a bait. Do you know what that is? In the Liar's Scripture, it's the start of a big scam. The bait isn't usually a scam and might even benefit the target. It's like the initial sweet treat for a new player at a gambling table."

Chapter 738 - Siming

Hong Zhong looked at Li Huowang. "I think combining the cultivation of 'Truth' and 'Lies' might actually cure your madness. However, that might be Shai Zi's bait to lure you in.

"The scary part is that Shai Zi probably foresaw this situation long ago, setting traps and waiting for you to merge the cultivation of 'Truth' and 'Lies,' then triggering the traps."

Li Huowang couldn't help but seriously consider it.

"Why would he set traps if he's already dead? Does he want to deceive me to revive him?" Li Huowang asked.

Currently, the Heavenly Daos of Truth and Lies were in Ji Zai's hands. There was no way he would borrow divine powers from his future self. No matter how useless he might be, he would not do something like that to aid the enemy.

He managed the Heavenly Dao of Bewilderment, not the Heavenly Dao of Stupidity.

Without divine powers, even if Shai Zi came back to life, he'd just be a clever old scammer.

The fate of the White Lotus Sect had been very miserable since they worshiped the Heavenly Mater, who had lost all Heavenly Daos. Li Huowang had seen it firsthand.

"Don't always assume their motives are so selfish. The Sitting Oblivion Dao's schemes don't always have a reason. Sometimes, they just do it for fun to trick you."

Hong Zhong rested his chin on his hand. His expression mirrored Li Huowang's, with both of them frowning deeply.

They stood there pondering for a long time, unable to figure out what Shai Zi's real plan was.

After a while, Li Huowang said, "No matter what Shai Zi is

planning, I have to cultivate ‘Lies.’ If I don’t, I might explode before Shai Zi’s traps do.”

He continued, “Now that we know there might be traps, it’s not too bad. We can try to take the sugar coating and throw the bomb back.”

Hong Zhong felt frustrated. “Would Shai Zi’s sugar coating be that easy to swallow? Why did you even cultivate ‘Truth’ in the first place? Didn’t Zhuge Yuan warn you not to cultivate it?”

Li Huowang replied, “Don’t mention him! Without cultivating ‘Truth,’ how could I deal with the Dharma Sect when they get stronger every day? With the Profound Records? Do you think Ba-Hui is more reliable?”

At this moment, Li Huowang noticed the chanting in his ears growing fainter. He knew his time was running out.

“I can’t stay in this damned place much longer. Let’s get out first!”

Hong Zhong thought for a moment before finally nodding. “Once we’re out, find a way to use your ‘Truth’ cultivation to turn me into an existence like the monk. That way, I can stay by your side.”

He continued, “I’ll keep an eye out for you. If any of Boss Shai Zi’s traps emerge, I can warn you in advance.”

Li Huowang looked at Hong Zhong as a thought flashed through his mind.

Does this guy have any schemes of his own? Maybe Shai Zi’s traps aren’t the real problem—maybe it’s Hong Zhong.

Hong Zhong seemed impatient. “What are you thinking about? Didn’t you say there’s no time? Hurry up!”

“Let’s go.” Li Huowang ran towards the source of the chanting, with Hong Zhong following closely behind.

“How has everyone been while I’ve been away?” Hong Zhong suddenly inquired.

“They’re fine. After Gao Zhijian became the emperor, everyone’s life improved. The Lu Family Troupe is gone, though.”

“I know. I saw Lu Xiucan.”

They hurried along. As time passed, the chanting in Li Huowang’s ears grew softer.

As the chanting disappeared, Li Huowang felt his body becoming heavier, making it even more difficult to move.

“Hurry!” Hong Zhong reached out to him.

“Now you’re in a hurry? Why were you wasting time chatting earlier?” Li Huowang grabbed his arm.

They picked up speed together. Just as Li Huowang thought nothing could go wrong, a black mist began swirling on the left.

This movement was familiar to Li Huowang. “Kui Lei is coming!”

He was about to close his eyes, but this time, Kui Lei’s body suddenly emerged from the black mist.

It looked like an amorphous mass, with pale, dark, abyss-like holes lining the edges.

Kui Lei was shrouded in a strange pale glow. Li Huowang found it extremely difficult to describe the feeling he got when he looked at Kui Lei. It was beyond terrifying and abnormal, and he felt profoundly shocked.

At that moment, the buzzing sound of a wheel brought Li Huowang back to his senses.

In that brief moment, he found his body had almost entirely melted, with some parts of his body even dislodging and drifting towards Kui Lei.

Li Huowang immediately closed his eyes, crouched down, and dragged Hong Zhong towards the Antrabhara Temple.

It quickly became apparent that he couldn’t move faster than Kui Lei. A familiar sense of oppression descended from above once again.

Li Huowang froze. He pressed himself to the ground with Hong Zhong and waited for Kui Lei to pass.

Time dragged on at a snail's pace. It felt like a long time, but the oppressive feeling still didn't dissipate.

"What's going on?" Li Huowang struggled to open his left eye by a tiny crack and glanced at the ground.

The next moment, he froze. It was incredibly dark around him. It was a shadow—Kui Lei's shadow.

Whether it was part of Kui Lei or Kui Lei itself, it was now right above Li Huowang, and it remained unmoving.

Has it discovered me? Li Huowang froze in fear, feeling as though he had been plunged into an ice cave.

Even if Kui Lei did nothing, its mere presence was extremely deadly for Li Huowang.

Time passed slowly, and Li Huowang felt his body continuously melting. Some of his insides felt instinctively drawn towards Kui Lei.

Li Huowang clenched his teeth and made up his mind. *I can't keep this up! Even if it's a gamble, I have to do something!*

He started to move and dragged Hong Zhong towards the Antrabhara Temple. *You can't see me! You can't see me!*

"Hong Zhong! Don't just freeze! Use your skills from the Sitting Oblivion Dao! Use them even if they're useless!" Li Huowang said with great difficulty.

There was no response. Instead, Hong Zhong pulled his hand away.

Li Huowang looked down and saw him moving in the opposite direction. "Hong Zhong! What are you doing?"

Hong Zhong turned to reveal his mahjong tile face.

Even under this Siming, Hong Zhong's mahjong tile face seemed to mock him. "Oh, look who it is. Li Huowang, such a rare guest."

“Damn it! The hour’s up!”

Chapter 739 - Hong Zhong

“Hong Zhong! Trust me! Don’t run! I didn’t plan to harm you! We agreed on this before!”

Li Huowang was nearly crawling on the ground, mustering all his strength to explain to Hong Zhong.

The current Hong Zhong was different from the one who had vanished earlier. His thoughts were already completely different.

Hong Zhong looked at Li Huowang with a slight smile forming on his lips. “Hehehe, you think you can fool me? Your skills are still too shallow. I~ don’t~ believe~ you.”

He began to move away from Li Huowang.

Li Huowang was on the verge of coughing up blood. It had been so hard to get him to agree to follow him. And now, as soon as the time was up, he forgot everything that had just happened!

Li Huowang ignored the deadly presence looming overhead. He gritted his teeth and hastened to catch up to Hong Zhong.

“Can’t you feel that something’s different above us? Do you really want to stay in this cursed place forever? Trust me! I’ll get you out!

“The fact that you deceive others doesn’t mean that others are always deceiving you! Consider our situation carefully! Staying here won’t help anyone. Coming with me is our best bet!”

Despite Li Huowang’s heartfelt pleas, Hong Zhong remained unmoved. He tried his best to distance himself from both Kui Lei’s shadow and Li Huowang.

Li Huowang realized that this Hong Zhong wouldn’t believe him. The previous Hong Zhong had seen the writings on the giant pillar, but this current one had no idea what he’d been through.

Under these circumstances, Hong Zhong would only grow more

suspicious no matter what he said.

As the buzzing sound of the wheel in his ears softened, Li Huowang clenched his teeth and stood up despite the oppressive force of the Siming.

His body began to melt faster, but he didn't care. He exerted all his strength and chased after Hong Zhong.

Walking was faster than crawling. When Li Huowang finally caught up, he lunged at Hong Zhong and pinned him down. "Stop!"

If persuasion didn't work, force was his only other option.

"Alright, I get it. You're telling the truth. Let me go, and I'll follow you," Hong Zhong replied, looking at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang glared at him while he melted like a wax figure. "Don't pull that trick on me! It won't work! I know you don't trust me! If I let go, you'll run!"

"Even if you think I'm lying, we need to get out of here first! I'll explain everything once we're out of Kui Lei's range!"

He wouldn't survive to explain anything if they continued to stay here.

Hong Zhong looked at Li Huowang and finally nodded slowly.

He didn't hold Li Huowang back this time. They worked together and struggled towards the outside. As they moved, Hong Zhong's body also began to melt.

Soon, they were too preoccupied with escaping to guard against each other. Their melting bodies started sticking together, making them resemble conjoined twins.

However, the melting didn't slow down no matter how far they walked.

Li Huowang was certain that his current appearance was anything but human.

"What did you do to provoke this thing with the previous me? You even dared to annoy a Siming? Are you crazy?" Hong Zhong complained angrily.

“We didn’t provoke it! It just showed up!” Li Huowang answered with difficulty.

The two of them continued to walk under the Siming’s pressure, unable to speak much.

Just as Li Huowang thought they would make it out, an unexpected beam of light shot down from above. *Is Kui Lei watching me?*

Li Huowang stopped. He felt his body was immobilized entirely, and his consciousness started to melt along with his body.

He was about to die. This was a feeling that any dying person would recognize.

As he neared death, Li Huowang’s gaze shifted upward involuntarily. The Siming of Death, which had been previously unbearable to look at, now seemed exceptionally comforting. It was even akin to the warm embrace of a mother.

Li Huowang saw himself getting closer to it, and a smile gradually spread across his face.

As he drew nearer, the object on the ceiling transformed into a flat, black mirror in front of him.

He saw his pitch-black self in the mirror. As their eyes met, Li Huowang understood some of the Heavenly Daos and the rules contained within.

The mirror was part of him and also part of Kui Lei. Since every living being carried “death” from birth, every living being was a part of Kui Lei.

The aggregation of all deaths was Kui Lei. Death was an eternal constant in the ever-changing world.

After an unknown amount of time, Li Huowang was about to see how he would die in the mirror. However, the mirror suddenly shattered, as if it had been pushed by something else.

The incomparably warm sensation disappeared.

Li Huowang felt as if he had been reborn. He did not know

what happened, but he realized that whatever had been above him was now gone.

Suddenly, he felt the ground beneath him give way, and he plummeted rapidly. He realized that his face was floating while his body was still connected below.

When he came to his senses, he found that he had been standing still for a long time.

Both Li Huowang and Hong Zhong collapsed to the ground, gasping for breath. Li Huowang felt lucky to be alive.

What just happened? Li Huowang tried to recall, but most of his memories were already a blur.

Though he didn't know why, it seemed he had narrowly escaped death.

Did Ji Zai intervene?

After catching his breath, Li Huowang asked, "Do you know the pattern of this thing's appearance?"

"You said it yourself. My memories only last an hour. Do you think I'd remember what happened?" Hong Zhong mocked.

Li Huowang didn't ask any more questions. The current Hong Zhong had no information—all of it had been inscribed on the giant pillar.

In any case, surviving an encounter with the Siming was a stroke of luck. It was better to forget about it since dwelling on matters involving Simings was unwise.

With the immediate danger now gone, Li Huowang turned to Hong Zhong, who was still gasping for air on the ground with his mahjong tile face.

Chapter 740 - Sitting Oblivion Dao

Li Huowang looked thoughtfully at Hong Zhong.

It wouldn't be challenging to get Hong Zhong to agree to his request again. He just had to follow the same steps as before.

However, Hong Zhong had already agreed earlier. Li Huowang still had some doubts in his heart since Hong Zhong was from the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

He had always been wary, even towards the previous Hong Zhong. He was unsure if the other had any ulterior motives.

Since this guy had just reset, why not take this opportunity to test the Li Huowang from the Sitting Oblivion Dao?

It didn't matter even if this guy saw through him. He wouldn't remember anything in an hour anyway.

Li Huowang calmly asked the distraught Hong Zhong, "Hong Zhong, can you answer a question? Why did you run away once you saw me? Do you really have such a poor impression of me?"

Hong Zhong chuckled. "What do you think? Do you really believe the impression others have of you... is good?"

He continued, "Stop deceiving yourself. If you had the choice, you wouldn't want to be with yourself either."

Li Huowang's brows furrowed. "Remember, you are Li Huowang too."

"Hahaha, that's right. I am Li Huowang too, so I also hate myself. Sometimes, out of boredom, I even deceive myself."

These weren't good words to hear. After a moment, Li Huowang asked, "So even if I sincerely wanted to help you, you wouldn't trust me?"

Hong Zhong smiled. "Would you trust someone who says they're sincere? You don't trust me, so why should I trust you?"

He added, "Zhuge Yuan didn't trust you either."

Li Huowang clenched his back teeth. He now understood the previous Hong Zhong's thoughts about him.

Maybe he would accomplish what he said he would, but he probably had his own hidden agenda too.

After considering things briefly, Li Huowang looked at Hong Zhong again. "Don't be so sure. The previous you cooperated with me."

"What did you tell the previous me? Let's hear it." Hong Zhong propped himself up.

"Fine, let's talk while we walk. I'll repeat what happened before, and you can judge if I'm lying."

Li Huowang began to explain quickly, knowing that Hong Zhong might forget everything again in an hour.

This time, Hong Zhong didn't run away. He silently listened as they walked.

After he fully understood the situation, he nodded in sudden realization. "Oh~! So that's how it is. You should have said so earlier."

"Would it have mattered? You ran away before I could explain."

As Li Huowang spoke, the Antrabhara Temple appeared upside-down on the distant ceiling.

"Well?" Li Huowang looked at Hong Zhong. "Since you understand me, Li Huowang, you should know I'm not lying now."

"You already made your choice once, but I'll let you choose again since you have different memories. Cooperating with me is better than waiting here aimlessly."

Hong Zhong replied, "Heh, not necessarily. Maybe someday Doulao will awaken and I'll be able to return."

“Don’t repeat yourself. You said this an hour ago. If you keep saying this, your thoughts are the same as the previous Hong Zhong’s.”

“Is that so?” Hong Zhong chuckled and scratched his head. “Alright, my choice is the same as last time.”

“Then let’s go quickly. The next hour is almost here, and I really don’t want to repeat this a third time.”

Having made up his mind, Li Huowang led Hong Zhong toward the Antrabhara Temple.

As they approached the temple, Li Huowang heard the buzzing sound of the wheel again.

Although Hong Zhong couldn’t enter the temple, Li Huowang could forcibly pull him in.

Their bodies began to stretch and elongate. Finally, with a buzzing sound, they entered the wheel in the hands of a Lama.

When Li Huowang opened his eyes again, he could clearly feel the people around him sigh in relief.

He gently reached out to pat Li Sui’s head, who had come up to him. He sifted through his thoughts quickly.

Soon, he felt a new segment of memories in his mind. They were memories from childhood to becoming Hong Zhong of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. These were the memories Doulao had implanted in him.

With these, the technique to cultivate ‘Lies’ was naturally included as well.

Li Huowang sighed with relief. Despite the twists and turns he had experienced, the results were still acceptable.

“Thank you for your help, masters.”

Li Huowang thanked the Lamas, but they said nothing in return and turned away indifferently.

Clearly, they had seen through Li Huowang’s tricks and realized that the division hadn’t disappeared.

Li Sui was very worried. “Father, are you alright? You really died just now, and it scared me.”

“I’m fine. It won’t happen again,” Li Huowang patted her head and walked out of the Antrabhara Temple.

On the way out, Li Huowang began to eagerly review the memories from the Sitting Oblivion Dao, looking for the cultivation method of ‘Lies.’

“To sit is to move. To forget is to contemplate. Without sitting, there is no end to labor. Without forgetting, thoughts cease. Without labor, the spirit calms down. Without thoughts, the mind is at peace...”

As Hong Zhong, he knew most of the Sitting Oblivion Dao techniques from childhood, even the incantations to summon Doulao. However, knowing them didn’t mean he could use them.

Li Huowang wiped his face and tried to change his appearance, but nothing happened.

He sighed. Back then, he could use the powers of the Sitting Oblivion Dao because Doulao had directly infused them into him.

Now that Doulao was gone, everything had been stripped away.

Even though he had found Hong Zhong’s memories, he had to relearn all the techniques of the Sitting Oblivion Dao from scratch.

However, Li Huowang wasn’t too concerned. The Sitting Oblivion Dao wasn’t proficient in direct combat, and he didn’t expect their techniques to help him fight against the Dharma Sect. His own ‘Truth’ cultivation ability was sufficient for that.

He had sought these memories to balance his ‘Truth’ cultivation and mitigate its severe side effects, which he no longer wanted to endure.

“Let’s see...” Li Huowang exited the Antrabhara Temple and sat down at a nearby teahouse, then began to review the most basic Sitting Oblivion Dao techniques.

However, as he sifted through the Liar's Scripture in his mind, he fell into deep thought.

The Sitting Oblivion Dao didn't start with how to cultivate or practice techniques, but rather with how to become a true scammer.

Chapter 741 - Liu Wan

“Brat, don’t just study and follow the book's instructions. You won’t learn anything like that. Here, let me teach you how the Sitting Oblivion Dao deceives others.”

Li Huowang continued to drink his tea while looking at Liu Wan.

"Deceiving others is the lowest form of deceit," a man with shifty eyes explained to the young person standing before him. "A more advanced form is to allow them to deceive themselves."

He continued, "You need to make them reconsider their words and make them believe that they’re the truth. They will then believe every single lie we tell them, no matter how implausible it may sound.”

Just then, a frail old woman walked past the tea shop with a basket of vegetables.

“Look at her. Her husband has gone to the military and hasn't returned after ten years. Most people would’ve believed that their loved one had died, but she refused to believe that. She holds onto the hope that her husband will come back one day. This is how we can trick her and make her deceive herself. You don’t even need to know what her husband looks like. The more they cling to their obsession, the easier it is to deceive them. Watch.”

Liu Wan wiped his face with his hand. He changed his appearance to that of an old man with tattered robes.

Dang~ Liu Wan knocked on his bowl and approached the woman.

Li Huowang couldn’t hear what they were talking about from afar, but he saw Liu Wan say something to the old woman. The old woman let go of her basket and the vegetables fell out. She

immediately hugged him and cried.

The two of them finally reunited and entered their house as they held onto each other.

A short amount of time passed before Liu Wan exited the house, once again looking like a beggar.

“See? It’s that simple.”

Li Huowang ate some peanuts as he said, “You didn’t even deceive her?”

“Who said I didn’t deceive her? She would give me free food for her entire life if I wanted to. Even if she were to die, her son would still let me live out the rest of my life in peace while providing food for me, assuming her son didn’t want to get scolded by the neighbors for being unfilial. This is called the cuckoo method. Some old, childless tricksters have used it to live the final moments of their lives in peace.”

Li Huowang started drinking from his cup. “Wouldn’t she eventually realize you’re a fake if you lived under her roof for a long time?”

“Oh? This is where the method becomes interesting. So what if she realizes that I’m a fake? Would she tell the others? Would she tell the others that the reunion with her long-awaited husband after ten years was a deceit, even after having slept with him for several months? She would feel humiliated if she were to tell others that not only did her husband not come home, but she also slept with another man! It would tarnish her husband’s family honor, and the village would kill her for it. She’d rather believe in a beautiful lie than face the tragic reality.”

“Wow, senior. You are a prick and a lowly livestock.”

“A livestock? We’re all made of flesh. We are livestock to begin with. Morality is nonexistent to us, though we get to deceive so many people thanks to it.”

Liu Wan put his tea down and said, “We are the Sitting

Oblivion Dao. We need to deceive them with more elaborate tricks. The more people we deceive, and the more impact it has on the people, the more False Qi we get.”

“False Qi?”

“Yeah, though it has several names. The name itself doesn’t matter, but we call it the False Qi. With it, we can use the Sitting Oblivion Dao’s techniques, ranging from simple face-changing techniques to planting spies or living dolls. The more you deceive others, the more joy you get!”

“Is that so? Thank you for your guidance!” Li Huowang revealed a thirst for more power.

“But you have to remember that we are the Sitting Oblivion Dao. We are not deceiving others to get False Qi—we are doing it for fun! The more fun we have, the more False Qi we get! More importantly, we get to laugh our hearts out every time we deceive others!”

“Liu Wan, you’re right. We are in this world to have fun, which is why I joined the Sitting Oblivion Dao.”

“Oh? You’re very smart, but I think it’s too early for you to deceive me. I know you didn’t join it on your own accord. Those in the Sitting Oblivion Dao were deceived into joining it.”

Li Huowang remained silent.

Liu Wan continued, “Don’t worry, it’s not the end of the world. That’s also how I joined the Sitting Oblivion Dao. That’s also how Shai Zi came in last time.”

Li Huowang smiled. “These tricks are too crude for you, it seems. I just wanted to see how much False Qi I would get from tricking you.”

“Oh? If you needed False Qi, you should’ve told me from the start. I’ve already prepared the stage and just need a partner. Want to join me? You can get quite a lot if we pull it off.”

Liu Wan picked up his cup and drank his tea before he looked

at Li Huowang. “Did you poison my cup while I was deceiving that old woman?”

“No,” Li Huowang said calmly.

The two of them smiled at each other, then raised their tea cups in a toast. Their tea splashed into each other’s cups as they clinked them together before drinking.

Liu Wan smacked his lips together. “Your poison is a little lacking. The women living in the mountains are more well-versed in poison.”

Li Huowang ignored Liu Wan and said, “Alright, I will follow you to see what you’ve prepared. Thank you for your guidance! What should I do to deceive them?”

“What do you mean deceive them? We are *helping* them.”

Li Huowang followed Liu Wan.

They walked on the clean street as they approached a more secluded area.

Li Huowang asked, “Senior, where are we going? Who are we helping?”

“We are going to help a certain good man. I should also tell you that the amount of False Qi we get differs from the type of people we deceive. Those who are illiterate yield the least amount, followed by those who can read a few words. People from the palace or officials come next, and finally, we have those within our own business. The greater the influence, the greater the False Qi we obtain.”

“Oh? Is that so? Then wouldn’t we get the most if we deceived an emperor?”

“Of course. How do you think our current Shai Zi became a Shai Zi in the first place?

Chapter 742 - Sitting Oblivion Dao

Li Huowang perked up when Liu Wan talked about the person at the peak of Sitting Oblivion Dao. “Please tell me how he became Shai Zi.”

“He became one by ruining an entire small nation. Shai Zi is amazing—he deceived an entire nation!” Liu Wan longed for the day he could do the same.

Since he tricked the Liang Kingdom, he might actually have had the chance to replace Doulao.

While thinking about it, Liu Wan reached a large estate. “This is the place.”

“How should we trick them?” Li Huowang was nervous.

Liu Wan looked at Li Huowang’s Daoist robes and smiled. Liu Wan changed his appearance to that of an old Daoist before chuckling and entering the estate. “Just react accordingly.”

The gardener tried to stop Liu Wan, but he ignored him. Instead, Liu Wan maintained an expression of worry. “Your lady has been possessed today. Do not block the way if you want her to live. Show me the way.”

The gardener was shocked and didn’t understand how the person before him knew about this.

“Stand aside! How dare you try to delay the mission of the Surveillance Bureau?!” Liu Wan pushed the gardener away. Unknown forces pinned the gardener to the wall.

Liu Wan then brought Li Huowang into the depths of the estate. They arrived safely, but they couldn’t be certain that Liu Wan’s fake identity as a member of the Surveillance Bureau had

truly deceived them.

They had just entered the inner courtyard when they saw a room plastered with talismans and a crowd outside of it.

“Move away!” Liu Wan pushed through the crowd.

Li Huowang had barely managed to push past the crowd when he saw a young lady tied up in her bed. She was trembling a lot.

The people in the room seemed to be her family, looking at her with concern.

“Oh no! An evil entity has invaded her heart!” Liu Wan rushed to the side of the bed as he took out a strange bell. The end of the bell was a fork instead of a regular handle. He rang it wildly.

“Everyone, please don’t be afraid. We are from the Surveillance Bureau. Your beloved will be cured soon.” Li Huowang made the entire situation look even more realistic.

“That’s amazing! You two must be the Immortals that have descended from the Heavens! Please save my daughter!”

Li Huowang wanted to say something else after seeing the patriarch believing them without any hesitation, but a massive man with killing intent blocked him. “You’re from the Surveillance Bureau? Show me your identity plate.”

Li Huowang raised his head and saw that the man was at least two heads taller than him. He kept calm and nodded as he reached into his pockets.

He felt something and was about to take it out when Liu Wan called for him.

“Disciple! Come and help your master now!”

Li Huowang’s face turned serious, and he immediately ran towards Liu Wan. He recited and made some seals using his hands before stamping them onto Liu Wan’s back.

When Li Huowang did so, the veins in Liu Wan’s body bulged out.

Liu Wan took out a roll of red thread with talismans on it. He

flicked the end of the thread, and it magically wrapped around the lady's hair.

"I seek the Supreme Treasured One to help your disciples, protecting our body and mind! Call for the Azure Dragon, White Tiger, Black Tortoise and the Scarlet Phoenix to come and help us!"

He had just chanted when the lady's eyes turned white as she started fighting back against her restraints. It was as if something was coming out of her body.

Liu Wan then took out a bronze coin pagoda and placed it on one end of the red thread. A white light flowed from the lady's head into the pagoda. The pagoda started shaking violently as the little bells on it rang wildly.

"Disciple! Hold the pagoda down! The pagoda is protecting the lady's soul, so you must not move it!" Liu Wan then threw the rest of the red thread to Li Huowang.

Li Huowang took the red thread and pushed the pagoda onto the ground when Liu Wan carried the lady out of the house. When he carried her out, the lady was releasing black smoke from her orifices.

Liu Wan soon disappeared with the lady as the red thread became longer and longer. The only one left in the scene was Li Huowang, along with the pagoda and the red threads.

Everyone looked at Li Huowang and the pagoda with anxious looks.

They had all heard that the pagoda was the thing protecting their daughter's life. All of them watched Li Huowang holding the pagoda down without moving.

Time slowly passed, and the pagoda's bell ringing became softer. Everyone started to panic.

No one dared to ask Li Huowang any questions, fearing that it might distract him from his intense focus and put their daughter's life at risk.

“Patriarch! Patriarch! Bad news!” The gardener from before ran into the inner courtyard.

“Patriarch! The old Daoist ran out of the city! He cut off the red threads on the lady’s hair before he ran away. We couldn’t stop him even on horseback since he ran into the woods!”

“What?!” The patriarch was shocked, and his wife even fainted. Everyone suddenly glared at Li Huowang, who was holding the pagoda down.

As he looked at them staring at him, Li Huowang gently lifted the pagoda and found nothing inside.

Li Huowang realized he had been deceived! Liu Wan had never intended to work with him!

This was a trap set for Li Huowang. Liu Wan left him behind to prevent them from chasing after him! Li Huowang was just a tool.

Li Huowang smiled calmly as he stared at the people surrounding him. “Don’t worry.”

He then tore off his face and revealed the lady’s face.

Everyone fainted when they saw the lady’s face in front of them.

Liu Wan was already fifty li away from the city when he laughed. Tears poured out of his eyes as he recalled how he had deceived Li Huowang.

“Brat, remember that the Sitting Oblivion Dao has no junior or senior relationships in your next life! Our only rule is to deceive others! Serves you right for getting deceived by me!”

“Senior Liu Wan, the lady is just a Curved One. Is there any reason to be that happy?” Li Huowang’s voice suddenly came from below his chin.

“Huh?” Liu Wan thought he was holding the lady when a stabbing pain blossomed in his chest.

Liu Wan threw the lady onto the ground. He looked down and saw a metal rod had been stabbed through his body.

He raised his head and was shocked to see the lady tearing off her face to reveal Li Huowang's face instead!

Chapter 743 - Real Or Fake?

“Hehe... You brat! You are fucking vicious!”

Liu Wan held his injury in pain. He twisted his arm to remove the steel rod from his back, but his efforts proved futile. The steel rod had somehow fused into his body.

Li Huowang chuckled, approaching the dying Liu Wan. “Don’t try to take it out, senior Liu Wan. You won’t be able to do so. I am a Sitting Oblivion Dao member myself, so I know what kind of techniques you have. This is an artifact that I acquired by deceiving others, and I went to great lengths to obtain it. It’s specifically designed to kill you.”

Liu Wan stared at the young man before him, a mix of fear and respect filling his eyes. “You... You were pretending. To use False Qi so easily... You must’ve been in the Sitting Oblivion Dao for quite a while. I can’t believe I fell for your deception...”

“You faked being my senior to try to trick me, right? I just set up another plot to counter yours.”

Liu Wan nodded approvingly. “To think there’s someone better than me at tricking others here. The future of the Sitting Oblivion Dao is going to be bright. I lost. The Curved One is yours! I won’t take it from you.”

Li Huowang shook his head, “No. Liu Wan, you must be kidding me. What use do I have for a Curved One? You should know what I want. Honestly, I don’t even have an identity, so I can’t call myself a member of the Sitting Oblivion Dao.”

Liu Wan panicked and touched his face because he knew what Li Huowang wanted. Li Huowang wanted his face!

Li Huowang took out a dagger and slowly approached the struggling Liu Wan, but it was too late. Li Huowang soon dismembered Liu Wan's limbs.

Li Huowang looked down at Liu Wan before sitting on his chest and grabbing Liu Wan's neck. Li Huowang used the dagger to slowly carve the sides of Liu Wan's face.

"Do you know how long I planned for this day? How long I have been stalking you? I know how many secret agents you have and how many backup plans you have. I even know you have a son."

Li Huowang cut off the old Daoist's face before putting it on. Li Huowang's voice became the old Daoist's voice too.

"But that doesn't matter to you anymore. All of this is mine now." Li Huowang cut off another face with a mustache before placing it on his face. "Your secret agents are mine. Your backup plans are mine, and even your son is mine."

Li Huowang carefully carved out the faces before plastering them onto his own. Only one face remained—the original face of Liu Wan, adorned with the mahjong tile bearing the Liu Wan symbol. Li Huowang didn't stop at all.

Li Huowang chuckled. "Don't blame me. These are the rules of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. I need to trick others into thinking I'm the real Liu Wan. I will then become the real Liu Wan."

He plastered the final face onto his own before cutting off Liu Wan's neck. "Now, I am Liu Wan."

Li Huowang laughed out loud when he saw Liu Wan's hatred seething in his eyes. "Senior, you were right. I should deceive as many people as I can!"

Li Huowang's faces flickered like the pages of a turning book before his face returned to normal.

He slowly closed his eyes and removed himself from the memories of the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

Li Huowang slowly explored the memories in his room.

He now had a deeper understanding of the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

“I need to trick others to obtain False Qi... And then use it to cultivate the Sitting Oblivion Dao’s techniques?”

Since he also had Hong Zhong’s past, he already had a good understanding of the techniques of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. What he needed now was False Qi.

However, False Qi was different from the primordial breath of a Strayed One. He needed to deceive others to obtain it. He had to cultivate ‘Lies’ to counter the side effects of cultivating ‘Truth.’

Still, he wasn’t sure of how to do so—he also didn’t want to truly become someone from the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

Li Huowang looked around and saw Li Sui lying on the bed. He stood up to leave, but Li Sui suddenly woke up.

“Dad, where are you going?”

“Watch the house. I will be back soon.” The stench was unforgiving within the city since there were feces everywhere, but at least it was a proper city. Even though there was a war with the Dharma Sect, there were still a lot of people here too.

“How should I trick someone?” Li Huowang looked around and squatted down in front of a stall.

The stall owner saw Li Huowang was an outsider and tried to communicate in the official language, saying, “Do... What... Do you want?”

Li Huowang picked up the objects being sold. He looked at the honest-looking merchant before he placed the items down.

Sigh. Li Huowang didn’t feel like doing something against his morality.

Li Huowang was thinking about what to do when he picked up some unusual sounds.

Since I don’t want to trick ordinary people, I can just trick some

bad people instead. I would feel better doing that too.

Li Huowang followed the voice's direction before he found several young people from Qing Qiu brandishing knives and surrounding a man.

The man's skin was tender and pale, suggesting that he was not from Qing Qiu. He appeared to have been taking refuge here.

“Maybe I can try something here...” Li Huowang approached them.

“Uh... There’s a fire.”

He coughed to get the attention of the youths. They all turned around and saw fire at the base of Li Huowang’s feet.

Li Huowang tapped the ground with his feet. The fire snaked towards the youths and scared them away.

After scaring them away, Li Huowang stood still but felt nothing. There wasn’t any False Qi.

Huh? I just tricked them, so why am I not getting any?

He then realized that even though he tricked them, the fire was real since he used his cultivation to conjure it. Since the fire was real and could’ve burned them, it was not trickery.

Should I use my cultivation to conjure something fake? To use ‘Truth’ and conjure ‘Lies’? Cultivate ‘Truth’... Cultivate ‘Lies’...

He frowned from his confusion.

Chapter 744 - Sitting Oblivion Dao

Li Sui was riding in the carriage as she rounded the small alleyway. Behind her carriage were two people. One was a skinny man with a messy beard, while the other was Li Huowang, who had changed his attire.

The skinny man was a pickpocket, but this time, he was Li Huowang's prey.

As the carriage trundled along the street, a small bag slowly opened up, revealing the reflection of silvers inside. The bag of money instantly attracted the skinny man.

"Go!" Li Sui drove the carriage even faster. The bag fell off the carriage and onto the ground before spilling out the silvers onto the alley.

Li Huowang was in front of the skinny man. When Li Sui's carriage wandered off, he quickly grabbed the bag of silvers. He then looked around and saw the skinny man.

"Shh! Let's be quiet and split this in half!"

"Al... Alright!" The skinny man's body trembled when he saw the bag of money.

Li Huowang chuckled when he saw the skinny man's reaction. *Since I can't really fool others, I should just refer to the tricks that I read in the Liar's Scripture.*

This was the missing bag trick, and also one of the classics.

It was a simple and reliable method of deceiving others. People still fell for this trick, even though it has been used since ancient times.

As long as the tricks remained reliable, there was no need to

introduce new ones incessantly. This particular trick targeted the greed residing within one's heart.

Now that the bag had been picked up, Li Huowang needed to take some of the silver, hide them away in a corner, tie up the bag again, and then wait for Li Sui to return to search for the bag. In reality, Li Sui was an accomplice. Li Sui was also a natural-born actor when she shouted to call the officers, saying that the money in the bag was less than the original amount. All they needed to do now was give the money in their own purse to appease Li Sui.

Even though Li Sui's expression was slightly exaggerated, it was still very believable. After Li Sui left, Li Huowang took out the hidden bag of silver that he had taken from Li Sui's bag.

Soon, Li Huowang took his portion from the skinny man before leaving. He then hid in a corner to see the skinny man holding his half of the share.

The skinny man waited until he confirmed that both Li Huowang and Li Sui weren't returning. He quickly opened his bag and checked the silver in it. He bit onto one and was happy to realize they were real silvers.

"Hm? What's going on?" It was Li Huowang's turn to be confused. According to the scripture, the man should've found a bag of stones rather than silvers, thus completing the deceit.

That was how Li Huowang was supposed to get some False Qi, but why wasn't it working?

"Dad, he didn't get deceived. That really is a bag of silvers," Li Sui muttered.

"I know, but I placed stones in that bag just now, so why did it turn into sil..."

Li Huowang suddenly realized his mistake. He had turned the stones into silvers!

Now that he couldn't control his powers to cultivate the 'Truth,' everything he said would become true. The trick would fail

in that case since it was the ‘Truth.’

The skinny man had indeed taken a bag of real silver. It wasn’t a trick at all!

Shai Zi was right to say he would suffer by cultivating ‘Truth’ but not ‘Lies.’ It would be difficult for Li Huowang to cultivate ‘Lies’ right now since he was too powerful.

“Wait, let’s follow him!” Li Huowang refused to give up. He took Li Sui and tailed after the man.

When he saw the happy-looking man trying to pay for a prostitute, Li Huowang focused on the bag and kept muttering, “Those are stones! Those are stones!”

The man opened the bag and realized the silvers had become stones!

He panicked and shouted. He ran out to find Li Huowang for payback, but the latter was long gone.

Technically, the trick should’ve worked, but Li Huowang didn’t feel any False Qi flowing into his body. It had failed.

Utilizing ‘Truth’ to set up a trick to obtain False Qi appeared ineffective. The two sides of the same coin balanced each other out, and Li Huowang gained nothing.

“Sigh, it’s one thing to not get any by turning them into real silvers, but why didn’t I get any even after I turned them back to stone? Why is this so hard?”

Li Huowang made several attempts and continued until sunset, then returned to the inn feeling defeated.

He reached his room and saw Li Sui sitting on the stool with an unhappy face.

“Dad! You lied to me! You said you would come back soon! Why did you return so late?”

She had just said that when Li Sui, who was beside Li Huowang, disappeared. Li Huowang suddenly felt a faint trace of tingling coming from the base of his spine entering his brain.

Even though it was very faint, Li Huowang immediately knew what it was. *This is False Qi!*

Li Huowang now understood what it took to cultivate ‘Lies.’ He had to use lies and tricks. He couldn’t use his cultivation of ‘Truth’ at all.

“So this is how I should do it!” He finally found the most important aspect of cultivating ‘Lies.’ It was exceedingly simple, but Li Huowang overcomplicated it.

Li Huowang didn’t bother explaining to Li Sui why there was another her when he decided to look for his next “victim.”

As Li Huowang was celebrating the success of his trip to Qing Qiu, Xuan Pin’s illusion floated up from the ground

Li Huowang stared at Xuan Pin’s illusion and felt the little trace of False Qi in his brain as he pondered.

He was already annoyed from seeing Xuan Pin, but there wasn’t much False Qi for him to use. He could only change his face.

Xuan Pin was about to say something when Li Huowang sat on the stool as he changed his face. His face flickered, and soon, Shai Zi’s eighteen-sided head replaced his actual head.

Li Huowang then copied Shai Zi’s tone and chuckled. “Xuan Pin, did you really think I didn’t have a backup plan? It’s not that easy to kill me.”

Xuan Pin’s illusion froze up and Li Huowang felt a tsunami of False Qi surging into his brain. He couldn’t withstand it and laughed.

“HAHAHA! You fell for it! You really fell for it!”

Chapter 745 - Information

When he saw Li Huowang laughing hard, Xuan Pin realized he had been tricked.

“Do you think this is funny?” Xuan Pin revealed a rare unfriendly side of himself.

“Of course! You lost nothing and helped my cultivation a lot! Be proud of it.” Li Huowang held his stomach and laughed again.

Xuan Pin remained still and Li Huowang stood up. He changed his face back to his original one.

“Don’t be so stingy. You’ve been using others all this time, so why does it matter if I tricked you? How about this? Let’s say our grudge from when we fought the Earth Dragon has been settled.”

Li Huowang had obtained a lot with just a simple trick. He quite literally received an ocean of False Qi.

It was also payback since Xuan Pin had left him in the Earth Dragon’s stomach.

Ignoring Li Huowang, Xuan Pin explained his purpose. “I’m here to tell you that Taishan Shi has confessed.”

“Oh!” Li Huowang became serious. “Can I see?”

“Alright.” Xuan Pin waved his bone-like fingers and placed them on Li Huowang’s shoulder. Everything shifted around them.

Li Huowang blinked and saw that he was in a dark and humid dungeon. The lines around them were squiggling a lot, but soon became solid.

“Hm? Hm...” Xuan Pin looked around him in confusion.

“What’s wrong? Is there danger?” Li Huowang realized that this differed from the illusions Xuan Pin showed him in the past.

Li Huowang touched the metal fence and felt the coldness of rusted steel. He looked at Xuan Pin in amazement.

“Xuan Pin, you are truly wondrous! To think you could transport me from Qing Qiu to Si Qi. Why didn’t you do this last time?”

Compared to the Imperial Preceptor flying on his sword, teleportation was exceedingly more powerful.

“...”

Xuan Pin remained quiet for a moment before he nodded. “You know I prefer to be secretive. I don’t trust others, and there was no reason for me to show you this before.”

Li Huowang never thought someone could be shameless enough to say something like that.

“Let’s talk more about it next time. Where is Taishan Shi now?”

“Here.” Xuan Pin led Li Huowang into the depths of the dungeon.

They walked down a stairway plastered with talismans before Li Huowang saw Tai Shanshi. The latter was currently immersed in blackish water, with numerous talismans floating on the surface.

Compared to his previous self, Taishan Shi looked much more disheveled now.

His eyes were sunken and his face was pale. It was as if he would die at any moment.

More importantly, someone had removed Taishan Shi’s scalp, leaving his brain missing and the interior of his skull exposed to the open air.

“Oh, to think we have rare guests here.” Zheng Boqiao was confused to see both Li Huowang and Xuan Pin here.

“So the Chief of Si Qi interrogated him personally. Is there any news?” Li Huowang said.

“You can see them yourself.”

Zheng Boqiao took out a porcelain bowl and dipped it into Taishan Shi’s exposed skull. He scraped the insides of Taishan Shi’s head against the side of his skull before scooping out a large jumble

of his blood and brains.

He swallowed it as if he was drinking soup. Zheng Boqiao used his own body as a furnace to refine a pill.

Li Huowang frowned when he saw what was happening. “Uh... You can just tell me. There's no need to show me.”

Zheng Boqiao blinked before regurgitating the contents back into his mouth, then chewing and swallowing them again.

“There wasn’t much valuable information, but I did obtain a backup plan from him. They plan to summon a god into the mortal realm if they start losing the war. They are willing to put in a lot of effort into it.”

“Summon? Who? Is it god Yu’er?” Li Huowang frowned.

“No. If god Yu’er could be summoned, they would’ve done so already. There would be no need for them to fight and scheme so much. They shouldn’t be summoning a Siming, but something else—something just below a Siming.”

Something just below a Siming? Li Huowang recalled the beings waiting outside of Baiyu Capital.

“Something like the God of Happiness?” Li Huowang recalled how hard it was to fight against it.

“No. You don’t even need to summon them. You can just call for them here. It’s something stronger than a God of Happiness. Since Taishan Shi came from the Great Qi, he only knows this much. The others didn’t reveal anything to him.”

Li Huowang looked into the glowing mirror and checked the situation at the frontline. The war was not looking good for the Dharma Sect, so Li Huowang thought this would be when they sprung their plan.

The reinforcements from the Liang Kingdom had arrived at Si Qi. The Dharma Sect would fall if they failed to get their own reinforcements.

Li Huowang considered it and looked at Xuan Pin. “Do you

have anything to fight against the thing they are summoning?”

“We shouldn’t even let them summon it in the first place. Since we know what they will do, we should stop them.”

He continued, “We can’t send the army to their location since that would reveal our intentions. We need to send a small group of elites to destroy their plans.”

“Why are you looking at me? Isn’t there anyone else?” Li Huowang frowned.

“The strong naturally get the most work. Don’t worry, others will accompany you. But I will only truly be at ease if you go. To be honest, you are stronger than me now.”

“Stop trying to place me on a pedestal. I don’t have time to do this. You need to figure out a plan yourself.”

Li Huowang actually wanted to go destroy the Dharma Sect, but he needed to cultivate ‘Lies’ first. He was just starting and didn’t want to stop.

If he couldn’t deal with the side effects of cultivating the ‘Truth,’ he would be in big trouble on the battlefield. No one would know what would happen to him.

“Don’t worry.” Zheng Boqiao stopped them. “We also need to send informants and spies to see if it’s true. You can tell us when you’re ready. It would be best if you could make it, but if you can’t, then it’s fine.”

Li Huowang took one last look at the half-dead Taishan Shi before he left the dungeon. “Xuan Pin, remember to take my daughter from Si Qi.”

Li Huowang left, and the dungeon was quiet once more. The two chiefs looked at each other and shook their heads.

“Working with him is not easy.”

“Don’t worry, his fate won’t be a good one. I have a feeling that we won’t be in contact with him much longer after this crisis is over.”

Chapter 746 - Let Go

In the incense-filled temple, Bai Lingmiao sat cross-legged on the lotus stone table with her long hair draped over her shoulders. Her teeth protruded from the corners of her mouth, while black porcupine quills and green snake scales were hidden among her white hair.

It was already a significant improvement compared to before. At least her face now had exactly two eyes, although one of them was still a beast's eye.

The monks of the Great Qi Righteous Monastery stood around her lotus platform. They sat cross-legged on their mats and rhythmically struck their wooden fish.

As they struck the wooden fish, they chanted esoteric Buddhist scriptures, "Assembly of the Lotus Pond, Amitabha Buddha, Guanyin and Mahasthamaprapta sit on the lotus throne, guiding us to the golden steps. The great vow is widely opened. May all be free from the dust of the mundane world. Homage to the Lotus Pond Assembly..."

As they chanted, Bai Lingmiao's body began to change gradually. The foreign elements within her body started to squirm and slowly transformed her deathly pale skin.

Some monks exhibited signs of beastly transformation, but they were quickly suppressed.

After two hours, the transformation slowly ceased. Bai Lingmiao lowered her hands and gently touched her face with her four hands. She found that her previously disfigured face had returned to its original state.

Bai Lingmiao bowed from the lotus platform and respectfully bowed to an old monk with a kind and benevolent face. "Abbot,

thank you for your care over these past few days.”

“Amitabha, there is no need for such words, female benefactor. In this realm of Luoism cultivation, this humble monk can offer only this meager assistance.”

After exchanging some polite words, Bai Lingmiao bade farewell to the Abbot of the Righteous Monastery. She turned and left the backyard, walking into the bustling temple at the front.

In the main hall, a giant, run-down Buddha enjoyed the offerings and worship of the people.

Bai Lingmiao took four incense sticks, followed the others, bowed three times to the Buddha, and then carefully placed the incense sticks in the incense burner.

As she walked out of the hall, a chaotic and bustling city came into the scope of her perception.

It was hard to imagine that just a month ago, this large city was under the control of the Dharma Sect, but it was now occupied by Great Liang.

The once ubiquitous black cloth strips and white scarves were gone. They were now replaced by white lotus marks on their foreheads.

“Saintess! The Saintess has arrived!”

“Hurry! Son, bow to the Saintess! May the Saintess bless your father to return soon.”

All the followers of the White Lotus Sect immediately prostrated themselves on the ground and bowed deeply. Nearly half of the people in the street also knelt down.

The speed at which the Dharma Sect expanded was now matched by the rapid growth of the White Lotus Sect, especially with the imperial court’s support.

Notices were even posted throughout the city, which mandated belief in at least one faith. Anyone who dared not to was directly executed.

Though simple and crude, this method was very effective in countering the infiltration of the Dharma Sect. As long as they believed in the Heavenly Mater, few would place their hopes in god Yu'er.

The Heavenly Mater could also deliver what god Yu'er promised, so why not choose the safer option?

Bai Lingmiao slowly walked past them with a gentle expression.

As she did, she lightly touched some people's heads, making them feel ecstatic as though they had received the Heavenly Mater's favor.

She saw an injured little beggar struggling to crawl towards her and approached him.

He looked at Bai Lingmiao with eyes full of longing. "Saintess, my parents and my elder brothers are dead. If I believe in the White Lotus Sect, will they really not become wandering spirits and live well in the Hometown of the true void?"

Bai Lingmiao saw that his face was unnaturally yellow, and his belly was already infested with maggots. She knew the child had little time left.

Regardless of how a war was fought, it always caused suffering for the same kind of people.

"Yes, rest assured, your parents and siblings are all in the Hometown of the true void." She gently patted the beggar's head, and he looked genuinely happy.

"That's great. I will be able to see them soon."

Bai Lingmiao saw him smile happily. She took out a small drum from her waist and lightly beat it. The boy's appearance quickly improved with the help of the Bai family immortals.

"Your parents also said they want you to live well and have many descendants."

"I will! I will rebuild our Yao family ancestral hall and get

married to carry on the family line!”

Bai Lingmiao stood up and began to comfort others, just as she had comforted the boy.

When she returned to a White Lotus Sect hall, she saw Lu Xiucan focused on explaining cultivation matters to some new followers.

Lu Xiucan had completely changed from when he first arrived. His left cheek was sunken, with all his teeth missing. His collarbone was wrapped in a blood-stained cloth where the skin was gone.

His left sleeve was empty, and his right hand had only four fingers without nails. His body was covered with scars, and he looked extremely tragic.

The Profound Records had allowed Lu Xiucan to survive the horrendous flesh-and-blood mill, but it came at the cost of parts of his body.

Lu Xiucan heard her voice and waved his four-fingered hand happily, “Mistress! [\[1\]](#) Long time no see! Are you here to see Master?”

The bitter and vengeful Lu Xiucan was gone, replaced by the carefree figure he had once been.

Bai Lingmiao’s expression turned complex as she sensed the unhealed wounds on his body. “Go back to Cowheart Village. Your father is just mad and not dead. Don’t forget your little niece.”

Lu Xiucan’s smile remained on his face. “It’s fine. Puppy and Zhao Wu will take care of them. I swore in front of my father that I wouldn’t stop until the Dharma Sect was eradicated.”

“I can’t return as long as the Dharma Sect still exists.”

The vengeful Lu Xiucan hadn’t disappeared. He had just learned to hide his feelings.

Bai Lingmiao sighed lightly. “Xiucan, there are many to fight against the Dharma Sect. One more or less won’t make a difference. You should let go.”

It was foreseeable that Lu Xiucan would soon die if he continued like this. Too many members of the Lu Family Troupe had died. She didn't want Lu Xiucan to follow the same path.

Lu Xiucan's smile gradually faded. He looked at Bai Lingmiao and asked, "Mistress, have *you* let go?"

1. As in his master's wife. 🤔

Chapter 747 - Help

“Mistress, have *you* let go?” Lu Xiucan’s words made Bai Lingmiao’s heart tremble as some buried memories surfaced in her mind.

She wanted to say she had let go, but no words would come out.

Lu Xiucan saw Bai Lingmiao standing there in silence, then bowed to her and turned to leave the White Lotus Sect hall.

“Mistress, you don’t need to persuade me. I, Lu Xiucan, may not be of much use. Still, if I can kill even one more follower of the Dharma Sect, then I am of some use.”

The sound of drums calling for the military camp’s assembly echoed in the distance. Lu Xiucan excitedly adjusted the bronze coin sword on his back. He ran towards the sound, singing theater lyrics as he did.

“If I succeed, I return to my homeland. If I fail, I die in a foreign land! It is my duty to avenge my relatives! Alone I stand, with loyalty! Boiling blood, burning with passion!”

Lu Xiucan’s song faded away. Bai Lingmiao’s mind became increasingly unsettled as she silently turned and walked deeper into the hall.

This area was heavily guarded since it housed the most important treasure of the White Lotus Sect.

She pushed past a door and walked behind two screens. A white lotus that emitted a soft glow appeared before her.

The lotus had blossomed even further since its discovery in the ancestral hall of Cowheart Village. Its gentle radiance now remained constant.

A group of people of both genders and all ages formed a circle

around the white lotus. Only those most qualified within the White Lotus Sect could approach it.

Bai Lingmiao sat cross-legged on a mat and quietly prayed to this Twelve Merit Jade Lotus.

“Heavenly Mater, Hometown of True Void. Heavenly Mater, Hometown of True Void...”

She prayed to the Heavenly Mater, as if trying to convince herself that the Hometown of True Void existed.

The white lotus mark on her forehead mirrored the white lotus on the table, and her upper body involuntarily split into two halves.

The two upper half bodies were back to back, with four hands forming lotus seals. They floated in mid-air like tree branches, making her look like a short and white fleshy tree.

This appeared to be a cultivation method of the White Lotus Sect, but only the White Lotus Saintess knew its specifics.

After two hours, the sky outside had gradually darkened, but the room remained as bright as day, illuminated by the white lotus.

Suddenly, Bai Lingmiao stopped. She stood up calmly from the mat, then turned to one side and listened intently. “What is it?”

Her senses were very sharp, and even the slightest sound couldn’t escape her notice.

“Saintess, the people from the Si Qi said that His Majesty wants to see you.”

“The Emperor of Si Qi?” Bai Lingmiao couldn’t help but recall the two Dragon Veins used as bait.

Although she didn’t know why he was looking for her, Bai Lingmiao didn’t dare to take her time since he was the emperor of a country. She quickly set off with her entourage.

Even though Si Qi had fallen, the emperor’s title still held weight. It was enough to secure a courtyard with three entrances as his residence in this crowded city.

Bai Lingmiao almost couldn’t recognize the Emperor of Si Qi

because he looked completely different from his previously disheveled state. The last time she had seen him, the Dragon Vein had just been dragged out of the mud, covered in dirt and unrecognizable.

But now, the Emperor of Si Qi was dressed in a bright yellow robe embroidered with the pattern of a dragon soaring over the sea. The imperial crown, with its pearl tassels, glinted like black jade. He exuded the majestic aura of a ruler who commanded respect without the need for force.

“No need to kneel. Provide a seat for Miss Bai.”

The Emperor of Si Qi waved his hand. Two elderly eunuchs immediately brought over a chair.

Bai Lingmiao bowed and thanked him, then gently sat down. “May I ask why Your Majesty has summoned this humble woman?”

The Emperor of Si Qi looked Bai Lingmiao up and down. “It’s said that the White Lotus Sect has been rapidly expanding recently and taking over many areas previously held by the Dharma Sect. Almost all the common people have been converted.”

Bai Lingmiao felt uneasy, sensing something off about his words. “Your Majesty, you flatter us too much. The White Lotus Sect’s efforts are insignificant, and it’s all done to prevent the Dharma Sect from making a comeback.”

“No flattery at all! Not in the least!” A plump man in armor came forward. “The people who believe in your White Lotus Sect are worth a country with a thousand chariots. Nothing else can compare if that’s insignificant.”

Bai Lingmiao remained silent. She was unsure of his intentions.

“I looked for you, and there’s no special meaning.” The Emperor of Si Qi descended from his throne and slowly walked toward Bai Lingmiao’s side with his hands behind his back.

“Since so many White Lotus Sect followers now heed your command, I wish to discuss a small matter with the Saintess.”

Bai Lingmiao slightly turned her head and waited for him to continue.

The plump man interrupted, “Hey, Your Majesty, let’s cut to the chase.”

He didn’t wait for the emperor to speak. “Saintess, here’s the thing. The Antrabhara Temple in Qing Qiu has a plan. They can perform a ritual to defeat all remaining Dharma Sect forces in Si Qi. However, the ritual requires something strange, so we’re here to seek your help.”

“Antrabhara Temple?” Bai Lingmiao felt a wave of unease at the mention of the name.

“They need human lives, not the kind extended by lifespan pills. They need human sacrifices. 1.81 million, to be exact.”

Bai Lingmiao remained silent. She was clearly stunned by the number.

The Emperor of Si Qi glanced at the chubby general. The general continued, “The strange part is that those Lamas insist that they must be willingly sacrificed.

“Can you believe it? The people of Qing Qiu must have twisted brains. How can we manage voluntary deaths? Hence, we seek the Saintess’s help.

“There must be some useless people in the White Lotus Sect, right? For instance, the old, weak, sick, and disabled. Why not make good use of them?

“Just use the same words as before, like telling them that dying will take them to the Hometown of True Void. They’ll happily go to their deaths.”

After the general finished, the Emperor of Si Qi added, “Rest assured, as long as you help rid Si Qi of the Dharma Sect and restore my throne, I’ll compensate you with five times the followers!

“What? Do you think I’m not a man of my word? I can swear

before my ancestors! That much should be enough reassurance, right?"

Bai Lingmiao's hands began to tremble. She suddenly recalled the female general Peng Longteng as she looked at the emperor.

"Your Majesty!" Bai Lingmiao's voice trembled. "It's 1.81 million lives!"

"So what? They're going to the Hometown of True Void to find happiness. Or does the Saintess doubt the existence of the Hometown of True Void?"

Chapter 748 - Choice

Bai Lingmiao clenched her hands slowly as her expression turned extremely grim. She seemed to have some trouble standing steadily.

The Hometown of True Void does exist. The Heavenly Mater said so herself. Her family now leads carefree lives there.

Bai Lingmiao was very certain that she would join them after her death.

However, Bai Lingmiao felt deeply conflicted when this deeply held belief involved the lives of 1.81 million people.

If the Hometown of True Void is real, dying is merely moving to a different place. If so, why am I... why am I hesitating?

At this moment, the Si Qi emperor continued, “Miss Bai, think about it. With the lives of around a million old, weak, and disabled followers, you can secure nine million good followers in the future. When has there ever been such a profitable deal?”

“You see, it’s a win-win situation—even the Heavenly Mater in the Hometown of True Void wins. No one loses. What are you still hesitating for, Saintess?”

Bai Lingmiao took a deep breath. Her hand, which trembled over her chest, suddenly steadied. She had made up her mind.

“Your Majesty, is this really a *deal* ? Do you always calculate things like this? Do you understand that they... that they are all people, living people? Even if they are disabled or useless, they are still living people!” Bai Lingmiao recalled everything from Cowheart Village.

She continued, “Do you know how much pain their deaths would cause? Do you know how painful it is to lose family members?!”

The Si Qi emperor and the plump general beside him were visibly shocked. They hadn't expected the leader of a cult, known for its sacrificial practices, to say such things. It was as if hell had frozen over.

"And Your Majesty! Among those 1.81 million, the majority are your subjects. Have you not considered them at all?"

A hint of anger appeared on his face. "Hmph! Why should I care about them? Do you know what I have sacrificed for this throne? I have earned all of this with my hard work!

"My main concern is my empire! Without it, I am just a king without a country! Those common people are like grass growing on my land. Even if they are cut down, they will grow back in time."

Bai Lingmiao clenched her fists tightly. Her sharp nails dug into her palms, but she did not let go.

She replied with a sharp tone, "Your Majesty! I cannot comply! They are not grass—they are people! They can't die like grass. Once they die, there's nothing left!"

The Si Qi emperor seemed puzzled. "Hmm? Haven't you realized? According to your beliefs, they aren't really dying. They are going back to the Hometown of True Void."

"What? Does the esteemed Saintess of the White Lotus Sect believe there is no Hometown of True Void? Is it all a lie fabricated by the Heavenly Mater to gain your faith?"

Bai Lingmiao took a few deep breaths and suppressed her anger. "Your Majesty, the Hometown of True Void does exist, but the Heavenly Mater has decreed that suicide violates divine laws. Those who take their own lives cannot enter the Hometown of True Void."

"Ridiculous. Why haven't I heard your White Lotus Sect say this before?" The Si Qi emperor frowned as he sensed rejection from her.

"I am the Saintess of the White Lotus Sect, and naturally, I

receive divine messages. If I say the Heavenly Mater has said it, then the Heavenly Mater has said it! This matter is not up for discussion.” Bai Lingmiao stood up to leave.

The Si Qi emperor stepped before Bai Lingmiao again. His expression filled with cold anger as dragon scales began to appear on his body. “Wait. You should carefully consider your actions, Miss Bai. Do you realize who you’re defying?”

Bai Lingmiao, who had been looking down, slowly raised her head as a slight smile lifted her lips. Her entire demeanor seemed to have shifted. “Your Majesty, Si Qi is still occupied by the Dharma Sect, isn’t it? If you’re so capable, why don’t you reclaim your lost territory yourself? Oh, that’s right. We were the ones who saved you from the Dharma Sect, weren’t we?”

Bai Lingmiao poked the Emperor's dragon robe with her finger, its nails painted black.

“I am from the Great Liang, not Si Qi. Besides, you are still a dethroned emperor. A fallen phoenix is worse than a chicken. What can you do if I defy you?

“Will you send troops to destroy the White Lotus Sect? Alas, Your Majesty, you have no soldiers under your command now. You only have a group of old eunuchs.”

Bai Lingmiao glanced disdainfully at the general beside her, who had his hand on the hilt of his sword but did not draw it. She chuckled. “You’re still putting on airs with me when you’re so short on men that you even dare bring such lowly individuals out in public.”

The Si Qi emperor trembled with rage, yet he dared not act against Bai Lingmiao. He could not afford to make enemies of those who had helped him reclaim his kingdom, even if he could defeat them.

Bai Lingmiao stepped out of the grand courtyard, her expression gradually softening. She silently walked through the

chaotic city.

The voice of the Second Deity resounded in her mind. “What are your thoughts? Do you believe in the Hometown of True Void or not? I’m confused.”

Bai Lingmiao didn’t know. She could no longer care about her own matters.

She realized that, at some point, she had gained the power to control the lives of millions of people at her whim. If she wished, she could command these people to die.

Her power had unknowingly grown to such an extent that this invisible pressure made her anxious.

Bai Lingmiao continued to walk as she observed the lives of the White Lotus followers in the city.

In times of war, the lives of the ordinary people were naturally difficult. However, they always found ways to eat and live as well as they could.

She had seen it before, but what she saw seemed slightly different from before.

A group of people gathered around a large black pot emitting white steam by the roadside, eagerly holding long chopsticks.

Inside the pot was a mix of leftover food sold by the street. Each bite was a bronze coin, regardless of what one picked.

Despite seeming dirty, this sort of business became more popular the more chaotic the times were. People often arrived early to ensure they didn’t miss out on the best selections.

This was the place where they could eat meat for the least amount of money.

A young girl, around thirteen years old, had a white lotus drawn on her brow and wore patched clothes. She hesitated for a long time before finally tossing her bronze coin into the bowl.

Chapter 749 - Cultivation

The little girl picked up the chopsticks and squinted closely along the edge of the pot for a long time. After a while, she forcefully plunged the chopsticks into the pot.

She pulled her chopsticks out and found she had grabbed a braised duck head with a portion of the neck still attached.

She paid no heed to the heat and cheerfully brought the duck head to her two waiting sisters.

The three of them ate the duck head as if it were a gourmet delicacy, their eyes brimming with joy. The youngest even tilted her head back and giggled with delight.

Bai Lingmiao walked silently, seemingly able to sense their happiness as her lips curled into a slight smile of her own.

She once had a younger brother too, and she would share her tasty food with him. As she watched the young girl, Bai Lingmiao seemed to see her former self.

Soon, she reached a bustling alley where a newlywed couple was worshipping the God of Prosperity. Everyone was cheering and laughing as if the hardships they had just endured were merely an illusion.

They brought out two cherished persimmon cakes and cut them into small pieces to share as wedding candies.

No one looked down on the makeshift candies. On the contrary, they ate them eagerly and savored this rare sweetness by letting them dissolve in their mouths. Some even carefully stored the candies in their pockets to take them home.

Are they all dead, having gone to the Hometown of True Void to the Heavenly Mater?

Bai Lingmiao was suddenly overcome with a blinding sensation

as this thought emerged. The telepathic connection granted by the relic stopped responding, and she felt that she had been plunged into darkness.

No, they... they don't need to go to the Hometown of True Void. Living well is enough for them. Only someone like me, who needs to escape, needs the Hometown of True Void.

Suddenly, Bai Lingmiao felt her telepathic senses granted by the relic extend even further. She could feel activities up to two or three miles away.

The next moment, she sensed Li Huowang speaking with a young man on the main street.

“Senior Li?” Bai Lingmiao stopped walking. She felt the emotions of other people within her sensory range.

In the past, she valued her own emotions greatly. Now, she realized that these emotions were not everything in life.

Her feelings were insignificant compared to the lives of all the followers of the White Lotus Sect.

Bai Lingmiao turned and walked towards the entrance of the White Lotus chapel, “Second Deity, let’s go.”

“Where to?”

Bai Lingmiao sensed the emotions of half the city and slowly said, “Too many people and too many lives depend on us. We can’t just think of ourselves.

“We need to find a way to prevent more people from losing their families. The feeling of losing loved ones is very painful. I don’t want my past experiences to happen to others.”

The Second Deity replied, “Alright then. At least you’re not conflicted anymore. If that brat Lu Xiucan can do it, surely we can too.”

In the kitchen, stones were constantly boiling in a pot of water. A man with a white cloth wrapped around his head earnestly added

firewood to the stove.

Hu Biao followed his routine and poked the stones in the pot with chopsticks. His expression turned very excited. The stones had actually softened from boiling!

Sir Arrogant Stone had said that once the stones were boiled soft, eating them would cure all diseases and even lead to Immortality.

“Father! Father!” Hu Biao rushed out with the ceramic pot filled with soft stones.

As soon as he ran out the door, he saw his senior coming towards him with a pot.

Hu Biao quickly pretended to be calm, carrying the softened stones home.

As they passed each other, Hu Biao’s senior suddenly raised the pot and smashed it towards Hu Biao’s ceramic pot.

The ceramic jar broke, and the stones tumbled onto the ground, bouncing softly. His senior watched on dumbfoundedly.

“You! You actually boiled it soft! It’s real!”

The Dharma Sect members peeked out from the eaves, windows, and behind wooden doors. They all watched the stones on the ground with shock and desire.

Hu Biao immediately reached out to grab the soft stone and stuff it into his mouth.

However, a flying stone hit his head and caused blood to stream down. The stone in his hand fell to the ground.

“Grab it!” Someone shouted, causing all the Dharma Sect members present to charge at Hu Biao.

The once close members turned against each other for this opportunity to become immortal, and they fought brutally in the narrow alley.

The soft stone kept changing hands. Even if someone swallowed it, others would cut open their belly to retrieve the stone

and swallow it themselves.

After some time, the alley was completely covered in blood and corpses. Only two severely injured people remained and stared at each other. Hu Biao was one of them.

He swayed and muttered to himself, "It's mine... it was supposed to be mine..."

Li Huowang was currently standing on the eaves and watching the carnage below. Stones couldn't be boiled soft. This was all part of Li Huowang's plan.

Li Huowang smiled as the last man eagerly swallowed the stone. He didn't achieve immortality and instead revealed a look of despair.

Tricking people felt really good, especially when it came to his enemies.

Li Huowang nodded with satisfaction as he felt the False Qi flow into him. He jumped down and kicked the man's head, causing it to explode.

Li Huowang finally understood why the Sitting Oblivion Dao liked to deceive so many people at once. Even the tiniest amount of False Qi from deceiving mortals could accumulate significantly.

Some experts of the Sitting Oblivion Dao liked to set up schemes that, when well-maintained, provided a continuous flow of False Qi akin to a spring.

The schemes could be complex or simple, sometimes needing only a rumor. The genital shrinkage scam he encountered a few years ago was such an example by the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

As he felt the increasing False Qi within him, Li Huowang realized the importance of shifting his mindset.

In the past, he often couldn't distinguish between the truth and falsehood. After many deceits, he finally sensed the true difference between what was real and fake.

The Sitting Oblivion Dao often lost their genuine emotions

through their deceit, which made them believe everything was fake—morals, family, friends, and even themselves.

If everything was fake, then one could naturally act without any restraint.

Cultivating 'Truth' but not 'Lies' would lead one to easily go crazy. On the other hand, cultivating 'Lies' but not 'Truth' would have the same effect.

Chapter 750 - Pursuit

The Sitting Oblivion Dao actually cultivated ‘Lies’ that led to madness. However, no one had ever seen anyone successfully cultivate both ‘Truth’ and ‘Lies,’ so the Sitting Oblivion Dao and other factions saw this state as acceptable.

“Pitiful, how pitiful,” Li Huowang muttered to himself. Shai Zi might have known this already, but it was hard to turn back as he was in too deep.

Li Huowang looked down and cut open the belly of the person before him. He took out the softened stone and placed it beside the person’s abdomen.

A tentacle emerged from Li Huowang’s navel and dragged the stone back inside.

The stone that these Dharma Sect members had fought over was actually a piece of Li Huowang’s liver that he had cut.

He had looked for other substitutes, but still found this to be the most suitable.

“Father, what have you been doing lately? I don’t quite understand,” Li Sui said. Two slits appeared on her neck, which revealed her eyes with double pupils.

“I’m deceiving them.”

“So that’s what deception is.” Li Sui had a sense of realization, having learned something new from her father.

Li Huowang needed to leave this place since he had already achieved his objective.

At the moment, he was deep within the territory occupied by the Dharma Sect. Such a commotion would naturally attract their attention soon.

Li Huowang heard footsteps behind him and immediately took

action. He wiped his face and transformed it into the likeness of the dead Hu Biao.

He cut off his right hand, threw it to the ground, then lay down with an expression of agony.

“Quick! He ran that way!” Li Huowang lifted his bloodied hand shakily and pointed the pursuing Dharma Sect members in the wrong direction.

After the enraged Dharma Sect members went in the wrong direction, Li Huowang stood up, picked up his severed hand, and stealthily followed them.

When they realized they had been deceived and started to go back, Li Huowang gradually withdrew in the direction they had abandoned.

Having changed his appearance again, Li Huowang arrived at a remote county. He was finally free from pursuit.

He sat in the common room of an inn, hungry after his long ordeal. “Innkeeper, some food, please.”

“Of course. But Sir, in these chaotic times, some ingredients are hard to come by. I’ll see what the kitchen has and bring you whatever we can make.”

“No problem, as long as it’s filling.”

Soon, half a fragrant roasted lamb head was placed before Li Huowang, accompanied by two slices of guokui^[1].

“Sir, here’s some bean paste and vinegar. Cut the meat, dip it in the sauce and vinegar, and stuff it into the guokui. It’s quite delicious.”

Li Huowang stared at the lamb head for a while. After confirming that it did not start talking to him like last time, he picked up a small knife and began to eat.

As he continued cultivating ‘Lies,’ Li Huowang found that many of the side effects of cultivating ‘Truth’ had indeed lessened.

At least, he no longer had to worry that the people around him

were the product of his cultivation.

Understanding ‘Lies’ more deeply inevitably led to a greater understanding of ‘Truth’.

Compared to the False Qi and the Sitting Oblivion Dao’s various abilities, the most significant change in Li Huowang was his mindset—the feeling of genuinely deceiving others with false things.

This change was exactly what he needed to counteract the side effects of cultivating ‘Truth.’

The key to differentiating truth from illusion was having the right mindset.

Cultivating ‘Truth’ and ‘Lies’ now felt like pulling on two sides of the same rope, which balanced each other out.

As he gradually understood falsehoods, he gained some more control over reality and his creations. Cultivating ‘Lies’ could indeed treat the deviations caused by cultivating ‘Truth.’

Li Huowang had to take the bait, whether this was part of Shai Zi’s scheme or just bait he had dangled.

Although the problems from cultivating ‘Truth’ were solved, he had to remain vigilant against Shai Zi’s schemes, even if there were no signs of them yet.

Shai Zi, what are you really up to? You’re dead and the Sitting Oblivion Dao was wiped out. What more are you trying to do?

Li Huowang was deep in thought. He lifted a piece of lamb meat on a small knife to his mouth.

Suddenly, he felt his heart jolt. A slit opened behind his left ear.

Li Sui’s eyes quickly glanced at the diners to his left. Li Huowang immediately sensed something was off when the couple glanced at him.

It would have been nothing if they had just glanced at him, but the speed at which they averted their gaze was suspicious. This was

something ordinary people wouldn't be capable of.

"Sir, are you enjoying the lamb head?" The cook bent over and smiled at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang's four eyes quickly scanned the surroundings to collect information. He gripped his purple-tassel sword and slashed out, beheading the cook.

Blood sprayed out all over, yet the cook's head did not fall. It transformed into a blood-soaked mask which flew towards Li Huowang's head.

A black tentacle emerged from Li Huowang's neck. It pulled out a bronze coin sword, which sliced the bloodied mask into pieces. The original peaceful inn had now become a battlefield.

The diners, the cashier, and the waiters stood up, pulling out weapons and charging at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang could handle these people, but his expression was grim. He couldn't figure out who had sent them. *Were they sent by... Shai Zi?*

Just as Li Huowang was about to take care of them, the beams of the three-story inn suddenly cracked. The upper two floors, which were laden with tons of weight, came crashing down on him.

In the ensuing crash, rubble and stones flew everywhere. Li Huowang stood up from the collapsed building, covered in black tentacles.

As the dust settled, Li Huowang noticed a significant change around him. Everyone in the small town had dropped their disguises.

They donned black cloth on their shoulders, erected white flags, and carried a massive idol as they surrounded the collapsed inn.

However, Li Huowang felt a strange sense of relief when he saw the Dharma Sect marks on them.

The Dharma Sect had ambushed him. Despite his efforts to hide

his whereabouts, they had still found him. Li Huowang realized he might be facing a formidable opponent this time.

At that moment, a path opened on the left side of the crowd. Four strange figures holding umbrellas slowly walked out.

Their faces were hidden by the black umbrellas. Standing at least ten feet tall, they wore knee-length clothing and their long arms were covered by sleeves, leaving no flesh exposed.

-
1. A type of flatbread. 🤔

Chapter 751 - Plot

All four of them held their umbrellas as they stuck to each other as close as possible. If the person in front didn't raise their feet in time, the rest would've fallen back.

Their strange movements and the four broken black umbrellas made them look like a single entity. It was as if they were tied together by a thread, and their heads resembled mushrooms.

This was the first time Li Huowang had seen someone like that in the Dharma Sect. Something was off, and his senses were warning him of the danger. What was even more concerning was that he didn't sense any gazes from the four people.

As Li Huowang was thinking about what the four of them were about to do to him, the shadows of the Dharma Sect members quickly converged together and gathered around him. They formed a massive, smoking black edict. [\[1\]](#)

The moment the edict appeared, the skies turned black, and dark clouds rolled in. It swiftly became nighttime.

Li Huowang knew this would be a difficult battle after seeing how tense the atmosphere was. The Dharma Sect had painstakingly laid out plan after plan to ambush him.

Li Huowang feared that the Dharma Sect had designated him as the highest-ranking threat ever since he took away Taishan Shi.

Li Huowang took a deep breath as he materialized Peng Longteng behind him.

Just as everything was on the brink of descending into chaos, Xuan Pin suddenly floated out from the ground.

"Don't move. I will take you away from here," Xuan Pin whispered as he revealed six bony arms from under his robes.

He then made seals and chanted, "μλ%Oγ∨U划类ψ豸

&≤λδΦ✱γπ8θ\$9.”

Li Huowang had no idea what Xuan Pin was chanting, nor did he recognize any of the seals Xuan Pin was making.

Li Huowang suddenly noticed a forest rapidly emerging in his peripheral vision. Before he knew it, he found himself in a new location—a forest.

The skies were bright again, and everything was peaceful. Li Huowang had been saved!

Li Huowang looked at Xuan Pin with shock. Xuan Pin proved himself useful this time, Li Huowang finally felt a sense of camaraderie with him.

Li Huowang asked, “What technique is that? That’s so convenient! You can escape from anything anytime you want! But why did you need to chant this time? You didn’t need to do so last time.”

Xuan Pin turned and looked at Li Huowang with a “complicated” expression. “I can’t tell you that. You already said I’m a secretive person. Did you think I would teach you that?”

Li Huowang frowned. His image of Xuan Pin had just shattered a bit. *He’s so shameless.*

Still, he refrained from voicing his thoughts since Xuan Pin had indeed saved him.

“Who were those guys with umbrellas? They look tough.”

Xuan Pin calculated with his fingers. “I don’t know. I can’t divine anything from them.”

Li Huowang frowned. “Even you don’t know?”

He understood that only people with certain levels of strength could make Xuan Pin fail his divinations. More importantly, they were targeting him.

Now that he knew the Dharma Sect was actively hunting him down, he had no choice but to be more covert next time. But this was a bad plan. Passively defending against ambushes would be

much harder.

Xuan Pin said, “Don’t worry about their ambush. I have a mission for you. If you succeed, everyone in the Dharma Sect of Si Qi will be destroyed.”

Li Huowang gestured for Xuan Pin to continue.

“The informants are all dead, but the Lamas from the Antrabhara Temple recalled their souls to obtain the information. Taishan Shi was right—the Dharma Sect is planning something big. They want to gather all of us in one location before killing us with whatever they are summoning.”

“Hmph! I want to see them try.”

“Since we know their plans now, we can devise ways to disrupt them. Might as well as go along with their plan for now.”

“Why should we go along with their plan?”

“I can’t tell you that. First, we follow their plan, but then I will cause a massive disruption. While they are distracted by me, I need you to bring some elite fighters to infiltrate and destroy their plans.”

“Oh? Is that why you saved me?” Li Huowang asked, pointing at his chest.

“Why? Do you not want to go? I thought you were someone who would risk his life to save the citizens.”

“Of course I do, but why do I think that you are using me as a chess piece?”

Li Huowang frowned, sensing that Xuan Pin was hiding something from him. This was not the first time it had happened.

Xuan Pin retracted his six arms. “What do you mean chess piece? We’re all fighting the Dharma Sect to protect the Liang Kingdom.”

“Really? Then tell me, what are you planning to do to deal with them? Why do I have to be the one to go? Why can’t you?”

“Because I’m not as strong as you. I’m old and withered.”

“Bullshit. You are still hiding something. Fine, I won’t do it. You can find someone else.”

Li Huowang turned and was about to leave the forest.

However, Xuan Pin called him back in a grave tone. “Wait.”

Li Huowang stopped.

Xuan Pin said, “Do you really not know why I’m not telling you? Do you think I should tell you?”

“Why shouldn’t you?”

“It’s one thing to let the others know about my plan, but it’s another to let you know about my plan.”

“Is it because I’m Ji Zai’s Twisted One? Or is it because I have the power to use ‘Truth’?” Li Huowang asked.

His questions were left unanswered.

He continued, “Tell me! Give me a vague reason! I don’t want to keep doubting all of you! I hate it when I’m fighting for my life while having to suspect you people are trying to kill me too!”

Xuan Pin hesitated before replying, “We are helping.”

“Helping what? Who?”

“Just as we are fighting at the bottom, they are fighting at the top too. Do you remember what I said before? About dealing with the problems at the root?”

Li Huowang realized what Xuan Pin was talking about. “You can enter the Baiyu Capital? You can talk to the Simings and get them to help us?!”

1. This is the symbol drawn on Daoist talismans. 

Chapter 752 - Departure

“You’re helping the Simings to fight god Yu’er?” Li Huowang asked.

He had to confirm with Xuan Pin again to make sure he had understood correctly, as the idea sounded ridiculous. He never thought such a thing was possible.

Xuan Pin remained silent.

Li Huowang questioned rapidly, “Which Simings are you helping? Which of them are fighting god Yu’er? How’s the situation?”

Xuan Pin continued to stay silent.

“Answer me, dammit! Do you think it’s funny to see me talking to myself like this?”

This time, Xuan Pin replied, “I can only tell you this much. Think carefully about what I’ve said before. Any more, and you will be tainted by their cause and effect.”

Li Huowang frowned. “Just you alone? Can the Surveillance Bureau really work with the Simings? I don’t believe it.”

He suspected that Xuan Pin wasn’t telling the truth.

Xuan Pin chuckled. “Hehe, so you think you know me? Or do you know the Simings a lot?”

“I’m not doubting you, but what you’ve said is too ridiculous.”

No matter what, a Siming was still a Siming. Li Huowang had seen them before and never thought Xuan Pin would be able to help them in robbing the Heavenly Daos.

“The fact you haven’t seen it doesn’t mean the method doesn’t exist. Since we can survey the Heavens, we also have our methods. Also, the other sects are hoping for the Dharma Sect’s downfall. They will naturally come and help us.”

Hearing that, Li Huowang wanted to ask more questions.

However, Xuan Pin gestured for him to stop. "That's enough questions for now. I cannot answer anymore. These aren't your concerns at the moment. What you need to do is to accept this mission and work hard. Only then can we prevent this disaster."

Li Huowang frowned before he raised one finger at Xuan Pin. "One last question. How are things up there? Which side is winning? Is it us or god Yu'er?"

"That depends on how well you do in your mission. If you are successful, god Yu'er will be dead in a few days. There's no reason to doubt me. No matter how many secrets I have, you have to remember that we are on the same side. I even gave you the Shimmer Mirror, which is an incredible artifact and a sign of my goodwill to you."

"How many times will you bring that up? Fine. Who else will be coming with me?"

"Some other experts."

Xuan Pin took out a Surveillance Bureau's identity plate. On it were two words: *Third General*.

Li Huowang already knew about the Surveillance Bureau's ranking system. This identity plate was leagues above his Seventh Banner rank.

Xuan Pin explained, "With this, no one will bother you. Everyone will also listen to you. They will even die for you if you order them to."

Li Huowang took the identity token and looked at Xuan Pin. "Where are they? When do we depart?"

Xuan Pin pointed at the mirror floating beside Li Huowang. "Go there and someone will explain to you."

Li Huowang said nothing as he looked at the glowing dot on the mirror and walked towards the designated spot.

Xuan Pin called out to him from behind, "Don't worry, I'll save

you if you are in danger.”

Li Huowang, however, preferred to rely on himself when it came to his own life. He still remembered how Xuan Pin hadn't saved him from the Earth Dragon's stomach the last time. *I doubt that he just learned that technique.*

“Alright, I understand. That's all for now. I will hang up now.” Li Huowang hung up after he pressed the glowing red button on the phone screen.

“Who called you?” Yang Na asked as she happily sipped her milk tea.

“Who else? It's the grad student. He wants us to go to his place for a bit. Probably something to do with Zhao Lei,” Li Huowang answered, looking warily at the crowded streets.

“Alright, let's take our stuff and go.”

Suddenly, Yang Na's eyes lit up. She shoved the milk tea into Li Huowang's hands before running towards a girl with braids in the distance.

Yang Na greeted her close friend excitedly. “My looove! Did you miss me?”

On the other hand, the girl in braids was visibly less excited than Yang Na. She stared at Li Huowang warily from a distance.

Despite wearing a different outfit and even sporting sunglasses, the girl still managed to recognize Li Huowang. She was Yang Na's close friend, after all.

“Meng Meng, where's the taser?” Yang Na asked.

She took the bag from Zhang Xiaomeng and opened it. Inside were several unopened packages of high-voltage tasers.

After what happened last time, Li Huowang understood the importance of having a weapon. Since he couldn't get anything illegal, he had no choice but to stock up on legal ones.

Zhang Xiaomeng pulled Yang Na further away from Li Huowang and whispered harshly, “Why did you think I went

through so much to get you a taser last time? Don't you know who you are supposed to be wary of? Why are you still with him? Do you have Stockholm syndrome?"

"What are you talking about?" Yang Na punched her lightly. "Huowang has been cured."

"But he killed someone before! You could've easily found someone else, so why did you stay with a crazy maniac like him?"

"It's complicated!"

Yang Na talked with her friend for a bit longer before she returned to Li Huowang with the tasers.

Li Huowang passed the milk tea back to her and opened the bag. He inspected the tasers and was satisfied with them.

"How much were they?" Li Huowang asked.

Yang Na answered, "Not much. It cost me a couple of milk teas, I suppose. You don't have to pay me anything."

"I'm not paying for them, and neither should you. We are getting them for the others, so Qing Wanglai is supposed to pay for them."

Yang Na sipped on her milk tea as she held onto Li Huowang's arm. "Is that so? That's good, then."

"Also, we don't have to tell him the real price. Just give him a larger figure. He's rich."

Yang Na laughed when she heard that. Even so, her eyes were filled with worry.

The situation was becoming more serious, and she was worried that it would get out of her control.

The two of them rode a bike and departed for Orange Isle.

For now, the only good news was that when Li Huowang brought Yang Na out, no one would ask them too many questions. It was normal for youngsters like them to go on dates.

Chapter 753 - Mental Illness

Orange Isle was deserted at night, but that didn't mean it was crowded during the day. It was empty all day long. The sunlight only made the paint on the half-built buildings look brighter, highlighting the work of unvirtuous real-estate developers.

Li Huowang saw that Wu Qi's RV and Qing Wanglai's sports car were already there. He was late.

He brought Yang Na up the half-built building's concrete stairs to their meeting place. Everyone was discussing something.

"We need to do something, but you keep telling us that we can't do this or that. We can't just sit around!" Chen Hongyu's voice echoed around the place.

Qing Wanglai nodded at Li Huowang and Yang Na. "Of course we can't just sit around and do nothing. We need to act first and seize the initiative. Zhao Lei has confessed, and we now know where their temporary base is. We need to attack them before they relocate."

"Really?" Li Huowang perked up. He would finally have the chance to retaliate after having been passive for a long time.

"How many guns can you get for us?" Li Huowang asked Qing Wanglai impatiently.

"Not a single one. It's not like we can buy illegal firearms here."

"Tsk ." Li Huowang took out all the tasers he had. "We can't win with just these. We need some bladed weapons, or maybe a crossbow or two."

Qing Wanglai sighed. "Li Huowang, we live in a society. We

can't brandish our knives or wave our guns around just because we're facing a slight difficulty."

"You want to subject them to the law? You think that's possible? We already killed once. Do you really think the law would apply here?"

"I'm ready!" Qian Fu excitedly pulled a plastic tarp off the corner of the wall, revealing several rebars that had been ground until they were sharp.

It was clear that Qian Fu had taken them from this building after seeing the concrete on the rebars.

"Wait a minute!" Chen Hongyu stopped them. "Do you think we can solve this problem if we go and kill all of them? They're an organization that wants to rob our special powers. The people we are attacking will just be their pawns. There's a chance that the organization's higher-ups are giving instructions through a satellite phone."

Everyone was shocked to hear that.

Li Huowang said, "Since we finally have the initiative, we should make the first move. We need to strike them first to gain as much advantage as possible before settling it once and for all."

"I agree with Chen Hongyu," Qing Wanglai said. "No matter their projection, we cannot just look at the surface. It's not as easy as we think. We also have to look into their interior. Still, if we manage to deal with it at the root, we can naturally escape this danger together."

Li Huowang looked at Chen Hongyu and then at Qing Wanglai. "Then what do you want us to do if we don't fight? You think they would surrender if we pleaded with them?"

Qing Wanglai took a test tube from his pocket. The test tube was sealed, and the liquid sloshed inside.

"Evaporates easily, odorless and tasteless. It will render a person unconscious and relax all of their muscles. It will also cause

temporary memory loss.”

Li Huowang’s eyes widened when he heard the effects of the drug. “You really have something like that? Where did you get it?”

It was much stronger than a taser.

“Through a legal channel,” Qing Wanglai said as he placed the test tube back into his pocket. “It’s best if we don’t have to fight. We can try to negotiate with them. This way, both of us can reap some benefits. Even if our negotiations fail, we will still get to know what their goals are. It will help us solve the mystery of their projection.

“Alright. Let’s not waste any time. We should go now.”

Li Huowang, however, held onto his tasers and rebars. He needed to make sure that he had some weapons in case Qing Wanglai’s drug failed.

All of them walked down as they carried the things together.

While they were heading down, Li Huowang asked Qing Wanglai, “Since Zhao Lei confessed, will you send him out of this country?”

“No,” Qing Wanglai shook his head. “Since Zhao Lei betrayed them, he will die if he gets out. It doesn’t matter if he’s willing—he will return to us even if I let him go. He has no choice but to stand with us.”

“How can you be so sure? Do you know him that well?”

“Not really, but he used to stand by our side.”

As they chatted, Qian Fu quickly passed by them, keeping his head low.

They turned around the corner, and Li Huowang caught a glimpse of Qian Fu’s eyes. His eyes were filled with dread.

“Qian Fu, wait. I have something to ask you.” Li Huowang sensed something was wrong. He slowly reached his hands into his shirt to take the taser.

Qian Fu ran faster.

“Quick! Chase after him! His personality changed again!” Li Huowang immediately ran after Qian Fu.

Li Huowang got closer and closer to Qian Fu, who was ultimately forced into a corner of the building. Qian Fu grabbed one of the sharpened rebars and started stabbing at everyone.

Li Huowang and the others retreated slightly as they blocked the surrounding exits.

“What are you crazy bastards trying to do? You guys are crazy! Why are you dragging me into your mess? I’ve already suffered enough! What do I need to do for you to let me go? Go away! I want to go back to the hospital! I want to get my treatment!”

“Qian Fu, don’t be rash. Look at me,” Qing Wanglai said as he slowly approached him. “Do you remember who I am? We’ve met before.”

“Who are you? You guys are a bunch of psychos, and you, Qing Wanglai, are the craziest of them all! Stop trying to fool me! I know you were the one who killed the two nurses! You are framing others for your crime too!”

Qing Wanglai frowned and whispered to Li Huowang, “This is tricky. Qian Fu’s condition is too unstable.”

“Is that so?” Li Huowang glanced at Qing Wanglai but said nothing.

“I’ll say it again! You guys are the crazy ones! Stop trying to drag me into your mess! Go away!”

“Alright, we will move. Don’t get too agitated.” Qing Wanglai gestured for the others to move away from the staircase leading downwards.

Qian Fu was about to run when a shiny object fell and shattered in front of him. He froze, then realized it was the test tube with the chemical.

He attempted to escape, but his consciousness was quickly fading. His limbs went limp and he collapsed to the ground.

Chapter 754 - Reinforcements

The sound of horse hooves never stopped as Li Huowang weaved past the mountains on horseback. Corpses were scattered everywhere, clearly indicating that it was a dangerous area.

Both sides were using Si Qi as their battleground. The situation left ordinary people in the middle, forcing them to rely on themselves for survival.

Li Huowang headed towards the place Xuan Pin had designated. He was still suspicious of Xuan Pin, but he had no choice. He needed to see things with his own eyes to confirm the truth.

Li Huowang was still wary even after having forced Xuan Pin to divulge some secrets. *He might be telling me the truth, but he might also have hidden some of the details. Still, he's right—I must handle this myself. The Dharma Sect must be destroyed!*

Li Huowang suddenly heard footsteps coming from the front. A group of Dharma Sect members suddenly charged towards him! All of them had black cloths wrapped around their shoulders.

Li Huowang looked at them before he quickly galloped past them. The Dharma Sect member somehow ignored him as they continued to run.

This was not the first time Li Huowang had encountered people from the Dharma Sect. He was deep in enemy territory and one wrong move could cost him his life.

He was meticulous in concealing himself with his powers, paying attention and avoiding any mistakes.

Li Huowang continued his journey until he reached the red dot

displayed by the Shimmer Mirror. He stopped and looked around to find that he was in a corpse-riddled battleground.

The maggots, dogs, vultures, and crows were having a feast here. The death of humans had given them life instead.

They tore apart the corpses and littered them everywhere, causing the place to look like hell.

The stench was overbearing, but Li Huowang endured it.

He calmed the frightened horse as he looked around. He was confused about why Xuan Pin set this area as the meeting place.

The day turned to night as Li Huowang waited. The moon wasn't visible tonight and everything was dark. The only sound that reached Li Huowang's ears was the crunching of bones.

Even Li Huowang didn't know how to keep track of the time now that a single day had lost a lot of divisions. By the time he heard footsteps approaching, he didn't know what time it was, but he was certain it was during the darkest hour of the night.

He took out a glowing green stone and threw it towards the location of the sound. A strange figure appeared in front of him.

The man's appearance was weird. His skin was pale and smooth, and a braid hung down from under his cap. Li Huowang thought that the man looked like an eunuch.

The mysterious man wasn't wearing anything special either. Just a regular gray coat and a yellow robe.

But then Li Huowang noticed the strange part. He could hear footsteps, but the mysterious man left no footprints on the ground, as if he was floating.

The strange man bowed respectfully to Li Huowang. His posture gave him away as a eunuch. "Hou Shu's Deputy Chief Zhao Jiabao greets Daoist Li."

So even the royal family is sending their people here now?

"Why are we meeting here?" Li Huowang frowned.

"It's because this place has been taken over by something else.

The Dharma Sect cannot spy on us here. They can neither see nor hear us.” An ancient voice came from somewhere else.

Soon, three Lamas appeared from the stone's greenish glow. They resembled triplets and clasped their hands together to greet Li Huowang.

In contrast with the Lamas from the Antrabhara Temple, the Lamas in front of Li Huowang were covered in sutras. The sutras were written across their wrinkled skin.

Li Huowang looked at the various bone trinkets covered in gold and jewels before he realized that the three Lamas in front of him were most likely at the top of the hierarchy of the Antrabhara Temple. He recalled how the hanged Lamas were dressed similarly.

The other people slowly walked out from the darkness too.

There weren't many, but Li Huowang sensed that all of them were strong in their own right. Xuan Pin was going all out this time.

All of them greeted him at the same time. “We greet Daoist Li!”

Li Huowang looked at their attire. Apart from the monks from the Righteous Monastery, he didn't recognize any of the sects present here.

“Xuan Pin told me you know where the Dharma Sect is conducting their ritual. Is that true?” Li Huowang asked.

“Yes, Daoist Li.” Zhao Jiabao took out a map and showed it to Li Huowang.

Li Huowang glanced at the constantly shifting map before he looked at them again.

“Since you are already here, I assume that Xuan Pin has told you who we're facing this time? I know each of you is very strong, but can you defeat our enemies?”

No one here was stupid. They knew how much security the Dharma Sect had prepared to defend their ritual site against intruders.

“We are naturally not as strong as Daoist Li, but the Chief had

informed us to do our best to assist you. Your strength will naturally win us the war.”

Looks like Xuan Pin did tell them that. He really likes giving the credit to others.

“Alright. Let’s talk as we move. This is not the time to be sitting down.” Li Huowang jumped onto his horse.

Li Huowang was about to urge his horse to start running when a plump woman with a mole on her face approached him. She was holding onto a black glutinous rice dumpling tied by a red thread. “Daoist Li, this is an item that will help us stay hidden. That way, the Dharma Sect won’t know we are coming.”

Li Huowang inspected the item before keeping it on his waist. “Which sect are you from?”

The woman chuckled and flirted with him. “Oh dear~ I don’t belong to any sect. I’m just a weak, frail matchmaker. I don’t think I will be able to help much.”

“Matchmaker? A devotee of God Ru?” Li Huowang looked down and saw that the matchmaker had small feet. He wasn’t sure if it was a coincidence or not.

“Are you an evil entity that became a human by asking someone and obtaining their karma?” Li Huowang joked.

The plump woman took out a red handkerchief and covered her mouth as she chuckled. “Oh, Daoist Li is such a joker. I thought all of the Daoists were boring.”

Li Huowang turned serious before urging his horse into the stench-filled battlefield.

Chapter 755 - Deity

Li Huowang got to know them better as he traveled with them. Even though they came from different backgrounds and exaggerated many of their stories, Li Huowang knew there was a kernel of truth in their words. At the very least, the black glutinous dumpling tied in the red thread was working. They were deep in enemy territory, yet no one blocked them. It was a stark difference compared to how things were last time.

Xuan Pin floated up from the ground as he looked at the various moving red dots on the Shimmer Mirror. “Don’t worry, I chose some of the best for you. We will succeed and destroy the Dharma Sect’s plan.”

“I hope so.” Li Huowang knew that it was useless to argue about it right now. The most important thing for him to do was to succeed in his mission.

“What’s happening on your end? When will you start your plan?”

Li Huowang was sitting in front of a tea stall. At this point, they were all incredibly close to the ritual site. Li Huowang was certain that they would’ve been discovered if they didn’t have the black glutinous rice.

“Look over there.” Xuan Pin pointed at a red dot in the Shimmer Mirror. The red dot was close to Li Huowang. “Once the fight starts, we will shift the battle towards this direction. Afterward, you can begin your mission.”

Li Huowang tapped on the red dot and immediately saw rows upon rows of soldiers. All of them were standing calmly despite the upcoming difficult battle.

“Do the soldiers have a Siming?” Li Huowang asked suddenly.

Li Huowang had long pondered this question about it but never had the time to ask.

“Of course.”

“Which Siming is it?”

“Jiang Xiangshou.”

“It should be helping us in the Baiyu Capital too, right?”

Xuan Pin shook his head. “You ask too much. Prepare yourself. The war drums are beating, so it's time for you to move now. The fate of everyone's lives is in your hands.”

The sound of war drums spread far and wide. Li Huowang raised his head and saw a massive dark cloud in the sky. The sound of thunder coming from the clouds rumbled dangerously.

Li Huowang quickly finished his tea before leaving. He walked past Xuan Pin's illusion and headed towards one of the smaller paths to the left.

The path led deep into the mountains. The deeper they walked, the more desolate it became. But it was surprising that such a desolate place could hide so many people.

As Li Huowang continued to walk, the experts gathered by Xuan Pin gathered around the bushes as they moved discreetly.

They swiftly took down the guards stationed by the Dharma Sect along the way.

The atmosphere grew tense as the thunder rumbled consistently, resembling the beat of a drum. Everyone's heart was racing.

Li Huowang touched the banner icon on the Shimmer Mirror but realized too late that it was a mistake. The bloodlust and murderous aura pouring out from the mirror made it hard for him to breathe.

“Kill! Kill! Kill!” To the left of the battlefield was a massive formation. The soldiers inside the formation were cloaked in murderous aura. Their eyes were bloodred as they snarled and

howled.

They looked like they had lost their sanity, but their movements were surprisingly coordinated. They moved in unison as their formation shifted from one to another.

Hundreds and thousands of soldiers moved as one. Their bodies were like a shared skeleton, while the murderous aura enveloping them was their blood.

Compared to them, the Dharma Sect was just a group of ragtag refugees. Despite their massive numbers, their formation was in shambles.

Just then, You Zixiong swung down his yellow-colored triangular flag. “Charge forth towards the Heavens and Earth! Transform into a tiger with wings! Subdue the tiger and amplify its power! Use it wisely and transform it infinitely! Never doubt your potential!”

The soldiers shouted. The murderous aura solidified and pushed Li Huowang’s vision out from the mirror.

Li Huowang decided not to touch the Shimmer Mirror for now. He also noticed that he had reached his destination.

In front of him was a massive wooden city wall. To think that the Dharma Sect had built a city in the middle of a mountain.

Even though the wall was covered in red cloth, the green leaves on the wood were a clear indication that they had been chopped down not too long ago.

The sound of thunder rumbled again as it started to rain heavily.

Li Huowang took a deep breath as he saw the Dharma Sect members pouring out from the city to charge into the battlefield. He ensured he was safe before several tentacles sprouted out from his body.

“Let’s go!” Li Huowang stomped the ground and jumped forward. He was about to crash into the wall when he imagined that

he was entering a pond instead.

His body phased through the wooden walls and he entered the city.

Li Huowang was surprised by what he saw inside the city. There was a massive statue of a deity with four legs.

The statue was hidden under a massive bamboo hat. Underneath the bamboo hat were innumerable red ribbons tied to several different areas of the city, forming red bridges leading towards the statue.

Li Huowang ignored the gazes on him as he grabbed one of the red ribbons. He looked down and saw an altar covered in white smoke.

I have to destroy it no matter what they're trying to summon.

Several witches from the Dharma Sect approached Li Huowang in an attempt to stop him. This was where the experts came in. They intercepted the witches so that Li Huowang could fight freely.

Li Huowang approached the altar before being stopped by a strange person blocking his path.

The person wore a rectangular hat, but instead of having a regular veil at the front, it was a veil made of flesh.

At first, Li Huowang thought the person's face had melted off, but he then realized that it was actually a veil. The veil was essentially several organs and skin sewn together.

The person also had red ribbons coming out from his sleeves or hanging from his body.

Li Huowang then saw the person's legs. To his surprise, the person had chicken legs!

The chicken-feet man ignored Li Huowang as he worshipped the deity on the altar. He carefully lit up some incense and danced.

The white smoke from the incense pot moved according to the chicken-feet man's rhythm.

Every time he finished a section of the dance, the chicken-feet

man would lie down or kneel down, raising the incense high up into the air to pray to the deity.

The white smoke from the incense floated towards the top of the statue and into the depths of the bamboo hat, where numerous red ribbons originated from.

The strange ritual was being conducted during the rain.

Li Huowang gritted his teeth as he saw the chicken-feet man ignoring him.

He's not from the Dharma Sect! His strange dance, the statue, and the entire ritual look entirely different from what the Dharma Sect does!

Li Huowang didn't care what it was—he knew that the chicken-feet man was his enemy, and that was enough.

Li Huowang raised his head. A horse neighed loudly while Peng Longteng charged towards the chicken-feet man with her halberd. She swung her halberd down with enough force to crush the chicken-feet man's head.

Chapter 756 - Chicken-Feet Man

The halberd swung down, but instead of hitting the chicken-feet man, Peng Longteng struck the altar. Stones sprayed everywhere, but the chicken-feet man remained unscathed.

Peng Longteng frowned and kicked her left leg into the horse's stomach. The horse lifted its left leg and kicked the chicken-feet man, who was now carrying the incense burner.

But the chicken-feet man's body twisted bizarrely, causing the horse's kick to miss him. The flesh veil trembled as he moved.

Just then, the chicken-feet man sensed that the rain had stopped. He looked up and saw Peng Longteng was already in front of him with her halberd already swinging down.

He swung his hand and threw the incense burner high up into the air. Just as he was about to attack Peng Longteng, he sensed the air rippling behind him.

It was Li Huowang with his three swords! Li Huowang decided to attack at the same time as Peng Longteng to destroy the ritual as soon as possible.

The two of them had almost hit the chicken-feet man when the flesh veil expanded outwards. A snarling beast's face bit into Peng Longteng's face.

Just as the beast bit into Peng Longteng's face, she opened her mouth and bit back. At the same time, she swung her halberd the other way around to attack from the bottom.

The chicken-feet man raised his legs and stepped forcefully on the halberd. The sound of clanking metal exploded! *Clank! Clank clank!*

Even though the chicken-feet man was kicking down the sharp halberd, his feet were not injured at all. Li Huowang hadn't expected this. *His feet are as strong as metal!*

The chicken-feet man utilized his momentum to jump high into the air. He dodged both Peng Longteng and Li Huowang's attacks before landing safely.

After landing, he extended his arms and caught the incense burner that had been flying in the air. He then continued the ritual as he danced beside the statue.

"What the fuck!?" Peng Longteng spat out a bloody wad of saliva after losing half of her face. She was suddenly engulfed in flames, and her armor glowed a dull red.

"Charge!" Peng Longteng held her massive burning halberd as she charged towards the strange chicken-feet man.

But the mysterious chicken-feet man was surprisingly strong. He didn't lose to Peng Longteng even though she was on fire.

Both of them fought valiantly in the heavy downpour.

After some time, both of them took a step back. The chicken-feet man slowly placed the incense burner down before a guttural beast-like growl came from behind his flesh veil. He stomped his chicken feet down onto the ground like nails before slowly dragging them backward, causing a screeching sound.

The chicken-feet man then howled like a wolf. Out of nowhere, a Bei[1] jumped out from nowhere and hopped onto the chicken-feet man's back. It used its slender legs to hook itself tightly onto the chicken-feet man's shoulder.

Both of them howled at the same time. Several invisible figures emerged from everywhere and dived into the chicken-feet man's body.

As more invisible figures entered him, his body rapidly expanded. Several beast faces began appearing on his body as the ribbons on his body started pumping like arteries.

The chicken-feet man became monstrous and a strange ancient aura started radiating off him. The aura induced a feeling of horror to those affected by it.

Peng Longteng was naturally unaffected by the aura. She sensed that the beast's aura was at its peak before she threw her halberd at it.

The chicken-feet man was about to hit back when the ground beneath him collapsed. He lost his balance and his attack missed.

Before he could stabilize himself, a purple-tassel sword filled with murderous aura suddenly stabbed upwards from the ground beneath him.

The chicken-feet man was about to step on the purple-tassel sword when another attack came from the bottom. A rift flew towards him as it sprayed out a mysterious liquid.

One of his chicken feet stepped into the rift. Before he knew it, half of his body was already in the Qi Kingdom.

Several distorted organs sprayed out with blood before falling onto the ground. No matter how strong he was, he still died from that attack.

Li Huowang swiftly swam out from the ground. He quickly cut down the incense burner in half.

He sighed in relief when he saw the white smoke dissipated.

He then looked up at the statue still covered in the bamboo hat. "You can't cross over now! Your incense has been cut off!"

"Li! Turn around!" Peng Longteng suddenly called for him.

He turned around and saw why. There was a floating incense censer appearing from the depths of the mist. The white mist around Li Huowang suddenly solidified a lot.

The owner of the censer soon made his appearance, too. It was also another chicken-feet man with a flesh veil covering his face. He danced in the same strange rhythm as the ritual to summon down the deity continued.

But this time, the chicken-feet man was dancing on a single leg.

Li Huowang frowned because he knew the ritual had yet to be interrupted. He then saw several more censers appear out of the mist.

At first, there was one, then two, then five, then ten, and then there were too many for him to count. All the chicken-feet men hopped out from the rain and mist on one leg.

Water splashed everywhere as they hopped up and down.

Li Huowang's heart fell because he knew he was in trouble if all of them were as strong as the first one.

"Hey! Are you all done up there? Where are you guys? Are you all dead?" Li Huowang shouted towards the red ribbons on top of his head.

Dak! A strange, deformed man holding onto a single blade landed near Li Huowang. He had four artificial limbs on his back, but all of them were now broken.

Soon, Zhao Jiabao, the matchmaker, and the others landed too.

The atmosphere was tense.

Before long, everyone from Li Huowang's side had landed, but Li Huowang saw that they were still outmatched. It was going to be a bitter battle.

1. A legendary wolf that's crippled but has increased intellect.



Chapter 757 - Break

Even though Xuan Pin had told him they had lured away most of the Dharma Sect members, the people conducting the ritual here were still very powerful. It was clear that they didn't come from the Dharma Sect.

Li Huowang took one look at the glowing red dot in the Shimmer Mirror before turning to the incense smoke arising from multiple directions around him. He gripped his spine sword tightly.

“Xuan Pin said that you would die if I ordered all of you to do so. Now is the time! I don't know what they are worshipping, but we have to stop them! I will charge in with everyone. Your life is in your hands from now on! Go!”

No one hesitated as Li Huowang gave his order. They all followed Li Huowang's red robes as they charged into the horde of chicken-feet men. The sound of them killing each other never stopped.

Li Huowang's purple-tassel sword stabbed into one of the chicken-feet men's abdomen. At the same time, the chicken-feet man stabbed his talon into Li Huowang's abdomen. While they made their moves simultaneously, Li Huowang could tolerate pain beyond what the chicken-feet man had imagined.

Li Huowang opened his mouth as several tentacles shot out and plastered themselves onto the chicken-feet man's face.

He took advantage of the chicken-feet man's panic and twisted his sword upwards. The chicken-feet man was bisected.

Li Huowang stomped on the censer, but he wasn't happy. He only killed one of the many chicken-feet men.

The censers continued to release incense smoke, covering the entire ritual area in a white haze. No matter where it drifted, the

smoke ultimately floated towards the top of the statue.

The ritual continued uninterrupted, and they knew they were losing time. They had to deal with it no matter the cost.

Li Huowang dragged one of the corpses closer to him and tore its abdomen open. He then vomited his own daughter into the corpse before setting his own skin on fire.

Ba-Hui somehow sensed his presence, and Li Huowang's body tore open. Flames surged into his wounds and burned his organs too.

"AAAAAH! BA-HUI, YOU MOTHERFUCKER!" Li Huowang kneeled on the ground in pain as he cursed.

The pain had somehow increased even more than it did last time.

He looked at the flames on his body, which were being extinguished by the rain before lighting up again and again, and he realized why.

Li Huowang tasted the rain—it was salty.

It was a bad premonition, and his heart raced. *Xuan Pin was right! This is not god Yu'er coming down here! I need to hurry up and stop them!*

Li Huowang stood up and flames burst forth from his body. He was like a wicker man that burned everything around him.

The chicken-feet men felt something was wrong after seeing Li Huowang's transformation. Many of them surrounded Li Huowang as they worked together to bring him down.

Various beasts howled as their bodies turned beast-like. They attacked Li Huowang simultaneously as the red ribbons pumped rhythmically.

Li Huowang brandished a dagger and opened a slit on his abdomen. He tore off a large piece of his flesh and skin before throwing it at one of the chicken-feet men. The burning skin covered the chicken-feet man and didn't break, no matter how hard

he struggled.

Li Huowang then picked up several stones and chewed them forcefully. He spat out his broken teeth along with his burning blood.

The burning molars shot forward like a buckshot, piercing many of the chicken-feet men and inflicting burning wounds.

Li Huowang was about to charge into the fray when two birds appeared in the rain.

They flew high up as they circled the statue. One had the face of a human, while the other had the face of a horse. They sang in unison in an ugly tone.

“Recollect the murderous aura~ Receive their souls~ Recollect the murderous aura~ Receive their souls~”

As they sang, the red ribbons originating from underneath the bamboo hat started to vibrate a little.

Even though the vibrations were minute, Li Huowang still managed to sense them. He became anxious and launched several heavy-hitting attacks.

However, the chicken-feet men didn’t budge—they just stood still as they took on the attacks. They only started to dodge when they realized that Li Huowang outmatched them.

Even when Li Huowang and his group used all of their strongest attacks, the white smoke only cleared a little bit. The ritual continued on since the white smoke had yet to dissipate.

“Slow! It’s too slow!” Li Huowang tore off his rib bones, and maggots sprayed outwards like confetti. He used the Five Element Intercalation as he sprayed the burning maggots onto the group of chicken-feet men.

Li Huowang knew they were in deep trouble when he heard the scalp-numbing sound of the moving statue. Everything would be over if he didn’t stop them now.

Li Huowang rapidly thought about his array of techniques, only

to realize that none of them could help avert the crisis—except for the Cang-Qiang Ascension.

Just then, Zhao Jiabao jumped to Li Huowang's side, enduring the heat. With his only remaining arm, he took out a piece of paper and held it out. "Daoist Li! Take this! This is the note that the Chief told me to give you!"

"A note at this time? Who the fuck does he think he is?" Li Huowang swiftly opened the note for fear that the fire would burn it before he could read it.

Li Huowang was shocked. "What?! You mean the teleportation technique was due to my cultivation? He never had any teleportation techniques?!"

But he didn't have time to bother with that now as he continued reading.

Li Huowang, now that you know the truth, I can't save you through teleportation. We're sinking the boat with an axe, leaving no escape. Only then can you use your full powers. Don't worry—there is a way out. Your ability to bring yourself all the way here from Qing Qiu shows your mastery in cultivation. If you're in danger, you can conjure up anything with your cultivation to save yourself. Think carefully, the clue to averting this crisis is within you. What can you conjure now to save yourself?

"Something that I can conjure to save myself?" Various memories surfaced in Li Huowang's mind.

He remembered something, and his pupils shrunk. Li Huowang immediately pressed his temple and started using his power. A white figure slowly appeared in the air.

Li Huowang's veins were bulging and his head was engorged from the exertion, but the figure never fully materialized.

He was dismayed as his arteries continued to pump blood into his brain. He suddenly remembered his spine sword. He unsheathed and stabbed it onto the ground.

He then stared at the sword.

Blood flowed out of his nose as he continued to use his powers. Even the blood vessels in his brain started to pop one by one.

But the spine sword slowly transformed itself. First, there were organs, then flesh, then skin, and finally, clothes.

Pak! A white fan opened and Li Huowang saw the four words written on it.

Everyone. Has. Their. Purpose.

Chapter 758 - Death

The scholar in white stood still in the pouring rain, standing out to everyone.

It was the previous dead Zhuge Yuan that Li Huowang had brought back to life using the spine sword.

Zhugue Yuan took one look around and knew what was happening. He held onto his brush and dipped it into the red ground. He held onto it tightly and swung the brush across the chicken-feet men.

His brush was like his original Kuixing Brush. The chicken-feet men all slumped to the ground when he pointed his brush at them. The censer was also extinguished without any hope of it lighting up again.

Zhugue Yuan turned and looked at Li Huowang. “Junior Li, we haven’t seen each other in a while. How is everything?”

Li Huowang endured the head-splitting pain and wanted to smile, but the pain forced him to kneel down again.

He had to be clear that even though the man in front of him looked similar to Zhuge Yuan, he was not the real one. Li Huowang had materialized him using his cultivation of ‘Truth.’

Now that his cultivation had reached a great height, he could conjure Zhuge Yuan using the spine sword, but it was ultimately not the real deal. He was well aware that the original Zhuge Yuan was already dead.

He conjured Zhuge Yuan as a tool to help him fight, just like Peng Longteng! He could not attach any emotions to the Zhuge Yuan in front of him.

He wanted to differentiate what was real from what was not, but as he tried to do so, Zhuge Yuan’s body started to crumble

rapidly. He was on the brink of turning back into the spine sword.

The existence of anything conjured using his cultivation depended on his thoughts. He couldn't differentiate them clearly if he wished to use his powers. If he convinced himself that the Zhuge Yuan in front of him was fake, Li Huowang wouldn't be able to sustain Zhuge Yuan's existence.

Zhuce Yuan sensed what was wrong. "Junior Li, regardless of whether I'm fake, I will cease to exist the moment you think I'm fake."

Li Huowang howled and looked at Zhuge Yuan with tearful eyes.

Zhuce Yuan's crumbling body stopped and rematerialized.

Staring at the familiar face, Li Huowang extended his fingers and pointed at the enemies around them.

"Kill... Kill them all!"

Zhuce Yuan nodded and waved his brush in the air.

The chicken-feet men started dropping like flies. They sensed that something was seriously wrong.

This time, every single one of them focused on the groveling Li Huowang rather than the formidable Zhuge Yuan.

They had seen how Li Huowang conjured Zhuge Yuan and guessed what would happen if Li Huowang died first. But they couldn't get close to Li Huowang with Zhuge Yuan blocking all of them.

The battle was over the moment Zhuge Yuan appeared.

The chicken-feet men struggled and used various methods, but Zhuge Yuan stopped all of them. The difference in strength was clear.

The chicken-feet men were like children compared to Zhuge Yuan. A single stroke of his brush killed many of them. Their incense censers were also extinguished and the white smoke no longer drifted into the bamboo hat.

In the end, Zhuge Yuan stood alone on the bloody altar, gripping his sword. The only sound that remained was that of the falling rain.

“Junior Li, let me go. I’m the fake Zhuge Yuan. The real one is already dead.”

Li Huowang held onto his head as he slumped onto the ground. He panted as the rain continued to fall on him.

Maintaining Zhuge Yuan’s materialization for even a single moment hurt him a lot. He felt that his head was going to burst.

Without Li Huowang’s power, Zhuge Yuan’s body swiftly crumbled away. Before he was gone, he asked one last question.

“Junior Li, could I ask you one thing? Is the Qi Kingdom safe?”

Li Huowang nodded slightly and Zhuge Yuan turned back into the spine sword happily. It fell and embedded itself into the ground.

“Father,” Li Sui crawled towards Li Huowang and helped him up. “Father, don’t worry. Your head is still here.”

Li Huowang ignored her and stood up to see the aftermath of their battle.

The corpses of the chicken-feet men were littered around the altar. Almost all of them were dead, while the remaining ones were being hunted down by Zhao Jiabao and the rest.

The rain mixed with the blood in the wooden city. The grand city in the middle of the mountain was completely soaked in blood.

In the middle of the blood-soaked city was the massive statue covered in ribbons, depicting the deity with four legs.

It looked more scary with the blood on it, but at least it wasn’t moving anymore. Li Huowang sighed in relief.

But he did not let his guard down. He turned and commanded Zhao Jiabao, “Bring your people and spread out. Kill everyone in this city and leave no one alive!”

He mustn’t let his guard down at the moment of their victory. He dared not risk it since it was directly related to the demise of the

Dharma Sect.

He tried to stand up on his own, but the blossoming pain in his head prevented him from doing so.

Zhuge Yuan was a Twisted One, so he needed more strength to conjure him. He was barely able to do so, even by using the spine sword as a medium.

“Xuan Pin! Xuan Pin, get over here!” Li Huowang shouted loudly. He was angry, yet Xuan Pin’s illusion surprisingly didn’t appear this time.

“Xuan Pin! Get out of here!” Li Huowang shouted in the rain but nothing happened.

“You think you can hide? Just you wait till I get back!” Li Huowang cursed.

He felt the pain in his head subsiding a bit before he stood up. He looked towards the left and saw some of the blood flowing out from the window of the buildings.

It seemed that there were other people in the city besides the chicken-feet man. He wasn’t sure what the city was being used for.

Still, everything was now over.

He looked up at the massive statue and saw that it remained motionless.

“The Dharma Sect has failed this time, right?”

He brought out the Shimmer Mirror to check how the frontlines were doing when he saw something that made his blood run cold.

The massive red dot representing the allied soldiers had a bite mark on it. It was as if something massive had eaten the soldiers!

Chapter 759 - Being

Li Huowang stared at the Shimmer Mirror. He thought he was seeing things wrong because of his pounding headache.

The red dot representing the soldiers in formation had indeed been bitten by something!

“Impossible! I just interrupted the ritual!” Li Huowang looked at the motionless statue and then at the dead chicken-feet men lying in the pools of blood.

Li Huowang snarled as he touched the glowing red dot on the Shimmer Mirror. He needed to know what was happening.

His vision changed, and he found himself riding a warhorse and galloping away from the battlefield.

He turned around and saw an incomprehensible sight. The soldier’s massive formation was fighting against an invisible being.

Even though it was invisible, it was still clearly present. Every time it moved, the space around it distorted and sank.

By staring at the distorted space, Li Huowang saw that the being had four legs. It was both enormous and flat, with several ribbon-like objects floating around its body in the air.

Other than that, Li Huowang couldn’t make out any more details.

“What is that? What the fuck is that?” He gritted his teeth so hard that they cracked. No matter what it was, the Dharma Sect had successfully summoned that being down into the mortal realm. It appeared that they had a backup ritual somewhere else.

Even if they stopped the ritual here, the Dharma Sect’s other ritual had succeeded.

Taishan Shi’s memory was faulty to begin with! Regardless of whether the Dharma Sect had intentionally kept him in the dark or

if this was part of their trap, the situation had taken a turn for the worse.

Li Huowang snapped himself out of the Shimmer Mirror. “Go! Go towards the southwest and help them!”

Zhao Jiabao and the others wasted no time and immediately moved. They quickly charged towards the southwestern part of the frontline.

Li Huowang also prepared to follow them. His head was hurting, but he decided to go too.

He had to go. Otherwise, the invisible being would kill the soldiers. By then, the entire Liang Kingdom would be a sitting duck for the Dharma Sect to invade.

“I need to go! Faster!” Li Huowang held onto his head as he shouted.

Splurt! A sharp halberd pierced through his chest. Peng Longteng swung the halberd, forcefully launching Li Huowang high into the southwestern direction. Her immense strength made it possible for her to throw Li Huowang way past the city wall’s height.

The rain and wind were still intense. Li Huowang couldn’t open his eyes as he flew in the air. He could only determine his direction after landing and using the Shimmer Mirror.

Li Huowang wasn’t sure how far he had flown or how many times he was thrown, but he knew he had reached his destination when the cold air high in the sky froze his charred body. He saw that he was directly above the red dot.

“It’s here!” Li Huowang retracted his limbs and fell downwards.

He fell through the clouds and saw the being directly. It sat still in the middle of the crater-filled battleground.

It looked like a toad but was even more deformed than one. It resembled the statue in the wooden city, but there were also some differences.

Its body was shifting slightly. Somehow, its previously invisible body was now crawling with wriggling steel and flesh.

Li Huowang only realized what it was after he heard war cries—it was the soldiers! The soldiers were using their bodies to latch onto the being like ants!

The being suddenly shouted, its voice a mix of a wolf and a tiger. It shook off the soldiers from its body, causing them to rain down

The soldiers retreated slightly, and the being returned to its original form. It was distorting the space around it, but its body was still transparent.

The soldiers' attacks appeared ineffective, or maybe they worked, but the being's blood was also invisible.

The soldiers that had fallen regrouped, yet Li Huowang visibly saw their strength diminishing.

“Xuan Pin! Xuan Pin! I don't know where you are, but you better show yourself now! There's a huge problem here! Don't tell me you don't see that massive fucking being! Don't tell me you don't have any backup plans for something like this, you sly old fox! The Dharma Sect actually managed to summon the being, so stop hiding your secrets!”

Li Huowang's voice echoed across the battlefield, but there was no answer. It was as if Xuan Pin didn't care about what was happening.

Li Huowang was angry but somehow he had a feeling that something like this was going to happen. He then slowly approached the being.

“Xuan Pin, if I get back alive, you better clench your teeth!”

Li Huowang howled and Peng Longteng materialized. She hooked Li Huowang's shoulder with her halberd, and they both charged into the battlefield.

But the being was so massive that they underestimated their

distance. Li Huowang ran on horseback for more than fifteen minutes before he reached the proximity of the being.

He only sensed how strong the being was when he got close. A strange feeling was bubbling from the being's body, assimilating everything around it.

It was the feeling of barbarity and ambition.

Even though Xuan Pin said it wasn't a Siming, Li Huowang thought it was already close to one. Only Simings had the power to assimilate their surroundings into themselves.

The sound of a horrifying creaking reverberated as the being crunched on the soldiers. A lot of them were smashed into a pulp of flesh and blood as they rained down.

Once again, the soldiers latched onto the being's body as they attacked with their weapons, but none of them did any sizable damage.

It was as if the being was impervious to the weapons.

"What should I do?" Li Huowang didn't know what to do against such a being, but he needed to conjure someone since the soldiers were dropping like flies. "Fuck! I have to try it no matter what."

Li Huowang gripped the spine sword, but the pain in his head had yet to recede. He placed the spine sword back onto his back.

"No, I can't conjure another Zhuge Yuan right now. I need someone else."

Chapter 760 - Ma Tuo

Li Huowang had some other ideas after he managed to conjure Zhuge Yuan. Since he could do it with Zhuge Yuan, he should be able to conjure others too.

But he was looking for someone only slightly weaker than Zhuge Yuan, and he didn't know many people who fit that bill.

He wasn't sure if it would work, but he would rather give it a try than give up.

Even if his attacks only bought some time, it would still give others hope that reinforcements would arrive later.

Li Huowang took a deep breath and recalled the moment when Dan Yangzi took over his body. It was a memory that he had tried to hide in the past, but now, he was digging it up.

Li Huowang's charred skin grew back, but instead of his original skin, it was skin and flesh covered in wrinkles.

His skin turned into a tar-like substance as feathers protruded out. Li Huowang's head also split into three, forming the three heads of Dan Yangzi. The youthful, middle-aged, and elderly faces of Dan Yangzi appeared as a white shawl swiftly grew on his shoulder.

All three mouths opened at the same time. "Hahaha! I'm alive! I knew I would have the same lifespan as the Heavens themselves! Li Huowang was fake! He's just part of my Three Corpses!"

As he shouted, Dan Yangzi's organs swiftly grew outside of his body. He ignored everything and floated upwards.

The invisible being that had been decimating the soldiers was immediately transfixed on Dan Yangzi the moment he appeared. The aura of a Half-Immortal was special.

It started moving as the soldiers hung onto its body for dear

life. The being charged towards Dan Yangzi in an attempt to ram him.

“What is this stupid beast that’s trying to stop me from becoming an Immortal?” Dan Yangzi thrust his hands into his organs and pulled out a fleshy bronze coin sword.

Dan Yangzi blocked the being with his sword, but he was still knocked backward by the massive impact. Luckily, he remained unharmed from the attack.

Dan Yangzi steadied himself in the air and bit into the three fingers on his right hand. He started writing several runes on his bronze coin sword using his black blood.

“Supreme Heavenly Star of the Altar, respond to me with haste! Expel all evils and bind all demons for me to achieve peace of mind. The Three Souls endure for all eternity while the spirit remains unscattered. Respond to my command with haste and urgency!”

As he finished his rune, the eyeballs on the bronze coin sword exploded, forming a dense red mist. Dan Yangzi swung his sword, and the red mist flew towards the being.

Even though it was powerful, it was still ineffective against the invisible being. No matter what kind of technique Dan Yangzi used, they all landed ineffectively on the being.

Dan Yangzi had used all of his techniques, but he was still outmatched. An invisible tail slapped Dan Yangzi, dispersing his body. The weakened Li Huowang fell downwards.

“I guess it was useless?” Li Huowang fell onto the ground. His breath was ragged, and he was on the verge of death.

The being wanted to kill Li Huowang to stop any future threats against it. Suddenly, the hundreds and thousands of soldiers adopted a martial arts stance and raised three incense sticks in their hands.

The unusual movement of the soldiers caused the being to ignore Li Huowang, charging back toward the soldiers.

Just as the being was about to crash into the soldiers, they all opened their eyes in unison. They stabbed the incense sticks into the ground at the same time.

“We soldiers are machines! The realm of life and death, the path of survival and extinction! Jiang Xiangshou is above us! Jiang Xiangshou is in our heart! Jiang Xiangshou is under us! Annihilate the Gods! Annihilate the Immortals! Annihilate the Buddhas! Annihilate the Daos!”

An enormous amount of murderous aura surged into all of their bodies. All of their bodies were barely able to contain the murderous aura as they suppressed their bodies from exploding. Veins bulged and blood trickled out from their orifices.

The soldiers in formation and the being crashed into each other, but neither side gave away.

The sound of the horrific crash came again, and Li Huowang was affected by the feeling bubbling off from the being’s body. He felt the unending barbarity in the air and the ambition that could never be satisfied.

Regardless of what the being was, Li Huowang sensed that it was holding onto two different Heavenly Daos.

Wait, barbarity? Li Huowang realized something and stood up shakily. He looked towards the being and sensed the change in the air. The Heavenly Dao also visibly affected the soldiers as their strength waned.

The closer Li Huowang got, the more familiar the feeling got. He sensed a familiar feeling before, one that was very warm.

Ambition was an offspring of greed.

“Wait, answer me! Are you holding onto the Heavenly Dao of Greed?!” Li Huowang shouted angrily.

But the being ignored him, continuing to clash with the soldiers.

The being did not answer him, but Li Huowang was sure now.

He remembered that greed used to be paired with rot, but something had changed. Now, greed was paired with barbarity instead. One of the Siming's Heavenly Daos had been plundered.

The only Natural Disaster that happened recently that involved rot was the day when the Benevolent Nunnery was destroyed.

“You?! YOU KILLED ABBESS JING XIN? YOU KILLED THEM ALL?”

Li Huowang's eyes were bloodshot as he glared at the being. His anger continued to grow until it threatened to swallow him whole.

Li Huowang embedded the spine sword onto the ground as he howled in anger. A ribcage slowly grew on the spine sword.

Li Huowang's head expanded continuously as veins covered his scalp.

Zhuge Yuan's body was only halfway materialized when he slumped onto the ground with blood flowing out from all of his orifices.

He could cultivate the 'Truth,' but using it to materialize Zhuge Yuan, the Twisted One of the Three Ancient Ones, strained his body too much.

Zhuge Yuan's body was slowly crumbling away when Li Sui tunneled into Li Huowang's body. “Dad, let me help you! I will help you! Zhuge Yuan is real!”

Their thoughts linked together. Li Sui, who had been eating Li Huowang's flesh and blood, finally showed her usefulness. Zhuge Yuan's body swiftly materialized.

But even with Li Sui's help, Zhuge Yuan's body was still incomplete.

“A little more! Just a little more!” Li Huowang fell onto the ground in pain. “MATERIALIZE!”

Pop! Li Huowang's head exploded, leaving only the stump of his neck exposed in the air.

At the same time, Zhuge Yuan materialized.

Zhuge Yuan stared at the being fighting against the soldiers and frowned. “The ritual had been interrupted, so how did Ma Tuo get summoned here?”

Chapter 761 - Change

Zhugue Yuan's question was destined to remain unanswered. He was the only one who knew the being's name: Ma Tuo.

Li Huowang's head was missing, so he didn't answer Zhugue Yuan's question either.

Still, Li Huowang's head exploding finally allowed him to catch a glimpse of the being's actual body. It looked just like the statue from earlier—the one with the bamboo hat.

However, the statue was but an interpretation of Ma Tuo. Its actual body couldn't be captured by mortals and chiseled in stone.

The bamboo hat was not its head—it was its heart! Furthermore, the various red ribbons were actually its blood vessels.

The other interesting feature of the Ma Tuo was its head. Ma Tuo's head was an ever-changing amalgamation of beasts. The beasts disappeared and reappeared, with some detaching and flowing on the red ribbons towards the heart. It was a horrifying sight.

Without his head, Li Huowang could finally see Ma Tuo's invisible features. He was certain that if he still had his head, he wouldn't be able to look at it for even a single second.

“Senior Zhugue!”

Zhugue Yuan heard the voice and took out his almanac before looking at the ground. In the middle of a pool of blood, he saw half of Li Huowang's mouth.

“That thing! Its left leg is injured! That's its weakness! Attack there!”

Zhugue Yuan leaped into action. He flew towards Ma Tuo and pointed his brush at Ma Tuo's left leg.

Zhuge Yuan was not the only one who heard Li Huowang's words—Peng Longteng and the other soldiers also did. They moved in unison.

“Junior Li! Hold on! Give me a little bit of time!”

Zhuge Yuan suddenly jumped behind Peng Longteng and began drawing on her back. “General Peng, do you have the courage for this gambit?”

Peng Longteng saw the massive being in front of her and laughed. “What do you mean courage? We kill the Gods, Immortals, and the Daos! Kill them all!”

Just as she finished shouting, Zhuge Yuan had also finished drawing. It was a drawing of a demon filled with a murderous aura. The demon had a belt made out of skulls, green skin, and large fangs. It was eating the viscera of a poor man.

For the final touches, Zhuge Yuan painted the demon's eyes, which were filled with bloodlust and glee.

And so, the drawing came to life. The demon laughed, crawling out from Peng Longteng's back and superimposing itself on her. The demon's face was perfectly layered with her face, making her look even more menacing.

Zhuge Yuan never stopped, continuing to wave his brush around. Peng Longteng's massive frame slowly became thinner, and she eventually became a flat piece of art.

Ma Tuo tried to cover its injured leg, but the soldiers coordinated their efforts, sending two cavalries to protect Zhuge Yuan with their very lives.

“Open!” Zhuge Yuan waved his brush on Ma Tuo's injured leg. The flat Peng Longteng easily slipped into its wounds, hurting Ma Tuo and making its attacks less frequent.

The other soldiers finally saw hope when a blood-red liquid flowed out from the injury. They sent a small group of soldiers to pierce the wounds like a lance and attack from the inside.

Ma Tuo wanted to retaliate, but Zhuge Yuan threw his almanac into the air. “Prohibited: Siming descending onto this world!”

The old almanac only burned halfway. Li Huowang’s current cultivation wasn’t strong enough for it to elicit its complete effect.

But it was enough. Zhuge Yuan saw Ma Tuo’s body flickering and smiled. He then changed back into his spine sword. He had done his best.

The soldiers continued to pour into Ma Tuo’s wounds before tearing the wound wide open. Ma Tuo finally lost balance and fell onto the ground.

Li Huowang struggled to stand up as he held onto his sharpened rebar. He struggled for breath, staring at the large lorry burning after crashing into the wall.

The others looked at Li Huowang with shock. Wu Qi gave him a thumbs up. “What a badass.”

“See? What did I tell you? Your chemical doesn’t work!”

Li Huowang touched his head but found that it wasn’t there. He then collapsed onto the ground. Soon, a palm-sized skin doll appeared from his abdomen. It grew into Li Huowang’s size.

However, it was as flat as a leaf that could be blown away by the slightest wind. The doll ate Li Huowang’s shadow before expanding.

Li Huowang sighed in relief after he was revived. A smile spread across his face as he looked at the unmoving Ma Tuo.

The Dharma Sect’s plan had failed. Ma Tuo was dead, and Li Huowang had won.

Ma Tuo’s body crumbled to dust, leaving nothing behind. The only thing that remained was Peng Longteng’s flattened body.

Li Huowang felt tired. He had just changed into a new body, but the fatigue remained—mental fatigue.

He wanted to sleep forever.

“Father, are you alright?” Li Sui carefully helped him up.

“I’m fine.” Li Huowang’s eyes were unfocused when he said that.

“Father, look! The people are coming here! Someone is here to help us.”

“Reinforcements? Why are they only coming now?!” Li Huowang suddenly had a surge of strength as he got up and approached the sound of the horses’ hooves.

Li Huowang was dizzy, and everything kept changing form in front of him. It took him a long time to recognize that there was a horse in front of him.

Li Huowang gritted his teeth, stabbing his own feet with the purple-tassel sword to wake himself up.

“Xuan Pin?! Where is Xuan Pin?!” Li Huowang shouted at the reinforcement. “Xuan Pin, get over here!”

Li Huowang had lost all of his trust in that old fox.

A familiar voice called out to him. “Senior Li.”

Li Huowang looked up and saw that it was Gao Zhijian, the Emperor of the Liang Kingdom. He was holding a wooden plate with a grim expression.

“Why are you here? Where is Xuan Pin? Get him over here!”

Gao Zhijian was devastated when he passed the wooden plate to Li Huowang. “Senior Li, Xuan Pin is dead.”

On the wooden plate were Xuan Pin’s red robes. Li Huowang was stunned and only recognized what it was after a long time.

“Senior Li, Xuan Pin really is dead. Just as you were having trouble, he had unforeseen circumstances there too...”

Li Huowang took a deep breath and paced around as he got angrier.

“You... Mother fuckers!” Li Huowang suddenly slapped the wooden plate away, causing Xuan Pin’s red robes to fall to the ground.

“Why?! Why is everyone the same?!”

Chapter 762 - Fatigue

"I believed you were strong! I believed you were cunning! Didn't you use me like a chess piece? I thought you could summon the dead! You even successfully summoned a dead Siming, the Divine Mountain Ghost Eye! And this is how your life ends? Just like that? Are you kidding me?!"

Li Huowang shouted and vented his frustration towards everyone. He didn't care if Xuan Pin heard him. He just needed to let it all out before his bottled emotions drove him crazy again.

"Weren't you arrogant? Didn't you say you were strong? You said you could help the Simings and uncover their secrets! I had thought you were someone amazing. But now? You're dead, just like that? Embarrassing! Xuan Pin, you are a disgrace!"

Li Huowang's angry face abruptly transformed into one of laughter. "Hehehe, you're trying to trick me, aren't you? You're faking your death, right? Bullshit! I don't believe that you are dead! You won't trick me! Xuan Pin! Get over here! The Sitting Oblivion Dao has used this technique for ages!"

"Senior Li!" Gao Zhijian held onto Li Huowang's shoulders, his grief evident in his voice. "Senior Li, don't be like this. Calm down, I know you're sad, but—"

"Hah! I'm sad? Who do you think he is? I won't be sad because of his death! In fact, he's just playing tricks on me again! This isn't the first time he has done this. I had yet to make him pay for everything he had done, and now you're telling me he's dead?"

Li Huowang stood still as he laughed. "Do you think that's plausible, Gao Zhijian? Do you think that's plausible?! Why? Why do they keep throwing all the problems at me while they just kick the bucket?! Why?!"

He was not only referring to Xuan Pin.

Gao Zhijian didn't know how to answer. He stood there and just looked at Li Huowang.

As Li Huowang slowly accepted the news, Gao Zhijian said, "Senior Li, I know you have reservations about Xuan Pin, but he was working really hard without rest. He did everything he could in places where you couldn't see. You didn't know this, but he was actually heavily injured. He didn't even get to recover, and he refused to let you know because he was afraid of your powers."

Gao Zhijian slowly explained, "When the Dharma Sect invaded us, their true goal was to destroy Xuan Pin. They had laid down plan after plan, ambush after ambush, all for Xuan Pin. Aiming for you was just a distraction. They knew you weren't an easy target, but they didn't care because their true goal was Xuan Pin."

"Xuan Pin was the one who unified all the soldiers and the other kingdoms to push back the Dharma Sect. He was the key individual in pushing the Dharma Sect back. That's why the Dharma Sect paid a heavy price to kill Xuan Pin and the others."

"Others?" Li Huowang slowly raised his head. "People other than Xuan Pin died?"

Gao Zhijian's lips quivered, seemingly afraid to utter the words, but he explained nonetheless. "The Liang Kingdom's Imperial Preceptor, Hou Shu's Imperial Preceptor, Qing Qiu's Chief, and the Liang Kingdom's Chief are all gone."

Li Huowang thought he had misheard. "They are all dead?"

"Yes."

Li Huowang refused to believe it, making his head buzz. No matter how much they had schemed and lied to him, they were still allies.

But now, they were all dead, just like that. The few remaining competent fighters had died.

Li Huowang felt a growing emptiness in his heart. He had

always thought someone would stand and hold the Heavens up when they fell.

Now, he found himself alone as the tallest one.

Li Huowang might need to face the Dharma Sect by himself now.

He suddenly felt fatigued, more than he had been in ages. He sat down on the bloody battlefield and sighed when he looked at the sky.

Li Huowang didn't want to do anything. He just wanted to return to Cowheart Village to live out the rest of his life. Why must the fate of the world be in his hands? He was tired.

He closed his eyes to try to forget everything. A long time passed before he took another breath.

"Since Xuan Pin is dead, who will inherit his position?" Li Huowang said, lying in a pool of blood.

"The Chief of Hou Shu is temporarily holding it. I haven't told the others yet because it would demoralize them."

Li Huowang opened his eyes and struggled to sit up.

He picked up a broken blade on the ground and stabbed into his abdomen. He shouted angrily as he twisted up his insides.

He only stopped when he felt his intestines had been cut into pieces. He dragged his bloody body up and looked at Gao Zhijian.

He had no choice. They were all dead, and he was the only living person that could handle it.

Thunder rumbled in the skies as they noticed someone was running towards them. It was a messenger on horseback.

"Report! Victory from Xu Zhong! Victory from Xian Yang! Victory from Hu Laoguan!"

An old eunuch took the scroll and read it before whispering to Gao Zhijian.

Gao Zhijian revealed a victorious expression. He turned and looked at Li Huowang. "Senior Li! Xuan Pin's sacrifice was not in

vain! Their sacrifices were not in vain! After you defeated that being, the Dharma Sect realized their defeat and retreated from Si Qi! We have reclaimed Si Qi!”

Anything that would demoralize the soldiers should naturally be kept hidden, but anything that would bolster their morale should be spread out far and wide! Soon enough, word of their triumph reached every soldier’s ears.

The soldiers who had fought against Ma Tuo shouted and cheered happily, regardless of their ranks. Their cheers came in waves.

Everyone thought that they were winning and could soon return home. This large battle was ending soon.

They were filled with confidence in the outcome of the war, but none of them knew that their leaders had been killed by the Dharma Sect.

Li Huowang just stood there, his body covered in blood, as if he didn't belong among them.

Chapter 763 - Prisoners Of War

Li Huowang carefully pulled open his curtain and checked for suspicious gazes.

He ensured everything was clear outside before nodding at Yang Na. "It's safe now. Let's go!"

"Mom, I'm going out to have a meal with Nana. You don't have to cook for us," Li Huowang shouted.

"You're going out again?" Sun Xiaoqin was practicing a dance with her phone on a stand. She rolled her sleeves and looked out the hall to see Li Huowang and Yang Na leaving.

She sighed. "To think you would forget your mother after getting a wife."

Still, she was secretly happy because her son was finally acting like someone his age. He was finally taking time to go out and play.

Both Li Huowang and Yang Na hopped on their rental bikes and departed for their destination.

They were still headed for Orange Isle, but they wouldn't meet the others in the unfinished building this time. Instead, they were going to an underground room of an unfinished mansion.

They chose an underground room because they had managed to capture some of the assailants after winning last time.

Chen Hongyu was guarding the entrance when Li Huowang and Yang Na arrived. They spoke briefly before heading into the underground room.

As they entered, they saw Qing Wanglai talking to one of the prisoners.

"Osankodinakinatikokinaravu?"

“Eioiko?”

“Eseganiduanoau, nakaeakaseeibibieiochio...”

Yang Na whispered to Li Huowang as she recorded the conversation with her phone, “It’s not English. I don’t think it’s an Indo-European language...”

Li Huowang approached Qing Wanglai as he glared at the bearded man tied to the chair. “How’s the interrogation going?”

“Not that well. They are very guarded against us. They wouldn’t open their hearts to accept us, much less talk to us.”

Wu Qi rummaged through the prisoner’s belongings as she said, “These guys bought some passports from a poor island nation. Even their identities are fake. I don’t have any leads on them.”

“What about you? Is there anyone watching you at your home?” Qing Wanglai asked.

Li Huowang was visibly calmer and less anxious than before.

“None. No one came to stalk me after we destroyed their base last time, so I think they really were the ones who had been stalking me!”

Li Huowang looked at the guy tied to the chair with hatred. It was because of them that others wrongly believed Li Huowang had a relapse of his illness. He wasn’t sick at all!

“Where’s the woman with the umbrella, though? Everyone we saw was a man. We didn’t get to catch her.”

“It can’t be helped if someone did manage to escape. Don’t worry, since most of them are in our hands. They will become our bargaining chips,” Qing Wanglai said before continuing to talk to the prisoner.

Li Huowang approached the other prisoners and looked at their faces. He wanted to find the people that kidnapped him in the first place.

However, since it had been some time since that happened, Li Huowang had forgotten what his kidnappers looked like. It didn’t

help that most of them were foreigners, making it harder for him to distinguish them.

The prisoners didn't know what Li Huowang wanted to do, but they all shrank in fear when he approached them.

They were horrified by what Li Huowang had done last time.

"Hey, someone is here!" Chen Hongyu's voice alerted everyone in the basement.

A familiar face soon appeared. It was Zhao Lei.

He averted his gaze a lot and seemed somewhat awkward.

Despite this, he stood there without any intention of walking away.

"You're back?"

Qing Wanglai approached Zhao Lei and patted his shoulder. He then turned around and announced, "Everyone, let's give a round of applause for our old comrade joining us again. If not for him, we would never have been able to capture them!"

Amidst the sparse applause, Zhao Lei's previous betrayal appeared to have been pardoned.

Li Huowang frowned. It was hard for him to think Zhao Lei would be loyal to them after betraying both sides.

Zhao Lei was visibly awkward since he was caught between two parties he had betrayed, but he ignored their gazes and stood in place.

"You worked with them before. How about you try talking to them?" Qing Wanglai pointed at the bearded man tied to the chair.

Zhao Lei nodded. He had barely said anything when the bearded man spat on him. The bearded man said something vehemently.

Li Huowang didn't know what the man was talking about, although it was clear that he was saying some nasty things.

Zhao Lei retreated and Li Huowang approached him. "See? This is the result of betrayal."

Zhao Lei disregarded Li Huowang's words as he looked around

anxiously. “Where is Qian Fu?”

“We tied him up. His other personality came back.”

Li Huowang thought Zhao Lei would talk more about Qian Fu, but then Zhao Lei whispered to him urgently, “Do you really think that’s true? Do you think that everything that had happened was real? This is too strange!”

Hm? Why is he acting crazy again?

Li Huowang distanced himself from Zhao Lei.

He had barely taken a single step when Zhao Lei grabbed his arms. “Think carefully! Do you really think everything is true? So many people died, and yet the police still haven’t come and found us yet. Why is no one noticing what we are doing? Think about the details! You need to consider the details where the bizarreness is less noticeable!”

“Zhao Lei!” Qing Wanglai spoke in a strangely stern tone when he called for Zhao Lei.

Zhao Lei let go of Li Huowang and retreated a bit. While his eyes were still darting around, he didn’t speak to Li Huowang again.

“We will take it from here. Li Huowang, why don’t you go back and rest? I will message you if we have any new details.” Qing Wanglai smiled lightly.

“Thank you, but I don’t need to rest now. I have some time to help you now.”

Li Huowang suddenly recalled something and started checking the hands of the prisoners one by one.

He remembered biting off two fingers from one of the individuals who had tried to kidnap him. *He should be in this group of prisoners.*

Chapter 764 - Weapons

Li Huowang was slowly checking the hands of the prisoners in the underground basement. He wanted to find the person who had tried to kidnap him.

He checked everyone's hands but was surprised to find that none of them were missing any fingers.

That's strange. This shouldn't be right. Li Huowang was still pondering it when he recalled what Zhao Lei had told him just now.

Li Huowang shook his head and looked at the tied-up prisoners again. He found it strange that they didn't seem afraid of him.

He had a sudden idea and rechecked the hands of the prisoners. This time, rather than just looking at them, he pressed on each of the prisoner's fingers.

This time, he discovered something new. Li Huowang was checking the fingers when he noticed that one of the prisoners had different textures on two of his fingers. He looked at the prisoner before lightly pulling the fingers to reveal they were fake! The kidnapper had attached fake fingers to his hands!

"So it was you." Li Huowang stared at the prisoner in front of him.

The prisoner started scolding Li Huowang after seeing that the latter had taken his fingers away, but Li Huowang didn't understand a single sentence from the man.

Li Huowang turned to Qing Wanglai. "What is he talking about? Could you translate it for me?"

Qing Wanglai had been talking to Zhao Lei when Li Huowang called him over. After listening to the prisoner briefly, Qing Wanglai explained, "He's cursing you. Do you really want me to translate that for you?"

“Nevermind.” Li Huowang kicked the prisoner in his abdomen before speaking to Qing Wanglai. “Do you think it’s fine to keep so many prisoners here? We also killed a lot of them last time.”

“Don’t worry, everything is fine. As I’ve said, I have a lot of connections, and these people don’t have legal status to begin with. Just leave it to me to deal with them.”

He continued, “Also, don’t risk your life like last time. It was an entire truck! It’s solid metal, and you’re just flesh and bone. One wrong move and you would’ve been squished.”

“I know. You don’t have to tell me twice.” Li Huowang frowned out of annoyance. “We captured so many of them, but we only have a few people on our side. What if they don’t want to cooperate with us? It’s not like we can keep them locked up for that long.”

“Then we will use them as bargaining chips to talk to their leader. It would be best if we can determine what their goal is. Also, you should probably call them to ask about the thing on your ankle. It should’ve been removed already.” Qing Wanglai said, concerned about Li Huowang’s ankle monitor.

“I’ve already asked them about it. I need to wear it for two years and cannot approach any schools within these two years.”

“Two years? That’s not the protocol. Let me ask my lawyer friend about it.”

Li Huowang was surprised. “I didn’t know graduate students had such a wide network. I never thought you would know so many people.”

“Hoho. Are you praising me?”

“Just continue to interrogate them. I want to see how Qian Fu is doing. Sister Wu Qi, give me the keys.”

Li Huowang took the keychain, which was attached to a Swiss army knife. Afterward, he left the underground room and walked towards the RV parked beside the house.

Along the way, he saw Qing Wanglai’s sports car and patted it.

He reached the RV and unlocked it. He opened the door, and the first thing he saw was the tied-up Qian Fu. Qian Fu was stretching his neck while trying to grab a dagger on the table near him with his mouth.

Li Huowang grabbed the dagger and threw it into the pile of weapons on another table in the distance. The weapons had been taken from the base of the kidnappers.

Qian Fu felt frustrated when he saw his escape plan had failed. "What do you guys want?! I beg you! Let me go!"

Li Huowang walked towards the pile of weapons and inspected them.

"Qian Fu, be quiet. I'm doing this for your own good. It's clear that they are targeting us. If you run now, they will capture you for sure."

Li Huowang was still uncertain whether they would send any more people even though they had destroyed one of their bases.

Qian Fu looked at Li Huowang as if he was a maniac before he took a few deep breaths. "What did Qing Wanglai tell you? You've been tricked! He's a liar!"

But Qian Fu's face became pale when he saw Li Huowang pick up a crossbow and point it directly at him.

"Don't be fooled by his appearance! He's faking it! I was once admitted to the same hospital as him. He always managed to fool the doctors into thinking that he was cured, but he would always get locked up again sooner or later due to his illness. Don't trust him!"

Li Huowang placed the crossbow down. "Who else should I believe, then? I definitely wouldn't believe you. It's best if you stay here for now. To be honest, we don't want to tie you up. Once this is over, you can go anywhere you like. I won't even care if you pick up garbage to eat on the streets."

Li Huowang then ignored Qian Fu and inspected the pile of

weapons again as he picked some of them up.

Qing Wanglai couldn't get me a gun, but the kidnappers were kind enough to drop theirs for me. Li Huowang held the heavy lump of metal and played with it.

He felt much safer with it in his hands, although he had no clue about how to use it properly.

Even though Qing Wanglai's chemical hadn't been that efficient, Li Huowang still recognized that it had been vital to them. Without it, it would've been difficult for them to capture so many people.

Li Huowang toyed with the gun until he realized that he didn't know how to replace the magazine or turn off the safety. He then gingerly placed the gun down.

He was hoping that Qing Wanglai would have the time to teach him.

Li Huowang then picked up a military knife. It was sharp and broad, but Li Huowang placed it down.

The knife was more suitable for slashing people rather than killing them. Unless he managed to cut a person's artery, the enemy would have a higher chance of running from the adrenaline rush instead.

Li Huowang rummaged around the pile until he found a narrower knife.

The knife was completely black, approximately thirty centimeters long, and razor sharp. The hilt was even wrapped in hemp rope to prevent the user's blood from making it slippery.

He picked it up and stabbed the table in front of him. The knife easily left a hole in it.

He checked the hole in the table and nodded with satisfaction before he picked up another knife to keep behind his back.

It was helpful to have a knife because it could be easily concealed and required no training to use.

Chapter 765 - Ba

Li Huowang chose the weapons he liked the best before leaving the RV.

Since they are our enemies, we should always be prepared for the worst-case scenario. We can't even be sure that Qing Wanglai will successfully negotiate with them.

Qian Fu panicked when he saw Li Huowang leaving the RV. "Li Huowang! It's fine if you don't trust me, but please go and ask the others! They all know what Qing Wanglai has done! They just didn't tell you!"

Li Huowang turned around as he held the door knob. "Then answer one question. If they already know what Qing Wanglai did in the past, why are they still following him?"

Qian Fu remained silent.

Li Huowang continued, "I don't care what Qing Wanglai did in the past. It's not my job to bring him to justice, even if he killed someone. I don't care what he did before.

"I can assure you that I do not think of them as a family. I am only working with them to take care of the external threats I'm facing. Do you understand? Do you really think I like mingling with mentally ill people like them?"

Li Huowang was about to leave the RV when Qian Fu shuddered and twitched.

"Hm?" Li Huowang stopped.

"Li Huowang? Where am I? Why am I tied up?" Qian Fu asked Li Huowang in confusion.

"Oh? You are back?" Li Huowang approached him to release the ropes.

"You have a really good time here. We did all the dirty work

while you were staying here.”

“Really? What did you do?” Qian Fu was surprised and asked Li Huowang for more details.

“We followed your instructions and destroyed the UFO of the aliens.”

“Really? Aliens? What happened?”

Li Huowang stopped suddenly. He took two steps back and examined Qian Fu again. He then realized something was off.

“No, you’re not the other Qian Fu. You’re pretending to be him. It’s a shame that you’re not convincing enough. Just stay here quietly.” Li Huowang left, ignoring Qian Fu’s angry shouts.

He returned to the underground basement to tell the others about Qian Fu so that they wouldn’t get tricked by him.

But then, he saw someone unfamiliar speaking with Qing Wanglai near the entrance to the basement.

The person was dressed strangely and had a buzz cut. His entire body, neck, and half of his face were tattooed with thorny vines. His ear lobes were pierced with a huge hole capable of fitting two fingers in. As he talked to Qing Wanglai, Li Huowang also saw a tongue piercing in his mouth.

Li Huowang observed Qing Wanglai’s expression and deduced that the strange newcomer was someone they knew. His grip on the knife behind his back loosened slowly.

The man was very cautious, however. He shut up the moment he saw Li Huowang getting close to him.

“This is...?” Li Huowang wanted to ask who it was, but before he could, the man glared at Li Huowang warily and left.

Li Huowang looked at the man’s back and saw that the hair on his head was also a tattoo. The man was originally bald and had a buzzcut tattooed on his head!

“Who is he?” Li Huowang asked.

“Do you remember when I said that there were other people

who realized that we are mere projections? Other than us, there are others who couldn't be reasoned with, and others who wouldn't join us. He's the latter."

"Then why did he find you today? Does he want to work with us?"

"No. He was confident that he could deal with the problem alone. He just noticed we were taking action and came here to confirm it with us."

"That's strange. I never imagined someone would refuse to join us after learning about what had happened."

"Everyone has their own thoughts. He's almost like a hermit. We can't force him to join us."

"What's his name?"

"His surname is Ba. Ba Shengqing. He opened a tattoo shop and is quite skillful. You can find him if you need a tattoo."

"Ba Shengqing? What a stupid name."

"There are people with that surname, but it is very rare. I suspect he's from an indigenous tribe and doesn't want to tell us about it," Wu Qi said.[\[1\]](#)

Li Huowang committed the name to memory and checked the time. "I need to go back first. My family will be suspicious if I keep staying outside. Let me know immediately if you have any progress."

Li Huowang took one last at the prisoners before he left.

"Hey, remember to bring some snacks for us next time you come here. There's nothing at this dump," Chen Hongyu grumbled.

"I understand." Li Huowang hopped on his bike before realizing he had heard something familiar a long time ago.

Yang Na noticed Li Huowang's confusion. "Huowang?"

Li Huowang shook his head and left.

He had just exited Orange Isle when his phone rang. He saw the name and was surprised because it was none other than Yi

Donglai.

“Doctor Yi? Is something wrong?”

—I just called to make sure you are fine. How is everything recently? Are there any new hallucinations? Or maybe new symptoms?

“No, I’m fine right now. I’m completely cured. Thank you for your help, Doctor Yi! It seems that my mom sent the brocade to the right person.”

Just then, Li Huowang saw a motorbike parked just off the street. The person beside the motorbike was none other than Ba Shengqing.

They locked gazes, and Li Huowang noticed another interesting detail. It appeared that Ba Shengqing’s eyeballs had tattoos too.

It was the first time Li Huowang had seen eye tattoos.

—Li Huowang? Can you hear me?”

“Oh, yes, I’m listening. Please continue.”

—I’m asking if you are still taking your medicine on time.

“Yes, I’m still taking it on time.” Li Huowang lied. He hadn’t done so.

He stopped taking his medications after he captured the prisoners.

Now that it was certain that someone was stalking and trying to kidnap him, Li Huowang did not need to take his medicine. He thought that he was fine.

His medications had severe side effects. If he continued taking them, he could get a new disease soon.

—Then that’s good. Remember to take it on time to avoid relapsing. More importantly, it will prevent you from hallucinating again.

Li Huowang saw Ba Shengqing approaching him and nodded. “Alright, I understand. Doctor Yi, I still have some things to do, so I need to hang up now.”

1. The surname Ba has four possible origins. One hypothesis suggests that the surname Ba came from a place called Ba Shui, currently somewhere on the eastern side of Sichuan. Back then, there were five tribes, and the Ba tribe was one of them. 📖

Chapter 766 - Woman

“Li Huowang?” A black motorbike rumbled and stopped beside him.

Li Huowang looked at the tattooed man, Ba Shengqing. He gave Li Huowang a bad impression due to his tattoos.

Even so, Li Huowang extended his hand for a handshake. *It wouldn't hurt to have another ally.* “Nice to meet you.”

Ba Shengqing did not shake his hand and instead stared at Yang Na.

Li Huowang frowned and took a side step to block his gaze. “What did you talk to Qing Wanglai about just now?”

Ba Shengqing ignored Li Huowang's question. “Were you involved in the recent events?”

Li Huowang naturally didn't answer him since Ba Shengqing never answered him either. He just glared at Ba Shengqing.

“You shouldn't get involved.” Ba Shengqing understood something from Li Huowang's silence.

“Hoh. As if I could get away from this by ignoring them. They were the ones who attacked me first. You shouldn't give me any advice if you don't know my situation.”

Ba Shengqing flicked his wrist, and his motorbike roared to life. “Come. My sister wants to see you.”

“Your sister?” Li Huowang wasn't sure what was happening. *Who is his sister? Why does it seem that they know a lot about me?*

But Ba Shengqing had no intention of answering him. He just revved his motorbike and sped away.

Li Huowang was still hesitating when Yang Na whispered, “Huowang, it's best if we don't go. He doesn't seem like a good guy.”

“I know, but...” Li Huowang couldn’t tell her what he was thinking. Somehow, the gaze coming from Ba Shengqing was familiar to him.

“Let’s just go and see what’s happening. There’s no reason for me to be afraid of his motorbike if I can destroy an entire truck.” Li Huowang then followed Ba Shengqing with his rental bike.

But Li Huowang didn’t trust Ba Shengqing completely, either. He decided he would turn back and leave the moment Ba Shengqing rode towards a remote location.

Li Huowang was surprised to see Ba Shengqing riding towards a busy street instead of a remote place.

Li Huowang followed him to the second floor of a row of shops, where he saw Ba Shengqing entering a tattoo shop called Bloody Bonfire. His name was strange, and so was the name of the shop.

Li Huowang was hesitating about bringing Yang Na into a potentially dangerous place when she took out her phone.

“Huowang, I won’t stop you from entering. I will record from the outside and look out for you. The moment there’s anything wrong, I will call the police and inform Qing Wanglai.”

“Alright.” Feeling the knife on his back, Li Huowang relaxed a bit before entering the shop.

Ba Shengqing’s shop was the same as the other tattoo shops. It was decorated with photos of various tattoos.

The shop had numerous cubicles separated by black cloths. The sound of ominous buzzing came from some of them.

Ba Shengqing threw his motorbike keys onto the counter and entered one of the cubicles without waiting for Li Huowang.

The buzzing sound stopped for a moment before it resumed. A woman walked out from the cubicle with a cigarette in her mouth.

She looked just like Ba Shengqing, with her face and neck covered in tattoos of thorny vines. The difference was that her tattoo was on the left, while Ba Shengqing’s was on the right.

Her hair, however, was real. Her dyed grey hair covered the tattoo, which extended all the way to the top left part of her head.

She had piercings on her left eyelid, and both of her ears were heavily gilded with accessories. Her eye shadow and lips were black too.

She looked pretty in her getup.

Li Huowang noticed some similarities with Ba Shengqing and thought that she was most likely Ba Shengqing's sister.

The two looked at each other and said nothing.

Li Huowang was certain that this was the first time they had met, but there was a familiar feeling coming from her too.

"Are you Ba Shengqing's sister? You wanted to see me? Do you know me? Have we met before?"

She took her cigarettes with two of her fingers and exhaled the smoke onto Li Huowang. "Fuck. You talk like you are trying to sleep with me."

The familiar feeling vanished. Li Huowang was disgusted by her mannerisms and tone.

"Why are you looking for me? I will take my leave if you have nothing to say." Li Huowang had just turned around when she blocked his path.

But before she could say anything, Li Huowang already had his knife on her neck.

Sensing the cold metal, she became serious as she placed the cigarette in her mouth. She slowly pushed the knife out of her neck. "Don't trust Qing Wanglai. He's not a good guy."

Li Huowang didn't react to her words. He wasn't someone stupid that would trust anyone that came to him. For now, Qing Wanglai had done nothing to harm him.

But he did notice that her tongue was forked like a snake.

Even though he knew he shouldn't judge someone based on their looks, her appearance was far too off-putting for her to make a

good impression.

“Thank you for your warning. Did you ask your brother to bring me here just for this? I will keep that in mind. Thank you.” Li Huowang sheathed his knife and turned to leave.

“One more thing. Qian Fu and Qing Wanglai are working together. Everything he’s doing is most likely an order from Qing Wanglai.”

Li Huowang was already at the door, with Yang Na waiting just outside of it. “And why are you telling me this? To stir up trouble between us?”

“Sit.” The woman tapped her cigarette on a table filled with drawings of tattoos before tossing the cigarette butt into an ashtray. She then lit up another.

“I’m sure Qing Wanglai probably told you something about projections and parallel worlds? Don’t trust him. He’s crazy.” She pointed at her temples.

“I don’t care if he’s crazy or not. It won’t stop me from working with him to fight my enemy. As for you siblings... You guys were just sitting here and doing nothing.” Li Huowang scoffed.

“Fuck. Who said we didn’t do anything? This is the first time you have met us. Do you think you know us well?”

Li Huowang turned around and saw that the woman had already placed both of her legs up on the table. “Don’t follow Qing Wanglai’s plans. He will lure you into a trap. Since everyone has a different perspective, you should walk your own path. It would be bad if you got together just for the sake of working together. You can deal with anything if you follow your own path.”

Li Huowang didn’t understand what she was talking about. He had the feeling that she was going to talk about her views.

Chapter 767 - Awakening

“Are you guys really siblings? Is your surname Ba too?”

Li Huowang decided not to follow their conversation anymore. He was ready to leave if they didn't have any helpful information. There was no reason to listen to their baseless accusations.

The woman noticed that Li Huowang had changed the subject. “You’re right. I am Ba Nanxu, and he is Ba Shengqing. We’re twins.”

“Twins? I don’t see the similarity. He’s quite tall while you’re quite skinny.”

“That’s because we were conjoined twins. He took most of the nutrients, which caused me to be skinny.”

Li Huowang was shocked by this revelation. Ba Nanxu then pointed at her tattoo of thorny vines.

“We were once joined here. The tattoos are used to cover up the scars.”

Li Huowang recalled the tattoos on Ba Shengqing’s face. He never thought the tattoos were used to cover up scars!

“Then the surgery must’ve been dangerous, right?”

“We didn’t have the chance to undergo surgery. Our parents died early, and we had no money. We used a pair of scissors to separate ourselves.”

Li Huowang recovered from his shock when he heard that. “I don’t believe you. If you did that, the pain would’ve been unbearable. You would’ve passed out and even bled to death.”

“Hahaha, yeah.” Ba Nanxu took a deep drag on her cigarette. *Why is she not getting to the point?*

Li Huowang looked around the tattoo shop and stood up to leave.

“Ji Zai, something was stolen from you.”

A familiar gaze caused him to turn around and look at Ba Nanxu. "What did you say? Who were you calling?!"

"Hm?" Ba Nanxu looked at him, puzzled.

"What did you call me just now?!" Li Huowang grabbed her wrist as he shouted.

"Just now? I didn't say anything. Although this is quite a unique way to flirt with me."

"Ji Zai! You called me that just now! Why did both Qian Fu and you call me that?!"

Why does everyone know my name? How do they know the fake name that Zhuge Yuan had given me?

The memories started resurfacing against his own will.

Li Huowang tried to forget everything, but the memories crept up like a vine enveloping his brain. Zhao Lei's words echoed in his ears.

"Answer me! Why are you calling me Ji Zai?!"

"Let go." A cold voice came from his back. Ba Shengqing somehow appeared behind him, his tattoo gun on Li Huowang's back.

Li Huowang released Ba Nanxu and looked at Ba Shengqing seriously. He suddenly had a very disturbing thought.

"Both of you are conjoined twins. Why are your surnames Ba?"

"Because my father has the surname Ba. Is there a problem with that?" Ba Nanxu crossed her arms and looked at Li Huowang with confusion.

"No. Something's wrong." Li Huowang looked at their tattoos, forked tongues, and various piercings. His eyes lit up with a sudden epiphany.

"Pain! It's pain! I understand now! Both of you are..."

The words were just at the tip of his tongue, but he couldn't say them. That feeling drove him crazy.

Li Huowang stabbed his own palm with a knife.

The pain gave him clarity.

He pointed at the two and shouted, “I understand now! Both of you are Ba-Hui! You are a projection of Ba-Hui! Everything is fake!”

As he said that, Li Huowang felt his heart going empty.

Not only did he recognize Ba-Hui, but he also recognized Chen Hongyu, the one who had told him to get snacks for them. She was also a Siming—Abbess Jingxin’s Siming!

The others are probably Simings too. I don’t recognize them since I’m not familiar with the other Simings, but I am very familiar with Ba-Hui.

That was why he felt their gazes were very familiar.

The Ba siblings stepped back in unison when they saw Li Huowang acting strangely. The customer in the cubicle had already run out without his shirt because he was shocked by Li Huowang’s actions and bloody hand.

“The two of you were originally one! No, the two of you should be a single Siming! I know you guys! No wonder you guys are so familiar! You are Ba-Hui!”

Then why are they calling me Ji Zai? Who is Ji Zai?

It was not just a simple fake name. It meant something more.

“If you are the projections of a Siming, then am I...” Li Huowang looked at his own body. “Am I a Siming too? Am I a projection? Impossible! When did I become a Siming? When? What kind of Siming am I?”

Li Huowang started recalling the things he had been suppressing.

“I was conjured with the cultivation of ‘Truth’? I really am a Siming? Does that mean this world is fake? Is it all just a projection?”

Fear gripped his heart. He ignored Ba-Hui and bolted from the tattoo shop into the sunlit streets.

Yang Na followed him and anxiously asked, “Huowang? What’s

wrong? What happened just now?”

Li Huowang looked around while panting, unable to focus on her words.

He suddenly squatted down and touched the stone path. The surface was smooth and hard. He even rubbed his face over the stone.

“This is so real. How could it be fake? How could this be the projection?”

Li Huowang suddenly stood up and ran towards a pillar.

He looked at the poster pinned to the pillar before tearing it down. He shakily tore the poster in half.

He listened as the sound of paper being torn reached his ears, and then he saw the gradual tearing of the paper right before his very eyes.

The contradiction hurt him. *Maybe I'm overthinking? Maybe everything is real?*

He suddenly crouched onto the ground and picked up the paper strips before chewing on them. He tasted it and felt his saliva turning the torn poster into wads of damp paper.

He felt gazes coming from all directions. He looked up and saw the crowd pointing at him.

What are they? What are their projections? Other Simings or enemies? Why are they crowding around me?

Li Huowang snarled slowly as he held tightly onto the hilt of his sword.

Chapter 768 - Ba-Hui

Who are they? What do they want? I am a Siming, so are they Simings too? How many Simings are there in the Baiyu Capital? What do they want?!

Li Huowang couldn't differentiate between what was real and what was fake, so he was wary of everyone right now.

He was going to take out his knife to protect himself when he felt the cold press of metal on his back.

The cold metal crackled, and intense pain surged into his body from the electric shocks.

"Who's attacking me?!" Li Huowang turned around with difficulty from the pain.

What awaited him was Yang Na's crying face. She was crying as she took out another taser, pushed it into Li Huowang's clothes, and pressed the button.

"It's you?! Why?"

Yang Na bit her lips. She had to do this because Li Huowang was ill again. If she didn't stop him now, he could end up killing people on the streets.

If he did that, he would be locked up forever.

Yang Na originally got a taser not to fight enemies but to prevent Li Huowang from doing anything stupid if his illness were to strike again.

The two of them locked eyes. Li Huowang's lips trembled as the taser continued to shock him. "Wait, stop a moment."

Yang Na's sadness and the intense pain slowly pulled Li Huowang out of his bewilderment.

But she refused. She continued to press the buttons on both tasers to shock Li Huowang. She refused to stop until he was

unconscious.

“I said stop!” Li Huowang grabbed Yang Na’s hands for a brief moment. The electrical current surged into Yang Na briefly. She yelped and dropped the tasers.

Li Huowang picked up the tasers and held her in his embrace. She was already slumping over from the shock.

“I’m fine. I’m fine,” Li Huowang repeated. It wasn’t clear if he was trying to calm himself down or calm Yang Na down.

The two of them hugged. The crowds were disappointed by the lack of action, so they lowered their phones.

“Hey lady, are you alright? Is he threatening you? Do you know this scarred man? Do you want us to call the police?” Several youths came forward to check on her.

Yang Na cried as she placed her face into Li Huowang’s embrace. “It’s fine. I’m his girlfriend. We were just breaking up.”

The crowd heard that it was just a lover’s quarrel. They lost interest and scattered in a flash.

Li Huowang hugged Yang Na and stumbled towards the stairs. He entered the tattoo shop again to place her on the sofa.

The Ba siblings didn’t chase them away. Instead, they temporarily closed their doors and stopped receiving customers.

Li Huowang’s body was still twitching occasionally, a side effect of the electric shocks. But there was a bigger problem that he had to consider. He was still confused.

“Is everything fake? If you’re fake, then whose projection are you? Why are you so real despite being fake?” Li Huowang looked at Yang Na’s tearful eyes and felt his heart ache from seeing Yang Na’s worried gaze.

He kissed her. He wanted to know what was real or fake.

He didn’t want to care if he was a projection or not. He only cared about whether Yang Na was the same Yang Na that had stayed up late at night on the rooftop to look at the stars with him.

One of the Ba siblings kicked the sofa. “Why the hell are you kissing so passionately? Do you want to get naked and give us a good show? Do you need a condom?”

Li Huowang stood up suddenly and looked at Ba Nanxu. “Stop pretending! What did you mean just now? Who stole something from me? And is this world real or not? You wanted to turn me into your Twisted One, didn’t you? Then tell me what is happening, and I will be your Twisted One!”

Li Huowang refused to accept this as reality because if it really was a projection, his parents, Yang Na, and even his experience of being discharged were all fake.

If he really transmigrated, he would never be able to get back. Everything he knew would be gone forever.

Ba Nanxu chuckled. “Well, it seems I was mistaken. You are much crazier than Qing Wanglai. It’s a good thing you found him.”

With a flash of steel, Li Huowang unsheathed both of his knives and snarled, “Tell me everything, Ba-Hui! I still haven’t paid you back for all the suffering you caused me!”

Ba Nanxu scoffed and threw the cigarette onto the ground. “You want to threaten me with a knife? Do you even realize that when you were just a baby, I was already burying people? Your little tricks won’t scare me.”

“Stop pretending! I’ve already recognized your gaze! You are Ba-Hui!”

“Who said I’m pretending? Also, put down the knife! One, two, three!”

Li Huowang heard the sound of the wind whooshing and sensed the impending danger. He dropped to his knees, narrowly avoiding being hit in the head by a colossal glass cabinet. He would’ve died if that had hit him.

The person who swung the glass cabinet was none other than Ba Shengqing!

Li Huowang turned and stabbed towards Ba Shengqing's legs with his knife. Just then, he felt pain coming from his waist.

He didn't turn back since he knew it was Ba Nanxu's doing. Instead, he continued to stab his knife towards Ba Shengqing in an attempt to injure him. He wanted to wound them no matter what!

A sharp cry stopped both of them just as blood was about to be drawn. "AAAAA! Stop it!"

They turned around and saw Yang Na had sat up. She raised her phone high. "Qing Wanglai wants to talk to you! Stop fighting and just talk it out!"

Everyone slowly retreated.

Li Huowang touched his waist and pulled out a spike-like earring.

"Crazy bastard!" Ba Nanxu took the phone. "Hey, you've gotta be a fucking psycho to take in this lunatic. Did you know that I was going to find him, so you told him to cause some trouble for me?"

Chapter 769 - Projection

Li Huowang frowned and stared at Ba Nanxu talking on the phone. *If they are Ba-Hui and Chen Hongyu is the Siming in control of rot, then what kind of Siming is Qing Wanglai? Does he know something about this world?*

There are so many Simings. There must be one of them who knows about what is happening.

Ba Nanxu frowned and threw the phone at Li Huowang. “Get out of my shop once you finish your call! What a waste of my kindness!”

Li Huowang grabbed the phone as he looked at the two siblings, who were placing the cabinet back in its original location. “Hello?”

—It’s me, Qing Wanglai. Yang Na told me about the situation. Don’t panic, and slowly explain what happened. Why are you suddenly behaving like this?

Li Huowang hesitated. He decided to speak after considering that Qing Wanglai was the one who introduced him to the hypothesis of different projections. “I finally understand what is happening in this world. I always wondered why this place was weird. It’s because this is not the world where I should be staying!”

Qing Wanglai paused when he heard Li Huowang’s explanation.

—Li Huowang, I think I understand what happened. Is it because you think this world is fake? Do you think your real girlfriend and parents are somewhere else? Do you think that you’ve transmigrated and that everything here is fake?

Li Huowang was conflicted when he looked at how real Yang Na was. “Isn’t it true? Didn’t you tell me that everything is a

projection?”

—I did tell you that the entire world is a projection, but that doesn't mean it's fake. We have flesh and our own thoughts. We are real. We are real projections, you understand? So why did you think that your past was not a projection?

—When I said that this world is a projection, I also meant that your past is a projection. You've always been here. The Yang Na you knew is the same. Your parents are the same. You are the same as us, so you don't need to be confused. We are just projections.

“They are all projections? Everything I've seen in the past is a projection?” Li Huowang pondered, reflecting on his memories from kindergarten, primary school, and high school. “They are all projections? Impossible!”

—Why not? Nothing is impossible. It's just that you never noticed it in the past.

Li Huowang fell into silence upon hearing this.

—Don't worry. You never got transmigrated. You're the same, and they have always been by your side. Nothing has changed. You just need to accept this hypothesis.

This hypothesis seemed much more reasonable compared to what he had previously thought and the despair it had caused him. It was easier for him to believe that everything had always been a projection.

Li Huowang remained silent as he took it all in. “And is there any proof? I need proof to believe that everything in the past was a projection. I won't just take your word for it.”

—Do you have proof that your past was not a projection?

“I do!”

Li Huowang's certainty confused Qing Wanglai.

—You do? Then tell me.

“I might be a Siming, but I was materialized using the power to cultivate the ‘Truth.’ That means that my past is not a projection!”

Both sides of the phone remained silent.

—Li Huowang, maybe it's best if we're honest with each other. I fear that we won't get to the end of it if you continue to argue about this ceaselessly.

"Fine! I will have to prove it with my own methods!" Li Huowang hung up.

Even though he said that, his mood was already visibly better than before.

Qing Wanglai had given him a good hypothesis. If he was a projection in the past, then he didn't have to worry about what the projections of his family and Yang Na were.

It was bizarre, but Li Huowang was currently experiencing something even more bizarre. He set aside the hypothesis for now, focusing on finding answers instead.

He wiped the blood on the phone with his shirt before returning it to Yang Na.

The two of them looked at each other. Li Huowang pondered if he should ask her, but it would be a waste of time if she really was a projection.

"Let's go back. We can talk more later." Li Huowang held Yang Na and headed towards the exit.

He was already at the door when he turned around and looked at the Ba siblings.

"Ba-Hui, we are technically old acquaintances. If you can help me figure out what's happening, I will consider joining forces with you. That way, you won't be all alone if you're attacked. They are targeting the Simings, and some of them have already died. Are you sure you won't be next?"

"Crazy bastard." The two siblings ignored him and shut the door.

That's strange. Ba-Hui should've recognized me. We even met numerous times. Was I wrong? Li Huowang shook his head. *No, they*

must be Ba-Hui! They even warned me just now. I must be right, but why aren't they talking to me?

“Is this because everything is a projection? Is the projection warping their meanings? What is this projection, then? How come there's a layer of projection after I've become a Siming?”

He recalled the people attacking him and frowned. *I've been so focused on my own problems that I never really spent time figuring out who they were. If we are the Simings from the Baiyu Capital, then who are the attackers?*

Li Huowang's frown deepened at the thought that so many figures could threaten a Siming.

“Li Huowang, let's go back. You should take your medicine. Did you become like this after you stopped taking it?”

“What medicine? I finally figured out what was wrong and who they really are! They must be the people from god Yu'er!”

Li Huowang took Yang Na away from the busy street, feeling like he had finally pieced everything together.

Chapter 770 - Bai

Dong dong dong~ Dun dun dun~ The drum beat rhythmically.

“Mount the Heavenly Disc, and the sky will rotate. Mount the Earthly Disc, and the earth will rotate. A black fish carries the earth while the qi above supports the skies. The black fish supports the moving earth. The qi supports the revolving sky. This was how the stars were arranged.”

Amidst Bai Lingmiao’s drumming, the incense from the house’s four corners slowly enveloped the dying baby.

White smoke entered the baby’s orifices. Bai Lingmiao took out a pair of scissors and cut open a small hole in the baby’s left palm.

Bai Lingmiao pressed hard on the baby’s left palm. The white smoke and a dark yellow gelatinous goo were forced out from the small wound.

As she continued to squeeze out the goo, the baby’s face became redder, and he soon started crying.

An old man also began crying when he heard the baby crying. “My son is alive! My family finally has an heir!”

The old man brought his entire family and kneeled on the ground before Bai Lingmiao, “Saintess! Thank you for saving our entire family! For the sake of the White Lotus Sect’s prosperity, we will donate our belongings! From now on, we will devote our everything to the White Lotus Sect!”

Bai Lingmiao walked out of the courtyard. Meanwhile, devotees of the White Lotus Sect marked chests filled with gold and silver with tapes of the sect as they hauled them out from the estate.

“Are we doing the right thing?” Bai Lingmiao asked.

The Second Deity scoffed. “We’re already this late into the

game and you still have the time to think whether this is fine? Think about what he had done in the past! If I was the one who made the decision, I would've blackmailed him using his son and taken all of his belongings instead!"

Bai Lingmiao remained quiet as she stared at the beggars downing bowls of porridge near a stand.

The world was in chaos, so it wasn't a time to be considerate to others. This amount of money could be used to save so many more people. The old tycoon would've just kept the money in his vault to rot. Money was meant to be spent to maximize its value!

Now that they were at war, there were very few people working in the fields. The cost of food was rising rapidly.

Bai Lingmiao walked out of the city and looked at the devotees working hard in the fields. All of them ran towards her and kneeled the moment they saw her.

"I am Qian Chaoqing. I greet the Saintess."

"How's the field?"

Qian Chaoqing's face was covered in dirt when she frowned.

"Saintess, it's as you've said. It's very bad right now. We've lost so many divisions in a day that the calendar is worthless now. I don't even know the season now. More importantly, the weather for the past few years has been bad."

Bai Lingmiao looked up. The clouds were flowing in a weird pattern, condensing and dispersing occasionally, as if something was fighting inside them.

"It's either a drought or flood. Saintess, I've been working in the fields for over forty years, but this is the first time I've faced so much difficulty. We have a lot of laborers from the White Lotus Sect, but no matter how hard we worked, we only managed to get half the amount of food compared to the previous years. There are even places where they yielded less than me."

"Do not worry about this. We will work as hard as we can

while we leave the rest to the Heavenly Mater.”

The white lotus on Bai Lingmiao’s forehead glowed faintly. Qian Chaoqing felt as if he had found the greatest treasure of his life, and he smiled before returning to his fields to work.

This was Bai Lingmiao’s idea—delegate the task of planting food to those with weak comprehension skills. Since they couldn’t learn any techniques from the White Lotus Sect, they were used as laborers.

For the sake of defeating the Dharma Sect, the devotees of the White Lotus Sect were willing to do anything.

The White Lotus Sect was rapidly expanding and providing background support for each country. She was maximizing every single resource in each one.

Producing food in every country was extremely helpful. Transporting the food from the Liang Kingdom to Si Qi would’ve wasted too much time and resources. Bai Lingmiao was certain that most of the food would’ve been eaten during the journey.

“I thought the Heavenly Mater was strong? How come she can’t just produce food?” The Second Deity taunted.

Bai Lingmiao shook her head lightly. “Even the Immortal Families can’t do so. I sent people to scour the lands, but none of them reported anything about a deity that could give us bountiful crops.”

“Hmph! Many of them can’t even help us. All they know is how to take from us.”

“We have to think of a plan. We don’t know how much longer we’ll have to fight.”

“Rather than thinking about how to produce more food, we should get rid of the Dharma Sect as soon as possible. We can then take over their granaries. That way, we won’t have to worry about food anymore.”[\[1\]](#)

Bai Lingmiao did not protest that idea. She continued to walk

and reached the barracks. They were special because the banner was a white donkey following a white lotus.

She saw numerous shirtless young men around fifteen to sixteen years old. They were all standing there and observing the master on the stage turning impervious to all bladed weapons. They yearned to learn that technique.

The youths were specially selected for their excellent comprehension abilities and physical bodies.

They had a wide selection of candidates since they could recruit a lot of people, but they were expanding so fast that they didn't have enough masters to teach the disciples.

Rather than a barrack, the place was more like a mobile temple for the Heavenly Mater. There were altars and drawings of the Heavenly Mater everywhere.

The White Lotus Sect accepted both men and women. All they required was good comprehension. Bai Lingmiao soon saw a familiar face on another stage, Chun Xiaoman.

She was very strict in her teachings. The black hair covering her body scared everyone.

“You are all women! If you want to live you will follow my training! You will not stop until I tell you to stop! If you lose on the battlefield, you will face an ending worse than death! I chose all of you because your family was killed by the Dharma Sect! If you think you can't endure it anymore, think about how your family was killed by the Dharma Sect! Think about how you swore to kill them for revenge!”

As she shouted, the women started stomping and chanting their sutras. All of them had a red dot on their forehead.

As they chanted, they began walking barefooted onto a large path of burning coal.

Many of them were unharmed when they walked out, but some were less proficient and got burned.

Thankfully, there were people on standby with buckets of sand. The moment any of them burned up, they threw the bucket of sand at them. Whoever had been burned would then be eliminated.

Bai Lingmiao couldn't stomach it, but she didn't call for them to stop. If the Dharma Sect won, there would be even more deaths.

Only after taking command did Bai Lingmiao realize there were no perfect plans, only the best ones possible given the circumstances. She could only choose plans that required the least sacrifice.

Bai Lingmiao had thought that her personality wouldn't allow her to do so, but every time she remembered how the Emperor of Si Qi talked about sacrificing 1,800,000 people for the sake of the world, she steeled herself to prepare for the worst.

She was doing this not only for herself—it was also for the sake of the other members of the White Lotus Sect.

She remembered what she had sworn to do, to prevent the others from losing their family. She didn't want them to suffer what she had gone through herself.

Bai Lingmiao had been working hard for that.

She was patrolling the area when she saw a paper crane flying down from the air.

She opened the paper crane and thought she had misread it. Xuan Pin was calling for her to discuss something.

1. The Dharma Sect drinks stone water to begin with. I doubt that they would leave the granary unpoisoned. 🙏

Chapter 771 - Banquet

Bai Lingmiao slowly made her way towards the grand hall under the guidance of four eunuchs holding lanterns.

This was not the palace of Si Qi's Emperor. It was a smaller place he lived in to escape the summer heat. [1] Even so, the entire place was built based on the palace itself.

Bai Lingmiao grew closer and heard the sound of cheerful music.

She entered the hall and saw hundreds of people sitting in two rows, chatting happily and toasting each other.

There were civil officers, martial officers, monks, daoists, and several others who looked like they didn't belong there.

In the middle of the hall, several beautiful ladies with small feet were elegantly and gracefully dancing in the palm of a massive armored man.

"Is this a celebratory banquet?" Bai Lingmiao wasn't sure what was happening. "Is this why Xuan Pin sent a message for me to come here?"

"Saintess, please sit here." The eunuchs guided her to a designated seat.

As soon as she sat, several rare dishes, such as bear paws and deer antlers, were served to her.

Bai Lingmiao ignored the food. She turned to look at the massive person in red robes sitting beside the main throne.

It was Xuan Pin. The dead Xuan Pin has somehow appeared again.

Bai Lingmiao wanted to take a closer look, but Xuan Pin noticed her. He shook his head gently and gestured to her to remain still.

She felt a familiar presence and frowned but still complied. She sat down without a word.

Bai Lingmiao then looked towards the main table and saw the emperors sitting on their thrones. The Liang Kingdom's Emperor, Qing Qiu's Khan, Si Qi's Emperor, and Hou Shu's Emperor were all present.

Gao Zhijian's status was the highest, so he sat in the middle. Qing Qiu's Khan sat at his side while the emperors from Si Qi and Hou Shu, who had just regained their kingdoms, sat on the edge.

Gao Zhijian held his cup, and the eunuchs gave the dancers a knowing look. The dancers swiftly finished the dance and retreated.

"Today." Gao Zhijian's low voice silenced the hall. "Today, I am thrilled to announce that the kingdom of Si Qi has been reclaimed from the evil Dharma Sect!"

Everyone in the hall smiled at the good news.

Gao Zhijian continued his speech. Bai Lingmiao had no formal education, but she still felt that his speech was meaningless.

The point was that the Dharma Sect had been defeated in Si Qi, and everyone was called to work towards its complete eradication diligently, with the goal of restoring normalcy by the end of the year.

The dancers made a comeback. This time, they didn't dance on the man's palm—they danced on top of some drums! Their tiny white feet moved rhythmically on the drums, synchronizing with the beat of the music. The crowd loved it.

Bai Lingmiao felt conflicted when she witnessed how wasteful the others were being, all while her followers had to make do with nearly spoiled vegetables.

She waited until the banquet ended late at night.

When almost everyone had left the hall, Bai Lingmiao approached Si Qi's Emperor. "Your Majesty, the war is not over. I don't believe spending so much on a feast is necessary."

“I was the one who told them to do it,” Gao Zhijian said. He looked exhausted, as if the weight of his crown was too heavy.

“Junior Bai, I understand what you are trying to say, but we cannot skimp on this. If we don’t do this, the people beneath us will speculate a lot. The expenses for tonight are a minor cost to reassure everyone and make them believe everything is running smoothly.”

Bai Lingmiao looked at Gao Zhijian and noticed that he was much different now.

Bai Lingmiao decided to let it go and asked another question. “And what about Xuan Pin? Isn’t he dead?”

Gao Zhijian waved his hands and signaled the guards to surround the palace. The eunuchs became the second line of defense as they surrounded the place too. “Let’s talk inside.”

They entered the inner palace. Then, Bai Lingmiao saw that Li Sui and Li Huowang were hidden beneath Xuan Pin’s robes. Li Sui slithered out of the robes with her tentacles, revealing Li Huowang’s face beneath the robes.

The Xuan Pin that everyone had seen at the banquet was fake—it was actually Li Huowang and Li Sui in disguise. The real Xuan Pin was dead.

The red robes filled with weird runes were trailing on Li Huowang’s body like a large bedsheet.

However, the red robes eventually became smaller until they became a good fit for Li Huowang’s body.

Li Huowang hugged Bai Lingmiao lightly before letting her go.

“We cannot let news of Xuan Pin’s death spread. It would affect the soldier’s morale,” Gao Zhijian said as a group of people walked into the inner palace.

Those who could enter the place were naturally the core nucleus of the allied army. Everyone in the room knew what had happened.

The banquet was just a smokescreen. The real fight began here.

As everyone took a seat on the chairs adorned with gold embroidery, the eunuchs served them a cup of tea before making their way out.

In contrast to the festive mood outside, the atmosphere within the inner palace was rather somber. A wisp of white steam escaped from the teacup, yet silence hung in the air, with no one daring to break it.

Li Huowang was the first one to talk. “Xuan Pin is dead and there’s no need to hide anything from me. How’s the situation?”

Li Huowang steeled himself for the battle to come, no matter how hard it would get.

But no one replied to him.

“What? Do you all think my rank is so low that I don’t have the right to ask?”

He looked at Gao Zhijian, who gestured at the deputy chief of the Liang Kingdom’s Surveillance Bureau to speak.

“The Dharma Sect is now hiding in Nan Ping. We’ve just sent the informants and we have no insight into their internal structure yet.”

Li Huowang frowned. “That’s it? I don’t believe that you guys would still hide information from me when the situation is already this critical.”

“Daoist Li, Chief Xuan Pin instructed not to divulge certain information to you.”

“Stop trying to use him to suppress me! I don’t have to listen to his orders! How did he die if he’s really that strong? Don’t try to push me to the side—I intend to fight in the war! Tell me everything, including what you expect me to do. I’ll decide if I want to do it or not!”

Gao Zhijian waved lightly at Li Huowang to calm him down. “Senior Li, please don’t be upset. They are not trying to hide

anything from you. What specific questions do you have? They will talk.”

“How did Xuan Pin die? What happened to them while I was fighting Ma Tuo?”

1. Essentially a summer home 📌

Chapter 772 - Plan

“How did Xuan Pin die? What happened to them while I was fighting Ma Tuo?”

Li Huowang wanted to know urgently. Did Xuan Pin and the others fight against the other Simings even though they were weak, or was it another ambush from the Dharma Sect?

Both scenarios were possible, but the former was less probable.

Xuan Pin was the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau. He clearly knew about the Simings' strength, and they were not idiots who would charge into the Baiyu Capital to fight the Simings.

Li Huowang was worried that the Dharma Sect had ambushed Xuan Pin. He never thought the Dharma Sect would have the power to both summon Ma Tuo to distract him and ambush Xuan Pin.

If that was the case, the Dharma Sect's strength had far exceeded everyone's expectations. They could swoop in and kill everyone if they wanted.

It would also mean that the Dharma Sect retreated not because they were defeated, but rather because they wanted to regroup and recover their strength. That way, they could destroy the Liang Kingdom in one fell swoop.

They really couldn't lose now. Si Qi, Qing Qiu, Hou Shu, and the Liang Kingdom were all allied now. If they lost, the Dharma Sect would dominate the entire land, and they would end up like the Qi Kingdom.

The deputy chief did not reply to Li Huowang's question. They whispered among each other while looking at Gao Zhijian from time to time to ask for permission.

“Let me tell you what happened. The deputy chiefs don't know what happened because there were certain things that even Xuan

Pin did not tell them.”

An unfamiliar voice came from the group of people. Li Huowang stood up and noticed a man sitting in the corner. The man was wearing an oversized Nuo opera mask.

Li Huowang recognized the massive Nuo opera mask depicting two distorted faces stacked on top of one another. It was the Chief of Hou Shu’s Surveillance Bureau, Zhang Tan. He had survived since he hadn’t gone with Xuan Pin.

“Xuan Pin observed earthly and celestial signs to predict that there would be chaos in the Baiyu Capital. He came up with a plan to use three Dragon Veins as the base of an array to help the Simings fight against god Yu’er. Don’t ask me how—I don’t know how he did it. Xuan Pin’s techniques are very mysterious.”

“Wait, which Simings did he try to help?”

“The Heavenly Mater, Ji Zai, Kui Lei, Doulao, Jiang Xiangshou, the Five Dhyani Buddhas, the Three Ancient Ones, Ba-Hui, and the Sacrificial God.”

“Wait a minute. Even Doulao is helping the other Simings fight against god Yu’er?” Li Huowang remembered that Doulao had been fighting against Ji Zai and wondered why it was helping now.

If that was true, he couldn’t imagine what was happening in the Baiyu Capital.

Zhang Tan didn’t answer Li Huowang’s question. “I didn’t follow them that day since I was guarding the Dragon Veins to prevent an ambush from the Dharma Sect. I also don’t know what happened there.

“However, there were corpses of Dharma Sect members on the ground. I believe that god Yu’er informed the Dharma Sect about their location, allowing them to send people to disrupt the ceremony.”

“So,” Li Huowang clenched his fists, “the Dharma Sect ambushed Xuan Pin and the others while they were in the array? Is

that why they died? Because they failed?”

“No,” Zhang Tan shook his head, “Xuan Pin and the others succeeded. They sacrificed themselves and now god Yu’er is dead.”

“Wait, what?!” Everyone in the inner palace stood up from shock.

They all knew that the Dharma Sect worshiped god Yu’er. If god Yu’er was genuinely dead, it was only a matter of time before the Dharma Sect crumbled.

“Wait, that’s not right!” Li Huowang’s voice calmed the others down. “There’s no reason for so many Simings to work together to defeat god Yu’er alone, especially since they also needed Xuan Pin and the others to help them!”

Zhang Tan nodded. “You are right. God Yu’er is dead, but the Dharma Sect has other patron gods too like Sir Arrogant Stone and the others still hiding in the darkness.”

Everyone deflated and sat back down.

Li Huowang took a deep breath. *At least Xuan Pin’s sacrifice was not in vain. They killed god Yu’er in the process. While the situation is not looking good, at least there’s still a chance of overturning it.*

One of the Lamas from the Antrabhara Temple stood up and whispered to Gao Zhijian after Li Huowang finished asking his questions. Gao Zhijian was shocked. “Is that true? Then please do so!”

“Did the Lamas have a method to defeat the Dharma Sect?”

Li Huowang drank his cold tea as he looked at the Lamas heading out to find someone.

“Senior Li, why are you wearing Xuan Pin’s robes?” Bai Lingmiao asked curiously.

Li Huowang felt the robes on his body and pondered before saying, “They’re thick and don’t burn up.”

Li Huowang touched the flowing runes on the red robes gently. “Xuan Pin is already dead, so he does not need them anyway.”

He wasn't superstitious, so he didn't mind wearing a dead person's clothes as long as they held value to him.

The robes could also shrink or enlarge freely, and there was the added benefit of fooling the Dharma Sect into thinking that Xuan Pin was still alive.

The Lama brought someone into the inner palace while Li Huowang placed his teacup down. The Lama had brought in an old man with white eyes. He held onto a white banner and trembled every time he walked forward.

Li Huowang stared without any reservation but found nothing special about the old man.

He was still thinking about what was happening when the blind old man knelt on the ground and kowtowed to the direction Gao Zhijian was in with the help of a eunuch. The old man then took out an old tortoise shell scribbled with various runes from his bag.

The old man fished out several coins and threw them into the tortoise shell while he chanted mysteriously. He then shook the tortoise shell with the coins clinking inside.

Once he was done, he swung the tortoise shell downwards. Eight coins flew out, with six facing heads up and two facing tails up.

The blind man touched the coins with his wrinkled hands and revealed a joyous expression. He knelt on the ground and started kowtowing in a random direction. "Your Highness! This is the divination of great fortune!"

"Oh my god!" Li Huowang pressed his temples with pain and stood up. "What the fuck are you guys doing? The situation is dire! Can you stop being superstitious? Can you really kill the Dharma Sect with your divination?!"

Chapter 773 - Solution

Everyone frowned upon hearing Li Huowang's words.

Qing Qiu's Khan wanted to say something but was stopped by Gao Zhijian.

"Senior Li, a divination before the battle has always been our tradition. The man standing before us is the famous Half-Immortal Fu Su. His divinations are known for always being accurate. While he may not be able to help us defeat the Dharma Sect, a divination of great fortune could greatly benefit us."

"Hoh." Li Huowang stared at the old man. "You can do divinations to see whether we're lucky or not? Which Siming do you follow? Which Siming's strength do you borrow?"

Half-Immortal Fu Su, who had been respectful towards Gao Zhijian, showed a prideful look on his face. "We fortune tellers do not borrow anything from other beings. Everything has its cause and effect, including the Simings. I calculate the fate of the heavens and find the cause and effect of the Simings!"

"So you're saying you can calculate the fates of the heavens when you yourself are already one foot into the grave? Are you saying that you can observe constantly changing fates? Are you stronger than a Siming?"

Li Huowang had seen too many things and was very skeptical.

Fu Su replied, "You're also a Daoist, so why don't you believe in fate? What is a Siming? As their name implies, while they control fate, they also have their own fate. Everything they do and will do is set in stone. Isn't that right, Li Huowang?"

Li Huowang felt surprised when the old man called out his name without ever hearing it before, but he soon calmed down.

"So you can tell my fortune? Well then, go ahead and enlighten

me! I want to see what else you can dig up. Tell me where I come from.”

Surprisingly, Fu Su shook his head. “I cannot calculate that.”

“Haha! So just like that, you can’t tell me my fortune? Why don’t you join the Sitting Oblivion Dao and become a Shai Zi if you’re so great at lying?”

“I cannot calculate because someone else has done it for you. It’s up to you to believe me or not, but the sign of great fortune is real. Unless... You want me to calculate great misfortune instead?”

“I—” Li Huowang shut up. The old man was right. He wanted to win, not lose.

Gao Zhijian sat down on his throne and looked at Li Huowang with a complicated expression. “Senior Li, now is not the time to fight. Could you stop fighting for the sake of my honor right now?”

Li Huowang remained silent and sat back down.

Fine. Let them be superstitious. I suppose it’s not bad for him to come up with a sign of fortune. Might as well consider it a good start.

Li Huowang believed in divination, but he didn’t believe that the old man could predict the end just like that.

Fu Su left and Li Huowang remained silent. Gao Zhijian then took the chance to announce, “A sign of great fortune. The heavens are helping us!”

Gao Zhijian glanced at Li Huowang, who was drinking tea. “Let’s put that aside for now. We have more important matters. A kingdom cannot lose its ruler for even a single day, and the same thing can be said for the Liang Kingdom’s Surveillance Bureau. Now that Xuan Pin has passed away, we need a new chief. We cannot leave that position empty.”

Everyone nodded in agreement. They were about to fight the Dharma Sect, so the position was critical.

“I thought you wanted me to masquerade as Xuan Pin to calm the hearts of others? Wouldn’t we reveal that Xuan Pin is dead if we

have a new chief now?”

“Senior Li, you will continue to masquerade as Xuan Pin. On the outside, you are still the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau, but on the inside we have someone else using Xuan Pin’s name to operate everything.”

Gao Zhijian had just answered when someone suggested, “Your Majesty, you have the highest status here. Whoever you nominate will become the Chief!”

Gao Zhijian glanced at Li Huowang before looking at everyone else. “This isn’t about just filling the position but about finding the most suitable person for the role. We are now at war. In addition to managing all the affairs within the Surveillance Bureau, the person also needs to help us defeat the Dharma Sect. If the new Chief makes a single mistake, it could cause irreversible damage.”

Gao Zhijian looked at the Deputy Chiefs of the Surveillance Bureau. According to the law, the royal family couldn’t partake in the matters of the Surveillance Bureaus.

However, the Liang Kingdom’s Surveillance Bureau lacked a leader. Despite his lack of knowledge regarding the affairs of the Surveillance Bureau, he needed to appoint a new leader.

“I can give it a try, at least until everything blows over,” said Zhang Tan, the Chief of Hou Shu’s Surveillance Bureau.

Li Huowang said nothing as they continued their discussion. He wasn’t someone perfect. While there were things Li Huowang excelled in, the things that Xuan Pin did were not something he could replicate.

In order to defeat the Dharma Sect, it was important for everyone to focus on their individual strengths and do what they do best.

Li Huowang was actually thinking about something more important. When he snapped back, he noticed that everyone was already paying their respects to the four emperors before leaving.

Gao Zhijian approached Li Huowang and bent down slightly. “Senior Li, you cannot go to Nanping or An Xi to fight alone. The Dharma Sect took over a long time ago. The only ones alive in those two kingdoms are undoubtedly the people from the Dharma Sect.

“Master Xuan Pin said that the Dharma Sect was aiming for you. The moment you go, they will do everything in their power to ensure your demise. The safest option is for you to go when we send our soldiers down to Nanping. You can follow them.”

Li Huowang shook his head lightly. “No, the Dharma Sect is not the pressing matter here. It’s the Simings that are supporting the Dharma Sect!”

“Senior Li, what are you talking about?”

Li Huowang looked at the familiar giant in front of him. “Do you remember what Xuan Pin did? He borrowed the strength of the other Simings to kill god Yu’er. This means that we can affect the heavens above with our meager strength. If we can kill the Simings supporting the Dharma Sect, we will naturally eradicate the Dharma Sect.”

Gao Zhijian wanted to persuade Li Huowang against doing something so dangerous. “But Senior Li, have you forgotten that Master Xuan Pin died because of this? It’s too dangerous!”

Li Huowang waved his arms in annoyance. “He died because he didn’t prepare thoroughly and got ambushed by the Dharma Sect. It doesn’t matter to me.”

He stood up and headed outside. “Since we already found out that there are Simings supporting the Dharma Sect, it’s only natural for us to try and destroy them, isn’t that right?”

It was a chance to end the war. Xuan Pin’s success had pointed him towards the direction that he should take, especially since they had managed to kill god Yu’er.

Chapter 774 - Chief

“Try? Of course we must try it! I never said we shouldn’t.” Gao Zhijian blocked Li Huowang. “I will send as many people as possible to try it!”

Li Huowang replied, “As if they have the strength to do so. I don’t think any of them would know where the Baiyu Capital is located. I went there once, and I’m a Siming’s Twisted One. I can do this, but we could do this together to increase our chances of winning.”

Gao Zhijian held onto Li Huowang’s robes. “Senior Li! It’s very dangerous to partake in the matters of a Siming! You will die!”

“Idiot. You spent so much time with me after we left the Zephyr Temple. Have you ever seen me afraid of death?” Li Huowang turned his robes incorporeal and escaped Gao Zhijian’s grasp.

Li Huowang’s departure left Gao Zhijian feeling quite anxious. If he had known this would happen, he would’ve encouraged Li Huowang to go to Nan Ping to fight instead. It would’ve been much safer compared to going to Baiyu Capital.

Gao Zhijian asked Bai Lingmiao for help. “Junior Bai, please try to persuade him! It’s too dangerous.”

Bai Lingmiao pursed her lips and shook her head with sadness. “If you couldn’t convince him, neither could I. Senior Li is also right. Handling the problem from the top would also destroy the Dharma Sect for good. We wouldn’t have to go through so much suffering either.”

“But Senior Li could die!”

Bai Lingmiao clenched her fists. “The White Lotus Sect and I will do everything in our power to keep him alive.”

The two of them were still discussing when Li Huowang left the palace. Even though he knew what he needed to do, he still didn't know how.

Xuan Pin treated Li Huowang like a snitch and revealed absolutely nothing to him. He had no choice but to find the way to enter the Baiyu Capital by himself.

Li Huowang headed towards the Surveillance Bureau in hopes of finding the method that Xuan Pin had used.

He reached a small estate guarded by two lions. Li Huowang flashed his identity plate and entered the estate without a hitch.

There were many people inside, most of them here to exchange for treasures. The Surveillance Bureau could mobilize so many people because they quite literally had a trove of treasures to attract mercenaries.

After all, asking people to fight against the Dharma Sect with just ideals wasn't realistic.

"Master." Li Huowang thought he had misheard, but he turned around and saw Lu Xiucan.

Lu Xiucan had undergone a drastic transformation from his initial naive appearance. His entire scalp was gone, one of his eye sockets was empty, his trousers were dangling in the air, and his mouth was devoid of teeth.

Lu Xiucan had become what his father had initially told him last time: an evil entity that Li Huowang would fight against.

Lu Xiucan's shirt was in tatters, and he used his one remaining arm to hold onto his modao, using it as a crutch to stand.

He used his modao to jump forward when he saw Li Huowang approaching him.

"What are you doing here?" Li Huowang frowned as he looked at Lu Xiucan.

"I don't have any legs and can't walk quickly. I'm here to see if there's anything I could use." Lu Xiucan smiled.

“When did you join the Surveillance Bureau?”

“I didn’t. The Surveillance Bureau opened up their vault to the outside. Those who fought against the Dharma Sect can exchange items. Don’t you know about this?”

“Why would I know something like this?” Li Huowang looked at Lu Xiucan’s missing legs and shouted angrily, “Why did you cut off your leg? How did you use the Profound Records? Don’t you know that you should skin yourself first? You could even cut off your feet instead!”

“Master, I did. But it was a difficult battle. Skinning my leg and cutting off my feet didn’t work. I had to cut off my legs.”

Li Huowang sighed. He understood the agony of losing limbs in comparison with losing skin. *Lu Xiucan must’ve faced a really strong opponent.*

Li Huowang had thought Lu Xiucan had either died or returned to Cowheart Village. He never thought that Lu Xiucan was still on the front lines. “Why did you fight so hard? You should go back now.”

Lu Xiucan shook his head and smiled. “No, Master. I won’t return until the Dharma Sect has been completely crushed.”

Li Huowang looked towards the Surveillance Bureau. “I have something to do, so you better be careful.”

“Please go ahead.”

Li Huowang had just taken a few steps when he turned around and took out his dagger. He cut open a small wound on Lu Xiucan’s abdomen.

Li Huowang then took out a small human-skin doll from his own abdomen and stuffed it into Lu Xiucan’s body.

Li Huowang pressed the wounds tightly and Lu Xiucan’s abdomen was healed.[\[1\]](#)

“I am giving you one more life. Go back when it’s gone. If you die, the Lu family will be gone forever.” Li Huowang patted his

shoulder and turned to leave.

“Thank you Master!”

Lu Xiucan turned and hobbled to a different direction than Li Huowang.

Lu Xiucan reached a wooden counter before giving them his collection of black cloths and left ears, which he had collected from the Dharma Sect members he had killed. He planned to exchange them for lifespan pills to get something from the vault.

“Dear Sir, what do you need?” An eunuch with coins sewn into his eye sockets smiled.

“I don’t have legs anymore. Are there any treasures that make me walk again so I can chase down people?”

“Is that so? Please go and wait behind the screen. I will check for you.”

“Alright.” Lu Xiucan hopped on his modao towards the screen.

He initially struggled to hop around on his modao. But now, he was surprisingly skilled at doing so.

He sat behind the screen while touching the place where Li Huowang had cut him on the abdomen previously.

What did Master give me? A life? Could that thing really give me another life? Lu Xiucan was still intrigued when several people approached him from the other side of the screen.

It wasn’t the eunuch with coins for eyes, but instead several people wearing large robes and tall hats. Lu Xiucan caught the stench of blood the moment they entered.

“What do you want?” Lu Xiucan wasn’t worried because this was the Surveillance Bureau’s territory. He was certain that no one would stir up trouble here.

“You and I were fated to meet.” The elder in front revealed a bloody Profound Records and pointed at Lu Xiucan’s Profound Records, which was barely peeking out of his bag.

1. He could've just regrown Lu Xiucan's limbs with his "Truth" cultivation... 🤔

Chapter 775 - Underground

Lu Xiucan wasn't quite sure about what they wanted. However, he recognized the Profound Records in the man's hands, so he had a good guess about who they were. He was no longer a youngster who knew nothing about the world. "You guys are... from the Ao Jing sect?"

"Pleased to meet you. I am Zu Yi." Zu Yi shook Lu Xiucan's hands.

"I am Lu Xiucan. Is there a reason you were looking for me? And what did you mean by 'fated'?"

Zu Yi smiled and sat down next to Lu Xiucan with the other Ao Jing Sect members. He looked at Lu Xiucan's battle-worn body and said, "That's not the proper way of using the Profound Records, but your talent is undeniable. Did someone teach you how to use the Profound Records?"

"My Master."

"I don't think your Master is from the Ao Jing Sect, is he?" Zu Yi probed.

Lu Xiucan didn't answer. He was unsure what they were trying to do, so he didn't want to reveal too much.

"You've used the Profound Records and show no signs of stopping despite your body already being like this," Zu Yi explained. "That means your potential is very high. I am here to invite you to join us. That's what I meant by fate."

Lu Xiucan thought they were bluffing since they were very direct. "I am happy you wish to recruit me, but I must respectfully decline. I am currently a disciple of the White Lotus Sect."

“So what? You can keep praying to your white lotus. The Sacrificial God and Ba-Hui don’t need prayers. Only pain connects us to them.”

Lu Xiucan remained silent. Only then did Zu Yi reveal some benefits to him.

“You’re already like this. Are you afraid of someone taking advantage of you? Have you ever wondered why I still have all of my limbs while you only have a single arm left? As I said before, you’re not using the Profound Records correctly. We have methods to regenerate your limbs in our sect. Have you ever seen any of us missing a limb?”

Lu Xiucan’s eyes widened in realization. He still remembered how his Master regenerated his wounds and severed limbs. *It must’ve been a technique of the Ao Jing Sect!*

“Will you teach me?” Lu Xiucan wanted that power. If he could use it just like his Master did, he could regenerate his wounds and kill more members of the Dharma Sect. His power would increase too.

Zu Yi chuckled when he heard Lu Xiucan’s sincere plea. “You need to ascend. The Profound Records is the martial technique of Immortals. If you retain your mortality and do not ascend, you can only use the methods listed in it for a limited amount of time.”

“Ascend? Do you mean the Cang-Qiang Ascension?” Lu Xiucan recalled seeing it in the Profound Records before, but the conditions were too harsh.

Zu Yi shook his head. “It’s not limited to that. While the Cang-Qiang Ascension is useful, you might not be able to do it. There are different levels of ascension. The Profound Records is a versatile technique, but it’s not the only one we have in the sect.”

“Oh, then what other techniques do you have, if I dare ask?” Lu Xiucan was intrigued. He knew too little about the Ao Jing Sect. The only thing he knew about the Ao Jing Sect was that it was unlike

other sects—its members didn't need to read or have good comprehension skills. This was very helpful for him.

Zu Yi didn't tell him. "As long as you join us, we will naturally tell you."

Lu Xiucan frowned. He looked down, noting his own battered appearance. He decided to join the Ao Jing Sect.

He was already so broken that there was nothing the others could want from his body. The only thing he could do now was kill more Dharma Sect members, and he was ready to pay any price to do so. "Fine, I will join the Ao Jing Sect!"

"Talking here isn't convenient. Let's go back to the Cross Temple and discuss more."

Lu Xiucan grabbed his modao and was about to stand up when Zu Yi stopped him. "Since you want to join us, you cannot move around like that anymore. You've used the Profound Records before, so you should know how we do things, right?"

"But senior... I don't have legs. How should I walk?"

Lu Xiucan screamed when a sharpened wooden stick was stabbed into him to act as his amputated left leg.

After that was the right leg.

Lu Xiucan, who had lost both legs, stood up once more with wooden sticks as legs instead. The pain was unbearable, causing him to tremble and his face to turn pale.

They were looking at Lu Xiucan when he gritted his teeth. "You go first. I will follow you!"

Lu Xiucan had just taken a step with his right leg when the wooden stick sank deeper. Blood flowed down the stick.

However, Lu Xiucan did not hesitate. He saw it as a trial.

"Alright, we will wait for you in the temple." Zu Yi had no intention of waiting for Lu Xiucan. He brought the others and exited the screen before leaving the Surveillance Bureau.

Just then, one of the individuals behind Zu Yi asked, "Elder,

are you sure about this? He may be Li Huowang's disciple, but it's possible that Li Huowang doesn't favor him."

Zu Yi glared at him. "Just do your job. You have no right to question the grand elders."

The man lowered his face and remained silent.

Unbeknownst to them, Li Huowang was walking through a narrow corridor just fifteen meters below them.

Even with no one around, Li Huowang could still clearly feel the gazes of others. This was the core of the Surveillance Bureau's temporary base. Their sentries and traps were merely invisible, not absent.

As Li Huowang reached a bamboo door, it opened by itself. On the other side of the door was a spacious underground hall with torches on the side.

Li Huowang found the person he was looking for in the middle of the hall. It was Zhang Tan, the Chief who temporarily took on Xuan Pin's mantle.

Several burly men were holding up four bamboo poles wrapped in red cloth. They held it in a way that made the poles cross each other in the middle.

Zhang Tan was jumping on the poles as he performed a Nuo Opera with music.

Li Huowang had seen a lot of operas and performances thanks to the Lu family, but he couldn't bring himself to think that the one Zhang Tan was performing was a show.

Zhang Tan was still wearing a large wooden mask, which covered his body. He twisted his body in a way that no normal person could do. He effortlessly hopped onto an elastic bamboo pole.

Sometimes, Zhang Tan brought both arms together behind him. Sometimes, he hooked his right foot on the bamboo pole and twirled.

Just then, the drum sounds became faster. Two figures, one black and one white, hopped onto the bamboo pole.

Li Huowang was surprised since he recognized them. They were the Lion Dances that he had fought before!

Chapter 776 - Search

Li Huowang thought his eyes were playing tricks on him when he saw the Lion Dances, but he became certain when he saw the numerous feet beneath the white cloth. It was the same Lion Dances he had fought against underneath Qing Qiu.

At Zhang Tan's guidance, the two Lion Dances jumped, leaped, climbed, and prayed on the bamboo poles.

Li Huowang could understand if Zhang Tan was just performing the Nuo Opera, but he never thought the Lion Dances could be incorporated into it.

When taking a closer look, Li Huowang could see similarities between the masks of Zhang Tan and the Lion Dances.

As he watched, Zhang Tan ended the Nuo Opera. In the past, the person performing would sing a bit, but this time, Zhang Tan remained silent until the music ended.

As the Lion Dances left and the men carried away the bamboo poles, Li Huowang approached Zhang Tan. "What were you doing just now?"

"Welcoming an old guest."

"Why?"

Zhang Tan turned and faced Li Huowang, looking at him from beneath his large wooden mask. "Do you need something?"

Li Huowang decided not to pursue meaningless questions and instead said what he needed.

"I need to know the method Xuan Pin used to assist the other Simings to kill god Yu'er."

"I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"Yes, I don't know." Zhan Tan turned to leave before being

stopped by Li Huowang.

“Do you really not know, or are you just pretending you don’t? The people who know are dead, and you’re currently the highest-ranking person here. If you don’t know, no one else in the Surveillance Bureau would. Don’t forget that I am also your ally in trying to eradicate the Dharma Sect.”

Zhang Tan stared at Li Huowang through his mask. “If Xuan Pin didn’t trust you, why would you think he would trust me? Do you think he would tell me everything?”

Zhang Tan left without looking back. Li Huowang frowned. “You don’t know? I don’t trust you.”

Li Sui’s tentacles helped Li Huowang put on Xuan Pin’s red robes. Li Huowang disappeared into the darkness of the robes and became Xuan Pin.

When he extended his arms out of the robes, they had already turned into Xuan Pin’s long, skeletal arms.

He then waved lightly before Shangguan Yuting appeared beside him. She smiled and waved at Li Huowang.

Now that his cultivation of the “Truth” had reached a considerable level, he could manifest any illusions that Xuan Pin used. And instead of manifesting fakes, Li Huowang could manifest the real illusions.

Li Huowang was certain that Xuan Pin wouldn’t leave zero traces of such an important ritual, especially after he succeeded in doing it. There must be some traces in the Surveillance Bureau.

Since he doesn’t want to tell me, I will have to find it myself. I am also using his identity as the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau right now.

For now, Li Huowang was indeed the highest authority of the Surveillance Bureau. No one could stop him.

“Let’s go to his study.” Li Huowang floated up with Shangguan Yuting and phased through the ceiling.

They soon reached Xuan Pin’s room. Since Li Huowang was

masquerading as Xuan Pin, no one stopped him.

He was surprised to find Xuan Pin's room wasn't large compared to his massive body. It was actually narrow.

There was nothing except for books lining up all four walls and a table with an inkwell, brush, and papers. The room was so bare that there wasn't even a bed.

It was also very messy, either by design or because Xuan Pin had been too busy to tidy up the place.

"Didn't he need to sleep?" Li Huowang inspected the table and the documents.

He was disappointed to find that it was just a map of constellations.

"Or maybe it's in the book?" Li Huowang looked at the books stacked all the way up to the ceiling. "I thought his techniques all came from Ji Zai. Does he even need to read?"

Li Huowang flipped a random book and noticed that the ink was slowly moving.

"Amitabha, amitabha." Li Huowang turned around and saw the old monk was praying to the books.

"Xuan Pin most likely died in the Baiyu Capital. I don't think he can reincarnate, so there's no reason to pray for him."

"Daoist, I'm not praying for him. I'm praying to the Buddha."

"Buddha? Here?" Li Huowang approached the old monk and saw a small Buddha statue on the book shelf.

He picked it up and inspected it. He frowned because he had seen it before in the Righteous Monastery.

"Help me find out if there's anything else." The other illusions scattered in the room to search for any noteworthy objects.

They soon found a lot of things.

"Daoist, I found the prayer wheel of a Lama."

"There's also a talisman depicting a cow's nose," Peng Longteng said.

They found more and more things. Li Huowang caught on to key information when they found a mahjong tile of the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

It appeared that everything here was connected to different sects, all of which worshiped the Simings who worked with Xuan Pin!

“I should’ve known!”

Xuan Pin didn’t go to the Baiyu Capital directly when he said that he was helping the Simings.

He first contacted the various sects so that they would allow him to seek their Simings. Then, he went to the Baiyu Capital after they finalized and approved the plan! They must’ve been sitting on the sidelines when Xuan Pin was contacting the Simings.

Li Huowang placed the items down and walked out.

He looked at the Shimmer Mirror and contemplated which sect he should visit first. The closest one in Si Qi was the Righteous Monastery. The other sects had either been destroyed or were too far away.

“Let’s go!” Peng Longteng appeared and threw Li Huowang towards the direction of the Righteous Monastery.

He flew high and fell down numerous times before he reached the Righteous Monastery.

He had come here once before, but now it was different.

The monk at the entrance immediately noticed him.

“Amitabha. Benefactor Li, please follow me.”

Li Huowang followed him and walked past the crowd to enter from the side door. It wasn’t the path that Li Huowang took last time, but he still ended up in front of the Abbot of the Righteous Monastery, in the hall with the five massive Buddha Statues.

Chapter 777 - Abbot

Underneath the five Buddha statues, two abbots wearing red robes were chanting while fiddling with their prayer beads.

One of them was the Abbot of the Liang Kingdom, whom Li Huowang had met before. His appearance was still as conspicuous as ever, with his distinct pink pupils. He had albinism, just like Bai Lingmiao.

The other abbot was ordinary, but he looked like the old monk's illusion that was following Li Huowang around. He was none other than the Abbot of the Qi Kingdom's Righteous Monastery. The last time Li Huowang had seen him was back in Cowheart Village, and he had visibly gained weight since then.

"Amitabha."

"Amitabha."

The two of them greeted and gestured to Li Huowang to sit down at the same time.

"Benefactor Li, it would be a little impolite not to burn some incense for Buddha since we're at the temple," the Abbot from the Qi Kingdom said.

Li Huowang looked at the five Buddhas when he raised his hands. Three lit incense sticks materialized as he prayed simply and stabbed the incense sticks into the hard stone floor, causing it to crack from the impact.

"It's been a while, Abbot. I suppose you didn't think that we would meet again after last time, did you?" Li Huowang asked the Abbot who tried to kill him previously.

He still remembered how the Abbot had tried to trick him into staying in the temple after coming out from the Zephyr Temple. When that failed, he even sent people to kill him.

It was only thanks to Dan Yangzi parasitizing his body that Li Huowang managed to survive.

“Amitabha. Those who become monks must put kindness and compassion first. I was trying to save more people that time.”

“Bullshit! You are a fake! I know what you were thinking. You wanted to kill me because I’m a Strayed One!”

“I am saving people. You are indeed a Strayed One, a being capable of harming many others. Benefactor Li, am I wrong? Did you not cause the death of many after you escaped?”

“Bullshit!”

Just as they were about to fight, the Abbot from the Qi Kingdom intervened. “Alright, that’s enough. There’s no need to bring up the past. Benefactor Li, why are you here today?”

Li Huowang really wanted to kill that baldy, but he needed to let the abbot live if he wanted to defeat the Dharma Sect. He couldn’t ignore the big picture and help the Dharma Sect by killing him.

Li Huowang shamelessly accepted Chan Du's offer to step down and let the matter rest. He was here to talk with them.

He looked at them and said, “Then I’ll get to the point. Did Xuan Pin speak to the Five Dhyani Buddhas through the Righteous Monastery?”

Li Huowang briefly explained why he was there. After explaining, he noticed a slight change in the faces of the two abbots. Li Huowang looked up and realized that the facial expressions of the five Buddha statues had also changed slightly.

Li Huowang stared at the Abbot from the Liang Kingdom while frowning. “Did Xuan Pin really not come here to talk with the Five Dhyani Buddhas? Or are you guys just as clueless as Zhang Tan?”

“No, the Chief did come here before, but he didn’t find him. He found me.” Li Huowang turned and looked at Chan Du, the Abbot from the Qi Kingdom.

“Xuan Pin did come to find me, and I helped him meet Buddha.”

“What did he say? How did Xuan Pin help the Five Dhyani Buddhas?” Li Huowang’s heart was pounding rapidly.

“I apologize, but I am unable to assist you with that. The secrets of the Buddha cannot be spilled. I naturally do not know what the Buddha has chosen to keep secret.”

Li Huowang gnashed his teeth. “You don’t know either?! Fine, let me meet the Five Dhyani Buddhas myself! Since Xuan Pin could meet them, I can too! Let me meet them!”

Li Huowang had just shouted when the Abbot from the Liang Kingdom admonished him, saying, “Preposterous! Do you think the Buddha is someone you can meet just because you want to?”

“I can’t meet them even if it’s to defeat the Dharma Sect? Weren’t you the one who said that those following the teachings of the Buddha should prioritize kindness and compassion? How many people can we save if we defeat the Dharma Sect? Won’t the Five Dhyani Buddhas meet me to help the people? Or did you bring up doing kind deeds just to justify killing me? Why aren’t you doing anything when there’s suddenly an opportunity to do an incredibly good deed?”

The Abbot from the Liang Kingdom replied, “No! I do not trust you. Buddha’s true form cannot be seen by just anyone. Who can take on the wrath of Buddha if we disturb them?”

“Senior, I am willing to shoulder their wrath should it come our way.” Chan Du’s words extinguished Li Huowang’s anger.

Li Huowang had anticipated they wouldn’t cooperate, but he never thought they would agree so quickly.

“Are you sure? You’re not fooling me, right?”

“Amitabha. Those following the teachings of the Buddha don’t lie.”

Li Huowang liked the Abbot of the Qi Kingdom much better

than the one from the Liang Kingdom. Their personalities were very different.

“Great, when should we start?”

“The ceremony requires a lot of preparation. Benefactor Li can rest for the night here. Both my senior and I will send you to Buddha tomorrow afternoon.”

“Alright! Let’s do this tomorrow!” Li Huowang stood up.

He was about to leave when he turned around. “Abbot, I hope that this won’t be like last time, right? Haha.”

Li Huowang opened his stomach and took out the spindle Zhuge Yuan had given him, which had been stuck to his intestines. He pulled it out along with a portion of his intestines.

He threw it onto the ground, and his identity as a Strayed One became as plain as day to the two abbots.

“I trust that you wouldn’t ignore the big picture while the Dharma Sect is still around. Also, I’m no longer a weakling who has to run away from every single enemy.”

Li Huowang left as the two abbots stared at the spindle in silence.

“Benefactor Li is paranoid.”

“I agree.”

“Tomorrow afternoon,” Li Huowang mumbled as he paced around the temple. This was the first time he would meet a Siming other than Ji Zai of his own accord, so he was nervous.

He recalled what he had seen in the Baiyu Capital and snarled. His body started trembling uncontrollably and his surroundings began to warp.

Chapter 778 - Buddha

Li Huowang sensed something was wrong and started rapidly punching his own head.

He realized that it wasn't working. He stabbed his head with a long needle instead. The intense pain stopped his thoughts in time.

"Hah!" Cold sweat drenched his blood-red robes as he panted and gritted his teeth. No matter what the Siming was, since he had to defeat the Dharma Sect, he had no choice but to meet them.

Just then, he felt a pair of eyes staring at him.

"Who's there?!" he shouted. Three tentacles sprouted out, with Li Sui gripping a sword in each of them.

He then saw Chan Du, the Abbot of the Qi Kingdom, shuffling out from a small alley.

"Benefactor Li, I require a bit of assistance. Would you be kind enough to help?"

I knew that there would be a price to pay. No wonder he agreed so fast just now. He wanted me to help him with something...

Li Huowang pondered before asking, "What do you need? I can't do many things, and I don't have the time to travel anywhere far away."

Li Huowang hated doing other people favors to get what he needed, especially when they were allies. Nevertheless, he couldn't be bothered to argue.

He only needed to find out the method that Xuan Pin had used. Everything else was insignificant at the moment.

"Benefactor Li does not have to fight. Please follow me."

Li Huowang sheathed his three swords and followed Chan Du.

Even though Chan Du wanted Li Huowang to help him, he never explained what he needed. He just brought Li Huowang deep

into the temple.

The monastery still looked beautiful, though the Righteous Monastery was not as clean as before.

Li Huowang walked slowly through the monastery as the sun set and the bell tolled. He stared at the majestic temples, emanating an aura of reverence.

They walked for fifteen minutes before they approached a large hall.

The hall looked new. There was no sign on it, and a few monks were still busy painting the wood.

Several old ginkgo trees surrounded the large hall, which was solemn and majestic from the front. Since it was new, there were very few devotees there.

Li Huowang followed Chan Du into the hall before realizing it was empty inside. There was an altar with a lotus seat, but there was nothing there. The hall was completely empty.

For some reason, there was a lot of lit incense in the incense burner, even though there wasn't a deity or statue in it.

"What's going on? Did your Buddha run away? You want me to track it down?"

Chan Du shook his head and lit three incense sticks before praying earnestly towards the empty altar.

"Benefactor Li, I've sent some of my disciples outside to scour for information. They told me it wasn't a coincidence that we survived—we were saved by someone else. We were supposed to die, but someone saved us by connecting the Dragon Vein of the Qi Kingdom to the Liang Kingdom."

Li Huowang gradually let his guard down when he heard Chan Du. He somehow knew what Chan Du wanted him to do. "You are right. Someone saved you."

Chan Du perked up attentively. "May I know our savior's name? I've also heard that this matter concerns you?"

“He’s already dead. Why are you asking for this now?”

“No, every survivor of the Qi Kingdom is indebted to our savior. We, who follow the teachings of Buddha, do not allow ourselves to be indebted to another person without repaying their kindness. I wish to erect a statue of our savior so that the others can pray and give their thanks.”

Li Huowang stared at the empty altar and chuckled. “So that’s how you become a Buddha? Would he actually become one? He doesn’t even believe in Buddha, so that’s quite a joke.”

“Benefactor Li, what is a Buddha? Is a Buddha a cultivator who has undergone all three major tribulations? Or is it one who has obtained sufficient merits and wisdom? Or is this a Buddha?” Chan Du pointed at the empty altar.

Li Huowang sat on the ground and wrote “Buddha” on the marble. He stared at the writing before sighing.

“Those capable of saving hundreds of thousands of people should become a Buddha. I’ve even asked my disciples to spread the word of the savior who rescued us from the Qi Kingdom. I wish for the remaining survivors to come and pray to the savior.”

“He’s already dead. What good will it do?”

Li Huowang raised his hand, and the marble tiles of the hall slowly began to stick together. Eventually, they formed a marble statue of Zhuge Yuan on the altar.

Chan Du’s eyes widened with shock upon seeing this. “It’s him?!”

Li Huowang sighed and left the newly opened hall.

Chan Du did not move. He stood still and stared at the statue. “So this is what a Buddha looks like.”

Once news spread out of the new hall, every surviving monk who came from the Qi Kingdom put down their work and started making their way to pray to their savior.

Soon, several groups of survivors from the Qi Kingdom

somehow caught wind of the newly opened hall. They made their way towards the new hall, carrying offerings and taking their children along. They prayed earnestly to Zhuge Yuan's statue, and their prayers didn't stop, even late into the night.

Li Huowang stared at the crowd from a corner in the dark. He looked at the statue enveloped in incense smoke and heard the prayers coming from the devotees with his sharp hearing.

Their prayers were so earnest that even Li Huowang thought the statue would come to life and reply their prayers.

Li Huowang stared at them and realized that Zhuge Yuan had indeed saved a lot of people.

The old monk illusion beside him jumped excitedly. "Daoist, please materialize me! I want to do good deeds and become a Buddha!"

Li Huowang ignored him and turned to leave. Just then, Li Huowang saw the other Abbot leading a group of serious-looking monks into the hall.

They were conducting a ceremony, but Li Huowang didn't know the details about it.

The Abbot held a roll of yellow fabric and carefully wrapped it around the statue. He then took out a brush dipped in cinnabar before drawing a single red dot on Zhuge Yuan's forehead.

Li Huowang laughed when he saw Zhuge Yuan with a red dot on his forehead. "HAHAHA!"

His laughter spread out far. Several monks and devotees were looking at where the laughter came from.

"Pfft! Hahaha! It's alright, just continue doing your things! Hahaha!" Li Huowang laughed as he left the hall.

Chapter 779 - Ceremony

“Benefactor Li, I will explain what will happen later since you don’t practice the teachings of the Buddha. My disciples, you, and I will conduct the Samgharama Ceremony in the Thousand Buddha Hall. At the same time, my senior, Abbot Xin Hui, will lead the Great Equal Assembly in the other four halls.”

Chan Du, wearing his robes, walked in front of Li Huowang. As he did, he held a purple alms bowl that seemed to be an artifact.

“Great Equal Assembly?” Li Huowang felt disgusted. “Birds of a feather really do flock together. Never thought one needed to do one to gain the attention of the Buddhas.”[\[1\]](#)

“Benefactor Li, the Great Equal Assembly is a ceremony that allows everyone to participate. It doesn't matter if someone is a noble, criminal, monk, civilian, kind, evil, smart, or stupid—everyone is treated equally during the assembly.”

“Oh? It looks like I was overthinking. No need to explain it to me. I just need your help to meet the Five Dhyani Buddhas.” Li Huowang suddenly felt that he was seeing the Righteous Monastery in a very negative light. He had thought it was another kind of ceremony.

But when he passed by the halls, he saw rows upon rows of monks praying with their hands clasped together. They had their back against the wall, and they were completely naked except for the prayer beads on their neck. They were hitting the wooden fish rhythmically. Li Huowang realized that Chan Du hadn’t explicitly denied what he had implied just now.

He got closer and heard them chanting. “Deeply practicing the perfection of wisdom, for a long time he saw clearly that the five aggregates are all empty. Bodhisattva, relying on the perfection of

wisdom, thus proclaimed the mantra of great knowledge: Gone, gone, gone beyond. Hail to the Bodhisattva!”

Under Chan Du and the other monk’s guidance, Li Huowang changed into a clean robe as he entered the Thousand Buddha Hall.

The hall was filled with lit incense, obscuring Li Huowang’s view of the Buddha’s head while still revealing the rest of their body.

In addition to the Buddha statue in the middle, the surroundings were adorned with many other Buddha statues, each depicting different gestures. Some were lying down, while others were seated.

Li Huowang wasn’t sure if there were really a thousand Buddhas in the hall, but he was certain that the hall was much more important than the others because all of the statues here were coated in gold.

Li Huowang sat on the cushion and closed his eyes.

He took a deep breath and opened his eyes again. The Buddha statues around him had completely changed. The sound of drums, bells, and gongs from outside filled the hall.

The Buddhas, both large and small, had turned into the disgusting form that Li Huowang had once seen before.

Despite being coated in gold, they still seemed perverse and disgusting.

The giant heap of flesh sat on the altar like a mound of clay. Its bumpy back was covered in thick blood vessels and goo.

Several strange and twisted reproductive organs rhythmically extended and retracted, moving in sync with the pumping of blood. They also swayed in the air as the body pulsed.

The disgusting being was covered in naked monks and large incense sticks roughly a meter long.

The monks eagerly inhaled the white smoke as they excitedly used their own bodies to plug in every hole they could find in the

“Buddha’s” fleshy body. They pulsated and moved in sync with the rhythm.

Li Huowang took a deep breath and closed his eyes. *Leaving Li Sui outside was the right call.*

As the loud tolling of the bell spread throughout the Righteous Monastery, Chan Du led his disciples and sat around Li Huowang.

“Benefactor Li, if you wish to see Buddha, you must be virtuous. Only then will Buddha notice you. If not, you will fail to meet Buddha.”

“I understand. You can start now.”

Chan Du took a long incense stick and hit it lightly on his alms bowl. *Dang~*

The monks surrounding Li Huowang started doing each other while the “Buddhas” sitting around the hall looked at them with merciful eyes through the openings in their bodies.

Simultaneously, the monks fervently prayed, their prayers blending with the vile sounds of bodies colliding and perverse utterances.

The sounds of the wooden fish, chants, and flesh on flesh entered Li Huowang’s ears. His body started trembling uncontrollably as he felt his senses melding together.

Li Huowang focused on himself and attempted to discard all stray thoughts. He kept praying earnestly to Buddha.

It might be difficult for the others to pray earnestly without any stray thoughts, but it was easy for Li Huowang. Cultivating the “Truth” required the same requisite. If he had stray thoughts while he cultivated, he would’ve accidentally materialized them too.

Li Huowang wasn’t sure how long he had been praying for, but he realized that everything was quiet around him. So quiet that he could hear a pin dropping.

He opened his eyes warily and saw an astonishingly bizarre entity floating just in front of him. He saw it! The five Dhyani

Buddhas from the five worlds had merged.

They were half-male and half-female, with their reproductive organs inserted into each other. They pleased each other and themselves at the same time.

But the scene didn't last long. Li Huowang barely made out any other details when his eyes exploded. A mortal body couldn't view the Five Dhyani Buddhas directly.

Despite that, he could still perceive the Five Dhyani Buddhas with other senses—touch, smell, and hearing.

A Siming was a special being. Li Huowang could feel their existence even without his eyes.

However, Li Huowang couldn't last long. His organs were quickly dissolving as his brain started expanding rapidly.

Li Huowang shouted with all his breath, "I'm here to help you! No matter who you are facing! If Xuan Pin could do it, so can I! Tell me what to do! Tell me what I should do to help you!" His voice spread far and wide, but there was no reply.

Li Huowang endured the pain of his organs dissolving and moved closer.

But he sensed something was wrong when he got close. His body was being assimilated by the Heavenly Dao of the Five Dhyani Buddhas!

His body shifted wildly like a child playing clay. There was not much he could do other than relying on his cultivation of "Truth" to maintain his body.

1. The Chinese raw 无遮大会 is quite literally translated as uncensored or exposed conference. He thought it was a ceremony where everyone gets naked. 🙌

Chapter 780 - Secret

Li Huowang refused to die right after finally meeting a Siming. The Siming did not react to his words, so he materialized his body and decided to try a different approach.

“I am Ji Zai’s Twisted One. Don’t you recognize Ji Zai? Didn’t you guys fight god Yu’er together?!” Li Huowang’s left ear dropped off as he said that. He quickly picked it up and reattached it to his head.

The Five Dhyani Buddhas did not react to him. Li Huowang felt his brain hurting again and panicked. “What the fuck do you want? How come Xuan Pin can help you guys but I can’t?! What do you want?”

This time, Li Huowang finally felt the Five Dhyani Buddhas react. In the next instant, he felt something incomprehensible enveloping him. He felt his skin, flesh, and bone being peeled away until there was nothing left.

“Try and kill me if you can! Ji Zai will kill you if you do!” Li Huowang used all of his strength to materialize his body again. However, his body soon disintegrated again. The Five Dhyani Buddhas were assimilating his body until everything disappeared. There was nothing left in the space.

And just like that, the Five Dhyani Buddhas left.

“What the fuck is going on?! I’m here to help you! Are you crazy? Can’t you differentiate who’s good and who’s bad? Can’t you talk? Don’t you have a mouth?”

As Li Huowang dejectedly prepared to leave, he felt something come to a halt at the spot where the Five Dhyani Buddhas had been.

Something was there, but Li Huowang had no idea what it was. It was a strange feeling, and his body wasn’t being assimilated by

any Heavenly Dao this time.

“Ji Zai? Is that you?” Li Huowang asked and readied himself to leave at any moment.

He wasn’t sure if he was in the Baiyu Capital right now. If he was, he had to seriously consider what was behind him.

Li Huowang suddenly heard a fleeting voice. It was a profound and familiar voice that stirred his deepest memories.

“I’ve seen it before!” Li Huowang tried to recall, but the more he looked into his memories, the more he forgot.

Just then, the being appeared once more. Li Huowang could make out its size this time. It was a very profound being. Its body was both large and small—it was both so big it could cover the Heavens and so small that one could barely perceive it.

Li Huowang wanted to determine if it was a Siming, but his eyes had been blinded, so he had no choice but to rely on his other senses.

I don’t think it’s a Siming. I’m not being assimilated by a Heavenly Dao.

He extended his hands in a daze before touching something that resembled a ribbon.

The being appeared once more before disappearing for good. Li Huowang suddenly felt a strong force that pulled him downwards.

“Father! Father!” Li Huowang opened his eyes forcefully and saw Li Sui looking at him worriedly.

"Father, are you okay? Is everything fine? I tried to wake you up by shaking you, but it didn't work," Li Sui said, wiping the sweat off his forehead with a wet towel.

“I’m... I’m fine!” Li Huowang held his head in pain. He stared at the copper basin and washed his face with the cold water.

His grogginess faded as the cold water woke him up. He felt much better now.

What was that thing? What did it want? Li Huowang frowned and

pondered when he suddenly noticed something was wrong with his reflection in the water. He had seven eyes!

Li Huowang finally realized what the ribbon-like being was. It was a Shangji Guankou! The very same Shangji Guankou that exchanged one secret for another secret.

However, in contrast to the Shangji Guankou he had encountered previously, this one was much older and held a higher rank.

Li Huowang had not revealed any secrets and yet received seven secrets.

It gave me the secrets... Does it want me to find out how Xuan Pin helped the Simings?

Li Huowang thought that it was possible since he had no use for the seven secrets to begin with.

His goal had been achieved, but he was still confused. *What did that thing want? Why does it want me to help? If it's a Siming, it should be in charge of one of the Heavenly Daos.*

Shangji Guankou... Secret... Heavenly Dao? Is there a Heavenly Dao of Secrets in the fifty Heavenly Daos?

His question would remain unanswered. He attempted to recall everything in hopes of learning something from the small clues.

Then, he felt that something wasn't right. His memories were swiftly disappearing!

"What's... What's happening?" As Li Huowang was trying to figure it out, someone knocked on his door.

"Who is it?"

"It's me, Chan Du."

I wonder if the abbots know anything. I did manage to meet the Simings through their ceremonies. Li Huowang didn't even wear his shoe when he opened the door in a hurry.

He saw Chan Du was standing there with the purple alms bowl with the group of monks behind him. All of them were clasping

their hands and staring at him.

“Amitabha. The hour of the ceremony is approaching. I shall lead you there.”

Li Huowang stepped back in surprise. “Are... Are you kidding me?”

He gazed at Chan Du but noticed that the Abbot was serious, with no signs of deception.

Was everything just a dream? Was it fake? Li Huowang tried to recall his hazy memories but realized that he couldn’t differentiate them from reality.

He quickly looked at his reflection in the water and saw the seven eyes from before on his reflection. It hadn’t been a dream. It was real!

“Benefactor Li, what happened? I thought you wanted to meet Buddha. Did you change your mind?”

Li Huowang heard his questioning and understood something.

Everything was real, but it hid the entire ordeal! It must’ve been the Siming that controls secrets!

Chapter 781 - Siming

“You recognize me, don’t you? You definitely do. You once called me Ji Zai in the psychiatric hospital. That’s absolutely true. Others might not know, but you surely know something!

“No need to hide it anymore. I already know. I am fully awakened now. I know who I am. I am Ji Zai—the Siming of Bewilderment!

“What kind of Siming are you? What Heavenly Dao do you oversee? Which Heavenly Daos do the others oversee?”

Qian Fu watched the rambling Li Huowang as he slowly stuffed his mouth with a hamburger. He turned his head and asked Chen Hongyu beside him in a muffled voice, “What’s wrong with Li Huowang?”

“He’s gone mad.”

Li Huowang suddenly turned his head towards her. He asked emotionally, “Abbess? Or rather, a part of the Abbess? The thoughts of everyone at the Benevolent Nunnery were connected. As the Siming of Rot, you should have some memories of her, right?”

Chen Hongyu rolled her eyes in disgust and moved toward the back of the RV, where Wu Qi was making a phone call. She asked, “Has Qing Wanglai arrived yet? How much longer do we have to wait?”

Wu Qi didn’t answer. She walked further in, holding her phone to her mouth as she chuckled.

“Huowang, don’t be like this. Please take your medicine,” Bai Lingmiao said, stopping Li Huowang from walking towards Wu Qi and handing him the medicine and water.

Li Huowang gripped the steaming glass cup, then sat down on the stool and let out a heavy sigh.

He had already understood his identity, and he was sure the others were also Simings.

Since they were Simings, the threats they faced had to be from god Yu'er and the Dharma Sect. This way, all the logic from before was completely connected.

Simings in the Baiyu Capital usually only cared about their own affairs. However, they were forced to unite when facing external enemies.

"Is god Yu'er really that powerful? Forcing seven Simings to join hands. No, it's probably not just god Yu'er. It doesn't seem like a single Siming could achieve the previous schemes by themselves."

Li Huowang looked at his companions again. Unfortunately, he could not communicate effectively with them, even if he understood. They wouldn't listen no matter what he said to them now.

This projection was obviously distorted when refracted, which made it difficult to convey the meaning of his words.

How can I make them understand my point? Wait, if I am a Siming, does everything from before exist? Are Puppy, Bai Lingmiao, and Gao Zhijian still around? How are they doing? Li Huowang thought of them and his expression turned heavy.

"Come on, be good. Take your medicine quickly." Yang Na placed the medicine in Li Huowang's hand and then guided his hand to his mouth. "Place the medicine at the base of your tongue first, then wash it down with water so it won't be bitter."

Li Huowang still didn't take the medicine. He held the medicine in one hand and the cup in the other as he stared blankly at Yang Na. "Nana, what kind of Siming are you?"

Li Huowang was certain that he had only been a Siming for a short time, so there shouldn't have been any Simings that had such a good relationship with him.

This was very strange. Or maybe, the projections on both sides

were not perfectly matched.

Yang Na couldn't hold it in any longer and burst into tears as she leaned on the table.

Li Huowang's heart trembled when he heard her heartbreaking sobs, snapping out of his previous state.

It didn't matter what Siming Nana was—she was his Yang Na first and foremost.

He had been too eager to uncover the truth and had completely ignored her feelings. It must have seemed like his mental illness had relapsed.

As Li Huowang comforted Yang Na, Wu Qi hung up the phone and walked over. "What's going on here? Why are you crying all of a sudden? Are you two breaking up?"

"Li Huowang is going crazy and upset his girlfriend. Who were you calling just now?" Chen Hongyu asked while fighting with Qian Fu for fries.

"My best friend." Wu Qi put her arm around Yang Na's shoulders and gently comforted her.

"You have a best friend? I thought you were too busy driving this broken car around to make friends."

"How can you say that? How come I can't have friends? Come help out. Can't you see that she's crying?"

Chen Hongyu grabbed the Coke from Qian Fu's hand. "I wasn't the one who made her cry, so why should I help? Anyway, don't interfere. This is a small issue. If they can't handle this, how will they deal with getting married and having kids in the future? This is nothing. They'll break up eventually."

"Nana! Look, I will take the medicine." Li Huowang displayed the medicine and capsules in his hand to Yang Na, then put them in his mouth and swallowed them.

Yang Na felt slightly less overwhelmed. Li Huowang's recent manic behavior was clearly caused by his old illness relapsing due

to not taking his medication.

She realized she would need to monitor him to ensure he takes his medication. Yang Na didn't want Li Huowang to be sent back to the psychiatric hospital, and she didn't want to see him lose his sanity again.

Wu Qi saw Li Huowang signal her with his eyes, so she tactfully left her seat and gave him some space.

Li Huowang sat in Wu Qi's place then gently hugged and softly comforted Yang Na.

Li Huowang let out a soft sigh as he thought about the past. His feelings towards everything here were very complicated.

If everyone was a projection, then was it this side projecting that side, or that side projecting this side?

The only thing he was sure of was that he didn't want to give up now. He had to protect her and consider her feelings.

He couldn't talk to Yang Na about the current situation. He himself could not properly differentiate things, and he had been unable to care for both sides.

Now that he understood things clearly, he had to consider both sides.

After Li Huowang comforted Yang Na, she sniffled and got out of his arms. She grabbed her bag and went to the bathroom to fix her makeup.

At this moment, the sound of Qing Wanglai's car came from outside the RV.

He seemed very happy, grinning broadly as he placed the food on the table. "I have good news. After days of persuasion, the other side finally agreed to negotiate with us."

Li Huowang felt a bit better. As long as god Yu'er wasn't looking for a fight, the Simings wouldn't fight to the death either. It wouldn't benefit anyone.

If they fought up there, many people in the mortal realm would

die.

“Great! The Leotians finally caved! Although it’s a pity we didn’t get their UFO.”

“Wanglai, be careful. The groups that steal special abilities are very cunning. They might say it’s a negotiation, but they could actually be setting a trap.”

Chapter 782 - Clothes

“Don’t take that. It’s too heavy and not flexible at all,” Li Huowang took the steel spear from Qian Fu’s hands and then looked over at Wu Qi.

“Sister Wu, didn’t those guys let us seize a lot of weapons before? Bring them all out.”

Wu Qi used a key to open the storage box in the bathroom and piled the previously seized items on the table.

Li Huowang reached for two heavy pistols. These pistols were a bit different from the ones in television dramas. Their stocks were long and looked like they could hold a lot of bullets.

Li Huowang weighed them lightly in his hands, then nodded at Qing Wanglai. “We have time now, right? Teach me how to use a gun.”

Li Huowang didn’t know how to use a gun, but he could still understand the value of firearms.

The gun is fast beyond seven steps and both fast and accurate within seven steps.

He didn't know what the gun corresponded to, whether it was the Simings’ use of the Heavenly Dao or some kind of weapon belonging to them.

It was sufficient for him that this thing could kill his enemies, no matter what they were.

“Uh... Li Huowang, we are going to negotiate, not fight,” Qing Wanglai said helplessly as he looked at the table full of weapons.

“Just because we say it’s a negotiation doesn’t mean it will be. The chances of successful negotiation might actually be higher with these things.”

“Hey, we have their people in our hands. They should be much

more willing to negotiate this time.”

Li Huowang looked at Qing Wanglai. “Why talk so much? Just teach me how to use a gun. What’s the matter? Do you have to keep those skills from me too?”

Li Huowang’s expression suddenly became serious as he held the two guns and walked towards Qing Wanglai. He stared at his face persistently, carefully discerned his features, and then compared them to the Simings he remembered.

Li Huowang’s pupils shrank. “Zhuge Yuan? Qing Wanglai? You are... you are the Three Pure Ones!”

“Heavens, this guy has completely lost it. You were right not to teach him how to use a gun.” The others quickly gathered around, pulled Li Huowang back a few steps, and then took the guns from his hands.

“What are you guys doing? I’m not crazy!” Li Huowang shook off the hands holding his arms in frustration. He wouldn’t have blurted out his thoughts if he hadn’t been so shocked just now.

He had spoken the truth, but the others just viewed him as someone having an episode. He realized these people didn’t understand the true nature of reality.

Wait... The other Simings should know that Qing Wanglai is the Three Pure Ones. Why are they acting like this? Li Huowang looked uncertainly at the others.

If he was here, why were the other Simings surrounding him in the Baiyu Capital? What kind of event was this a reflection of?

“It’s okay, everything is fine.” Yang Na placed herself before Li Huowang. “He took his medicine. Just a few more courses and he’ll be better.”

Wu Qi leaned her back against the wall and sighed deeply. “What kind of people do I have around me? There’s not a single normal person.”

Li Huowang no longer planned to explain anything. They

would always misunderstand him no matter what he said.

In the future, he would have to use the projection method to communicate with them. As long as the main goal was to join forces against the god Yu'er of the Dharma Sect, everything else could be set aside.

“Qing Wanglai, what Chen Hongyu said before was right. Think about it carefully; what if this is a trap? If we are not fully prepared, what if they wipe us out in one fell swoop?”

The others said nothing and simply looked at Li Huowang with confused expressions. What was going on with this guy? Why was he acting so erratically?

Qing Wanglai patiently explained, “Since I agreed to the negotiation, I have everything prepared. You don’t need to worry.”

“Okay, as long as you say so. Now teach me how to use a gun.”

“I already told you not to worry. Why do you still want to learn how to use a gun?” Qing Wanglai seemed a bit troubled by Li Huowang’s request.

“I’m not worried about the negotiation, but I do worry about potential problems afterward. Learning a new skill opens up new paths. Why are you being so stingy about teaching me?”

Li Huowang focused on Qing Wanglai’s expression, trying to figure out why he was hesitant to teach him how to use a gun.

What kind of Siming is Qing Wanglai? Why is he so wary of me? Does the gun symbolize something?

“It’s not as simple as you think. This thing isn’t as easy to use as you imagine. The way they show it in movies and TV, hitting the target with a single shot, is all just an act.

“Moreover, this thing is very sensitive. If someone sees it or if it’s caught on surveillance, it’ll be big trouble.”

“You can’t say that. If someone shoots at me, I can’t just rush at them with a knife.” Li Huowang became more suspicious the more Qing Wanglai explained. *What is this guy guarding against?*

“Actually, Li Huowang, I prepared something more suitable for you.”

“What?” Li Huowang frowned.

Li Huowang saw a black protective suit presented in front of him, but it didn’t feel quite right when he picked it up. The suit was very heavy and weighed down in his hands, with some hard sheets inside.

“This is...”

“Try it on.”

Li Huowang looked at Qing Wanglai, glanced at the others, and quickly changed into the heavy suit.

After putting it on, Li Huowang felt his breathing become more difficult. This suit probably weighed over twenty pounds.

“What is this?” Li Huowang asked. Before anyone could react, Qing Wanglai took out a gun and fired several shots at his chest.

The incredibly shocked Li Huowang was knocked to the ground by the strong impact.

As he quickly reached for his chest, he found there was no bleeding, and the pain in his chest was actually decreasing.

“How is it? With this bulletproof vest, you’ll be invincible if you combine it with your close combat skills. I also prepared a helmet for you.”

Qing Wanglai picked up a helmet thicker than a motorcycle helmet and was about to explain again.

Smack! Yang Na rushed forward and slapped him hard in the face.

Yang Na was trembling with anger. She stood in front of Qing Wanglai and glared at him with eyes filled with rage, as though she wanted to eat him alive.

Chapter 783 - Motorcycle

Qing Wanglai saw Yang Na looking like an enraged lioness, so he paused momentarily and calmly explained, “I had him wear it because the suit is bulletproof. Don’t worry, I know what I’m doing, your little boyfriend won’t get hurt.”

He waved the helmet in his hand towards Li Huowang, who had now climbed up. “And this thing is also bulletproof. It protects your head as well.

“More importantly, unlike a gun which can easily cause trouble, wearing a bulletproof vest is completely legal. You can even buy them online. These items cause much less trouble than a gun.

“If anyone asks about them, you can just say they’re motorcycle helmets and riding gear.”

“Really? Then I have to try it!” Li Huowang pulled Yang Na behind him, then took the helmet from Qing Wanglai and put it on.

“Why is this thing connected to my shoulders? I can’t even turn my head once I put it on.”

“The helmet needs to be connected to the shoulders. Think about it, if a bullet hits your head and the helmet isn’t connected to your shoulders, the impact could break your spine several times over.”

“Is that so? I’ve learned something new.” After putting on the whole set, he jumped up and down a few times before excitedly remarking to Qing Wanglai, “Awesome! This thing is amazing! Come on, shoot me again. Let me feel it.”

The gunshots rang out again, but Li Huowang was prepared this time. He staggered a few steps but didn’t fall down.

He pulled out a military knife and started attacking imaginary

enemies in the air, trying to get a feel for combat in this gear.

Wu Qi, who had pulled Yang Na to the side of the bed, frowned. “He could dismantle a truck with a knife before. Now, he could probably take apart a plane.”

Qian Fu added, “Not just that. This guy is also mentally unstable, and killing people wouldn’t even be illegal for him. He’s practically invincible and can do whatever he wants.”

Yang Na’s face grew even darker upon hearing this.

Zhao Lei, who had been mostly silent, let out a cold snort while playing with a black fidget spinner.

“Here, catch.” Li Huowang caught two keys and a small black notebook that were thrown to him.

He opened the notebook and found it was a motorcycle license, complete with a photo of himself taken at some unknown time.

“What’s this?”

Qing Wanglai opened the RV door, revealing a heavy, brand-new black motorcycle.

“How can there not be a motorcycle if you have a riding helmet and protective gear? As long as you’re riding this, you can go anywhere. Even the traffic police won’t stop you.”

“Wow! You got this? You really went all out. This must’ve been expensive.”

Li Huowang got off the RV and circled the motorcycle, examining it just like a kid with a new toy.

“It’s not expensive. These are all just projections, and the cost doesn’t matter as long as they help us.”

The bike had a streamlined design and sporty side panels. It gave off a muscular feel, with many steel pipes that made it look even more robust.

The overall sense was full of mechanical beauty, and Li Huowang noticed a small hp4 logo on this beast.

He didn’t understand what it represented.

“Can a mentally ill person get a driver’s license?” Wu Qi asked Qing Wanglai.

“Yes, as long as they can prove they’re cured.” Qing Wanglai lightly touched his own face as he answered.

“*Hmph*, cured? I doubt it.”

Qing Wanglai chuckled and walked over to Li Huowang. “Li Huowang, do you know how to ride a motorcycle? I can teach you.”

“Don’t underestimate me. I can ride an electric bike.”

Under Qing Wanglai’s patient guidance, Li Huowang finally managed to ride the motorcycle after a long time. He enjoyed the thrill of speed as he rode through the unfinished buildings.

“You actually dared to let him ride it? Aren’t you afraid he’ll crash into a wall?” Chen Hongyu asked as she watched Li Huowang on his motorcycle.

“It’s fine. I told him to never exceed fifty kilometers per hour. As long as he stays under that, it’s no different from an electric bike. Some electric bikes are even faster. It’s safe, and this bike is just a disguise for his bulletproof gear.”

After Li Huowang rode for a while and got used to the new vehicle, he slowly stopped in front of the others. He struggled to take off his helmet and said to Yang Na, "Come on, let's go for a ride!"

Yang Na glanced at the others, who said nothing. She then hopped onto the back seat and wrapped her arms around Li Huowang’s waist.

“Text me the time for the negotiations! I’ll be there!” The engine roared as Li Huowang and Yang Na sped away.

Li Huowang rode down the road at a slow pace, with Yang Na clinging tightly to his back. Her soft black hair fluttered in the wind as she listened to his heartbeat.

“You felt it too! He didn’t hesitate at all when he shot you! Qing Wanglai is just pretending!”

Li Huowang put one foot down, and waited for the red light. He replied calmly, "Of course, but so what? It's good enough that he's pretending. After all, we're not related."

"Since we need to cooperate against external enemies, we have to at least maintain appearances. If we don't even pretend, it'll be awkward for everyone."

"Once this crisis is over, we probably won't see them again. After all, I'm going to spend my life with you, not them."

The light turned green, and Li Huowang twisted his wrist and slowly rode the new motorcycle home. "Trust me, Nana. I'm not crazy."

"..."

When they returned to the neighborhood, Li Huowang's new outfit immediately caught the attention of the old security guard at the gate. "Who are you? Are you a resident here?"

"It's me."

The security guard observed Li Huowang removing his helmet. He promptly took two steps back and directed his attention towards Li Huowang's motorcycle.

"Oh, no wonder you've been leaving early and coming back late recently. You've been going to a driving school to learn how to ride a motorcycle."

Li Huowang nodded immediately. "That's right. I've been learning how to ride a motorcycle."

After Li Huowang left, the security guard nodded with satisfaction. "Not bad, the young lad has ambition. Even if he can't go to college, he can rely on his motorcycle to make food deliveries. That's much better than staying at home and living off his parents. It seems like his illness has truly been cured. It's no small feat."

Chapter 784 - Dragon-Slaying Immortal-Killing

Li Huowang had returned from the Righteous Monastery. He was back in his simple bedroom, looking at his reflection.

He saw seven eyeballs on his forehead, which seemed to have a consciousness of their own as they stared straight back at Li Huowang.

These were seven secrets, and Li Huowang understood their value.

One eyeball alone had been able to determine the location of the head of the Sitting Oblivion Dao, Shai Zi. If Li Huowang wanted, he could use these seven secrets to uncover any secret in the world.

At this moment, however, Li Huowang's primary concern was how Xuan Pin had helped the other Simings in Baiyu Capital.

Although the problem had been resolved, Li Huowang was still worried about the origins of this thing.

Li Huowang's expression became solemn when he recalled his past experiences.

That being had casually given him such a precious thing, and the only thing Li Huowang understood about the being was its hair-like texture.

At this moment, his memories had disappeared. He could only understand what had happened before by relying on the notes he had written when he still had his memories.

Even though Li Huowang wrote the notes himself, they still felt unfamiliar to him when he read them.

"The Siming who controls all secrets..." Based on his personal

experience, this Siming could easily uncover or conceal all secrets.

Anything that was concealed could become a secret, including a period of time, an object, or even an entire timeline different from his own!

Unlike Ji Zai and Ba-Hui, this unnamed Siming was obviously very mysterious and powerful.

The only thing that reassured him slightly was that this Siming didn't seem to be aligned with the Dharma Sect, at least for now.

Still, if we haven't defeated the Dharma Sect with such a powerful Siming as an ally, just how strong is the other side? Li Huowang thought silently.

Well, let's do our best and leave the rest to fate. Li Huowang shook his head and stared intently at his reflection.

"Back then, how did Xuan Pin help the Simings?"

He saw the seven eyeballs close slowly on the forehead of his reflection.

The next moment, Li Huowang's vision suddenly blurred. Various images quickly flashed before his eyes.

He clutched his head in pain as memories of what Xuan Pin had done slowly emerged in his mind. It seemed like a fragment of a past recollection.

"Chief, everything is ready." Xuan Pin heard the response from the imperial guard and put down the pen in his hand. He turned slowly and walked out of the house, heading to a huge altar stacked with torches at the edge.

In the center of the altar were the others who had died with Xuan Pin.

At the center of the circular altar stood a massive bronze tree, towering dozens of meters high.

Xuan Pin stopped under the tree and made various gestures with his six hands. Then, he suddenly halted.

"What's wrong?" asked Huangfu Tiangang, the Imperial

Preceptor of the Liang Kingdom. He was barefoot and holding his Constellation Sword while preparing to perform a ritual.

Xuan Pin shook his head. "Someone is here."

"Someone?" Huangfu Tiangang's face immediately darkened. He pulled out a Daoist bell and shook it violently, causing the sound to echo around the altar.

When the sound of the bell ceased, Huangfu Tiangang looked back at Xuan Pin in confusion. "Where's the person? I set up a great formation outside. Not even a bug should be able to get in. It's impossible for someone to be here."

Xuan Pin didn't explain further. He seemed to notice Li Huowang's gaze and looked in the direction of his line of sight through the hole in his red Daoist robe. "I don't know who you are, nor do I know why you need the Dragon-Slaying Immortal-Killing Array.

"But since you need to learn it, the world must be in a very dire situation. I will teach you now, so pay attention.

"To begin the array, one must step on the Gang star that transcends the three realms. This step is the foundation of the Yu step. By retracing the steps, nothing is impossible. The steps need not be complex, but the heart must connect with the nine stars. The feet must inspire the nine spirits, and the body must embody the nine energies, thus achieving clarity."

As he spoke, Xuan Pin began to demonstrate to Li Huowang. "For men, the left foot goes first. For women, the right hand leads. The left hand follows, with the right hand forming the Taiyi gesture. The left hand follows again, with the right hand forming the Siming gesture for longevity. The left hand follows the right hand to form the Tianguan gesture."

As Xuan Pin explained, his three pairs of hands emerged from his Daoist robes and coordinated to form various gestures.

"Step into the Yang stance and recite with me: 陽氣生於左，陰氣生於右，左陽右陰，陰陽相生，生生不息。"

The incantation from Xuan Pin's mouth was incredibly cryptic, but Li Huowang immediately understood its meaning. *Among the positions of the twenty-eight constellations, the Purple Star is the golden beam that supports the jade column.*

As Xuan Pin continued step by step, the so-called Dragon-Slaying Immortal-Killing Array became imprinted into Li Huowang's mind.

The Imperial Preceptor raised the Constellation Sword and pointed it forcefully at the sky. Two Dragon Veins flew over from afar, coiling around the gigantic bronze tree. One of them was Gao Zhijian.

As the two Dragon Veins settled on the bronze tree, the tree brightened significantly, shifting from its original color to a shade of gold.

The clouds in the sky dispersed and revealed stars. Xuan Pin and those beside him continued to chant and perform rituals as the sound of dragon roars echoed in the air. The Dragon Veins connected with the Earth Veins, altering the landscape and Feng Shui across the world. The stars moved aside and revealed a patch of pitch-black sky.

Li Huowang finally understood why this secret required seven secrets to exchange. In that extreme darkness, he saw a massive jade door—the Ox Tail Gate.

A vast, multi-eyed creature was looking down through the Ox Tail Gate.

As Xuan Pin chanted and performed rituals, the Imperial Preceptor raised the Constellation Sword and lifted three Nine-Dragons Light-Emitting Talismans.

“With bare feet, urgently tread the Heavenly Gate. The energy of the Yin demons invades the south while the Nine Dragons rise and return the sun's rays. The sky clears as brilliance spreads across

the vast universe. The evil Yin spirits perish, their shadows scattered. Om, Black Wheel Deity, heavenly light piercing the sun, obey the command urgently!”

The gold talismans on the Imperial Preceptor’s sword ignited instantly as dragon roars echoed in the air. Golden dragon bodies rapidly climbed from the bronze tree onto everyone on the altar.

Immediately, dragon scales and horns began to appear on everyone. They tore through their clothes and exposed deformed dragon scales as dragon qi emanated from them.

Conversely, the Dragon Veins on the bronze tree weakened, and numerous withered corpses hung all over the bronze tree.

Chapter 785 - Emperor

“It’s time!” Huangfu Tiangang shouted.

He was now completely transformed. Everyone resolutely extended their dragon claws and forcibly gouged their eyes out.

“Go!” Huangfu Tiangang said as he threw his Constellation Sword into the air and leaped onto it.

Then he flew toward the Ox Tail Gate.

Xuan Pin’s robes shrank. A strange golden dragon covered in golden claws emerged from it and charged toward the Ox Tail Gate.

Once they left, everyone else used their own unique abilities and followed them toward the Ox Tail Gate.

As they moved, the entire world’s Feng Shui and spiritual veins shifted with them. They weren’t only borrowing the luck of the Dragon Veins—they were tapping into the luck of the entire world.

When Li Huowang opened his eyes again, he found himself lying on the ground. He was bleeding heavily from his nose and felt so dizzy that he could barely stand.

Despite this, Li Huowang clearly remembered everything that had just happened, down to the smallest detail. This was not just a display of the secret but a forceful implantation of it into Li Huowang’s mind.

“So that’s what happened! On their own, they couldn’t help the Simings. They needed to borrow the power of two Dragon Veins and the world’s Earth Veins to intervene in the Simings’ battle! I knew Xuan Pin had a backup plan!”

Li Huowang’s excitement gradually faded when he realized that Xuan Pin and the others were still dead.

Before he could mourn, something strange happened. His memories about the events began to fade.

Li Huowang exclaimed frantically, “What’s happening?! Aren’t you helping me? Why are you taking it back!”

As the fading accelerated and even affected the spell Xuan Pin had recited, Li Huowang grabbed his head. “Come back! Don’t disappear!”

He tried to use his “Truth” cultivation abilities to stop the process, but they had no effect on the already fleeting memories.

“I said come back!”

Veins bulged on Li Huowang’s forehead. As he increased his force on both hands, he suddenly heard a crack as his skull fractured.

Li Huowang was momentarily stunned by the shattering sound, then his face showed a trace of joy. He inserted his right hand into the fissure in his skull and began to rummage through his brain.

Li Huowang quickly found the vanishing memory. He tightly held onto it with his right hand to prevent it from disappearing.

He used his trembling left hand to dip into the soft memory and quickly wrote on the ground. He couldn’t let the memory vanish, so he had to record everything.

Li Huowang held the memory in one hand as he wrote frantically. He wrote wherever he could, filling the floor, the walls, and even his own body with notes.

Finally, when he could no longer dip into the memory, he pulled his hand out of his head.

Li Huowang stood in the center of the room, surrounded by his writings. He breathed a long sigh of relief. He had recorded everything.

After resolving this issue, Li Huowang began to review his notes and organize his thoughts.

As he looked through them, he sensed something was off and frowned.

Something’s wrong! If they went to Ox Tail Gate, how did the

Dharma Sect ambush them? Didn't Xuan Pin get killed due to a Dharma Sect ambush?

Zhang Tan wasn't there, so he might not know, but Gao Zhijian was there. How could he not know?

The truth Gao Zhijian had previously relayed to him now began to blur. *Was he lying to me? Was he lying to me as well?*

Li Huowang couldn't believe this possibility. He decided to confront Gao Zhijian and ask him personally.

He found Gao Zhijian on a large road outside of the military camp. He was dressed in his dragon robes and seated on a jade chariot pulled by sixteen carriages. The entire procession looked very grand.

The people dared not block his path, kneeling and bowing as he passed.

Li Huowang's appearance alarmed the eunuchs and guards, but they stood down at Gao Zhijian's command.

Gao Zhijian said, "Senior Li, can it wait? I'm heading to the military camp to send off the soldiers. If I'm late, it might upset them."

Li Huowang jumped onto the chariot and yelled, "Tell me the truth! How did Xuan Pin and the others die?"

"The Dharma Sect ambushed and killed them while they were helping the Simings."

"Nonsense! They set up the Dragon-Slaying Immortal-Killing Array, borrowed your luck and the world's luck, then went to the Ox Tail Gate! How could the Dharma Sect have harmed them?"

Gao Zhijian froze. "How do you... know all this?"

"Don't ask me how I know! I just want to know why you lied! You were there. You even participated in the array, so why didn't you tell me?"

"Are you still Simpleton, the one I could entrust my life to, or are you now a calculating emperor on the dragon throne?"

The yellow silk of the canopy fluttered in the wind as Gao Zhijian sat silently.

After a moment, he said, "Senior Li, Xuan Pin entrusted some things to be kept from you, and I agreed. I am still the person you can entrust your life to, but you once told me to be a good emperor.

"A good emperor can't speak freely—a good emperor must be shrewd and capable of lying without blinking.

"A good emperor must prioritize the country's affairs over personal matters.

"A good emperor must use imperial tactics without hesitation while treading carefully to avoid becoming a tyrant or a muddler.

"But if being a good emperor conflicts with being a simpleton you can entrust your life to, which one should I choose?

"Senior Li, you saved my life multiple times. Tell me which one to choose, and I will choose it without question."

Li Huowang's anger dissipated, giving way to a complex expression as he looked at Gao Zhijian. He remained silent.

As they stared at each other, a groan interrupted them. A pregnant woman kneeling nearby collapsed, with blood flowing from her body.

Gao Zhijian urgently pointed. "Quick, help her deliver the baby! Don't let her die!"

Eunuchs and maids from within the convoy rushed to assist.

Li Huowang finally replied, "A good emperor."

"Good."

Another shriek filled the air as the eunuchs and maids assisting in the childbirth fled fearfully.

A monstrous creature with a baby's head and a vulture's body emerged from the blood, laughing with a mouth full of rotten teeth.

Chapter 786 - Decree

“HAHAHAHA!”

The human-faced beast ignored everyone as it lay in the puddle of blood. The monster struggled to control its limbs as it laughed.

“Hahaha! May the sun and moon fall! The sun sets at dusk. It sets in the evening and rises in the morning! The Nine Calamities, the Celestial Dragons, and the Fallen Star! The Crimson Court falls, and the white jade darkens! The Celestial Deities’ ichor shall flow!”

Everyone saw the naked human-faced vulture ranting and laughing maniacally before falling lifelessly to the ground.

The events unfolded so quickly that no one could comprehend what had just happened. They just had their eyes fixed on the motionless corpse.

Despite the gaping wound on her abdomen, the woman who had been pregnant just a moment ago draped herself over the corpse of the beast and cried. “My son! Aaaaah!”

Her scream spurred everyone into action.

“GUARDS!” Gao Zhijian shouted.

His guards immediately surrounded him.

Li Huowang almost lost his balance when he realized what had happened. His face contorted in disgust and hatred.

It was an Omen. He had seen it once in the Qi Kingdom. The Qi Kingdom had fallen shortly after the Omen’s appearance.

The Omen was a sign of great misfortune, and now it had appeared in the Liang Kingdom. Li Huowang didn’t know what lay ahead, but he knew that everything was in grave danger.

Gao Zhijian did not recognize what it was, but some of the people around him did. An old eunuch with bronze coins sewn into his eye sockets quickly explained the Omen to Gao Zhijian in a

hushed tone.

Gao Zhijian's eyes widened with shock as he stared at the monster in the puddle of blood.

Li Huowang nodded and said in a grave tone, "He's right. We are in grave danger."

Gao Zhijian didn't have the mood to go to the barracks anymore. He waved quickly. "Quick! Return to the palace!"

As if dissatisfied with how slow they were going, Gao Zhijian hopped on a horse and charged back towards the palace.

Li Huowang walked over and picked up the dead Omen from the lady's embrace before quickly following Gao Zhijian.

As the Liang Kingdom's Emperor, Gao Zhijian had the highest authority and could command everyone. He commanded his officials and the soldiers to prepare to depart at any moment.

The city was shrouded in uncertainty and depression. The civilians somehow sensed something was wrong. Even in broad daylight, the streets remained empty. Anyone who had to venture outside scurried like frightened rats and huddled close to the walls.

Before long, the upper-ranked officers were summoned. All of them stared at the dead Omen and listened to Gao Zhijian's explanation, but none of them said anything.

After some time, a young eunuch entered the room and reported, "Your Majesty, I've received news that we are not the only place to have produced an Omen. Si Qi, Qing Qiu, Hou Shu, and even the other counties in the Liang Kingdom... have... have reported the appearances of Omens."

The miniscule hope in everyone's heart was shattered. Something more dangerous than the Dharma Sect was now at play. The entire world was going to experience great danger.

"Your Majesty" A general with two scars on his face swiftly kneeled down. "Please allow me to fight! I will fight with my life on the line to destroy the Dharma Sect and destroy these inauspicious

omens!”

With his words, a chain reaction ensued as everyone began echoing his words. The appearance of the Omens worried everyone, making them want immediately to leap into action. Even the civil officers and the Surveillance Bureau wanted to join.

Li Huowang was standing in the corner to observe the situation. *Their reactions... They are afraid that the world is going to end.*

Li Huowang was afraid too. The Qi Kingdom was gone, so its inhabitants ran to the Liang Kingdom. But what if the Liang Kingdom fell too? Li Huowang dared not imagine such an ending.

“General, do not be rash! We have to be careful. The Dharma Sect has lost a lot of their manpower. They are most likely using this to trip us up. Haste makes waste!”

Gao Zhijian calmed them down and started giving them different orders. He gave every person a suitable task and started aligning their hearts as one.

Gao Zhijian appeared to have learned a lot from the previous Dragon Veins. He had learned how to calm everyone during a major crisis and devise plans to tackle it.

The officers and generals slowly left one by one.

Then, Gao Zhijian looked at Li Huowang. “Senior Li, what do you intend to do?”

The Omen’s appearance had solidified Li Huowang’s thoughts. “I need to conduct the Dragon-Slaying Immortal-Killing Array. An Omen’s appearance usually indicates that something bad is happening up there. I need to go up there and see what has happened.”

“Senior Li, is there a need for you to do so?”

“Yes.”

Gao Zhijian sat on his throne and stared at Li Huowang. “Senior Li, do you remember what I said earlier about my choice?”

“I still remember.”

“Then I will have to advise you to not do so. Xuan Pin had told me that the array could destroy the Dharma Sect in one go, so I allowed him to take that risk. I let him become the nexus of the array, but look what happened.

“They all died, and now even Omens began appearing. That method is useless! I have a plan to deal with the Dharma Sect here. I need you to help me.”

Li Huowang shook his head. “No, this method will work. No matter what that Siming was, it gave me seven secrets in hopes that I would conduct the array. The Siming needs my help.”

Gao Zhijian gripped his throne tightly. “And what are those Simings? You don’t even know who the Siming is and you trust them? Can you be confident that they aren’t using you like a pawn? Maybe Xuan Pin died because he was fooled by those Simings. The fate of humanity must be held in our own hands and not in the hands of other beings!”

Li Huowang could tell how much Gao Zhijian detested the Simings from his tone.

“Senior Li, you are strong. You should stand where you are needed the most. With Xuan Pin’s death, you have to be our main strength. Only then can we win.”

Li Huowang’s anger started to bubble after seeing how stubborn Gao Zhijian was. “You think I’m only trying to destroy the Dharma Sect? Do you think everything would be solved with that? What if everything worsens even after we destroy the Dharma Sect?”

Gao Zhijian waved his arms after seeing Li Huowang still refused to listen to him. An eunuch quickly brought out a brush and a golden decree.

Gao Zhijian wrote his decree swiftly before placing it onto the tray. The eunuch then displayed the tray to Li Huowang.

“Li Huowang, receive the decree.”

Li Huowang did not move.

Chapter 787 - Explode

Li Huowang did not move, so Gao Zhijian repeated his command. "Surveillance Bureau, Third General Li Huowang, accept the decree."

Li Huowang was about to say something when Gao Zhijian stood up from his chair, approached Li Huowang, and stared at him calmly.

"Left and Right Jinwu Guards, Cavalry Commander Er Jiu, accept the decree."

Li Huowang looked at Gao Zhijian with a complicated expression on his face.

Gao Zhijian, in his dragon robes, suddenly knelt on both knees and kowtowed, his crown hitting the ground heavily in the process. "Senior Li, please accept the decree!"

Li Huowang looked at the massive body kneeling in front of him and relented. He took the decree and raised it up high in the air.

"Thank you, Your Majesty! Li Huowang accepts the decree!"

Li Huowang kept the decree in his robes and walked out.

Gao Zhijian stood back up after seeing Li Huowang exiting. The eunuchs quickly dusted him off with their horsetail whisks.

Gao Zhijian calmed down and sat back down on his throne. An imposing pressure emanated from him as he resumed his duty as the Emperor.

He said, "Da Nuo is facing great danger. Issue my imperial orders, and summon everyone into the palace. I shall meet each sect and each faction myself."

Li Huowang walked out from the cold palace without opening the decree. He didn't know what Gao Zhijian had ordered him to

do.

Gao Zhijian wouldn't help Li Huowang even though he had finally obtained the Dragon-Slaying Immortal-Killing Array. And without Gao Zhijian's help, he couldn't use the Array.

Nevertheless, he was more worried about Gao Zhijian than himself.

Li Huowang had barely left the city when the sound of rapid drumming reached his ears, coming from within the city.

He listened carefully and recognized the signal. It was the signal for the soldiers to prepare for battle. They were heading out to Nan Ping.

It was hard to believe they only managed to obtain a brief respite before heading out to a gruesome battle.

Li Huowang's heart felt heavy when he recalled Gao Zhijian and the weight of the foreign object in his robes.

Gao Zhijian had changed immediately after saying that he had to change. He was not a stranger to Li Huowang, but there was nothing he could do. He was the one who had told Gao Zhijian to change in the first place.

"Father, are you upset?" Li Sui piped up.

"There's nothing to be sad about. No matter what I chose, we would still be sad," Li Huowang replied, feeling tired.

He then walked past a White Lotus Sect disciple who only had a single leg. Li Huowang stared at the white lotus motif on their shirt before approaching the White Lotus Sect's main hall.

He wanted to find someone to vent to, but there weren't many people he could talk to. Somehow, as time passed, there were fewer and fewer people he could confide in.

There was only one person he could rely on, the one who could make him feel slightly better, even if it meant resting on her shoulders temporarily.

Li Huowang soon found Bai Lingmiao. She was reading some

papers.

As he approached her, she suddenly stood up. “No, this won’t work. Nan Ping is too far away, and there are too many people. We don’t have enough food for them. Quick, contact the people and find a way to do this.”

“Understood, Saintess.”

“Also, send out some of our people to test out their capabilities on the battlefield. If they do well, we can rotate some of our people to go to war to help the Liang Kingdom end this as soon as possible. Please give me notice every time our disciples are heading to war. I will request the Heavenly Mater to bless us so that we may achieve victory. One last thing... Send out orders for our disciples to stop any rumors the moment they encounter them.”

Bai Lingmiao suddenly felt something to her left and stopped talking. She felt a familiar gaze and turned around.

She walked towards the direction from which she sensed the gaze and extended her hands, searching for someone. However, no one was there.

“What’s wrong?”

“No, everything’s fine,” Bai Lingmiao said, shaking her head. She turned around and resumed her work.

They were in a crisis. As the Saintess, she had various things to do. She could not rest now.

Just as the situation had finally stabilized, everyone was spurred into unrest again. The Dharma Sect, who had been forced away from Si Qi, would not relinquish it that easily. The witches from the Dharma Sect also detested the Surveillance Bureau. Neither side refused to go down without a fight.

Li Huowang had no choice. He followed the decree’s instructions and accompanied the military as they marched down towards Nan Ping.

Near the borders, both the soldiers and the Dharma Sect

charged towards each other on sight.

Words were useless here—there was no room for reconciliation.

Li Huowang was the vanguard. Black tentacles sprouted out from his body as he raised his spine sword high into the air. He stood on the skull of Peng Longteng's horse as he charged into the Dharma Sect.

Explosions of blood came into view wherever he went. Every path he took turned crimson red.

Li Huowang was like an incredibly sharp weapon for the soldiers. Every time he broke through one of the Dharma Sect's formations, the soldiers following him would immediately surge into the cracks of the formation, destroying any members of the Dharma Sect they encountered.

Li Huowang's appearance had attracted the Dharma Sect's attention, but they did nothing. It was as if they were waiting for something. Meanwhile, Li Huowang continued butchering their ranks.

Half a division later, when the Dharma Sect was slowly breaking down, a ragged umbrella brushed past Li Huowang. A tall and skinny man wearing ragged Daoist robes appeared in front of him.

Li Huowang recognized that man. It was the same person who had tried to ambush him! He never thought the umbrella man would appear.

The man was tall. His head seemed elongated, with the top of it stuffed into a white urn. The only thing he revealed was his mouth.

There was a red cloth wrapped around the white urn. One word was written on the cloth—tribute.

Li Huowang took half a step back when he felt someone behind him. An eye opened on the back of his head, and he saw another umbrella man standing behind him. The newcomer looked exactly like the first umbrella man.

No, there were two more, one on his left and another on his right. They had isolated Li Huowang from the others.

It was clear that they were here to ambush Li Huowang!

Just then, a massive general appeared. He expanded before exploding into bits of flesh. An old monk wearing a robe of flesh walked out from the remnants of the general's body. It was Chan Du.

“Daoist Li, do not be afraid. We are here to help!”

Chapter 788 - Ru Shou

“Fire!” Li Huowang roared as he and Peng Longteng were engulfed by fire.

They broke through the entrapment of the four strange men, charging towards the other Dharma Sect members.

Li Huowang had allies on the outside, so he wanted to group up with them to increase his chances of winning.

But the Dharma Sect was clearly trying to stop him from doing so. The four weird men opened their umbrellas simultaneously. It suddenly started raining out of nowhere, and the rainwater suppressed Li Huowang’s fire.

Fire and water collided, forming a dense mist of steam that the four weird men held onto. They pulled the steam and covered their surroundings in white mist.

With the concealment of the mist, Li Huowang and Peng Longteng lost sight of their targets.

Chan Du disappeared as well. Li Huowang had lost his bearings and didn’t know where his allies were.

Splat! Peng Longteng impaled Li Huowang with her halberd and launched him high up into the air. Li Huowang needed to find a way to escape through the white mist.

Li Huowang flew high before landing back into the white mist. Suddenly, he saw something red flashing in the mist.

Without hesitation, he stabbed towards the red light with his sword.

There were two stabbing sounds. One came from Li Huowang stabbing his sword into Peng Longteng, while the other was Peng Longteng stabbing her halberd into Li Huowang.

They stared at each other in a daze as the flames burned their

bodies.

Peng Longteng swung her halberd and threw Li Huowang to the side. “What’s going on? Didn’t you fly up just now? How did you end up behind me?”

Li Huowang held his chest and stood up as he observed the white mist.

He had a gut feeling that something was wrong. He stabbed his sword into his mouth to pry off some of his molars before spitting them out like shotgun pellets towards his front.

He was surprised when the molars hit his back, causing sparks to fly from the impact. “Something’s wrong with the mist!”

The moment the words left Li Huowang’s mouth, the rain became heavier, threatening to extinguish his fire.

What should I do? Am I trapped?

Li Huowang shook his head to snap out of it. “No, this is good. I need them to buy as much time as possible! I already have a team of elites heading towards them from the back. They are doomed to die today from our pincer attack!”

He felt False Qi enter his body.

They believed it!

He smiled without anyone knowing.

Just then, the white mist to his left started to bubble and swirl before a weird man with the umbrella walked into his line of sight.

Li Huowang asked, “Who are you? Give me a name!”

He stomped on the ground and ran towards the weird man.

“Ru Shou.”

“Ru Shou.”

“Ru Shou.”

“Ru Shou.”

Four identical voices answered as the weird men threw their umbrellas at Li Huowang from four different directions.

Li Huowang swung his spine sword, sending a rift towards

every umbrella.

The umbrellas spun through the air, shaking off droplets of rainwater. The rifts diminished in size as the rain continued to fall on them.

Who are they? Li Huowang wondered, looking at the four umbrellas flying towards him.

Without any hesitation, he tore off one of his rib bones and stabbed his own chest. Just as he did, he saw an eyeball underneath one of the tattered umbrellas.

The four umbrellas didn't stop at all, seemingly unaffected by the pain. They tried to stab Li Huowang, but they were not the only ones attacking Li Huowang. Even their shadows had joined in, attacking Li Huowang's shadow.

Peng Longteng's massive frame suddenly appeared in front of Li Huowang and blocked their attacks.

The umbrellas pierced her before spinning wildly. Peng Longteng's flaming body was split into pieces before scattering onto the ground.

Li Huowang stood still and glared at the four men in front of him. "You don't feel pain? Are you not alive?"

The four of them, Ru Shou, did not answer. Their emaciated bodies suddenly trembled. Li Huowang even heard their urns shatter underneath their umbrellas.

The four men suddenly expanded, though their lower halves were still long and thin.

Li Huowang thought they were going to attack him again, but the white mist around him suddenly cleared up a lot.

Soon after, Li Huowang saw a familiar Buddha consuming the white mist. It was the one he had seen in the Righteous Monastery. It was sucking the white mist into the holes on its body.

"Nan wu shi ji chui~ Yi meng ah li ye~ Po lu ji di shi fo luo leng two po~"

There was a superimposed chanting coming from the Buddha as a fleshy Bodhisattva with two faces crawled out from one of the Buddha's orifices.

The two faces were none other than Abbot Chan Du and Abbot Xin Hui.

“Sa po pu duo~ Na mo po jia~”

As they chanted, the four Ru Shous swelled up more and more, with lumps of flesh protruding out.

Li Huowang recalled that this was one of the very few times that he was fighting with his allies!

“Keep going, don't stop!” he yelled.

Li Huowang watched the four weird men, Ru Shou, slowly turn into mud.

Their umbrellas suddenly fell downwards, blocking Li Huowang's vision. Ru Shou had disappeared by the time the umbrellas landed on the ground.

The white mist scattered, and Li Huowang was back on the battlefield filled with bloodthirst and a murderous aura.

“He ran?” Li Huowang muttered, scanning his surroundings.

“No, he would not. If the Dharma Sect couldn't even hold their ground here, they wouldn't be able to defend all of Nan Ping,” Chan Du replied.

The ground suddenly trembled.

“Is the Earth Dragon turning again?”

Li Huowang focused on the ground to prevent himself being swallowed by the Earth Dragon once more.

Just then, the eyes growing at the back of his head widened with shock. “Father! Water! There's a lot of water behind us!”

Li Huowang turned around and saw muddy water surging towards them like a yellow dragon.

The water submerged everyone on the battlefield, both the soldiers and the Dharma Sect members. All of them were washed

away.

Chapter 789 - Trust

The raging river surged through the battlefield, sweeping away horses, chariots, and even the soldiers in their formations. The murderous aura dissipated soon after.

However, amidst the tumultuous waters, one being remained unwavering—a massive Bodhisattva. It was Chan Du and Xuan Pin, who had transformed into a Bodhisattva several meters tall with two faces. They also had a thousand arms behind their back.

They stood with their waist submerged in their water. One of their bloody arms scooped up Li Huowang from the water.

Li Huowang didn't realize what had happened. He touched the Shimmer Mirror to inspect what had transpired.

He soon let go of the mirror and frowned. “Those crazy bastards destroyed the river banks!”

Si Qi, a kingdom abundant with rivers, faced a difficult situation because the Dharma Sect had decided to flood the entire battlefield. That single flood instantly erased the momentum that the soldiers had obtained.

The Dharma Sect also didn't care about how many people would die from the flooding water flowing downstream.

Just then, the flesh Bodhisattva suddenly stumbled. The two Abbots frowned. “Be careful. There are enemies in the water!”

Li Huowang scanned the water but saw nothing except for the muddy water.

The rain continued to fall and scattered his reflection in the water.

Swish! Suddenly, a black rope shot out from the water, wrapping itself around Li Huowang's neck before dragging him into the water.

“What is this?” Li Huowang held onto the rope with his hands before opening his mouth. Li Sui’s tentacles shot out and chased after the enemy.

When Li Sui retracted her tentacles, Li Huowang saw a strange entity entangled within them. It resembled a monkey, but its eyes were wide, like those of a fish. Furthermore, it had gills behind its ears.

“A water monkey?”[1]

Li Huowang remembered seeing them once on a boat, but they were completely different. The water monkey in front of him looked even more gnarly and ferocious.

Li Huowang had just said that when the massive Bodhisattva lost its balance and fell into the river. “It’s not just those smallish evil entities in the water! Be careful! There’s something massive in the water!”

With those words, Chan Du fell into the water along with Li Huowang.

The icy cold water of the river submerged Li Huowang.

Numerous tentacles sprouted out from Li Huowang’s body, allowing him to navigate freely in the water.

Regardless of what was in the water, Li Huowang understood that he could not fight it in its natural habitat. He had no reason to do so either.

He started swimming upwards with the help of Li Sui’s tentacles.

He attempted to resurface, reaching out to push through the water. However, he soon realized he couldn’t break through. It was as if he was trapped in the muddy water.

No matter how hard he pushed or how high he was, he was stuck underwater!

“This is just the surface. I can get out! I can get out!” Li Huowang mumbled, using his powers to try to surface.

As his hands finally broke through the water's surface, a surge of joy washed over him. But just then, numerous gazes fell onto him from beneath the water.

He looked down and saw four people standing in the muddy water. He didn't recognize three of them, but he did recognize Ru Shou and his four umbrellas.

It was clear that they were here to hunt Li Huowang down. It doesn't matter which side won today as long they caught Li Huowang. All in all, it would be the Dharma Sect's victory if they did.

Xuan Pin was dead. The Dharma Sect was naturally aiming for him next.

"I can get out! I can get out!" Li Huowang continued to push upwards.

He had just extended his arm out of the water when a flash of steel cut both of his arms off. His arms sank down into the muddy water with blood trailing out from the wound.

One of the figures, the one at the left, opened its mouth and ate both Li Huowang's arms.

Li Huowang had no choice but to fight. He raised his wounded arms up as the water was diluting his blood.

Two tentacles sprouted out from the opening of Li Huowang's arms. He snarled before charging towards the four figures. "Let me see how strong you guys are!"

The four figures split apart and charged towards Li Huowang from different directions.

As they got closer, bubbles floated up from the bottom, obscuring Li Huowang's vision. All of a sudden, a stone mask tangled in weeds flew towards Li Huowang's face.

Li Huowang stared at the stone mask intently. The person behind the stone mask slowly turned into stone and sank into the bottom of the water.

Both of Li Huowang's legs were spread apart out of nowhere. It was as if something was holding each of his legs, pulling them further and further apart until the sound of cracking bones rang out. If the pulling continued, Li Huowang would be split in half!

Li Sui held the purple-tassel sword and came out from Li Huowang's body to swing it at the thing holding Li Huowang's legs, but Li Sui's sword hit nothing.

"It's not invisible! It's the water! The water is alive!"

The next instant, Li Huowang's legs were torn apart from his body.

Splat! An umbrella suddenly stabbed into Li Huowang's chest. The umbrella had come from nowhere.

As the umbrella was on the verge of opening up to tear Li Huowang to pieces, he used Li Sui's tentacles to wrap around the umbrella. He was trying to prevent the umbrella from opening.

But it was useless as the other witches of the Dharma Clan encircled him.

Li Huowang stared at the single eye inside the broken urn of the umbrella before he laughed out loud.

"Did you really think I came unprepared despite knowing that you all were targeting me? How about it? Am I really that good at acting? Hahaha! To think that you believed me! You thought you were ambushing me? In reality, I am the one ambushing you! Didn't you realize that Chan Du is missing? I'm just bait to lure you all in!"

The witches of the Dharma Clan quickly looked around to prepare for the unseen attack.

Li Huowang laughed extremely hard upon seeing them. He laughed until he almost cried.

"Hahaha! I tricked you guys! I can't believe you guys believed it! Hahaha!"

rivers or other bodies of freshwater. It feeds on fish and prawns, though it may drink human blood too. 🐟

Chapter 790 - Tian Wu

Li Huowang laughed even harder when he sensed how angry they were. He wasn't afraid at all.

"You won't have the chance to laugh anymore!" The umbrella in his chest suddenly spun, cutting off Li Sui's tentacles.

Ru Shou unfolded the ragged umbrella, tearing Li Huowang's body apart into several pieces. His blood stained the water, turning it crimson red while his flesh descended into the depths of the muddy water.

Ru Shou held onto his umbrella and smiled at the pieces of Li Huowang's flesh.

Suddenly, black tentacles sprouted out from the pieces of Li Huowang's flesh. They stuck and pulled the chunk of flesh together before recombining Li Huowang's body together.

"Are you stupid? Did you really think there was no ambush just because I said so? Why don't you look around?"

Li Huowang had just said that when the water quickly subsided. Someone had blocked off the hole in the river bank.

Li Huowang stepped on the muddy ground, now completely free from the river's influence. He looked at his enemies and his allies.

There was the Righteous Monastery, the Antrabhara Temple, the Luo Sect, the Mo family, the Ao Jing Sect, the soldiers, and even several other sects that Li Huowang had never seen before. All of them encircled the Dharma Sect.

This was supposed to be an ambush to kill Li Huowang, but the situation had completely changed. Li Huowang now had the advantage.

Li Huowang inspected his enemies again. Due to how turbid

the water was before, he had only seen them as shadows in the water. Now, he could see them clearly.

He recognized some of them, including Ru Shou.

But the most conspicuous one was a large pile of wet hair. On closer inspection, Li Huowang realized that they were the water monkeys. They huddled each other to protect something in the middle.

Their strength had greatly diminished without the river water.

Beside the water monkeys were four chicken-feet men. They all had a veil of viscera covering their faces. Li Huowang recognized them because he fought them before.

Beside them was someone he had never seen before. It was someone wearing a stone mask. The mask's eyes were empty, with rounded ears and a tall nose. The mask's mouth was slightly agape. Li Huowang had to admit that it looked somewhat divine.

It resembled the mask he had seen in the Liang Kingdom's palace. The difference was that those were made from copper, while the one in front of him was made of stone.

The final person was a hunchbacked man carrying a large gourd on his back. Half of his face was average, while the other half had been transformed into a large trailing lump of flesh. Various organs grew on the tumor on his face as he dragged it along the ground. The lump of the tumor also pulsated according to the person's breath.

Li Huowang wasn't sure what was happening, but he felt his body itching, so he scratched his chin with his arms. As he did, he noticed several red welts on his arms, resembling mosquito bites.

This was the battlefield. There was no reason to introduce themselves. The Righteous Monastery was the first one to attack.

"Mo lo... Di li ni... Mo suan li tai..." The flesh Bodhisattva was seated behind the Abbots. As they chanted, everything around the Bodhisattva turned into flesh and blood, regardless of what it was.

Mud, stone, wood, and trees slowly transformed into flesh, including the ground beneath the Dharma Sect.

The low roar of a dragon came from the middle of the group of water monkeys. Rain began pouring heavily, and the group of water monkeys scattered.

A woman with fish-scale tattoos appeared from the group of water monkeys. Li Huowang recognized her tattoo as the same one Yang Xiaohai's family used. She was a boat person!

However, compared to the boat people who worked on the sea for food, the one in front of Li Huowang appeared to hold even more power. She smiled and revealed razor-sharp teeth. She was holding a statue covered in fish skin. It was small, but it gave Li Huowang a bad feeling.

"Come!" Peng Longteng rode her horse as she threw Li Huowang towards the woman. It was clear that she was the one who had brought the rain.

Suddenly, a bunch of limbs covered in white tassels covered the group of water monkeys and the woman.

The organs of the water monkeys shifted rapidly in different directions. Li Huowang remembered what they were—the white tassels of the Lion Dance Palace!

Even they had come to help for the sake of their survival.

Seeing that someone was dealing with her, Li Huowang changed directions and charged toward the man with the tumor.

Li Huowang didn't dare let his guard down in this life-or-death situation. He wasn't sure what abilities the man with the tumor had, so he decided to use his cultivation to test the waters first.

Li Huowang glared at the man and slowly turned him to stone. The petrification process had almost been completed when the stone suddenly cracked open. Yellow smoke billowed out from the gourd and flowed towards Li Huowang.

"Longteng, go and see what kind of abilities he has!"

“Charge!” Peng Longteng kicked her horse and charged into the yellow smoke. Her target was the cracked statue.

When the yellow smoke touched her body, it quickly made her mutate. Screaming mouths grew on her body, along with several weird hands. They quickly seeped out from the chinks of her armor and continued to grow.

Her horse grew larger too. Its legs split into six before splitting into eight.

Several strange iridescent liquids dripped from Peng Longteng’s armor onto the ground. It somehow gave life to inanimate objects.

Li Huowang had seen the same liquid before! It covered the entirety of the Qi Kingdom and could mutate everything!

God Yu’er is dead. Did something snatch its Heavenly Dao? Or is this the Heavenly Dao of another Siming? Li Huowang waved his arms to turn Peng Longteng into an illusion again.

But something was wrong. Peng Longteng’s body continued to mutate. She didn’t turn into an illusion. Under the influence of the strange liquid, Li Huowang’s control over her had somehow been lost.

Peng Longteng was currently fused to her horse, and she started becoming slower and slower. She soon fell onto the ground and continued to mutate before becoming a strange fleshy gourd that continued to produce the strange liquid.

The strange man emerged from the back of the gourd and patted it before revealing his black teeth with a smile. “I am Tian Wu. I greet Daoist Li.”

Chapter 791 - Heavenly Dao

Li Huowang stood motionlessly as he looked at Tian Wu, seemingly deep in thought.

The next moment, Tian Wu's head plunged into his chest, avoiding a crack that shot from behind.

Li Huowang's figure gradually appeared behind Tian Wu. As he did, the motionless Li Huowang pulled off his face to reveal Li Sui's cute face.

Tian Wu was hunched over. He dipped two fingers into the strange liquid that had leaked from the crack, then put them in his mouth to taste it. "Hehehe, Daoist Li, you really like to play tricks. You even used a fake person to fool me."

"Daoist Li, are you really not going to join our sect? This opportunity won't come again. If you join us, we can discuss everything else."

"Are you stupid? We have you cornered in an ambush! You still want to recruit me despite your position? Do you think that's possible?" Li Huowang sneered as he stepped on the soft flesh. He drew his sword and stabbed himself in the abdomen, exposing his internal organs to the air.

The opponent's powers seemed extremely strange, so holding back was not an option. After finally capturing an expert from the Dharma Sect, he had to make them suffer.

Li Huowang spread out a scroll of the Profound Records on the ground. He tore out his liver and slapped it onto the red bamboo slips forcefully. "Wood Liver!"

When the Five Elements Intercalation was complete, Li

Huowang strode toward him with his abdomen covered in all sorts of twisted worms.

Just as he was about to touch the yellow mist, a gap suddenly cracked apart on the flesh on the ground and swallowed him whole.

“How interesting.” Tian Wu shook his gourd as the yellow smoke floating in the air drifted toward the flesh where Li Huowang had disappeared.

After a while, the flesh came alive. Bizarre limbs continued to grow out and quickly broke free from the control of the Abbot of the Righteous Monastery. Another gourd of flesh appeared, which secreted the strange liquid in all directions.

Tian Wu suddenly felt a pain in his feet. Looking down, he saw countless worms covering his feet and gnawing away.

Just as they were about to gnaw through, a blister swelled on the gourd beside him.

Pop! The blister burst and sprayed the strange liquid all over his feet.

The liquid covered the worms, causing their bodies to deform as it contended with Li Huowang for control of them.

“Is this all you can do, Daoist Li? I really don’t know why the Witch thinks so highly of you,” Tian Wu said.

Suddenly, a crack flew out from the ground, attempting to cut him in two.

Tian Wu, who seemed able to foresee the future, quickly leaned back and dodged the flying crack.

To his surprise, a long purple-tassel sword was thrust through the crack.

It stabbed into Tian Wu’s abdomen, then cleaved him in half with a forceful upward stroke.

Shortly after, the completely deformed Li Huowang emerged from a new crack. He held his head in pain while the wriggling things on his body quickly withered and disappeared.

He had used the crack to jump to the Great Qi and launch a stealthy attack, making this move hard to defend against. However, going to Great Qi in its current state clearly required a price.

If things in that place were all crazily deformed, a person could become a monster in just a few breaths.

Fortunately, with his “Truth” cultivation abilities, Li Huowang could reverse the deformation of his flesh.

It can't be wrong! This feeling, the liquid this guy uses, is the same as the one in the Great Qi! Li Huowang grimaced at the gourds secreting liquid.

He didn't know which Siming's Heavenly Dao it was that Tian Wu was drawing upon, but it clearly had something to do with deformation.

“Is deformation also a Heavenly Dao? What's the name of the Siming in charge of deformation?” Li Huowang muttered.

The hunched old man who had been cut in two suddenly stood up. “In your terms, you can call it the God of Pestilence!”

Strange liquid spurted from his hump like a volcano and splashed toward Li Huowang.

Worms flew out from Li Huowang's chest to block the black liquid, giving him time to dodge.

Li Huowang stood on a piece of protruding bone. He lifted his sword and looked at Tian Wu with an expression of uncertainty.

“Still not dead? Where is this guy from?”

“Hehehe... I have no origin. I'm just an ordinary old man,” Tian Wu said, with his two mouths still split open and his body still deforming.

“You're an ordinary old man? Like I believe that!” Li Huowang roared and charged at Tian Wu, his veins bulging on his forehead. Tian Wu's body split apart and forcibly merged again, the deformations on his body rapidly disappearing.

Tian Wu was about to use his magical powers as Li Huowang

approached, but his body didn't obey his commands. At that moment, he truly seemed like an ordinary old man.

By the time Tian Wu reached for the weapon at his waist, it was too late. There was a flash of white light, and Tian Wu's head soared into the sky.

The next moment, blood spurted from his neck, almost reaching a foot high.

Li Huowang felt uneasy about Tian Wu's strangeness. He rushed to the headless corpse and then opened his mouth wide towards the spurting blood.

As the blood gushed into his throat, worms poured out from Li Huowang's mouth like fish, swimming against the flow of blood.

Bleargh! As Li Huowang forcefully vomited, the worms burrowed into Tian Wu's body, gnawing and devouring everything they touched.

The worms chewed and caused Tian Wu's headless corpse to shrivel up quickly. When Li Huowang finally threw away the skin, which was now supported only by bones, the worms crawled back into his internal organs through his robes.

Li Huowang didn't dare to rest after having dealt with this enemy. He rushed to help Abbot Chan Du, who was fighting hard. He needed to finish this battle before the Five Elements Intercalation ended.

"Wait... wait!!" The voice from behind made Li Huowang freeze. He slowly turned around and saw Tian Wu's shriveled body, with its limbs moving, crawling toward its head.

"He's still not dead? How is that possible?"

As Li Huowang stood in shock, a hand grabbed his ankle. A monk, with half of his face covered in blisters and his eyes unfocused, pleaded desperately, "Master! Kill me! It hurts! It hurts!"

Li Huowang lifted his foot and crushed the monk's head. Even as the red and white matter sprayed from his nose, the monk

continued to scream in agony. “Ahhh! It hurts! It hurts so much!”

Li Huowang looked at the monk writhing on the ground in pain, then at Tian Wu, who was standing up shakily with his head in his hands.

When he surveyed the area, he noticed that despite the intense battle, there were no corpses around. He finally understood what had occurred.

A Natural Disaster had struck. Death was gone.

Chapter 792 - Death

Li Huowang's breathing quickened and his pupils constricted. He half-squatted and gazed at Qian Fu lying on the ground, spitting frothy blood.

He reached out and tried to press his hand against the bloody hole in Qian Fu's chest. However, no matter how hard he tried to stop it, the blood continued to seep through his fingers.

He was injured, and it seemed like a fatal wound.

"Sister Wu, Sister Wu!" Li Huowang called out as he saw Wu Qi. Her face was also bleeding, but she ran over with a box to tend to Qian Fu's injury.

Li Huowang drew two military knives and charged out from the corner of the wall. "I'll hold them off! You guys go first!"

As soon as he came out, he saw that the enemy had already snuck to this side along the wall.

"Aaaah!" Li Huowang roared and rushed forward. He pinned an enemy against the wall and frantically plunged the knife into the man's abdomen, stirring it around.

Bang! A powerful force struck Li Huowang's shoulder and sent him flying. He had been shot.

As he got up, two bullets hit his helmet and knocked him down again.

Li Huowang struggled to his feet, using the wall as support. He glared viciously at the enemies hiding behind cover not far away. They were the Simings of the Dharma Sect!

The Simings wielded weapons and were crouching with cold, statue-like expressions.

"Damn you!" Li Huowang hurled one of his knives, which spun rapidly and lodged itself in the head of one of the enemies.

There was a brief lull in gunfire, which Li Huowang took advantage of. He dashed into their cover, yanking the knife from the man's head and slashing it at the others around him.

Bang! Li Huowang was slammed against a wall. His head buzzed, and when he looked up, he saw a tall man raising the butt of his rifle to smash down on his helmet.

Li Huowang braced himself with his arms, enduring it before his head hit the ground.

"You dare to ambush us and kill Qian Fu!" Li Huowang shouted. He butted his head against the man's chest and caused a dent.

A stick swung down forcefully from the side, bending Li Huowang's left arm into an L shape.

Li Huowang screamed in pain as he slashed his knife across the attacker's neck. Blood splattered everywhere, staining the bulletproof glass of his helmet and turning his vision entirely red.

Amid the chaos, a smoke grenade landed at Li Huowang's feet and quickly spewed thick smoke.

The acrid smell seeped through the gaps in his clothes. It was clearly not an ordinary smoke grenade.

The pungent smoke made him cough violently. Soon, he felt dizzy, his head no longer feeling like his own.

"Huowang! Retreat!" Li Huowang quickly retreated while coughing violently, still using the wall for support.

At the stairwell, he saw Chen Hongyu carry Qian Fu down.

He lifted his knife and vigilantly watched for enemies through the smoke before quickly following them.

Their expressions became grimmer upon reaching the ground floor.

Three pickup trucks blocked the exit. Their enemies were using the vehicle doors for cover while aiming their black gun barrels at them.

Li Huowang heard the footsteps above them. He took a deep breath and charged forward. Bullets struck him, and he was soon bleeding from his abdomen.

He used his severed limb to cover the wound and kept pushing forward.

Bang bang! Two bullets hit his right knee and caused him to fall. Though the armor could deflect bullets, it couldn't prevent the impact from breaking his leg.

He saw that they were about to be surrounded. A sudden explosion occurred—one of the pickup trucks burst into flames.

At that moment, the glass on the left shattered. The siblings Ba Shengqing and Ba Nanxu appeared on their motorcycles. "Over here!"

Upon hearing the siblings, Li Huowang and the others moved towards them. Li Huowang moved the slowest with his broken leg. Zhao Lei stepped in to support and help him move forward.

They heard footsteps behind them. Without turning back, Qing Wanglai took out three test tubes and threw them behind him.

When they reached the parking lots, they quickly got into their vehicles and sped away.

In addition to Wu Qi's RV, Qing Wanglai's sports car, and the motorcycles of Li Huowang and the Ba siblings, there was also a red sedan and an off-road vehicle present. It seemed like more help had arrived, beyond just the Ba siblings.

Li Huowang couldn't think about so much now. He quickly mounted his motorcycle, revved the engine, and sped away from the abandoned building.

Just as they thought they were safe, a green truck suddenly appeared ahead and barreled towards them.

Li Huowang revved his engine and rode his motorcycle towards the front. He accelerated to the maximum, aiming for the truck's left tire.

Li Huowang stood up from his motorcycle and prepared to jump. Finally, he saw the terrified driver turn the steering wheel in a panic to swerve away from his motorcycle.

When Li Huowang managed to scare away the truck, peace was finally restored.

The vehicles stopped at Orange Isle. Li Huowang dragged his injured body and rushed into Wu Qi's RV. He saw Qian Fu lying there, with his blood flowing down and soaking the bed.

Li Huowang saw Wu Qi shake her head grimly through his blood-red helmet. Li Huowang questioned Qing Wanglai tremblingly, "What's your backup plan?"

"You made us walk right into their trap! Whose side are you on?"

"Don't worry, didn't we get help? Otherwise, how would we have escaped?" Qing Wanglai replied with a faint smile.

Li Huowang strained to remove his shattered helmet and hurled it at Qing Wanglai's feet. "Qian Fu is dead! Don't you see? He lost his life!"

Qing Wanglai picked up the helmet and set it aside. "I'm pained by Qian Fu's death, but we learned useful information from that half-hour talk. Our chances are good."

Li Huowang stepped back in shock. He stared at Qing Wanglai as if he were a stranger.

Chapter 793 - Change

Qing Wanglai looked at Li Huowang with a confident smile. “Based on my previous analysis, I thought dealing with them would be very difficult. But after our encounter, it turns out their situation isn’t as good as we imagined.”

“Madman! You’re a madman!!” Li Huowang yelled at him.

“Huowang? What’s going on?” Yang Na hadn’t gone with them and was unaware of the situation. As she walked up to the RV, she saw Qian Fu on the bed and screamed in fright.

She hurried to the bedside and tried to help Qian Fu, but she realized there was nothing she could do. Tears streamed down her face.

At that moment, Qian Fu’s bloody hand suddenly reached out and grabbed Yang Na, making her scream again.

Li Huowang rushed to the bed with rekindled hope.

He quickly turned to Wu Qi. “Sister Wu, start the car! Get to the nearest hospital!”

Wu Qi only sighed softly and walked towards the driver’s seat.

Li Huowang leaned closer to Qian Fu and said, “Hold on, we’re taking you to the hospital! Hold on!”

However, Qian Fu seemed oblivious to Li Huowang’s words. With his eyes fixed on Yang Na, his mouth widened into a grin and his grip on her tightened. “So... beautiful... truly magnificent...”

With those last words, Qian Fu released Yang Na. His pupils dilated, and his body went limp. Qian Fu was dead.

Yang Na stared at the corpse and the blood on her hands. She couldn’t hold back any longer and broke down in tears while backing off.

Li Huowang walked over with a solemn expression, gently

reaching out to hold her and silently comforting her.

After a few minutes, Yang Na seemed to snap out of it. She opened her bag shakily. “Call the police! Call the police!”

A long hand reached over and snatched her phone away.

They looked up to see Qing Wanglai. His long fingers slid along the side of the phone and pressed the power button. “We can’t call the police.”

“Why not? Why can’t we? He’s dead!” Yang Na stammered.

Qing Wanglai looked at Li Huowang. “In your understanding of the world there, do the police exist?”

Qing Wanglai answered his own question. “We are projections, reflections. So what are they?”

Then, a woman’s raspy voice came from the front. “They are the rules. Every world has its own rules, and they are the embodiment of those rules.”

A woman wearing a white cotton shirt walked over. Her soft, black ponytail draped over her shoulder.

Her crimson lips parted as she explained to Li Huowang. “Don’t expect the rules to help you. Rules are rules. Those who rely on them will ultimately find themselves hurt by them.”

“Like being mistaken for a lunatic and locked up in a psychiatric hospital,” Qing Wanglai quipped.

The woman continued, “True existence isn’t as simple as you think. Do you know why the projection in our minds is different for everyone?

“Actually, according to my theory, everyone’s thoughts are correct because true existence is beyond human comprehension. We can only perceive it through a distorted worldview that we can understand.

“It’s like blind men feeling an elephant. You felt the trunk, I felt the mouth, Qian Fu felt the tusk, and Wu Qi felt the leg.

“But I’m different from you. I didn’t use my hands. I used the

most powerful human sensory organ to explore everything over there. Mathematics.

“Therefore, I understand that world better than anyone here.”

Li Huowang stared in shock at the woman, then at Qian Fu’s lifeless body. He was unsure of what to say.

“Zhao Shuangdian,” the woman said, extending her slender white hand to Li Huowang. “Nice to meet you, Li Huowang.”

Li Huowang finally said, “You’re all insane! Don’t you see there’s a dead person here? Qian Fu is dead!”

Qing Wanglai nodded. “I know Qian Fu is dead. We’re all sad, but as adults, we should control our emotions and not let them interfere with important matters.”

“Besides, were you really that close to Qian Fu? Weren’t you also wary of him? Why are you so upset about his death?” Qing Wanglai looked puzzled.

Li Huowang glanced at Qing Wanglai and the unfamiliar Zhao Shuangdian before guiding Yang Na out of the RV.

“Huowang, where are you going? There’s important stuff to discuss. Don’t you want to know the information I got? Beauty Zhao brought people to rescue us. Shouldn’t you get to know her a bit?”

Li Huowang glanced at the distraught Yang Na then quickened his pace towards his motorcycle. “I need to take care of my girlfriend. Everything else can wait!”

Li Huowang cradled Yang Na in his embrace. He started his motorcycle and headed home. His face was dark and stern as he replayed the recent events in his mind, which was currently in a mess.

They soon arrived at their neighborhood. Li Huowang’s unusual behavior caught the attention of the residents, but he quickly brought the sobbing Yang Na upstairs.

When they reached their home, Yang Na rushed into the bathroom while covering her face.

Li Huowang saw that his mother was about to step out of the kitchen. He did not want her to see him like this, so he quickly went into his room.

“Son? Are you okay?” Sun Xiaoqin heard the crying from the bathroom and tapped the door with a spoon. “Did you have a fight? Be more magnanimous.”

“Mom, it’s nothing. Go do your own things,” Li Huowang wedged his broken arm between the coat rack and the wall. He gritted his teeth as he tried to set his arm straight.

I need to go to the hospital. I can’t handle this injury myself. Li Huowang dragged his broken arm along as he lay on the bed in pain.

Qian Fu was dead, just like that. But what angered him even more was Qing Wanglai’s attitude.

He was lying. That attitude wasn’t about suppressing emotions. He just didn’t feel the slightest bit of sorrow for Qian Fu’s death.

Chapter 794 - Why

Li Huowang sat on his bed for several hours. Eventually, he let out a long breath and finally calmed down.

Qian Fu was dead. He had known Qian Fu the longest, and his death made Li Huowang sorrowful. Still, the dead couldn't come back to life, so thinking about him was useless now.

At the moment, the issues concerning Qing Wanglai that came to light after Qian Fu's death were more important.

Li Huowang had always thought Qing Wanglai was just somewhat self-righteous and stubbornly believed his ideas were always right. Now, it was clear Li Huowang's impression of him had been wrong.

Something was very off with Qing Wanglai. The most troubling aspect was his emotions.

When faced with someone's death, even the death of someone he knew, he showed no concern. Qian Fu's death mattered to him even less than a helmet left on the ground.

Li Huowang had never seen such behavior in the psychiatric hospital, so he didn't know what kind of illness Qing Wanglai had.

Perhaps Qing Wanglai's projection was the most complete, as he was an existence that very closely resembled a Siming.

Someone like that, with no emotional fluctuations, would never act impulsively. If given the opportunity, Qing Wanglai would probably sell out Li Huowang without hesitation for his own benefit. He would abandon his useless companions without a second thought. Cooperating with such a person was undoubtedly a recipe for disaster.

Li Huowang remembered what Ban Nanxu had said. He had been skeptical before, but now mostly believed it.

A question arose: if he didn't cooperate with the Three Pure Ones, would he have to face the invading Simings of the Baiyu Capital on his own?

Li Huowang clearly couldn't handle it by himself. However, blindly following Qing Wanglai could lead to him being betrayed without even realizing it.

Li Huowang thought of the Ba siblings and the woman named Zhao Shuangdian. They weren't aligned with Qing Wanglai, yet they came to help.

"Seems like the Simings within Baiyu Capital have different factions," Li Huowang murmured to himself.

After some thought, he concluded it wasn't the right time to cut ties with Qing Wanglai. Instead, he should use this period to reach out to the other Simings, whom Qing Wanglai had said were unwilling or unable to collaborate.

He couldn't just take Qing Wanglai's words for granted. If he did, he might get sold out.

After careful consideration, Li Huowang realized his earlier reaction had been excessive. At least for now, he was still an ally with the Three Pure Ones.

He couldn't disregard Qing Wanglai just because he was cold-hearted. Fortunately, Qing Wanglai wasn't an emotional person. He didn't react at all when Yang Na slapped him, so he probably wouldn't mind losing face.

Li Huowang took out his phone and dialed Qing Wanglai's number. It rang a few times, then he answered.

—Hello? Li Huowang?

Qing Wanglai's voice was as casual as ever, with a hint of warmth even. However, Li Huowang now knew what lay behind it.

"Sorry, I acted impulsively earlier. Please apologize to Zhao Shuangdian for me. My girlfriend was really shaken by seeing someone die up close for the first time, so I had to take her away."

—Miss Zhao isn't that petty. Is your girlfriend okay? As her boyfriend, you need to comfort her.

"She's much better now. I'll make sure she stays home next time and doesn't come along."

He looked down at his injured hand and continued, "I'm not available today. I need to handle my injury, but can we meet tomorrow to discuss your findings?"

Qing Wanglai's expression hadn't been fake, so he must have obtained very valuable information. Since Qian Fu was dead, they could only hope his death wasn't in vain.

—Sure, tomorrow at noon, same place. I'll bring Zhao Shuangdian and the others to meet you.

"Zhao Shuangdian..." Li Huowang frowned and recalled the woman with the ponytail. If Qing Wanglai was the Three Pure Ones, what Siming was Zhao Shuangdian?

Her talk about the blind men and the elephant theory indicated she was indeed one of the Simings, but which Heavenly Dao did she govern?

Forget it, no point in guessing now. I'll learn more when we meet tomorrow.

After some thought, Li Huowang replied, "Alright. I'll hang up now."

—Hold on. Remember to bring the bulletproof vest tomorrow. After today's incident, some of the inserts might be damaged and need to be replaced.

There was a knock on the door.

Li Huowang tucked the phone between his ear and shoulder as he walked to the door, "Maybe Sister Wu should come tomorrow. It might cause trouble if I go to the hospital with my injuries."

He opened the door and saw six tall orderlies before him.

Li Huowang had just made out the red crosses on their chests when the men rushed in. They surrounded him and put him into a

straitjacket.

“What are you guys trying to do?” Li Huowang tried to resist, but his injuries had weakened him greatly. “Why are you restraining me? Who sent you?”

“I’m cured! The hospital even issued a certificate. Or are you all their people?”

The worst-case scenario crossed Li Huowang’s mind, and his expression turned extremely wary.

While he was wondering who these men were, a familiar face appeared. It was Yi Donglai, his doctor whom he had not met for a while. He was still wearing a white coat and frameless glasses.

“I sent them,” Yi Donglai said.

Li Huowang was confused. “Why? Doctor Yi, I’m cured. My illness was cured!”

“Is that so? Your girlfriend says otherwise. She said you haven’t been taking your medication recently.”

Li Huowang saw Yang Na emerge from behind the door with her head down. He stared at her dumbfoundedly as the orderlies lifted him onto a stretcher and took him out.

As they passed each other, Li Huowang asked a single question in a trembling voice filled with anger and sorrow.

“Why?”

Yang Na suddenly cried. “Because you’ll die! This isn’t a game. People really can die! This time, it was Qian Fu. Next time, it could be you!”

“I used to go along with you, but not anymore! Even if we can’t be together, I’d rather you be in a psychiatric hospital! I don’t want you to be used as a tool! I don’t want you to die!”

Chapter 795 - Deal

Yang Na followed behind Li Huowang as he was carried away. She sobbed as she explained, “Huowang, don’t be afraid. I recorded all the conversations you had with Qing Wanglai and the others using a voice recorder.

“I’ve actually been collecting evidence all along. I gave all this evidence to Doctor Yi, and he knows that a group of people has been threatening you!

“Once you’re admitted, Dr. Yi will call the police, and I’ll tell them everything. Huowang, you’re safe now. You’re under their protection and won’t be in danger again!

“Huowang, don’t be afraid. You just need to take your medication!”

As the orderlies carried Li Huowang down the stairs, he continued to look up at Yang Na in disbelief, repeatedly asking why.

After Li Huowang uttered his final “Why,” Yang Na covered her face with her hands and squatted down, crying in despair.

The familiar areas of the White Tower Prison flashed before his eyes. The iron gate, barbed wire, the TV in the lounge, the fellow patients, and the isolation room.

Li Huowang sat in the isolation room, tightly bound. He ate when food was brought to him and took his medicine when it was given to him. Doctors treated his injuries, and he cooperated fully.

It was as if time didn’t exist. Li Huowang had no idea how long had passed.

When the restraints were taken off and his injuries had mostly healed, he was handcuffed and shackled. Then, the orderlies led him out of the isolation room.

He recognized the path they were taking—he knew he was being taken to Yi Donglai’s office.

He took his seat and, unsurprisingly, saw Yi Donglai.

The orderlies left at Yi Donglai’s signal, and then he sat down before Li Huowang with a tablet. “Don’t you have anything to say? This isn’t like you, Li Huowang.”

Li Huowang glanced around and observed Yi Donglai’s office. “What do you want me to say? Would you believe me if I said I wasn’t sick?”

It was a small, simple place. There was a desk with a computer and a therapy chair. Other than that, the only notable feature was the bookshelf on the left.

The tall bookshelf held various books related to Yi Donglai’s profession and some decorative items. One of them was an eighteen-sided die the size of a Rubik’s cube.

Yi Donglai noticed Li Huowang looking at the die and explained, “This is an eighteen-sided die inlaid with gold and silver. It is a relic from the Western Han dynasty. They used it for drinking games or Liubo chess.”

“Haha, a Western Han relic in your office? Are you crazy?”

“Of course, the original isn’t here. I saw it at Guanfu Museum in Shanghai and bought a replica from the gift shop.”

Yi Donglai picked up the die, quickly flipped it over a few sides, and showed Li Huowang the small characters at the bottom.

“See? Made in Yiwu. It’s fake.”

Li Huowang turned away, uninterested.

Yi Donglai placed the die on the table. “Why are you so calm now? Don’t you want to know how Qing Wanglai is doing? Or what happened to your enemies?”

Li Huowang clenched his fists. “There’s no point in me asking. I’m sure you will tell me anyway.”

“Let’s start with Qing Wanglai, the graduate student you and

Yang Na mentioned. He doesn't work or study at that university. I couldn't find anyone named Qing Wanglai there."

Li Huowang's pupils shrank slightly. "That's impossible!"

"It is possible. See for yourself."

Yi Donglai handed over the tablet.

Li Huowang scrolled through quickly but did not find anything. Beside him, Yi Donglai joked, "So? Unless your friend is a computer expert who hacked the university's network to change his information?"

Yi Donglai paused briefly before continuing, "And as for those enemies who spied on you and later tried to harm you, if it was such a big deal, it would've likely been filed as a case—maybe even with a special task force. Unfortunately, no case was filed."

"Why?" Li Huowang pressed his thumb into the screen in frustration.

"Because there's no evidence. All the places Yang Na mentioned happened in places without surveillance. The places have all been checked, and no evidence was found.

"We live in a society governed by law. Even if you confess to murder, you are innocent without a body found.

"Normally, without any physical evidence, eyewitness testimony would suffice. But in your case, I'm afraid the police won't listen to you. As for Yang Na, the police won't believe her either."

"Why not?" Li Huowang asked, recalling Zhao Shuangdian's theory of rules.

At this moment, he found the world increasingly absurd.

"Because she has depression, which can cause delusions. Your case is more akin to schizophrenia, without any basis in reality. But with depression, delusions formed from a distorted view of reality are common."

"She's been cured for a long time! Where would the delusion be

from?!”

Yi Donglai’s expression turned serious. “No. Her condition has relapsed, and it’s worse than before. She needs rest, not stimulation. More importantly, you shouldn’t have blamed her. You’re the cause of her current self-destructive behavior.”

Li Huowang’s fists tightened, his nails piercing into his flesh. “Where is she? I want to see her!”

“Forget it. She has other doctors caring for her. You two shouldn’t meet now. Focus on yourself first. This time, you might have to stay here for a year or two.”

“Yi Donglai! You tested me! I’m not sick!”

Li Huowang couldn’t stay for a year or two. God Yu’er and the other Simings had already infiltrated deeply. He would only become a target if he stayed here.

Yi Donglai replied sternly, “You’re not sick only while you’re on medication! Why did you stop taking your meds?! And how did you get injured?”

“I was beaten by those people!”

Clearly exhausted, Yi Donglai sighed. “Alright, it’s time to eat. After your meal, we’ll run some tests.”

Li Huowang turned and left with a heavy expression on his face.

Once he was outside the office, he quickly rushed into a nearby restroom instead of going to the cafeteria.

Li Huowang looked around, ensuring that no one was nearby. He then retrieved the eighteen-sided die and placed it meticulously in front of him.

He stared at the single large yellow dot and then said with a tone of negotiation, “Shai Zi, let’s make a deal.”[\[1\]](#)

1. Shai Zi is also the Chinese name for dice. 

Chapter 796 - Help

Li Huowang frowned as he stared at his own reflection in the water. “Talk! Why aren’t you talking?”

Li Huowang was pacing around his room in anxiety. “The Natural Disaster this time is different! In the past, only ‘Rot’ or the sun had disappeared. But this time, ‘Death’ disappeared! Do you know what this means? It’s not some minor issue!

“A Natural Disaster occurs when there’s a change in the Heavenly Daos. Since ‘Death’ vanished, that means there’s something wrong with the Heavenly Dao of Death!”

Li Huowang stopped pacing, and a horrifying thought came to his mind. He stared at the reflection in the water basin. “Say something! Did the Simings of the Dharma Sect take away the Heavenly Dao of Death? Why aren’t you talking?! How can you still be confused when they are attacking us?”

His reflection finally replied, “I think I did fight back.”

Li Huowang harshly scolded Ji Zai when he heard the reply. “You finally came out! I thought you were dead!”

“I don’t think it’s time for me to die yet. Is something the matter?” Ji Zai’s response remained nonchalant.

Li Huowang didn’t want to waste time arguing with Ji Zai. He wanted answers. “What’s going on? What happened to Kui Lei? He was supposed to be the one who controlled the Heavenly Dao of Death.”

“He’s dead.”

Li Huowang’s pupils shrunk from shock. “He’s dead? Really? How did he die? Did the allies of god Yu’er kill him?”

Ji Zai’s eyes were blank. “I think so.”

“Then who’s holding the Heavenly Dao of Death right now?”

Why is the world like this?”

“Hmm...” Ji Zai tried recalling. “I don’t know. I didn’t see them.”

Li Huowang was so angry that his veins started bulging on his head. His fists trembled from anger. “Fine, then I want to ask you what you know. Which Siming gave me the seven secrets? Should I trust them?”

“Probably. At the very least, they should still be on our side. They wouldn’t betray me.”

Li Huowang’s anger calmed down a little after obtaining some helpful information. “Then how’s your situation over there? Was Xuan Pin’s help useful?”

“I am not acquainted with Xuan Pin right now. I think I will have met him a few times when you talk with me again.”

“Huh?” Li Huowang was confused. *What does Ji Zai mean?*

“Do you still have anything else to ask? I’m quite busy here.”

Li Huowang had finally managed to talk to Ji Zai. He didn’t want to waste his opportunity here. “One more question! Do you need me to go to the Baiyu Capital to help you?”

“That depends. Are you helping me, or am I helping you instead?”

Li Huowang lost his patience. “What the fuck do you want? Don’t play games with me!”

“Help. I will help you.”

Ji Zai became silent after saying that last sentence.

Li Huowang was so angry that he cut the bronze washing basin in half along with his reflection in the water.

“Fuck! Even calling you useless is a compliment!”

Li Huowang walked out angrily. *Ji Zai is still useless. I need to figure this out by myself.*

As he stepped outside, he immediately sensed that something was amiss within the barracks. A palpable sense of unease hung in

the air as everyone periodically glanced towards the east.

The eastern side of the barracks had been isolated, with buzzing flies filling the air above the restricted area and smoke rising continuously.

Li Huowang frowned in disgust before walking towards the east. He stepped on a basket and was whisked upwards with a winch. While he was at the top, he saw a horrific scene displayed in front of him.

He had seen a lot of unmarked graves, but he had never seen one so revolting.

Numerous people in varying states of decay were concentrated in this place. They had all been stripped naked and stuffed into wooden enclosures. Almost all of them had suffered a lethal wound, with either their heads missing or half of their bodies gone.

However, no matter how severe their injuries were, their bodies were still moving.

Death was missing, but Rot and Pain were still in this world.

Eternal rest was withheld from everyone who should've died on the battlefield. They had to endure the pain of rot forever.

They saw their bodies breaking down with their own eyes. Their flesh slowly rotted as pus and maggots filled their body. Li Huowang and the others could only think of one way to release them from the pain. It was fire. They burned them in a large fire that was never extinguished.

The undying people, now no different from pieces of flesh that moved, were thrown into a fiery pit with the aid of large pitchforks.

Despite the fire engulfing their bodies, scorching their flesh and tongues, and causing their blood and brains to boil, they continued to struggle in pain as their cries echoed in the air.

The woeful cries mingled with the crackling of burning flesh, and yet they did not die. Death, the final chapter of their lives, eluded them.

It was only when their bodies had transformed entirely into ash that they became silent.

“They are not dead.”

Li Huowang turned around. An old mummified Lama with a crown approached him. The Lama was spinning the prayer wheels in his hands as the strange humming filled the air.

The Lama stared at the black smoke rising from the pit and the ashes at the bottom. “They are not dead. Their bodies have been reduced to particles, with each particle enduring the eternal agony of having their flesh torn. Now, they are experiencing pain hundreds and thousands of times worse than when they were alive.

“They do not scream, but not because they don’t want to. They don’t have mouths anymore.

“They do not move, but not because they don’t want to. They don’t have limbs anymore.

“Unless Mahakala returns, they will be subjected to this everlasting agony for eternity.”

When Li Huowang heard what the Lama from the Antrabhara Temple said, his scalp went numb and his limbs became cold.

Even Li Huowang, who was used to unbearable pain, trembled at the thought of experiencing everlasting agony.

“Death is a cycle, and also the fate of humans. Most people are afraid of death and go to great lengths to avoid it, unaware that death is the ultimate blessing bestowed upon us by Mahakala. Unfortunately, they did not realize how valuable it was until it disappeared...”

Chapter 797 - Clue

Li Huowang interrupted the Lama and said, “Stop chanting!”

He continued, “Chanting your mantras is useless. Can you chant for Death to return? You’re a Lama from the Antrabhara Temple! You need to figure out a way to end this! I thought your Mahakala controlled Death. Do you not trust him? Can’t you figure out a way to bring back your Mahakala?”

With his face filled with wrinkles, the Lama bitterly shook his head before sitting down with his legs crossed. He stared at the black smoke from the fire and began chanting again while turning the prayer wheels in his hands.

“Fuck!” Li Huowang cursed under his breath as he left the crematorium. He walked towards the largest tent in the middle.

He walked into the tent and noticed that the messenger pigeons were all on a big table, each carrying different information. The generals and tacticians were reading the messages.

Li Huowang ignored them and approached an old eunuch.

The eunuch was very old and one of the most senior eunuchs in the palace. He had served Ji Man, the previous emperor of the Liang Kingdom, Ji Lin, who turned out to be a woman, and finally, Gao Zhijian.

“What did His Majesty say? Are we not attacking Nan Ping yet? How much longer must we wait?” Li Huowang asked. They had set up camp here after the ambush and had not moved since then.

The old eunuch bowed gracefully to Li Huowang. “Daoist Li, we are now experiencing a Natural Disaster. This is not a good omen. It's not a good time to wage war.”

“Don’t you think it’s possible for the Dharma Sect to be the one responsible for causing this Natural Disaster? Do you want them to

obtain the Heavenly Dao of Death before we start moving again?”

“Daoist Li, please be at ease. The Surveillance Bureau will handle the Natural Disaster. We are certain that the Natural Disaster will end soon. Also, how can we fight if there is no death anymore?”

The eunuch's words were not comforting. While it was true that the Surveillance Bureau had handled the Natural Disasters in the past, this time was different. Xuan Pin and his group were dead. Furthermore, Li Huowang wasn't sure they could have done anything even if they were alive.

The Natural Disasters in the past lasted a few divisions or two days at most, but the current Natural Disaster had been in effect for the past ten days. It was clear that the Natural Disaster this time was much more serious.

Li Huowang looked at the old eunuch one last time before leaving silently. He went straight towards the underground prison.

Despite the ongoing Natural Disaster and the numerous unforeseen circumstances, Li Huowang had to admit they had technically won this time.

This time, they captured many prisoners thanks to the disappearance of Death. Li Huowang wanted to interrogate them to obtain some information.

Li Huowang had just reached the prison when he saw an Ao Jing Sect member using a winch, as if pulling up a bucket of water from a well. However, instead of a well, the winch was hooked on a wheel, and the wheel was pulling out the intestines of the woman with fish scale tattoos. She was a boat person, and her intestines were being pulled out from her belly button.

The Ao Jing Sect, the crazy bastards who mutilated themselves, were the ones that benefited the most from this Natural Disaster.

They could now ignore death and mutilate either themselves or others without worry. Under such conditions, their strength had

increased tremendously.

Zu Yi let go of the wooden handle and welcomed Li Huowang. “Elder Li.”

“How is it? Are there any updates?”

Zu Yi shook his head. “No, but we should be getting some information soon enough. She cannot tolerate the pain much longer.”

Li Huowang saw the woman was still glaring at him. He approached her without hesitation.

“Talk. Tell me everything you know, including what you did to cause the Natural Disaster. I will give you some respite if you tell me. If you don’t, your suffering will never stop.”

Despite her fear, the woman spat a mouthful of blood onto Li Huowang from her toothless mouth.

“Hehe... You guys have lost! You guys will lose! This is just the start! The start!”

Li Huowang stood there motionlessly as the Ao Jing Sect people carried her and threw her into a pot of boiling oil.

It wasn’t over. They poured down bags of coarse salt to fry her.

After several cycles, the woman gave up and shouted as she lay on the side of the pot, “I will talk! It’s because of the Dragon King! The Dragon King is so strong that they took away Death!”

As she cried, her eyes glazed over in bewilderment temporarily before she continued shouting, “The Dragon King is the true dragon! The Dragon Veins are fake! They have no right to be compared to the Dragon King of the Four Seas! The Dragon Veins were nothing but tributes for the Dragon King!”

Dragon King of the Four Seas? What Heavenly Dao do they hold? Wait a minute...

Li Huowang pulled her out from the boiling pot of oil. “What did you say just now? Dragon Veins? You guys have Dragon Veins in your possession?”

Li Huowang placed her back into the pot when he saw that she was hesitating.

She talked once more when she was dipped back into the pot of oil.

“Yes! We do! We have An Xi’s Dragon Vein and the Luo Sha Kingdom’s Dragon Vein. They were all placed on the altar as a tribute for the Dragon King to absorb the Dragon Qi!”

Li Huowang’s original plan, which Gao Zhijian had denied, came into his mind again.

If Gao Zhijian doesn't help me, I can get the help of the other Dragon Veins!

Li Huowang threw her back into the pot of oil as he paced around. He wasn’t sure if it would be possible.

It would be difficult for me to go and take the Dragon Veins from the altar, especially since I don't know what kind of entity the Dragon King of the Four Seas is. Still, I don't have time to figure it out. The situation is dire, and Ji Zai also confirmed that the ribbon-like Siming was most likely on our side.

It doesn't matter if the Siming who controlled the Heavenly Dao of Death disappeared or if the Heavenly Dao of Death itself disappeared. Whatever the case, it means that the Baiyu Capital is in danger. I need to find a way to help them.

Victory down here is irrelevant if the war is lost up there. I need to ensure that the Heavenly Dao of Death doesn't fall into the wrong person's hands.

Li Huowang rolled up his sleeves and picked up the boat people again from the pot of oil.

He needed to confirm the location where the Dragon Veins were being offered as tributes, or even if they were actually being offered as tributes. He had to know that they were the truth.

After obtaining the same information from another person, Li Huowang set his goal on taking back the two Dragon Veins.

By taking back the two Dragon Veins, he could also weaken the strength of the Dragon King. There was no reason for him not to do so.

But do I have to go alone? Li Huowang thought that it would be too risky. He needed help.

As he pondered over whom to bring, his gaze fell upon the members of the Ao Jing Sect. The Natural Disaster had coincidentally powered them up.

Chapter 798 - Lion Dance Palace

“Elder, what do you think about my proposal?” Li Huowang looked at the woman in black robes.

Li Huowang did not recognize any of the higher-ranking members of the Ao Jing Sect, but he was certain that the woman in front of him was one of them.

Her exposed skin was covered in myriads of weird bruises and scars. She did not have a single piece of complete skin on her body.

Her stomach was also engorged, but it didn’t look like a pregnancy. It looked like a tumor.

She opened her mouth and revealed the empty cavity inside. Her tongue had been removed, and even the skin in her mouth had been peeled off. Her mouth was filled with white pus and blisters, including her throat.

After demonstrating her inability to speak due to her disfigured mouth, she picked up a brush and wrote on a red bamboo slip. *Li Huowang, I am Shen Benyou. I have long heard of your infamy.*

This is a good method. We could both wound the Dharma Sect and take care of the Natural Disaster. Why aren’t the royal family or the Surveillance Bureau using this method? Why are you the only one implementing this plan? Are they stupid?

Li Huowang leaned forward. “The situation is critical. Do you really think we should spend our time discussing that? Just tell me if you want to help or not. I thought those who had ascended were treated as a higher-ranked individual in the Ao Jing Sect. Is my position that low?”

Shen Benyou dipped her brush into an inkwell before writing

again. *We will naturally help since we are allies now, but why should we? It's a dangerous mission. Since you've ascended before, you should also know that the members of the Ao Jing Sect want this Natural Disaster to last as long as possible.*

“Is that so? Do you just want to suffer from the pain? This time, Death disappeared. Can you be certain that Pain won't disappear next time? Also, I thought your objectives were the same as those of the Sacrificial God—stealing the Heavenly Dao of Pain from Ba-Hui. Are you *really* sure that the current phenomena won't lead to another Siming taking the Heavenly Dao of Pain from Ba-Hui?

“If Ba-Hui's Heavenly Dao gets taken by someone else, wouldn't that mean that all of your actions—your self-mutilation, killings, and the pain you inflict on yourselves—would become a joke?”

Shen Benyou and the other Ao Jing Sect members remained silent.

Li Huowang approached Shen Benyou closer and stared into her eyes. “Don't think that this situation doesn't affect you. The Natural Disaster concerns everyone. You know that too, don't you? If you didn't, then why would you be here?”

Li Huowang calmed down a bit before he took a few steps back. “Also, now that we have lost Death, you guys won't die. You lose nothing by helping me.”

Saying more was meaningless. Li Huowang sat still and waited for their answer. *If they don't want to help me, I'll have to find another way.*

Shen Benyou wrote her response on the bamboo slip. *You, Li Huowang, owe me a favor .*

She didn't wait for his reply. *You owe me a favor. The Ao Jing Sect will not only help you, but we will also help you find another ally to ensure our success.*

Upon seeing those words on the bamboo slip, Li Huowang

replied, "Let's make this clear. Do I owe you, and only you, a favor, or do I owe the Ao Jing Sect a favor?"

Me.

"Then it's decided!" Li Huowang stood up and agreed to it. He didn't want to waste any time.

"Call your allies here. We can depart immediately."

Li Huowang was about to walk out when he stopped. He forgot to ask them who their allies were. "Who are you planning to ask for help? Best not to find someone from the Surveillance Bureau. I fear that there may be imperial spies mixed in with them."

The Lion Dance Palace. Do not worry. I guarantee that there are no spies in there.

"Why them?" He recalled the few times he had encountered the Lion Dance Palace. He didn't really know a lot about them.

Li Huowang knew they lived underground in Qing Qiu and about the white tassels capable of shifting a person's organs. Other than that, he knew nothing else about them.

The Lion Dance Palace can dance with anyone and anything. They can help us.

Li Huowang couldn't care less about what the Lion Dance Palace was. He just wanted to take back the two Dragon Veins as soon as possible and end the Natural Disaster.

Shen Benyou did not walk by herself. Instead, she was carried away on a palanquin. Under her guidance, Li Huowang and the others got closer to where the Lion Dance Palace was located.

They walked towards a remote part of the forest. In the middle of the forest and mountains, there was a massive cave as large as a house. It constantly emitted a gust of cold wind. Li Huowang stood in front of the large cave.

"What are the Lion Dances? Why do they always stay under the ground?" Li Huowang asked out of curiosity.

Apparently, the thing they worshiped had a dispute with the sun.

They always cover up to prevent the sun from shining on them.

Shen Benyou pointed at the sun before they entered the cave.

The stairs in the cave were clearly man-made. They were new and very flat.

The stairs were also massive. It would take a regular person tens of years to complete such a feat.

Navigating the cave was easy for Li Huowang. He simply had to follow the only white light in the cave, just like he did in Qing Qiu last time.

He soon found the Lion Dance Palace. Rows of large faces lined up on the sides while a massive wall of human faces sat near the end.

The white light scattered here and there were the white tassels stuck between the large human faces.

The white tassels pulsed lightly, as if they were breathing.

The large faces, each the size of a dinner table, stared at Li Huowang together. The oppressive feeling made it hard for him to breathe.

When Li Huowang saw them, he recalled some bad memories and frowned. He hated them, even if they were to help him.

“What is it?” Various voices echoed from the other side of the wall of faces, blending together in a symphony of male, female, old, and young tones.

Shen Benyou did not speak. Instead, she threw a bamboo slip towards the wall of faces.

The white tassels extended like tentacles and swiftly disintegrated the bamboo slips before guiding them into the wall of faces.

“Do you have a good relationship with the palace master?” Li Huowang whispered.

They are not a palace, nor do they have a palace master. They can converge as one or divide as many units. Everything you see here is a

single living being, and it's called the Lion Dance Palace.

Chapter 799 - Allies

Li Huowang's eyes widened in shock as he read Shen Benyou's explanation. He gazed at the wall of faces in front of him and the white tassels in between them.

He never thought the Lion Dance Palace was an entire entity and not the name of a sect!

"Wait, does that mean the Lion Dance Palace is cultivating the Dao of Fusion?" Li Huowang stared at the numerous legs underneath the white cloth of the Lion Dances before realizing what it meant for them to cultivate the Dao of Fusion.

According to Shen Benyou's description, the Lion Dance Palace was most likely a fusion of both their bodies and minds. They had a hive mind, and the entire hive mind was the Lion Dance Palace.

The techniques of a regular sect either amplify or destroy other sects' techniques, but the Lion Dance Palace is different. They can complement anything with no risk of backlash. They can merge other people into their bodies and vice versa, regardless of their sect. The righteous become even more righteous, and the evil become even more evil.

Li Huowang now understood why Zhang Tan had two lion dances on the side while he performed the Nuo Opera.

Suddenly, a man's flattened face on the left stared at Li Huowang with lantern-like eyes. The red and white light was unnerving.

The left lantern of the lion dance slowly shifted upwards, revealing a circular dark hole in its place. Several dried monkey-like black arms extended from the hole and placed themselves in such a way that made them resemble the eyelashes of the lion dance.

Several eyes, both big and small, filled up the empty eye socket

and stared at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang thought that something as horrific as them were most likely worshiping something even more horrific. He had no idea what the entity that the Lion Dance worshiped would look like.

“I’ve touched you once.” Several voices overlapped with each other as they spoke.

Li Huowang recalled the night when he became something inhuman on Qing Qiu’s plains.

“Yes. All thanks to you. Thank you for letting me go that night.” Li Huowang waved his arm to brush it off.

“I’ve touched you once. Your body was stuck with cause and effect. That was why I let you go. It seems that it was fated to be.”

The wall of faces started to shake. Three Lion Dances and a single Dragon Dance appeared out from the wall.

As they crawled out, they took something black and sticky with them. The black goo had tentacles.

When the goo got out, it quickly moved into the darkness, but Li Huowang’s keen vision saw what it actually was. It was none other than the Black Taisuis.

Li Huowang now knew why the Black Taisui appeared in Qing Qiu. It was because they were related to the Lion Dance Palace!

Shen Benyou turned to Li Huowang. *Daoist Li, since everyone is here, we can depart now.*

“No wait, I need to go back first. Before I went to the crematorium, I left my daughter behind in the city.”

Li Huowang swiftly returned to the city.

Li Sui was currently walking happily on the main streets. Even though she was happy that she could help her father, she still preferred to walk on the streets when there was a celebration. She loved seeing things that she hadn’t seen before.

But as she walked, she slowly lowered the candied fruits in her hands. Many people were crying, and very few were smiling. Even

those who weren't crying had a solemn look on their faces.

Are they sad? Is it because a lot of people died? The somber atmosphere also dampened Li Sui's mood.

I don't want them to be sad. I want to do something. Li Sui recalled something and approached a blacksmith.

When she returned outside, she was holding a bucket of molten metal. "Time to strike the tree flowers! Strike tree flowers! Everyone, come and look!"

After attracting a crowd, Li Sui used a wooden ladle to scoop out some molten metal before throwing it at the city wall.

The molten metal splashed everywhere. Even though it was daytime, the sparks from the molten metal still dazzled the crowds.

Li Sui started working harder after seeing that the crowd were reacting to her performance. She wasn't that good at doing so and a lot of molten metal fell onto her body, but she didn't mind it.

She soon finished her bucket, and everyone's expression slowly turned back to normal. They scattered after her performance, their worry and sadness returning after Li Sui's temporary distraction ended.

Li Sui seeing them leaving the place made Li Sui feel sad as well. "Did it not work?"

"Of course not. Striking tree flowers is not enough to make them happy."

Li Sui turned around and saw a handsome man in front of her. He had an identification plate on his waist, and she remembered that her father also had one.

"My father is not happy. Everyone is not happy." Li Sui squatted down near her pail.

The man squatted down and gently peeled off the cool metal on her back. "I have a method to make your father and everyone else happy, but it would take quite some time."

"What plan? Who are you?"

Li Sui turned to look at the man and saw that he was smiling lightly as he patted her head, “Remember your choice right now. You are simple, but your potential is huge. Do not hesitate when you have the chance to do something that only you can do. But I’m certain that you won’t hesitate as well.”

Li Sui grumbled because she didn’t want anyone touching her head except for her father.

But she was shocked when she tried to use her tentacles to remove the man’s hand. Her tentacles phased through the hand. The man didn’t have a body!

“Suisui!” Someone shouted, and with that, the man in front of Li Sui disappeared like bubbles.

“Father, someone was here just now. Did you see! It’s a guy!” Li Sui ran towards Li Huowang in a panic as she explained what happened just now.

“Someone was beside you just now?” Li Huowang frowned. He never saw anyone just now.

“Did you... become a Strayed One too?” Li Huowang answered her with hesitation.

Li Sui had eaten his flesh for a long time and had indeed obtained part of his cultivation to control the “Truth”. She might be turning into what he once was.

But then he thought that might not be the case. His illusions were created from times when he experienced strong emotional trauma. Li Sui hadn’t gone through such experiences, so how would she create illusions?

Li Huowang stared at Shen Benyou’s palanquin before dragging Li Sui towards it. “Let’s ignore the illusion for now. Once everything is over, I will help you figure out a way to deal with it. We have something more important to do. Let’s go!”

“Father, where are we going?”

“To the sea.”

Chapter 800 - Sea

A massive ship sailed on the azure sea. Li Huowang stared at the waves while occasionally checking the Shimmer Mirror.

“Captain, are you sure we are heading in the right direction?” He looked at the man with dark skin and calloused feet.

“I’ve been sailing for more than forty years. My ship will navigate flawlessly as long as you give the right coordinates.”

Just then, a muffled cry came from the bottom of the deck, sounding excruciatingly painful.

But the captain ignored the screaming from the Ao Jing Sect. He continued his work without acknowledging them. When he turned around, a single mahjong tile with the Hong Zhong pattern could be seen at the back of his neck.

The captain was not the only one with the mark. Li Huowang had tricked the entire ship's crew into turning them into his pieces.

Li Huowang didn’t want to employ any random group of people because he feared that there could be spies from the Dharma Sect. That was why he used the Sitting Oblivion Dao’s tricks.

After confirming they were sailing in the right direction, Li Huowang walked down from the deck and entered the cabin. He had just entered when he saw Li Sui meditating with her legs crossed.

“What are you doing?”

“Father, didn’t you say I turned into a Strayed One? I’m learning from you to cultivate the ‘Truth.’ I want to become as strong as you.”

The surroundings did not change, so it was clear that Li Sui did not succeed, but Li Huowang was still touched by her actions.

He patted her shoulders. “Cultivate well. We can solve it

together if you encounter any problems. Also, did the illusion of the man appear again?"

Li Sui shook her head as she placed her legs down. "No. He only appeared once."

"Only once..." Li Huowang pondered. It didn't sound like an illusion created by being a Strayed One, so it wasn't a major issue.

"Don't worry, it's just an illusion. I have several of them, which have been following me for a few years. Even if you end up with illusions too, it won't affect you. At most, they would just be annoying."

"Alright father. I won't worry too much about it." Li Sui beamed as she squinted her eyes.

"Sorry for dragging you into this."

"It's alright." Li Sui hugged Li Huowang and snuggled into his embrace. "Father, I want to help you. I want to protect you and make sure you don't die."

As Li Huowang was patting her head, one of the Ao Jing Sect members interrupted them. "Daoist Li, Elder Shen is calling you."

He let go of Li Sui before following the person down deeper into the other cabins.

The cabins in which the Ao Jing Sect were staying was covered in the stench of blood. They also drew various runes using blood, but Li Huowang was used to it.

He approached Shen Benyou. "Is something wrong?"

"Does Daoist Li know who we're facing? Who are the Dragon Kings of the Four Seas?"

Li Huowang briefly explained what he had experienced at Yang Xiaohai's old home. "From the captives, we've learned that we are most likely facing the deities that the boat people worshiped. I've seen it once before, and it seems it controls water."

"The Dragon King's Heavenly Dao appears to control water and could forcibly change someone's Ten Emotions and Eight Sufferings.

You should prepare yourself.”

But Shen Benyou shook her head. *They didn't exist in the past. We knew about the boat people's faith, but most were merely superstitious. They only prayed to calm themselves before they went out to the sea. It seems that an impostor took over and proclaimed themselves as the boat people's deity.*

“Is it a Siming from another world? Did they come from beyond the Baiyu Capital?” Li Huowang wasn't surprised since he had a similar conjecture.

Shen Benyou shook her head again. “The Sacrificial God hasn't answered us in a long time. I do not know what to do. We should be careful this time. No matter who these Dragon Kings are, we should be careful since the Dharma Sect recruited them.”

“You can't die anyways. What are you afraid of? Aren't you ashamed to call yourself the Ao Jing Sect?” Li Huowang did not hold back. “Also, we are not fighting against them head-on. We only need to take away their tribute. The mission shouldn't be that dangerous. Once we are down there, I will steal their tribute while all of you suppress the Dragon King and the others.”

I'm worried, not afraid. There are too many variables. Daoist Li, do you not see them? Do you really think this is a coincidence?

“And what good is it for us to be worried? You are worried, and yet you wanted me to owe you a favor to do this? You wouldn't have accepted it if you were that worried.”

Li Huowang wanted to scold her further, but the captain's voice came from above the deck. “Sir, we are here!”

“We've reached the place. I will listen to you once this is over.”

Shen Benyou took a bag of metal thorns and opened her mouth. She dumped the contents of the bag into her mouth covered in blisters and ulcers before chewing on the steel thorns forcefully.

Four Ao Jing Sect members walked over and carried her palanquin. They followed Li Huowang up to the deck.

Everyone gathered at the top of the deck. They saw that the ocean was still the same, but Li Huowang sensed danger. He felt gazes coming from the bottom of the ship. Something had noticed them.

Li Huowang opened his mouth and swallowed Li Sui before waving his arm. The Ao Jing Sect members jumped into the sea like dumplings into boiling water.

Li Huowang jumped into the icy water and took a deep breath. The briny sea water surged into his lung and suffocated him.

Li Huowang instinctively struggled as his breathing became rapid and his body turned rigid. The suffocating feeling intensified until it reached a peak. Li Huowang quickly got used to the sensation of drowning.

Under normal circumstances, he would've drowned to death. However, with the Heavenly Dao of Death gone, he couldn't die. That was why he could dive into the water without any hesitation.

Several black tentacles with suction cups and hooks appeared out from Li Huowang's body. He swam swiftly in the oceanic current.

Li Huowang looked at the others. He saw the Lion Dance Palace had fused into a blob before transforming into a fish-like being. Densely layered palms covered in white tassels were arranged into the fins.

As for the Ao Jing Sect, they had turned the water around them into a bloody-red color.

Li Huowang pointed to the deep, dark ocean, and everyone descended even further.

Chapter 801 - Dragon King Temple

The cold seawater surrounded Li Huowang as he slowly descended. The pressure of the water slowly increased and pressed on him. It felt as if two walls were slowly crushing his body from both the front and the back.

However, this was not an issue for him since Death had disappeared.

He slowly sank as the surface grew further away from him. The waters around him turned darker as he descended. His visibility decreased, making it harder for him to detect any danger.

In the dark ocean, Li Huowang slowly sank into the depths as the darkness seemed to stretch on endlessly before him.

He suddenly stopped and stared at the murky depths around him.

He fished out three pieces of glowing rocks from the inside of his clothes before throwing them towards the front.

The green light dispelled the darkness, revealing a dense group of boat people with fish-scale tattoos and water monkeys.

One was human, and the other was an evil entity, yet there wasn't much difference between the two groups this deep underwater.

"Kill them!" Li Huowang charged into the group of boat people as each of Li Sui's tentacles held onto a torture tool. The sharp blades of the torture tools sliced up the boat people easily.

The Ao Jing Sect and the Lion Dance Palace did the same. The Lion Dance Palace swallowed a lot of the boat people before leaving behind a massive writhing pile of twisted flesh.

As Death had vanished, neither they nor their enemies could die, so it was pointless to prolong their fight.

Li Huowang was not here to kill them. He observed the glowing rocks descending, revealing a large crevice at the bottom. Li Huowang ushered Li Sui's tentacles to work hard to swim after the rocks.

"This is the Dragon King Temple! Follow me quickly before the Dharma Sect comes!"

Soon the battlefield shifted towards the crevice. Under Li Huowang's guidance, everyone swam towards the three sinking glowing rocks. Li Huowang had taken the initiative for the assault this time.

The glowing rocks weren't bright, but in the dark ocean they were like three miniature green suns that lit up the crevice.

Li Huowang saw several human and fish skeletons littered on the uneven rocks.

Li Huowang thought this was where the boat people and the water monkeys buried their dead, but as he swam downwards, he realized he was wrong.

The skeletons weren't scattered randomly but arranged in a specific pattern. Someone had deliberately placed them to form a mural on the walls. "Is that a human?"

The bones were arranged in the shape of a massive human taller than a mountain. The light coming from the glowing rocks wasn't enough to illuminate it.

Li Huowang could only rely on his memories and piece together the sections he had seen with the light coming from the glowing rocks to form a vague image of the man.

Whoosh~ Li Huowang suddenly sensed danger and quickly shifted sideways. He barely avoided a dark shadow zipping past him.

Hair?

Li Huowang couldn't make out what it was. He only saw something as large as a house disappearing in the darkness.

As he approached, the resistance he encountered started becoming fiercer. Something other than the boat people and the water monkeys was underwater. There appeared to be even more entities worshipping the Dragon King in the Dragon King Temple.

"Father, look! There's a temple in the stomach of the bone-man on the wall!"

"A temple in that thing's stomach? I'm looking for the Dragon King Temple, not an organ temple."

Li Huowang looked down when he heard Li Sui's warning. He saw an eerie temple lodged into the wall of the crevice, and its location was exactly at where the liver of the man made from bones on the wall would be.

He read the words on the rusted signage and realized it was exactly what he had been looking for.

Just then, the intense water pressure crushed the three glowing rocks and plunged everything into darkness again.

The moment the light disappeared, numerous shadowy objects swam up from the crevice, and as they did, the surrounding currents grew fiercer. In the darkness, all Li Huowang could see were shimmering scales.

Li Huowang didn't know what those things were, but he knew they would try to stop him from approaching the Dragon King Temple.

Li Huowang turned towards the direction in which the stench of blood was the heaviest before shouting, "Hey, do your job! Is this the limit of what the Ao Jing Sect can do?"

Right then, he heard the Ao Jing Sect all shout at the same time. "Wooden Liver!"

Many of them used the Five Elements Intercalation simultaneously as a dense mat of maggots burrowed into the flesh

of the shadowy figures. The maggots made the surrounding waters murkier.

They shared the pain as howls from men and beasts alike resounded in the dark water.

Under the protection of the white tassel and maggots, Li Huowang approached the Dragon King Temple, which was shrouded in darkness.

Li Huowang fished out three more glowing rocks and threw them towards the Dragon King Temple. A horrific scene unfolded in front of his eyes as he saw numerous headless corpses floating upside down in the Dragon King Temple. They were neatly arranged in the water.

“I don’t care what those are—it’s your job to buy time for me! I will go take the offerings and finish this early!” Li Huowang shouted. Dense layers of maggots and white tassels surged into the Dragon King Temple.

Under their protection, Li Huowang projected his image and swam into the temple with the tentacles.

One of the headless corpses splayed open its limbs and flew towards him like a starfish, but a palm formed from maggots intercepted the corpse and dragged it away.

As the obstacles were cleared away, Li Huowang soon found a massive table filled with offerings. On one of the white jade plates were two entire Dragon Veins! The heads of the Dragon Veins, the Emperor of the An Xi Kingdom and the Emperor of the Luo Sha Kingdom, had been pierced by corals and forced to kneel towards something on the wall.

Faint golden lights were peeling off from the Dragon Veins like golden foil as they drifted towards the wall. Li Huowang followed the path of the light and stared at the wall.

He was certain that the Dragon King was not a dragon even though it looked like it. The thing on the wall looked more like a

ball of whiskers covered in dragon scales and dragon claws.

“What is that bizarre thing?” Li Huowang was running out of time. He quickly swam over and grabbed the two Dragon Veins before tying them together and dragging them out of the Dragon King Temple.

But when the two Dragon Veins left the table, the entire Dragon King Temple started shaking vigorously, accompanied by the spread of a horrifying aura.

Li Huowang turned around and stared warily at the mural on the wall.

But the mural did not move. It was something else that moved.

Chapter 802 - Ao Mojie

Li Huowang sensed that the tremor and the terrifying aura were becoming stronger. The currents began to swirl chaotically. He understood what was happening and shouted at everyone, "Get out! The temple is sinking!"

The Dragon King Temple had fallen off from the wall and was sinking deeper.

They were already quite deep in the crevice. Li Huowang had no idea where he would reach if he sank even deeper.

The terrifying aura also came from the bottom of the crevice!

Sensing that the temple was sinking, the Ao Jing Sect and the Lion Dance Palace tried to swim out of the temple under Li Huowang's lead.

But the headless corpses, boat people, and water monkeys were all surging into the temple to block them from escaping. Both sides clashed intensely as they fought in the temple.

Bam! The black tiles of the temple roof blasted apart as Li Huowang's body, now stuck together with the Lion Dance Palace, blasted upwards from the temple as they escaped through the hole in the roof.

He didn't dare to stop as he continued to swim upwards. Halfway through, he looked back down and saw the horrifying aura coming from the darkness below. The darkness was impenetrable, even with the presence of light. Hot currents blasted upwards in a rhythmic pattern, almost as if the darkness itself was breathing.

The Dragon King Temple sank into the darkness and disappeared forever.

Li Huowang sighed in relief when he saw the darkness did not chase after him. He was glad that he managed to make it out alive

at the last moment, or he would've been trapped in the stomach of that evil entity.

He then looked upwards. Their fight had altered almost everything in the ocean surrounding them.

He barely saw any empty patches of water on top of him as innumerable evil entities surrounded them from above like a blanket.

Li Huowang looked down at the two Dragon Veins covered in maggots before charging upwards at the evil entities. He wanted to break through the blanket of flesh!

Even though he didn't know what they were or where they came from, he had to admit they were terrifying. But even then, they were no match for Li Huowang. He was no longer the naive and weak Daoist who had just exited the Zephyr Temple.

Several rifts shot forward and cut up the flesh of every entity in the path. The strange fluid leaking out from the rift mutated everything it touched.

The amalgamation of flesh, white tassels, and maggots was even more terrifying. It was like a shark that consumed everything it touched. To it, flesh was nothing more than wet paper.

They charged upwards and reached the depth where the Dragon King Temple had previously been.

Li Huowang thought they were almost at the surface when the evil entities in front of him suddenly parted ways. They revealed the murky surface before a large shadow covered it. Something massive, one larger than a mountain, was sinking towards them.

"Be careful! Something as big as a mountain is coming!" Li Huowang warned his comrades and readied himself for combat.

But as it got closer, Li Huowang realized that he had been mistaken. "This isn't something as big as a mountain, it's an actual fucking mountain! Dodge!"

But it was too late. There were no more paths to evade the

mountain. It was a crevice, and there was nowhere to hide. At the last moment, Li Huowang swam towards the mountain and extended his arms towards it. “Stand behind me!”

When his hands touched the mountain, the rock turned soft and became white tofu.

Li Huowang destroyed the tofu easily before revealing the next layer of rocks. He continued to use his cultivation to turn them into tofu as he tunneled through the mountain.

With Li Huowang carving up a tunnel in the mountain by turning the place he touched into tofu, the Lion Dance Palace and the Ao Jing Sect members were unharmed.

Li Huowang dug through the entire mountain and successfully survived being crushed by the mountain.

Li Huowang heard a massive crashing noise coming from down below in the crevice and thought that the mountain had most likely fallen into the darkness down there. He wasn't sure what the darkness was, but he was certain the mountain would hit it.

However, his happiness was short-lived as a terrifying chill came from below.

Suddenly, with a warm current surging from below, a large mass of dragon scales covering a lump of rotting flesh surged towards Li Huowang.

Li Huowang fought back and sent several rifts towards it.

The lump crashed into the rift and broke it apart like glass. The rift, which had been incomparably sharp, was destroyed just like that.

Li Huowang shifted his body and barely avoided it. He steadied himself and saw what it was.

He had seen it before. It was the mural in the Dragon King Temple just now, Ao Mojie.

“It's ... It's actually below us? There's a Siming below us?” Li Huowang saw the lump of dragon-scale flesh swimming towards

him again.

Sensing that Li Huowang was being attacked, the maggots and white tassels swiftly attacked Ao Mojie, but none of them worked. Both the maggots and white tassels stopped moving the moment they touched Ao Mojie's body.

Li Huowang realized what was happening when he saw the scene. "Be careful! It absorbed the Dragon Qi, and normal techniques are useless!"

Li Huowang had once seen the Dragon Vein destroying the rifts coming from the spine sword and understood that the thing in front of him was going to be hard to fight.

Ao Mojie immediately charged towards him again. Li Huowang barely dodged it with his tentacles.

Just as the two zipped past each other, Li Huowang extended his arms and grabbed one of the dragon scales.

He ripped it off the lump of flesh, but a strange triangular head grew from behind the dragon scale and bit Li Huowang's hands with its two singular fangs.

Li Huowang grabbed the head and crushed it with his fingers.

He took a deep breath and stared at the lump of flesh. Both the Ao Jing Sect and the Lion Dance Palace are worthless here now.

He threw the Dragon Veins towards the back. "Take them and run! I will stop it!"

Chapter 803 - Dragon Vein

Li Huowang had no intention of fighting the being to the death. This was especially true because Death had disappeared. Killing the being would be difficult.

He hadn't forgotten the reason he was here. It would be a waste of time to try and kill the lump of flesh in front of him.

"I will stall it for at least the length it takes for an incense stick to burn, so swim as far as you can! We will meet again in Si Qi!"

Li Huowang swung his tentacles hard as he charged toward the being.

He got close before he swung the spine sword again to send a rift towards the being.

This time, the rift was not intended to attack Ao Mojie but to ambush it. Li Huowang swiftly vanished into the rift.

The rift then splintered against Ao Mojie. Li Huowang disappeared from the dark depths of the ocean.

Ao Mojie saw Li Huowang disappearing and didn't stand idly by. It opened the eyes surrounding its body and expelled a hot current from its intestines, propelling itself forward and upward towards the location of Shen Benyou and the rest of the group.

Just then, a rift suddenly materialized out of thin air, revealing a sharp blade that stabbed Ao Mojie. As quickly as it had appeared, the blade vanished once more.

Right after the sword vanished, it reappeared and stabbed Ao Mojie again. This cycle continued, with the sword repeatedly stabbing him until his blood stained the water all around.

Li Huowang stabbed it one final time. Unable to endure any

longer, he fell out of the rift.

Even though his cultivation of the “Truth” was strong, the strange liquid from the Qi Kingdom altered his body. His body bulged outwards, and six twisting limbs sprawled out from underneath his robes.

The limbs all ended in a crab-like pincer. There were four thin white stems on his forehead, each with a flower-like structure. Eight green whiskers hung beneath his chin, surrounded by sparse white hair that extended to his neck, concealing a strange little head that had sprouted there.

However, the transformation was temporary. Li Huowang quickly returned back to normal after he used his cultivation.

Just then, the small, shrinking head on his neck said, “Li Huowang, what is the meaning of this? You promised me!”

Li Huowang did not look back. He tore off the small head forcefully.

“Hmph! And you believed my words? To think that you would call yourself Hong Zhong of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. I lied! I’ve already had enough illusions by my side. Compared to Shai Zi’s plan, I’m more worried about what you would do behind my back!”

Li Huowang threw the little head away and faced Ao Mojie again. Despite risking his life to attack Ao Mojie, his attacks had barely worked on the house-sized being.

But Li Huowang did not give up. He was here to buy time and not fight to his death.

Through the compound eyes growing on the back of his neck, Li Huowang saw that Shen Benyou and the others had reached the surface. Li Huowang then sliced off his compound eyes before charging towards Ao Mojie again.

Having discovered the two Dragon Veins, he had partially achieved his goal. His mission would be completed after he stalled for more time, but it seemed like Ao Mojie didn’t want to fight Li

Huowang.

The scales on its body vibrated as it called for the boat people to gather around it. A high pitched noise coupled with warm currents spread out far and wide.

The cry reached the ears of both the boat people and water monkeys, prompting each of them to grab a dragon scale and devour a handful of Ao Mojie's flesh. Afterward, they placed the dragon scales on their faces and shielded their eyes.

The aura they gave off was now very different. While they still looked the same, Li Huowang sensed something was fundamentally different. They surrounded Li Huowang as he tried to use his cultivation of the “Truth” to stop them, but it was futile. It seemed like they had obtained some Dragon Qi.

Li Huowang knew something was wrong when he saw more and more dragon scales being distributed. Ao Mojie had an abnormal amount of Dragon Qi.

It didn't completely absorb the two Dragon Veins, so where is it getting so much Dragon Qi from?

Li Huowang had fought against a Dragon Vein before, but Ao Mojie was very different from the one he had fought before.

When the boat people and water monkeys arranged themselves in a massive snake-like formation with their eyes covered by the dragon scales, Li Huowang finally realized what was happening.

“You... You didn't rob the Dragon Qi! It's your own Dragon Qi! You are not a Siming! There's not a single Siming as weak as you.

“You are a Dragon Vein—a Dragon Vein from their world! Isn't that right? You're not stealing the Dragon Qi; you're reinforcing yourself with it!”

Ao Mojie had no intention of answering. It swam along with the massive array of boat people and sea monkeys like a dragon swimming in the water.

Li Huowang stared at Ao Mojie without fear. “Simings from

another world, and now Dragon Veins from the other world. Why are you here? You have your own place, so why are you here to steal ours?”

Against the reinforced Ao Mojie, Li Huowang was suppressed throughout the fight.

Fortunately, Li Huowang couldn't die under any circumstances since Death was gone.

He was still questioning Ao Mojie even at this point. “Why? Why come and steal our Heavenly Daos? Don't you have Death in your world, or do you think it's fun to have two Heavenly Daos of Death?”

Li Huowang stopped when he said that. He recalled the Door God that tried to recruit him last time and realized that he had just hit the nail on the head.

Li Huowang was in a daze, so Ao Mojie seized the chance to attack and cut him in half. However, the black tentacles soon stitched Li Huowang back to normal.

“I understand now! I finally understand! There's no Death in your world! There's no Rot in your world! There's no Pain in your world! There's also no Lies in your world! You wanted them! You crave for Rot, Pain, Lies, and even Death because you don't have them!”

He saw Ao Mojie's eyes shifting slightly. Li Huowang smiled as he drew his spine sword.

“But... Don't you dare try to take them away! As long as I am alive, you will not take our Heavenly Daos! I want to see what will happen if I kill you! A portion of our time disappeared every time one of our Dragon Veins was destroyed, so let's see what will happen to your world if I kill you here!”

Chapter 804 - Destroy

Li Huowang cut the water monkey in front of him in half, its flesh ripping apart audibly.

As the battle dragged on, both Li Huowang and his allies suffered severe injuries.

But it wasn't over. There were too many enemies that had obtained Dragon Qi. Li Huowang was surrounded by enemies and encircled by the Dragon Vein.

Due to the disappearance of Death, no one could fatally harm the other.

Li Huowang understood that dragging things on was worthless, but his efforts would be in vain if they dismembered him.

The small fries weren't the problem. It was the Dragon Vein called Ao Mojie!

Li Huowang calculated his distance with the Dragon Vein before taking a deep breath of water and swinging his spine sword.

The rift appeared once more, and Li Huowang slipped into it using his tentacles.

The briny smell of seawater was exchanged by the shimmering strange liquid. Li Huowang's heart was filled with despair as his flesh began mutating.

Li Huowang endured it and charged towards where Ao Mojie would be. Since he couldn't do anything in the Liang Kingdom, he had to find a way to deal with it from the Qi kingdom instead. As long as he could align himself with the position of the Dragon Vein in the Qi Kingdom, he could appear directly in the stomach of Ao Mojie!

Time was ticking. Li Huowang acted swiftly as he approached Ao Mojie's location in the Liang Kingdom. His swimming speed

increased thanks to the strange fins that were growing out of his tentacles.

“You think... You think you can escape if you don’t materialize me? I’ve always been in your body, and I am Li Huowang!” A strange diminutive face appeared on Li Huowang’s neck and struggled to grow outwards. “You are already a part of me, or else you wouldn’t have thought of lying to me with your usual demeanor!”

“Scram! I don’t have time to waste on you!” Li Huowang said.

He shaved off the skin on his neck, but he soon saw a new face appearing.

“Rubbish! Without me, you are just a pile of gullible rubbish that anyone could deceive!”

“Aiya, Aiya, stop fighting!” a third voice rang out.

Another head popped up in between them. This time it was the old monk trying to block them from fighting.

The old monk was not the only head that was growing on the back of his body like a strange tumor. Jin Shanzhao, Qiu Chibao, and Peng Longteng were all growing on his back with faces of fear, unease, and anger.

“Fuck!” Li Huowang cursed.

With the heads on his back, Li Huowang swiftly reached Ao Mojie.

He found the correct location and swung the spine sword, only for the rift to shatter when it appeared. He was too close—the rift touched Ao Mojie the moment it formed, causing it to shatter.

“I refuse to believe that I will die here!”

Li Huowang swung the spine sword rapidly as numerous rifts shot out.

Finally, after he tried shooting out the rifts from numerous angles, he found a particular angle that allowed the rift to stay up for a short period. Li Huowang knew that it was his chance.

The rift could sustain itself for a while, meaning that Ao Mojie's body was hollow inside. There was a space in there that he could fit himself in!

When he shot out another rift, he projected his body and slipped through it immediately. He had just come out from the other side when he felt his body was burning up. It appeared to be the stomach of Ao Mojie.

"Die!" Li Huowang yelled.

He stabbed the spine sword forward, and a splash of burning liquid splattered on his face. He tasted it and realized it was blood. Li Huowang perked up immediately.

He controlled the tentacles around him and sliced up his surroundings with his torture tools. Blood flowed out from the wounds and covered him.

The seawater couldn't drown him, so naturally, he couldn't drown in the blood either. As Li Huowang carved out more and more wounds, the space around him started to shake.

"How is it? You must've never felt this before right? This is the pain that you lack on the other side! You better savor it!"

Li Huowang stabbed his sword downwards and carved out a table-sized chunk of flesh.

His allies and enemies were fighting on the outside, but Li Huowang's battle was fought inside. He refused to get out until he dismembered Ao Mojie.

He was busy carving out the flesh when a hole in Ao Mojie's stomach suddenly appeared. A water monkey with a dragon scale covering its face swam from outside the hole and charged towards Li Huowang.

This was just the start. As Li Huowang cut the water monkey in half, more and more of them surged into the stomach. They were trying to stop Li Huowang from harming the Dragon Vein any further.

And thus a bitter battle began, this time inside of Ao Mojie's stomach.

Still, it was much easier for Li Huowang to fight inside there. He was fighting inside of Ao Mojie after all, so Ao Mojie couldn't do much. Victory was his.

Blood and seawater merged together and turned the area murky. The lack of light didn't help at all either.

Li Huowang was in the middle of ripping out the head of one of the evil entities when a chaotic turbulence erupted in the bloody water to his left. A massive ashen-white being, as big as a tree truck, crashed into Li Huowang.

The being was slimy and smooth on the outside until it revealed its spiral mouth.

The evil entity shot something out from its snout. It was so fast that Li Huowang only saw a blur in the dark when it crashed into him and sent him flying. The stomach wall suddenly opened up, and Li Huowang was shot out of Ao Mojie's stomach.

Li Huowang steadied himself in the cold seawater and was surrounded once more by the enemies cloaked in Dragon Qi.

However, things had changed. Ao Mojie had sustained a severe injury. Its body was dented and dehydrated, with numerous small wounds across the surface of its body. It wriggled around, yet it couldn't heal itself.

The flesh on the outside was rotting, but the interior of Ao Mojie was completely different. It was mismatched.

Staring at the strange beings entering Ao Mojie's body, Li Huowang asked with uncertainty, "Your appearance... Is it not what it was in the past?"

"Is it because of the lack of Death? Is that why your appearance slowly changed to what it is now?"

Ao Mojie ignored him.

Its worshippers shielded Ao Mojie as they charged towards Li

Huowang. Countless beings, all with a dragon scale covering their faces, were charging towards him!

Li Huowang was going to use the same trick again. However, before he could, a large portion of the evil entities were knocked away by a fleshy blob covered in white tassels.

“That’s... The Lion Dance Palace. What are you doing here?”

Li Huowang couldn’t understand what was happening when the blob of flesh covered in white tassels attached themselves to him.

Chapter 805 - Arise

“What are you doing here? I thought I told you to run?” Li Huowang tried to push the blob of flesh away.

“Help you. Deal with them first.”

The Lion Dance Palace uttered those words before increasing the speed of its fusion with Li Huowang. The white tassels and flesh started to force themselves into Li Huowang’s body and take over Li Sui’s space. Li Sui had no choice but to move most of her tentacles into Li Huowang’s mouth.

It was not over yet. Li Huowang’s body bulked up as his organs shifted around.

It wasn’t only him. The four strange tumor-like heads on his back were shifted around too.

Li Huowang had changed. His red robes covered in strange runes were the only thing that hadn’t changed.

Xuan Pin’s robes were somehow enchanted, fitting Li Huowang’s body no matter what. It didn’t matter that the Lion Dance Palace had enlarged his body.

In just a few breaths, in the dark depths of the ocean, Li Huowang had transformed into a monster several stories tall.

He was still wearing his red Daoist robes even though he was now several stories tall. The black tentacles were hanging down from his mouth, and the sensory organs on his face had shifted slightly. After sensing the change in his aura, the boat people, water monkeys, and the other evil entities became wary of Li Huowang.

Li Huowang felt as if he had grown a lot of eyes in this form. Each white tassel gave him a line of sight. He could even feel the white tassels inside the box that Puppy had stashed away for himself.

It wasn't just his vision—his body had changed too. He couldn't quite describe the way it felt.

The Lion Dance Palace wasn't assimilating with him—it was fusing with him! Li Huowang experienced a peculiar sensation, as if he had the power to control every aspect of his own body.

Suddenly, one of Li Huowang's eyes rolled down to the back of his left hands. "Ao Mojie is running away!"

Li Huowang was going to move when numerous white tassels sprouted out of his body and moved like a fin.

The evil entities tried to block Li Huowang as the Lion Dance Palace's voice came from inside his mind. "A sword made from a live Strayed One is very unique. Try using it. We can block the current danger with it right now."

Li Huowang reached behind his back with his disjointed right arm and shoved his hands into his flesh before pulling out his own spine. A bloody spine-like sword appeared in his hand.

He swung it around his body, and everything in the path of the attack was pushed back. Li Huowang also realized that even if his sword didn't touch them, the evil entities' bodies all became elongated beyond what was reasonable.

He no longer needed to be wary of their encirclement. He quickly swam to chase after Ao Mojie.

Ao Mojie tried to run but it was too late. Just as it had almost reached the bottom of the sea, Li Huowang caught it.

"Shatter!" Li Huowang swung his spine sword down hard and split Ao Mojie's rotting body in half.

But it wasn't over. Li Huowang swung his sword again and again. Rotten flesh floated around in the area as he continued his assault.

After torturing it to the point of being unrecognizable, Li Huowang tied Ao Mojie up in a knot.

He then swung the entire thing towards the wall of the crevice

before pulling out a boulder larger than his own body and smashing Ao Mojie with it.

The dust settled and Ao Mojie was flattened into a meat paste. Everything became quiet as Li Huowang looked at the flesh floating upwards.

Li Huowang slowly swam upwards while the Lion Dance Palace slowly detached itself from his body.

Li Huowang broke through the surface of the water and stood on it.

He winced in pain as he forced his facial sensory organs back to where they belonged.

His body slowly turned back to normal and the four heads on his back slowly withered away.

Li Huowang looked down at the Lion Dance Palace hiding under the surface of the sea before asking, "What's going on? I thought I told you to go first. Why did you come back?"

Ao Mojie's flattened flesh floated up to the surface and Li Huowang kicked it away. Due to the disappearance of Death, Ao Mojie was still alive, though the condition it was in was no different from being dead.

He wanted to take back two Dragon Veins but now he had three. It was a surprising harvest.

"We can't go."

"Why not?" Li Huowang thought he had misheard. He turned around and looked at the Lion Dance Palace again.

The Dharma Sect has surrounded us. All twelve of their Grand Witches are here. Shen Benyou frowned as she surfaced from the water too.

Her engorged abdomen was now flat and flaccid. She exposed a large hole on her abdomen where her flesh had been pulverized.

The Ao Jing Sect members were behind her, but many of them were missing. Even the two Dragon Veins had disappeared.

“What’s going on?” Li Huowang was frustrated as he looked at the horizon. He soon saw numerous ships of different sizes.

Behind the ships were large waves and torrential rain.

As the boats got closer, Li Huowang saw someone unexpected in front of him. It was Xuan Pin. Xuan Pin was wearing his red Daoist robes as he stood at the bow of the ship!

“Li Huowang, surrender. You are finished. We have kept you occupied here while the Li Kingdom fights back on the other front. Victory has been decided. Everything is over. You’ve lost to us.”

Li Huowang stared at Xuan Pin with an incredulous expression. “Are you stupid? I’m wearing Xuan Pin’s robes. Who are you to try and imitate Xuan Pin?”

The Xuan Pin on the bow of the ship shook his head slowly. “I just faked my death. I defected to the Li Kingdom a long time ago.”

He continued, “I’ve told them the secrets of the Surveillance Bureau. Everything is over.”

Just as he said that, several azure gourds were thrown from the ship into the water. The strange black liquid slowly spread and formed a large circle around Li Huowang. The strange liquid slowly made its way towards Li Huowang.

At the same time, twelve individuals, each wearing a veil with the word “Witch,” appeared at the bow of the ship. All of them had a black cloth tied to their shoulders.

Even though they were very far away, Li Huowang could still feel how special they were. It was as if they were much heavier than the others that caused even space to distort around them.

“Hmph! Grand Witch?” Li Huowang spat out some blood. “Dream on if you want me to surrender! Victory has yet to be decided!”

Li Huowang’s face contorted in pain and blood sprayed out from his nose. Veins bulged on his forehead and his brain started expanding. “AAAAAAH! ARISE!”

A massive bronze tree shot up from the depths of the ocean. It pierced the flattened Ao Mojie on its crown and towered behind Li Huowang.

Chapter 806 - Ascend

What... What is that thing? Shen Benyou stared at the bronze tree behind Li Huowang in shock.

Ao Mojie, now nothing more than a flattened piece of meat, was impaled on the massive tree. Its broken flesh rained down from the impact as it landed on the tree branches on the lower levels.

The bronze tree that had been emitting a golden light was now covered by a layer of flesh. It was both bizarre and incredible to see.

This was the Dragon-Slaying God-Killing Array. Even though he was surrounded, Li Huowang still had one last card to play.

He was well aware that fighting in this place would be futile. Not only was he uncertain of his ability to defeat the twelve Grand Witches, but he also couldn't kill them since Death was no longer present.

Since they would act in the mortal realm, Li Huowang just needed to ascend and fight up there instead!

The twelve Grand Witches were flustered and charged towards him as they stepped on the strange iridescent liquid.

But Li Huowang had materialized the bronze tree, so it was too late to destroy the Dragon-Slaying God-Killing Array.

“Suisui! Hands!”

Li Sui sprouted four tentacles from Li Huowang's armpits. Under his guidance, the four tentacles split and became four arms instead.

Li Huowang recalled what Xuan Pin did to activate the array, copying his movements from memory.

As the array started, the skies beneath the dark cloud split apart. A dark rift appeared and was gradually being pulled apart by

invisible hands.

Li Huowang saw the path to the Baiyu Capital!

Li Sui extended her head out of Li Huowang's robes using one of her tentacles. She held the bronze coin sword with her left tentacle and three talismans on her right tentacle.

As the tentacles moved swiftly, she impaled the three talismans using the bronze coin sword and started chanting according to Li Huowang's instructions.

"Walk barefoot, step on the Heavenly Gates with haste. The dark aura of the demons approaches Nanyang ..."

As Li Sui chanted, Li Huowang, the Lion Dance Palace, and the remaining Ao Jing Sect members all grew dragon scales and claws, and their bodies started to grow.

Two twisted dragon horns grew out from Li Huowang's forehead. They grew longer and blood trailed down his face.

Ao Mojie, the Dragon Vein that was impaled onto the bronze tree, slowly dried up. It looked like it was on the verge of death. If Death hadn't disappeared, it might've really died.

Just then, the Dharma Sect attacked. The seas around them were completely black, and a large wave crashed into Li Huowang and the rest.

The wave didn't do anything. They remained unscathed as the wave retreated. Thanks to the Dragon Qi, a once formidable technique had become utterly ineffective against them.

The dark clouds had been split in half, and a dark circle rotated slowly above Li Huowang. It was incredibly far, but the horrific aura emanating from it made everyone want to run.

"The Ox Tail Gate is open! Let's go!" Peng Longteng appeared beside Li Huowang and threw him high up towards the black rift in the air.

The twelve Grand Witches also flew upward, trying to intercept him.

Li Huowang smiled when he saw their frantic actions. *They panicked the moment they realized I was going to the Baiyu Capital to nip this in the bud.*

That also indirectly proved that his method was correct. He needed to head upwards to deal with the issue from the root!

Several artifacts and techniques crashed into Li Huowang's body, but the Dragon Qi shielded him from all harm without fail.

One of the Grand Witches tried to block Li Huowang from the front when a Dragon Dance imitating a real dragon appeared from below and wrapped the Grand Witch around its body. "Go! We will stop them!"

Shen Benyou stood at the crown of the bronze tree. She removed her clothes, skin, and finally her flesh. Each layer of hers was connected by the blood vessels.

She bathed herself in the pain and took out a book—the Ascension Volume.

"I owe you guys one!" Li Huowang shouted. Peng Longteng appeared once more before throwing Li Huowang towards the black rift.

With the Lion Dance Palace and the Ao Jing Sect buying him time, he flew faster and faster as he approached Ox Tail Gate. "Faster! Faster! I need to be faster!"

He barely entered the rift in the skies when it sealed up. Rain poured down once more.

After passing through the clouds, Li Huowang continued flying upwards into the star-filled skies.

He crossed through the stars and saw some familiar faces. They were the strangely mutated horrors that he had seen once before.

He saw the flesh Bodhisattva still siphoning something from its surroundings with a pink tentacle wriggling at the front of its body.

He saw a dull ash-red maggot with slime covering its body. There were incense sticks stuck all over it, and it expanded and

contracted rhythmically.

He also saw the God of Happiness and the Immortal Families.

Li Huowang came here once before, but this time it was different. All of them scattered and made way for Li Huowang after seeing him.

He wasn't certain if they were afraid of him or the Dragon Qi on his body.

Li Huowang sped up because this was not the Baiyu Capital. He reached the deep part of the stars and saw a chaotic, colorless jade plate suspended in the air.

The jade plate was suspended by something hiding in the depths of the darkness, wriggling and moving.

The mountain-sized jade plate bobbed from time to time. There were three large contorted words on it: Ox Tail Gate.

But this time, it was different. Li Huowang saw that the two serpents holding the gate were gone.

There were also several cracks on the jade plate. Something black was trying to take over the Baiyu Capital!

Li Huowang realized that even the Ox Tail Gate was affected. His heart sank.

He shuddered whenever he thought the Ox Tail Gate could shatter and spill unspeakable horrors into the mortal realm.

"Thankfully I'm still not too late! I'm here now!" He looked inside the jade plate and saw nothing but primal chaos.

Li Huowang wasn't sure what would happen if he entered now, but he was clear that he had to do it one way or another.

"Everyone, hang on! I'm here to help!" Li Huowang shouted into the jade plate to notify the Simings before running into the Ox Tail Gate.

Chapter 807 - Mental Image

“Where are we going?”

Li Huowang walked down an illuminated corridor, his hands handcuffed as a nurse escorted him. They were following behind Yi Donglai.

“Somewhere nice. You will know when you see it,” Yi Donglai said without turning around.

Li Huowang had been in the hospital for quite some time and his hair had grown to the point where it almost covered his eyes. Through his bangs, Li Huowang stared at the back of Yi Donglai’s head. *I wonder what Siming he is. He should be a Siming, right? Why isn’t he helping me escape if he’s on my side?*

They reached their destination while Li Huowang continued making assumptions.

The nurse stood guard at the entrance while Li Huowang followed Yi Donglai into the room.

It was a simple room with several stools, a table of sand, and several cupboards filled with random knickknacks.

“Wait, a sand table?”

Li Huowang looked at the square table. Blue boards surrounded the edge of the tables while yellow sand filled the top.

Li Huowang looked at the table and then checked the cupboards. He saw various little models placed in them.

There were miniature humans, animals, trees, flowers, grass, cars, boats, flying objects, stones, and monsters. Li Huowang had a sudden realization.

“Oh. I understand now. You want me to make a miniature

scene? I will have to place those objects in the sand table as a way to express my inner world?”

“Oh, so you know about it? In that case, there’s no need to explain. You can start when you are ready.” Yi Donglai took out a key and unlocked Li Huowang’s handcuffs.

Li Huowang rubbed his wrists and frowned. “You trust me that much? Aren’t you afraid that I will go crazy and kill you?”

“Li Huowang, you still have the time to joke with me? You don’t seem desperate enough. Did you know that your mom cried for a very long time yesterday when she called me?”

Yi Donglai sat on the opposite side of the sand table after he saw Li Huowang’s bitter face. Li Huowang was also clenching his fist in pain.

“You are already a regular here. I won’t explain much to you either. If you want to get discharged quicker, you have to follow the treatment plan. There’s no other way here.”

Yi Donglai tapped the edge of the table with his pen and placed a small human figurine in the center of the sand table.

“Imagine that this is you. What would you do next? Don’t think too deeply and just follow your heart.”

Li Huowang looked at the figurine with a complicated look on his face. He stood silently as he contemplated before he approached the cupboards. He returned with an armful of figurines and models.

Li Huowang picked up the human figurine in the middle of the sand table and contemplated a little before placing it back. He then started placing different models and figurines onto the sand table.

Yi Donglai frowned as Li Huowang placed more and more figurines onto the sand table. *What is he thinking? Why is his mental image so weird? He placed several figurines next to each other... But why are they planted upside down into the sand?*

Li Huowang stopped. Yi Donglai stared at the sand table and was unsure of what to say.

Li Huowang had used the monster figurines the most, but they weren't standing on their legs. Instead, they were either planted upside down or clumped together in a group. Li Huowang also dug a large pit in the sand.

"These things... Are they related to you?" Yi Donglai pointed at the human figurines at the edge of the pits.

Li Huowang shook his head and said nothing.

Yi Donglai stared at Li Huowang before he extended his right arm and grabbed the little figurine that represented Li Huowang. He then hovered the figurine at the top of the monsters before making a gesture of tossing the human figurine into the pit that was being observed by the monsters.

Yi Donglai observed Li Huowang's face cautiously as he did that. He wanted to detect any changes in Li Huowang's expression.

He did the same gesture a few times before he noticed that Li Huowang was staring at him with a weirded-out gaze. "Are you alright? I've already set it up. I want to go back if there's nothing else to do."

"Wait, don't be hasty. We are just getting started." Yi Donglai placed the figurine representing Li Huowang into Li Huowang's hands before taking out all of the figurines in the miniature scene. He then reset the sand table. "Come, continue. I want to see what else you will make."

Li Huowang sighed and did it again.

The miniature scene remained largely unchanged, except for one difference—the figurine representing Li Huowang was now positioned closer to one of the upside-down monsters.

"If..." Yi Donglai pushed the Li Huowang figurine forward until it touched the monster. "What about this? Is it better?"

"It's better if you say that it's better. Do we need to continue?"

"Yes." Yi Donglai said, placing the figurine back into Li Huowang's palms.

Li Huowang soon finished the third miniature scene. This time, the little figurine was buried in the sand with two monsters at the side.

Yi Donglai somehow understood something and started taking notes. "Don't look at me. Continue. Don't stop until I tell you to."

Li Huowang continued to place the figurines. The little Li Huowang figurine was sometimes in the pit and sometimes at the edge, but the two monsters continued to be by his side.

On the twelfth iteration, the figurine was placed on the head of the monsters.

"Continue, don't stop." Yi Donglai placed the figurine back in Li Huowang's hands.

This time, Li Huowang placed the figurine on the board at the edge of the table as he stared at Yi Donglai.

Yi Donglai asked, "What is the meaning of this?"

"It means that I've had enough!" Li Huowang punched the sand table, and the monsters were sent flying. Even the little plastic figurine of himself fell to the ground.

"Yi Donglai, do you think it's fun to play with me? You only need the patient to arrange the miniscape once if you want to learn of their inner heart!"

"The rules are dead. We are alive. Everyone has a different method in doing this."

Li Huowang endured his frustration and started arranging the miniature scene again.

"Since you're already frustrated, we can stop here for today. Go back now. It should be time for your meal too."

Hearing this, Li Huowang stood up and approached the door.

He came to a halt at the doorway. "Yi Donglai, I will go along with your treatment plan, but I have one condition. If my mother calls you again, just tell her that my treatment is progressing smoothly and that I will be discharged soon."

Chapter 808 - Dream

Li Huowang wolfed down his meal inside the brightly-lit canteen of the White Tower Prison. He was still thinking about what had happened just now.

Shai Zi is smart. He knows that he can't fight against the Simings. He has no choice but to work with me to get what he needs. He's just someone that I can kill at any time now.

Li Huowang was distracted and choked on something while his face turned red.

He stood up and clenched his throat with his hands.

Someone suddenly patted his back forcefully, causing him to regurgitate what he had eaten just now.

Li Huowang braced himself and looked at the messy table. He saw a small plastic figurine amidst his vomit.

The plastic figurine laid there silently and stared at him with the beady eyes.

"This is..." Li Huowang wiped his mouth and picked up the plastic figurine. He inspected it under the LED light and realized that it was the very same plastic figurine that Yi Donglai had given to him at the sand table just now!

Li Huowang was trying to figure out why the figurine appeared in his food when he saw the figurine opening its mouth to shout at him. "Ji Zai...! Ji Zai...! Ji Zai, don't get distracted!"

"Ah!" Li Huowang sat up from his bed out of shock. He panted as cold sweat poured out from his body.

He glanced around and realized what had happened.

"It... it was just a dream?" Li Huowang sighed in relief and looked at the clock on the wall. It was only three in the morning.

Li Huowang frowned and massaged his temples. He grumbled

and complained about Yi Donglai's treatment plan. It included the miniature scene, which subsequently gave him that nightmare.

"Ji Zai!" Li Huowang turned around and saw the little plastic figurine somehow glowing and standing atop his bedpost!

Bam! Li Huowang smashed his head to the wall and woke himself up from the intense pain.

He looked around him and found that the little figurine was not anywhere. He then realized that it was another dream. He had dreamed within a dream.

Thinking back about what had happened, Li Huowang pressed his head in pain and lay back down on the bed. "Shit. To think that the figurine could glow in the dark."

Li Huowang rolled around in the bed, but he couldn't sleep at all. He ended up staying up all night.

The breakfast at White Tower Prison today was plain congee and buns. Though the buns were made using old flour, they were still tasty and chewy.

Li Huowang, who was tired from the lack of sleep, took his plain breakfast and sat in a corner. "Damn that Yi Donglai. Why does he want me to go and play with a sand table? My mind's a mess now!"

Li Huowang stared at the other patients and thought to himself. *I've already sent Shai Zi out. As long as he manages to speak with Zhao Lei, Qing Wanglai and the others should come rescue me soon. I pray that Qing Wanglai's contact will help me get out of here "legally." I hope they don't try to resort to a jailbreak.*

Li Huowang didn't care that the Three Ancient Ones were using him as a pawn. He didn't mind as long as the trouble could be taken care of.

But... I think the Simings from the Dharma Sect could find me first. I hope that Qing Wanglai and the others aren't too late.

Li Huowang stared at his surroundings as he thought about it.

Even though he was back in this place, he still knew how to tread carefully.

He was thinking about what to do when someone approached him. "Why are you back here? What happened outside? Is everything alright?"

It was a familiar face. She was Zhao Ting, the girl with depression. It seemed like she was doing much better after receiving treatment. She even came to greet Li Huowang on her own accord.

Another youth followed her and greeted Li Huowang. It was Wei Shili, the man with mania. His fingers still twitched occasionally. "You are back? Why? Did you relapse?"

Behind Wei Shili was a large youth. It was the one that Li Huowang had helped before. "Brother, here. Apple."

Li Huowang frowned and was wary of them. Even though he knew them, he couldn't guarantee that they wouldn't harm him.

Li Huowang looked at the apple on the table and didn't take it. He still remembered how it felt to have a needle stabbing into his tongue.

"It's nothing. Just a small issue. I can get out again once I'm done with it." Li Huowang left after tossing them those words.

He had no desire to make friends there or involve them in his life, regardless of their opinion of him.

Li Huowang walked outside and stood behind the wire mesh. He looked outside and saw the eighteen-sided die that he had thrown out was gone. With a sense of satisfaction, he made his way back inside.

He was soon called by a nurse and escorted back to the room with the sand table. Yi Donglai had been waiting for him.

"Feeling better today? Let's finish this early so you can rest." Yi Donglai tapped the table with his pen. The little figurine was already in the middle of the sand table.

Li Huowang wanted to explain something to Yi Donglai, but he

ultimately said, “I need to go to the toilet.”

Yi Donglai nodded. “Go. Third door on the left. Do you need tissues?”

Li Huowang ignored him and entered the toilet. He turned on the tap and splashed his face with cold water.

Who does Yi Donglai represent? Can I trust him? Can I explain everything that I’ve encountered to him?

Yi Donglai was different from Li Huowang. He had helped Li Huowang before and hadn't harmed him so far, but Li Huowang didn't want to leave his fate in someone else's hands.

More importantly, Li Huowang was afraid that Yi Donglai was part of the Laws. He had once angered the Laws and was punished severely because of that. He feared something grave would happen if he angered them again.

He kept thinking before deciding on continuing to observe the situation once more. He chose to wait for the Three Ancient Ones to come and rescue him.

Li Huowang calmed down and returned to the room. He sat down on the plastic stool and reached for the plastic figurine in the middle.

Five enormous fingers, even larger than mountains, exerted pressure on the figurine, causing space-time to warp and emitting a resounding boom.

“Alright, let's start.”

Chapter 809 - Baiyu Capital

“Where... where are they?” Li Huowang floated around in Baiyu Capital and stared at the empty space around him.

The various beings—the Buddhas, the Bodhisattvas, and the gods—were gone. The once-populated Baiyu Capital was surprisingly vast and quiet.

Li Huowang was here to help. He thought that the war in the Baiyu Capital was intense, but apparently, that was not the case. He couldn’t find the Simings at all.

He did find several dangerous things, but he wasn’t sure if they were the Simings trying to invade Baiyu Capital.

Tentacles wriggled around his body, pushing him around in the empty space to search for clues.

Li Huowang still recalled how fast the Dharma Sect was acting down there. This place shouldn’t have been this calm.

“Ji Zai! Come out! I’m here! Where are you? What’s going on?”

This wasn’t what he had expected. It was not what Xuan Pin had seen when he was out here. Xuan Pin wouldn’t have died if it was this calm up here.

“Ji Zai! Ba-Hui!” Li Huowang continued to shout, but there was no response.

“Was I mistaken? Should I head back?”

Li Huowang was thinking about that when he felt a mirror appearing below him. He touched the mirror gently.

In the next instant, he saw himself being reflected in the mirror. His reflection was staring at him through the lake at Cowheart Village! Li Huowang himself rarely goes there.

In the blink of an eye, he caught sight of his own reflection in the mirror. Surprisingly, his mirrored self was gazing back at him through the lake at Cowheart Village, a place he rarely visited.

“Ji Zai?” His reflection spoke from the other side of the mirror. Li Huowang was so startled that he let go of the mirror.

Li Huowang raised and looked at his trembling hands. “I’m Ji Zai? I become Ji Zai the moment I reach Baiyu Capital?”

Li Huowang was filled with confusion as he realized that he had transformed into the very Siming that he had once resented. The disbelief washed over him as he reached out to touch the mirror once more. The familiar voice echoed from the other side once again.

The Li Huowang on the other side was very angry. “Hey! Speak! Why aren’t you speaking?”

“The Natural Disaster this time is different! In the past, the sun disappeared and everything stopped decaying. But now, Death is gone!”

Li Huowang let go of the mirror and his reflection paused. His reflection was waiting for him to answer.

Li Huowang looked at the scene in front of him with shock. He had said the exact same words previously! He was talking to his past self now! He was Ji Zai!

The moment Li Huowang understood what was happening, more mirrors appeared below him. Each mirror represented the different times that Li Huowang had been trying to find Ji Zai.

Some of them had happened in the past, while others had yet to happen.

He stared at his past and future self before he realized something. Only the mortal realm had time—there was no concept of time here in the Baiyu Capital. In this place, the past was the future. There were no distinctions between them. “Simings... Beings without past nor futures?”

As Li Huowang vaguely remembered what Zhuge Yuan had written on his fan, the surrounding space changed again. The space around him became very cramped as more and more mirrors appeared.

Some of the scenes happened in the past, and others happened in the future. The Baiyu Capital was a place without the concept of time, so everything occurred within the present.

“Something is moving!” Li Huowang snarled and swung the tentacles covered in dragon scales around him. He barely missed the beings around him.

His surroundings slowly became more chaotic, and Li Huowang found what he was looking for—the Simings. They were back!

They were fighting. The Heavenly Daos clashed against each other. The Baiyu Capital was torn apart and then stitched back together, again and again.

Li Huowang was currently stuck in a small pocket dimension, and his surroundings became increasingly dangerous.

He hadn’t figured out why the Imperial Preceptor and the others blinded themselves before coming here, but now everything had become clear.

Those with eyesight would stare too far into the Baiyu Capital and would know too much to focus, just like what was happening to him now.

“AAAAAAH!” Li Huowang’s pupils darted around as he stared deep into the Baiyu Capital and saw the things in the past.

He witnessed the unfolding of the past and why Da Nuo went mad. He also observed the Heavenly Daos that shouldn’t have existed creeping in.

The Heavenly Daos were still here, but the Heavenly Daos that were not from this world had caused Da Nuo to go crazy. The world had gone crazy!

As more Simings appeared, more details stemming from

different time frames forced themselves into Li Huowang's mind. They continued to push into Li Huowang, forcing out the things that were supposed to be his from inside his body.

Li Huowang dug out his eyeballs and felt his surroundings finally return to normal. He could finally focus on what he needed to do.

Despite losing his eyes, he retained other organs to perceive his surroundings, along with six dragon whiskers. Although his range of perception had diminished, he could still sense everything in his vicinity.

He could still hear the Simings' voices, smell them, and taste them.

He felt Ba-Hui! He felt Death! He even felt Rot! They were fighting against something sticky, a sticky Heavenly Dao that was foreign to the Baiyu Capital.

The Heavenly Daos were glued together, cycling out one after another. The sticky Heavenly Dao were laws that didn't exist in this world.

They were trying to consume Baiyu Capital. Li Huowang had lost his eyesight, so he wasn't sure what they looked like, but he was confident that they were just a large black mass.

Li Huowang felt that suns were colliding above him as the Simings fought.

Li Huowang wanted to help—he was Ji Zai, the Siming of Bewilderment, but he wasn't sure what he could do given the intensity of the fight.

“No, it shouldn't be like this!” Li Huowang ducked and weaved while attacking whenever a gap presented itself.

“Xuan Pin and the others were up here! They should've killed god Yu'er!”

He seized an opportunity and jumped out from the little pocket that he was in. He floated in the space and swung both arms

forcefully. “Die!”

Nothing happened. Ji Zai was somehow thrown back. He didn’t have the qualifications to join in the fight.

If not for Dragon Qi on his body, even looking at them for a moment would have been lethal.

Chapter 810 - Heavenly Dao

“Why... why? Why are my powers useless here?”

Li Huowang persistently attempted to utilize his powers, both on the Simings and in the vacant space before him, yet nothing happened.

“Unless... Unless... Unless I don’t have the Heavenly Dao of Truth and Heavenly Dao of Lies?” Li Huowang looked down and saw the vast arrays of mirrors with his reflection once more.

Ji Zai started searching the mirrors for clues to see if anything similar had happened before. He suddenly lifted his hands, and a specific mirror floated towards him.

The Li Huowang inside the mirror was different, with a lotus root as his head.

“Is that so? Do you really think that I’m fine? How would you explain Bei Feng’s words, then? Why do I feel that you’ve instigated it?”

Ji Zai listened to Li Huowang and wasn’t sure how to respond. He had said those exact same words once, but he had forgotten what Ji Zai had answered.

He paused for a moment, gathering his thoughts before addressing Li Huowang in the mirror. “It’s because something happened, and we need your help.”

“Help? How may I help you? Why are you acting as if I were your Twisted One?”

Ji Zai wasn’t sure what to feel about himself when he heard his past self. “There’s no reason to differentiate between ourselves. I am you, and you are me. We have the same Heavenly Dao.”

Li Huowang rubbed his temples; flesh had started growing on his lotus root head. “The denouement has come. Can’t I even live in peace?”

Ji Zai looked up at the chaotic battlefield and said anxiously, “You chose this, and my choice is your choice, so you should not complain.”

“Fine. Tell me what to do.”

“The Sitting Oblivion Dao has been annihilated, so this is our golden opportunity. I need your help snatching away Yinyang Doulao’s Heavenly Daos of Truth and Lies.”

Ji Zai needed them to join in the fight!

The Li Huowang in the mirror was outraged and almost laughed because of how absurd the suggestion was. “You need my help doing that? *Pfft!* I’m just an ordinary person. How can I snatch those away? How can I help you deal with a Siming with two Heavenly Daos? Also, aren’t you responsible for the Heavenly Dao of Bewilderment? Are your hands not full just taking care of your own Heavenly Dao? Why do you need more Heavenly Daos to the extent that you’ve actually considered robbing a Siming for it? I’m tired... I’m really tired. Can’t I rest for a few years?”

An intense pressure shot downwards. Even though Ji Zai was covered in the Dragon Qi, he was still thrown away from the impact.

Ji Zai, now currently upside down, quickly said to the mirror, “I’m not the one seeking trouble here; I am simply trying to protect myself. Don’t forget that helping me equals helping yourself. If anything were to happen to me, what had happened would change.”

“Protect?” Li Huowang was shocked. He stared at Ji Zai and asked nervously, “Did something happen at the Baiyu Capital? No, even if something had happened, how could that event be significant enough to harm you—a Siming?”

“You'll know the answer if you think about the reason why the Surveillance Bureau wanted the Sacred Mountain Ghost Eye. You should also think about why Shai Zi even came up with such a complicated plan to obtain the Dragon Vein. Something major is happening, and they can feel it. How about you? Don't tell me that you don't feel anything.”

“Is it god Yu'er?” Li Huowang asked seriously.

Ji Zai smiled bitterly when he sensed the chaos above him. “If it were just god Yu'er, it would be easy to handle.”

This was not about god Yu'er's singular Heavenly Dao—it was a war between Simings.

“Who could it be other than God Yu'er? Who are they, where did they come from, and what do they want?” Li Huowang repeatedly asked questions from the mirror, causing Ji Zai to grow increasingly irritated.

After conversing for a while, Ji Zai finally recalled what happened to the Li Huowang behind the mirror. This conversation took place when he had just defeated Shai Zi. At that time, his head had burst, and he had temporarily used a lotus root to substitute his head.

“I can't tell you that, as they'll immediately learn of your existence the moment you learn of their existence. In addition, even your future self did not tell your present self.”

Li Huowang was confused—he had no idea what Ji Zai was talking about.

“You want me to help you snatch Doulao's Heavenly Daos, but you haven't told me how to do that. What do I need to do?”

“You can probably do it through Bei Feng. Find Bei Feng and Doulao's Twisted One. Kill them and leave the rest to me,” said Ji Zai.

Ji Zai smashed the mirrors with both hands after having said that.

Moments later, the Li Huowang from the other side of the mirror shouted angrily.

“What?! You could have told me that earlier! The Surveillance Bureau just captured Bei Feng! They are never going to let me make contact with Bei Feng!”

Ji Zai slowly raised his head and felt the minute changes around him. He slowly felt that the beings above him weren't as large as previously thought. He felt his distance between them slowly becoming smaller.

“Truth and Lies... I've obtained both of the Heavenly Daos!” Ji Zai shouted out what was destined to happen as he raised both arms and pushed away the darkness in front of one of the Simings.

A lot of information flowed into him the moment he touched it. All of the Simings were currently connected by an umbilical cord and acted as one! Each of them shared each other's Heavenly Daos! That was how all of them could feel pain, truth, and falsehoods.

They were now one, and they were stuck together in the Baiyu Capital. The umbilical cord was the Dao of Fusion! The connected Simings acting as one were Da Nuo!

“Do you think this is better?” Yi Donglai frowned and observed the sand table.

Several figurines were tied together into a ball with white yarn. The ball of figurines was placed in the middle of the sand, and the little figurine representing Li Huowang was also placed in the ball.

There was another ball in front of this ball. Various monster figurines were tied together with a black yarn.

Yi Donglai pushed his glasses up and looked at the silent Li Huowang. “And then? What happened? Why do you think you are one of them?”

Li Huowang coughed gently and didn't answer. He used his right hand to pick up the ball of figurines tied together with the white yarn.

He pondered shortly before winding up his arm and throwing the ball towards the black ball on the sand table.

Both balls collided, and their yarns snapped. Various figurines and monster figurines flew high up into the air.

Chapter 811 - Siming

Li Huowang was dressed in a blue and white striped hospital gown. He sat on a bench in the exercise yard and stared silently at the barbed wire fence in the distance. He was waiting for Shai Zi to contact Doulao.

At that moment, someone next to him gently bumped into him and passed him a small piece of paper.

Li Huowang reached out and unfolded the crumpled note. He read the contents as a slight smile appeared on his lips. "Has it finally arrived?"

Just then, Li Huowang saw his black motorcycle flash by on the overpass in the distance.

"What are you looking at? Why can't I see it?" A bald patient leaned over and asked Li Huowang in confusion.

Li Huowang sneered. "*Hmph!* You're not a Siming, so of course you can't see it."

"Bed number 13! Come here! Dr. Yi is looking for you!"

Li Huowang stood up and walked toward the sandplay therapy room. Yi Donglai was already waiting there.

"Li Huowang, based on my observations of your mental state these past few days, I must say your issues are quite serious." Yi Donglai adjusted his glasses. "Have you really not experienced any hallucinations recently?"

"No." Li Huowang sat back down in front of the sand table.

"You should reconsider it. Did you take your medication today? Maybe you have experienced them but didn't realize it?"

Li Huowang looked at the empty sand table, searching for something. "Where's the little figurine?"

"No, today we're doing something different. Those figures don't

represent you.” Yi Donglai pointed his pen at the wall of models. “Today, you decide which model represents you. Whatever you choose will be you.”

Li Huowang glanced at the door, walked over to the model cabinet, and began to choose.

First, he picked up a ferocious monster, then a human figure. He threaded a rope through them and bound them tightly, back to back.

Suddenly, he thought of something. He reached into the drawer on the left, then took out two magnets stuck together and tied them together.

The rope rose high and made Ji Zai fly off the ground. Fortunately, the other Simings pulled it back, preventing it from flying away.

“Get away!” Ji Zai changed his opponents' Truths and Falsehoods. However, no matter how many times he altered them to be falsehoods, they always returned with their bodies spread from various angles. Their Heavenly Dao let them metamorphose!

No contact was needed. Just knowing of its existence was enough to become part of it.

This Heavenly Dao was too strange, clearly not originating from the Baiyu Capital. It was from outside, and there were sixteen others like it.

Voices traveled through the rope into Li Huowang's ears. “You need eyes to see the Five Purities. Heaven and Earth are born together. Just stripping away their shells is useless. You need to see their hearts.”

“Eyes? I'm blind now! How the hell am I supposed to have eyes?!” Li Huowang removed the extra metamorphosed parts of his body and shouted, “Who will give me eyes? I need to see them!”

“Eyes! The Heavenly Daos of Truth and Lies are not enough! I still need eyes!” Li Huowang shouted with all his might.

“You have eyes! They’re with you. Find them carefully!”

“I don’t have them!” Li Huowang frantically searched for mirrors while he dodged the attacks. No matter how strange his reflections were, he never found the eyes he wanted.

“You do! Look closely, don’t just focus on one side.”

Li Huowang quickly altered reality and evaded the enemy’s attacks. He suddenly lifted his body. “Give me eyes!”

His body shuddered, and a slight smile appeared on his lips. He saw them—the eyes had arrived.

Li Huowang put down the model he was holding. “I want to go to the bathroom,”

Yi Donglai nodded. “Alright. Go ahead.”

At that moment, a phone call came in, which Yi Donglai quickly answered. Soon, a furious expression appeared on his face.

“What did you say? Transfer hospitals now? Do you have any idea how unwell this guy is right now?”

“Don’t tell me about these. His treatment has just started, so transferring is absolutely impossible.

“No matter who you send, it’s not happening! Don’t forget that the White Tower Hospital isn’t private!”

After he hung up the phone, Yi Donglai sat back down at the sand table. He noticed a drop of blood on the ground.

He frowned, walked to the model cabinet, and looked at the chaotic model Li Huowang had assembled. A few drops of blood had stained the table.

“What’s going on? Did Li Huowang cut himself on the model?” He used his pen to straighten the peculiar model.

Suddenly, on the back of the model, a terrifyingly bloodshot eyeball appeared and stared at Yi Donglai!

The eyeball had just been gouged out—it was Li Huowang’s left eye! At that moment, Li Huowang’s left eye was tightly bound to the model with a rope!

Just a moment ago, he had gouged out his own eye!

Yi Donglai felt a chill run down his spine. He immediately turned and rushed outside. “Orderlies!”

As he left, the eyeball on the model slowly slid down from the model to the edge of the table, then toward the ground. Upon reaching a lower point, numerous tendrils swiftly attached themselves to the flesh behind the eye, seamlessly intertwining them together.

“Father! Do you see it coming?” Amidst the chaos, Li Sui held up the eyeball and asked loudly.

“I... I can see! I can finally see!” Li Huowang gazed at them in the distance and made out even more details.

The lost divisions had not vanished. They were in their bodies, twisted into something more suited to them—their three souls and seven spirits!

With these divisions, they could come to the Baiyu Capital. Those missing divisions had been transformed into shells.

“Finally.....!” Li Huowang took a deep breath and raised his hands toward a division in the distance.

The missing divisions were returning to their rightful places. Li Huowang intended to forcibly take their three souls and seven spirits away!

Rip! One of their shells shattered. It vanished without its three souls and seven spirits, never to reappear in Baiyu Capital.

Li Huowang saw that it was effective, so he immediately seized the opportunity and continued his actions.

However, it was apparent that they did not plan to stand by and let Li Huowang attack. Some things overlapped with each other, and it would take Li Huowang a long time to remove their shells. The situation seemed to reach a stalemate once again.

Chapter 812 - Dragon Qi

This time, Ji Zai was not fighting alone. When the other Simings saw his movements, they immediately came to help.

The umbilical cords behind him pulsed continuously, which caused Li Huowang's body to grow larger and more deformed.

However, Li Huowang soon noticed a mirror appear out of nowhere before him. As he grew stronger, the mirror also grew stronger.

“What kind of Heavenly Dao is this?!”

As Li Huowang shouted, he saw his reflection in the mirror reach into its mouth and pull Li Sui out. Li Sui's tentacles twisted continuously, but it was useless.

“How dare you touch my daughter!” Li Huowang squeezed with both hands and caused the opponent's body to flicker like a faulty screen.

In the end, they still failed. The scales on Li Sui's body shone with a golden light, and the reflection of Li Huowang in the mirror released its grip.

The opponent's actions made Li Huowang realize their weakness. Their Heavenly Dao was ineffective against Dragon Qi!

Li Huowang charged forward without hesitation. With the Dragon Qi coursing through him, he slammed into them.

He watched the opponent's body fall apart from the impact, and a smile appeared on Li Huowang's face. The advantage was theirs, and they were going to win! The entanglement between different Heavenly Daos was not crucial—the key was the Dragon Qi from a mortal!

As Li Huowang thought this, the entire Baiyu Capital began to crack. Li Sui raised the eyeball high and moved it up and down to

see what was outside the cracked Baiyu Capital.

Li Huowang could only see one side of it, but there was clearly more than just one side. He heard strange sounds. “Ancient moss is three feet thick, stepping on it feels like thin cotton... Stooping out from beneath it, touching the gas, mushrooms are fresh... The old sandalwood trees twist together in momentum... Ride a phoenix to pluck its flowers... your touch will turn into ancient smoke...”

Li Huowang suddenly understood what it was—a Greater Siming.

Li Huowang also finally understood that everything before was just a prelude to bring this thing into the Baiyu Capital. This thing was the key. It must not be allowed to come over!

Li Huowang rushed forward recklessly and pulled on either side with his hands, desperately trying to close the cracked Baiyu Capital.

However, no matter how hard Li Huowang tried, the crack continued to widen.

From behind, a mass of blackness rapidly approached him to try to stop him. However, some Simings on his side rushed over to block them.

Li Huowang’s body was stretched longer and longer like a rope. No matter how long he stretched, he refused to let go.

“Dragon Qi!” A familiar voice sounded in his ear. It was Shai Zi, who drifted past Li Huowang’s eyeball like a speck of dust.

The words Shai Zi was about to say appeared in Li Huowang’s mind. *Use Dragon Qi to sew it up! Use your Heavenly Daos of Truth and Lies along with your flesh and blood to mend the sky!*

Li Huowang’s flesh rapidly stitched up the Baiyu Capital, and the crack was continuously healing. Just as it was about to fully recover, it stopped. The Dragon Qi was insufficient.

“Father, take this! It’s from my body,” A surge of Dragon Qi flowed into Li Huowang’s body and helped the cracked Baiyu

Capital to recover a little.

However, Li Sui's form began to waver as she gave away the Dragon Qi from her body. Everything about her was being torn apart by the Baiyu Capital, and she was about to die.

"Wait... wait!" Li Huowang cried out in despair. He wanted to push the Dragon Qi back, but Li Sui had already left his body.

"Father, I'm sorry. I've always been so useless. I could only help this little. If only I could've done more for you."

"Li Sui, come back!" Li Huowang shouted in agony while Li Sui's body gradually began to disintegrate. It finally collapsed powerlessly and fell downward.

"Ahhh!" The crack in the Baiyu Capital rapidly healed with Li Huowang's flesh and blood and stitched it together.

However, a slight pulse from the other side caused the healed gap to start to tear open again.

Li Huowang thought of his daughter and felt as if his heart was being gouged with knives. As his body cracked, extreme pain filled his entire being. The power of Ba-Hui surged through the umbilical cords and caused his body to swell even more.

And yet, it was still not enough. Mending the Baiyu Capital would require more Dragon Qi.

At this critical moment, Li Huowang sensed a dense Dragon Qi.

He looked down and saw a six-clawed golden dragon and a group of mutated dragon people emerge from the darkness. It was Xuan Pin!

They twisted and turned amidst the chaos, as though they were searching for something.

"I'm here!" Li Huowang shouted. Xuan Pin and the others found their direction and crashed directly into Li Huowang's body.

A massive influx of Dragon Qi poured into Li Huowang, and his Heavenly Daos of Truth and Lies instantly had a medium. He quickly stitched the two sides together and pushed forcefully, which

caused the cracked Baiyu Capital to instantly close up.

Once the Baiyu Capital was without cracks, Li Huowang's body fell along with everything inside him.

He did not disappear, but he saw that his eyes and Heavenly Daos of Truth and Lies were all above him. That was Ji Zai, who was still fighting afterward.

Thump! Li Huowang slammed heavily into the cold seawater from a great height.

This might have been perilous for other mortals, but not for Li Huowang.

After some time, he emerged from the water and made his way to the shore. His mouth hung open as he let out a desperate, lifeless howl. Tears and saliva mixed together, cascading down and dripping continuously to the ground.

Li Sui was dead. The evil being that had followed him for so long was gone.

He had initially kept this being by his side to avoid obstacles. Somewhere along the way, they had developed a bond akin to family ties. Yet now, it was gone.

"Are you okay? What happened?" A hand reached over to help Li Huowang up.

Li Huowang heard the voice, looked up excitedly, and saw Xuan Pin's familiar face.

"Not bad at all, truly amazing. Because of you, we finally won this time."

"Perhaps... maybe...." Li Huowang suddenly pounced on Xuan Pin and forcefully tore off his red Daoist robes.

A handsome young man's face appeared before Li Huowang, one he had never seen before.

The young man looked at Li Huowang's emotional face with a hint of bitterness.

"Actually, I didn't want this body either. 160 years ago, when I

fell from the sky, I accidentally crushed him to death.”

As Xuan Pin spoke, his face began to change. It eventually returned to the cute girl’s appearance from before, except her demeanor was now like that of a dignified lady rather than the young girl Li Sui once was.

Xuan Pin awkwardly reached out and patted Li Huowang on the shoulder, who stood there in a daze.

“It’s been so long since I called you that, I suddenly find it hard to say. Uh... Father, are you okay?”

“I wanted to find you when I fell from above, but I realized there was no sun or moon in the sky. Since I fell more than a hundred years ago, I had to wait for you to return.

“I actually wanted to reunite with you sooner, but then I remembered that you lacked Dragon Qi before I came down, so I thought of a way to send—”

Before Xuan Pin could finish speaking, Li Huowang pounced forward and hugged her tightly in his arms.

Chapter 813 - Death

Dong, dong, dong! The sound of war drums accompanied by howling wind kept resounding. With the drumbeats, the massive formation of soldiers advanced step by step.

As the drumbeats quickened, their speed also increased. Everyone exhaled and inhaled in unison as if tens of thousands of soldiers moved as one body.

Hundreds of followers of the Dharma Sect stood opposite them. They pulled gigantic statues of Buddha and waved towering soul banners as they surged toward them like wild beasts.

When the two sides clashed, the battlefield's center became a grinding stone of flesh and blood, continuously devouring everything and spitting out fragments and remains. Most importantly, these remains were still alive.

When battles no longer resulted in death, everything inevitably became more extreme.

The Dharma Sect followers with stone statues inserted in their heads chanted as they charged at rows of White Lotus followers.

Their bodies were already broken, but they stood up again and endured the pain through stitches and the purple talismans on their foreheads.

Their hands were gone, replaced by rusted blades tied to their bones. They had completely transformed into beasts and livestock.

The Grand Witch said that the enemy caused all their pain. As long as they killed them, Sir Arrogant Stone would mercifully grant everyone peace.

They didn't have much power, but their sheer numbers were overwhelming. They would keep getting back up unless they were torn into pieces.

Amidst the blood and gore, the two sides fought for days and nights until they were completely drained of strength.

At that point, each person was filled with despair and numbness, moving purely on instinct.

Everyone dragged their exhausted bodies and slowly left the decaying battlefield. They forced themselves to make it back to their lines before finally succumbing to exhaustion, collapsing into a heap.

Bai Lingmiao, covered in blood and grime, staggered through the battlefield. They wouldn't die, and once they regained their strength, they would stand up again.

Bai Lingmiao had already exhausted all her tears two days ago. She was extremely tired and could only let the White Lotus followers, who still had a little strength, return to the halls to sleep.

Her mind was buzzing as if it was no longer her own. Everything felt too tragic.

She looked at the distant, pulsating ground of flesh. Her heart was devoid of any fluctuations now. She had experienced far too much during this time.

Just then, a group of people in black robes quietly walked through the crowd. They moved as silently as possible to avoid waking anyone. They crouched by each person and left a trace of red behind.

Soon, they reached Bai Lingmiao and placed the same red traces beside her and the people behind her. *The teachings of Ao Jing shall endure, and pain shall persist.*

Bai Lingmiao picked it in her hands and realized that the trace of red was the Profound Records.

The followers of Ao Jing Sect were attempting to distribute the Profound Records to everyone, in preparation for an even more ruthless battlefield.

Bai Lingmiao's lips trembled slightly. She wanted to say

something but ultimately kept quiet.

If the pain-inducing Profound Records could bring an end to everything sooner, she had no right to stop what was happening.

A disheveled young man rushed from among the corpses to Bai Lingmiao, then knelt and continuously bowed to her. "Saintess, please help my grandfather! I'm begging you!"

Bai Lingmiao gently lifted him up and followed him to the nearby tents.

Many people lay in disorder inside the tents. They wore no armor and weren't soldiers. These were laborers who fell to the ground like logs.

Since they wouldn't die of sickness or cold now, they could sleep anywhere they wanted.

After walking a while, the young man suddenly turned and rushed toward a black humanoid mass by the gutter.

As the black mass buzzed and dispersed, Bai Lingmiao realized it was a living person who was previously covered by a thick layer of flies.

It was an old man covered in age spots. His head was sunken, his belly was leaking, and a hole in his temple had white maggots crawling within.

In ordinary times, he would've died long ago. Now, he remained alive and coughed with all his strength. The itch in his throat did not ease no matter how much he coughed.

The young man wiped his tears. "Saintess, please help my grandfather! He's so tired, but he can't sleep. He's so hungry, but he can't eat. Whatever he eats leaks out."

Bai Lingmiao looked at the intestines that had slipped into the gutter.

Bai Lingmiao realized she couldn't do anything now that death was gone, even if she wanted to. The old man was old, and he should have died of old age long ago.

This was his fate, and no divine power she wielded could reverse it.

Bai Lingmiao sat by the old man and watched his pain with compassion. She silently recited the White Lotus Sutra in her heart.

She knew it was useless, but it was the only thing she could do at this moment.

As Bai Lingmiao's heart filled with compassion, the suffering old man gradually stopped moving under everyone's shocked gazes.

Soon, black flies swarmed and crawled into the old man's mouth.

"Dead? Really dead? The Saintess can kill! The Heavenly Mater has manifested!"

"Really dead! Finally! I can die too!"

Hope gradually appeared in everyone's eyes and seemed to spread outwards.

The crowd began to gather around Bai Lingmiao, their eyes filled with anticipation and reverence as they kowtowed towards her.

"I..." Bai Lingmiao looked at her hands in shock. "Has the Heavenly Dao of Death returned?"

When she looked at the kneeling half-body before her, Bai Lingmiao quickly realized that the Heavenly Dao of Death had not returned. She had merely gained the power to grant death.

Bai Lingmiao understood what it meant. There was death on their side but not on the enemy's side, providing a massive boost in morale! Pain was no longer eternal—they could die whenever they wanted.

As the news of the White Lotus followers spread, everyone's spirits lifted despite their extreme exhaustion.

More people witnessed Bai Lingmiao granting the release of death to those who should have passed away long ago.

The once lifeless camp buzzed with vitality.

Without death, there was no life. Only death could bring life.

Chapter 814 - Perish

After a brief rest, the drum sounds resumed, and the flesh mill started turning once again. But this time, it was completely different from before.

On Bai Lingmiao's side, everyone was extremely excited, attempting to receive fatal injuries so they could die with the Saintess's blessing.

A group of chicken-feet men wearing veils on their faces noticed something was amiss. They attempted to surround Bai Lingmiao.

The White Lotus followers were not to be underestimated. They quickly formed an array with Bai Lingmiao at the center.

Meanwhile, on the other side, something began to bulge beneath the ground of flesh, stealthily moving toward Bai Lingmiao.

Before it could get closer, a streak of red descended from the sky and slammed into the bulge. Foul-smelling blood quickly seeped out of the soil with a squelch.

Li Huowang stepped forward and crushed a head beneath him. He wiped the blood off his face with his hand. "I made it in time!"

When they saw him, the nearby Dharma Sect followers roared in anger. They changed direction and rushed toward Li Huowang.

"Ha!" Li Huowang opened his arms and pushed outward. Within several meters centered around him, the Dharma Sect followers were crushed into an indistinguishable pulp of flesh and blood.

After clearing the area, Li Huowang found himself facing three Grand Witches. Above them, blood started dripping incessantly.

Li Huowang looked at them and laughed happily. "You are all finished!"

The next moment, Li Sui appeared behind them. The father and daughter simultaneously exerted their strength and charged toward the three Grand Witches.

Just as they collided, a low rumble of thunder echoed from the sky. *Boom! Boom! Boom!*

Li Huowang twisted his throttle sharply and rode his motorcycle high over a pile of debris. He landed heavily on Orange Isle's unfinished asphalt road.

Dark red blood seeped through the cracks in his helmet and dripped down his bulletproof vest to the ground.

Deep in Orange Isle, he heard gunshots and engine noises. Soon, he saw the enemy—the projections of the foreign Simings! They were engaged in combat!

Li Huowang pulled out a military knife and slashed it forcefully into the motorcycle's front. "It's time to cut off their retreat and beat them!"

His motorcycle hummed as its speed approached the limit of 320.

Someone emerged from the side and attempted to block him. Li Huowang twisted the throttle, making his motorcycle collide with them and directly rip them into two.

Amidst the rain of blood, he charged into the enemy like a bowling ball and caused a storm of flesh and blood.

The enemy clearly didn't expect Li Huowang to suddenly join the fray, causing chaos. They had assumed he was stuck in the psychiatric hospital.

Li Huowang braved the hail of bullets and broke through to Wu Qi's RV. He leaned against the vehicle. "I'm here to help you!"

"Cut the crap! The situation is dire! I don't know what's going on with these guys. They've gone mad!" Chen Hongyu replied grimly.

"Where's the Three Pure Ones?" Li Huowang wiped the blood

off his helmet and asked the others.

“Who?”

“Qing Wanglai.”

“He said he went to find you! But since you came back, who knows where he went!” Zhao Lei said with a grimace.

Li Huowang glanced at the encirclement in the distance and the enemies hiding behind the car cover, quickly making up his mind.

Without hesitation, Li Huowang climbed onto Wu Qi’s RV and quickly turned the steering wheel to charge toward the encirclement ahead. He stepped firmly on the accelerator, though all the glass was shattered.

The vehicle was under constant fire, causing the tires to burst and the hood to smoke and catch fire.

Boom! The RV slammed into their black car and caused the vehicle to explode, sending flames soaring into the sky.

While everyone ran clear from the raging flames, Li Huowang, who was currently engulfed in the fire, charged out of the blaze with twin knives and directly sliced off an enemy’s head.

Li Huowang was going to rush toward the next person, but a towering figure appeared before him.

He raised his foot and kicked hard at Li Huowang’s stomach, causing him to slam against the charred car frame.

“What the heck kind of projection are you?!” Li Huowang yelled angrily. He endured the sharp pain in his abdomen and charged with his knife toward the figure.

The opponent sprayed Li Huowang’s chest with a machine gun, and more blood seeped from the cracks of his helmet.

Li Huowang staggered and fell, but he flung the dagger forcefully, embedding it into the opponent’s chest.

“Come on! Again!” Li Huowang struggled to stand and looked at the corpses on the ground. The others finally began to retreat, gradually fading into the darkness of the unfinished buildings.

“Hahaha! We won! You’ll never take over our world!” Li Huowang laughed out loud.

“Yeah, yeah, you won, you won.” Two burly orderlies, with a cigarette in each of their mouths, walked past the charred car frames and bullet-ridden walls. They carried a wheeled stretcher to Li Huowang’s side.

“It’s New Year’s. Stop running around and make us search everywhere,” they complained as they lifted Li Huowang onto the stretcher, firmly tied him, and then carried him toward the distant ambulance.

Li Huowang was momentarily stunned, but then he smiled.

As the Simings over there vanished, their segments of history vanished, just like Doulao did before.

This meant that his side had truly won this time!

“What did you win? If you mean pulling your eye out and scaring me, then you really won,” Yi Donglai said helplessly.

“Li Huowang, that’s your eye! Did you ever think about what that means? You’ll only have one eye from now on. What were you thinking?!”

At this moment, Li Huowang was in good spirits. “Heh heh... you wouldn’t understand.”

He turned his gaze toward the sand table before him. The sand table was filled with people. Their voices annoyed Li Huowang.

“Shut up!” He waved his hand and toppled the models on the sand table.

Suddenly, the chaotic battlefield fell silent. All the Dharma Sect followers stopped in their tracks, looking confused.

The next moment, a gentle breeze blew by. All the Dharma Sect followers regardless of rank, from the Grand Witches to the lowest novices, simultaneously leaned back and fell straight to the ground.

In the entire Nanping, including An Xi, occupied by the Dharma Sect, all the followers lay flat on the ground silently.

The Li Kingdom had fallen.

Chapter 815 - Won

“We won?” Li Huowang stood in place and stared blankly at the Dharma Sect followers lying scattered on the ground.

He walked over and checked someone's pulse. He was shocked to find that the person wasn't breathing at all. They were all dead.

There was a loud clattering noise as the earth crumbled. The enormous Buddha statue, which had been dragged to the center of the battlefield by the followers of the Dharma Sect, started to crack and eventually crumbled into scattered fragments.

“We won, we won!” Excited shouts spread endlessly like a tsunami that reached everyone's ears.

The cries of excitement echoed through the sky, filled with exhilaration. They lost themselves in ecstasy as they pounded the ground with their fists.

They had won. Their enemies had been defeated, and the fear of a dreadful destiny akin to that of the Great Qi no longer burdened their hearts.

Many people even tossed their weapons high into the sky. If death hadn't disappeared, that alone would have killed many people.

“We've won... finally won...” Li Huowang smiled as he glanced around, and his gaze finally settled on Xuan Pin.

“Li Sui, how did I do as a tall guy?”

Li Sui gently nodded. She approached Li Huowang, reached out to open his abdomen, and crawled inside. “Father, let's go home.”

“Yeah! Go home!” Li Huowang nodded. He felt elated as he headed off the battlefield.

“It seems we really won up above. Only then could we win so easily down here!”

The corners of Li Huowang's mouth lifted slightly as he listened to the cheers around. "Li Sui, what do you think I should do next?"

Li Sui didn't answer. She just extended two tentacles from his navel, wrapping them around Li Huowang's left hand and gently shaking it.

Li Huowang approached a group of White Lotus Sect devotees who were zealously kneeling on the ground and kowtowing toward Bai Lingmiao amidst the crowd. They were calling for the manifestation of the Heavenly Mater.

"Miaomiao! We won! Let's go home!" Li Huowang shouted.

Bai Lingmiao smiled and shook her head slightly among the dense crowd of White Lotus believers. She discreetly pointed at the believers around her.

"Okay!" Li Huowang smiled and nodded, then pointed towards Cowheart Village and strode towards that direction.

Just as he stepped off the battlefield, he saw Huangfu Tiangang, the Imperial Preceptor of Great Liang, flash by, standing on a sword in the sky. "Where is Xuan Pin?! His Majesty commands Xuan Pin to return to the Great Liang immediately!"

Li Huowang paused for a moment before finally reaching out to gently pat his abdomen. "Go on."

Suisui had grown up and now had her own matters to attend to. Li Huowang's abdomen slowly opened and her dense tentacles poured out.

Li Huowang took off his red Daoist robe and draped it over Li Sui's sticky body. Li Sui nodded at him, then quickly retracted her body into the earth and vanished completely.

Li Huowang looked at the ground where Li Sui had vanished, then smiled again. He happily turned his head to shout at the monk beside him. "Monk! Did you see that? We won! We really won!"

The monk also nodded vigorously. "Yes! Daoist! You won and saved many people, which is a great deed! You can become a

Buddha now!”

Jin Shanzhao also dragged his broken body over and muttered excitedly to Li Huowang.

“We won! Hahaha!” Qiu Chibao held her rotten child and laughed hysterically as she circled Li Huowang.

“*Hmph* .” Peng Longteng watched the farce unfold atop her horse as she slowly followed along.

Li Huowang left the bustling scene with the company of these illusions.

“Daoist? Is it really you? Daoist?” A voice that was both familiar and unfamiliar sounded behind Li Huowang.

Li Huowang paused. He slowly turned around and saw an old monk smiling at him.

It was the monk—the one who always wanted to do good deeds.

Li Huowang turned his head to look at the illusion beside him, which looked exactly like the old monk.

“Daoist, long time no see! I didn’t expect you to come too. Did you come to help with the fight?” The monk held his prayer beads and asked Li Huowang curiously.

Li Huowang glanced between the two monks and finally stared wide-eyed at the real one. “You’re not dead?”

“Huh? What are you talking about? Of course I’m not dead,” the monk said matter-of-factly. The illusion of the monk began to flicker.

“Wasn’t I working at Righteous Monastery before? After you left, I kept moving stones there, all the way until now.

“Then there was a war, and I heard I could do good deeds, so I came to help with the masters. I did a lot of work along the way, but I can’t tell if they’re considered good deeds.”

“You’re still alive?” Li Huowang slowly turned his head and looked at the illusion of the identical monk beside him. “If he’s still

alive, then who are you? Who are all of you?"

Li Huowang's mind was in chaos. He had always believed these illusions were the souls he kept around with the power of his Strayed One just before they died.

He had believed this for so long, yet now he realized that he was wrong.

The illusionary monk glanced at the real monk, who was identical to himself. He looked at Li Huowang with a complicated expression. "Daoist, if he's the real monk, then we're probably all fake."

Jin Shanzhao and Peng Longteng also began to flicker alongside him.

"Nonsense!" Peng Longteng jumped off her horse and approached Li Huowang. "Can't you see? We're not the original us. We're just parts of you! You're not cultivating the 'Truth.' You're just cultivating 'Lies'!"

These words struck Li Huowang like a thunderbolt. Peng Longteng, Jin Shanzhao, and the monk all quickly became transparent.

After seeing this many times, the illusionary monk walked up to Li Huowang as if he knew his own ending. "Daoist, I'm sorry. I couldn't help you much during this time. I was only able to recite 'Amitabha.'

"Still, I think that even if it's not useful, you should always have a good heart. Otherwise, how can you become a Buddha?" the monk said, then completely vanished.

Next was Jin Shanzhao. He said nothing but reached out and gave Li Huowang a thumbs-up as he smiled happily.

Jin Shanzhao was about to say something, but Peng Longteng bumped into him and caused his body to scatter like smoke.

"Kid, you're a man. I tried to kill you before, but you ended up killing me, which is fair. Our debt is settled."

Li Huowang stood there in a daze as he watched the illusions around him disappear one by one. Finally, only Qiu Chibao remained as she danced crazily with her child.

"This...." Li Huowang looked at the empty surroundings while a flood of distress suddenly surged into his heart.

The self-deception that he had always believed in had finally crumbled.

Li Huowang staggered backward with a twisted expression. The monk hurried to support him, only to be pushed away by Li Huowang. "Shai Zi, what do you mean by this?!"

Somebody gently tapped on the sounder of the monk, and he immediately froze. The one who tapped him had an eighteen-sided die on his head.

"Nothing. I helped you, and so naturally, you should help me. I couldn't come down from above, so I used your deception to come down. You can't go back on your word."

"What the hell do you want?!"

Li Huowang looked at Shai Zi with a gaze that could kill. As he stared, Shai Zi's body gradually shrank.

"For now, I want nothing. I just want to stay alive."

Shai Zi snapped his fingers, and he stopped shrinking.

"Li Huowang, you surprised me. I originally thought the sky would collapse, but you held it up.

"When I took the Dragon Vein, I had just been thinking of picking up the pieces after the sky cracked. As expected of Ji Zai's Twisted One, everything is uncertain with you around.

"Don't worry, you've already patched the sky, so I don't need to work against you. Isn't that right, Xuan Pin?"

The red-robed Xuan Pin walked between Li Huowang and Shai Zi. She glanced at Shai Zi and then reached out with six hands to embrace and support Li Huowang. She gently whispered to him as she slowly retreated.

Shai Zi turned around to look at Huangfu Tiangang, who had suddenly appeared. He reached into his bosom, pulled out a fortune mask, and handed it over.

Huangfu Tiangang harrumphed, his face ashen. He waved his sleeve and turned to leave.

“Wait!” Shai Zi reached for his eighteen-sided die head, took out a die with six sides, and offered it again to Huangfu Tiangang.

This time, Huangfu Tiangang didn’t leave. He hesitated for a moment before reaching out to accept it.

It was the twelfth lunar month. On the 24th, they dusted and cleaned the house. On the 25th, they ground tofu, then slaughtered pigs and cut meat on the 26th. On the 27th, they slaughtered chickens and went to the market. On the 28th, they made rice cakes and steamed buns, then pasted window decorations.

With red paper decorations on the windows, the air filled with the sweet scent of snacks. After the heavy snow, the flavor of the New Year had arrived in Cowheart Village.

It wasn’t just Cowheart Village. The Great Liang, Hou Shu, Qing Qiu, and Si Qi also tried to be as lively as possible. It was as though they wanted to wash away the past sorrows with the joy of the New Year.

Li Huowang stood on the second floor of the Bai family courtyard, watching smiling children run freely in the snow.

The room was cold, and the stove was not lit. He stood there as though waiting for something and stayed there until nightfall. The white snow in the air slowly fell and landed on his black hair, forming a thin layer.

Li Huowang caught sight of the dazzling fireworks illuminating the sky above the distant wall, while the White Lotus flags swayed gracefully between the houses. The corners of his mouth slowly lifted.

Chapter 816 - Li Sui

“Father! Father, where are you?” Li Sui shouted in panic as she looked around at the unfamiliar forest. The leaves were completely red. She had never come here with her father before, so she didn’t know where she was.

This was the first time she had been genuinely separated from Li Huowang. Most of her tentacles were already broken, and her body had been torn apart. She was both afraid and in pain.

She looked down and saw that she was crushing a young man. The impact from her fall had crushed him, and he was vomiting blood. She had seen him before. It was the same young man who talked to her before she left.

Li Sui didn’t have the time to ponder why he was here. In the end, she confirmed that he was dead and then ate his organs. Afterward, she wore his skin to recover her frail body.

She felt her body slowly getting better thanks to the nourishment from her food, but her situation was still perilous.

She looked up and saw the hole in the sky had been grafted over. She couldn’t go back even if she wanted to. Without Dragon Qi, she would be dead when she flew up there.

She called for help, but no one came to her rescue. Li Sui had no choice but to cheer herself up. “It’s alright. Father is busy up there. He will come down soon once he’s done. I can wait for him here.”

Li Sui pushed her eyeballs out of her eye sockets and raised them high in the air to look at the sky. She stared at the sky for an entire day, but she still didn’t see Li Huowang falling from the sky.

Although she may have been naive, she was smart enough to realize that something was amiss.

“Unless...” As Li Sui worried, she remembered what Li Huowang was going through before she fell down.

Li Sui regained her motivation and started running down a dirt path. “My father said he needs Dragon Qi! I need to go and help him obtain some!”

“The big Emperor has Dragon Qi. I need to find him and ask him to send Dragon Qi to my father!” Li Sui said as several tentacles sprouted out from her body.

Li Huowang had never hidden anything from her, so she remembered what he had said even though she hadn’t understood it.

Li Sui perked up upon seeing track marks of carriage wheels on the dirt path. She earnestly followed the tracks.

She noticed a carriage up ahead and quickly approached it. She jumped up and grabbed the reins, then turned to face the astonished carriage driver. “Where is the war? I want to go there!”

The driver stammered when he saw Li Sui. “There’s... There’s no war. I don’t think there’s a war here.”

“Impossible! So many people died! Isn’t this place Nan Ping?” Li Sui suddenly panicked. Somehow, the situation wasn’t unfolding as she had remembered.

“Nan... Nan Ping? I never heard of that place. This is the Great Qi!”

The sound of footsteps snapped Li Sui out of her reminiscence. She looked out from the window and saw several children running excitedly in an alleyway.

One of the children had vitiligo. Despite her condition, she made an effort to keep pace with the others. She was holding a lit incense stick in her right hand.

They ran around and soon found their target at the entrance of the village: a fresh pile of cow poop.

“I don’t think this is a good thing to do. My dad said we needed

to take the cow poop home and plaster it onto the walls to make biscuits.”[1].

“Who cares? Blasting them away is much more fun than collecting them! Everyone, stand back. I’m going to light it up!”

One of the older children placed a red firecracker into the poop before taking the incense stick from the younger child and lighting it up.

Sparks flew and everyone scattered. Those who didn’t manage to run out of the blast radius in time would be peppered in cow poop.

Even so, there was an undeniable sense of excitement among all of them as they saw the cow poop getting blasted apart by the firecrackers. All of them laughed happily. A child’s happiness was always so simple.

Li Huowang, who had been soaking in the sun’s rays at the top of the roof, saw everything. “Why are there so many children in the village now? And of all things, why are they playing with cow poop?”

Li Huowang lifted his finger when he saw the children lighting one of the firecrackers up again. The firecracker, which was supposed to explode, became silent.

As the children took out another firecracker and circled around the cow poop, Li Huowang let his finger down. The previous firecracker exploded and covered all of the children in cow poop as they cried.

“Hehehe.” Li Huowang chuckled gleefully when someone overshadowed him from the back.

“Want to sit down for a bit? Taking in the sun’s rays during winter is pretty comfy.” Li Huowang patted the spot to his left.

Li Sui, who was now wearing Xuan Pin’s red robes, sat beside Li Huowang. “Father, there’s something I need to do in the Surveillance Bureau. I have to go back now, so I won’t be

accompanying you and mother.”

“Does the Surveillance Bureau not celebrate the New Year? At least go back after the Lantern Festival. [2]

Li Sui replied, “The Dharma Sect might’ve been eradicated, but the divisions haven’t returned yet. The Surveillance Bureau in Nan Ping needs to be rebuilt too. Also...”

“Also?” Li Huowang looked at his daughter.

“The Sitting Oblivion Dao is back. We have a lot of work to do.”

“Sitting Oblivion Dao!” Li Huowang’s killing intent leaked out. “Leave it to me!”

“Father, there’s no need to do that. The Sitting Oblivion Dao will never be exterminated as long as the Heavenly Dao of Lies exists. We just need to knock them down a peg if they go overboard.”

“But they are the Sitting Oblivion Dao!”

“I don’t think it’s rational to destroy the Heavenly Dao of Truth and the Heavenly Dao of Lies just because we want to exterminate the Sitting Oblivion Dao. The Sitting Oblivion Dao will exist for as long as they exist.”

Li Huowang frowned at those words. The Heavenly Daos must exist, including the most dangerous and useless ones. The world would be in chaos if even one of them were gone, especially since Li Huowang himself was controlling the Heavenly Daos of Truth and Lies.

Li Sui continued, “You are technically a Sitting Oblivion Dao member too. You can’t kill yourself to remove the Sitting Oblivion Dao permanently, right?”

“You are talking about Shai Zi, not me.” Li Huowang frowned when he recalled that unkillable pest. “I always wondered what his plan was, but I never thought he had a plan to use my ‘Lies’ to bring himself back to life.”

Li Sui was surprisingly calm in the face of Li Huowang's reaction. "Father, the Sitting Oblivion Dao is indeed a hassle, but it's just a small issue."

"Small issue? Don't forget that they almost stole the Liang Kingdom's Dragon Vein."

"They wouldn't be able to do so. They almost succeeded because I let them do it. If not, we wouldn't have Ji Zai. This is part of the Cause and Effect, after all."

Li Huowang looked at Li Sui with displeasure. "Sui Sui, why do I think that you are speaking out for him?"

1. Not the kind of biscuits they would eat. They plaster the poop onto the wall and use the sunlight to dry them. The dried poop biscuits can then be used as fuel to burn wood since they are rich in fiber. 🤔

2. The fifteenth day of the new year, which is also the day signaling the end of the celebrations. 🤔

Chapter 817 - Red Packet

Li Sui bent her body forward and snuggled against Li Huowang. “It’s not like that. It’s just that Shai Zi is very smart. He knows that causing trouble now would benefit no one. Also, he knows that it would be detrimental to him if anything were to happen to Da Nuo.”

Li Huowang reflected on the name. “Da Nuo... is Da Nuo the name of this world?”

“Da Nuo is also our name. Everything in this world—the seas, the land, and every grain of sand, is part of Da Nuo.”

“What about the Simings? Are the Simings part of Da Nuo?”

“Da Nuo is the Greater Siming.”

“Greater Siming... A Greater Siming does not have the past and the future.” Li Huowang sighed. “If we are part of Da Nuo, then what about them? What about god Yu’er? What are they?”

Li Huowang tried to recall the beings outside of Baiyu Capital. They had tried to tear Baiyu Capital in half, but no matter how hard he tried to remember, he could not come up with anything.

Suddenly, the skies almost split apart! The small crack in the sky trembled as it threatened to open. It was alive.

“Don’t think about it! Just carry on!” A low shout snapped Li Huowang out of it. The voice sounded like him and Ji Zai at the same time.

Li Huowang smacked his head and looked around. Nothing had changed, as if it had been an illusion.

Li Sui explained, “I don’t know what it’s called on the other side, but the Surveillance Bureau called it Fu Shengtian.”

“Why is it called Fu Shengtian? Is there any special reason?” [\[1\]](#)

“The name was passed down in the Surveillance Bureau. Those

before me called it Fu Shengtian, so we continued to use that name.”

Li Huowang then looked at Li Sui. “Since you already knew all that, why didn’t you tell me? Why were you letting me guess what was happening?”

“Father, I didn’t dare to tell you. I feared that revealing what was happening might alter the course of the future. We would’ve been in trouble if Ji Zai had disappeared because of that.”

“Heh.” Li Huowang wanted to make a snarky remark, but he stopped himself. Ji Zai was his past self. He would become Ji Zai if he entered the Baiyu Capital.

“Also, why did you give yourself the name Xuan Pin? Xuan is one thing, but what does Pin mean?”

“Father, Xuan is the color black. As for Pin, it holds the meaning of a female beast. For example, ‘A Pin chicken doesn’t call the dawn’ means that a hen doesn’t crow like a rooster does. There’s no other meaning.”

Li Huowang was embarrassed. He might’ve deduced Xuan Pin’s identity if he had known the meaning of Xuan Pin’s name.

Li Huowang sighed. “Sui Sui, you’ve grown a lot. You are now taller and wiser than me.”

His daughter was now a hundred and sixty years old. Even though Li Sui had constantly been changing, he felt that she was very different now.

Li Huowang also felt empty now that Li Sui was not constantly by his side.

“Father, no matter how much I changed, you’re still my father.” Li Sui said, pointing at a faraway alley. Inside the alley was none other than Lu Xiucui pulling along his crazed father towards their home.

“Look. Even if Lu Zhuangyuan can’t remember or recognize anyone, he will always be Lu Xiucui’s father.”

Li Huowang nodded and gently pulled on Li Sui's tentacles. "You've worked hard for the past hundred years. You have done a lot to ensure the peace of the world today. If you hadn't come in time, all of this might have ended differently."

Although Li Sui never mentioned it, Li Huowang was aware that she had patiently waited for a hundred and sixty years just to send him the Dragon Qi. He was fully conscious of how long that was and the excruciating pain that accompanied such a lengthy wait.

"Father, when I was young, I believed you were everything, but every child must eventually leave their home. In the past, whenever I encountered problems, I hid inside of you. I was certain that you could handle anything.

"However, when I ventured out into the real world, I began to truly grow up. I didn't merely wait for a hundred and sixty years—it was also an important part of my life. I matured and became Xuan Pin, Chief of the Liang Kingdom's Surveillance Bureau. As the Chief, it is my responsibility to protect Da Nuo."

When Li Huowang heard what Li Sui told him, he felt a complex feeling in his heart. His daughter had grown up, and he was also experiencing what it felt like to be a father, much like a father does when his daughter gets married.

Li Huowang glanced at the kitchen filled with smoke and turned to Li Sui, saying, "I know you're busy, but could you at least stay for lunch?"

"Alright, I will go and help my mother." Li Sui phased downwards from the roof.

It was the second day of the new year, and the warm meal was quickly finished.

Li Huowang held onto a de-feathered live chicken and snapped its neck before tearing it in half to present it to Li Sui. "Eat this. I know you like eating raw food. Eat something nice before you go."

Li Sui declined Li Huowang's offer. "Father, I don't need to eat that now. I can now easily control my nature as a Black Taisui."

"Then..." Li Huowang looked at his arm.

"Father, here, eat this." Li Sui stretched out two tentacles from her robe and grabbed some chopsticks. She then picked up the braised ribs and placed them in Li Huowang's bowl.

Li Huowang only gave up on tearing off his limb to feed Li Sui when Bai Lingmiao kicked his legs gently under the table.

"Here, eat this instead." Li Huowang picked up a large piece of duck meat and placed it in Li Sui's bowl.

Xuan Pin's large body slowly shrunk before the familiar little girl's body walked out from the robes.

The three of them sat and ate their meal. It was a rare occasion where they felt like a family.

While the three of them were savoring their meals, the courtyard door suddenly swung open. Puppy, who was now in new clothes, entered with his wife and their daughter in tow. Laughter filled the air as they made their way inside.

"Senior Li! Happy New Year! I'm here to visit you! May you be prosperous and have good luck in your endeavors!"

Puppy greeted Li Huowang and then gently picked up his daughter, placing her near Li Huowang. "Nan Nan, say hello to your Uncle Li."

"Hello, Uncle," she stammered, her voice fading into silence out of shyness. Puppy was also staring at Li Huowang without a word.

Bai Lingmiao took out some money wrapped in red cloth[2] out of her clothes and passed it to Nan Nan. "It's impressive how well your daughter can express herself at such a young age. She will grow into a fine young woman in the future."

Seeing that his mission had been accomplished, Puppy smiled with joy. He took his daughter and readied himself to visit the

others. “Senior Li, now that times are peaceful again, you should hurry up and have children. If you don't, you'll only be handing out money during the New Year.”

He turned to his daughter. “Nan Nan, let Daddy hold onto the red packet for you. I will return the money when you get married.”

Just then, Li Sui blocked Puppy's path. “Uncle Puppy, I wish you a Happy New Year! I wish that your blessings will be as vast as the Eastern Seas and your lifespan as long as the Southern Mountains.”

“Uncle... Puppy?”

Puppy was shocked and caught in a daze as Li Sui extended her arms and took back the red packet.

1. Fu Shengtian can be literally translated as “Prosperity Births the Heavens” 🙌

2. A red packet. It contains money in it. In folklore, red packet money is used to ward off evil beasts that devour children. Nowadays, it's a way for elders to pass on blessings to children. 🙌

Chapter 818 - Story Teller

Li Huowang brought Bai Lingmiao along to send off Li Sui after their lunch. They were now at the entrance of Cowheart Village.

“If you encounter any difficulties, feel free to reach out to me using your illusions. I will rush there as soon as I can,” Li Huowang said.

“Father, don’t worry. I will always tell you if something requires your attention.”

“Good. Then let me know if someone bullies you as well.”

“Father, I don’t think anyone in the Liang Kingdom could bully me now. I will leave first.” Li Sui disappeared instantly like a popping bubble.

Li Huowang exhaled a white wisp of breath as he gazed at the village blanketed in snow. He held onto Bai Lingmiao’s hands as they walked back. “I forgot to tell her to write to us once in a while.”

“Senior Li, I think she would still write even if you didn’t tell her. Next time, should we still call her Sui Sui? It feels very strange to call her Xuan Pin.”

Li Huowang shook his head. “It’s fine if we call her Sui Sui at home, but we should still refer to her as Xuan Pin outside. We can’t embarrass her since she’s the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau. Also, isn’t my other name Xuan Yang? One’s Yang and one Ying. I think the name Xuan Pin fits our daughter well.”

“That’s true.” Bai Lingmiao nodded. “Senior Li, don’t try to feed Sui Sui your flesh next time. She’s no longer the same little child that we know of.”

Li Huowang looked at the spot where Li Sui had disappeared. “She waited a hundred and sixty years just to fulfill her promise. I

just wanted to find a way to thank her.”

“We don’t have to be this formal since we’re a family. You would’ve done the same if you had been in the same situation.”

Li Huowang nodded and held onto her hands.

The two of them walked silently in the snow-covered village.

They had almost reached their estate when Li Huowang asked, “You’ll be leaving soon as well, won’t you? As the Saintess of the White Lotus Sect, you’re about as busy as Sui Sui, right?”

As Bai Lingmiao was going to say something, Li Huowang stopped her. “Go. Have a safe journey.”

Li Huowang tried to let go of her hand, but Bai Lingmiao held on. After some time, she loosened her grip.

“Death is still missing. I have to perform a ceremony to pray for the Heavenly Mater’s blessing and return Death to the world. I will come back once I’m done.”

“Alright.” Li Huowang wasn’t worried about it. The Heavenly Mater had indeed obtained the Heavenly Dao of Death. The Natural Disaster would soon come to pass.

“There’s so many devotees in the White Lotus Sect nowadays. Don’t hesitate to bring Sui Sui and me into your business if someone tries to usurp your position. We will make sure that they think twice before they act.”

“Don’t worry. I was chosen by the Heavenly Mater. Trying to usurp my position would be equivalent to betraying the Heavenly Mater. Those who worship her would never do so.”

Upon hearing that, Li Huowang suddenly raised his head and shouted into the skies. “You better be honest and don’t pull off any tricks! I will smash your golden lotus if you dare to do so! I always honor my promises!”

Bai Lingmiao pushed his back lightly before quietly whispering for the Heavenly Mater to forgive his outburst.

Soon, the devotees of the White Lotus Sect with white donkeys

tattooed on their backs carried a large palanquin into the village. Bai Lingmiao entered the palanquin before they left Cowheart Village.

Li Huowang entered his estate and saw that the busy estate was now empty. Even his numerous illusions had dwindled, leaving only Qiu Chibao behind.

“The others already left, so why are you still here? You should be fake too,” Li Huowang asked Qiu Chibao.

However, Qiu Chibao ignored him and silently ran into the kitchen. She tried to pick up the leftover food on the plates.

Her dirty hands phased through the plates repeatedly, but she kept trying.

Seemingly out of nowhere, she managed to grab a large braised pig trotter. She was briefly shocked, but then she jumped with joy and quickly stuffed the trotter into her mouth, devouring it eagerly.

Li Huowang stood behind her, staring at the sad scene before him.

Qiu Chibao's belly gradually expanded as she indulged in the meal, yet she showed no signs of stopping. Li Huowang waved his hands, causing Qiu Chibao to once again transform into an illusion.

She then sat in a pot and held onto her rotten child as she cried. Li Huowang left her and walked away.

He had just taken two steps outside when he met Zhao Wu. “Happy New Year, Senior Li! Where are you going?”

“Heading out for a walk.”

“It's the New Year. Don't you think it's inauspicious to carry that around you?” Zhao Wu pointed at Li Huowang's spine sword.

Li Huowang pondered a little before he removed it and passed it to Zhao Wu. “Help me put it back in my house.”

As Zhao Wu barely opened his mouth to reply, Li Huowang walked past him toward the outside of the village.

With every step he took, the ground folded and slid under him.

It was as if he took a hundred steps with a single step.

He walked for a brief moment before reaching the town beside Cowheart Village.

But Li Huowang had forgotten it was the second day of the New Year. At this time, almost everyone was visiting their family.

The streets were empty except for the place where the White Lotus Sect was recruiting devotees.

“Think about it carefully. Who is the Heavenly Mater? What is the Heavenly Mater? Heavenly means death. [1] Think carefully. How strong must the Heavenly Mater be to hold the reins of Death? Do you not believe us? You can also enjoy your afterlife in the Void Home after your death!”

Li Huowang walked past them and heard the storyteller’s voice in one of the tea shops.

“The storytellers wish to advise everyone to choose the middle path! Everyone will face their karma, whether they are kind or evil, for such is the path of life. Today, please allow this young one to talk about the person with a majestic and regal appearance. He is above the Dharma and commands the Heavens, the Saints, and the Universe. He illuminates the Heavens and heeds the lessons of Heaven. He had the ability to create all things and saved countless lives! He is none other than the merciful Zhuge Yuan! Everyone, please listen to me closely!”

The storyteller threw a piece of wood onto the table to catch everyone’s attention. The voices in the tea shop quieted down.

Li Huowang turned and entered the tea shop.

Li Huowang had just sat down when a waiter placed the teapot on his head and poured a cup of tea for Li Huowang from a meter away.

“Dear customer! You are just in time. We’ve just opened during the New Year, so there’s a promotion going on. The boss says you can drink as much tea as you want for twenty coins. We would even

throw in two plates of cakes for each customer!”

Another waiter appeared and served two plates of small cakes to Li Huowang.

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1. The Chinese raws 无生 mean without life, i.e., dead. 

Chapter 819 - Qi Kingdom

“Dear customer, here are some pomegranates and begonia cake for you. Please enjoy the meal, and call us when you need more tea.”

Li Huowang took a sip of tea and continued to listen to the storyteller.

“Saint Zhuge Yuan stood on the walls of You Capital and shook his bar mace! He glared, and the cowardly Dharma Sect members dropped like flies! All of them got scared to death!”

When they heard the story, the customers whistled and clapped. Some of the richer ones even threw some money onto the stage.

“Heh. This is interesting. To think that the storyteller would turn into a story itself.”

Upon hearing that, Li Huowang turned to his left. He saw a middle-aged man with a black mustache sitting there. “Do you know Zhuge Yuan?”

“Sure, I’m from the Qi Kingdom,” the man replied, lifting his empty tea cup and calling out to a waiter, “Excuse me, waiter!”

“Coming! Please hold still!”

A long teapot spout extended from the second floor and poured down a thin stream of tea from the top. The tea fell accurately into the customer’s teacup and filled it perfectly.

“You know who Zhuge Yuan is, yet you can still stomach this story?”

“Sigh. I have nothing to do anyway. My family and relatives are all dead, and I don’t have anyone to visit. I just came here to pass the time listening to stories. Look around you. I think many of the people here are from the Qi Kingdom.”

Li Huowang looked at the customers and nodded. "Even though this guy is telling some rubbish story, it's still undeniable that Zhuge Yuan saved the Qi Kingdom."

"Heh, who knows if it's true? I believe the monks are embellishing the details to deceive others into giving them alms," the man remarked casually before lifting his cup and starting to drink his tea.

He almost choked on his hot tea as he coughed. His face was red from the choking.

Li Huowang ate a cake and slowly chewed on it. He savored the sweetness as he listened to the story.

The storyteller began to exaggerate his story, going as far as claiming that Zhuge Yuan carved out the heavens themselves. Li Huowang couldn't bear it anymore and decided to leave.

"Dear sir, please come and visit again soon! The price is right, and we serve the best of the best for just twenty coins!"

When Li Huowang heard the waiter say that, he reached into his pockets and placed twenty brand-new coins on the table before leaving.

He suddenly realized that the man from the Qi Kingdom beside him had disappeared. Li Huowang hadn't noticed the man's departure.

Li Huowang left as he pondered. *He's probably not just someone ordinary. I wonder what kind of background he has.*

He walked around the village and found that there was nothing he could do, so he decided to head back. *I should just focus on cultivating.*

The troubles were over, but it was still beneficial to become stronger.

Li Huowang returned to the village and entered the familiar cave at the back of the village. He closed his eyes and focused.

The more he cultivated, the more the difficulty spiked. Still, he

wasn't in a rush. He took his time, gradually pushing the primordial breath within him with his inner sight.

He didn't know how long he was cultivating, but he saw that it was already nighttime when he opened his eyes.

Li Huowang was heading back to the Bai family estate when he walked past Puppy's house.

Puppy held onto a bowl as he walked out. "Senior Li, where have you been? We thought you ran away somewhere again."

"Hm? Did I leave for a long time?" Li Huowang was confused.

"Yeah. We last saw each other on the second day of the New Years. It's now the Lantern Festival. [1]" Puppy gave Li Huowang his bowl of glutinous rice balls. It bobbed around in the sweet soup.

"What?! I've been cultivating for so long?" An intense drowsiness overtook his mind, lasting only a short moment before being replaced by an intense feeling of hunger.

Without any hesitation, Li Huowang ate the bowl of glutinous rice balls. He ate and drank his fill before slipping onto the ground and falling asleep.

He slept for three nights before waking up again, and he felt that the world was spinning when he did.

The others who had been taking care of him circled around. Puppy said, "Senior Li, maybe you should... bring someone to accompany you when you go and cultivate. Next time, you could easily end up accidentally starving yourself."

"I would've been fine if you said nothing." Li Huowang kicked off his blanket and drank his tea.

He only looked at everyone after he finished his drink. The people around him were Puppy, Zhao Wu, Yang Xiaohai, and Lu Xiucui.

"Where's Xiaoman?"

"She's with the Saintess of the White Lotus Sect. Don't you know that?"

“Alright, fine. I understand now. You can go back now.” Li Huowang needed to think up a plan to prevent something like this from happening again.

They didn’t leave, confusing Li Huowang. “Is something wrong?”

“Something happened, but it's not anything major. Senior Li, do you remember how we accepted a group of refugees from the Qi Kingdom?”

“Yes, I still remember. What about them?”

“They are gone.”

“Gone? What do you mean?”

“They just disappeared into thin air. Thankfully, none of our people are gone.”

“Only the people from the Qi Kingdom disappeared? Since when?”

“Since the evening of the second day of the New Year.”

Li Huowang frowned. He recalled the man who had abruptly disappeared right next to him in the tea shop. “Did only the people staying in the village disappear? What about the other places?”

“We asked the peddlers, and they told us that the people of the Qi Kingdom in other places were also gone. We sent a letter to Gao Zhijian, but we have no clue if he could do anything about it.”

“How could they just disappear like that? What happened?” Li Huowang frowned and stared at the stars in the skies.

“Wait... Unless?” Li Huowang suddenly remembered something. He took the spine sword beside his bed and swung it. A single rift flew above Cowheart Village.

It was different this time. The strange liquid was gone! Li Huowang saw light from the other side of the rift!

“I knew it!” Li Huowang swung another rift and then jumped into it, propelling himself with his window.

He reached the Qi Kingdom and was shocked to find that it had

been restored. The grass on the ground was already an inch long.

“Who’s there?” Li Huowang suddenly turned around to find a shocked Qi Kingdom resident chewing on the grass.

1. Also the fifteenth day of the new year. 📖

Chapter 820 - Shangjing

“Eat slowly. Don’t choke on it.” Li Huowang frowned and stared at the man wolfing down his meal.

The man in front of Li Huowang almost choked on the sweet potato in his hands. It was as if he was the embodiment of a hungry ghost.

Li Huowang barely recognized the man due to how disheveled he was.

He inspected closely and recognized the man in front of him was none other than Niu San, the Qi Kingdom refugee who had previously sneaked into the kitchen for food.

Niu San appeared to have been staying in Cowheart Village, which is why Li Huowang saw him when he entered the rift. Niu San shook his head with his cheeks stuffed with sweet potato. He then drank from the puddle beside him.

He washed the food down his throat and smiled at Li Huowang before he started eating the other food that Li Huowang had brought for him.

This time, he spoke as he chewed on his food. He mumbled, “I dare not eat slowly. Food is life right now.”

Niu San cried as he said, “Foster father, what just happened to us. I finally became the head of Cowheart Village’s militia force and finally obtained four Mu of land to plant my crops. The good days were coming for me. I was enjoying myself when I was suddenly transported back! Look at this barren place. There’s nothing but grass here! How can I survive?”

Niu San crunched on the sweet potato out of spite after he complained.

Li Huowang looked around and asked, “What happened to the

others? Were the other people from the Qi Kingdom sent back here too?”

“Yes. We had nothing to eat even if we were together, so everyone scattered to find food. We began digging out the roots of the grass to satisfy our hunger. Some of the weaker ones already died from starvation as well.”

“Died from starvation?” Li Huowang was shocked to learn that Death was still in the Qi Kingdom.

“Did you encounter any danger? Like the Dharma Sect or the strange water that causes people to grow extra limbs?”

The Qi Kingdom appeared to have been restored to normal, but Li Huowang wasn't sure. The Qi Kingdom was massive. It would be a headache if his enemies lurked in some obscure corner of this world.

“Danger? There's nothing here! The biggest danger is that there's nothing here!”

Niu San was startled when he saw Li Huowang frowning before he begged earnestly. “Foster father, could you send me back? Please take mercy on me and send me back. I will... I will kowtow to you.”

Niu San kneeled and started kowtowing to Li Huowang.

“Stand up,” Li Huowang said as Niu San shot upward like a zombie.

“The Qi Kingdom is your true home. Where else can you go? Stay here.”

Niu San shouted, “But my wife is from the Liang Kingdom! She's also pregnant with our baby! If I have to stay here, doesn't that mean that I won't see them again?”

“You can't go back at all. You would be sent back here if I tried to send you to the Liang Kingdom, but I should be able to bring your wife here. However, the Qi Kingdom is now a desolate place. Do you really want your wife to suffer with you?”

Niu San stopped being emotional as he gave up. “Then... That's

fine.”

“Wait.” Li Huowang looked at Niu San as an uneasy thought came to his mind.

“If everyone from the Qi Kingdom is here, what happened to Gao Zhijian?”

Gao Zhijian was the Qi Kingdom’s Dragon Vein, but he was now attached to the Liang Kingdom. Which side would he be on?

Sensing that something might be wrong, Li Huowang created another rift and returned to the Liang Kingdom.

He didn’t bother explaining to Puppy and everyone else. He gave them some simple instructions before running towards Shangjing.

With his cultivation, he arrived at Shangjing two days later. It was as bustling as ever. The city itself had not been affected by the things that had happened.

Because this might affect the Dragon Vein of the Liang Kingdom, Li Huowang took no chances and went straight toward the palace despite his disheveled face.

Gao Zhijian must’ve given them instructions beforehand because none of the guards stopped Li Huowang. In fact, there were very few gazes on Li Huowang himself.

Gao Zhijian was already sitting on his throne when Li Huowang saw him once more.

Gao Zhijian had changed a little compared to last time. He had a beard, and his face was plumper now. He looked much more commanding.

“Why are you here?” Xuan Pin’s red robes floated up from the floor.

Li Huowang explained, and Xuan Pin shook her head. “Since Fu Shengtian has been repelled, its effect on the Qi Kingdom was naturally dispelled. This is good news—there’s no reason to be worried.”

Xuan Pin saw that Li Huowang was looking at Gao Zhijian with worry before explaining further, “There’s no need to worry about the Emperor. Since he’s attached to the Dragon Vein of the Liang Kingdom, he no longer has any connections to the Qi Kingdom.”

Li Huowang sighed in relief. He was happy that his thoughts were wrong.

He refused to take any chances since this was related to the Dragon Vein.

“As long as everything’s fine. I thought we might have some new troubles again. Since it’s good news for us, you can just continue with your work.” Li Huowang yawned and turned back.

“Senior Li, it’s been a long journey for you to reach here. How about having a meal with us? I didn’t have time to return even during the New Year.” Gao Zhijian’s words made Li Huowang turn around.

He looked at Gao Zhijian before stepping back. “I think we don’t have to do that, your Majesty. You are busy too.”

Gao Zhijian, however, insisted. He sat up from his throne and pulled Li Huowang towards the back palaces.

Soon, Li Huowang was seated in front of a table with a hundred and eight dishes.

Shark fin crab soup, braised chicken with mushroom, ham enveloped in fish bladder, shark skin chicken soup, false panther placenta, steamed camel hump, and civet steamed with pear slices.

Li Huowang had never even heard of some of the dishes. This was the first time he had witnessed the extravagance of the royal family.

Li Huowang had no intention of being reserved in front of Gao Zhijian. He eagerly devoured the food while listening to Gao Zhijian introduce his children.

“Senior Li, this is my eldest son. He is naturally also the prince,” Gao Zhijian said, handing the plump little prince to Li

Huowang.

The plump little prince was handed to Li Huowang.

Chapter 821 - Emperor

Li Huowang looked at the little boy with innocent, wide eyes in Gao Zhijian's arms. Picking up his chopsticks, Li Huowang dipped them into the vegetable broth before guiding them toward the boy's mouth.

The old eunuch nearby was about to step forward and stop him, but a single glance from Gao Zhijian made him retreat.

The chubby little prince licked the vegetable broth, only to find it tasted spicy. He immediately scrunched up his face like a steamed bun and began crying loudly.

Both men exchanged smiles, and the atmosphere returned to what it once was.

"How are things in the village?" Gao Zhijian handed the crying child to the eunuch beside him and asked Li Huowang.

"Not bad. With the silver you sent, how bad could it get?" Li Huowang said as he picked up a piece of camel hump with his chopsticks and stuffed it into his mouth.

"I heard that Sun Baolu brought his family from Qing Qiu to our village?" Gao Zhijian asked before picking up a steamed bun, dipping it in the braised pork sauce, and chewing on it.

Li Huowang shook his head. "He didn't. The grass in Qing Qiu had turned yellow and he was worried he wouldn't survive there, so he thought about it.

"Later on, the grass turned green again, so he stayed in Qing Qiu with his people to continue herding sheep. I reckon they wouldn't come to Cowheart Village unless absolutely necessary. The people from Qing Qiu might not be used to a farming lifestyle."

Gao Zhijian nodded and raised his tiger-head wine cup. The eunuch quickly poured him some wine. "Senior Li, let's drink."

Li Huowang shook his head. "I don't drink—I get drunk easily. Besides, it doesn't taste good."

Gao Zhijian laughed and leisurely downed the wine. He closed his eyes as he set the cup on the table. "Wine isn't about the taste. Sometimes, when your heart is troubled and your mind is jumbled, a pot of wine can calm your heart and mind, allowing you to get a good night's sleep."

"You're troubled? Isn't the Dharma Sect gone? What's there to worry about?" Li Huowang asked as he drank the milky yellow croaker soup. After rushing all the way here, he was very hungry and decided to eat his fill before he slept.

"Ah, of course. A good emperor has troubles, but a bad one doesn't worry about them."

Gao Zhijian raised his cup again and drank, his face slightly flushed. "Senior Li, now that everything has settled down, what do you plan to do next?"

"What else can I do? I'm a Daoist, aren't I?" Li Huowang said, patting his red Daoist robes. "Of course, a Daoist cultivates immortality. Who knows, one day I might really ascend to heaven and become an Immortal."

Gao Zhijian laughed heartily. "Hahaha, Senior Li, if you hadn't mentioned it, I would've forgotten you were a Daoist priest."

"What? Do you think I'm a fake Daoist priest?" Li Huowang also laughed.

"Real, you're definitely real." Gao Zhijian turned to the old eunuch. "Bring a Daoist register for Senior Li. My Senior Li must be a true Daoist priest."

Li Huowang smiled faintly. Pouring himself some wine, he gently clinked his bowl with Gao Zhijian's cup before raising his head and drinking it.

Gao Zhijian's smile widened as he grabbed the wine jug from the eunuch and personally poured wine for Li Huowang.

With the delicious food and fine wine, their harmony deepened, reminiscent of their journey to the Great Liang back when they had left the Zephyr Temple.

After eating and drinking heartily, Li Huowang began to feel drowsy. He had ways to avoid getting drunk but chose not to use them.

“Alright, that’s enough for today,” Li Huowang said as he put his arm around Gao Zhijian’s shoulder.

Li Huowang yawned. “Do you have a place to sleep? I’m exhausted.”

“Of course.” Gao Zhijian turned to the eunuchs. “Take Senior Li to the sleeping quarters.”

Li Huowang staggered as he turned around. Two eunuchs supported him on his way to his room.

Just as they were about to reach the door, Li Huowang suddenly remembered something and turned back. “This drinking almost made me forget the important matter.”

He tapped his head. “What was it again...? Oh, right! The people in the Great Qi have no food. Don’t forget to allocate grain for disaster relief.”

As Li Huowang reached the main hall door, Gao Zhijian called out from behind him, “Senior Li, while I can promise you many things, I’m afraid I can’t promise you this.”

“Hmm?” Li Huowang almost thought he had misheard. He turned around and saw Gao Zhijian with three heads overlapping each other. “What did you just say?”

“I said I can’t do it. I can’t provide disaster relief for the Great Qi.”

“Oh, you mean you can’t go to the Great Qi? No problem, just prepare the supplies, and I’ll take them.”

“Senior Li, I’m the Emperor of the Great Liang. Why should I waste the hard-earned grain of my people on disaster relief for the

Great Qi?”

Li Huowang pushed away the eunuch supporting him, and the eunuch staggered. “What do you mean? The Great Qi has nothing now. They’re starving and eating grass!”

He had thought this was a trivial matter, but it was quite the opposite.

“What does it matter to me if they eat grass? They don’t pay taxes or provide labor for the Great Liang.”

“Many people died in the Great Qi! It won’t take much grain to feed those who are alive!”

“Great Qi is twice the size of Great Liang. There are still many people alive,” Gao Zhijian replied resolutely.

Li Huowang now saw this completely different side of Gao Zhijian. He sighed softly and softened his tone.

“I know that. We don’t need to help everyone. Just make sure they don’t starve to death. We can send them some seeds to get them through this tough time.”

“No! The Great Liang is still recovering. Every grain of food is valuable and cannot be wasted.”

“Gao Zhijian!” Li Huowang jumped onto the table and towered over him. His hand instinctively gripped his sword hilt.

In an instant, Li Huowang was surrounded. “Stand down!”

Gao Zhijian looked up directly at Li Huowang without flinching. Li Huowang gradually released his grip on the sword.

“It’s fine, it’s fine,” Li Huowang said, forcing a smile as he patted Gao Zhijian on the shoulder. “You’re right. You’re a good emperor for the Great Liang, not for the Great Qi.”

“If you don’t help, then I will. I’m now the emperor of the Great Qi. I’ll take care of them!”

Li Huowang took the crown from Gao Zhijian’s head and placed it on his own head. Without another word, he sliced open a rift with his spine sword and jumped through it.

Chapter 822 - Grain

Li Huowang walked through the Great Qi with a heavy expression as he observed everything around him.

This wasn't as Niu San had described, where there was nothing but grass. At least in the capital of the Great Liang—You Capital—there were still countless ruins and broken walls.

Li Huowang had used the spine sword to travel from Shangjing, so he naturally arrived in Great Qi's capital city since Shangjing was built on top of the Great Qi's capital.

A person blocked Li Huowang's path, lying motionless on the ground like a corpse.

This person appeared to be overweight. Though several days of starvation hadn't turned her into a skeleton, drinking too much water had caused her body to swell considerably.

As Li Huowang stepped over her, she suddenly moved and shakily raised her blackened fingernails toward him.

Her cracked, pale lips trembled as she tried to say something. Before Li Huowang could do anything, her raised hand fell back down. She had starved to death.

Qiu Chibao was terrified by the scene. She wailed as she ran away while holding onto her rotten child.

Li Huowang clenched his fists tightly, but he gradually relaxed them and continued to stride forward.

This wasn't the first person he had seen starve to death, and it probably wouldn't be the last. The capital of the Great Qi was filled with people collapsing from hunger.

Li Huowang knew the most immediate thing he should do was transport grain from the Great Liang to save as many people as possible.

However, saving all of the Great Qi couldn't be done this way. If he couldn't turn the situation around, bringing grain would be useless, no matter how much he brought.

Disaster relief wasn't just about providing food. It also required the organizational capability to integrate all the refugees from the Great Qi.

When Li Huowang arrived at a temple and saw monks distributing porridge, he knew he had found the people he had been looking for—the monks of the Righteous Monastery.

He noticed something was off as he approached. *If there's nothing left, where did the porridge come from?*

He hurried to the porridge stall, only to discover that what was being distributed wasn't plain porridge or mixed grain porridge—it was meat soup!

At that moment, a monk emerged from the city, pushing a wheelbarrow filled with various dead bodies. It included the woman who had just starved to death before him.

"Amitabha, Benefactor Li, it's been a while," Chan Du, the abbot of the Righteous Monastery, said from behind Li Huowang.

Li Huowang turned around and looked at him with a shocked expression. "Are you all eating people?!"

"Benefactor Li, your words are mistaken. These are just dead bodies. In the eyes of Buddha, the flesh is merely a vessel. Moreover, the monks of Righteous Monastery chant sutras and strike wooden fish to offer prayers before cooking them.

"Besides, there's no food anywhere now. As monks, we must be compassionate. We can't let others starve to death just because of some taboo against the dead."

Li Huowang stood there in silence for a long time. He ignored the large pot beside him, then turned and walked toward the Righteous Monastery.

Under these circumstances, if he told them not to eat human

flesh, it would be akin to asking them to eat cake when there was no bread. They were just trying to survive.

Thanks to the monks' maintenance, the Righteous Monastery was relatively intact compared to the rest of the capital. It was still habitable, at least on the surface.

The monks inside didn't appear emaciated from hunger and looked relatively healthy.

Li Huowang sat down on a stone bench above a newly sprouted sapling. He got straight to the point with Chan Du. "This can't go on. Without food, the remaining people will eventually starve to death.

"The Righteous Monastery's religion used to be the Great Qi's state religion, right? After all of your good deeds, shouldn't you should still have some influence?"

"Why does Benefactor Li ask this?"

"To save people! I can't stand seeing others starve to death any longer!"

Li Huowang laid out his plan to Chan Du. "Use the Righteous Monastery's influence to gather as many survivors as possible. I'll bring as much grain and seeds as I can. We'll plant them together and have a unified distribution.

"There must be some officials amongst the survivors, right? They're good at managing things, so set them to work. The sooner we restore Great Qi's government, the sooner we can turn this dire situation around!"

"Amitabha. Benefactor Li, you are truly compassionate. On behalf of the people of Great Qi, I thank you." Chan Du bowed to Li Huowang.

"Enough with the talk! Let's get to work. People are dying every moment."

Li Huowang stood up and pulled out the spine sword to return to the Great Liang, but Chan Du blocked his path.

“Senior Li, it’s said that you’ve achieved great success in cultivating ‘Truth.’ Can you create grain out of nothing?”

Li Huowang sighed. “Do you think that’s possible? Do you think I’m a Siming? I don’t know if I’ll be able to do that in the future, but right now, I can’t.”

“I do have the ability to create food,” Li Huowang said. He looked at the stone table in front of him, and then the stone expanded and transformed into a pile of white buns.

The sight of the white buns immediately drew the monks’ attention and caused them to salivate.

“These things are edible and taste good, but once I stop maintaining my ‘Truth’ cultivation, they’ll turn back into stone.”

As Li Huowang thought about it, the buns instantly became solid black rocks.

“I can’t constantly keep thinking about these foods being real. It’s slow and won’t save many people. With the time required to spend on that, I could bring several bags of grain from Great Liang instead.”

“I’m not just trying to save a few people or even a group of them. I’m trying to save all of the Great Qi!” Li Huowang said. He drew the spine sword and returned to Shangjing.

Upon his return, he wasted no time and dashed into a store to start buying grain.

The shopkeeper thought he had landed a big customer and was overjoyed. However, an old eunuch with his golden whisk also walked in.

“Master Li, if you use gold created through ‘Truth’ cultivation to buy grain, that would be considered fraud, wouldn’t it?”

He continued, “This grain is the result of the hard work of our people, meant to fill their bellies. It wouldn’t be quite fair if you were to take it and give it to the Great Qi for nothing, would it?”

Li Huowang sneered. “Who said I’m going to cheat? I have my

own money! I even have a courtyard in Shangjing! If I sold it, don't you think I could afford enough grain?"

"Of course. Although grain is expensive now, real estate in Shangjing is worth a lot. But what if the money from selling your house runs out?"

Li Huowang stood before the eunuch and said, "I also have a Strayed One's corpse in Shangjing! Is that enough? Now get lost!"

The eunuch took two steps back, bowed respectfully to Li Huowang, and then turned to leave the store.

Li Huowang turned around while still enraged. He had scared the shopkeeper so much that he was trembling.

"What are you looking at? Get your workers to load the grain! I'm going to get the land deed!"

Chapter 823 - Mother

Six-year-old Miao Guihua lay in bed. Her head felt dizzy and foggy. She was simply too hungry.

At first, she cried loudly out of hunger, begging her mother to find food. After two days, she couldn't cry anymore. Her eyes were filled with hunger, and her mind was consumed by a single thought—finding something to eat.

There were people in the city, and her mother had carried her around while searching for food. Although she had money, she couldn't find any food.

They had heard there was Guanyin clay^[1] to eat outside the city, so Miao Guihua had gone there with her mother. However, too many people were digging by the river, and the two of them couldn't squeeze in.

They managed to dig up some grassroots, which ran out eventually.

There were grassroots in other places, but by then, the lack of food had weakened them too much to walk that far.

After being hungry for more than ten days, she became numb. Her stomach no longer growled, and she needed a stick just to walk.

"Mother, I'm hungry..." Miao Guihua weakly called to the woman lying on the ground beside her, but she didn't respond.

She wanted to cry, but no tears came out. She looked around, then used her fingernails to scrape off some white wall plaster before chewing on it.

Her mother had forbidden her from eating that. However, she was simply too hungry.

The wall plaster tasted bitter and absorbed moisture. After just a few bites, her mouth felt dry.

Guihua picked up a stick from the ground and shakily approached the water jar. She leaned forward into the moss-covered jar and scooped with a gourd ladle, yet didn't get a single drop of water.

She turned back and weakly called out to the woman on the ground, "Mother, the water's gone too."

Guihua still got no response from her mother. She leaned on her stick to walk over and push her mother with all her strength.

Guihua started to panic when her mother still didn't respond. She had seen adults suddenly stop moving and then never speak again.

In her panic, she hurried to the door to call for help.

"Master." Guihua imitated her mother and called out to a monk who was pushing a wheelbarrow. "Master, my mother won't move. Can you help her?"

The monk walked into her house. After a while, he carried her mother out, placed her in the wheelbarrow, and left.

"Master, where are you taking my mother? Can you wake her up?" Guihua followed behind the wheelbarrow with her stick for support.

Guihua walked slowly, but the kind-hearted monk would wait for her whenever she was about to fall behind. More and more people were piled onto the wheelbarrow.

Finally, Guihua followed the monk into a temple. Her mother had told her about this place. It was the place where people prayed to the Buddha, and her mother had prayed there before she got pregnant with her.

The monks here were good people, giving out meat soup daily. Her mother had once been lucky enough to get a bowl, but she gave all of it to Guihua without taking a sip herself. The soup had been delicious, and she had licked the bowl clean.

"Master, where are you taking my mother?" Guihua was in a

state of panic when she saw her mother disappear into the temple. She started crying helplessly, feeling something was wrong.

After a while, the monk who had pushed the wheelbarrow returned, picked her up, and carried her into the temple.

The monk placed her on a stone bench. "Be good. Wait here, and you'll soon have something to eat."

Guihua thought she was being good, so she waited as the monk instructed.

Before long, the monk came out of a red building with a bowl full of meat soup.

Guihua reached out her hands to take it just as another monk ran over and whispered something to him.

The monk looked at her with a complicated expression and repeated, "Be good. Wait here, and you'll soon have something to eat."

Shortly after, a group of bald monks came out with many wheelbarrows and carts. It seemed as if they were getting ready to transport something.

It wasn't just monks only. Soon, some young and strong men started coming in from the temple gate.

While they all looked hungry, at least they didn't need sticks to walk. Everyone gathered together, their faces filled with anticipation as though waiting for something.

Guihua was wondering what they were doing when the sky suddenly split open.

A bag flew out from the opening. She heard cries and shouts as everyone rushed over. Guihua tried to see what was happening, but her efforts proved futile.

Another bag flew out, though it wasn't full. She saw golden millet spilling from it and realized the bags must have been filled with food.

Bag after bag of food fell from the sky, piling up rapidly.

Eventually, a man in red came out, holding two bags. Guihua joined the adults, kneeling on the ground and bowing to him.

Guihua heard the adults cry out and learned that this man was called Bodhisattva, the one her mother had said could do anything.

Soon, the deity came over, helped her up, and handed her a bun. Guihua forgot about everything else and started to devour the bun.

She had finished half of it when she looked up and asked, “Bodhisattva, can I have another one? My mother is still hungry.”

After she received another bun, she ran to the monk with the wheelbarrow and said, “Master, where’s my mother? I have food now.”

Guihua followed the monk’s trembling hand and ran into the kitchen.

She saw her mother on the table. She climbed onto it and tried to stuff the bun into her mother’s mouth.

“Mother, there’s food now. Eat it so that you won’t be hungry anymore.”

Guihua saw that her mother was still unresponsive. She turned helplessly to the red-robed Bodhisattva at the door. “Bodhisattva, can you help my mother? She’s not eating.”

The deity didn’t move, and Guihua seemed to understand. Her lips trembled, and tears welled up in her eyes. “Bodhisattva, is my mother dead?”

“Child, I’m not dead. I can still eat.”

She looked up in surprise and saw her mother’s eyes open.

Guihua's eyes welled up with tears of joy as she threw herself into her mother's embrace. "Mother!"

1. A type of clay people ate to survive during times of famine. It can curb hunger but cannot be digested by the body 🤖

Chapter 824 - Bodhisattva

Feng Wanba stood in the long line. It was the sixth time he was licking his lips. The scent of food that wafted from the porridge stall in the distance made him swallow involuntarily.

He finally understood what it meant for time to crawl. The people ahead of him had hardly moved.

Feng Wanba didn't dare cut in line. He feared the monks would get angry and send him home without porridge.

After a long wait, it was finally his turn. He was given just a spoonful of porridge.

Once the porridge was poured into his bowl, he couldn't contain his excitement. Ignoring the heat, he eagerly scooped it up with his hands.

The millet porridge was quite bland, with added wood shavings and minced meat.

However, Fang Wanba felt it was a gourmet delicacy. Although it was plain, he thought it was fragrant and smooth. It tasted better than anything he'd ever eaten.

He licked each of his fingers clean with his eyes closed, then slowly opened his eyes and sighed deeply.

He was still famished, but the warmth in his stomach reassured him that he wouldn't starve to death.

After licking the porridge bowl clean, he still didn't leave. He inched closer to the porridge stall and deeply inhaled the aroma wafting out.

Feng Wanba had a secret he hadn't told anyone. One could absorb the porridge's essence by inhaling the porridge's aroma. It was a trick his grandfather had taught him.

Just then, he noticed one of the monks coming out of the

temple, calling for people to help move things. He immediately stopped inhaling the aroma and rushed over.

There was no reward for helping the monks move things. Anyone who felt they still had strength could join them and also stop whenever they wanted.

Feng Wanba noticed that the monk calling for help was surrounded by a crowd.

Everyone selected was excited, and some even jumped with joy.

Feng Wanba knew what they really wanted—to see the living Bodhisattva.

The people who had moved things earlier returned and spread the news. This grain was brought over by the living Bodhisattva, who had come to the mortal realm to save them!

Everyone wanted to see a real living Bodhisattva and get some blessings from them. It was rumored that those who had previously seen the Bodhisattva had all their minor ailments cured.

He wanted to meet the Bodhisattva too, so he squeezed his way in and raised his hand as high as possible.

“You, you, and you.” Feng Wanba was so excited at being selected that he could hardly contain himself.

When he arrived at Righteous Monastery, he was still buzzing with excitement and chatting with those around him.

“Did the Bodhisattva really send food? A lot of food? Does that mean we won’t go hungry anymore?”

“What does the Bodhisattva look like?”

“I heard the Bodhisattva is a man this time. Why is it a male Bodhisattva?”

“I heard the Bodhisattva was once a man and then became a woman. Maybe the Bodhisattva is androgynous.”

“Are you crazy? How dare you disrespect the Bodhisattva! What if he gets angry and stops sending food? Kneel and

apologize!”

While they chatted, a hole suddenly appeared in the sky and a sack came out from it.

The rustling sound of the sack falling on the ground made Feng Wanba’s ears perk up—that was the sound of rice!

Then, one sack after another of food was sent down. One sack even burst open, and corn spilled out of it. The merciful Bodhisattva had indeed come to save them!

Feng Wanba and everyone else immediately knelt and bowed deeply to the food.

At that moment, the hole in the sky seemed like a divine manifestation to them.

Feng Wanba was overwhelmed by the scene. He didn’t even know what he was saying and was just shouting excitedly.

Everyone cried out loudly when the red-robed Bodhisattva descended from the sky.

An omnipotent, divine being was looking after them. They hadn’t been abandoned. They were going to survive!

Li Huowang directed the approaching monks. “The sacks marked with a line are seeds! The unmarked ones are food. Quickly gather people and get those seeds planted.”

The cries and shouts around him made him irritable, so he turned and yelled, “Enough noise! Stand up!”

In an instant, everyone who had been kneeling stood up. “Get the food to the granary! If it rains, everything will get soaked!”

Everyone started to move, but they still howled as they worked.

“Where’s the Abbot?” Li Huowang asked the nearest monk.

“Amitabha, the Abbot is having a meal in the kitchen.”

Li Huowang headed that way with a cold expression.

“Bodhisattva! What is your name? I’ll set up a shrine for you and offer incense daily!” Feng Wanba shouted from behind.

“Zhuge Yuan!”

Li Huowang soon found the abbot in the kitchen. He was sitting by the stove and eating meat from a large bowl.

Nearby, some monks skillfully skinned, deboned, and cleaned the innards before adding them to a steaming pot.

“You’re still eating that?”

Chan Du put down his bowl and chopsticks. “Wine and meat pass through the gut, while the Buddha remains in the heart. The Buddha won’t blame me.”

“I meant that we have grain now. Why are you still eating this?” Li Huowang frowned as he looked at the pot of simmering flesh.

“There will never be enough grain. If I don’t go to hell, who will? Let the people eat the grain. This is fine for me. Besides, I like meat.” Chan Du picked up another piece and chewed it contentedly.

“I brought seeds this time. Get people to plant them and ensure no one eats the seedlings out of hunger.”

It was not enough for him to deliver food by himself this way. The Great Liang’s food supply was limited, and the people of the Qi Kingdom needed to take action to solve their own problems.

“Amitabha. Thank you, benefactor. There’s fertile land near You Capital that yields three harvests a year. I’ll send people to plant there immediately.”

After a pause, Chan Du added, “Benefactor, in addition to seeds, could you also bring us some piglets?”

“After all, meat is our specialty. We can fatten the pigs up quickly.”

“How are you going to raise pigs when the people don’t have enough to eat?”

“Pigs can eat excrement and even human corpses. We can certainly raise them.” Chan Du replied as a matter of fact.

His words reminded Li Huowang of some things in the past.

Chapter 825 - Trouble

Li Huowang did not refute his words and replied, “There are so many people in the Great Qi. Is there no one who can make the crops grow faster?”

“Yes, we usually call such people farmers.”

“Damn it, that’s not what I meant! I’m talking about divine powers! Divine powers!”

Li Huowang paced back and forth in the kitchen, biting his fingernails. Suddenly, he stopped. “Whether it’s the remnants of the Surveillance Bureau or people from other sects, notify them all to gather here and brainstorm a solution for the Great Qi!”

“We must use all available resources. No matter how much food I bring, I can only save the people around You Capital. Everyone else is still starving.”

“Amitabha. You do not need to worry so much, benefactor. Heaven has the virtue of cherishing life. The people in other parts of the Great Qi won’t all starve. Those who survive can eat the corpses of those who perished, which should sustain them for a while.”

“As if that’s a good thing! Nevermind. I’ll go get some more pigs.” Li Huowang drew his spine sword and slashed forcefully at the kitchen wall.

He returned to the Great Liang and immediately headed to the west market of Shangjing.

“Brother Li! Brother Li!” A somewhat familiar voice called out to him.

Li Huowang turned around, and his gaze fell upon the wooden mask on the man’s face. It took him a moment to recall that this was Liu Zongyuan from Moongate.

When Li Huowang infiltrated the Surveillance Bureau, he had worked with him on a few tasks.

Liu Zongyuan was well-informed and clearly aware of Li Huowang's elevated status. As such, his attitude was far more respectful now.

He said a few words, but the shouts of the White Lotus followers nearby drowned him out, making it impossible for Li Huowang to understand him.

The two moved a bit farther away, and Liu Zongyuan immediately complained, "The White Lotus Sect was once considered evil but is now openly welcomed. How does that make sense?"

"What are they up to?" Li Huowang looked at the people in the distance.

"I've heard they're praying for the Heavenly Mater to bring down the lost Hometown of True Void to save everyone."

Li Huowang had heard from Miaomiao that they wanted to pray for the Heavenly Mater to let go of the vanished Heavenly Dao of Death. Still, the situation was more complicated than that.

Li Huowang turned his gaze back to Liu Zongyuan. "By the way, what were you trying to say?"

"Oh, I was just saying, Brother Li, it's been a while. How about I treat you to a meal to catch up?"

Li Huowang quickly lost interest when he realized it was just small talk. "Maybe next time. I'm busy right now."

"Oh? What troubles you, Brother Li? Perhaps I can lend a hand?"

"How can you help the dead?"

"The dead? That's not a problem these days. In fact, it's considered a blessing. Many people are desperate to die but can't. Why be troubled?"

Li Huowang wanted to explain, but he was too exhausted.

“Yeah, being dead isn’t great, but neither is not being dead. People are just that contradictory.”

He paid no further heed to Liu Zongyuan and went to the west market.

After quickly negotiating the prices with a pig farmer, he proceeded to prepare multiple piglets in pig cages for transportation to the Great Qi.

Upon delivering the piglets to the Righteous Monastery, Li Huowang saw the monks bringing out their wriggling Buddha statue.

The monks sat cross-legged around the Buddha statue on the lotus seat. Then, they struck their wooden fish and chanted.

“Peace and happiness to be bestowed upon the world, where the immovable heaven can see. Living beings blinded by ignorance are often lost in delusion, but the wondrous eye can understand this method. The pure and wondrous form of the Tathagata manifests in all directions and is incomparable. This body is formless and without attachment.”

Amidst the chanting, the squirming Buddha began to consume the piglets one by one, just like someone eating steamed buns.

It didn’t entirely swallow them, leaving a part of each pig’s head exposed. The uneaten pig heads let out pitiful screams.

As the chanting grew louder, the pig heads swelled, and strange bumps appeared on their bodies.

The piglets grew rapidly to adult size, but they looked bizarrely deformed, with short limbs or tumors on their backs.

The pigs were expelled with a series of plopping sounds. They immediately began climbing on top of each other while writhing frantically.

The sight made Li Huowang frown. Though the Righteous Monastery was a famous and upright sect, their methods made him uncomfortable.

At that moment, the monks arrived with carts full of corpses and buckets of feces. They proceeded to dump them onto the pigs.

The pigs ravenously devoured the mixture and rolled in the filth and blood. Their bellies gradually swelled as they ate.

“Benefactor Li, the union of male and female is a great way of interaction between yin and yang. There’s no need to feel this way. Soon, the common people won’t have to eat just grain and human flesh. They’ll also get to enjoy pork.”

“Is there any difference?” Li Huowang felt nauseous, so he stepped outside to get some fresh air.

Once he started feeling better and was about to return, Chan Du offered him a bowl of pork.

“Benefactor Li, would you like to try some?”

Li Huowang did not accept it. “This pork smells foul! How can you expect others to eat this?”

In his opinion, the pork had an overwhelming stench resembling that of a cesspit.

Chan Du picked up a piece and chewed on it. “Is it? No, Benefactor Li, this meat is fragrant. You find it foul because you’re not hungry enough yet.”

Li Huowang had nothing left to say. He drew his spine sword to prepare to transport more grain.

Chan Du called after him, “Wait, Benefactor Li. Your compassion is known to us all, but the Qi Kingdom lacks more than just food. Haven’t you noticed anything unusual about the sky on your travels?”

Li Huowang looked up at the sky, which seemed normal. He didn’t understand Chan Du’s point.

“The Dragon Vein of the Great Qi is gone, and with it, time itself. It’s been stuck at one o’clock. The cycles of heaven and earth have come to a halt.”

At that moment, Miao Guihua, who was sweeping the floor,

walked by. Chan Du waved her over and handed her the bowl of pork. Guihua happily accepted it and began eating it ravenously.

Chan Du gently patted her head. "With no dawn or dusk, this little girl will never grow up and will stay like this forever."

"That's just the effect on people. The absence of time has broader consequences for the Heavenly Daos of the Great Qi."

Chapter 826 - Helpers

The Qi Kingdom requires a Dragon Vein and an emperor. Only then will the people be unified. With the Dragon Vein, the wheels of the world will turn on their own. The birds, flowers, and animals would return soon after that.”

Chan Du explained as he gently patted Miao Guihua’s head.

Li Huowang stared at the skies that were doomed to be forever bright as he listened to Chan Du. “What will happen if there’s no flow of time? How long will it take to affect everyone?”

“Amitabha. I’m afraid I do not know.” Chan Du shook his head. “Divination is not the specialty of the Righteous Monastery.”

“Is there anyone skilled in divination here in the Qi Kingdom?”

“There is. I pray that the Gan family has not died off. They are the best when it comes to divination.”

Li Huowang looked at the skies and frowned. “Then find a way to locate them! Find them!”

“Daoist Li, this low-ranked general has sent his men to go and find them.” A boisterous voice suddenly came from Li Huowang’s side.

Li Huowang turned and saw an eight-foot-tall burly man walking out from the gates of the Righteous Monastery. He was muscular and had a large beard.

Even though he wasn’t holding a weapon and was wearing civilian attire, the faint murderous aura emanating from his body proved that he was a soldier.

His facial appearance also differed significantly from that of the civilians. The muscles on his cheeks hadn’t shrunk even though he was starving.

The man clasped his fists together to greet Li Huowang. “Low-

ranked General Chen Yurong greets Daoist Li!”

“A soldier of the Qi Kingdom? How many of you are left?”

“Vanguard, thirty-six. Cavalry, twenty-four. Spear-users, one hundred seventy-one. Foot soldiers, three hundred ninety-eight. Chariots, seventy-five. Elite soldiers, four. All of them are yours to command!”

Li Huowang frowned. “Is that all? Is no one else working as an official in the Palace of the Great Qi?”

“There are more people, but at this moment in time, none of them can compare to you. As the Qi Kingdom’s soldiers, we would swear our loyalty to our kingdom’s savior!”

Li Huowang realized that the soldiers were much more intelligent and adaptable than he had expected.

Li Huowang did need people to help him, even though they would only work for him for the sake of food.

“An order? Fine. Summon all of the officials to come find me. Tell them I won’t let them starve if they work for me. Also, continue your search for the Gan family. Find them as soon as possible!”

“Low-ranked General Chen heeds your command!” Chen Yurong turned and left the Righteous Monastery.

Li Huowang stood there, pondering before saying, “Wait for them to come back and we will see what we can do. Right now, we need to address the food crisis. We don’t want anyone to starve to death, even after this crisis is over. Also, the Qi Kingdom must be saved by someone from the Qi Kingdom. You cannot rely on an outsider like me.”

Chan Du replied, “Amitabha. I must now ponder whether the Qi Kingdom's destiny will be shaped by an Emperor from within, or... if it will be shaped by Benefactor Li. The choice of what to do next is in your hands.”

Li Huowang understood what Chan Du implied. “What do you mean?”

“It doesn’t mean anything.”

Chan Du was trying to use power to sway Li Huowang over. However, Li Huowang said, “I’m just a Daoist who wishes to become an Immortal. I have no use for the Qi Kingdom. Did you think I wanted something from you all by helping you?”

The Qi Kingdom was massive—as large as the Liang Kingdom, Qing Qiu, Si Qi, Hou Shu, and Nan Ping combined.

Li Huowang had told Gao Zhijian that he would become the Emperor of the Qi Kingdom, but he had said it out of spite. He just didn’t want to see so many people starve to death.

He wasn’t even from the Qi Kingdom and had to return one day. It would become a burden for him to rule over the Qi Kingdom.

However, Chan Du didn’t want him to return. He decided to reveal something else to persuade Li Huowang to help them.

Chan Du looked up at the skies. “Benefactor Li, the decision is yours. Don’t look down on the Qi Kingdom just because our current population is small. If the Qi Kingdom becomes prosperous again, it could easily overshadow the Liang Kingdom. And by then, you would have the power to determine the official religion of the Qi Kingdom with just a single sentence.”

Li Huowang followed his gaze, and a question popped into his mind. *Does Ji Zai need followers?*

Li Huowang was confused about his future self. It was as if Ji Zai was the only Siming without followers.

There were even devotees who worshiped Death. Why weren’t there any for Bewilderment?

It wasn’t as if Ji Zai had zero followers. Li Huowang was technically one, and Sui Sui was the other.

Li Huowang decided to ask the crucial question. “Would a Siming’s strength increase as its worshipers increase?”

Li Huowang was interested in possible methods to strengthen

his future self.

If nothing else, a beefed-up Ji Zai would be more helpful if there was another threat like the Dharma Sect.

Also, compared to the other Simings, Ji Zai was still too weak.

Chan Du shook his head. "Amitabha. We monks cannot lie or make assumptions. I do not know."

"Old monk, you have become quite cunning." Li Huowang looked at Chan Du, who looked the same as the old monk. "Don't worry. I will still help the Qi Kingdom, regardless of whether it benefits me. I just don't want to see people starve for no reason."

Li Huowang unsheathed his spine sword and swung out another rift before diving into it.

Li Huowang continued to send food around You Capital for a period of time. At the very least, the monks weren't serving human flesh anymore. That meant that there were no longer people who starved to death around the You Capital.

Li Huowang was sending food and resources to help the people of the Qi Kingdom stand on their own feet again. He sent them some lambs from Qing Qiu since there was an abundance of grass in the Qi Kingdom. While the lambs would take some time to mature, the people should at least be able to drink their milk.

Li Huowang sat on a rock in a remote forest around Shangjing and looked at a buried corpse in front of him. He reached into it and pulled out the spine.

He couldn't sell it right now, but the spine of a Strayed One would still make a good weapon.

He swung it to his left, distorting and pulling the trees apart. The trees didn't break despite their distorted state. It was clear they would continue to grow like that.

Li Huowang placed the spine behind his back before he wrapped the remaining pieces of his body to exchange them for

Lifespan Pills, which he would later exchange for money.

He was busy working on the corpse when he suddenly stopped.
Someone was coming.

Chapter 827 - Luck

As Li Huowang was gazing at the road, a carriage emerged in the distance.

The sound of bells filled the air as the extravagant carriage moved towards him.

Eight well-groomed horses trod gracefully and slowly pulled the carriage along. It was clear that the owner of the carriage was not someone ordinary.

Li Huowang's face lit up with joy when he saw Xuan Pin open the carriage curtains. He put down his sword and leaped onto the carriage.

However, his face fell when he saw the people inside the carriage. Xuan Pin was not the only one there. There was also the current Emperor of the Liang Kingdom, Gao Zhijian.

“Sit.” Xuan Pin pulled Li Huowang down and let him sit.

Xuan Pin stared at the two before disappearing into the back of the carriage.

“Senior Li, Shangjing’s food prices have skyrocketed because of your purchases.”

“Really? Are you sure it's not because of the Emperor's hundred and eight dishes that day?”

Gao Zhijian did not deny it. He just remained silent.

It was only when they heard the sound of people talking outside that Gao Zhijian slightly opened the curtains. They were back in Shangjing.

“To destroy the Dharma Sect, many people in Shangjing had to relinquish much of their fortune. Also, since we’ve lost a couple of divisions in a day, our calendar is obsolete now. Food is hard to grow, and since you keep sending food to the Qi Kingdom, it would

be useless for us to open our granaries.”

To the left was a grain shop. Several civilians exited the place as they sighed and cursed.

Li Huowang replied, “At least they are still alive and don’t have to eat human flesh. Compared to the Qi Kingdom, the Liang Kingdom could be considered Heaven.”

“That’s true, but Senior Li, don’t forget that people in the Liang Kingdom cannot die right now.” Gao Zhijian closed the curtains, and the carriage continued trudging into Shangjing.

Soon, the carriage stopped. Gao Zhijian opened the curtains to reveal an alleyway filled with beggars. All of them were extremely skinny from starvation. Their limbs were like chopsticks, and their abdomens were engorged. They looked exactly like the hungry ghosts depicted in operas.

They were all lying on the ground without moving. Some of them were even rotting.

An old man was pulling over a cart, picking out the beggars in a more advanced state of decay and transporting them elsewhere to be incinerated.

“Senior Li, as you know, no one is born a beggar. The Liang Kingdom didn’t have that many beggars before—they were all ordinary civilians. Food prices are the lifeline of the civilians. If they increase, everything else follows suit. The higher the prices are, the more beggars there will be.”

Li Huowang looked outside and snapped, “Fine, I understand. I will go find food somewhere else.”

“Senior Li, do you really think I’m talking about food to you? When it comes to the Qi Kingdom and the Liang Kingdom, which is more important to you?”

Gao Zhijian bent his body forward. His face was serious.

“Who cares which is more important? Why can’t we make them equal and reduce the amount of deaths on both sides?”

“We cannot! Senior Li, have you ever wondered why the Surveillance Bureau imposes severe punishments on individuals who print out calendars or alter history books? The punishments even extend to three generations of their families. And also, why do you think the Surveillance Bureau was so guarded against Zhuge Yuan, the storyteller?

“It’s because the Qi Kingdom and the Liang Kingdom are not mutually exclusive! A thousand years ago, the Qi Kingdom fell. Then, the Liang Kingdom was born. If the Qi Kingdom hadn’t fallen, the Liang Kingdom wouldn’t exist. But if the Qi Kingdom is still around, then the Liang Kingdom shouldn’t exist! This is the fate [\[1\]](#) of the world!”

The carriage fell back into silence, broken only by the soft breaths of Li Huowang and Gao Zhijian.

Gao Zhijian took a deep breath. “Senior Li, do not go help the Qi Kingdom again. Let everything flow naturally. Even the Storyteller is gone. Just think of it as if they never existed.”

“I need some time to think about it.” Li Huowang turned and left the carriage, his brain buzzing from the new information.

Gao Zhijian sat in the carriage for a moment before he opened his mouth again. “You were supposed to tell him these things. Why did you need me to tell him?”

Xuan Pin’s massive frame floated down from the top of the carriage. “You’re already playing the bad guy, so you might as well do it all the way. I don’t want my father to hate me.”

“Your father is a clumsy oaf!”

Gao Zhijian sighed after venting his frustration. “Do you think Senior Li will listen to us?”

“No, but it’s time that we tell him about it. He will decide what to do.”

“Sigh. Why can’t Senior Li think about it from my position? I really don’t want to become the bad guy.”

“Again, since you are now the Liang Kingdom’s Emperor, your path is destined to be different. You just need to play your part.”

“I’m already regretting my decision. I shouldn’t have become the Emperor.” Gao Zhijian took out a bag from under his robes. Inside the bag was the flesh of a Spiritual Sin. Gao Zhijian took a heavy whiff of it.

He felt less conflicted about his decision when he opened his eyes. He was now once again the regal and authoritative Liang Kingdom’s Emperor.

“Do you think we will successfully annex Si Qi and Nan Ping into the Liang Kingdom? They are separated by Qing Qiu and Hou Shu.”

“I am the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau. I cannot interfere in the matters of the palace.”

“Hm...” Gao Zhijian pondered before he waved his arms. “Return to the palace and call for the six ministers[2].”

Li Huowang walked on the road, feeling distraught as he recalled what Gao Zhijian had told him.

If the Qi Kingdom is real, then the Liang Kingdom is fake. If the Liang Kingdom is real, then the Qi Kingdom is fake. So which side is real?

The two sides aren’t parallel worlds—they’re part of a single timeline that existed a thousand years ago. It’s impossible to split them now.

But then, why is it impossible for the two of them to exist simultaneously? It’s contradictory.

“What’s going on with this world?” Li Huowang had a headache.

“That’s because it’s crazy,” someone interrupted. Li Huowang looked down and saw Ji Zai in the reflection of a pool of water.

He stared at his future self and asked, “And then?”

“Nothing else. I can’t say anything else right now since I

haven't said it yet."

"Do you think I don't know this world is crazy? Do you think can't see that? Go away."

"You are indeed missing an eye." Ji Zai disappeared, and Li Huowang saw that his reflection had returned.

He squatted down and splashed his face with the water to wake himself up.

As he shook his head to remove the excess water from his hair, he realized he had traveled back to Cowheart Village.

Even though he could cultivate the "Truth," it still took him two days to reach Shangjing from Cowheart Village. However, he had somehow instantly traveled back to Cowheart Village.

Li Huowang entered the village and saw Puppy. "Senior Li, you're back early this year!"

1. Previously translated 气运 as luck, but fate would be more appropriate. 📖

2. The six ministers representing Official Affairs, Revenue, Rites, Military, Justice, and Industry. 📖

Chapter 828 - Busy

“This year?” Li Huowang’s heart beat rapidly when he heard Puppy saying that. He had an unsettling thought bubbling out from his mind.

“What do you mean?” Li Huowang approached Puppy and carried him up. “Did a long time pass?”

“Senior... Senior Li, please don’t relapse into your illness again. Not... Not much time has passed. It’s still not the Qingming festival yet.”

Li Huowang took a deep sigh before placing Puppy down. “Please speak more clearly and be specific next time.”

“Alright.” Puppy dared not get angry at Li Huowang, who was mentally ill.

“Oh, right. Senior Li, you have nothing to do, right? Do you mind managing the village if you are free? There are more and more people in the village. Without you or Senior Bai, Zhao Wu and I can barely manage it.”

“Can’t you hire someone to do it? Do you need me to say this?” However, as he observed the village, he had a realization.

“Puppy, do we have enough food in the village?”

“Of course we do. Senior Li, do you remember how the Heavenly Dog ate the sun last time? You instructed us to stockpile more food for emergencies. We did buy a lot more food. We should have enough food to feed the village for a few years.”

Li Huowang was overjoyed. “Bring me to the granary then!”

Puppy led Li Huowang to the Bai family’s ancestral hall. They twisted the bronze monkey statue and went underground.

Li Huowang saw the secret rooms of the White Lotus Sect stuffed with food. The spacious underground hall and the corridors

were filled with mountains of food.

Li Huowang's eyes were wide with shock, but Puppy misunderstood and quickly explained, "Senior Bai took everything last time. Since this place was empty, we used it to stockpile our food instead. It's a very good place to keep food, with plenty of space and no water leaks. More importantly, it's also hidden. Even if the village comes under attack, it'd be hard for the enemies to find this place."

Li Huowang laughed when he saw the food in front of him. He never imagined the village would have such a large stockpile, all while he had been painstakingly searching for food.

"Puppy, call everyone in the village and bag up the food. I want to use it!"

"Use it? How?" Puppy was confused, but he still followed Li Huowang's orders.

Even though Li Huowang was rarely in the village, everyone knew that he made the decisions.

Everyone gathered around the Bai family's ancestral hall and slowly moved out the food from the secret room, bag by bag.

"You guys, keep sorting the food in the bags. Let me go check the other side." Li Huowang swung his spine sword.

He returned to the Qi Kingdom and saw a man with tattered clothes hunched over the ground.

"Niu San! What are you doing?" Li Huowang called for the man.

Niu San looked back and was surprised to see Li Huowang. "No... nothing. I'm planting some potatoes."

Li Huowang had left some food for him last time. Niu San didn't want to eat it all, so he decided to plant some.

"Stop whatever you are doing now and come help me fetch food!"

"Alright!" Niu San tearfully nodded and ran towards Li

Huowang.

Those nearby the area were once the refugees who lived in Cowheart Village. They all heard Li Huowang shouting that there was food and came running towards him. They cried and called him their savior again and again.

At the very least, there were enough people to carry the food. They sent bags of food through the rift again and again.

There was so much food that it would take days to transport all of them to the Qi Kingdom, even with the help of the entire village, especially since the secret room's corridor was tiny.

While the food was being transported, Li Huowang ran towards the You capital to meet with Chen Yurong.

He had just reached there when he met someone he had not seen before.

"This lowly one is called Liang Yuxuan. I greet the Daoist!" A disheveled elderly man greeted Li Huowang. There were several people behind him.

Chen Yurong explained, "Daoist, they are the officials that I found. Thankfully, you ordered me to find them in time, or they would have starved to death."

Li Huowang looked at the man and asked, "What kind of official are you in the Qi Kingdom?"

"I work in the Imperial Clan Court."

"What kind of official is that?" Li Huowang did not understand what the job entails.

"We take records of the palace by etching the records onto jade discs at certain time intervals. We record the family tree of the royal family and the titles of the nobles and officials. We also write down details about deaths, births, and marriages within the royal family."

Li Huowang pondered before asking, "The Qi Kingdom is in chaos now. There's no law and order everywhere. Can you

temporarily form a palace in the Qi Kingdom with the people behind you right now?”

“We can!” Liang Yuxuan answered without hesitation. The price of not being able to do so was naturally starvation. He had no choice but to put together some sort of organization with whatever he had left.

Li Huowang looked at the sunken faces of the people and nodded. “Alright. Let’s get it started, then. I will talk about my ultimate goal right now. We need to revive the Qi Kingdom and make sure that the people of the Qi Kingdom can stand on their own feet. They must be able to survive even if I don’t send food here.”

Everyone felt nervous when they heard that.

“Daoist, does that mean you won’t send food from today onwards?” asked a younger official out of fear.

“Are you deaf? I said I want us to be independent. Now go and work!”

Li Huowang wasn’t sure they would be helpful, but it was better than nothing.

“Yes!” All of them bowed and retreated except for Liang Yuxuan.

He bowed towards Li Huowang once more.

“The disciple of the Minglun Hall, Liang Yuxuan, greets the Daoist.” For some reason, his aura changed completely.

“Minglun Hall?” Li Huowang stared at the man before him but wasn’t surprised.

He knew that there were people like him in the Qi Kingdom, so it was inevitable that he would run into them one day. After all, they had a higher chance of surviving after a Natural Disaster than regular people.

However, he hadn’t expected to meet someone from the Minglun Hall, a sect he hadn’t interacted with. It wasn’t the White

Lotus Sect, the Moongate, the Ao Jing Sect, or the Antrabhara Temple.

Still, Li Huowang had some memories of meeting them before during his fight with the Dharma Sect.

The people from Minglun Hall all had three arms and could turn drawings into real life. *He must've hidden his third arm.*

Chapter 829 - Reviving The Society

“Can you enter the palace and become an official with your identity?” Li Huowang asked the old man in front of him.

“Yes. The disciples of the Minglun Hall are all disciples of Confucianism too.”

“Are you alone?”

“I apologize, but with our current situation, it won’t be easy for me to contact the others. However, if we revive the palace of the Qi Kingdom, they might catch wind and come assist us.”

Liang Yuxuan paused a moment before continuing, “Daoist, when I was on my way here, I coincidentally encountered the leader from the Mo family. He had caught wind of the news in the You Capital and wanted to help.”

“Oh? Then that’s good news.” Li Huowang didn’t care who it was as long as they could help. The more, the better.

He was here to help the Qi Kingdom, and there was a limit to how much Li Huowang could do on his own.

Liang Yuxuan hesitated when he heard Li Huowang’s answer. He glanced at Chan Du, who had stopped rotating his prayer beads.

“Daoist, I’m not sure if I could say this...”

“What do you want to say? There’s no need to ask for my permission. Speak.”

“The people from the Mo family do things differently. You need to be careful.”

Li Huowang heard him and remembered what he had heard when he worked for the Surveillance Bureau. Different branches had formed within the Mo Family. The Mo family from the Liang

Kingdom was orthodox, but the Mo family from the Qi Kingdom was an evil sect.

"Are they an evil sect?" Liang Yuxuan remained silent in response to the question, yet Li Huowang could tell it was a tacit agreement.

Li Huowang looked at Chan Du. *If the orthodox sects are like this, I wonder how bad the Mo family must be for everyone to label them as an evil sect.*

"Is the Sitting Oblivion Dao an evil sect?"

"Yes."

"I see. Go ahead and focus on your work for now."

Li Huowang decided to stay put and wait for the leader of the Mo family from the Qi Kingdom to arrive.

Li Huowang didn't care if they were an evil sect or not. He was sure that the leader of the Mo family wouldn't be stupid enough to stir up trouble in the current situation.

Li Huowang temporarily lived in the You Capital. While it didn't matter to him, it significantly boosted the morale of the people since he was their Bodhisattva.

He didn't know when, but he had somehow turned into everyone's anchor.

What Li Huowang had not expected was that the famine in the Qi Kingdom had been greatly alleviated. Surprisingly, it was not because of the Mo family—it was thanks to a sack of moldy grain with mushrooms growing on it.

"Did you plant this?" Li Huowang saw Feng Wanba busily tending to rows of mushrooms in the underground room.

"Yes, I planted them!" exclaimed Feng Wanba with great excitement, eagerly nodding as he presented the mushrooms to Li Huowang. "We were feeling quite hungry, and then I unexpectedly came across these mushrooms, so I had the idea to try eating them.

"And guess what? It worked! These mushrooms can be

harvested every few days, and they just keep on growing. They're even better than grain!"

"Are you sure these are edible?" Li Huowang saw black spots on the mushrooms.

"You can fill up your belly with them, although they cause diarrhea and make your lips turn purple."

Li Huowang was confident that the mushrooms were poisonous and couldn't be eaten.

Still, it did give him an idea. Grains were hard to grow and took a long time to harvest. Mushrooms, on the other hand, were easy to grow. More importantly, mushrooms grew faster and could be harvested within a few days. Purchasing mushrooms also wouldn't increase Shangjing's food prices.

Li Huowang returned to the Liang Kingdom and bought some edible mushrooms before sending them over.

Although a lot of people had died in the Qi Kingdom, there were still enough farmers. Under their care, the mushrooms soon grew and helped alleviate the famine.

Soon, almost everyone in the You Capital started growing mushrooms. While not everyone was successful, it greatly reduced the need to eat grain.

People gathered on the western ruins of the You Capital. They were there to sell items they carried in baskets.

Li Huowang walked among the crowd and checked his surroundings. There wasn't a large selection of items being sold. While some people were selling items like straw slippers, most of them were selling food, such as wild vegetables, mushrooms, goat milk, pork, and even kaolinite.[ref]A type of clay. In ancient times, people ate it during famines to alleviate hunger. While it didn't provide any nutrients, it helped fill their stomachs.[ref]

Food was the currency here. Gold, silver, and bronze coins were useless now. No one picked them up, even if they were lying

on the street.

An old man walked into the market with four catties of pearly-white rice. A crowd immediately formed around him, attracted by his merchandise.

White rice was an incredible food, and its rarity made it exorbitantly expensive. The current value of four catty of white rice in the Qi Kingdom was beyond measure.

The old man chewed on some white rice beads, making the people around him feel envious. Even so, the surrounding crowd only shouted out prices, with no one daring to steal.

There were three individuals from the military within the western ruins. They were holding swords dripping with blood to maintain order.

Li Huowang was satisfied with the scene in front of him. Even though it was still scrappy, order was slowly being introduced back to the You Capital.

“Not bad.”

Li Huowang’s praise made Liang Yuxuan bow down a little lower. “It’s just part of my duty.”

Even though it wasn’t his expertise, he had people working under him who once worked in magistrates and local administrative offices. With the soldiers and food at their disposal, maintaining order among the refugees was a relatively simple task.

"Daoist, the Qi Kingdom is too big. We don’t have enough people to extend aid to everyone, especially since we lack carriages and horses right now. Traveling would prove challenging, so I plan to first revive our society here.

“People will flock here once the You Capital is up and running again. Then, we can organize them and assign them to work in the fields to grow food.

“Our current issue is not lack of food, but rather lack of manpower. Distributing free porridge will only foster a group of

lazy individuals who refuse to work. We need them to work in exchange for food. This way, we'll be able to mobilize everyone. With everyone working, the Qi Kingdom will slowly recover."

Liang Yuxuan dared not speak in jargon and explained things as simply as he could to Li Huowang.

"Then let's make it quick. The fewer people we lose, the better."

"Daoist, you are indeed right. I will do my best to chart out a path of survival for the people of the Qi Kingdom. My master taught me that those who wish to unify the land should first fix their country. To fix their country, the leader must first unify the people. To unify—"

"Shut up."

"Yes."

At that moment, a quarrel erupted in a corner of the western ruins. An elderly man was pulling on a young person, exclaiming, "You insolent child! You're not selling kaolinite! It doesn't fill up my belly!"

"Stop slandering me! I'm eating the same things I'm selling!"

Soon, a crowd gathered around them. Two soldiers approached to break up the fight.

Li Huowang wanted to leave when he saw the little altercation when he stopped. He noticed someone was observing the fight.

Upon witnessing the little altercation, Li Huowang decided to leave. However, before he did so, he came to a sudden halt as he caught sight of someone observing the fight. Li Huowang and the man locked eyes simultaneously, and Li Huowang immediately knew that the man was none other than the leader of the Mo family.

Chapter 830 - Mo Family

Li Huowang had never seen the leader of the Mo family before, but he was certain that the man in front of him was the leader, especially since he had a black bird on his shoulder.

The bird was filled with life, but something was wrong with it. Li Huowang noticed that while it looked normal, it had a strange warping sense.

Li Huowang turned his attention to the man instead of the bird. The man was wearing a cotton overall and dressed just like a woman. For some reason, he was also wearing a smiling clay puppet head.

Despite his weird attire, no one noticed him. More importantly, he had three shadows.

Liang Yuxuan whispered to Li Huowang, “Daoist, that’s him.”

As Li Huowang approached, the man also made his way towards him.

He could now see him more clearly. The man before him didn’t have his Ten Emotions and Eight Sufferings. It was as if he wasn’t human at all!

“Are you the leader of the Qi Kingdom’s Mo family?”

The man’s clay puppet head moved slightly. “What’s the Qi Kingdom Mo family? The Mo family has always been a single sect. There is only one of us.”

Since there was no Liang Kingdom in the Qi Kingdom, there was naturally no divergence between the Liang Kingdom’s Mo family and the Qi Kingdom’s Mo family.

The man bowed to Li Huowang. “Mo family leader Meng Sheng greets Daoist Li.”

Li Huowang did not avoid it but instead accepted it, “I’ve heard

that you came to help me?”

“Indeed. The Qi Kingdom is in danger. The rules of our family dictate that we must save the world if it's in danger.”

Li Huowang pondered before asking, “How many people do you have?”

“We have 342 families.”

Li Huowang silently calculated. *Since each family has roughly three people, they appear to have more than a thousand people.*

“What is the Mo family’s specialty?”

“Machinery and protective rituals[1].”

Meng Sheng removed the doll's head, revealing a wooden mesh made from dovetail joints that formed an empty skull. The person was indeed not human.

Li Huowang frowned when he saw the doll in front of him. “You’re not even meeting me in person to offer assistance?”

Just as Li Huowang finished speaking, a dwarf suddenly emerged beneath the doll's head.

“Meng Sheng, leader of the Mo family, greets Daoist Li!” The dwarf greeted Li Huowang again.

“Call everyone here if you want to help me. You can’t save the Qi Kingdom alone.”

“I understand. I will call for them now!” Meng Sheng leaped into action as he donned the doll head and reattached it to the main body. With a swivel, the doll headed off.

Li Huowang frowned after Meng Sheng disappeared. “You said they are an evil sect. Is it because of the techniques they cultivate? I didn’t sense anything evil from him.”

From that short interaction, Li Huowang sensed that the Mo family was far weaker than the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

Liang Yuxuan explained, “No, the Mo family only uses some evil entities or treasures for their cultivation. They do not need sacrifices nor evil deeds to cultivate.”

“Then why are they evil?” Li Huowang was confused. The Mo family seemed much milder than the Righteous Monastery, an orthodox sect.

“Daoist, did you remember what I told you last time? They are not that easy to cooperate with.”

Liang Yuxuan hesitated as he tried to explain it better to Li Huowang. “Daoist, did you know where the saying ‘stuck in a rut’^[2] came from?”

Li Huowang found that Liang Yuxuan always avoided the point and didn’t give a straight answer. “Just tell me. Stop talking in circles.”

“Stuck in a rut describes someone who resists change and refuses to adapt. They will always adhere to the outdated rules. There’s also another meaning to it. It means that the Mo family will always cling to their rules. The Mo family will always abide by their own ancient rules, steadfastly following them when interacting with others, themselves, or addressing any matter. However, these rules were only suitable in the past. Abiding them now is nothing short of being evil.”

“Such as?” Li Huowang realized that they were not considered evil because of their cultivation methods, but rather because of the rules they followed.

“For instance, the Mo family has the peculiar tradition of capturing officials and braising them over a small fire until they turn into a slurry. They then consume the concoction with rainwater.

“Another unusual custom is that when a family member reaches adulthood, they must consume an evil entity and choose one of the Immortals to be their guardian. After that, they are required to sacrifice their first child to their chosen guardian.

“Furthermore, the Mo family strictly adheres to the rule of not marrying outsiders. Parents and children marry each other, brothers

and sisters marry each other, and grandchildren and grandparents marry each other, following a cyclic pattern that repeats every five years. There are many other rules, but I don't know all of them since I am not a part of their family."

Li Huowang remained silent for a very long time. "Which fucking century did these rules come from?"

It was impossible for such rules to exist even a few thousand years ago. That was why the Surveillance Bureau labeled them as an evil sect. It was impossible to turn them into a righteous sect!

Liang Yuxuan was crestfallen. "I'm afraid you would have to ask their leader for more details."

Li Huowang regretted allowing the Mo family to intervene. The situation would go out of control when a large group of those weird rule-abiding dwarves were here.

"Find an empty space outside of the You Capital for them to stay at. Make sure that they are far away from us!"

"Yes."

"Also, ask your men to think about how we can use the Mo family in this situation!"

"Yes!"

Li Huowang was worried not only about the Mo family but also about the other evil sects. It would be impossible to stop them from arriving due to how the situation was evolving.

Keeping evil sects in check and using them to save the Qi Kingdom was beyond Li Huowang's expertise. He had the feeling that Gao Zhijian would be much better suited for this.

"I don't have enough people that I can use," Li Huowang mumbled.

It wouldn't be easy to restore the Qi Kingdom. He had finally encountered obstacles that even he found hard to surpass.

Li Huowang returned to the Liang Kingdom and saw that the old eunuch was already waiting for him.

Without waiting for the old eunuch to say anything, Li Huowang guessed what it was. “Go back and tell Gao Zhijian to stop nagging me! I’ve already heard what he has to say. I don’t want to revive the Qi Kingdom to destroy the Liang Kingdom!

“I just don’t want to see the people suffering there! I don’t need much. I simply want them to survive and have something to eat every day! As long as that is achieved, I won’t return!”

1. The original text here is 厌胜, a specialized field of traditional practice in warding off bad luck. The term combines “厌” (yàn), which means to dislike or dispel, and “胜” (shèng), which means to win or overcome. Typically, these practices involve rituals, charms, talismans, or specific behaviors believed to counteract negative influences or evil spirits. They can also be used for evil, in which certain items are placed or buried in different parts of a house to curse the inhabitants. 📖

2. The original text 墨守成规 is literally translated as “to cling to the rules like ink.” Mo can be the surname or the word for Ink.



Chapter 831 - Rescue

“Heaven and Earth, all things change... The sun and moon rotate while the Heavenly River swings in the sky. Spring and autumn come and go, and the four seasons change without fail. Grass, trees, wood, and the fruits of it all. Sacred crossing...”

Bai Lingmiao sat on the white lotus throne, her upper body split in half. All four of her hands formed a lotus seal, making her look like a tree.

The other devotees of the White Lotus Sect surrounded her and chanted the same mantra as her. All of them sported an expression of mercy and reverence. The white lotus motif on their forehead flickered from time to time.

The phenomenon wasn't happening at just this one location. The devotees of the White Lotus Sect in every corner of the world had set aside their work and were chanting simultaneously. The sheer number of devotees in the sect was enough to fill the entire Liang Kingdom with the sound of their collective chants.

The magnificent scene made everyone else show respect or reverence towards them. They even softened their tone when they spoke.

The ceremony ended after one division. Bai Lingmiao opened her eyes, and the hall gradually grew silent.

Everyone looked at her hopefully, waiting for her to announce something. They were ultimately disappointed.

The Heavenly Mater had personally requested that the ceremony be performed every day. Its purpose was to bring the Void Home down to earth through the earnest prayers of the devotees.

The devotees bowed to Bai Lingmiao as they sat up from their

cushions and left. The bustling hall grew quiet again.

Bai Lingmiao sat up from her cushion and was about to pick up her white shoes when a familiar voice came from her back. "Do you think the ceremony will work? I don't think so. I doubt that the Void Home would descend here even if they were to chant ten thousand times."

Bai Lingmiao shook her head lightly. "We are all devotees of the White Lotus Sect. The Heavenly Master told us it would work, so it will work. We have to believe."

Even though she didn't want to admit it, Bai Lingmiao believed that the Void Home was real. What if it really existed and her family was residing in the Void Home?

"Hmph! I don't know what you are doing right now."

"We are doing what we must do." Bai Lingmiao reached the door to find that some of the devotees, the ones with the white donkey motifs tattooed on their backs, had prepared a palanquin for her.

She sat on it, and the devotees held up the palanquin. They took her towards an alleyway in the distance.

The alleyway was messy and dirty, with people swarmed by flies while rats incessantly fed on their flesh. It was full of people who could not die, even if they wanted to.

When Bai Lingmiao disembarked from the palanquin, the people somehow sensed her. They wriggled their dirty bodies and raised their dirty hands towards her white dress.

Everyone longed for her. Their eyes filled with desire as they gazed at the Saintess. They wanted her to grant them death.

Bai Lingmiao looked at them with immense sadness and benevolence. All of them were living humans, yet their existence was now even more miserable than that of a ghost.

She extended her arms and waved them above their foreheads, her heart brimming with thoughts of mercy. Every time her hand

passed by someone, they would fall to the ground with a smile.

Waves of people died in Bai Lingmiao's hands. Amid the crowd, Bai Lingmiao appeared even purer to the people, even if her upper body was split into two.

Too many people in the Liang Kingdom wished to die. Many of them had traveled there in hopes of being reincarnated.

Bai Lingmiao didn't know how many people she had granted death to, but she felt that it was worth it every time she saw them smiling after being released from the shackles of life.

However, no matter how many people she sent off, countless others were still suffering, particularly those who had already been reduced to ashes...

After dealing with the people in the alley, the merciful Bai Lingmiao continued to pray to the Heavenly Mater.

"O merciful Heavenly Mater, please grant the embrace of death to the people again.."

She wasn't sure if the Heavenly Mater heard her, but she persevered and prayed daily.

Why hasn't the Heavenly Mater returned Death to us?

Bai Lingmiao questioned her from time to time. If the Heavenly Mater had it, she should've given it back.

Perhaps something happened to the Heavenly Mater? Bai Lingmiao thought it was possible and wanted to do something.

"Heh. What could we mere mortals do if she encountered a problem?"

After hearing the Second Deity, Bai Lingmiao returned to her palanquin. Instead of returning to her hall, she went to the Surveillance Bureau.

"Helping or not is one thing. Being able to do so or not is another thing."

Bai Lingmiao's excitement surged as she saw a figure in red robes appear before her. She almost called her Sui Sui but stopped

in time. “Chief, thank you for meeting me.”

“Saintess, is there an issue?” Xuan Pin waved her arms, and both Bai Lingmiao and Xuan Pin shrunk to the size of a grain of rice. No one could hear what they were talking about now.

“The Natural Disaster is still in effect. Is there anything the Surveillance Bureau is doing to mitigate it?” Bai Lingmiao asked. The Surveillance Bureau was typically in charge of dealing with Natural Disasters.

“Is there anything the White Lotus Sect could do to help? Just let me know and we’ll do our best.”

Xuan Pin paused. “What did the Heavenly Mater say?”

Bai Lingmiao’s face darkened as she lightly shook her head. “The Heavenly Mater asked us to have the ceremony every single day. We received no further response even when I used the Twelve Merit Jade Lotus.”

“Something happened to the Heavenly Mater.”

Xuan Pin’s words made Bai Lingmiao’s heart skip a beat. “What?”

“Usually, a Siming who obtains a Heavenly Dao dispels the Natural Disaster within half a day. However, this Natural Disaster has lasted for over a few months. I fear that something might be wrong with the Siming holding onto this particular Heavenly Dao.”

Xuan Pin continued, “I also fear that the Heavenly Dao of Death might not be the only one being affected. The Heavenly Mater is still in charge of the Heavenly Dao of Mercy.”

“If Death and Mercy are gone, then... what can we do to end the Natural Disaster?” Bai Lingmiao asked earnestly.

Xuan Pin pondered and asked, “Did you say that the Heavenly Mater requested you to conduct the ceremony every day? Could you elaborate on what the ceremony entails?”

Bai Lingmiao did not hesitate to reveal every step of the ceremony since Xuan Pin was Li Sui.

Xuan Pin recorded something on her long robes with her slender fingers. She scrutinized it carefully after writing down the steps of the ceremony. “I think I know why she wanted to have the ceremony. She needs it to escape. The Heavenly Mater is being trapped. If she manages to move a bit, the Heavenly Dao of Death should return. Maybe we could try and help the Heavenly Mater by combining the forces of the Surveillance Bureau and the White Lotus Sect.”

Chapter 832 - Ceremony

The Heavenly Altar of the Liang Kingdom was a three-tiered building with a rounded roof. The top was covered in gold and azure blue tiles. The nine golden dragons within the hall were exceedingly dazzling.

Within the building was a single bronze tree that pierced through the azure blue roof and into the skies. Eight smaller altars surrounded the larger one. There were Daoists wearing bronze masks staring at the sky on the surrounding altars. All of them were waiting for the command of the Chief.

The devotees of the White Lotus Sect were outside the building, completely surrounding the altar. Clad in white robes, they stared at the building with reverence. Most of them were so excited that their hands were trembling.

A gentle wind blew past, causing the white ribbons on their foreheads to flutter in the wind. It looked like a sea of white just outside the altar.

All of them were looking at Bai Lingmiao, who was now in the Heavenly Altar. She was getting nervous with so many eyes on her.

She forced herself to calm down and focused on what she needed to do. Their mission was tied to the fate of everyone in the world, as death had completely vanished. They couldn't be reckless.

"Don't worry. I managed to invite a powerful individual this time. We can succeed."

Bai Lingmiao nodded after Xuan Pin assured her that everything would be alright. She calmed down a little.

The Surveillance Bureau naturally prepared everything for such a ceremony. You just need to focus on yourself.

Bai Lingmiao kept reassuring herself again and again.

Everyone was here, and nothing had happened yet. Time slowly passed as everyone painstakingly waited.

Just as the sun was in the middle of the sky, a bell tolled from the distance. Xuan Pin revealed three sets of arms and started making seals with all of them.

The devotees of the White Lotus Sect chanted deeply. The ceremony was starting in earnest now.

“Start the ceremony!” Huangfu Tiangang, who was now blind, pointed his sword at the sky. The eight Daoists at the smaller altars waved their cherry-wood swords and scattered red talismans into the air.

Purple flames lit up each of the altars, instantly engulfing Shangjing in a specific energy. The people of Shangjing all started chanting involuntarily.

Xuan Pin waved his arms and sent illusions throughout each corner of the Liang Kingdom. She instructed everyone to start chanting.

Everyone who could speak began to chant, no matter what county they were from.

With the allure of being rewarded with food, everyone chanted earnestly. Soon, everyone in the Liang Kingdom was chanting. The entire Liang Kingdom temporarily became part of the White Lotus Sect. It was the largest ceremony ever conducted.

Bai Lingmiao, who was in the array's center, felt something unusual happening. She appeared closer to the invisible thing she had always faintly felt.

As the Twelve Merit Jade Lotus was placed on the bronze tree, it emitted a bright white light that illuminated everything around it.

Bai Lingmiao held her breath and sat underneath the bronze tree. She closed her eyes and started chanting, “Heavenly Mater, the people of this world need you. We are here to help if you are encountering any dangers!”

Xuan Pin began chanting, joining the chants of the White Lotus Sect and smoothly slithering in like an eel.

“天門開，地門開，人門開，鬼門開，陰陽門，生死門，萬物門，萬物歸一門”

Bai Lingmiao didn't know what happened next since she was focused entirely on the white light. She tried her hardest to get in contact with the Heavenly Mater.

In the sea of chants, Bai Lingmiao was already infinitely close to the Heavenly Mater, but there was a barrier barring her from reaching her.

In the past, she would've met the Heavenly Mater already, but something was currently blocking her. Time passed, and the situation did not change. In fact, it became worse—she couldn't sense where the Heavenly Mater was.

Bai Lingmiao refused to give up in that field of chaos. She worked harder to get close to the Heavenly Mater, and her efforts paid off! She faintly sensed the Heavenly Mater.

She kept calling out for the Heavenly Mater, but it seemed as though the latter was dead. A veil separated them, and the Heavenly Mater didn't move one bit.

“天門開，地門開，人門開，鬼門開，陰陽門，生死門，萬物門，萬物歸一門” Xuan Pin's chanting could be heard, bringing clarity to Bai Lingmiao's thoughts and making her quicken her pace.

Not only that, Bai Lingmiao began seeing threads on her body that were connected to the Heavenly Mater.

Bai Lingmiao raised all four of her arms and pulled on the threads to approach the Heavenly Mater.

She slowly got closer and saw that the Heavenly Mater was covered in large blobs of darkness. They were the reason the Heavenly Mater could not move!

Bai Lingmiao gingerly touched a dark blob and felt an intense desire for death surging into her. It washed away everything within her except for the notion of suicide.

Bai Lingmiao opened her eyes listlessly. She saw that she was

not in the Heavenly Altar anymore. The bronze tree had disappeared too.

The conjoined lotus, still glowing white, was causing her to float. It didn't allow her to fall.

Everything was reversed now, with the skies below her and the earth above her. A massive jade door appeared in front of her like a mountain.

However, Bai Lingmiao thought nothing was important anymore. She grabbed her hairpin and tried to stab her own neck. The sharp pin had almost sunk into her white neck when a beast claw covered in white fur grabbed her hands.

"Li Sui!" The Second Deity bared her fangs and shouted at Xuan Pin, who was blocking off the other evil entities.

"We have an issue here! Where's your helper?! I thought you said you found some powerful allies!"

Evil entities were surrounding the Baiyu Capital from all angles. It was chaos—the evil entities wanted the Twelve Merit Jade Lotus and tried to approach it incessantly.

Just then, several rifts shot upwards from below. The rifts tore the evil entities apart.

Li Huowang flew upwards and stabbed one of his swords into the gate to anchor himself in place.

Xuan Pin's ally was naturally Li Huowang.

"What's going on?! Why are you guys so close to the Baiyu Capital for no reason? Don't you know that it's dangerous here?" Li Huowang shouted at them as he sensed the gazes coming from the other side of the Ox Tail Gate.

Xuan Pin waved her arms and disintegrated the evil entities in front of her before explaining, "This place is closer to the Baiyu Capital!"

"Li Huowang, we need your help!" the Second Deity yelled, her voice filled with urgency. She growled as she tightly gripped Bai

Lingmiao's jaws, preventing her from biting her own tongue.

Chapter 833 - Return To The Throne

“Li Huowang, come and help us quickly!”

Li Huowang whipped his bronze coin sword to wrap Bai Lingmiao in red threads before pulling her toward him.

He looked at her and made her hairpin and teeth turn soft. Now, she couldn't harm herself.

“Come! Let me bring you back!” Li Huowang removed his spine sword from the Ox Tail Gate to bring Bai Lingmiao back down to earth.

It was too chaotic here. They needed to leave so that they could talk safely.

Bai Lingmiao suddenly gripped his arms tightly. “Wait... wait, don't go! She's right there! We are just a little bit away!”

She then vomited out black gas from her mouth.

“Be careful! That's the Heavenly Dao of Death! Don't touch it!”

Li Huowang quickly dodged it and noticed Bai Lingmiao's condition deteriorating. He prepared himself to move away from the Baiyu Capital.

Bai Lingmiao pushed him away and slowly turned under the shining sunlight. “Just... just a little bit left! I saw her! She's in a lot of distress!”

“Wait, we might have a chance!” The Second Deity's beast-like eyes were also stained with some suicidal compulsions. She had sensed part of Bai Lingmiao's thoughts.

“What chance? This place is too dangerous. It would be the same if you came here again!”

Li Huowang was worried about her life and tried pulling her

into his embrace. However, the Second Deity pushed him away with her claws.

Li Huowang wanted to try again, but Xuan Pin blocked him.

“Father, you are here to help. You don’t even know what she’s trying to achieve. It’s best if you don’t try to decide for her. She has her thoughts and worries, so it’s best not to place yourself before her.”

Li Sui’s unexpected remark took Li Huowang aback.

Still, he slowly nodded when he saw Bai Lingmiao striving to do something on her own. She was working hard to achieve her own goals. “Fine! I will help!”

Li Huowang glared at the evil entities surrounding them and helped Xuan Pin to block them.

In the field of chaos, Bai Lingmiao followed the thread and immersed herself in the black mist to get closer to the Heavenly Mater.

Death continued to take over her senses, but she could slightly move since someone else was sharing the burden with her. The Second Deity was here to help her.

It was a long and painful process.

Bai Lingmiao almost gave up a few times, but every time she remembered the people shouting in the burning fire and the half-decayed civilians, she pressed on.

She finally had the chance to end the Natural Disaster! She wouldn’t let herself be the reason for failure, especially when the opportunity to end it was right in front of her. The civilians were enduring a living hell!

Bai Lingmiao bit through her lips as she smashed the softened hairpin into her heart. It broke apart in a pile of mush as she pulled on the thread.

She got closer and closer until she finally saw the Heavenly Mater.

The threads on her were undeniably connected to the Heavenly Mater and attached to her wrist and ankle. Bai Lingmiao couldn't determine if she was the one controlling the Heavenly Mater or if it was the other way around.

The suicidal compulsions in her heart were slowly replaced with mercy, causing tears to stain her white eye covers as they slowly slid down her cheeks.

“Heavenly Mater, please help them! They are suffering so much! It's too terrible! Please let them rest in peace!”

Heavenly Mater heard her words. Bai Lingmiao raised her arms to wipe her tears, and Heavenly Mater moved too.

The spinning white lotus above Bai Lingmiao's head suddenly stopped, making her plummet downwards.

Li Huowang and Xuan Pin quickly swooped down and caught the falling Bai Lingmiao.

Sensing the gazes around her, the weakened Bai Lingmiao smiled. “The Heavenly Mater... has returned to her throne.”

Li Huowang's happiness was evident. “Does that mean that... Death is back?”

As he was thinking about falling down faster to see if it was true, an uncertain voice came from the Baiyu Capital.

“... Li... Wang...”

Li Huowang raised his head in alarm and stared at Baiyu Capital. “Who's calling me?!”

“I believe... Everything you say... I... believe... them.”

Li Huowang didn't manage to catch what the voice was talking about—it was too late. The stars and clouds were slowly concealing the Baiyu Capital. No more voices came.

They fell rapidly, and Li Huowang soon saw the Heavenly Altar below him. He also saw the group of White Lotus Sect devotees.

Li Huowang stomped on his own feet rapidly to slow down his descent before landing firmly on the ground.

The White Lotus Sect somehow got the news faster than Li Huowang. He had just stabilized himself when the devotees around him kneeled on the ground and cried.

“The Heavenly Mater had returned to the throne! The Void Home is real!”

“May she bless us all!”

“The White Lotus saves us all from the muddy chaos! The Heavenly Mater has returned!”

Bai Lingmiao looked at everyone and stumbled out of the palace. She disregarded her frail body as she stumbled forward.

She went straight to the alley where they placed the people who could not die.

This time, the alleyway was silent. The once audible groans and moans had ceased, leaving only the faint buzz of flies.

Bai Lingmiao pushed away the hands that were holding her up and walked into the alley. She saw the dead people and cried, but this time, out of happiness.

Death had returned. She was ecstatic.

It wasn't just the people here. Those who had turned into ashes could die now. Those who had their flesh separated from their body could finally rest in peace.

More importantly, she had set out and completed what she intended to do. She did it, and she felt good.

More importantly, she accomplished what she had set out to do. She stayed committed and saw it through, leaving her with a profound sense of satisfaction.

Xuan Pin hugged Bai Lingmiao, her large red robes surrounding them both.

“Mother, you are amazing. You ended the Natural Disaster and saved so many people.”

Bai Lingmiao turned around and cried in Xuan Pin's embrace, finally releasing all the pent-up stress in her heart. She was still

young and would only turn eighteen this year.

Xuan Pin turned around and looked at her father before pointing at Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang shook his head and took out the spine sword. He swung open a rift and returned to the Qi Kingdom.

“Sui Sui, take care of your mother for me.”

Chapter 834 - Help

Dressed in a silk brocade and a hat, Puppy squatted down underneath a tree, slurping braised meat noodles from a bowl.

The braised meat noodle had chili in it. He was sweating as he ate.

Zhao Wu took a bite of a white bun and patted Puppy with his shoulder. “Hey, where do you think Senior Li is transporting that food to? Is he selling it or something? Did he say that he would give the food back?”

Zhao Wu was in charge of the village's finances. He felt uneasy when he saw the numbers in his ledgers slowly disappearing.

“I don’t know. He’s a god now. He’s flying everywhere,” Puppy said, huffing indignantly.

Puppy saw his food getting transported out from his house and yet saw no monetary returns. He felt his heart ache when he saw Li Huowang’s wasteful actions.

“What will happen to us if there’s a famine? What if we don’t have any food?” Zhao Wu estimated that their food would be emptied out within a few days.

Puppy finished his noodles and licked the bottom of the bowl clean. “I did ask him about it. Guess what he said.”

“What did he say?” Yang Xiaohai joined their conversation, holding onto his own bowl of noodles.

“He said there’s no way we would have that many famines here. Didn’t the big guy send us money? We can buy food with it. At worst, we could ask the villagers to each hold a bowl and walk to Shangjing to request food. There’s no way the Emperor would ignore us that way.”

Zhao Wu didn’t believe it. “Are you sure that was what Senior

Li had said? I don't think that's how he usually talks. Are you sure that you didn't exaggerate it?"

"Well, he did say it like that. I just added some details here and there."

"You damn blabbermouth. You always exaggerate the details."

Puppy was hurt by Zhao Wu's words and retorted, "Zhao Wu, I've heard you still haven't given up on Xiaoman. You even requested the peddler to send her letters. How many words are you even capable of writing in those letters?"

It was Zhao Wu's turn to panic as he tried to beat Puppy with his crutches. "Stop trying to butt into other people's business! I can now read and recognize many words. The teacher even said I could go take a test to become an official!"

Just as they were quarreling, Yang Xiaohai saw someone approaching the village and ran up to them. "Senior Bai! You are back!"

Upon seeing Bai Lingmiao, Puppy and Zhao Wu stopped fighting and went up to greet her too.

"Senior Bai, did Xiaoman not return with you?" Zhao Wu raised his head and stared at the White Lotus Sect's procession.

"Move away! I was the one who sent someone to call her back!" Puppy pushed Zhao Wu away to complain to Bai Lingmiao.

"Senior Bai, Senior Li has gone crazy again. Please take care of him. He has almost emptied our coffers!" Puppy then exaggerated the details as he described what Li Huowang was doing.

"Don't worry. He won't do that with me here."

"Yes! Please scare him a bit when you find him. Just say you won't live with him anymore if he keeps this up! We might be rich, but we cannot be so wasteful. Even a mountain of silver and gold wouldn't be enough for us if we lived like this!"

Bai Lingmiao shook her head lightly and tilted her body slightly. Her procession split apart, revealing multiple carriages

carrying heavy loads of food behind her. The carriages were so heavy that they left deep prints on the path.

Soon, the bags of food were sent into the hidden room. The empty room was slowly getting filled back up again.

“Senior Bai, where did you get this food from?” Puppy was astonished by the sight.

He wanted to ask them to place the food outside since Li Huowang was bound to come back and take it away. Moving them in and out would just be a waste of time and energy.

However, Puppy decided not to say anything since it would help slow down their wasteful expenditure. “Senior Bai, where did you get all this food from?”

“The devotees of the White Lotus Sect donated it to us. Our followers come from all walks of life, not just the impoverished. Also, don’t tell him I brought this.”

Puppy thought that both of them were crazy for being so wasteful. “Do you not want to tell him to stop?”

“Since this is something he intends to do, I will support him. He is my man, and I will help him achieve his goals.”

Puppy scratched his white and yellow face as he pondered. He felt that they had turned slightly bizarre after the New Year. With some caution, he asked, “Are you sure you guys are fine?”

Bai Lingmiao shook her head and sat back on her palanquin. The devotees then took her out of the village.

“Are you heading back now? It’s not every day you come here. How about having a meal with us first? Xiaohai, go and slaughter a pig!”

“Maybe next time. The Heavenly Mater finally returned to the throne. There’s still a lot of work to do in the White Lotus Sect. I will send someone to replenish the granary from time to time. Please coordinate with them.”

“What would Li Huowang say, though? Wouldn’t he find it

weird that the granary is constantly full and the food never runs out? I wouldn't be able to explain it without revealing that you're sending food."

Bai Lingmiao didn't slow down on her way out of the village. "Don't worry, I know him well. As long as there's enough food, he won't pay attention to the minor details."

"Also, Senior Zhao Wu, Xiaoman told me you shouldn't send those letters anymore. She doesn't know how to read."

The procession of the White Lotus Sect left the village as Puppy and Yang Xiaohai made fun of Zhao Wu.

Li Huowang bent down as he walked into an underground room. He saw Miao Guihua and a monk diligently watering the ground to keep the room moist.

The monks and the civilians were carefully plucking the mushrooms before placing them into a grass basket.

Their faces had clearly improved. Despite having just one hot meal and one preserved meal per day, they could at least eat actual food now.

The underground room was massive, with baskets full of soil mounted on the walls. The soil was rich black soil used for agriculture, allowing the mushrooms to grow rapidly.

He quickly looked around and found the person he needed to see. He walked towards the depths of the underground room and saw Chan Du diligently gathering mushrooms.

"The abbot of the Righteous Monastery is now picking mushrooms. Don't you need to help people give birth to sons?"

Chan Du straightened his back. "Amitabha. Benefactor Li, everyone is starving to death here. Who would want to give birth to a child?"

"Let's go up to talk." Li Huowang raised his chin and gestured upwards before leaving the place.

In an abandoned ruin, Li Huowang asked, “Are your people keeping a close eye on the Mo family? Have they done anything?”

Chan Du shook his head. “They might be an evil sect, but they are smart. They know what they shouldn’t do. The Mo family is good at machinery and construction. With their help, the You Capital is gradually returning to its former state.”

Chapter 835 - Who Was It?

Li Huowang calmed down a little after hearing what Chan Du had told him.

Li Huowang would not touch them as long as they didn't interfere with him, no matter how evil they were.

“Good. What about the issue with the food? We should be much better off now with the mushrooms and goat milk, right?”

Li Huowang felt disappointed when Chan Du shook his head. “Benefactor Li, don't forget that every surviving human in the Qi Kingdom is rushing here thanks to the food. We still don't have enough food to feed everyone. More importantly, fewer people are dying. It's difficult for the pigs to grow on just feces.”

Li Huowang nodded. “We have no choice but to endure. Didn't you say the black soil could grow crops three times a year? As long as we endure until the first harvest, we should be able to tide over the biggest issue of the Qi Kingdom. I will continue sending food periodically until the Qi Kingdom can stand on its own. Also, I've had time to think about what to do with the Dragon Vein of the Qi Kingdom.”

Chan Du perked up his ears when he heard what Li Huowang was talking about. “Benefactor Li, do you have a way?”

“I don't, and I will never do. I will deal with the famine, but I won't deal with the Dragon Vein.”

Chan Du's eyes went wide with shock. He thought he had misheard.

Li Huowang ignored him and continued, “I am from the Liang Kingdom. I have to think about my people first. The Qi Kingdom

must be rescued by someone from the Qi Kingdom. If you all want to survive, you need to unite and work out a solution instead of forcing the responsibility on an outsider like me. Besides, your predicament has nothing to do with me. I'm helping you because I can't bear to see everyone die. That's all."

Chan Du looked at Li Huowang with shock, as if he were a stranger. "You... Benefactor Li, do you wish to see everyone die?"

"Don't threaten me with those words. This has nothing to do with me. Why am I the one who has to manage the Qi Kingdom? I don't owe you anything."

He continued, "We have to look at this realistically. I want to help you and save their lives, but there are things more important than you. If you don't want to accept this, find a way to deal with it yourself. Don't place all of your hopes on someone else."

"Benefactor Li, think about it! If you save the Qi Kingdom, the entire place will be yours! You could have the entire Qi Kingdom for yourself!"

"Let me repeat myself. I'm just a Daoist. Go try to tempt others with those words."

Chan Du stood motionless, stunned by what he had just heard. Still, he had no choice but to eventually accept it. He bowed and left in a hurry, as if he were going to discuss the situation with someone else.

Li Huowang looked at Chan Du disappearing in the distance and said nothing.

He wanted to help, and saving others was naturally good, but he didn't want to be the one leading them. He had to push them a little to maximize their chances of success. Li Huowang could save his own time and effort if they did come up with a method.

He stomped the ground hard and left the Righteous Monastery. He followed the broken road to walk out of the city, wanting to see how the crops were doing.

He saw several new houses had been constructed on both sides of the road in the You Capital.

Black lines on the ground had been drawn using a carpenter's ink marker. The black lines sectioned up the entire You Capital.

The laborers hired by the palace were busy clearing up the rubble within those lines. They threw out everything except for the gold, silver, and bronze. There was a small stall nearby where officials accepted those precious metals. A catty of gold earned the laborers a catty of rice, and ten catty of silver earned them a catty of millet.

Li Huowang noticed that the Qi Kingdom's palace was attempting to revive the monetary system.

Li Huowang looked at several other laborers fixing the potholes on the road.

Everything was being done systematically. He had to admit that leaving it to the professionals was a good idea.

The people were still thin, but they weren't in despair anymore. Li Huowang realized that his efforts were paying off.

He followed the road and walked out of the city. He saw the black soil was being covered by lush greenery.

Rows of green crops were being grown on the fertile black soil. The farmers painstakingly watered and provided nutrients for the plants, caring for the crops like their children.

The fields were large and there wasn't an end to them. Li Huowang was sure there would be a magnificent sight when the crops were ready to be harvested.

He saw an old farmer kowtowing to him. He pulled the farmer up and asked, "Is the soil alright?"

"Bodhisattva! Please relax. We would not dare to delay planting the seeds you gave us! Those seeds will provide the food that will save us!"

Right after, the farmer expressed his frustration. "Still, we have

no idea who the incorrigible thief is who has been eating the leaves of our sweet potatoes! They pluck some every time we don't watch over them. We've sent men to find them but have yet to do so!"

Li Huowang thought that was normal. This was a large piece of agricultural land and there was a famine. It was inevitable that someone would try to steal some food for themselves. He didn't mind as long as they didn't destroy the fields.

The old farmer suddenly shouted, "Everyone! Come here! The merciful Bodhisattva is here to look at us mud legs!"

Upon hearing him, the farmers put down the work in their hands and surrounded Li Huowang excitedly. Li Huowang was getting annoyed by them.

As he was getting ready to walk away, an old man blocked him. The old man seemingly had no control over his body, standing in place without knowing what he wanted to say.

Li Huowang was still focused on the old man when several hands covered in calluses reached behind Li Huowang's back and stole his two spine swords, bronze coin sword, and purple-tassel sword. They took them all.

"Stab him!"

The farmers surrounding Li Huowang suddenly pulled out sharp objects from within their clothes and stabbed Li Huowang.

However, Li Huowang had projected his image and dodged it. His real body was three meters away.

The next instant, a hidden dagger stabbed deep into Li Huowang's body and tore his organs up from inside.

Li Huowang grabbed the dagger forcefully as killing intent burst forth from him. He opened his mouth and bit into the invisible figure that was stabbing him.

"Who dares to try and kill me?!"

Chapter 836 - Ambush

Swish! A black dagger stabbed towards Li Huowang's chest.

Li Huowang turned around and glared at the dagger. It floated just an inch away from his forehead before he twisted both the dagger and the attacker into a rope.

Although he defeated every enemy relatively quickly, many of them remained. It was not a pretty sight for him—all the people surrounding him were somewhat strong.

They also took away his weapons. It was clear that they had planned it beforehand.

One of the farmers caught sight of the twisted flesh and promptly let out a sharp whistle. Seemingly on cue, another elderly man swiftly swept his legs, causing a cloud of black soil to scatter into the air. Subsequently, another person forcefully pushed the air with their palm, creating a miniature sandstorm.

As Li Huowang was busy killing the attackers, he lost his target. The sand somehow came alive and tried to bury itself into Li Huowang's eyes.

The moment he got distracted, a hook shot out from the sand and latched onto his left leg. It tore off his legs just like that.

“Who the fuck are you guys?!” Li Huowang opened his eyes and let the sand batter his eyes all it wanted.

He swiftly turned around with his single remaining leg toward the direction the hook had come from.

A skinny man was grinning while looking at the leg on the hook. Just then, Li Huowang pounced out from the sandstorm and slapped the top of the skinny man's head. His head rolled on the ground like a ball.

Li Huowang ignored the arrows being shot into his torso as he

picked up his leg. He reattached it and stomped onto the ground before running towards the spot the arrows had come from.

“Who are you guys?” Li Huowang grabbed the archer by the ears and tore him in two, just like a piece of paper.

Li Huowang’s eyes were bloodshot from the assault of the sandstorm. His eyes were hurting a lot. It felt even worse than someone poking them out with red-hot iron.

The more his eyes hurt, the angrier he became. He finally snapped when someone tossed a flying guillotine and enveloped his head with it.

“Fire!” Li Huowang shouted as burning flames burned off his skin.

Several metal spikes melted before they could even touch him.

The metal spikes melted even though they were far away. The flying guillotine had long since been burned to nothingness.

The sandstorm grew stronger in an attempt to extinguish his flames, but it couldn’t extinguish them.

Li Huowang glared at the sandstorm and turned it into reeds. With fuel near him, Li Huowang’s flames surged forward like a fiery tsunami.

“Burn! Burn all of them!”

As the sandstorm slowly turned into reeds, various scenes unfolded in Li Huowang’s eyes.

The fire burned fiercely as several people staggered out of the burning reeds. As they scattered, they stepped on the cracking black soil, which was turning into porcelain from the flames.

Half of the burning people were the ones who had ambushed Li Huowang, while the other half were the Bai family.

A lady fell before Li Huowang and stared in a single direction. “My daughter...”

“AAAAAAH!” As the burning flames continued their advances, several burnt corpses fell to the ground. All of them had died.

Li Huowang was still burning up when he panted out of exhaustion. He suddenly remembered something and started searching the corpses.

His anger boiled over after he went through all the corpses. All four of his swords were gone! Their goal had been to take away his spine sword, preventing him from returning to the Liang Kingdom.

Li Huowang looked around and found no other traces. Everything around him had been burned to ashes, and he couldn't discern anything from the ground.

He didn't know why they wanted his weapons, but he could not return to the Liang Kingdom without Zhuge Yuan's spine sword. He would be trapped here forever!

Just then, someone hastily approached him. It was Chan Du, the abbot of the Qi Kingdom's Righteous Monastery, along with other people from the Qi Kingdom.

As they looked at the scorched ground surrounding Li Huowang and the flames still engulfing him, they grasped the situation. The atmosphere was filled with an eerie silence, broken only by the crackling of Li Huowang's burning skin.

Li Huowang glared at Chan Du. The latter clasped his hands together and nervously explained, "Benefactor Li, we did not do this! You are our savior! We would never return your kindness with animosity!"

"Ha! Who says so? They even took the spine sword that I need to return to the Liang Kingdom! You knew I wouldn't help you with the Dragon Vein, so you devised this plan to trap me here! Or did you want to go to the Liang Kingdom to get food for yourself?"

"Daoist, you are going too far!" The leader of the Mo family stood up. "The Mo family might do other things, but since we have set rules, we would never break them. Your words are an insult to us!"

"Scram!" Li Huowang shouted, his fire burning brighter. The

leader of the Mo family scampered back into the group of people.

“Monk!” Li Huowang approached Chan Du. The fire coming from Li Huowang was causing Chan Du’s robes to roll up.

“You said that the Qi Kingdom is mine, didn’t you? Everything here belongs to me, correct?”

“Yes! This is the Qi Kingdom of Benefactor Li! You have shown great grace and compassion to the Qi Kingdom, so this is naturally yours!”

“Fine!” Li Huowang shouted, causing everyone to step back in fear.

“I don’t care how you do it, but you must find my sword! Find it! Otherwise, I will burn all the food I brought here!”

Li Huowang extinguished his flames and ran towards the Righteous Monastery.

“Benefactor Li, you can’t do that! A lot of people would starve to death!”

Li Huowang turned around and glared at him. “What? I thought you said that the Qi Kingdom was mine. Is this place really mine if I can’t even do what I want with the food? Were you just trying to trick me into staying here with your words, all to keep me here?”

Li Huowang ignored them and left. “Also, you guys can’t use the spine sword anyway! Don’t forget how you came here last time! You’re not Twisted Ones, so you can’t travel to the Liang Kingdom with a spine sword!”

Li Huowang walked past the guards and reached the granary that the Righteous Monastery had been guarding. He sat on the food and waited.

He could light up his body and turn the food into ash at any moment. However, even Li Huowang wasn’t sure if they were the perpetrators.

Although he didn't believe Chan Du would do something like

this, he had gone through a lot in this world. As a result, he always considered the worst-case scenario.

The entire incident was too bizarre. He had told Chan Du that he wouldn't involve himself with the Dragon Vein just half a division before the ambush happened. It had been too fast.

And the "farmers" had cooperated a little too well. They were also strong. It was too illogical for Chan Du to gather these kinds of men within half a division and achieve such a result.

Chapter 837 - Search

The problem right now was that no one else in the Qi Kingdom was capable of it. Other than the area around the You Capital, which was doing relatively well, the other places were still stricken with famine.

Since it was impossible for another group of people to live in a community outside of the You Capital, Chan Du and the others were naturally the only suspects.

Even though the sun did not move, Li Huowang slowly kept track of the time.

The fourth division had just passed when he heard rapid footsteps outside of the granary. It was Chan Du, but he had returned empty-handed.

Chan Du was unflustered when he greeted Li Huowang. “Benefactor Li, the Gan family has managed to divine where they are and found out where your sword is! Please follow us. You’ll get to see the people who tried to assassinate you with your own eyes!”

Li Huowang jumped down from the sacks of grain. “Abbot, remember that monks can’t lie. I hope you’re not pushing me into another trap.”

Chan Du frowned but remained silent as he led Li Huowang outside.

“If you located the Gan family, why didn’t you tell me before?”

Chan Du remained silent and continued to lead the way.

Li Huowang and Chan Du arrived outside the city and saw the soldiers, the Mo family, members of the Minglun Hall, a Daoist from the Luo sect, and two members of the Ao Jing Sect. Each individual was armed with their respective weapons.

Li Huowang’s body lit up again. “What are you thinking of

doing?”

“Daoist, we are naturally here to help you recover your weapon.”

Li Huowang sighed in relief because the worst-case scenario did not happen.

“Let’s go. Where are they right now?” Li Huowang ran first. He was unaware of the situation but determined to retrieve his swords quickly.

“There’s a village to the southwest. They should be there.”

Li Huowang ran faster, but a question popped into his mind. *Who else in the Qi Kingdom could do this if it wasn’t Chan Du and the others?*

Li Huowang was unable to figure it out.

The Qi Kingdom had fallen, and everyone was busy figuring out how to obtain more food for themselves. Who would run all the way here to ambush me? Did they go crazy from starvation?

Li Huowang only snapped out of his thoughts when he noticed he had arrived. The village lay in ruins and was utterly desolate.

Everyone scattered and surrounded the village.

Li Huowang checked his Shimmer Mirror and saw that there was indeed someone inside the village. They came to the right place.

It was clear that the people inside the village weren’t villagers. The regular villagers were all heading towards the You Capital to find food. They wouldn’t stay here and starve.

With a single order from Li Huowang, everyone stormed into the village, causing the once peaceful atmosphere to be consumed by a frenzy of bloodlust.

Li Huowang had already burned most of the assassins to death during their ambush, so there weren’t many of them remaining. The six people inside the village were overwhelmed, and the battle ended quickly.

“Daoist, your sword!” Chen Yurong gave the spine sword to Li Huowang with both hands.

Li Huowang grabbed the sword but frowned. “This is not Zhuge Yuan’s spine sword! This is my own spine! I need the other one!”

They all turned to the two living assassins.

“Where’s the other sword?” Li Huowang’s lips trembled as he fished out his torture tools.

The two assassins looked at each other and closed their eyes simultaneously.

Sensing that something was wrong, Chan Du stuffed his prayer beads into their flesh, but it was too late. Their bodies exploded.

“Shit!” Li Huowang roared. They were dead, and the trail ended with them.

Li Huowang looked at Chan Du again. “Find them! The Gan family excels at divination, right? Ask them to find out where the other spine sword is! It’s the key.”

However, Chan Du’s answer plunged him into cold water. “Benefactor Li, the Twisted One’s spine sword cannot be divined.”

Li Huowang frowned and paced around, his gaze eventually falling on the corpses. “Do we have anyone from the Fangxian Sect?”

“Benefactor, what’s the Fangxian Sect?”

“Damn it. It’s do or die now!” Li Huowang grabbed one of the dead assassin’s heads and carefully shaved off their hair to reveal their scalp.

Li Huowang closed his eyes and took a deep breath before muttering, “I can see it! I can see it!”

He repeated it before he opened his eyes and cracked open the scalp. He dipped his fingers into the assassin’s brain, searching for the information he needed as if it were a book.

Li Huowang’s intense rummaging made the brain swiftly break down and turn into soup. Unfortunately, no words or images

emerged in Li Huowang's mind even though the brain had been entirely pulverized.

"Fuck!" Li Huowang threw the skull onto the ground and stomped on it. His cultivation could do nothing right now!

Li Huowang was about to fly off the handle when he found something bizarre with the exploded corpse.

"Wait a minute." He calmed down and inspected the corpses as he thrust his fingers into the stomach of the corpse.

"Benefactor Li, did you find something?" Chan Du asked.

Li Huowang said nothing as he frowned. He checked the other corpses by opening their stomach and rummaging it around.

He did this for all six corpses and became very moody.

One of the Minglun Hall members, Liang Yuxuan, couldn't hold back any longer when he saw Li Huowang inspecting the sixth corpse. "Daoist, did you find something?"

Li Huowang tore off an organ from the corpse. "Do you know what this is? It's a stomach."

He cut open the stomach. The putrid stench made Liang Yuxuan step back as he held onto his nose.

"Look at the contents of the stomach. He was eating really well before he died. Look, this is an egg." Li Huowang picked off some yellowish goo from the stomach.

He then took a whiff at the stomach. "And it seems that they had drank some wine before they died."

After explaining that, Li Huowang noticed that Liang Yuxuan was still confused. "You still don't understand? Something's wrong with what they've eaten!"

Li Huowang pointed at the first corpse. "He ate chives dumplings."

He then pointed at the second corpse. "This person ate scallion tofu."

Whenever he pointed at a corpse, he would name a single dish.

Eventually, he pointed at the last corpse. “This person ate a scallion omelet. Now, isn’t this interesting? I didn’t bring any of the necessary ingredients into the Qi Kingdom. How could they have eaten such dishes?”

Indeed. Food was scarce here. No one here was able to eat omelets or drink wine.

“Unless...”

Liang Yuxuan had just opened his mouth when Li Huowang said, “Unless they were not from the Qi Kingdom!”

Li Huowang visibly deflated in disappointment. He muttered to himself, “Yeah, I should’ve known they were not from the Qi Kingdom...”

Chapter 838 - Secret

Li Huowang was devastated, no longer displaying the energy he had moments ago. “They are not from the Qi Kingdom... They really aren’t from the Qi Kingdom...”

Chan Du realized what had happened when he heard Li Huowang’s muttering. “I see. So that’s what had happened.”

Chan Du pondered a bit before clasping his hands and asking Li Huowang, “Benefactor Li, do you know where they came from? Did you have any conflict with them in the past?”

Li Huowang nodded but said nothing. He sat on the ground for a long time.

He had previously wanted to know who the assailants were, but now he wished he didn’t know.

Chen Yurong couldn’t stand the silence and asked. “Daoist, what should we do next?”

Li Huowang raised his head, his blurry eyes refocusing. “What else can we do? Find a way to get back that sword! I want to go back and ask that bastard personally!”

Li Huowang refused to believe that Gao Zhijian would send people to attack him like this.

It was impossible for him to send assassins after Li Huowang! Gao Zhijian used to be a simple and honest brute who wielded a club as he followed Li Huowang.

There was no way Gao Zhijian sent assassins after consulting Li Huowang only once. He needed to ask Gao Zhijian personally to find out what had happened!

“Daoist, you are right. No matter if they are from the Qi Kingdom or not, we need to find your sword back. This concerns your ability to return to the Liang Kingdom as well as the survival

of the Qi Kingdom.”

Another person interrupted, “But there’s no more survivors. How can we find the sword now?”

“We have a way!” Li Huowang’s voice made everyone shut up. “Even if the Gan family is unable to find the sword, there are other beings who can find it. For example, Shangji Guankou!”

He had once used one of Shangji Guankou’s secrets to find Shai Zi, the Twisted One of Doulao. He was sure he could locate his spine sword if he found Shangji Guankou again.

“Daoist, I have to interrupt you for now. Everything in this world has paused.^[1] There’s no longer any feng shui. It would be difficult to find Shangji Guankou.”

Li Huowang raised his head and stared into the sky. “Who said I will be finding it in the Qi Kingdom? I can just go find the Siming in charge of the Heavenly Dao of Secrets!”

“Si... Siming?! I don’t think that’s possible!”

“Who says so? I can do it since I’m Ji Zai!”

He recalled how he had encountered the Siming before and turned to Chan Du. “Prepare for the Samgharama Ceremony! I need to find your Buddha, and I need a catalyst to do that!”

Chan Du hesitated. “Benefactor Li, the Samgharama Ceremony is not simple. It would consume a lot of resources even during regular times. I’m afraid it might not be prudent to do so now...”

“Are you going back on your words now?” Li Huowang glared at Chan Du.

Chan Du sighed and fiddled with his prayer beads before finally nodding. “Amitabha. This old monk heeds your words. The Qi Kingdom is yours, and your words are the rules.”

The Samgharama Ceremony was soon conducted in the Righteous Monastery. It was still the same as the previous one, with the Great Equal Assembly being conducted in the outer circle and the Samgharama Ceremony being conducted in the inner circle.

Li Huowang slowly closed his eyes amidst the wriggling flesh. He didn't know how long it took, but the voices around him and his senses gradually disappeared.

When Li Huowang opened his eyes again, he saw the Five Dhyani Buddhas in all their glory, hanging above his head like the moon.

Under the moonlight, Li Huowang's physical flesh slowly escaped his control.

Li Huowang tore off his own eyes and shouted at the Buddhas while his body was still intact, "I'm not here to see you! I'm here to see another Siming! The one from before that controls secrets!"

Just then, Li Huowang slowly regained control of his body. He was currently blind, so he couldn't confirm whether the Five Dhyani Buddhas had left.

"Are you here? Are you there? I'm Ji Zai! Do you still remember me? I was the one who ran at the forefront last time! All of you owe me one! I have some trouble in the mortal realm, and asking for some secrets from Shangji Guankou shouldn't be too much, should it?"

Li Huowang had barely finished speaking when he suddenly felt a sensation of something brushing past him. It felt as if strands of hair had grazed his skin.

"You are here. Who are you?"

Li Huowang bent down hastily to pick up his eyes. He plugged them back in before he looked up.

He saw nothing. It was the same as when he was blinded.

However, Li Huowang could clearly feel the strands brushing past his body.

Li Huowang extended his right hand, attempting to grasp the strands of hair, but his hand returned empty.

"What is this?"

Li Huowang was asking that question when the strands brushed

past his head. The questions in his heart were answered.

“Seen yet unseen, thus it’s called Yi. Heard yet not listened, thus it’s called Xi. Grasped yet unattainable, thus it’s called Wei. Individually, the three cannot be questioned, hence they merge into one. It’s without a fixed form, and it’s not obscured below. It is intricately subtle and cannot be named, thus returning to a state of nothingness. This is the form of the formless and the image of the non-existent.”

"Yi Xi Wei? Are you the Three Ancient Ones?" Li Huowang's body abruptly jerked, and he woke up from his dream. The sight that greeted him was a bunch of naked monks around him.

Li Huowang suddenly found that all the questions in his heart had been answered, and his doubts had completely vanished. It was as if he had always known the exact location of Zhuge Yuan’s spine sword!

Li Huowang didn’t care which Siming was in control of secrets, but he knew he needed to take his sword back now!

“Let’s go! I saw it! Everyone, let’s depart now!” Li Huowang ran outside impatiently.

One of the senior monks wiped the sweat off his chin and looked at Chan Du with confusion. “Abbot, I thought the Samgharama Ceremony was used to meet the Buddhas. How did he meet the Three Ancient Ones?”

Chan Du stared at the unmoving Buddha statue and shook his head. “I do not know either.”

No one dared to ignore Li Huowang’s order in the Qi Kingdom. Those with even an ounce of strength followed Li Huowang’s orders and marched out.

Li Huowang held onto the image of his spine sword and moved faster.

They arrived at a place with numerous hills. The culprits were hiding among the complicated terrain.

When they got close to the location, Li Huowang used his cultivation to sink into the ground as if it were water.

The others separated and formed a large encirclement. They slowly closed in to prevent the assailants from escaping.

They approached silently, with everyone holding their breath as they prepared themselves for a battle to the death.

The air was filled with tension as they neared their target. Many of them were already chanting their techniques in preparation.

However, they stopped when they got close. There was nothing in the middle except for a green grassy field.

1. As in there's no day and night, and no changes to the seasons. As such, there's no feng shui either. 🤔

Chapter 839 - Someone Familiar

The sight of the empty grass field stunned everyone. It was utterly desolate.

However, the Daoist had firmly affirmed that there was someone here. Could he have been wrong?

Everyone looked down and waited for an answer from Li Huowang, who was currently underground.

Li Huowang was equally confused. *What's going on? The spine sword should be here!*

Li Huowang had a bad feeling. *What's going on? The Three Ancient Ones aren't part of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. Could the Three Ancient Ones also trick others?*

As he pondered, his surroundings underwent a sudden and rapid transformation. The lush green grass swiftly morphed into trees, and the plains became a forest that continued to stretch outwards.

A group of armed people walked out from the center of the forest. Their leader, a man with a single eye, was holding onto Li Huowang's spine sword!

It wasn't that they weren't hiding here. Li Huowang and the others had arrived a bit early!

Li Huowang thrust both arms upwards and grabbed the single-eyed man's legs. They sprung their encirclement and everything exploded into action.

The tranquil forest turned into an intense battlefield, descending into utter chaos. Li Huowang ignored everything as he pursued his top priority—taking back the spine sword!

The ground turned soft, and Li Huowang dragged the man downwards. The next moment, just as both of them had sunk into the ground, the entire layer of earth exploded.

The man with only one eye leaped up, his veins bulging across his body. He held onto the spine sword and stabbed Li Huowang.

Instead of dodging, Li Huowang recklessly charged ahead.

The spine sword phased through Li Huowang's body, and then he held onto it so firmly that the man could not move it.

Li Huowang glared at the single-eyed man. "Give me back my spine sword!"

"Bullshit! It's mine now!" He kicked Li Huowang's abdomen.

"Split apart!" Li Huowang shouted, and the man's head cracked open like a watermelon.

Even though the man's pale brain slid down onto the ground along a translucent fluid, he refused to let go of the sword.

The two of them continued to pull onto the spine sword. Li Huowang's body was slowly cut up, and his flesh fell onto the ground too. Blood splattered around and turned the grass red.

Li Huowang swung his other spine sword and cut off the fingers from the corpse. Only then did he manage to release himself and Zhuge Yuan's spine sword from the grasp of the man's corpse.

Li Huowang stood there with the spine sword in his chest. He was about to pull it out when the sword sunk into his body.

Li Huowang understood that the spine sword was not disappearing into his body—someone was trying to pull it out from the other side!

He turned around, shocked to find the same one-eyed man standing behind him! The man, now without most of his fingers and head, was standing there motionlessly.

The headless man swung upwards with his fingerless hand and threw the spine sword high up into the air. It flew up high before descending, piercing the man's severed neck. The blade sank so

deeply that only the hilt remained visible at the neck's opening.

Li Huowang was even more furious when he saw Zhuge Yuan's shriveled head on the decapitated man's body.

"You are finished!" Li Huowang pulled at the air and began tearing the man in half. However, the tearing abruptly stopped halfway, and the man's body rapidly regenerated. Even his decapitated head jumped up from the ground and landed on his neck. It had covered the spine sword completely!

The revived man smiled cruelly. He moved his body slightly to reveal a woman. The woman appeared to be around twenty-three years old, with jade-white skin and a beautiful face.

She was wearing a green jacket. While it was a bright color, it seemed dull due to her attractive face. When Li Huowang caught sight of her, he couldn't help but feel a peculiar sense of familiarity.

He was sure this was the first time he had seen her, yet he felt that he knew her. He was very confident that he had worked with her in the past.

He only understood the feeling when the woman spoke.

"Aiyaya~ Boss Hong Zhong, long time no see. Do you still remember me?"

Li Huowang remembered her! It was one of the Liang Kingdom's Sitting Oblivion Dao members, Bei Feng! He had thought she was dead, but here she was, working for the royal palace of the Liang Kingdom!

"Bei Feng!?" Li Huowang spoke and realized his voice had turned into that of a woman! He looked in front of him and saw Bei Feng in his original body!

Li Huowang looked down and saw the green jacket before realizing what had happened. *Bei Feng switched bodies with me!*

He was now in a regular woman's body—he was trapped inside a useless body!

"As long as I kill Hong Zhong, I will become Hong Zhong

instead.” Bei Feng, now in Li Huowang’s body, chuckled.

Bei Feng had just said that when everyone around her turned and charged toward him with their weapons. They intended to kill him while he was in the woman’s body!

At that crucial moment, Li Huowang’s memories of being in the Sitting Oblivion Dao resurfaced. Out of nowhere, the woman began scolding the surrounding people with a furious expression.

“You bunch of fools! I haven’t had the chance to switch bodies yet! Are you stupid? Why are you blindly trusting someone just because of their words? Don’t let Hong Zhong deceive you!”

Their weapons stopped just a single inch away from her body. Everyone looked at Li Huowang before looking at the woman before them. They started to hesitate.

“Hehehe~ Boss Hong Zhong. We haven’t seen each other in a while, but you seem better at trickery now. You must’ve been practicing hard.”

“Hehehe~ Boss Hong Zhong. We haven’t seen each other in a while, but you seem better at trickery now. You must’ve been practicing hard.”

Li Huowang and Bei Feng spoke the same words at the same exact time, and now everyone was confused as to who was who.

“Interesting. This is really interesting...” Li Huowang and Bei Feng spoke and laughed simultaneously.

The winner would now be determined by a game of deceit.

Chapter 840 - Meeting

“Boss Hong Zhong, stop resisting. They sent me here because they knew my ability would work on you. You lose this time,” Bei Feng said triumphantly from Li Huowang’s body.

Li Huowang was pissed when he saw Bei Feng acting flirtatiously in his own body.

He raised his right arm and splayed it towards the single-eyed man. “Give me the sword!”

The single-eyed man hesitated briefly, and then Bei Feng took over his body. She jumped away from Li Huowang and chuckled.

Li Huowang ignored Bei Feng and immediately grabbed a sword before running towards his original body.

“Quick! I’m controlling Li Huowang right now! Kill him! He’s Ji Zai’s Twisted One! We cannot let him live for even a moment longer! He could kill all of us with his cultivation of the ‘Truth’!”

Just then, Li Huowang stabbed the sword into his original body’s abdomen and tore it in half.

Bei Feng was stunned and unsure what Li Huowang was trying to do.

Li Huowang then dug out the eyes from his original body to prevent Bei Feng from switching back into his body. He lowered his head and tried to wear his original body like a jumpsuit.

It wasn’t easy. He wasn’t Li Sui, and there were many things inside his abdomen. It wasn’t easy to slip inside his original body.

He heard footsteps approaching. Li Huowang wasted no time and started eating his own flesh and blood, which contained the powers of a Strayed One.

I am Li Huowang! I am Li Huowang! Li Huowang chanted furiously in his own heart.

While Bei Feng didn't know what Hong Zhong was trying to achieve, she still wanted to stop him.

She piloted the single-eyed man's body, but it was too late. A plume of fire exploded towards the sky and burned everything around Li Huowang.

"Fire!" An explosion reverberated and the fire burned brighter. The forest began to burn down.

Li Huowang slapped the single-eyed man with his fiery palms.

Under the attack, the single-eyed man's body disintegrated like paper, revealing the spine sword within it. Li Huowang grabbed onto the spine sword tightly.

But this wasn't enough to quell his anger. He thrust his hands into his body and tore off his own heart before placing it on the Profound Records.

"Fire heart!"

Li Huowang used the Five Element Intercalation. The moment he did, the entire battlefield shifted in his favor. Bei Feng switched bodies numerous times, but it was futile.

The battlefield finally became quiet after the final tree burned down.

Li Huowang slumped down. The doll enlarged and ate his shadow before reviving him back to life.

"Benefactor Li, we won!" Chan Du excitedly said.

He got back the spine sword. That meant he could continue to send food to the Qi Kingdom, and the people wouldn't starve. Still, Li Huowang felt worried when he looked at the corpses. "Bei Feng escaped."

"What? Escaped?"

"She can swap bodies with anyone she makes eye contact with. None of you could've stopped her if she wanted to run."

"What should we do?" Chan Du turned in a circle before saying, "Benefactor Li, don't worry. The Gan family is still here. We

can locate Bei Feng as long as she's in the Qi Kingdom!"

Li Huowang sighed, his voice low. "No need. Killing her won't amount to anything. What's more important is the people backing her."

Li Huowang didn't want to explain much to Chan Du. "Bring everyone else back. I will go talk to him."

Li Huowang swung the spine sword and returned to the Liang Kingdom.

Once he returned, he ignored the voices of the busy surroundings and instead ran towards Shangjing.

Once he was there, he was informed that the Emperor wasn't there. It was the Spring Equinox, so the Emperor was in the fields to conduct the ceremony of plowing the fields. [\[1\]](#)

It wasn't difficult to find him. Li Huowang ran towards the black soil at the edges of the city and saw the grand scene. The officials, the consorts, the Emperor's wives, and the princes were present.

There were circles upon circles of guards protecting them. Li Huowang barely even got close when they noticed his presence.

They refrained from taking action when they saw that it was Li Huowang. Only the older eunuchs circled Gao Zhijian more tightly to protect him. Gao Zhijian was currently raising the hoe high up to plow the field.

Li Huowang did not approach him. Instead, he stood on the sidelines and looked at the scene.

The massive Gao Zhijian was showing his wives and sons how to plow the field. As a former soldier, he was used to physical labor.

He brought down the glittering golden hoe so fast that afterimages appeared. His consorts and wives grumbled in pain as they worked, unable to keep up with Gao Zhijian's pace.

"Your Majesty! Your Majesty! You only need to do it as a gesture of respect! Don't make your esteemed body tired!" Several

eunuchs chased after Gao Zhijian.

“You think mere physical work like this would tire me out? Are you looking down on me?” Gao Zhijian plowed the fields even faster.

He only stopped after an entire field had been completely plowed.

It wasn't over yet. Gao Zhijian had to whip a plowing cow several times with a multicolored ribbon before the ceremony ended.

Gao Zhijian threw the golden hoe to the eunuchs before approaching Li Huowang.

“Senior Li, look!” Gao Zhijian pointed at the field in front of him.

“This is my land. I never thought that the Emperor would have his own personal land. One mu and a third, no less.”[\[2\]](#)

“What are you doing?” Li Huowang asked lazily.

“I'm conducting the ceremony to plow the field. It's the Spring Equinox. I need to set an example for the people so that they start working on the fields today.”

“There's so few divisions in a day now. I'm surprised you can calculate the time now.”

“Well, we can't stand idly by just because we can't calculate time.”

Gao Zhijian showed no hint of his regalness as he sat on the ground. He felt better outside than cooped up in the palace.

“Sigh, it feels much better to work my body a bit. I felt like I was getting moldy just from staying in the palace all day.”

Gao Zhijian talked for a bit before he turned and looked at Li Huowang with confusion. “Senior Li, why aren't you talking?”

Li Huowang smiled and sat beside Gao Zhijian. He picked up a piece of stone and fidgeted with it in his palm.

“Yeah, what should I talk about?”

1. A ceremony in which the Emperor personally plows the field to show respect to agriculture and the farmer during spring, when the first seeds are planted. 📌

2. A mu is a traditional Chinese unit of area, which is approximately 666.67 square meters. 📌

Chapter 841 - Answer

“You can talk about anything. Just think of it as a casual conversation. Since becoming the Emperor, I haven’t had anyone I can converse casually with.” Gao Zhijian said, expressing his complaints to Li Huowang.

Li Huowang threw the stone and dusted his palms. “Heh, you think I’m here just to talk.”

“No, but you can think of it as just talking to me before we enter the main conversation. After all, I have to watch what I say when I’m in the palace.”

“You are the Emperor. Who’s controlling you?”

“As I am the Emperor, there are rules that I need to follow. How I eat, how I speak, and how I greet someone.”

As he talked, his consorts and wives approached him and complained flirtatiously about how tired they were.

Gao Zhijian shooed them off. He pointed his rough fingers at the women walking away and said, “I don’t like them. All they want is to sleep with me. I feel like puking when I look at them.”

“You are going to make every man in the world mad with that statement.”

“Senior Li, you don’t understand. You would probably understand me if I threw you into their hands for three months.”

“Ahem!” An old eunuch coughed, holding onto his horsetail whisk.

“Gao Zhijian, it’s best if you talk like an Emperor now. Otherwise, the old eunuch will cough his lungs out.”

“Hahaha!” Gao Zhijian laughed as if it was the best joke he had heard. He slapped his knees and raised his head as he laughed.

His laughter faded and he became serious again. With a wave

of his arm, everyone around him took several steps back.

Li Huowang sighed and took out two spine swords from his back before throwing them onto the ground.

“Senior Li, will you still send food to the Qi Kingdom?”

“Yes,” Li Huowang said frankly.

“Wait, listen to me first,” Li Huowang interjected before Gao Zhijian could say anything. “Do you still remember how the Qi Kingdom and the Liang Kingdom lived prosperously even though both of them existed simultaneously?”

“I don’t want the Qi Kingdom or the Liang Kingdom to disappear. Can’t they exist at the same time? They coexisted for a thousand years. Were there any negative effects on the Liang Kingdom? I don’t want much. I simply want things to return to how they were before.”

Gao Zhijian remained silent, and Li Huowang continued, “Who told you that only one of the kingdoms could exist at a single given time?”

“My ancestors of the Dragon Vein.”

“Are you sure what they say is always the truth? Could they not lie? I had a friend who was a gentleman and a storyteller. He wanted to tell the Liang Kingdom that the Qi Kingdom existed. If what you’re saying is true, that they cannot exist simultaneously and one of them must fall, then there must be something wrong with him! He wouldn’t be a storyteller!”

Gao Zhijian looked at the fields and then at the eunuchs cleaning up after him. He slowly opened his mouth. “Senior Li, you said that the Dragon Vein can lie to me. But would your friend not lie to you? Is everything that he told you the truth?”

“You!” Li Huowang clenched his fists, causing the eunuchs to prepare for action. The tension in the air was palpable, but ultimately, Li Huowang released his grip.

“He’s dead. My friend is dead. He could trick me, and I can’t

verify his claims, but,” Li Huowang’s tone became serious, “I know he wouldn’t trick me about this. He would never do something that would result in the death of an entire timeline! He wouldn’t have tricked me for the sake of the world, nor would he have sacrificed his life for me! So!”

Li Huowang was panting at this point. “Could you just give me some time? Think of it as me begging you. You’ve starved before. Do you know how many people are starving in the Qi Kingdom? Do you know that even a child at just six years old had to eat her mother’s flesh to survive? Do you know how tragic that was? She didn’t even know that her mother had died. I had to use my techniques of the Sitting Oblivion Dao to trick her into thinking that her mother was alive!”

Gao Zhijian was silent for a very long time. “Senior Li, if something were to threaten the Liang Kingdom, as a good Emperor, I must do my best to stop it.”

“I know, I know, but there’s still time for things to change. The Qi Kingdom might not threaten the Liang Kingdom. Don’t worry about the food I’ve sent there. Once the Qi Kingdom is self-sufficient, I will slowly return the food, catty by catty. I won’t let the Liang Kingdom lose a single penny! In fact, the Qi Kingdom might even help the Liang Kingdom in the future! We could establish trade between the two kingdoms!”

Gao Zhijian stood up and patted the dirt on his butt. “Senior Li, your friend is not a god. What he thought might not be true.”

“Then is the Dragon Vein always right? They were humans when they were alive! They weren’t gods either!”

Gao Zhijian shook his head and left.

Everyone slowly left the place, leaving Li Huowang alone in the unsown field.

A familiar voice came from behind Li Huowang. “Don’t worry, I’m still here.”

He knew who the owner of the voice was without even needing to turn back. "I doubt that the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau could stop the Emperor. No need to butt in. This is a fight between adults."

Li Huowang didn't want Li Sui to get involved. If the Liang Kingdom's Surveillance Bureau and the Liang Kingdom's palace were to fight, no one would gain anything.

Li Huowang stood up and patted Li Sui's head, concealed within her red robes. "Don't worry. This is my own problem and I will handle it myself. No need to involve yourself."

"Even if he wants to kill you?"

"Even if he wants to kill me."

Li Huowang swung the spine sword and returned to the Qi Kingdom through the rift. The fields of the Liang Kingdom were where the Qi Kingdom's Righteous Monastery was. The monks recognized him, so there was no commotion when he returned.

However, what Li Huowang had said just before leaving caused them to worry. Once Chan Du learned that Li Huowang was back, he immediately rushed over.

"Benefactor, how was it? Did you manage to talk with them and learn why they are attacking you?"

Li Huowang answered bitterly, "We talked. As for why, the Liang Kingdom's Emperor thought that once you guys are prosperous again, you would threaten them instead."

"The Liang Kingdom's Emperor? Benefactor Li, is it really him?!"

Li Huowang didn't understand why Chan Du was confused. "Didn't you already know that? Why are you reacting so loudly?"

Chan Du clasped his hands and turned the prayer beads in his palm. "Amitabha. I have never once suspected him. I thought that the assailants came from another world."

"What? Other worlds?" It was Li Huowang's turn to be

confused. He felt that a bomb had just gone off in his head. “Why didn’t you tell me this important?”

“Uh... did we really need to tell you? Didn’t you already know about it?” Chan Du pointed at the five glittering Buddha statues in the hall.

“Vaicorana from Vajradhatu, the Diamond Realm. Akshobhya from Abhirati, the Eastern Pure Land. Ratnasambhava from Śrīmat, the Southern Pure Land. Amitābha from Sukhavati, the Western Pure Land. Amoghasiddhi from Prakuta, the Northern Pure Land. Together, they form the Five Dhyanī Buddhas because they control the five different worlds.”

Li Huowang stood there, his mouth hanging open in shock at Chan Du’s words.

“Benefactor Li, why are you so surprised? I thought you knew about it?”

Li Huowang was practically fuming with anger. “You sects and your fucking contradicting worlds! How would I know which is real and which is fake?!”

Chapter 842 - Five Worlds Of Buddhism

“The five worlds of Buddhism.” Li Huowang remembered having heard the term before. It wasn’t just the monks of the Righteous Monastery who had mentioned it—even Abbess Jingxin had told him about it before.

Back then, he didn’t couldn’t even deal with Dan Yangzi. His life had been in danger, so he hadn’t given any thought to it.

He had also interacted with the other sects and realized that each sect’s worldview contradicted the others, so he completely ignored the concept of the five worlds of Buddhism.

“No, wait, you are wrong!” Li Huowang’s words made Chan Du speechless. He wasn’t sure about how to continue the conversation, as it was something supposed to be common knowledge. Chan Du hadn’t expected such an intense reaction from Li Huowang.

“No... you’re wrong...” Li Huowang’s pupils trembled as he paced around the area.

Li Huowang combined his experience to figure out what the five worlds were.

“It’s not five worlds—it’s five different histories! They all lead down to a different future!” Li Huowang revealed what he thought.

The Liang Kingdom had been formed after the Qi Kingdom fell a thousand years ago, while the Qi Kingdom maintained itself as if it didn’t fall a thousand years ago!

Li Huowang followed the same thought process to determine the three remaining histories and what had gone wrong in the past.

The people were still the same, but the world had split into five different possibilities, and all five histories existed simultaneously.

This was only possible in this crazy world.

“Wait, Benefactor Li, you have to listen to me.” Chan Du naturally disagreed with what Li Huowang said. He had to correct him, or all the years he dedicated to memorizing the scriptures would be meaningless.

“Benefactor Li, the five worlds of Buddhism existed since ancient times, not as you said. According to the Yiqiejing Yinyi, Vairocana Buddha, the Tathagata of the world, is described as 'Vairocana,' where 'Vai' means 'pervade' and 'rocana' means 'illuminating.' This means that the Buddha, through his body and wisdom, is unobstructed in his radiant light, illuminating and pervading the entire Dharma realm without obstruction.

“The term 'pervade' refers to the universal coverage of the Dharma realm, while 'light' indicates the unobstructed nature of dependent origination, shining away the darkness of ignorance...”

Li Huowang abruptly grabbed Chan Du's collar. “Shut up! I'm not here to listen to you preach. This isn't important right now. What's more important is to figure out which history is trying to kill us and why!”

He let go of Chan Du's robes and scratched his scalp anxiously. Li Huowang paced around before laughing. “Hahaha! Gao Zhijian was not the culprit! He didn't want to kill me!”

Li Huowang's heart sank. *Gao Zhijian might've changed, but perhaps I didn't change much.*

He was still the same Gao Zhijian who had previously traveled with him!

Once Li Huowang knew that Gao Zhijian was not the culprit, he felt like everything had suddenly become uncertain.

Since there were five histories, his suspicions of Gao Zhijian were naturally the lowest.

Sui Sui is still watching him. She would've let me know if he were trying to do anything.

However, Li Huowang was still confused. *Who's trying to kill me, then?*

If there were three other histories, who would be the culprit? Li Huowang had only just learned about the other three, so he couldn't have offended anyone from there.

Who's trying to harm me for no reason? Did I accidentally make them my enemy while escaping the Zephyr Temple?

Li Huowang didn't have the answers and looked at Chan Du. "Abbot, why do you think they are attacking us?"

Chan Du frowned and turned the prayer beads in his hands before shaking his head. "I do not know. In Buddhist teachings, the Five Dhyani Buddhas are considered the Primordial Buddha of Dharma Nature. The term 'Primordial Buddha' refers to the essence of the mind. Aksobhya, Vajrapani, and Vajrasattva represent the three manifestations of the Tathagata Garbha, which are essentially the mind manifested as three bodies..."

Li Huowang sighed. "And who's asking you about that?"

Li Huowang had to figure it out himself since the Abbot didn't know either. He suspected Bei Feng's superior.

Shai Zi had once said that to defeat Doulao, he had cleaned up all of the Sitting Oblivion Dao in the Liang Kingdom. In a sense, he was correct. The Sitting Oblivion Dao of the Liang Kingdom had been destroyed, but Bei Feng survived. She escaped to another history to avoid Shai Zi.

Is she tricking people from other countries to kill me? Li Huowang considered the possibility, although it seemed a bit unrealistic.

He had never heard of masterminds who risked their lives by running to the front lines.

The members of the Sitting Oblivion Dao weren't idiots—they would trick others into making risky moves instead. The Sitting Oblivion Dao also didn't usually go to the front lines.

They might do so if it was to trick others, but they would never

do it just for the sake of fighting.

There must be someone else behind Bei Feng. Whether they are forcing or collaborating with her, they are ultimately using Bei Feng's unique powers.

“Benefactor Li, have you fought with other Twisted Ones?” Chan Du tentatively asked.

“Hm?” Li Huowang frowned. “What do you mean?”

Chan Du looked at the spine sword on Li Huowang's back. “The five worlds have always been independent, without intertwining connections. Aside from the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, the only ones who can travel freely are the Twisted Ones. The Twisted Ones are beyond the five worlds. They each hold the karma, merits, cause, and effects of the Bodhisattvas and Buddhas, placing them between two worlds. They can travel freely between the two worlds.”

“What are you talking about? I'm a Twisted One too. Why can't I travel between two worlds? Also, I never fought any of them before. The only Twisted One I know of is Zhuge Yuan, which you are also familiar with. He was stuck between the Liang Kingdom and the Qi Kingdom. He didn't have any connections with the other three histories.”

Chan Du nodded silently and said nothing. It appeared that it wasn't as he had thought. After eliminating all other factors, Li Huowang finally thought of a final possibility.

“Am I obstructing them by saving the Qi Kingdom?” Li Huowang muttered.

He recalled what Gao Zhijian had said. What if it wasn't just the Qi Kingdom that the Liang Kingdom had to contest against? What if it's a competition between all five histories? What if they sent someone to stop Li Huowang from saving the Qi Kingdom?

Li Huowang thought it was a bit far-fetched but realized it was possible.

Chan Du shook his head when Li Huowang told him about his theory. “No, Benefactor Li, the five worlds of Buddhism exist in harmony. They help each other and do not compete. The Five Dhyani Buddhas protect the five worlds. They would never let one of the worlds disappear without a trace.”

Li Huowang chuckled. “Oh? Then what happened to the Qi Kingdom when you had no food? Did one of the Five Dhyani Buddhas come down and help you?”

Chapter 843 - Method

“Where were your Five Dhyani Buddhas? I thought they were guarding the five worlds. Why didn’t they show up when the Qi Kingdom was on the brink of destruction?”

Li Huowang’s tone was nothing short of offensive towards the Buddhas of the Righteous Monastery, but Chan Du wasn’t angry. In fact, he felt nothing.

He clasped his hands and prayed earnestly to the five Buddha statues. “Amitabha. Mercy on this one. As a disciple, I dare not talk in the stead of the Buddha. However, did the Five Dhyani Buddhas truly refrain from taking any action? If they did, would you have come to the Qi Kingdom to help us? Maybe your desire to save the Qi Kingdom was part of the Buddha’s cause and effect.”

Li Huowang became furious when he heard that. “What do you mean? I’m putting in a lot of effort, working tirelessly to bring food and revive the Qi Kingdom. Yet now you’re saying all the credit should go to the Five Dhyani Buddhas?”

Chan Du shook his head rapidly. “No, the credit naturally belongs to you, but the Five Dhyani Buddhas are the ones who take care of the five worlds, which are within their all-encompassing wisdom. While the credit is yours, the merits belong to the Buddhas.”

Li Huowang naturally would not accept that—it was an explanation without an explanation. “Come here and tell me directly! What do you mean by the merits belonging to the Five Dhyani Buddhas? What is the ‘all-encompassing wisdom’? Call for your Five Dhyani Buddhas to come and deal with this, then!

“Aren’t they the ones taking care of the five worlds? Now, another world wants to attack the Qi Kingdom, so why aren’t they

showing up? I won't bring food anymore if you can't give me a satisfactory answer!"

Chan Du felt a headache coming when he realized that Li Huowang was going to argue with him, but he didn't want to preach to Li Huowang, who was not a disciple of Buddhism. Winning or losing the argument brought no benefits.

Also, Chan Du was confident that it would be useless for him to talk about it since Li Huowang never read any scriptures.

Chan Du had no choice but to admit defeat. "Benefactor Li, I was wrong. Since you were the one who accomplished it, the credit and merits are all yours. No one can dispute that."

Li Huowang became even angrier. If they hadn't been allies, he would have really liked to kill Chan Du.

"Let's stop talking about unrelated things. We need to focus on figuring out who they are and which world they come from. I doubt that they will stop after today. Their attacks will only become fiercer," Li Huowang said, clenching his fists tightly.

He didn't care who was trying to murder him. He was determined to exact revenge on them, vowing to repay them a hundred times over!

Chan Du nodded and agreed.

"Stop nodding and say something useful!"

Chan Du shook his head. "I don't know. Still, I am certain that one of them must be a Twisted One. If they weren't, they wouldn't have been able to make their way into the Qi Kingdom."

"Twisted One... Twisted One..." Li Huowang muttered and recalled what had happened when he tried to take back his sword.

A forest sprung up in the middle of the field of grass. He thought they had used the powers of the spine sword to reenter the Qi Kingdom, but it now seemed more similar to a Twisted One using their powers to enter the Qi Kingdom instead. More importantly, it differed from Zhuge Yuan's case—they could control

their powers freely.

Li Huowang thought long and hard. He ultimately decided what to do based on his understanding of Bei Feng.

“It’s useless if we just sit still and think the whole day. If we want to know where they came from, we need to capture one of them alive. I’m sure that they will come here again.

“Since they dare to enter the Qi Kingdom, we need to ambush them. Call everyone and think of a plan to ambush them! We will eat them alive if they dare enter the Qi Kingdom again! Do not let them go back!”

Chan Du nodded and tapped his prayer beads lightly. A skinny monk near the door clasped his hands and left.

Li Huowang didn't have any time to waste while the others gathered. “Wait here. I need to settle something in the Liang Kingdom. I will return as soon as I can.”

He had to explain to Gao Zhijian what might’ve really happened.

He returned to the Liang Kingdom and ran towards the palace, but was soon stopped by a familiar face—Xuan Pin.

“Father, where are you going?” Li Sui cocked her head to the side and asked Li Huowang.

Li Huowang wasn’t sure how to explain to Li Sui. *Do I tell her that I misunderstood Gao Zhijian and thought he had sent someone to kill me?*

Li Sui didn’t press on after seeing that Li Huowang remained silent. Instead, she gave him something. It was clad in red cloth. “Father, this is for you. I made it myself.”

Li Huowang took it and saw that it was a red Daoist robe. It was intricate, with cloud motifs embroidered on the collars and sleeves. Li Huowang could tell by touch that the fabric used to make it was not ordinary.

He put it on and found that it fit him perfectly. “This is...?”

“I made it myself. It’s fireproof. Also, you can open up this place.” Li Sui extended her tentacles and pulled on the front, revealing Li Huowang’s abdomen. “With this, it’s easier for you to use the Profound Records.”

Li Huowang fell in love with the robes, especially since they were a gift from his daughter.

“Do you like it?” Li Sui asked.

Li Huowang nodded. A young girl’s face peeked out from Li Sui’s robes and smiled happily.

“As long as you like it.”

As Li Sui was about to leave, Li Huowang stopped her and said, “Since you’re the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau, there are some things that I need to let you know, even though they’re not related to the Liang Kingdom.”

Li Huowang brought Li Sui to a nearby tea shop and sat down. After reviewing all the evidence, Li Huowang explained what had happened.

“I misunderstood Gao Zhijian, so please apologize to him in my stead,” Li Huowang said sheepishly.

Li Sui sat quietly as if thinking about what was happening. After a long period of silence, she said, “Alright. I understand.”

“Thank you. I wanted to go, but I think everyone in the Qi Kingdom has gathered together by now. I need your help for this.”

Li Huowang drank a cup of tea. The bitterness made his body tremble a bit.

“Wait.” Li Huowang finally realized something and looked at Li Sui. “Since you’re the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau, you already knew about the five parallel histories, right?”

Li Sui nodded. “It’s not exactly a secret.”

Chapter 844 - Voices

Li Huowang asked again after hearing Li Sui's answer, "Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Father, you never asked. It's also not like I could talk to you about it casually during the New Year. Also, why are you asking me this? Did you not know about it?"

"I did. Of course, I knew," Li Huowang said, drinking the bitter tea again.

"What I meant is that we could talk more about the information of this world. You've lived here for a hundred and sixty years and should know more than me about this place."

Li Sui held onto her girl's head and used eight tentacles to snuggle the head against Li Huowang.

"Father, I think it's best if I don't talk to you about this easily. You know how dangerous it could be. The more you know about this world, the more dangerous it gets. It's generally better to be kept in the dark.

"And since you're a Strayed One, it might be dangerous for you to learn about it, especially since you've achieved a high degree of proficiency in cultivating the 'Truth.'"

Li Huowang patted her head and sighed. He knew what Li Sui was hinting at. Xuan Pin had said it once, but it felt different when Li Sui said it.

A stern voice suddenly came from Li Huowang's side. "Li Huowang, do you think that this is fun?"

Li Huowang closed his eyes and reopened them to see the white LED light tube above him. He completely ignored the voice outside of the door.

He was wearing two straitjackets and was completely tied up.

Still, this was only temporary. He had won, and Qing Wanglai would soon send someone to rescue him.

While he only had a single eye left, it was still a great price to pay for ending the war.

Everything was over. No one would be stalking him again, and no one would harm his family anymore. He was free and could finally rest.

Yi Donglai's voice came from outside the room. He was angry. "Li Huowang, what are you thinking? Stop playing dumb! You are not crazy—I know I treated you!"

It was understandable because when Li Huowang became crazy again, Yi Donglai had become a laughing stock for the others. His thesis, which he had worked hard on, was now worthless.

He refused to believe that Li Huowang would defeat him. Yi Donglai had treated many patients before, and even if they weren't completely cured, they still managed to become somewhat normal.

Li Huowang ignored Yi Donglai and didn't move.

Twenty minutes later, Yi Donglai left. Li Huowang blinked with his single remaining eye.

The room was utterly silent. Half an hour later, Li Huowang heard something and began to slowly move on the ground.

He said nothing as he worked his way towards the left wall. It was difficult to move in two straitjackets. After moving a couple of inches, he was sweating, but he never stopped.

He plastered his ear on the soft leather wall and heard the faint murmur of a woman's voice. He remembered the voice. It was Zhao Ting, the patient in his group who had slight depression.

"Li... wang, are you...?" Her voice was hazy, but Li Huowang could more or less guess what she meant through the fragmented words.

He smiled and nodded. "I'm fine. I'm just locked up for now. They have done this before. It's nothing to me."

Another voice could be heard, this time belonging to a man. However, his stammering and the thick walls made it unintelligible.

The particular tone of the voice was distinct enough for Li Huowang to recognize it. The man was Gao Jingyun, the slightly mentally challenged patient.

Another voice came. Li Huowang managed to guess who it was based on the identity of the first two patients. It was Zhang Shuier, the woman with OCD.

They were all part of the same team at one point. Despite the others considering him a crazy patient, they still extended their friendship to Li Huowang. Their willingness to become friends had touched him.

Many would eagerly befriend the rich and famous, but only a few would extend a helping hand to the poor and nameless.

Li Huowang was sure that almost everyone outside thought of him as a crazed murderer.

After conversing with them for a bit, Li Huowang heard Zhao Ting's voice again. "Re... we... will... save... out."

Li Huowang's heart froze because Zhao Ting was different than usual. He tentatively asked, "Did Qing Wanglai ask you to contact me?"

"Yes..."

Li Huowang's heart sank. "Go back and tell him to find another way. Don't drag innocent people in!"

While Li Huowang wanted to escape, he didn't want anyone, especially the people he knew, to become his accomplice.

They were all patients who already led a hard life. Receiving treatment to live out the rest of their lives was the best possible outcome for them.

Who knew what would happen to them if he dragged them into his fight with the Simings?

Li Huowang also recalled how Qing Wanglai treated the others.

He would discard useless people like tools.

“No... we... talk...” Zhao Ting’s voice gradually grew faint. Li Huowang moved to try to continue listening, yet no further voices could be heard.

“What did you say?” Li Huowang stopped moving, focusing on one spot.

Immediately after, someone opened the door to his room. It was Yi Donglai.

“Who are you talking to?” Yi Donglai asked.

Li Huowang remained silent. He soon saw Yi Donglai’s shoes appearing in front of him.

Yi Donglai reached for the straps of Li Huowang’s straitjackets before dragging him out of the room.

“Come here and look! Look carefully with your single remaining eye!”

Yi Donglai showed Li Huowang the exterior of the left wall. Other than the art on the wall, there was nothing else.

“Look at that! There’s no one near this room! Everything’s an illusion! Li Huowang, you are sick!”

Li Huowang opened his mouth and repeated what he had told Yi Donglai before. “No, I’m not sick. I just learned the truth of the world.”

Chapter 845 - Mental

Yi Donglai laughed out of anger. In fact, he almost gave up on Li Huowang. Yi Donglai thought Li Huowang was the craziest person he had met in the medical field.

“Really? You learned about the truth of this world?”

Yi Donglai opened Li Huowang’s straitjacket before placing his phone into Li Huowang’s hands. Yi Donglai swiped on the phone’s screen swiftly.

“This is your mother’s WeChat! Talk to her on a video call. Look at her with your single remaining eye and tell her you’re not crazy! Tell her that you’ve learned the truth of the world! Do that if you have the guts!”

With a slight tremble on his face, Li Huowang slammed Yi Donglai’s phone onto the ground. “You don’t know *anything*! Everything’s over! All of the problems have been resolved! Yi Donglai, I know I was sick, but I also know you cured me.”

Yi Donglai was not afraid of Li Huowang’s snarling face. Instead, he took a step forward and glared at Li Huowang.

“Then tell me what you meant! I can only help you if you tell me!”

Li Huowang slowly calmed down and shook his head lightly. He went back into the room and sat facing the walls. “Doctor Yi, I’m not ill. You can perform as many tests as you like. I assure you that the results will confirm I’m fine.”

Since everything was over, any further interactions with Yi Donglai would only make him think that Li Huowang’s condition had worsened. It was useless to converse with Yi Donglai right now.

Moreover, Li Huowang wasn’t sure what Yi Donglai’s projection was. He was, however, certain that Yi Donglai was not his ally. If Yi

Donglai were an ally, he would've saved Li Huowang when he was fighting god Yu'er instead of sending people to catch him.

Now that the danger was over, all Li Huowang needed to do was wait. Even if Qing Wanglai didn't save him, Li Huowang was sure that as long as he followed the rules of the projections in this world, he would pass the examinations and get discharged again.

Though the process might be long and arduous, Li Huowang wasn't worried. As long as the people around him were safe, he didn't mind what was happening to him.

Li Huowang sat there for a very long time, yet he did not hear the door close. He turned and saw the metal door was wide open.

"Come out. The doctor said that you don't have to stay inside anymore," the nurse guarding the entrance said.

Li Huowang was confused. He had just killed a lot of people, but now they were allowing him to interact with the other patients.

Li Huowang was sure that this was a trick from Yi Donglai. It couldn't be that simple.

Despite that, he walked outside after pondering for a moment.

It didn't matter what Yi Donglai wanted to do. He would continue to live and act normally, as they couldn't do anything to a regular person during the examinations. The only thing he had to do was not bring up anything about the Simings.

"Wait," Li Huowang had just stepped outside when several burly nurses stopped him, "we still need to put preventive measures on you. Wait here."

They put on heavy handcuffs and leg cuffs onto Li Huowang. They also placed a special helmet on Li Huowang's head, which would prevent him from gouging out his one remaining eye.

Li Huowang was okay with it, although he felt like a serial murderer walking into a park while wearing all that equipment.

Li Huowang gazed upwards, enjoying the pleasant sun. He sat on the bench and basked in the sunlight.

He felt peculiar gazes from every direction, but he was already used to them. Sitting there, he exchanged greetings with some of the familiar faces. He even raised his hand to wave at the guards holding guns atop the guard towers.

He didn't see the people who had talked to him before this. Li Huowang thought it would be too obvious for them to approach him now, considering that Yi Donglai had just released him.

Li Huowang stretched lazily. Compared to the restrictive room, he felt much better outside right now. At the very least, he could scratch the itches on his body and move around if he felt sore.

He felt the wind blowing through the wire fence. It blew his hair apart and revealed his bloody eye socket. "It's a good day today..."

Li Huowang relaxed and closed his eyes. He slumped onto the bench, his body slowly tilting to the left as his head bobbed. In the end, he lay down and fell asleep.

The room he was kept in was not a good place to sleep. It was a place to prevent the patients from killing themselves. To avoid any accidents, they never turned off the lights, so Li Huowang barely got any sleep at night.

He felt his body relax as he fell asleep. He slowly curled up on the bench like a baby in a mother's womb. It was peaceful.

However, the peace was short-lived, as he soon frowned and snarled.

"No! Wait!" Li Huowang opened his eyes with shock, his body drenched in sweat. His sudden shout startled the others around him.

He wiped off the sweat on his forehead and sighed in relief. It had only been a bad dream.

"Are you alright?" Zhao Ting tried to help Li Huowang up. She stretched out her arms and revealed the scars on her wrist.

"I'm fine. It was just a nightmare," Li Huowang whispered as he slowly retracted his hands. "You guys have to leave. Don't talk to

me for a while—Yi Donglai must be observing us right now.”

Zhao Ting nodded and left the area.

Li Huowang sighed. The nightmare had felt incredibly real, leaving him with a lingering sense of fear. Thankfully, it was only a creation of his imagination that hadn’t actually occurred.

Li Huowang scratched his head. “It’s fine. It was just a nightmare. It’s all over now, and I can live a normal life.

Suddenly, a troubling realization crossed his mind. “Wait a minute, why is Qing Wanglai a graduate student while I’m stuck here, treated like some deranged mental patient? We’re in the same situation.”

Li Huowang swore to himself before walking back into the building. “Damn it. If I get out, I will enjoy my life to the fullest! I cannot let them be afraid of me anymore! I need to make them proud! I don’t care who their projections are. At least they are not illusions! Definitely not!”

Chapter 846 - Hospitalization

Once Li Huowang was granted permission to leave the confines of his room, life became tranquil for him. His daily routine remained unchanged: taking his medications, indulging in television shows, and drifting off to sleep. Other than the absence of a treatment plan or a doctor, he was the same as the other patients.

Yi Donglai no longer looked for him and made him use the sand table. In fact, Li Huowang did not see Yi Donglai at all.

He wasn't sure what Yi Donglai was trying to do, but he didn't care. He would just live normally like this, one day after another.

Li Huowang walked into the canteen with his handcuffs and leg cuffs. The chains rattled on the ground loudly.

The other patients knew Li Huowang was coming and stood aside to open a path for him. He was being treated as a murderer again.

Li Huowang could have been the only person in White Tower Prison walking around with cuffs.

He picked up a plastic tray and grabbed his food from the canteen—a meat dish, a vegetable dish, a soup, and rice. The meat dish consisted of stir-fried tofu with pork skin, while the vegetable dish included blanched vegetables. The soup was egg-drop seaweed soup.

Li Huowang picked up the oily tofu and ate it. The soft yet firm texture of the bouncy tofu had absorbed the sauce from the meal. He enjoyed the delectable flavor with delight.

Li Huowang then looked at the kitchen and found that the people responsible for the meal had changed. Their meals this time

were much better than before.

Li Huowang drank a spoonful of soup before placing his rice into the meat dish, stirring it quickly before digging in.

Due to his handcuffs, it wasn't easy for him to eat his meal. He had only finished half of it by the time everyone else was almost done with theirs.

A sudden coldness came from his left, and someone sat beside him. Li Huowang turned and saw a spectacled middle-aged man sitting at his side.

The man wore the same hospital gown and appeared to be another patient. "Hello, Mr. Li. Let me introduce myself. I'm Hai Dongqing. Here is my business card."

Li Huowang did not accept the "business card," which really was tissue paper with words scrawled on it. *Another mental patient, though this is the first time I've seen one of his kind.*

However, Li Huowang was curious about why the doctors weren't doing anything and allowed Hai Dongqing man to roam freely.

Seeing that Li Huowang was ignoring him, Hai Dongqing rolled up the tissue paper and shoved it towards Li Huowang's mouth. "Do you have anything to say about your relapse this time?"

Li Huowang turned to the nurse and said, "Can you shoo him away? He's preventing me from eating my meal."

The nurse forcefully pulled Hai Dongqing away. Li Huowang thanked the nurse and continued his meal.

After having his meal, Li Huowang watched TV shows for a bit before heading out to get some sunlight. This was his only source of entertainment right now.

As he lay on the bench half asleep, a faint voice reached his ears—it was Zhang Shuier.

"We are ready... If you're also ready, we will move out in three days at midnight. The patients in ward seven will revolt, and we

can leave during the chaos.

Li Huowang frowned without opening his eyes. "No, tell them to stop."

"Why?"

"If Qing Wanglai wants to help me, he must do it properly. I don't want to run out and become a fugitive. I would rather stay here if he intends to do it illegally. If you can't decide for yourself, send a message to him. Ask him to come and visit me personally, and I will tell him. Leave now. You are being too conspicuous."

Li Huowang said this, but there were no longer any voices. He opened his eyes to find that no one was around him.

He stretched and waved towards the sentries on the tower before heading back in.

If it weren't for the regular medication schedule, this place would be indistinguishable from an old person's home.

He had just entered the building when he saw the large Gao Jingyun squatting beside the toilet, startling everyone who exited the bathroom.

"What's wrong?"

Li Huowang asked patiently. Although Gao Jingyun had a large body, his mental capabilities were only those of a child.

"Apple... someone... took it."

Li Huowang wasn't surprised that it was the same question. "Bring me to them. Who took your apple?"

Gao Jingyun led the way, with Li Huowang following closely behind. Together, they arrived at the quarters and opened each door one by one.

"Was it him?" Li Huowang pointed at an apple in an old man's hands.

"Mmhm!" Gao Jingyun nodded as he twisted his own robes.

Li Huowang walked over and grabbed the apple. "You're so old, and yet you're stealing apples from a young patient?"

“Hey! What are you doing? My granddaughter bought that for me!” The old man protested, but Li Huowang pushed him back onto the bed.

“Your granddaughter bought it for you? Did your granddaughter also write someone else’s name on the apple?” Li Huowang pointed at Gao Jingyun’s name on the apple.

Another mortified patient held back the old man. Li Huowang turned and passed the apple to Gao Jingyun.

“Take it. If they give you apples next time, just eat them immediately. No need to wait.”

Gao Jingyun shook his hands, “I... I want to give it to you. You don’t have an apple to eat.”

Li Huowang tried to hand the apple back to Gao Jingyun. “I don’t like apples. Don’t give them to me next time.”

But Gao Jingyun did not accept it. “You eat it.”

After pushing and shoving the apples for a few rounds, Li Huowang gave up and ate the apple before leaving.

Li Huowang’s daily life was really dull since he was different. While the other patients had to fight their illnesses, Li Huowang didn’t face such struggles.

After taking a nap, he went to the canteen to eat. After his dinner, he would normally watch the news with the others before going to sleep.

Even though the nurse appeared to have an easy time monitoring him, Li Huowang knew that it was taxing on them. Their gazes only broke off once Li Huowang was back in his room.

Li Huowang naturally lived in a single room, which had been retrofitted from one of the isolated rooms. There wasn’t even a toothbrush in it to prevent all chances of him committing suicide.

There was nothing he could do and nothing to do, so he just lay on the bed. After staying here for so long, his bad habit of staying up late into the night had also changed.

However, as he tried to fall asleep, he was abruptly awakened by the soft sound of footsteps.

Chapter 847 - So?

After hearing the noises outside, Li Huowang chose not to make a scene. Instead, he opened his eyes and moved slowly to the door.

He held onto his handcuffs and waited. He would use the handcuffs to strangle them if they were an enemy.

Li Huowang waited and frowned until a voice came from the other side of the door. “Uh... Li Huowang!”

He carefully looked through the peephole and saw Zhao Ting in her hospital robes. She was glancing around nervously.

She looked much better than before. Zhao Ting looked at Li Huowang, her eyes now large and crystal clear. Her face was also much healthier and more vibrant now.

“Why are you here?” Li Huowang questioned Zhao Ting.

“Didn’t you ask me to come? You said it was too conspicuous outside, so I came while everyone was asleep.”

Li Huowang looked at the empty corridors and said, “Keep it short. There are patrols and cameras around. You will be in trouble if they find you.”

“Yes!” Zhao Ting shivered as she hugged herself. It was so cold that she was tapping her feet. “As you said, the boss knows about your intentions. He wants to get you out before making a false identity for you.”

“Hah. He’s a sly one, but tell him I said no. I would never escape from a prison like this.”

He didn’t want to involve Zhao Ting in this. Li Huowang knew what kind of person Qing Wanglai was. After Qian Fu’s death, Li Huowang understood Qing Wanglai’s personality well.

While Qing Wanglai appeared kind, he was actually a very cold

and calculative psycho. He did things based on pros and cons rather than emotions.

If Li Huowang escaped from prison, Qing Wanglai could use it to keep him under control.

If that were the case, Li Huowang would be doomed to be Qing Wanglai's pawn for the rest of his life.

Li Huowang noticed that Zhao Ting was also conflicted. She didn't know what to do. "If you can't decide on your own, ask Qing Wanglai to come and talk to me personally!"

He had been itching to ask Qing Wanglai why he was the one who was fighting on the front lines, all while Qing Wanglai never showed up at all.

If Qing Wanglai was both cold and fearful of death, then Li Huowang had no intentions of allying himself with such a Siming.

To Li Huowang, Zhao Shuangdian was more friendly. He didn't mind contacting her instead.

Wait, if Qing Wanglai's projection is the Three Ancient Ones, then which Siming is Zhao Shuangdian?

Li Huowang clearly remembered that Ba-Hui's siblings followed her. What kind of Siming could give orders to Ba-Hui?

Li Huowang tried to recall, but none of the Simings really matched her.

"Um..." Zhao Ting's quiet voice pulled him back to reality. "I will have to go and ask. I can't decide on my own."

"Go. You never should've been involved in this to begin with."

As Zhao Ting turned to leave, Li Huowang called out and said, "Wait, I have one more thing to ask."

"Hm?"

He stared at her face and became solemn. After a moment of hesitation, he said, "I've been wondering... can depression be cured? I have a friend who has been battling it, and her condition recently became worse. I'm worried."

“How bad is it?”

“I...” Li Huowang grimaced as he remembered Yang Na. “I don’t know. I haven’t seen her in a long time. I only heard that she was trying to commit suicide.”

“Then it should still be around the medium range of severity. It’s not the worst.” Zhao Ting explained. “If it were the severe kind, she wouldn’t even think about suicide. Her mind would be in a perpetual haze.”

Li Huowang sighed in relief and said, “Is your recovery going well? Is your depression getting better?”

Zhao Ting bit her lips as she pondered. “When it comes to people at the medium range of severity, their symptoms should alleviate as long as they take their medicine on time and have a competent doctor. However, the worst part of depression is that any pent-up negative emotions could trigger a relapse.

“As for the severe cases... I don’t know anything about them. I’ve just heard the doctors mention that severe cases require the patients to rebuild their psyches, which sounds very difficult.”

Li Huowang nodded after hearing Zhao Ting’s explanation. If Yang Na’s symptoms remained the same after he got out, then Li Huowang would have to find a way to transfer her to Yi Donglai’s care.

Even though Yi Donglai was a pain to deal with, Li Huowang had to admit that Yi Donglai was a responsible doctor. If Yang Na could accept his treatment, she would be cured before long.

Having experienced mental illness himself, he didn’t find it that scary. The thought of Yang Na relapsing didn’t scare him either. If needed, he would be there for her and take care of her for the rest of his life.

Tap tap tap tap~ The sound of rapid footsteps came from the corridor and interrupted both of them. The sudden arrival of people surprised Zhao Ting.

“Quick! Hide!” Li Huowang hissed. “Don’t go there! There are cameras over there!”

Zhao Ting had barely escaped when Li Huowang lay down on the bed. From his position, he observed Yi Donglai and the other nurses opening the door to his room. “Li Huowang, who were you talking to?”

Li Huowang rubbed his eyes and crawled out of his bed, annoyed. “What are you talking about? Why are you here so late at night instead of sleeping?”

Yi Donglai left the room and took out a recorder concealed above the door frame. Li Huowang’s voice came out from the recorder with the press of a button. “Quick! Hide! Don’t go there! There are cameras over there!”

Li Huowang remained silent.

“Did you really think I wouldn’t know? Do you think I’m letting you roam freely just for the sake of it?”

Yi Donglai pressed a button on Li Huowang’s leg cuffs. A small memory card popped out. “Zhao Ting, Gao Jingyun, and Zhang Shuier. Am I right? These are the three people who contacted you these last few days.”

Li Huowang remained silent.

“You talked to them for quite some time. Didn’t you realize something was wrong? Li Huowang!” Yi Donglai charged towards Li Huowang and glared at him. “Do you still not realize?”

“You are ill, but you are not stupid! They are patients of Kangning Hospital, but we are in the White Tower Hospital! How could they possibly be here?”

Li Huowang’s pupils widened with shock as a sudden realization struck him. “Wait... so Qing Wanglai didn’t send anyone to rescue me? He actually gave up on me?”

Chapter 848 - Xiaoman

Chun Xiaoman took out three incense sticks and lit them using a candle.

She swung them to extinguish the fire before kneeling on a cushion. Then, raising the three incense sticks high up onto her head, she started praying to the statue in front of her.

The Heavenly Mater had completely changed. She was now an old lady with a cane, sitting on a conjoined lotus seat with a red dot on her forehead and a smile filled with mercy.

The statue was made of stone, but her devotees had colored it and given the Heavenly Mater some semblance of life.

“Oh great and merciful Heavenly Mater, may the disciples reach the Void Home after death to serve you forever...”

She prayed earnestly before placing the incense sticks into the incense burner and retreated from the hall.

Outside the prayer hall was naturally the large hall of the White Lotus Sect. Chun Xiaoman was covered from head to toe in long black hair, but none of them treated her as an outsider.

In the White Lotus Sect, every member was treated with equal respect, as if they were brothers and sisters. Making fun of someone's exterior was taboo in the White Lotus Sect.

Chun Xiaoman was also one of the bravest fighters of the White Lotus Sect. She fought on the front lines throughout the war with the Dharma Sect, and her unique appearance had left a strong impression on the other sect members.

Chun Xiaoman bowed and greeted everyone who was smiling at her.

When she began learning the techniques of the White Lotus Sect, she didn't give it much thought. She did it because she wanted

to help Bai Lingmiao and have the strength to protect Cowheart Village.

However, her attitude changed after leaving the village and joining the White Lotus Sect.

Chun Xiaoman liked it here. It felt more like home to her. She had always doubted herself and thought she was a mistake born into this world. However, she had changed.

It wasn't just that her siblings and friends were here—she also had faith in the Heavenly Mater now.

Chun Xiaoman had long resolved to work diligently for the White Lotus Sect, forever.

She left the hall and walked towards the alleyway where the White Lotus Sect members lived. While they were poor, they weren't in shambles.

Even the houses without roofs were appropriately cleaned. No one locked their doors there because no one would steal from one another.

Everyone was kind and treated each other with respect. If anyone needed help, they would just shout, and everyone in the alley would help. It was like a perfect world.

“Sister Xiaoman! Sister Xiaoman!” Several children wearing tattered clothes ran and circled her.

Even though they were beggars, they were still the beggars of the White Lotus Sect. “Sister Xiaoman, where did you go? We didn't see you for days. We missed you.”

“I just came from Si Qi. It's very far from here, and my journey got delayed,” Xiaoman explained patiently.

She looked at them and recalled her past self. “Are you hungry? What do you want to eat? Let me get you something.”

The children jumped with glee as they pulled Chun Xiaoman out of the alley. “Wait, let me grab my veil.”

They arrived at the city's eastern section, which was bustling

with people. Each child now held a scallion pancake in their hands, happily eating it. Chun Xiaoman scratched the back of the children's heads and told them to eat slowly.

Since she swore not to get married, she would naturally bear no children. Puppy's incident with his baby pushed this notion further. Still, she didn't mind it. Chun Xiaoman would treat the children in the White Lotus Sect as her own. The White Lotus Sect had everything she needed.

She saw one of the children biting on the scallion pancake while staring at a cart filled with several vases.

Chun Xiaoman approached and hugged the child even though the latter was dirty. "What's wrong? Do you want to eat that? Let me buy it for you."

The child looked at the eldest beggar before shaking her head. "No need. I just want a pancake."

"Don't worry. Even though I donated most of my assets to the White Lotus Sect, I still have enough money to buy some snacks for you all," Chun Xiaoman said, bringing them to the cart.

She stood in front of the cart and addressed the seller, "Hey, what are you selling?"

The skinny man had a plaster on his forehead. He opened one of the jars and showed them its contents. "These are some rare items I bought from the Tianyi Pavilion."

Chun Xiaoman looked down and saw that the jars contained fruit peels soaked in water. "Fruit peels? Are you sure you didn't just pick them up from the trash cans in the Tianyi Pavilion? Why are you selling these?"

"Hey, what are you talking about? My friend is working there. He's responsible for cutting up all sorts of things, and these fruit peels are clean! Ten coins per bunch!"

Chun Xiaoman saw it as a scam. "Ten coins? I could buy a bowl of noodles with that money! Are you insane?"

“Can’t you see that I’m soaking them in sugar water? Also, don’t you know what season it is? These are more expensive than gold because they were planted in a greenhouse.”

“Sister Xiaoman, let’s go. I don’t want to eat them anymore.”

“Sister Xiaoman, let’s go. A single pancake is enough.”

Chun Xiaoman stared at their faces before taking out a piece of fragmented silver.

The skinny vendor was elated as he carried one of the vases down from his cart.

Just then, the eldest beggar walked up and said thoughtfully, “Sister Xiaoman, we don’t want them. These things are too expensive, and we are already fools. We cannot waste your money like this.”

“It’s alright. It’s just some fruit peels.”

Soon enough, the children received the strips of fruit peels. They were really happy, tasting the different types of fruit peels and comparing them to see which was more delicious.

Chun Xiaoman smiled happily when she saw how happy they were. “I always wanted to eat these when I was younger, but my father would only buy them for my brothers. My sister and I could only watch from the side.”

Chun Xiaoman suddenly remembered something and laughed. “That said, my sister and I had to find a way to satisfy our cravings. We would fill two bamboo pieces with watermelon seeds that people spat out. They were delicious once we had dried them.”

However, she felt solemn when she remembered something else.

Her train of thought was interrupted by one of the children. “Sister Xiaoman, have this. This is a watermelon peel. It’s delicious.”

She bit into the peel and felt a sweetness in her heart as she looked at the smiling child. Chun Xiaoman smiled again.

“Sister Xiaoman, try this! This is a persimmon peel!”

As they happily enjoyed these small treats, Chun Xiaoman noticed a group of Lamas. Chun Xiaoman remembered them. They were the mummified Lamas of the Antrabhara Temple.

However, she was confused about why they were headed towards the hall of the White Lotus Sect.

Chapter 849 - Invitation

“That’s strange. Why is the Antrabhara Temple seeking out the White Lotus Sect?” Chun Xiaoman was worried, so she said goodbye to the children before quietly following the Lamas.

She quickened her pace when she saw that the Lamas were headed towards the residence of Bai Lingmiao. The Lamas probably wouldn’t fight in the city, but Chun Xiaoman still felt uneasy.

As she was drawing nearer, a sense of dread washed over her, as though death itself was inching closer. Her scalp went numb, and her fingers froze in place.

Struggling, she attempted to draw her serrated sword from her waist so she could employ her techniques. However, her limbs remained frozen—she could not move at all.

At that moment, Chun Xiaoman caught sight of someone's head in front of her. At first, she assumed it belonged to one of the Lamas, but to her surprise, it was her own!

Is that me in front? Then who am I?

Chun Xiaoman shivered. She looked down and was shocked—there was nothing there!

I’m... dead? Is this my soul?

The feeling retreated as fast as it had come. When one of the Lamas walked past her, Xiaoman crashed into her own back uncontrollably, and she woke up.

She touched her body and stared at the Lamas with fear.

Their techniques are too bizarre! What are they doing here? Chun Xiaoman picked up her pace and ran towards Bai Lingmiao’s residence.

“Miaomiao, are you alright?” Chun Xiaoman urgently asked Bai Lingmiao, who was seated on her lotus throne.

Bai Lingmiao lightly shook her head and remained calm as if nothing unusual had happened.

“The Antrabhara Temple asked us to bring a statue of the Heavenly Mater to them. They needed a new deity after the death of Da Heitian, so I agreed.”

Bai Lingmiao had no reason to stop another person from devoting to the Heavenly Mater, especially since it was also the latter’s intention.

Besides, the Antrabhara Temple would also provide some of their techniques as payment.

In the future, the White Lotus Sect could use not only its own techniques but also part of the Heavenly Dao of Death, just like the Lamas from the Antrabhara Temple.

However, the techniques of the Antrabhara Temple were rumored to be extremely hard to learn. Thankfully, the White Lotus Sect had many devotees, so they could just pick from the large pool of devotees.

Chun Xiaoman sighed after learning that Bai Lingmiao was okay. She had almost called the other sect members to intercept the Lamas.

“But Miaomiao, why do they want a statue of the Heavenly Mater?”

No matter how Chun Xiaoman looked at it, the White Lotus Sect had nothing to lose and earned much more than expected from the negotiation. She believed that it was too good to be true.

As the Saintess, Bai Lingmiao naturally knew more than the others, especially since she learned a few things from Suisui. However, she didn’t know how to explain it to Chun Xiaoman since it was related to the Heavenly Daos. Simply telling the truth to Chun Xiaoman could be bad.

“Hmm... How should I explain this to you...” As Bai Lingmiao was worrying over the matter, a devotee barged in.

“Saintess, the Emperor wishes to see you.”

Both Bai Lingmiao and Chun Xiaoman were confused. They didn’t know why Gao Zhijian was looking for them.

Nevertheless, they had to go. He had once traveled with them. Without any hesitation, Bai Lingmiao stepped outside.

“Let me accompany you.” Chun Xiaoman was worried, so she followed Bai Lingmiao.

They got into an intricate carriage. The wheels, covered in bronze, started turning as they were ushered to the palace.

However, when they reached the gates, the carriage did not stop and continued inside. None of the guards stopped them. The carriage stopped in front of a grand palace before Bai Lingmiao disembarked.

Bai Lingmiao frowned when she looked at the building. It seemed like a place for discussing official matters rather than reminiscing about old memories.

“Let’s go.” Bai Lingmiao lifted her white skirt as her white shoes touched the smooth marble floor. She walked into the palace without fear.

The palace was empty, but Bai Lingmiao could clearly see with her mind’s eye^[1] that several people were having a meal in the middle of the hall.

She saw the Emperor of the Liang Kingdom, the Khan of Qing Qiu, the Emperor of Si Qi, the Emperor of Hou Shu, and the Emperor of Nan Ping. All five Emperors related to the Dragon Veins were gathered in the middle of the hall.

They turned their gazes toward Bai Lingmiao, and she felt a massive pressure on her.

Gao Zhijian placed his wine cup down and happily pointed at the space beside him. “Senior Bai, come. Let’s talk and eat at the same time.”

Gao Zhijian was slightly startled when he saw Chun Xiaoman.

He raised his wine glass and toasted the Emperor of Hou Shu.

The meal of the Emperors was a stark difference from the outside world. It included steamed chicken soup, stir-fried bamboo shoots, Fotiaoqiang, winter melon fish balls, stir-fried crab yolk with shark fins and osmanthus, and braised scallops with mushrooms.

The dishes were unparalleled and couldn't be compared to the food outside. The best chefs of the Liang Kingdom were all hired by the palace.

When she looked at the delicious meals on the table, Chun Xiaoman remembered the beggars eating the fruit peels. She became upset.

Even the things thrown out from the palace were rare food the commoners could barely afford. And yet, the emperors didn't pay much attention to the meals, regardless of how delicious they were.

Bai Lingmiao sat down and recalled what she had seen when entering the hall. *They were already eating before we arrived here. It doesn't seem like he wants to treat us to a meal.*

"Here, let me give a toast to the Saintess. Your hard work was paramount in ending the Natural Disaster." Gao Zhijian and the other emperors raised their wine glasses in unison.

Bai Lingmiao raised her own glass and toasted each of them before sipping on her wine.

The bitter wine did not affect Bai Lingmiao at all. She placed down the cup and asked directly, "Gao Zhijian, just tell us what you need. We're all the same, and we traveled together for a long time."

"Hahaha!" Gao Zhijian laughed. "That's true. We did escape Zephyr Temple together in the past. I somehow miss the days when we were eating and camping outdoors. Since we are all friends here, I won't beat the bush around anymore. I'm here to treat you to a meal and talk about the White Lotus Sect."

1. The relic that restored her sight. 🙌

Chapter 850 - White Lotus Sect

“Is something wrong with the White Lotus Sect?” Chun Xiaoman was confused. *Wasn't everything fine?*

Gao Zhijian glanced at her but said nothing. Instead, the Khan spoke up. “Stop beating around the bush and tell it to her straight. Saintess, when we fought against the Dharma Sect in the past, your sect definitely sacrificed a lot of men and money to fight against them. We are grateful for that, but we must keep one thing clear—don't you think the White Lotus Sect has stepped over the boundaries?”

A low voice growled, “It's not just in Qing Qiu, but also Si Qi, Hou Shu, Nan Ping, and the Liang Kingdom. Even An Xi to the east! The White Lotus Sect is everywhere and shows no signs of stopping its expansion. Doesn't that mean that you will ultimately engulf our land?”

Bai Lingmiao heard their words and knew why they had summoned her. She lightly pinched the back of her hand, and her heart fluttered. Another body extended out from the back, but this second body had a red cloth covering her head.

The Second Deity chuckled. “Are you worried that the White Lotus Sect has a lot of people? Didn't you say it would be better if more people joined us? Are you trying to kill us off now that the Dharma Sect has fallen? Have you considered the price you would have to pay to fight us? Don't try to push us too far. The Dharma Sect could revolt, and so can we. In fact, the White Lotus Sect might do better than the Dharma Sect.”

“Impudent!”

The atmosphere in the hall became tense. Bai Lingmiao played the good cop and stopped the Second Deity. “Don’t say that. Since they invited us here, they want to discuss it with us. We are all friends here. There’s no need to burn any bridges here. We even worked together to fight against the Dharma Sect.”

All five Emperors sighed and looked better after Bai Lingmiao said that.

The atmosphere mellowed, and Gao Zhijian immediately gave Bai Lingmiao a way to step down. “Senior Bai, we called you today to see if there’s a plan to solve this. It’s not just because the White Lotus Sect has a lot of devotees, but also because they are spreading and recruiting like crazy. If we do nothing, I fear the White Lotus Sect will take over the entire world.”

“I think that that would be fine. Everyone would become brothers and sisters in this world. There wouldn’t be any war, and everyone would be equal,” Chun Xiaoman said.

When the other Emperors revealed a hint of anger, Gao Zhijian frowned. “I summoned the White Lotus Sect Saintess. Why is this black-haired girl here? Guards, show her out!”

Chun Xiaoman was shocked when she looked at Gao Zhijian. It was as if she didn’t know him.

The eunuchs carried Chun Xiaoman and tossed her outside. Only then did the Second Deity speak to all five Emperors. “Fine, I know what you’re talking about. What do you want us to do, then?”

Gao Zhijian sighed. “The nation is in tatters, and there are a lot of places that require fixing. The people cannot handle another war. Senior Bai, you need to consider where we stand. What I want is for the palace to issue certifications. Only those with them can join the White Lotus Sect, just like what we did with the Righteous Monastery. This way, we can satisfy both sides. The White Lotus Sect members can be granted official statuses and identifications, and we can effectively monitor and control the sect’s expansion.”

“A win-win on both sides? I don’t think so. If we did that, the palace would control who can join the White Lotus Sect. Who’s the Saintess—you or me?”

“This is non-negotiable!” The Emperor of Si Qi was adamant. “If you don’t comply, we will do it the old way!”

Everyone tensed up again when they heard that. Everyone knew what the old way meant.

“Are you threatening me? Hahahah! You must feel strong! I fear that even if you gathered everyone in Si Qi, you would still have fewer people than the White Lotus Sect. Do you think we are afraid of you? I wonder why are you feeling so haughty now? I didn’t see that side of you when you were bound by someone in the mud!”

The Emperor of Si Qi stood up straight and waved his sleeves. “Hmph! The Emperors are the leaders of all life. We are the ones who brought prosperity to the world! I am the son of the Dragon who carries the fate of the world! Did I ask you to save me last time? Why don’t you leave me alone and let this world lose another division!”

The Second Deity scoffed at him. “Is this how the Emperor of Si Qi acts? Fighting against a little girl?”

“Come on, stop fighting! We can talk it out.” Gao Zhijian and Bai Lingmiao intervened to calm both sides.

After Bai Lingmiao tested the waters with Gao Zhijian about several solutions, she decided to delay the matter a bit. “I need to talk to the elders of my sect since this is very important. We will give you an answer soon.”

After testing both the roundabout and direct route, Bai Lingmiao had a good grasp of the bottom line. Now, she just needed to figure out a way.

“Alright, I must implore Senior Bai to let me know soon.”

Gao Zhijian gulped down his wine when he looked at Bai

Lingmiao leaving the hall.

“Liang Kingdom Emperor, do you think she will agree?” the Khan asked.

Gao Zhijian gradually clenched his fists. “It doesn’t matter. What’s more important is the answer of the Heavenly Mater.”

He didn’t want to fight against the White Lotus Sect when they had just dealt with the Dharma Sect. The more dangerous the situation was, the faster the sects would grow.

“The White Lotus Sect is expanding too fast. We need to act now. Even the Antrabhara Temple got in contact with her.”

Gao Zhijian frowned and thought of a solution: “Divide and conquer. While the White Lotus Sect is scary as a massive entity, we won’t have to worry about it anymore if we manage to separate it into ten different sects.”

“Do you have a plan to do so? This is not something a regular person could do.”

The four Emperors and Gao Zhijian looked at the Imperial Preceptor, who walked out from the darkness. “We have the Sitting Oblivion Dao.”

Gao Zhijian remembered what the contents of the Emperor’s Art[1] were—it emphasized the duality of things, where each thing had good and bad aspects. Whether something was good or bad depended on how it was used.

“Fine, let’s just stop this today. Dismissed.” The moment Gao Zhijian spoke, the other four Emperors disappeared without a trace.

They had never been in the Liang Kingdom. They were nothing but illusions.

Gao Zhijian stared at Xuan Pin floating up from the ground. “I don’t know if you are more like Li Sui or the Chief nowadays. I fear that I might not be using you anymore since we know each other.”

Xuan Pin shook her head. “Lord, please be at ease. I think you’re doing the right thing, and I won’t stop you. Also, this is good

news for my mother. This was never her responsibility, and she shouldn't have to shoulder it. It would be good if someone could take on her mantle."

"Really? Do you think she won't hate you for pulling her down from her throne?"

"This was your doing. Even if she were to hold a grudge, she would hold it against you. It has nothing to do with me."

Gao Zhijian looked at her calmly. "You should know that you won't be able to stand on the sidelines all the time. Since you are the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau, you will eventually have to clash with her."

"I will await for that moment. Until then, I will try my best to avoid it."

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1. A book detailing what an Emperor should do 📖

Chapter 851 - Zen

In the capital city of Qi Kingdom, Li Huowang strolled through the streets in You Capital from the Qi Kingdom. Li Huowang had put on a face using the techniques of the Sitting Oblivion Dao, so none of the civilians noticed him.

He put his real face on one of the Mo family's "robots" in the palace to confuse the others.

He wasn't sure if it would work, but he decided to do it anyway. So far, they hadn't found out which world was trying to kill them, whether they asked the Gan family to use their divination skills or utilized the techniques of other sects.

They could only confirm that it was not the world where god Yu'er came from. They had once taken over the Qi Kingdom, and their world didn't resemble a world inhabited by regular people.

Li Huowang could do nothing without knowing who was going to attack him. The only thing he could do was to wait and ambush the attackers.

He wasn't sure if he had tipped them off last time, but no one had attacked the Qi Kingdom for a while. Still, Li Huowang couldn't just spend all day waiting for them. He still needed to do his work to revive the Qi Kingdom.

He saw the civilians' health improving and the Qi Kingdom slowly reviving. Both the palace and the Surveillance Bureau were being reconstructed, which also meant that the power he controlled was slowly expanding.

The survivors heard that the You Kingdom had food, so they slowly flocked there. The ones reaching the You Capital the fastest were, naturally, those with supernatural powers.

It was unclear whether this was due to the presence of a

common enemy or Chan Du's promise, but somehow, everything in the Qi Kingdom was within Li Huowang's grasp.

With them under his command, Li Huowang could capture the assailants alive next time.

He needed to capture the Twisted One and pry out their spine to make another spine sword. He could then use it to enter their world to see what was going on.

He was thinking about it when he stopped after he saw Miao Guihua, the little girl, holding a few ribs while listening to an elderly man along with a group of other children.

Li Huowang took off his fake face and changed into his original face. He patted her head lightly. "What are you doing?"

"Bodhisattva!" Miao Guiha greeted Li Huowang. She was very happy to see him.

Li Huowang asked her again what she was up to, and she revealed the ribs in her arms. "My master told me to collect things that could be burned. I saw a lot of skeletons on the road, so I picked them up."

Li Huowang thought it was good that the Righteous Monastery could let her work. After all, according to their values, only the helpful, productive people were worthy enough to live right now. A child without value would be stuffed into a vase and sold off as a human "hard drive."

"Guihua, I'm afraid that bones are really bad kindlings, but go back to tell the monks to grind the bones into powder. That way, they can use them as fertilizer for the fields."

"Ok, I will remember it!" She nodded vigorously, and the ribs in her arms slid down a bit. She bent down and hugged the ribs even tighter.

"Go and don't run around aimlessly. While we have patrols here, there are more and more people entering this place, so it's not as safe as you would think."

Miaohua looked at the talking old man, hesitant to leave.
“Bodhisattva, can I leave after I finish listening to him?”

Li Huowang patted her head while looking at the old man with a beard full of white hair. “What is he doing?”

“He’s talking about old history. My grandfather also talked to me about it before he died.”

Li Huowang chose not to leave but instead sat down and listened.

“*Sigh~* You guys were born at the right time. It was even worse last time. We didn’t know anything, and we could only grovel on the ground to eat dirt. However, the Heavens couldn’t bear it any longer and helped us. They told us that we could use cotton to make clothes, and they told us how to plant grains and rear livestock. They told us how to use fire, and more importantly, gave us wisdom. That is why we can now use rules and maintain order. From there onwards, we finally differentiated ourselves from the birds, beasts, and insects.”

Li Huowang frowned and clenched his fist a bit. A woman appeared from a crossroads, waving at them. “Guihua, come here!”

Miao Guihua saw that woman and ran after her excitedly.
“Mother, look! I picked up a lot of bones!”

“Is that so? My daughter is amazing! Come, let’s give the bones to the masters.” The woman held Guihua’s hands to bring her to the Righteous Monastery.

Miao Guihua left, and Li Huowang finally questioned the old man. “Old man, can I ask you something? How did you survive last time when you didn’t have food?”

The old man let out a deep sigh, appearing weary as he remembered. “Both my son and son-in-law were incredibly filial. They cut off their flesh to feed me, but now they are dead and I’m still alive. What an ironic twist of fate...”

“Bullshit.” Li Huowang frowned, and the people around him

scattered. Soon, they were left alone.

“Who are you, and why are you here?” Li Huowang asked directly because he felt something was wrong with the old man. More importantly, the old man did not try to hide it.

The old man didn’t panic when Li Huowang saw through him and instead introduced himself courteously. “I am called Po Daer. I’m just a minor cultivator without any sect. I greet Daoist Li.”

“What are you cultivating?”

“Zen.”

“What kind of Zen?”

“Wild Fox Zen.”

“Wild Fox Zen?” Li Huowang inspected the old man before him and recalled his actions. He had a strange sense of familiarity to him.

“Old man, did you know I had an old friend who loved telling stories like you?”

“I’m not telling stories. I’m telling histories.”

“That’s doesn’t matter. Just like you, he always ran to another world to talk about stories. And more importantly, he was a Twisted One!”

Li Huowang had just said that when the ground beneath the old man sank, rendering him immobile.

Li Huowang then used his spine sword to stab towards the old man’s abdomen. However, just as the spine sword touched the old man’s body, the head of the old man shook violently before it shot up.

His organs were connected to the bottom of his neck as his head flew upwards into the air. Li Huowang had stabbed into the empty shell of the old man’s body.

Chapter 852 - Po Daer

Po Daer flew in the air rapidly with his organs trailing beneath him before planting himself on a man's neck. Then, he somehow controlled the man's right arm to tear off their own screaming head and take its place. The man's body was now Po Daer's.

With his new body, Po Daer shouted at Li Huowang, "Daoist Li, don't be rash. I'm just here to talk. There's no need to make the situation so tense for everyone here. We can discuss things peacefully."

Li Huowang stopped and frowned at the old man. Po Daer had decided not to use aggression since it wasn't working on Li Huowang.

Li Huowang did not object to the discussion. He needed to know what was happening, and he could kill the old man anytime.

For some reason, Li Huowang was stuck in the middle of a plot again, and yet he was still clueless about the situation.

"Alright, talk. Explain to me clearly. I've always been a fair man. I don't know how or when I've offended your world to the point that you would kill me without a single warning."

The Qi Kingdom's palace had received information about their skirmish while Li Huowang was talking. The Surveillance Bureau of the Qi Kingdom had already surrounded the entire street.

Po Daer was not afraid even though he was surrounded by the Surveillance Bureau. He looked at Li Huowang without a single hint of fear.

"Does Daoist Li really do not know, or are you pretending not to know?"

"I do know, but how does saving the Qi Kingdom affect you guys? Can't you just live peacefully?"

Li Huowang tried to bait Po Daer into revealing more information.

“Of course we can’t. In each world, there is one flower and one tree to sustain everyone’s life. The flower of my world is dying. Daoist Li, you are the embodiment of a living Bodhisattva who couldn’t bear to see the people of the Qi Kingdom dying from starvation. Will you really allow the millions of people from the Tianchen Kingdom to suffer that fate?”

“Stop trying to guilt trip me! Your cheap tricks will not sway me! How am I involved if your world is dying? You should find the one who’s trying to destroy your world! Why are you trying to kill me instead?”

Po Daer bowed to Li Huowang gracefully. “Daoist Li, I do apologize. The people from before were crude men, and I apologize on their behalf. I disagreed with their methods, and you are correct—we should be finding the person trying to destroy our world, not you. However, if we were to pluck the flower from another tree, we would have to cross into the Qi Kingdom. It would be problematic for us if you were to revive the Qi Kingdom while we are crossing.”

Li Huowang understood what the old man meant. There was going to be an all-out war.

Po Daer stroked his white beard and chuckled. “Daoist Li, since you understand our plight, why don’t we make a deal?”

Li Huowang smiled coldly, doubtful of Po Daer’s words. “What? Do you only want to negotiate with me now that you know I’m hard to kill? What were you doing before this?”

“Daoist Li, we do not have a grudge that requires us to fight to the death. Why don’t we solve this amicably?”

“What about this? If you let us cross to the other world by passing through the Qi Kingdom, the Tianchen Kingdom will open up its granaries and give the Qi Kingdom three years’ worth of harvest. I imagine this will help a lot with your famine issue.”

Everyone from the Qi Kingdom was excited to hear Po Daer's proposal. The Qi Kingdom lacked food, so everyone knew how important that offer was.

"And why do you need to go to another world? Did you think that I wouldn't notice the catch to your proposal?"

No one knew what the Tianchen Kingdom was trying to do by passing through the Qi Kingdom. The more attractive the proposals were, the more worried Li Huowang was. He still remembered how they had tried to kill him.

Po Daer chuckled when Li Huowang questioned him. "To think that Daoist Li is such an astute man. You are right. We do need your help."

Po Daer pointed at the spine sword on Li Huowang's back. "We need Daoist Li's Horizon Rending Sword. I hope you will cooperate."

"Stop giving another name to my sword."

Li Huowang reached for his sword and recalled how they desperately tried to take it away.

"Wait, why do you need my spine sword? Is the problem from your world related to the Liang Kingdom?"

"Yes, that is correct." Po Daer nodded. "The scholar from the Astronomy Academy has discovered that the Infernal Matron has taken back her throne. We need to kill that evil demoness of the White Lotus, or the Tianchen Kingdom will fall into ruins!"

"White Lotus... Demoness....? Infernal Matron?" Li Huowang fell silent and slowly approached Po Daer. "You said that we don't have any grudges, right?"

"Indeed."

"Now we do!" Li Huowang shifted his body and instantly appeared in front of Po Daer. He stabbed the spine sword directly into Po Daer's forehead.

Just as Po Daer's head was almost sliced in half, his previously

empty shell of a body stood up and ran.

His head is not important. His body is!

Chan Du was already prepared by the time Po Daer tried to run. Chan Du sat down and plucked the nine scars on his forehead before flicking them to Po Daer.

In the middle of the sky, the black circular scars grew into grotesque balls of flesh.

The balls of flesh had almost hit Po Daer when a hole suddenly appeared out of nowhere. The balls of flesh plunged themselves straight into the hole.

Po Daer was on the verge of escaping into the hole when Li Huowang glared in his direction. In that instant, Po Daer's body froze in midair and began collapsing on itself. But then, just as Li Huowang was about to grind Po Daer into meat paste using his cultivation, a clear jade-like hand emerged from the hole.

The hand gently pinched Po Daer's body before removing something intangible from it. The hand threw the intangible energy to the side and Li Huowang's vision followed it uncontrollably.

One of Chan Du's scars had turned into a meat paste since Li Huowang had looked at it, while Po Daer had vanished into the hole without leaving a trace.

Li Huowang stood motionless—he never thought something like that could happen. The hand had picked up and tossed his cultivation of the “Truth.”

The power to traverse between worlds clearly belonged to a Twisted One. However, not anyone could touch his “Truth” cultivation. Even if he used his own cultivation on himself, he wouldn't be able to turn it tangible and grab it. And yet, the jade-like hand could grab it and throw it away!

Li Huowang clearly understood how strong his powers were. He thought that he was almost undefeatable in this world, but it appeared he was wrong.

Whose hand is it? How did they do it? Only a Siming could do it!

Chapter 853 - Li Sui

“Father, where are you?”

Li Sui was wandering on the streets as she looked around her.

The street was bustling with activity, and a market was taking place today. People were peddling their wares on the sidewalk. There were even performers earning their daily bread by having monkeys perform tricks. The atmosphere was full of life.

While Li Sui would’ve run around excitedly in the past, she didn’t intend to play around now. She had fallen here two days ago, and everyone kept saying this place was the Qi Kingdom. However, how could this place be the Qi Kingdom?

Her father had once used the spine sword to send her there, but he had also told her that god Yu’er had destroyed the Qi Kingdom—there shouldn’t have been so many survivors.

She didn’t know where she was or what was happening, leaving her in a state of confusion.

Nevertheless, she couldn’t just stand still and wait. She needed to move around because her father was still waiting for her to send Dragon Qi up there.

She stared at the people’s faces and hesitated. Then, carefully approaching an old woman who looked easy to talk to, she said, “Excuse me, ma’am. Do you know where the Emperor is?”

No matter where she was or what was happening, Li Sui knew that the correct choice would be to go to the place where the Emperor was.

If this was the Qi Kingdom, heading towards where the Emperor lived meant she would meet the monks. And even if the monks weren’t there, she could still head to the Surveillance Bureau to find where her father was.

“Huh? Emperor? I don’t know. He’s not in my house,” the old woman exclaimed loudly, her voice raised as her hearing was impaired.

“Little girl, why are you looking for the Emperor? Are you his secret child? Ha! I saw that plot in yesterday’s performance!”

Li Sui didn’t know what the old woman was rambling about, so decided to find someone else to ask.

She had just taken a few steps when a man with a medicinal plaster on the back of his hand grabbed her and dragged her out of the market. “Hey, why are you still walking around in the market? Your father is so anxious that he’s going crazy! Come with me.”

Li Sui perked up and quickly followed the man. “My father?”

After exiting the busy market and walking through half of the city, Li Sui was finally brought towards a massive estate.

“Master You! Master You! We found the young master!”

Everyone in the estate ran out upon hearing the man’s shout. Li Sui was confused about why they were circling him anxiously, and then she looked down and saw her new body. The father the man was talking about wasn’t her real father—it was the father of the young man whom she had crushed.

She looked around at their excited faces and felt ashamed, realizing what was happening. Li Sui had already learned the meaning of death and what it meant.

“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to do it. I didn’t want it to happen.”

They didn’t listen to Li Sui’s attempts to explain. They crowded around her as they walked towards the courtyard.

“I didn’t mean to do it! I really didn’t!”

She attempted to flee, but the people were already on high alert. They encircled her, preventing any chance of escape.

“I didn’t want to do it! I want to find my father!”

Li Sui pushed forcefully as several tentacles sprouted out from

her body. She pushed everyone away with her tentacles.

As soon as they laid eyes on the squirming tentacles protruding from her body, a wave of shock washed over everyone. For a brief moment, silence enveloped the room, but it was swiftly shattered as fear took hold and screams echoed through the air. Chaos erupted, engulfing the entire place.

They all tried their best to distance themselves from Li Sui, to the point that they ended up trampling over one another.

Li Sui took advantage of the chaos and escaped. She ran back to the market and sighed in relief.

“I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to do it. I will find a way to compensate everyone once I’ve found my father,” Li Sui murmured before continuing to wander around the market.

“Do you know where the Emperor is?”

“Do you know where the You Capital is?”

“I want to find the Emperor. Do you know where he is?”

Li Sui wandered around the market, persistently asking different people. As the market was closing, she finally obtained some useful information.

An old man who was selling roasted pickled vegetables gave her directions. “Head towards the east and continue to walk down the path. You will find the Emperor at the end of the path.”

After thanking the old man, Li Sui walked out of town, found the road, and continued her journey.

She dared not stop moving—her father’s survival was still uncertain.

Li Sui walked for two days and felt very hungry. She swallowed her saliva when she saw a group of ducks in the river, but she decided not to catch them. There was a large flock of them, so it was clear that somebody had been raising the ducks.

Just then, all of the ducks entered the water to swim to the opposite shore. Li Sui immediately noticed some white dots on the

river bank—duck eggs.

She ran over and picked three duck eggs before swallowing them whole one by one.

The three duck eggs weren't enough to fill her belly. She looked around and found one of the duck eggs was cracked open on a rock. She ran over and scooped up the broken egg before sucking on her fingers.

As she was enjoying her meal, she heard footsteps behind her.

A tentacle sporting two eyeballs sprouted from the back of her neck and caught sight of a group of people trailing behind two Daoists. One of the Daoists was old, while the other was young.

Li Sui recognized the crowd. Most of them were from the You family, including the so-called Master You and his wife. Li Sui, however, didn't recognize the two Daoists.

They wore strange Daoist robes without sleeves, revealing their arms as they gripped their cherrywood swords.

The old Daoist pointed the sword at Li Sui, causing her to jump from fright. "You animal! How dare you take the body of someone else! I shall enact justice in Heaven's stead!"

As she stood up to run and get away, she found herself surrounded by another group of people from the other side. They were guards from the You family and some city guards.

"Die, you animal!" The Daoist ran at Li Sui to stab her with his bloodied cherrywood sword.

Li Sui didn't want to fight him and kept dodging. As she was evading the attacks, the skies above her darkened and a foul-smelling liquid splashed onto her body.

The liquid was blood. While she was trying to wipe it away from her eyes, a sharp pain shot through her chest. The cherrywood sword had stabbed into her body.

The onlookers erupted in delight at the sight of Li Sui's injury. "Amazing! The black dog's blood really is useful to ward off evil!"

Chapter 854 - Chat

“It hurts! You’re hurting me!” Li Sui tried to push the old Daoist and the sword away. “Go away! I don’t want to kill people! Leave me alone!”

The two Daoists, in contrast, were excited when they heard her. “The evil entity is getting weaker! It’s trying to run away! My disciple, get ready to use the Soul Plunging Into Ocean Formation!”

“Yes, master!”

The two Daoists encircled Li Sui with synchronized hand seals and precise, deliberate movements.

Their shoe prints left a strange Daoist array on the ground, and the Feng Shui around them started to change.

Li Sui felt something was amiss and didn’t want to die here, so she took out some yellow talisman papers and began inscribing them with her own blood.

“Ma... Master. Am I seeing things right? Is the evil entity... is the evil entity drawing a talisman?”

Li Sui placed three talismans onto her tentacles and jumped up forcefully. She soared through the air and aimed for the river.

She wanted to avoid them by swimming away.

But as she was just about to land in the river, she saw several white flags embedded in the riverbed.

The Daoists had expected her to escape through the river and left traps there!

Bai Lingmiao felt her heart tense as she listened to Li Sui’s story. She leaned forward in anxiety as she held onto her teacup.

“And then what happened? Were you alright?”

Li Sui placed her teacup down lightly and chuckled. “Of course, everything was fine in the end. I wouldn’t be here today otherwise.

“The Daoists weren’t my match. I only panicked because it was the first time I was separated from Father. I won, but I was injured.”

Li Sui continued her story, recalling what had happened over a hundred years ago.

“Uuuu...” She dragged her bloody and tattered body from the river as she escaped.

Most of her tentacles had been snapped, and her body was filled with holes. She was almost blinded, and black fluid continued to leak out from a large hole on her head.

“Uuuuu... Father, where are you...? They are bullying me... It’s so painful...” Li Sui cried towards the sky as she ran.

She was heavily injured. Her instinct was driving her to find a new host to recover.

Li Sui returned to the river and discovered the Daoists who had been swept downstream. She dragged them out of the water and prepared to leave.

However, someone was blocking her path. It wasn’t the city guards or the guards from the You family. It was the wife of Master You.

“Oh great Immortal!” The woman practically broke down in tears as she kneeled before Li Sui.

“Oh great Immortal! Please, let go of my son! Let him go, please! He had just passed his village exams! He’s going to be a scholar in the city soon! Please, let him go and eat me instead!”

“Sorry...” Li Sui sobbed and bowed to her before walking past the woman.

“Great Immortal!” Her sorrowful cries made Li Sui stop.

Four plump children wearing dudous were presented in front of Li Sui.

“Great Immortal! I’ve bought these four children! Let’s exchange them, please! Four of them for my son! You won’t get cheated by me! It’s a fair deal!”

“I... I don’t want... I want to go back... I want my father...” Li Sui dragged the corpses as she continued to trudge onwards.

A sharp pain suddenly shot through her back. She looked back and saw the crazed woman stabbing her with a hairpin!

The woman was looking at Li Sui with deep hatred. “Give me back my son!”

Such small wounds did nothing to Li Sui, but with each stab and each time she met the woman's eyes, the guilt in Li Sui's heart intensified. It made her feel like a child being scolded for making a mistake.

In the end, Li Sui threw down the corpses and ran into the forest.

The skies turned dark and it started raining. She was tired and wanted to find a place to rest, but no such place existed.

Li Sui was cold, hungry, and wounded. She squatted down under a large tree and cried in despair.

“Father! Mother! Where are you?”

Wisps of steam floated out from the teacup in Li Sui’s hands. Under her watchful gaze, the steam dissipated in the air.

“Afterwards, the woman did not blame me. She was a rational woman who forgave me because it was an accident. After establishing a foothold in the Qi Kingdom, I even helped the You family and gave one of them the title of a fourth-rank official[1]. I suppose it’s compensation for them.

“Still, even though it was an accident, the reality is that I crushed their son.”

Bai Lingmiao sighed when she heard the story's ending. “I suppose it’s alright to let it go since everything ended well.”

“I never held onto the guilt. It’s just a story I thought would be suitable to talk to you, mother,” Li Sui said, picking up the gifts she had made. “Mother, these are red sugar cubes with gum and honey dates. Put them in hot water and drink them when you have your

period. They should help you relieve pain and cramps.”

Bai Lingmiao felt a warmth in her heart. No one had taken care of her so well in the past.

“Also, I made some clothes for you. I know you prefer simple clothes, so I didn’t choose brightly colored fabric. This one opens up at the back so Second Mom can come out from there.”

The Second Deity felt the smooth silk and chuckled. “It’s good that I treated you so well when you were younger.”

They were talking when urgent footsteps came from outside.

It was Li Huowang. Bai Lingmiao had been trying on her new clothes when Li Huowang asked her hastily, “Miaomiao, where are the books kept in the secret underground chamber of the ancestral hall? I need them!”

“You mean the books with the techniques of the White Lotus Sect? They’re all in the White Lotus Hall for copying and distribution. They’re not here anymore.”

“No, not that. I need the books recording the various nonsense about the White Lotus Sect!”

“Oh, they are on the second shelf of the east wall.”

After hearing Li Sui’s answer, Li Huowang ran inside and started rummaging around.

Li Sui checked the new clothes that Bai Lingmiao was trying on. “Does it fit? If it doesn’t, I can change it for you now.”

“It does fit. Suisui, what’s happening to your father?”

“Don’t worry. He will tell us what’s happening later. Mother, there’s actually something important that I need to tell you today.”

Bai Lingmiao looked at Li Sui and sat down. “Oh? What is it?”

“Mother, do you still remember why you were chosen to become the Saintess?”

“The Heavenly Mater chose me. I didn’t want to do it willingly.”

“Then, if I gave you the chance, would you give up on being a

Saintess? I remember that becoming a Saintess wasn't your dream, right?"

"Suisui, what's going on? Why are you telling me this?"

Thump! One of the books fell on the ground.

Li Sui paused and stared at Li Huowang, who was busy going through all the books. "Father, could you be quieter? I'm talking with Mother."

1. Officials in ancient times were ranked from one to ten, with one being the highest rank 📖

Chapter 855 - Help

“Father, could you be quieter? I’m trying to talk to Mother.”

Li Huowang ignored her and continued to search for the book he needed. He continued to murmur to himself, “This book... It’s not what I need.”

Li Sui saw that Li Huowang was ignoring her, so she didn’t think much about it. She turned to Bai Lingmiao. “Mother, I really don’t want you to be the Saintess. The higher up you climb, the more dangerous it is for you. I’m worried.”

“Danger? I thought the Dharma Sect had been exterminated. What danger is there left? Are you saying...?”

Bai Lingmiao looked towards the direction of the palace.

“Those at the top are always in danger, no matter where they are. To be honest, I didn’t want Gao Zhijian to be the Emperor or father to be a Twisted One because it’s dangerous. They didn’t have a choice, but you do. I can find a way to have someone replace you.”

Bai Lingmiao lowered her head and looked at her new clothes silently. “Is this related to the emperors seeking me out? Do they want to do something to me?”

Li Sui shook her head lightly. “No, we haven’t reached that stage yet. However, the situation will get very messy very quickly if this continues on. The frequency of such incidents will increase as long as you’re the Saintess. I fear that the situation will deteriorate in the future.

“Mother, don’t forget that we now have five Emperors. While Gao Zhijian may not do anything to you, the other Emperors are more than eager to get rid of you. There are still people who are on par with me in terms of strength in the other Surveillance Bureaus.

“More importantly, there’s nothing the White Lotus Sect can do. Any resistance would be treated as treason.”

“Then so be it! We will show them how strong we are!” Bai Lingmiao’s voice revealed a rare hint of anger.

The Second Deity turned and voiced the thoughts Bai Lingmiao had been keeping in her heart. “We, the White Lotus Sect, were the ones who fought against the Dharma Sect on the front lines! Our people generously donated money, food, and resources to support them!

“And now they have the nerve to tell us that there are too many people in the White Lotus Sect? Do they think that we are expendable tools?”

"You're absolutely correct—the White Lotus Sect is a tool." Li Sui's words caused the room to fall into a hushed silence, except for the sound of Li Huowang rummaging through the books.

Bai Lingmiao was in shock, her eyes wide as she looked at Li Sui.

“Mother, you must understand that these kinds of incidents are inevitable when you hold such a high position. Mother, you must know that these incidents become common as you sit high in your throne. Since ancient times, emperors have always been cruel people, and the saying that the cruelest person is the Emperor is no mere exaggeration. ”

“You’ve escaped from the Zephyr Temple and finally have some time to relax. We finally have some time to relax after escaping Zephyr Temple. Now, it's your turn to enjoy some peace and tranquility.”

Bai Lingmiao recalled her past and remembered her naive dream. She remembered looking at everyone’s back and smiling.

A few breaths later, she was pulled back to reality. Bai Lingmiao shifted her gaze elsewhere and said, “It’s true, but there are some things I cannot decide for myself. I cannot leave,

especially after listening to your words.”

“Why?” Li Sui wasn’t surprised, but she still asked out of curiosity.

“Because I’m worried. I’m worried about the Emperor who would treat two million lives as a statistic. We are all humans, not weeds sprouting from the fields.”

Bai Lingmiao clutched onto her clothes as she spoke, “I could, at the very least, intimidate them a bit by staying here. If I were to actually leave, the White Lotus Sect would crumble into a disorganized mess, easily manipulated by the Emperor’s whims.”

Bai Lingmiao then placed her clothes to the side. “Suisui, go back and tell Gao Zhijian everything can be negotiated. As a sign of our sincerity, I’ve restricted my people from recruiting or spreading our gospel.”

Li Sui sipped her tea and said, “Mother, it’s not just humans we have to be wary about. We also have to consider what the Simings above think. Will the Heavenly Mater agree? You might end up with two dissatisfied parties instead.

Bai Lingmiao’s expression changed slightly, but she refused to budge. “I know that there will be issues, but I don’t want to give up. I want to at least try.

“I can’t give up just because I know it will be difficult. I don’t want to run from my problems—I want to face them head-on this time. I will not regret this, no matter what the outcome is.”

“Nice!” The Second Deity circled around and gave Bai Lingmiao a light peck on her cheek. “We’ve worked hard to secure our role, and now they want us to back down just because they said so? Who do they think they are? Let them try to force us. Let’s see if we get exterminated or if we get to punch out their teeth!”

Li Sui understood Bai Lingmiao’s intention and nodded, “Alright, I will pass on your message.”

Li Sui stood up and looked at Li Huowang, “Father, are you still

searching for the book? Do you need my help? What kind of book are you looking for?"

The Second Deity glanced at the gift Li Sui had brought them before whispering in her heart, "In the end, we are only her stepmother, so it's natural that she's a bit distant from us. Look at how chummy she is with her father."

"Why are you treating Suisui like that? I thought you were very close to her last time. This isn't her fault. She's caught in the middle of two opposing forces and has to be careful."

"Are you sure she's in a difficult position? I might be close to her, but she's no longer two years old. She's already one hundred sixty-two years old. There's always going to be a barrier between us."

Bai Lingmiao frowned before approaching Li Huowang too.

Seeing that Bai Lingmiao didn't want to talk to her anymore, the Second Deity decided not to say anything else. Her intentions had already been made clear.

"Hey, crazy bastard. What are you looking for? It's been half a day, and you still couldn't find it?"

Eight pairs of eyes were better compared to a single pair of eyes. They rapidly searched through the books and soon organized them based on their contents.

Some were illustration books, some were records of history, and there were even some scriptures—the genres of the books were chaotic. Li Huowang sat on the floor and read every single one because he couldn't afford to miss anything. He was hoping that he would find what he needed in the books.

"Father, did something happen in the Qi Kingdom?" Li Sui suddenly sensed that something was wrong.

"Yes, they are here! Their goal isn't the Qi Kingdom—it's the Liang Kingdom! They are passing through the Qi Kingdom, and their real goal is to cross into the Liang Kingdom and kill your

mother!”

Li Sui and Bai Lingmiao were shocked at his words. They now understood why Li Huowang was panicking.

Chapter 856 - Void Home

Li Huowang explained the situation to Bai Lingmiao and Li Sui. One was from the Surveillance Bureau, while the other was from the White Lotus Sect. They needed to learn about it sooner or later.

He could even ask Li Sui to pass the message to Gao Zhijian.

Threats like these needed to be told to the highest authorities in the history so they could prepare.

It would be a significant issue if they were to come and fight against the White Lotus Sect with their full strength now.

“Based on what I’ve learned, they appeared to have some kind of fight with the White Lotus Sect in the past. Since I can’t find anything else from them, I thought it would be plausible to find some information through the White Lotus Sect, especially about the jade-like hand.”

Li Sui found the key to the problem. “Jade-like hand? Father, did they have a grudge against the White Lotus Sect or the Heavenly Mater?”

Bai Lingmiao’s heart sped up because she remembered something.

“Isn’t it the same? Help me find all the past enemies that the White Lotus Sect encountered in the records. We can slowly rule them out later on.”

“I think... I think I know who they are,” said Bai Lingmiao.

Miaomiao had never once come into contact with them, so it was a bit unnatural that she knew who the enemies were.

“Did they record it down in the books? Who are they? Who’s the one with the jade-like hand?”

Bai Lingmiao didn’t know how to explain it. She scanned the books littered on the ground and accurately picked one up before

giving it to Li Huowang.

Li Huowang looked at her with doubt before quickly reading through the book.

The Heavenly Mater is the ancient God that cannot be birthed or killed! She could send all of us to the Void Home to avoid any tribulations! Everything in this world was supposed to be in the hands of the Heavenly Mater! Every part of the world belonged to the Void Home. Under her care, we gave birth, grew, and became old.

One day, someone betrayed her, and they were none other than her most trusted grandchildren!

As the army of Unspeakable was being birthed from the Heavenly Mater's dantian, some of her grandchildren revolted. They conspired with the army of Unspeakable to betray her! They killed the loyal grandchildren and took away everything from the Heavenly Mater.

They discarded what they didn't need and swallowed what they wanted. Afterward, they positioned themselves in the very spot where the Heavenly Mother ought to be seated!

They feared their deeds would be discovered, so they rewrote the history books! They've changed history in people's hearts!

However, we remember. Our history forever belongs to the Heavenly Mater. We will never forget, and we will patiently await the day when the Heavenly Mater reclaims her rightful place on the throne!

The Heavenly Mater is both dead and alive. Since they've taken everything, there's nothing else the Heavenly Mater could lose.

A person covered in unhealable wounds would never have new wounds on their body. After being stripped of everything, the Heavenly Mater had nothing else to be taken away.

The Heavenly Mater is constantly trying, day and night, men and women, or even Yin and Yang. The traitors are always watching because they are afraid. They are continually hindering us from reuniting with the Heavenly Mater.

They can send their people to stop us if they want, but it doesn't

matter to us. We simply need to succeed once. With that, the Heavenly Mater will be reinstated upon her rightful throne and return to her rightful place!

No matter how long it will take, I will forever wait as her last surviving grandchild. Even if I were to be killed, my son would crawl out from my body and continue the wait. I will have sons and grandsons, and my family will wait forever! For the Heavenly Mater and the Void Home!

Li Huowang stared at the contents and gradually understood what was happening.

“So...” Li Huowang placed the book down and looked up. “The people who betrayed the Heavenly Mater in the other history were her grandchildren?”

Li Huowang’s questions were answered the moment he voiced them.

It explained why the people of the Tianchen Kingdom held a grudge against the Heavenly Mater, which was also why they sought to kill the Saintess of the White Lotus Sect after the Heavenly Mater's reinstatement.

He was shocked. He continued to read the book in a panic.

They allied themselves with the army of Unspeakable and killed the grandchildren who were loyal to the Heavenly Mater. Then, they stripped her of everything, tossing away what they didn’t need and taking what they did need. They replaced her and stood where the Heavenly Mater once stood.

“If this is real, that means that the Void Home is another timeline of the history and the turf of the Heavenly Mater!”

Li Huowang looked up and took a sharp breath as he stared at Bai Lingmiao. To think that they actually did it.

That was how the jade-like hand could move his cultivation of the “Truth” so easily. They had taken the Heavenly Dao of the Heavenly Mater and used them for their own purposes.

Even though the five branches of history did not intersect, the current history of the Tianchen Kingdom undoubtedly strayed from the path the most.

Being able to strip the Heavenly Dao from a Siming meant that they were very strong, which was bad because it meant that they would be troublesome opponents.

Li Huowang frowned and continued to analyze the words of the book.

The army of Unspeakable was being birthed from the Heavenly Mater's dantian when her grandchildren revolted.

“They had allied with the army of Unspeakable to betray the Heavenly Mater before stripping everything off her... The Unspeakable army...”

Li Huowang pondered those words carefully.

The army of Unspeakable was the key here. If not, the grandchildren wouldn't have been able to steal the Heavenly Dao from the Heavenly Mater successfully.

He now had to face both the grandchildren from the Void Home and the mysterious army of the Unspeakable.

But the Unspeakable recorded in the book clearly didn't indicate that it was Ji Zai. Ji Zai was Li Huowang himself, and he couldn't have crawled out from the dantian of the Heavenly Mater.

Also, Ji Zai was just unspeakable in a sense. Unspeakable was not Ji Zai's name. Therefore, the army of Unspeakable did not point to Ji Zai.

More importantly, the word army meant that there were a lot of Unspeakable.

“If that's the case, who owns the jade-like hand? The grandchildren of the Heavenly Mater or the army of the Unspeakable?”

Chapter 857 - Analysis

Even after he flipped through all of the books, Li Huowang had no idea if the owner of the jade hand belonged to the army of the Unspeakable or the so-called grandchildren.

He even asked Bai Lingmiao to go and question all of the elders of the White Lotus Sect, but they came up empty-handed. It had been a very long time. The White Lotus Sect had been hiding for so long that they had no idea how many generations had passed on the surface.

As for their memories of the Heavenly Mater and the Void Home, they were looking through it with a filter of their belief. To them, the stories were just legends or myths that had no substance.

Still, their method of questioning them was ultimately correct. Li Huowang compiled the information they had obtained and finally understood why he was the one being ambushed instead,

The Tianchen Kingdom was none other than the Void Home. The Heavenly Mater had once controlled that particular branch of history.

However, after the betrayal of the army of the Unspeakable and the grandchildren, they stripped away the Heavenly Dao of the Heavenly Mater and took it as their own.

After everything was taken away from her, the Heavenly Mater had no choice but to find a way to revive and somehow ended up in the Liang Kingdom.

The Heavenly Mater influenced the regular people here, and the influence of the White Lotus Sect slowly spread to find a way to revive herself. Unfortunately, there wasn't a spare Heavenly Dao around, so the White Lotus Sect could not be revived.

Finally, the Heavenly Mater found a chance and obtained a

Twisted One after going through various issues. At the same time, the Heavenly Mater obtained both the Heavenly Dao of Death and Heavenly Dao of Benevolence. That was how she returned to her throne.

As for the Tianchen Kingdom, previously the Void Home, they had sensed the reinstatement of the Heavenly Mater.

They would never let the Heavenly Mater become stronger—they knew for certain that she would take revenge on them after they had betrayed her and even taken her Heavenly Dao.

They wanted to pass through the Qi Kingdom to enter the Liang Kingdom. Their goal was to kill the Twisted One of the Heavenly Mater before she became powerful. They planned to destroy the White Lotus Sect from the root.

There was even a possibility that they would take it a step further by once again stripping both the Heavenly Daos from the Heavenly Mater.

Li Huowang was coincidentally the one saving the Qi Kingdom and interfering with their plan. That was why they wanted to take away the spine sword, which allowed for traversal between the Qi Kingdom and the Liang Kingdom.

After seeing that Li Huowang was not an easy foe, they sent Po Daer to forge an alliance with him. The only flaw in their plan was that the Saintess of the White Lotus Sect was Li Huowang's wife.

Li Huowang couldn't wait for the Heavenly Mater to grow strong enough to take revenge on her grandchildren or the army of the Unspeakable.

Li Huowang would never let his wife face an entire army from an alternate history on her own. In this situation, negotiations were completely out of the question.

After hearing Li Huowang's explanation, both Li Sui and Bai Lingmiao were worried. The Liang Kingdom had just been freed from the threat of the Dharma Sect, and now another war was

looming just over the horizon.

“The Void Home is another alternate history?” Bai Lingmiao frowned. “Senior Li, maybe you’re wrong. Perhaps it isn’t another history but the real Void Home.” Bai Lingmiao’s hands were trembling. “Yes, that’s right! It’s the real Void Home, but it’s being occupied by someone else! We just need to help the Heavenly Mater to take it back. That’s right. It must be like that.”

Li Huowang was about to argue, but Li Sui called out to him, prompting him to turn around.

“Father, if it’s as you say, then we can ask the Heavenly Mater directly. Maybe we can get more clues.”

“That’s right!” Li Huowang perked up. The Heavenly Mater would certainly remember who had betrayed her and left her in the dust to rot.

“Miaomiao, can you tell your men to find the Heavenly Mater and find out what happened?”

Bai Lingmiao took a few panicked breaths before finally calming down. “No, I can’t do that. I’ve been trying to contact her ever since Death returned, but the Heavenly Mater still appears to be dead. She hasn’t reacted to my voice at all...”

Li Huowang sighed and couldn’t even get angry. Someone was knocking on their door, yet the Heavenly Mater was still playing dead!

It wasn’t just Ji Zai. The Heavenly Mater wasn’t being useful either. Li Huowang lamented how all of the Simings by his side were practically useless.

“Nevermind. Let’s not place our hopes on them. We have to rely on ourselves.”

Li Huowang scratched the back of his head while pacing around, deep in thought as he tried to come up with a plan. He suddenly stopped. “Suisui, you can head back first and let Gao Zhijian know what’s happening. Let him and the other emperors

prepare.”

Li Sui was about to say something when Li Huowang said, “Actually, you don’t have to go. I’ll go ahead and inform them. You can contact the other Surveillance Bureaus—I’m not familiar with them. If the people from the Tianchen Kingdom do come, it will be a disaster far greater than a Natural Disaster.”

Li Huowang looked at Bai Lingmiao. “Miaomiao, just let the Heavenly Mater know what’s going on, even if she’s pretending to be dead.”

Li Huowang paused and said seriously, “Tell her that whether I can help or not depends on the decision of the Saintess. Let her know that it was Ji Zai who said that!”

If the Tianchen Kingdom was aiming for the Saintess of the White Lotus Sect, then Bai Lingmiao was in danger. He needed to find a way to protect her.

He hoped that even if they failed, the worst-case scenario would be the death of the Heavenly Mater rather than Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang nodded at Bai Lingmiao before leaving. As he was running towards the palace, Li Sui caught up to him and said, “Father, did you overhear the conversation between me and Mother? Are you killing two birds in one stone?”

“I’m not deaf. Of course I heard it.”

“Mother might not understand your intentions. Maybe you don’t know this, but I’ve seen that the White Lotus Sect has become a big obsession and responsibility for her. She poured her heart into it and would never let go of it. If she didn’t have the White Lotus Sect, she would be left with nothing.”

“Why would she be left with nothing? She still has me.”

“Father, you are really clueless. Mother never let the past go—she’s just trying to escape it by using the Void Home as an excuse. I’ve tried to figure things out for you two, but I can’t find a good

solution. After all, you're the person who killed her entire family.

"I think that if being together causes suffering for both of you, it would be better if you were separated."

Chapter 858 - Plan

Li Huowang stopped and looked at Li Sui incredulously. He never thought she would say something like that.

His lips quivered and he shouted, “Don’t butt into the matters of adults! You are just a child!”

Li Huowang began to walk away, then stopped again. “It’s up to her whether to understand me or not. Still, I need to use this chance to shake up the Heavenly Mater so that Miaomiao has the choice at least.”

“Alright, as you say.”

Li Sui’s slowly sank into the earth, saying, “Father, forgive me for my harsh words, but certain issues should be addressed as soon as possible. Dragging things on isn’t an option here.”

Li Huowang’s body glittered and disappeared. He was invisible now.

The palace in Shangjing wasn’t far, so Li Huowang reached it within moments. This time, Li Huowang found Gao Zhijian in the study, where he had been approving proposals and reports. Li Huowang kept the story short and explained everything that had happened.

Half a division later, Gao Zhijian was frowning. Li Huowang said, “I hope the emperors do not forsake the White Lotus Sect for the sake of peace. The White Lotus Sect is so massive that almost every civilian is a part of it. They are integral in every kingdom.”

Gao Zhijian frowned at Li Huowang. “I’m not so stupid enough to do that. There’s no difference between allowing foreign soldiers to run amok in my lands and giving my throne to someone else.”

“Good. I understand the conflict you have with the White Lotus Sect. Don’t worry about it—I’m certain that there’s a way to resolve

it.”

Gao Zhijian scratched his head. He didn’t want Li Huowang to get involved with them because he himself didn’t know what to do either.

“Senior Li, what do you think we should do to solve this?”

“I don’t have a plan. I will just sit in the middle and not let anyone kill anybody. We can slowly think about a plan that way. I will destroy the side that crosses the line first—they will have to do it over my dead body!”

Li Huowang then looked up at the ceiling and shouted, “Stop trying to pretend that you’re dead! I’m talking to you too! If you have the audacity to pull off any stupid stunts, I will go to the Baiyu Capital to give you a good beating!”

“Senior Li, can you stop fooling around? Actually, that’s fine. We have a common enemy in front of us, so let’s just set it aside for now. We can get back to it once we resolve the current issue.”

“Fine, let’s do this!” Li Huowang didn’t mind making threats and fooling around if it meant that their plan would work.

Li Huowang asked, “What do you intend to do?”

“This is an important decision, so it’s best not to be rash. We can wait until the other officials are here before we decide.”

Gao Zhijian pondered silently then asked, “Senior Li, are you still sending food to the Qi Kingdom?”

“Yes. Why? Do you still intend to stop me even though I’m sending food from Cowheart Village now?”

“No, I will not. In fact, I will even give them six months’ worth of food.”

Li Huowang was confused as to why Gao Zhijian suddenly changed his mind.

What is he thinking? If the Dragon Vein wasn’t protecting him, I would’ve thought the Sitting Oblivion Dao tricked him.

Gao Zhijian’s explanation gave Li Huowang the answer he

needed. “I won’t send only food but also weapons and armor. I will even request the Surveillance Bureau to send out some artifacts, pills, and talismans. They will only need to return them once everything is over.”

Li Huowang looked at Gao Zhijian with a complicated expression. “I know what you are thinking. You want to turn the Qi Kingdom into a line of defense to prevent them from entering the Liang Kingdom.”

Gao Zhijian didn’t give even a single grain to the Qi Kingdom last time, so there must be a reason for his generosity right now.

Standing from the perspective of an Emperor, it was indeed an excellent idea to weaponize the Qi Kingdom and make them fight the Tianchen Kingdom in their stead.

It was an great plan. All they needed to do was to give some food and equipment. In exchange, the Qi Kingdom would deal with the massive headache, and no one in the Liang Kingdom would need to die.

“Why not? Both sides would benefit like this.” Gao Zhijian said, extending his arms. “Of course, I won’t give them anything if you don’t want me to.”

Li Huowang felt something was wrong, but the plan was logical and had no weaknesses. “Fine, just give them quickly. Prepare the things as soon as you can. I will go back and check on them to ensure nothing has happened to the Qi Kingdom.”

Li Huowang took out his spine sword and was about to send out a rift when Gao Zhijian stopped him.

“Senior Li.” Li Huowang lowered his arm and looked at Gao Zhijian.

“Senior Li, humans are humans, while Simings are Simings. Those who are different from us will ultimately have their own agenda.”

“Is that what you’ve been thinking about? What if there was a

Siming who was also a human? What would you do in that case?"

Li Huowang did not wait for an answer and returned to the Qi Kingdom.

Gao Zhijian sighed as he stared at the vacant study. The recent conflict with the Dharma Sect had finally ended, but another war loomed on the horizon. Once again, the Liang Kingdom was on the brink of chaos. Gao Zhijian couldn't help but wonder when peace would finally return to the lives of its people.

"It seems we are destined for yet another war," Gao Zhijian murmured.

"We will have to raise taxes again." He paused, frowning. "No, that's not possible. We cannot solely rely on the resources of the Liang Kingdom. The other kingdoms need to lend their support too. Summon the officials for an urgent gathering."

"We understand." A file of old eunuchs appeared from behind the screen as they greeted Gao Zhijian.

Gao Zhijian pondered before he asked, "Things have gotten to this stage. I don't think asking about what's going on with Li Huowang is too much, is it?"

"Mm-hmm." Xuan Pin floated up from beneath the ground.

Gao Zhijian hesitated before he gave out his summons. Soon, an old man carrying a white flag entered the study. The old man's eyes were completely white as an eunuch guided him.

Gao Zhijian had met the man before. It was the same person whom they had sought to learn their fortune before the war with the Dharma Sect. He was much older now.

"Master, what do you think about the dangers to the Liang Kingdom this time?"

"Hmm..." The old man nodded silently before he knelt on the ground. He took out a palm-sized tortoise shell written with red runes.

The old man took out eight bronze coins and threw them into

the shell, raising it above his head and shaking it vigorously.

As he shook it, the old man mumbled, “Zi, Wu, Mao, You by the roadside, Yin, Shen, Ji, Hai back to their home. Jia, Zhen, Yi, Li, Bing, Xing, Kun, Ding, Qian, Wu, Kan, Ji, and Xun at the gate...”

He was halfway through the chant when the tortoiseshell in his hands burst open. The shrapnel cut open the old man’s hands while the bronze coins, now bloodied, fell onto the ground.

Gao Zhijian frowned when he saw what happened. The atmosphere in the study became very tense.

The old man wiped the blood off his hands using his clothes and touched the bronze coins with his trembling hands. He felt the blood on the coins and shuddered.

Nevertheless, the old man remained silent, carrying on with his task of discerning the heads and tails of the coins. Finally, he kowtowed to Gao Zhijian. "Your... Your Majesty... it is a sign of great fortune.”

Chapter 859 - Sickness

Li Huowang held onto the metallic fence tightly. He looked at the patients outside with his single dispirited eye and observed their strange actions.

Li Huowang's lips trembled, pondering for a long time before ultimately muttering, "Are they really hallucinations? Am I actually ill?"

Yi Donglai's muffled, angry voice came from behind Li Huowang. "You're only just realizing that?! Do you really think you're a normal person even after committing murder, scaling an electrified fence, and gouging out your own eye?"

Li Huowang tightly grabbed the fence. "I have my reasons for doing all that!"

"Which patient doesn't have their own reasons when they injure someone? Those reasons only make sense in your head! They don't hold up in the real world!"

Li Huowang couldn't take it any longer and shouted at Yi Donglai, "Why are you so alarmed?! I'm the one who's ill, not you!"

Yi Donglai rose to his feet, his anger evident in his voice. "Can I *not* be alarmed? Do you know what it means to me if word gets out that you've relapsed? It would render my thesis useless, and I could say goodbye to any chance of getting a promotion! My peers would mock me, and I had even agreed to an interview with a TV station to boast about my treatment plans! If you're not cured, my life is over! I refuse to accept it!"

Yi Donglai sat back down and took a deep breath. He closed his eyes to calm himself down.

When he opened his eyes, he saw Li Huowang staring at him from just a short distance away.

“Yi Donglai, what are you talking about? Whose projection are you? Why are the changes in me affecting you?”

“AAAAAAAH!” Yi Donglai lost his temper again, slamming the table.

“Take care of him! I need to go and wash my face.” Yi Donglai slammed the door shut, leaving the nurse to monitor Li Huowang.

Li Huowang paid no attention to them and instead directed his gaze toward the exterior of the metal fence. He looked at Gao Jingyun, who was on the opposite side of the fence.

Am I really hallucinating? Why is everything so real then? If what he's saying is true, then was everything I saw last time true? Which is the hallucination instead?

Li Huowang went through his memories and found they had become very unreliable. Even after Yi Donglai had returned, he struggled to differentiate between what was real and what was not.

After washing his face multiple times, Yi Donglai sat down and noticed that Li Huowang had already taken a seat across from him. Li Huowang placed both hands on his knees as he patiently waited.

“What are you doing?”

“Am I not ill? You’re my doctor, right? What else do I want? I want to get cured.”

Yi Donglai rested his chin on his hand and frowned at Li Huowang. *What is he thinking?*

He had always thought he understood Li Huowang, but now Yi Donglai realized he had learned nothing about him.

Still, Li Huowang really wanted to be cured, and since he was ill, he needed to be cured. Also, since Qing Wanglai had given up on him, Li Huowang could only save himself right now.

Once Li Huowang was cured, he would be discharged once again. This time, he was determined to pay a visit to Qing Wanglai and force out an answer regarding his absence during the Simings' battle.

“Are you sure? Will you really cooperate with my treatment plan?”

“Of course. Do you need to ask that? I also want to get cured as soon as possible.”

“That can come later,” Yi Donglai moved his stool a little. Let’s get things clear first. What did you say about me being a projection? I remember you told me about it before. Could you repeat it?”

“No,” Li Huowang shook his head. “You don’t have to worry about that. You only need to cure my hallucinations.”

Yi Donglai frowned. “So you thought that you only needed to get rid of your hallucinations? Then what about the projections? Have you ever thought that the so-called ‘projections’ are part of your hallucinations too?”

Li Huowang sat silently for five minutes before raising his head. “Do you mean... Qing Wanglai was fooling us from the very start?”

“No, I meant that Qing Wanglai could be a hallucination too. You know what a delusion is, right? It’s a false belief about external reality, which persists despite substantial evidence proving otherwise.

“I once treated a patient who exhibited this behavior. He believed that any woman who made eye contact with him was attracted to him. It didn’t matter if he was beaten up or verbally scolded—he refused to believe otherwise. The more he was physically beaten, the more he convinced himself that it was love.

“Even if the woman cried and begged him to stop, he would think that the woman was playing the long game. He would always twist what his victims did to fit his delusions.

“Your condition is an extreme version of that. You even have hallucinations that talk back to you and offer ideas that further twist your delusions.

"I know you have your very own stable yet incomprehensible perception of the world, and I believe that you trust it very much. Unfortunately, I must point out that it is a type of delusion. It's the same as the patient who refused to let women go. Frankly speaking, that patient was already in his sixties with three broken fingers and a slanted mouth. I doubt that anyone would love him."

Li Huowang replied, "No, wait. Maybe Qing Wanglai was lying to me, but he's real!"

"Real? Are you sure? Can you prove it?"

"Nana!" Li Huowang raised his head. "Nana accompanied me last time to meet them!"

"Do you expect me to ask another mentally ill patient to validate your delusion? Can't you let go of her for the time being? You've harmed her too much."

When Li Huowang was being treated, a nurse carefully whispered to a coworker, "I've heard that the previous doctor who treated him went crazy and was locked up. I fear that this doctor could meet the same fate too."

"Doctor Yi shouldn't have accepted the case. Now that our superiors have given the orders, Li Huowang is doomed to stay here forever whether he's treated or not."

"They should've done that from the beginning. He has already killed so many people. I felt it was too reckless to discharge him so easily. Aren't they gambling with people's lives by letting a ticking time bomb out?"

Chapter 860 - Choice

The room resonated with the sound of Yi Donglai flipping through papers while diligently jotting down the information provided by Li Huowang.

After tens of minutes, Yi Donglai looked up. "So, just because of all of this, you think you are Ji Zai, the Siming that controls the Heavenly Dao of Bewilderment?"

"Yes." Li Huowang nodded, still clad in his blue-and-white hospital gown.

"Did you eat your medicine today?"

"I did."

"So let's confirm again. Are you really going to cooperate with my treatment? In our field of work, the patient's mental status affects the treatment."

Yi Donglai took out his phone and started recording their conversation.

"Of course, I'm aware of that. That's why I'm telling you so much. I'm sick, and I need your treatment."

"No, Li Huowang. You don't understand me. I need you to *really* want this treatment. You cannot avoid it at all."

"I have never avoided any of my problems!"

"Li Huowang, it's still too early to say that. I've seen many patients who would say that they didn't see an illusion, even though they knew it was a lie. The reality was far crueler than their hallucinations, and so their subconscious mind spurred them to avoid reality and hide in their hallucinations."

Yi Donglai continued, "Take, for instance, the challenging task of requesting a god, who controls the law of the world, to admit that they are actually a high-schooler who never graduated, who

blinded one of their own eyes, and who was afflicted by severe mental illness—to make them admit that, in reality, they are a young individual with nowhere to go.

Yi Donglai paused and gave Li Huowang time to think.

Li Huowang replied, “Don’t worry. It’s not like the other side is a good place to stay. It’s... even more cruel than reality.”

Li Huowang suddenly remembered something and bit down hard on his right palm. “Yi Donglai, I don’t mind if I’m not a Siming or Ji Zai! Qing Wanglai didn’t even care about me. He’s a person who burns bridges without any remorse. I wish all of them were just hallucinations!

“Now that everything is over, I want to get out and live peacefully. If what you’ve said is true, then so be it! Everything is a hallucination! Use every method that you have, and I will cooperate. If you can make me stop seeing them, I’ll believe you.”

“Good, then let me tell you which part of your past is a hallucination.” Yi Donglai passed him a stack of paper filled with words before highlighting specific sentences with a pen.

“Look here. You didn’t kill anyone, and the god you allegedly killed, Yu’er, doesn’t exist.

“No one robbed you, and there are no gun wounds on your body. Your shirt was also not bulletproof.

“In everyone’s eyes, you’re simply relapsing and becoming crazy again. They called the police, and that’s how we found out where you were. We sent someone to bring you back.”

“Impossible!” Li Huowang exclaimed, recalling the crazy wars between the Simings.

As Yi Donglai continued explaining, Li Huowang’s memories once again became fuzzy. “Everything was fake? Has it been fake since the beginning? No, wait, that can’t be true. You need proof to convince me. I can’t just accept that everything was fake. Not like this.”

“I will go find the proof for you. Since you will accept my treatment wholeheartedly, we should first consider everything I’ve previously said to be an illusion. That’s how we are going to proceed with your treatment.”

Yi Donglai felt a sense of satisfaction when he saw Li Huowang nodding. It reassured him that, at the very least, his patient was willing to cooperate with him.

“Here, look at this. You said that there was an armored car at the place where Qian Fu died, but you should know how illogical that is. We live in a lawful society with cameras everywhere. Do you really think there would be an armored car there? This is probably fake.”

Li Huowang stared at the sentence before denying it. “Not necessarily. Find a way to figure out who Qing Wanglai is and figure out his true identity. If you say he’s fake, you shouldn’t be able to find anything about him at all.”

“Li Huowang, stop playing games with me. I am the one who is trying to treat you, not the other way around. Do you understand?”

Yi Donglai’s phone suddenly buzzed. He picked up the call.

“Hello? Warden?”

Yi Donglai looked at Li Huowang once before he left to continue the conversation. Li Huowang saw Yi Donglai nodding a few times as he spoke into the phone before finally hanging up.

“Let’s stop here for now. I need some time to consolidate everything before we start a new treatment plan. Be careful not to get lost in your hallucinations. Try to figure out which part is reality.”

“As long as the people I care about are not hallucinations, I should have no problem differentiating the fake from the real.”

Yi Donglai had just taken a few steps away when Li Huowang said, “Yi Donglai, with your expertise, can you cure people with depression?”

Yi Donglai raised his glasses and looked at Li Huowang with some interest. "Is this about your girlfriend? I've seen her file a few times. The source of her depression is from the outside, so it's easy to cure her."

Li Huowang beamed. "Really?"

His assumptions were correct. Depression was something that Yi Donglai could treat.

"Yep. Exogenous depression can be cured by distancing the patient from the source. I cannot treat her unless I treat you first."

Li Huowang heard Yi Donglai's explanation and frowned.

"Li Huowang, you might think that sincerity is important in your life right now, but once you've reached my age, you will learn that sincerity isn't that important. It's more important to understand how your sincerity affects the people you love."

Yi Donglai's tone had softened, no longer harsh, almost as if he was offering advice to the younger generation.

"Try not to think only from your perspective, but also from the perspective of others. If your love for Yang Na ultimately harms her, then your love is selfish. In that case, it's not really love for her, but rather love for yourself," Yi Donglai said, patting Li Huowang before turning to leave.

Li Huowang stood frozen in place, his eyes locked in a vacant stare.

"I know you will still make the right decision, even if you are ill."

Li Huowang stood there for a very long time, his face remaining still until a slight twitch emerged. After a while, he managed to regain his composure.

With his legs still cuffed, he slowly walked out the door and peacefully entered his empty room.

He slowly slid his body under the bed, biting the bottom of the bedsheet with his teeth. Then, he furiously slammed both of his fists

against the wall. The pain in his hands only fueled his fury, pushing him to hit harder until his fists were bloodied.

Li Huowang tightly hugged his trembling fists, curling up into a ball. Memories of the beautiful moments he had shared with Yang Na flooded his mind, one by one.

Chapter 861 - Visitation

“Number 13! You have a visitor!”

The prison guard guided the tired Li Huowang into the visitation room, who pulled out a chair and sat down.

He looked up coldly at the guard unlocking his cuffs and said, “I’m not a criminal. This isn’t a prison visit but a family visit. I’m in the mental ward. I’m a patient.”

“Yeah, yeah. Everyone in the White Tower knows who you are, Li Huowang. You’re harder to handle than the prisoners. Even when you make a mess, we can’t deduct any points or extend your sentence, and we still have to take care of you. You’re more like an emperor than a patient.”

The guard yanked the cuffs down roughly and walked out. “Behave yourself. There’s surveillance here. We only took these off to make your family feel better.”

His handcuffs and leg chains were removed, but the headgear to prevent self-harm was still on.

Li Huowang stretched and rubbed his wrists. Wearing the restraints day after day proved to be quite uncomfortable.

So... who’s visiting today?

It couldn’t be Yang Na, so it was most likely his mother, Sun Xiaoqin, or his father, Li Jiancheng.

Is my mom here? Li Huowang looked toward the door with a mix of fear and anticipation.

As his eyes lit up, an arm covered with thorn tattoos dashed his expectations.

“What’s wrong? Disappointed to see me?” Ba Nanxu said, chewing on something as she picked up the phone from the other side of the glass.

She was still in her gothic-styled attire, just like when he last saw her in the tattoo shop. However, her tattoos seemed different now.

“Not really. I’m just happy someone actually came to see me. Thanks, Ba-Hui.”

“What happened to your eye?”

“I gouged it out.”

“By yourself?”

“Yeah.”

“Heh, impressive. When you get out, drinks are on me.”

Li Huowang had just begun chatting when he suddenly stopped in shock. His gaze shifted up towards the camera, which was blinking with a red dot. He urgently exclaimed, “Get my doctor, Yi Donglai, immediately!”

Li Huowang pointed at Ba Nanxu and excitedly continued, “Yi Donglai! Look at her! She’s real! She came to visit me! How can that be fake? None of this is a hallucination!”

“Stop it. Sit down!”

Li Huowang sat back down, his gaze still fixated on the woman before him. “You were there when I confronted those people, right? When Qian Fu died, you were there, correct? It was all real, wasn’t it?”

“You can’t leave today. I need you to explain to my doctor that all of this is real.”

Ba Nanxu glanced at the camera and then slipped her hand into her pocket to press a button. “They can’t hear us now. I don’t have time for your madness. I just want to ask you one thing—do you want to get out?”

Li Huowang understood her meaning but refused. “Yes, but not your way. I want to walk out the main gate legitimately. If you’re real, then I’m not completely ill. I only have hallucinations. Once those are cured, I’ll be discharged in no time.”

Ba Nanxu looked at him as if he was crazy. “Kid, do you really believe that? Do you really believe you can get out after everything you’ve done?”

“Let me be honest with you. There’s no way. Even if you’re cured, you’ll be kept under observation forever if you don’t pay up.

“The cost of feeding you is nothing compared to the mess you’ve caused. They’d rather pay a little extra than risk another incident. Otherwise, the entire system would collapse from top to bottom.”

“No! I don’t believe you! You’re lying! If I’m cured, why would they keep me here?”

Ba Nanxu leaned back, then leaned forward again. “Ha! Lying? Kid, when have I ever lied to you?”

“I told you to watch out for Qing Wanglai, and now look at you, all locked up. You think I’m lying and he’s not? Where is he, then?”

Li Huowang took a moment to calm down a bit and asked about the source of her information. “How would you know that? How can I believe you?”

“Don’t ask where I got the information. You can figure it out yourself. This isn’t the first time, and you know the saying—three times is the limit. Think about whether they have a reason to do this. This is human nature.”

She continued, “We can help you get out, but the price is cutting ties with Qing Wanglai and joining our side.”

Li Huowang finally understood what Ba Nanxu wanted. They were trying to recruit him.

Li Huowang was tempted but still cautious. He decided to probe further. “You say Qing Wanglai is unreliable, but can Zhao Shuangdian be trusted?”

“During the last crisis in the Baiyu Capital, where were your people? Qing Wanglai wasn’t there, but neither were you. You’re

both just as bad as each other.”

Ba Nanxu replied, “I don’t understand what you’re ranting about. Besides, you weren’t with us, so how do you know we didn’t do anything? Do things only exist if you see them with your own eyes? Is everything else on the planet nonexistent?”

Li Huowang was still suspicious of their words, so he declined the offer. “No, I’m not accepting that. I’m ill. I have a mental illness and need treatment. Since everything is over, why should I leave before I’m cured?”

Ba Nanxu rested her tattooed cheek in her hand while her forked tongue flicked briefly in and out of her mouth.

“Not even for your girlfriend? I hear she’s out of the hospital now. She’s resting at home and recovering well.”

Li Huowang shook his head, slowly clenching his fists. “Not worth it.”

“Shit, you’re a real scumbag.”

Ba Nanxu stood up. “Fine, since you refuse, then so be it.

“If nothing’s worth it, then it doesn’t matter that Yang Na is in Qing Wanglai’s hands now, does it?”

Li Huowang’s pupils shrank and the veins on his hands bulged. “What do you want? Do you really think I can’t get out? I saved the Baiyu Capital, and I can destroy it too!”

“Don’t take it out on me. I didn’t do it. Save that rage for Qing Wanglai when you get out.”

With that, Ba Nanxu left. She didn’t tell Li Huowang what he was supposed to do, or when they planned to strike.

Both of them understood that they had already come to an agreement.

Chapter 862 - Method

Li Huowang was handcuffed and shackled again before being sent back to his room.

He sat on his bed and thought about the information Ba-Hui had just revealed to him. He tried to suppress his growing unease as he pondered what Qing Wanglai was plotting.

Is he trying to use Yang Na to threaten me? But why? Has he finally dropped the pretense? What is he really up to?

Li Huowang trembled and suddenly bit down hard on his hand, his eyes flashing with rage. *I'm going to kill him! I must kill him!*

The longer Li Huowang stayed in White Tower Prison, the more his anger surged. Right as he was on the verge of an outburst and ready to escape, Ba-Hui finally made a move.

It was the Mid-Autumn Festival, and even the psychiatric patients were being given mooncakes. The patients actually made the mooncakes themselves, which not only saved labor costs but also allowed them to revel in the festivities. It was truly a case of killing two birds with one stone.

The mooncakes were stamped with the words “White Tower Psychiatric Ward.” The center featured the outline of a human head with a caduceus inside.

There were many flavors of mooncakes—milk and cheese, green apple and plum, coffee and chocolate, peach and oolong tea, taro, and golden sweet potato. However, Li Huowang had no interest in any of them.

A nurse handed him a snow skin sweet potato mooncake. “Try one. It’s the Mid-Autumn Festival—how can you not eat a mooncake?”

“I know you miss home. We all do. Cooperate with the

treatment, and you'll get to reunite with your family once you're better."

The room was adorned with colorful paper, adding to the festive atmosphere. Nevertheless, Li Huowang felt none of it. He numbly stuffed the mooncake into his mouth.

He suddenly froze halfway through chewing. There was something inside the sweet potato filling!

"Everyone! There's an inmate band from Zone 6 performing a show! Let's watch while we eat!"

The patients, who were watching television, quickly grabbed their mooncakes and rushed toward the voice. While Zone 6 was a maximum-security area, it was full of talented individuals who could rival the people outside.

Li Huowang remained seated. He waited until the lounge was empty before removing the object from his mouth.

He pretended to examine the design on the mooncake as he swiftly unfolded the piece of paper. He quickly memorized its contents, then chewed and swallowed it. Li Huowang acted nonchalantly, eating a few more pieces of the mooncake before standing up to leave.

An orderly who had been watching TV quickly got up to follow him. "Where are you going?"

"Bathroom."

"Number one or two? Hurry up, this comedy skit is pretty funny."

Li Huowang ignored him and headed toward the stall mentioned in the note.

To his surprise, there was someone inside. It was a doctor who looked exactly like himself.

The man raised a finger to his lips, motioning for silence. Then, he retrieved a lifelike mask and placed it on Li Huowang's face.

Sitting Oblivion Dao?! Li Huowang withdrew slightly.

He quickly realized it wasn't the Sitting Oblivion Dao. It was just a high-quality latex mask.

He had seen these online before. When paired with makeup, they could appear incredibly realistic. They had even been used for prison escapes in some countries.

Wearing the mask felt like wearing a second face. The man expertly began to apply some makeup to Li Huowang's face.

"Are you done?"

At the orderly's urging, the man swiftly switched clothes with Li Huowang and cuffed himself with the handcuffs, shackles, and headgear.

The man handed Li Huowang another piece of paper and patted his shoulder. Finally, he left with the nurse.

When the coast was clear, Li Huowang stepped out of the stall and stared at his unfamiliar reflection in the mirror.

He touched his face, astonished at Zhao Shuangdian's abilities.

The skin, the eyes, and everything else looked incredibly real. A quick glance under his bangs revealed no noticeable difference unless inspected closely.

Still, now wasn't the time to admire the craftsmanship. Time was running out.

After double-checking the contents of the note, Li Huowang swallowed it before taking out a magnetic card from his pocket.

He took a deep breath, gripped the card tightly, and then walked toward the exit of White Tower.

He swiped the card at the metal door, which beeped and opened. Li Huowang felt a weight lift from his body.

As he approached the second door, a familiar voice stopped him. "Wait, who are you?"

Li Huowang's heart raced. He turned toward the voice and saw Yi Donglai approaching.

Yi Donglai glanced at the name tag on Li Huowang's chest and

extended his hand. "Doctor He, right? Nice to meet you. I'm Yi Donglai."

Li Huowang panicked. Although his appearance had changed, his voice remained the same. Yi Donglai would instantly recognize him if he spoke since they were well-acquainted.

"You're new, right? Your silhouette seemed familiar, so I thought you were someone else."

As the atmosphere tensed, Li Huowang suddenly had an idea. He recalled something Yi Donglai had once said to him.

Li Huowang took a step back and looked at Yi Donglai disdainfully. He shook his head and clicked his tongue in mock derision. He was deliberately displaying contempt towards Yi Donglai, the doctor whose thesis had been retracted.

It was rude and offensive, but the world was full of such arrogant people.

Yi Donglai understood the message. His breathing deepened and his face reddened.

In the past, colleagues would gossip behind his back. However, this new doctor didn't even try to hide his disdain, making it hard for Yi Donglai to keep his composure.

"What gives you the right to look down on me? You have no idea what kind of patient Li Huowang is. If Li Huowang were left in your hands, you useless doctors wouldn't even know where to begin!"

Li Huowang feigned indifference, turning around and striding away.

Although he felt a little guilty for treating Dr. Yi this way, he couldn't afford to care about it. All he could think about was Yang Na's uncertain fate.

"You all just wait. The day I cure Li Huowang, I'll make sure all of you open your eyes and see! I, Yi Donglai, am still number one!"

Chapter 863 - Meeting

Li Huowang continued walking forward. As he moved farther away, Yi Donglai's voice became fainter and fainter.

Li Huowang finally breathed a sigh of relief when he passed through the second door and could no longer hear Yi Donglai's voice. He was safe.

He quickly changed into plain clothes and exited through the main door. A black car was already waiting nearby.

He took one last look at the gray-white building of the White Tower Prison behind him and walked toward the car.

When he opened the car door, he saw Ba Nanxu sitting inside with her legs crossed, focused on scrolling through her phone without even looking up. Her younger brother was driving.

“Get in.”

At this point, Li Huowang no longer hesitated and got into the car.

The first thing he did was tear off everything from his face. The glue they used stuck painfully to his skin.

“Does Zhao Shuangdian have more connections than Qing Wanglai? He got me out so easily.”

“Hehe, breaking into a prison to rescue a criminal would be hard, but breaking out a mentally ill patient is not too difficult. After all, who would expect someone to go to such lengths for a mental patient?”

Li Huowang looked up at Ba Shengqing, who was driving. “Do you know where Qing Wanglai and Yang Na are? We need to find them as soon as possible!”

His legs started shaking uncontrollably, and his emotions grew increasingly agitated. “Is there a knife? I need a weapon!”

Ba Nanxu lazily stretched out her leg, covered in thorn tattoos, and pressed it down on Li Huowang's trembling knee. "Why are you so anxious? We'll figure it out when we get there. Things might not be as bad as you think."

"When we arrive, control your temper. We've brought you along, but we're not trying to make you enemies with the Qing kid. We're still on good terms with him, at least on the surface. Let's not make things too ugly."

Li Huowang didn't listen to a word of this. He was entirely lost in his own thoughts.

He didn't know how much time had passed, but every second felt excruciatingly long.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, they arrived at a villa in the woods. It was secluded and private, giving off an air of luxury. The moment the car stopped, Li Huowang leaped into action, flinging the car door open and bolting out like a cheetah.

A European-style villa came into view, showcasing an elevated entrance, a grand door, arched windows, and stone corners blending with white plaster walls and black roof tiles. It exuded elegance and grandeur, clearly setting Qing Wanglai's turf apart.

Li Huowang quickly scanned the courtyard before jumping into the garden's pond. He grabbed a fist-sized rock and rushed toward the villa's entrance.

Bang! He kicked the door open and startled Chen Hongyun, who was sitting in the living room. She had been eating snacks and watching a movie.

"Are you crazy? Can't you be quieter?"

Li Huowang stormed up to her and shouted, "Where is Qing Wanglai? Where is he?!"

"He's on the third floor. He stayed up all night with Zhao Lei, so he's probably catching up on sleep."

Li Huowang immediately rushed up the stairs. When he

reached the third floor with the rock in hand, Qing Wanglai had already come out of his room to check out the commotion.

Qing Wanglai saw Li Huowang charging at him with the rock. “What’s going on? Calm down. What’s wrong with your eyes? Are you okay?”

Although his tone indicated concern, his actions didn’t match his words. He pointed a black gun directly at Li Huowang’s head, forcing him to stop in his tracks.

“Where is Yang Na? Where is she?! If you hurt her, I’ll never let this go!”

Qing Wanglai remained calm. “First of all, I’d like to clarify that she came to me on her own. I don’t know where you got your information, but I had no intention of kidnapping her. She can leave whenever she wants.

“She hasn’t left because she thought you’d come here. She’s been waiting for you.

“Now, I’ll answer your question. She’s in the third door on the left behind you. Wu Qi has been taking care of her these past few days. While neurology isn’t her specialty, she is still a medical professional.”

Li Huowang glared at Qing Wanglai and slowly backed toward the third door on the left while still facing him.

Thump thump thump. Li Huowang knocked hard on the door.

Wu Qi, wearing a face mask, opened the door and said, “Who’s making all this noise? It’s so annoying.

“Oh, Li Huowang? You’re out? We were planning to rescue you. What happened to your eyes?”

Li Huowang quickly pushed past her and rushed inside. He found Yang Na curled up in the corner, holding her head.

“Nana, Nana...” Li Huowang walked over and pulled her into his arms.

She smelled his familiar scent, then slowly raised her head and

looked at his face.

In her weary state, she reached out and touched his empty eye sockets, her gaze filled with anguish. “Huowang, what happened to your eyes? Where did they go? Was it because of me? Did this happen to you because of me?”

“No, it wasn’t because of you. It’s all my fault. It has nothing to do with you. Don’t blame yourself.”

Li Huowang repeatedly reassured Yang Na to prevent her from feeling any more guilt, as that was the last thing she needed.

After a long while, she finally smiled softly. She leaned in, and their faces touched gently.

“Huowang, I believe you! I believe everything you say! And I heard their voices. I’m just like you. We’re both Simings—You’re Ji Zai, and I’m the Heavenly Mater.”

Li Huowang’s face twitched uncontrollably. It was unclear whether he wanted to cry or laugh.

He didn’t care whether this was real or not. He just wanted to bear it all himself and not let anyone else suffer like he had.

Clap clap clap! Applause rang out from Qing Wanglai, who stood smiling. “Very good, very good. Let’s all give a round of applause to welcome our new comrade.”

“Damn it!” Li Huowang lunged forward and punched him in the face, sending him flying.

As he was about to pounce on Qing Wanglai again, the others stepped in to stop him.

“That’s enough, Li Huowang, don’t be like this.”

“It’s not worth it. We’re all on the same side.”

“Come on, separate them.”

With the others pulling him back, Li Huowang didn’t get another chance to hit Qing Wanglai. He shook them off, walked over to Yang Na, and gently lifted her up.

“Where are you taking her?”

“I’m taking her home! She’s mentally ill and needs rest. She needs to be away from... the triggers.”

Chapter 864 - Trigger

Li Huowang slowly rode his motorcycle down the lane, with Yang Na seated behind him.

He intentionally freed one hand to grip Yang Na's hands, fearing she might fall.

Yang Na clung tightly to Li Huowang, her long hair fluttering in the breeze. "Huowang... where are we going?"

"Home."

"Home? Why go home? It's all fake and all just projections. I'm now the Heavenly Mater. I'm like you now—a Siming, a deity of the world."

Li Huowang felt a sharp jolt in his heart. At that moment, he finally understood the despair his mother must have felt when she knelt at the kindergarten gates.

"Nana, you're sick. It's all fake, just... illusions."

"Then what about yours? Were all the things you said just illusions too?"

Li Huowang's head began to ache. He felt as though two giant hands were violently pulling at his brain, attempting to crush it into a pulp.

He clenched his fists and punched his own head several times. Finally, he nodded with great pain.

"Yes, that's right. I was very ill too, with a serious mental illness. During that time, I had all sorts of hallucinations.

"But look at me now. I'm cured. I no longer have any hallucinations."

"Really?" Yang Na rested her head against Li Huowang's back, her eyes filled with deep confusion.

She slowly began to cry, and her tears soaked Li Huowang's

back.

“Don’t cry. If something is troubling you, tell me. Keeping things bottled up isn’t good for you.”

“I’m sorry... it’s all my fault. If I hadn’t called the police, you wouldn’t have lost an eye. It’s all my fault.

“Huowang, you only have one eye left, and there’s a scar on your face. If I die and no one wants you, what will you do?”

Li Huowang replied, “It’s okay. It really has nothing to do with you.”

He continued to comfort her, despite knowing his words likely wouldn’t help much.

She was too ill to be cured with mere words. She needed medical treatment.

While they talked, Li Huowang drove the motorcycle into a residential complex and stopped at the entrance of a building. He had been to Yang Na’s home many times and couldn’t possibly forget where it was.

He saw the missing person notice posted at the building’s entrance and paused momentarily. It seemed Yang Na had been gone for a while.

He helped Yang Na off the bike, supporting her frail body as they headed toward the elevator. However, Yang Na wasn’t cooperating.

She grabbed the door tightly. “Huowang, are you lying to me? Why does everything you said before seem different now? Why do I feel like something’s wrong with you? What’s going on?”

“Come on, nothing’s wrong.” Li Huowang tried to pull her hand away. Just then, the sound of hurried footsteps came from behind him.

Li Huowang’s scalp tightened. He froze in place when he turned around to see who it was.

The next moment, he was punched and sent flying backward.

As he staggered and felt his teeth loosen, he stood back up to see the man holding Yang Na in his arms.

Li Huowang didn't get angry. After all, that man was Yang Na's father, Yang Wanli.

Li Huowang rubbed his face and lowered his hand. "Hello, Uncle."

"You bastard! So it was you who abducted her! What have you done to her?" Yang Wanli led his daughter to his wife, then rolled up his sleeves and charged at Li Huowang.

"Wanli! Come back! That guy's dangerous! He's a madman who's killed several people!"

His wife's words brought a sudden calm to Yang Wanli, who quickly retreated and stood protectively in front of his wife and daughter.

"Li Huowang!" Yang Wanli's voice shook with fear and desperation. "What did we ever do to you? Why are you doing this to Nana?"

"Look at her! Look at her wrists!" Yang Wanli raised his daughter's delicate arm, where scars crisscrossed on the inside. "I'm begging you! She's already suffered so much. Please let her go! Are you only gonna stop once you've pushed her to the point of death?!"

Li Huowang stood silently and endured the accusations. In the end, he said nothing and turned to leave.

As he mounted his motorcycle, he heard Yang Na's heartbreaking scream from behind. "Huowang!!"

Li Huowang's heart trembled. He opened his mouth as if to say something, but no words came out. He understood everything.

Yang Na had external depression. To help her recover, she needed to be far away from her triggers, and he was the biggest trigger.

No matter what happened to Li Huowang, it seemed that

misfortune would inevitably strike those who were associated with him.

If nothing went wrong, today might be the last time he saw Yang Na. He was willing to let go if his departure could help Yang Na recover.

“Uncle, if possible, take Nana to live in another city for a while,” Li Huowang said, seated on his motorcycle. Then, he revved the engine and drove away.

The motorcycle sped up, soon reaching a dangerous speed. At that moment, Li Huowang found himself thinking that, perhaps, dying in an accident wouldn't be such a bad thing.

However, things didn't go as he wished. There hadn't been any accidents even as he neared White Tower Prison.

By that point, his motorcycle was low on fuel. He tossed it on the roadside and began to walk towards White Tower Prison.

A black car slowly approached from behind on the deserted street, matching his walking pace.

The car window rolled down, revealing Ban Nanxu holding a beer bottle. “Hey, kid, did you forget something? You're too young to have such a bad memory.”

“Get lost! I'm not in the mood!”

“Don't play dumb. We went through all the trouble to break you out from there. You're not walking back. Come on, Zhao Shuangdian wants to see you.”

“I'm not going! Why do they need me so badly? Is the sky going to fall without me?”

“Kid, that's not how this works. We had an agreement—we help you escape, and you join us against Qing Wanglai.”

Li Huowang turned his bloodshot eyes towards her. “I'm breaking the deal! So what? Come bite me if you don't like it!”

The screech of brakes echoed as the two siblings stepped out of the car. They looked at Li Huowang with malice. “We've been

waiting for you to say that. Been wanting to take you down for a long time.”

Li Huowang scanned them to search for weaknesses. *I can't fight both at once. I'll have to take down the girl first, then focus on the big guy.*

Just as the situation was about to escalate, a sharp ringtone cut through the tension.

Chapter 865 - Negotiation

“Pause for a moment,” Ba Nanxu said before pulling out her phone and answering it. “Hello? Yes, it’s me. Yeah, he’s right in front of me.

“He refuses to go, no matter what. I don’t know what’s gotten into him. We had a deal, and now he’s backing out. Are we really going to deal with someone like him? Aren’t you worried it’s contagious?

“Alright, you talk to him.”

Ba Nanxu tossed the phone to Li Huowang. “Here, Zhao Shuangdian wants to talk to you.”

Li Huowang caught the phone, hesitated, then held it to his ear. A familiar, pleasant voice came through the speaker.

—We know more than Qing Wanglai. Join us, and you’ll finally understand what’s happening to you.

“I know what’s happening. The doctor already told me—I have a mental illness. I don’t need you to repeat it.”

—Really? Do you genuinely believe you’re mentally ill? Then how do you explain the earrings your girlfriend is wearing? Can mental illnesses make things appear out of thin air?

Li Huowang remained silent.

—Don’t lie to me, and don’t lie to yourself. This isn’t something that a mental illness can explain.

—Forget the information others have drilled into your mind. That’s just the system and rules trying to correct your misalignment.

—Remember this: you are you. You are your own Li Huowang, not the one others want you to be.

Li Huowang finally said, “I don’t understand. If you’re saying I’m not mentally ill, then prove it! I want solid evidence—evidence

that is not just from me, but from you! I can't tell what's real and what's not. However, I can't be the only one suffering, right?"

—Proof? Sure. The motorcycle that Qing Wanglai got for you is pretty expensive, right? He's rich, isn't he? How do you think he got so wealthy?

Li Huowang glanced back at the motorcycle lying on the ground.

—Don't be fooled just because it's a motorcycle. It's more expensive than a car. It costs over a million.

—He's not a trust fund kid, so have you ever wondered how he has so much money? Think about the earrings you gave to your girlfriend and the gold your family received. You're not the only smart one around here.

—Want to know more, Li Huowang? Let's talk in person.

Zhao Shuangdian hung up, leaving Li Huowang deep in thought. She was clearly trying to bait Li Huowang into asking more questions.

Qing Wanglai's money came from that other world? But he never went mad like I did. How did he manage it? Is his other world the same bizarre place I was in? Could we have crossed paths in that world without me knowing?

Questions flooded Li Huowang's mind, leaving him desperate to understand what was going on. He wanted to know the truth, whether it was an illusion or reality.

"Fine, take me to see Zhao Shuangdian!" Li Huowang climbed into the car. The siblings exchanged disappointed looks and got in as well.

As the car sped past buildings, Li Huowang's thoughts swirled between past experiences. Fantasy mixed with reality, which left him in turmoil.

Could Zhao Shuangdian's words just now have been an illusion? He turned to examine the siblings beside him. Could they be illusions

too?

He reached down to feel the seat under him. *Could this car be an illusion too?*

Ba Nanxu's expression shifted when she noticed his strange actions. "Idiot."

No, this can't continue. I need a way to distinguish between what's real and what's not. Otherwise, I'll go insane.

Li Huowang closed his eyes and tried to think of a way to figure it out.

The solution was elusive. By the time they arrived at Ba Nanxu's Bloody Bonfire tattoo parlor, he still hadn't come up with anything.

For now, Li Huowang set his concerns aside and followed them down into the tattoo shop.

Upon entering, he saw Zhao Shuangdian lounging on a couch. Although she looked the same as before, her actions were completely different from when they had first met.

She was drinking whiskey while watching a TV drama on her tablet.

"Sit," Zhao Shuangdian said, patting the couch beside her.

Li Huowang sat down beside her. The show was a romantic drama, though he couldn't recall its name. *If Yang Na were here, she would probably know. She loved this type of show.*

His expression darkened at the thought of Yang Na.

"Feeling down? Want some whiskey?" Zhao Shuangdian said.

Li Huowang grabbed the dark blue bottle and took a swig. The next moment, he felt like his mouth was on fire.

After a few more gulps, the alcohol kicked in and he started to feel better. "Alright, tell me, what's going on?"

"You need to ask specific questions before I can answer."

"What you said on the phone, is it true? Did Qing Wanglai's money really come from there?"

“Yes, it’s true. However, I don’t know the exact details. It’s just a logical deduction.”

“So that world really exists? And I really am a Siming? Yang Na wasn’t wrong either?”

Zhao Shuangdian swirled the liquid in her cup. “Have you heard about the story of the blind men and the elephant?”

“Of course, it’s a well-known tale. You even mentioned it before.”

“A group of blind men each feel a different part of an elephant. One touches the leg and says the elephant is like a pillar. Another touches the tail and says the elephant is like a broom. One touches the ear and says the elephant is like a fan. Another touches the tusk and says the elephant is like a horn. Finally, the one who touches the trunk says the elephant is like a thick rope.”

She paused and smiled at Li Huowang. “Which part of the elephant do you think you are touching?”

“I’m experiencing a world. A real world! Even if it’s bizarre, it’s real!”

“I’m not saying your world isn’t real. It’s just... limited, like the shadow of this bottle.” Zhao Shuangdian held up the whiskey bottle, which cast a shadow on the floor. “See that shadow?”

“Yes.”

“That’s your world. Real, but incomplete.”

She tilted the bottle slightly, changing the angle of the shadow. “This is someone else’s world. It’s also real, but also incomplete.”

She continued, “All of you see only shadows, never the deeper truth—the most real world.”

With that, Zhao Shuangdian placed the dark blue whiskey bottle before Li Huowang.

Chapter 866 - Cooperation

Zhao Shuangdian gently tapped her finger on the blue bottle in front of Li Huowang. Her finger was adorned with a coat of clear nail polish. “This is the real world. All the other worlds are merely reflections of it.”

Inside the closed Bloody Bonfire tattoo shop, Zhao Shuangdian continued to explain everything to Li Huowang.

“We can glimpse some information and changes through one reflection, but it’s very difficult to truly understand everything. Our cognition always alters and distorts our perceived reality, so we never fully understand the true reality.”

“So... your theory is no different from Qing Wanglai’s projection theory?” Li Huowang asked, looking at the dark blue bottle before him.

Li Huowang recalled the bizarre world. He remembered the Baiyu Capital and thought about how others perceive the world.

Li Huowang’s comment made Zhao Shuangdian shake her head. “No, it’s different. His theory is that everything is merely a projection of some entity.”

She continued, “However, I believe all of this is real and a part of the truth. Like the story of the blind men touching the elephant. Can you say that the elephant’s leg isn’t part of the elephant?”

Li Huowang felt irritated. “Stop with the metaphors! I don’t want to hear about the elephant’s leg or the elephant anymore! I just want to know what the real thing is!”

“Oh? How much do you know about Hilbert space? I could try to explain.”

“The what? Didn’t you say you were using mathematics?”

“Never mind, let’s stick with the elephant metaphor. It’s easier to understand.”

Li Huowang sat there silently, trying to digest the explanation. He wasn’t sure if Zhao Shuangdian was telling the truth or if this was just another delusion by a mental patient.

Although Zhao Shuangdian seemed calm and rational, Qing Wanglai had made him hesitant to jump to conclusions.

After thinking for a moment, Li Huowang stood up. “Thank you for explaining all this, but I still can’t fully trust your worldview.”

“Don’t trust me? Then, do you trust Qing Wanglai? Or do you trust nothing at all? Do you think this is all just an illusion and you’re just a lunatic?”

“That’s right! I’m a lunatic, so what? Is being a lunatic so rare? Why are you so eager to pull a lunatic like me in? You’ve been saying all this nonsense just to use me as a tool!”

Since there was no imminent threat to him, Li Huowang didn’t want to get involved with them anymore. His problem was reality, and no matter what that reality was, he just wanted to live well in this world.

He didn’t need to be successful—he just needed to become a normal person. That way, those who cared about him wouldn’t have to worry.

“This isn’t about using you—it’s about sticking together. You think what you’ve seen so far is everything?”

Li Huowang felt a jolt as memories of past events flooded back into his mind. Those who had spied on him, those who had tried to kidnap him, and those who had tried to kill him.

“Still eighteen, huh? So naïve.”

Zhao Shuangdian’s words stopped Li Huowang in his tracks. “What do you mean by that?”

“I mean that things aren’t over. We only pushed them back

once. Do you think that's enough for you to comfortably enjoy life now?"

Zhao Shuangdian's words sent chills through Li Huowang. He quickly approached her, his pupils trembling. "They'll come back? They still want to invade the Baiyu Capital? Why?!"

"I don't know what they're after. I haven't figured that part out, but I believe the real world isn't just one elephant.

"If they make a move, it won't be like their previous small tests. It could cause turmoil everywhere—the tusks, legs, trunk, and even our side of the elephant.

"Fortunately, we have ways to protect our part of the elephant since we're all blind men feeling the elephant.

"And you're special. Others can only feel one part, but you have unique senses. You can feel two sides, which makes you closer to the truth than anyone else."

Zhao Shuangdian reached out and gently stroked Li Huowang's face, her hand finally resting on his blood-red eye socket. "You're truly special."

Slap! Li Huowang knocked her hand away. "When will they strike again?"

"They? Strike? I don't know when they'll act, but I know our counterattack is on the second of next month."

"Counterattack?"

"Yes, exactly. The best defense is a good offense. We can't wait for them to strike first. We need to take the initiative this time, which is why I sought you out."

Zhao Shuangdian extended her hand toward Li Huowang. "I sincerely invite you to join us and use your talents to help us."

Li Huowang looked at her outstretched hand and said, "Why should I believe you? What if you're just another Qing Wanglai?"

"Because I have what you want. I know saying goodbye to her can't be easy. You two grew up together and shared the same

classroom since elementary school... It'd be a shame to let all that history just disappear."

"As long as you agree, once this matter is entirely resolved, I can help you and your girlfriend return to a peaceful and simple life. You will be completely cut off from everything you don't want to deal with.

"You could retake your exams together and lead a simple life.

"Of course, if you want wealth, I can arrange that too. Both options require the same amount of work from me."

Li Huowang remained skeptical despite the temptation. He had been deceived too many times before. "No, I think there's a catch in your offer. You're talking about isolating us from everything. Do you intend to take over the Heavenly Dao that Yang Na and I manage after this is over?"

Zhao Shuangdian frowned and shook her head. "Sorry, I really don't understand."

"It's fine if you don't understand. I just want to make it clear that I won't give up my Heavenly Dao! If I were an ordinary person instead of a Siming, I would be like a pig or sheep waiting to be slaughtered in front of you Simings. You'd be able to do anything you wanted to me.

"I don't have any expectations regarding your sense of good and evil.

"However," Li Huowang said as he reached out and shook her hand. "I am willing to cooperate with you. As for my compensation, let's not rush—we can discuss it while working together."

He no longer feared anything, given his current situation. The worst that could happen was death, which he no longer feared. On the contrary, it would be a massive gain if he could find a way to escape his current predicament.

He could only go up since he was already at his lowest point. There was no need to be overly cautious.

Zhao Shuangdian was satisfied with Li Huowang's response. She gently shook her head. "Very well, let's have a smooth cooperation. From today on, we are partners."

He looked at the intelligent beauty before him and pondered the final question. *Zhao Shuangdian, what kind of Siming are you?*

Chapter 867 - Strange

Thwack! A heavy burlap sack thudded onto Feng Bawan's sweat-soaked back, and his legs trembled.

"Another... another bag!" Feng Bawan shouted with a strained voice.

Another sack was added to his load, and Feng Bawan mustered all his strength and carried it to the construction site ahead.

Though it was exhausting work, he didn't slack off at all, sustained by the promise of good meals.

Clang, clang, clang! The gong sounded. "Mealtime! Mealtime!"

The workers promptly set aside their tools and eagerly turned their attention to the heavy baskets being brought in on a shoulder pole. It was the moment they had been waiting for.

When the cover over the top was lifted, golden fried rice was revealed underneath, making everyone salivate uncontrollably.

The fried rice was seasoned with soy sauce. It also included wild vegetables, mushrooms, and, surprisingly, chunks of meat.

This wasn't rice with fake meat. It was real pork, and nowadays, not many people were starving to death.

Feng Bawan didn't even bother to wipe the sweat from his forehead—he grabbed his chopsticks and devoured the fragrant, flavorful fried rice.

Even though it was just a simple serving of soy sauce fried rice, it felt like he was eating something extraordinary, like dragon liver and phoenix marrow.

After finishing most of the rice, he finally took the bowl of soup. He saw the thin layer of pork fat floating on the wild vegetable soup and then drank it with delight.

His entire body shivered as he slurped it up, and the

indescribable aroma lingered on his lips and teeth, refusing to fade away. It was truly delicious.

Niu San wiped the sweat from his forehead with his sleeve and sighed in relief. "This is what living is supposed to be like."

At that moment, he overheard some of the others discussing nearby.

"Hey, life is starting to look better. Look at how much soy sauce they put in. My wife wouldn't have used so much soy sauce when she was alive."

"Yeah, this is better than what I used to eat."

"It's all thanks to the Bodhisattva. These grains were all provided by him."

"I heard he's been sending food day and night and still hasn't finished. The Righteous Monastery has turned into a mountain of grain!"

Feng Bawan didn't join the conversation because he knew more than them. He had even seen the red-clad Bodhisattva with his own eyes.

While the Bodhisattva had a bad temper, Feng Bawan still viewed him as a savior.

At that moment, the stories he'd heard from the elders about the mysterious Bodhisattva became vividly real to him. He had even set up a clay altar at home, accurately depicting the Bodhisattva's sword and red robes. There was also a plaque before the statue bearing Zhuge Yuan's title.

There was no incense now, but he still worshiped it day and night. On the first and fifteenth of each month, he would save a little food to offer it at home.

Feng Bawan clutched his stomach in pain. It had started to hurt again. Ever since he had eaten the mushrooms he had grown, these occasional bouts of pain had become a regular occurrence. He didn't know what was causing the pain.

At that moment, he caught a glimpse of red streaking across the sky.

“Zhuge Bodhisattva?” Feng Bawan stood up despite his stomachache, but the red streak had already flown far away.

Li Huowang didn’t notice the insignificant gazes below. He was focused entirely on the city’s defenses.

The once-decayed city walls were gradually being rebuilt. Even if nothing was inside the walls, a solid foundation needed to be established first.

Li Huowang couldn’t afford to become complacent—they were vulnerable to potential attacks from the army of the Tianchen Kingdom at any given moment.

He shouldn’t need to transfer too many people based on the speed and range of his spine sword’s travel. However, it was better to be safe than sorry, and there was nothing wrong with being prepared.

The newly established Surveillance Bureau of the Great Qi Kingdom had already learned about the Tianchen Kingdom’s origins. They had begun to keep watch and expand their numbers.

However, not everyone had the talent for it. Only a few sects could join, and the overall strength of the Great Qi hadn’t increased significantly.

The only thing that could expand quickly was the military, which was gradually reestablished thanks to more citizens enlisting.

Strangely, the Tianchen Kingdom didn’t seem to be in a hurry. Despite the Great Qi’s rapid revival, no one had come to attack or make any moves.

Li Huowang wasn’t anxious. Time was on his side. The Great Qi would only grow stronger with time.

If the Great Qi could be truly restored to its previous power, the Tianchen Kingdom would have no chance at all.

However, the recent strange occurrences made Li Huowang

uneasy. He had not deceived anyone, but False Qi kept appearing.

There were quite a few occurrences, and their numbers kept increasing.

Although such False Qi would be useful in future battles, it was still odd.

What's going on? Could it be a scheme by the Sitting Oblivion Dao? Is Shai Zi trying to get involved? Or are these Bei Feng's methods?

After some thought, he deemed it unlikely. Bei Feng didn't have such means, and he had thoroughly checked the Sitting Oblivion Dao's Liar's Scripture and never saw one that gave out False Qi.

They deceived others—they didn't give things away.

Could it be a new trick? Using False Qi to deceive False Qi?

When I have the chance, I'll get Suisui to stir up some trouble with the Sitting Oblivion Dao to prevent them from causing chaos.

While pondering, Li Huowang arrived at the inner palace of the You Capital and floated down directly.

The Mo family also rebuilt the imperial city of You Capital, but there was no emperor there anymore. The Chief had completely occupied it.

“Daoist, the Gan family members and some colleagues skilled in divination haven't been able to predict where they will appear.”

Li Huowang wasn't upset with them. People in this world could only calculate things within the world. How could they predict the existence of the Hometown of True Void?

Moreover, now that the feng shui of Great Qi had stopped, it was unlikely they could calculate anything further. Astrological predictions were even more fruitless.

“Since it can't be calculated, let them stop trying. Focus on preparing for battle.”

“Okay.”

As soon as the military personnel left, the abbot of Righteous

Monastery approached. "Amitabha. Benefactor Li, I have some news."

"Are you sick? Is this the time for politeness? Speak quickly."

After a moment of consideration, Chan Du said, "Benefactor Li, I believe this matter isn't as serious as it seems. Perhaps we can negotiate with the other party."

There was some substance to his words. Li Huowang looked at him thoughtfully, and a cold smile gradually appeared on his face. "What? Do you think the grain from the Tianchen Kingdom is better? Do you think it would be better for the Great Qi to cooperate with them?"

He continued, "Imperial Preceptor Chan Du, you are a monk, not a merchant calculating every detail with an abacus."

Chapter 868 - Act

Li Huowang's words clearly had an underlying meaning, which Chan Du naturally picked up on.

Chan Du clasped his hands together and gave a slight bow. "Amitabha. As a monk, I do not speak falsehoods. Since I've already stated that the Great Qi is under your care, I will not go back on my word.

"However, even though the Righteous Monastery is the state church of the Great Qi, it cannot control the hearts of all people. Others may dare to believe in the deeds that the monks of the Righteous Monastery do not."

As he spoke, four monks used their staffs to carry an old man over, setting him down in front of Li Huowang.

As soon as he was brought over, the old man revealed everything he knew, as if any delay would lead to unbearable suffering.

"I don't know! I really don't know who spread those rumors!"

"They said that the Tianchen Kingdom had no intention of fighting against the Great Qi and that a fake Bodhisattva deceived the people of Great Qi. They claimed that we were being manipulated to work and suffer for the benefit of others!

"They also said that the fake Bodhisattva caused all the disasters in Great Qi!

"That's all! I swear, that's all I know! I truly don't know anything else!

"I won't dare anymore! I really won't dare!"

"Rumors..." Li Huowang hadn't expected the first move from the other side to be such a low blow of half-truths mixed with lies.

It now seemed that the Tianchen Kingdom had indeed made a

move, but instead of confronting him directly, they intended to play tricks from the shadows.

They understood now that directly opposing him wouldn't benefit them. Even if they won, it would result in mutual destruction.

As such, they decided to spread rumors to erode the morale of the Great Qi and undermine his authority. If he couldn't command the Great Qi, things would take a turn for the worse.

Li Huowang could tell that this was the work of Bei Feng. If not Bei Feng, then it was the doing of the Sitting Oblivion Dao from the Tianchen Kingdom.

He pondered for a moment and then turned to Chan Du. "Abbot, since they've made their move, has Great Qi's Surveillance Bureau come up with an answer?"

"I've already instructed them to stay vigilant and prevent the spread of these rumors."

Li Huowang shook his head. "That won't work. You can't block rumors. The more you try to suppress them, the more the people of Great Qi will believe them.

"And even if you manage to suppress them for now, so what? They can always come back and spread them again. We have no advantage in this regard."

"Then... what should we do?"

"Leave it to me," Li Huowang said as he walked toward the exit.

Rumors were one of the tools used in Sitting Oblivion Dao. Since Li Huowang understood how they used them, he could also unravel them.

If they want to spread rumors, I'll help them spread more! Li Huowang pulled a mask over his face and changed his appearance to that of an ordinary man.

He tucked his hands into his sleeves, hunched his neck, and

made his way to the western market. As his thoughts shifted, his robes transformed into worn-out cotton clothes.

Both the eastern and western markets were bustling places that sold a wide variety of goods. The selection has improved a lot compared to the past. Even a small amount of rice used to cause a commotion.

Li Huowang didn't linger in the open and quickly slipped into a secluded alley in the eastern part of the city.

After navigating a few turns, he opened a disused drainage well, revealing a dimly lit path beneath. This was the black market—a place where items that could not be sold publicly were traded.

As long as there were no major issues, the military authorities would turn a blind eye. Even if this black market were shut down temporarily, others would pop up elsewhere.

This was the perfect place for rumors to spread. Though some people were deliberately speaking in hushed tones, Li Huowang's sharp hearing caught every word.

"Hey, did you hear? We're suffering like this because of that Bodhisattva."

"Don't talk nonsense! The Bodhisattva brought us food. I saw it with my own eyes!"

"That's all a lie! I heard that this Bodhisattva is part of the Sitting Oblivion Dao, and they're known for deceiving people!"

Li Huowang shifted closer and glanced around shiftily before whispering, "Hey, you guys heard that too? I've also heard more than you might know."

The two people who were chatting leaned in closer. "Really? What else do you know?"

Li Huowang looked around nervously again, then lowered his voice further. "I'm only telling you two, don't spread this around, alright? I heard that not only are all the disasters in Great Qi caused by that Bodhisattva, but even the changes in the heavens and earth

are his doing!”

The two men gasped in shock with widened eyes. “Really?”

“I’m telling you, he’s choosing people! If you’re chosen, you’ll be taken to heaven to become an Immortal. But the rest of us? We’ll have to fend for ourselves!”

“Really?” By now, five or six more people had gathered around with shocked expressions.

As they continued to gossip, Li Huowang quietly slipped away and moved on to the next target.

With each of Li Huowang’s actions, these rumors, which were initially vague, gradually gained more details.

At first, he simply added to them. Soon, however, the rumors veered off in entirely new directions and became increasingly absurd.

“Hey, did you hear? I heard that Bodhisattva is the reincarnation of Danxi.^[1] With one breath, the heavens shake. With another, the earth crumbles!”

“You’re wrong! I heard that Bodhisattva is the Jade Emperor himself, on a journey to face his tribulations. Once it’s over, he’ll return to the heavens!”

“How does each version get crazier than the last? Are these really true?”

Li Huowang listened from a distance. He felt a sense of calm as he heard the final, absurd versions of the rumors. The Tianchen Kingdom’s first move had been neutralized.

When dealing with rumors, neither explaining nor ignoring them was effective. The best strategy was to make an even bigger rumor that drew more attention. Another option was to distort the original meaning of the rumor.

No matter how twisted they were, people who believed in rumors would never question their validity.

However, once the rumors became too ridiculous, they ceased

to be regarded as rumors and instead transformed into idle gossip devoid of any substance.

Li Huowang wasn't about to let rumors from another kingdom destabilize his own territory.

He was curious to see what the other side would try next.

If they continued using Sitting Oblivion Dao's tricks, Li Huowang was ready to face them directly. After all, he had a stockpile of False Qi at his disposal, just waiting for a chance to be used.

However, the next move from the other side took Li Huowang by surprise.

1. An ancient Chinese physician 📖

Chapter 869 - Liar

In the spacious hall, a scholar bowed deeply to Li Huowang. “Liu Yifang from the Minglun Hall greets Daoist Li. Yesterday, agents from the Tianchen Kingdom secretly contacted my subordinates and claimed there was no conflict between the Tianchen Kingdom and the Great Qi.”

He continued, “They said that as long as the people of the Great Qi stand by and watch, the Tianchen Kingdom will always provide three times the amount of food you send.”

This was a blatant attempt to sow discord and a very overt, cunning scheme.

In the past, Gao Zhijian wanted the Great Qi to act as his henchman. If the Great Qi were to become the Tianchen Kingdom’s pawn, it would be a significant problem.

“Are you the only ones they’re trying to sow discord with?” Li Huowang asked, his voice cold.

Liu Yifang quickly explained, “That should be the case. If others were aware, they would likely report it too.”

“No, since the Tianchen Kingdom is sowing discord, they wouldn’t just target you. You being the only one who has informed me suggests that others are either on the fence or already divided by the Tianchen Kingdom!” Li Huowang said.

He slapped the stone seat in a fit of anger, cracking it open.

“There is also me!” someone yelled from above.

As Li Huowang looked up, he saw the leader of the Mo family approaching. “Rest assured, Daoist. The Mo family will never turn our backs on our ancestral rules!”

Li Huowang’s expression remained indifferent, creating significant tension in the hall.

After thinking for a moment, Chan Du said, “Benefactor Li, it might not be as you think. The Tianchen Kingdom might not be sowing discord with everyone. Many people might not even be aware of the situation. At the very least, no one from the Righteous Monastery has had contact with them.”

“It’s fine, I’m not angry.”

Li Huowang paused for a long time before speaking again. “I was just contemplating how to deal with their scheme. You two, if anyone contacts you again, agree to their demands and consent to the Tianchen Kingdom’s discord.”

“What?!”

Everyone present thought they had heard wrong.

“You two should infiltrate and negotiate with the Tianchen Kingdom. Whatever route they suggest is fine, but there is one requirement. They must first send the food.”

Liu Yifang hesitated and looked at Li Huowang. “And after the food arrives...”

“Once the food has arrived, what is there to fear? By then, we can just ambush them. Ideally, we’d find a way to capture their Twisted One.”

Playing along with their scheme was better than exposing it directly.

Li Huowang didn’t know if there were other methods to cross between two different worlds. However, resolving the issue regarding the Tianchen’s Kingdom Twisted One was a priority. Once he had had their spine, he could go to their world and be less passive.

The others in the hall heaved a sigh of relief when they finally understood Li Huowang’s intentions.

“But this is not in accordance with the rules,” the leader of the Mo family said, frowning in dissatisfaction.

“Don’t you know that everything is fair in war? Besides, there

are two conflicting rules now. Which do you think is more important?”

Noticing that the Mo family's leader had fallen silent, Li Huowang waved his hand. “Alright, you can go now. Wait until they contact you again.”

”Yes!”

After the two left, the entire hall felt empty and cold.

“I'm tired. I'll take a nap,” Li Huowang said, standing up and walking to the back.

Chan Du quickly followed. “Benefactor Li, I have an idea about the Dragon Veins.”

“Don't tell me. I've already said that I only care about having enough food. Matters concerning the Dragon Veins of the Great Qi are for the people of the Great Qi to handle, not me!”

Chan Du watched Li Huowang gradually disappear, letting out a soft sigh before continuing to turn the Buddhist beads in his hand. “Ah, it's a real shame. If it weren't for the Tianchen Kingdom's enmity with him, he might have already returned to the Great Liang.”

However, Chan Du could empathize as he understood the situation from Li Huowang's perspective. After all, Li Huowang had previously helped wholeheartedly, only to be betrayed by the people of the Great Qi. It was pretty disheartening.

“This won't do. I must find a way to keep this Twisted One of Ji Zai.”

Although the Great Qi had no more divisions, time still passed little by little. Half a month later, spies from the Tianchen Kingdom approached Liu Yifang again.

“Follow me quickly.”

A shadow emerged from the trees and climbed onto Liu Yifang's shadow.

Liu Yifang said nothing and silently followed the shadow's

guidance. They headed towards the outskirts of the city.

With food now available, You Capital was no longer an isolated city. Four smaller towns had sprung up around it, used to accommodate refugees from other places. As such, leaving You Capital would not be enough—there were still too many people around.

Liu Yifang and the shadow pressed on, walking steadily until they reached a truly desolate wilderness.

The spot they stopped at had very tall grass and small trees. Then, Liu Yifang walked through the waist-high grass and headed toward a valley.

The valley was dark without sunlight. Faint, indistinct music could be heard from deep within.

Liu Yifang saw other members of the Surveillance Bureau. Although their faces were covered, he could still recognize them.

As they moved further in, Liu Yifang saw more people gathered there, and the music grew clearer.

It was a kind of pleasant string music, accompanied by the gentle sound of bubbling springs, the crisp chirping of birds, the joyful bleating of sheep, and the thunderous galloping of horses.

Liu Yifang saw the source of the music when they reached the valley's depths.

A woman sat there gracefully, with waist-length hair and a transparent veil. She held a peculiar black instrument with a long, slender neck and a gourd-shaped soundbox.

What made it even more peculiar was that two of her fingers were wrapped in thin threads that ran through the center of a circular stool, tied to the two small wooden sheep on the stool.

As her fingers plucked the strings on the instrument, the two wooden sheep were pulled back and forth in sync with the music. They performed strange and eerie movements as if in a ritual.

Liu Yifang had traveled extensively but had never seen such an

unusual instrument.

As the music accelerated, the two wooden sheep moved faster and oozed blood. Eventually, amid the stormy music, the two wooden sheep collided heavily, intertwining to form a bizarre, twisted bloodwood tree on the round stool.

“Has everyone arrived?” the woman asked.

Her voice was unexpectedly melodious. It sounded like a gentle spring, soothing and captivating.

Liu Yifang quickly surveyed the surroundings and found a total of twelve people.

The woman continued, “Although there aren't many of you, everyone here is a hero who cares for the Great Qi. The Great Qi ultimately belongs to the people of the Great Qi. It must not be occupied by others, and the lives of the people should not be used as a wager.

“By His Majesty’s decree, as long as the people of the Great Qi do not take action, the Tianchen Kingdom will not act against them.”

Liu Yifang could not contain himself and said, “Miss, does the Tianchen Kingdom really intend to send three times the amount of food to the Great Qi?”

“Yes,” the woman said, gently plucking a string.

A door in the nearby mountain opened instantly, and a flood of white rice surged out like a tide.

The sight of the mountains of rice made everyone tremble. So much food would genuinely save the Great Qi!

A thunderous voice rang out, “Wait!”

Everyone turned to look at Liu Yifang. He opened his hand to let the rice fall from his fingers.

He pulled at his skin, and Li Huowang’s enraged face appeared before everyone.

“You deceitful scoundrels!”

Chapter 870 <No Title>

"You deceitful scoundrels!"

Li Huowang's furious roar echoed through the air.

In a matter of moments, the once-pristine white rice surrounding him transformed into a putrid black mess, as if it had decayed over a thousand years in a single instant.

From this, it was evident that even if the Great Qi wanted to cooperate, the Tianchen Kingdom had no intention of keeping their promises. Their strategy of sowing discord was so blatant that they couldn't even be bothered to use proper bait.

Li Huowang's sudden appearance shocked both the people from the Tianchen Kingdom and the Great Qi, but it seemed that the Tianchen Kingdom had been prepared for this. The rotting rice suddenly surged like a turbulent sea.

The black rice covered Li Huowang, making him feel a sharp pain. When he lifted his right foot, he saw nothing but bare white bones below his thigh.

The woman floated above the black rice, smiling as she spoke to Li Huowang. "Zhuge Yuan, since you're here, you might as well stay for today."

"Zhuge Yuan?" Li Huowang uttered, his rage instantly subsiding as he looked around in shock.

He saw that there was no trace of white around him, and a hint of False Qi surged in his mind.

He quickly realized two things. Firstly, the woman was talking to him, not the deceased scholar. She mistakenly believed that his name was Zhuge Yuan. Secondly, the sudden appearance of False Qi and the woman's use of that name were both unintended consequences of his actions.

This was all because he had casually referred to himself as Zhuge Yuan when he had delivered the food, leading many in the Great Qi to believe that was his name.

Subsequently, whenever someone mistook him for Zhuge Yuan, he inadvertently accumulated False Qi.

As Li Huowang pondered this, the woman with the zither gently waved her red nails. This caused the bloodwood tree on the table to pour blood into the black rice, causing the rice to bubble up with blood-red foam.

The rotting black rice on the ground quickly became dark red. Suddenly, an urgent melody filled the air, and the dyed black rice danced around Li Huowang like a living creature. It surged upwards like a colossal tsunami, completely engulfing him.

Li Huowang noticed the woman plucking her strings in the distance.

He firmly grasped the handle of his spine sword and coldly smiled. "Zhuge Yuan, right? Alright! Then I'll give you Zhuge Yuan!"

As the tsunami of black rice approached him, he pulled out his spine sword from his back and forcefully hurled it toward the woman.

Some hidden agents from the Tianchen Kingdom couldn't help but take action since the spine sword was a crucial artifact for transportation to the Great Liang.

Two figures emerged from the dark and quickly reached for the spine sword, casting fleeting shadows as they moved.

When they grasped the hard sword body, flesh and organs grew rapidly atop the white bones. In no time, the spine sword had transformed into a scholarly figure dressed in white robes.

"Hmm?" Zhuge Yuan murmured.

He quickly took out a wolf-hair brush and made two swift strokes. The two people holding onto him were immediately erased,

and the color of the brush tip deepened slightly.

Zhuge Yuan quickly turned in mid-air and pulled the brush back, redirecting the massive amounts of rotting black rice toward the woman playing the zither.

The black rice shifted away to reveal the eroded and battered Li Huowang. He knelt on one knee and grasped his swollen head with both hands, as if fearing that letting go would cause it to burst.

“Brother Li, are you okay?” Zhuge Yuan asked.

Li Huowang suddenly pointed forward and gritted his teeth. “Kill them!”

Zhuge Yuan snapped open his folding fan, stepped onto the black rice, and flew towards the woman while holding his brush in one hand.

As soon as Zhuge Yuan made his move, the woman struggled to cope. The rotting black rice continually produced various minions, but they were no match for him.

Li Huowang staggered to his feet and looked coldly at the scene from afar.

Even though this was a fake Zhuge Yuan that Li Huowang had created, these people would not stand a chance against him.

The only slight regret was that the Tianchen Kingdom’s Twisted One had not come, denying Li Huowang the opportunity to kill two birds with one stone.

However, reducing the Tianchen Kingdom's power was still a good outcome. It was better than nothing happening at all.

Li Huowang glanced over at the defectors sitting uncomfortably to the side. *This is a chance to deal with those schemers within the Great Qi. Overall, I haven’t lost much.*

The people who had tried to betray him for additional benefits from the Tianchen Kingdom were destined to fail.

As long as the Great Qi lacked strength, the Tianchen Kingdom wouldn’t even use real rewards to deceive them. They didn’t take

the Great Qi seriously at all.

Thanks to this incident, the next time the Tianchen Kingdom tried to use tactics to sow discord in the Great Qi, no one would believe them even if they offered better conditions.

“What are you standing there for!? Hurry up and help!”

Li Huowang's words snapped everyone back to reality. Without hesitation, they nodded in agreement and armed themselves with various weapons. They hurriedly rushed over to assist Zhuge Yuan, even though they had just entertained the idea of betraying Li Huowang.

The opponents were originally no match for Zhuge Yuan, and with the addition of these twelve people from the Great Qi, the balance shifted even further. The situation turned decisively in favor of Zhuge Yuan.

Before long, the surging black rice diminished as Zhuge Yuan turned it into black ink. He splattered it across the valley walls, transforming it into artistic landscape paintings.

Just as Li Huowang thought the battler was ending, a new type of forest came into view around them, gradually blending into the surroundings.

It seemed that this vast area was filled with forests on the Tianchen Kingdom's side.

Figures suddenly emerged from these forests and rushed towards Zhuge Yuan and his group.

The Tianchen Kingdom is sending reinforcements? That's even better. I'll see how many more people they have to die!

Li Huowang had expected the reinforcements to be strong, so he was taken aback when he realized they were still no match for Zhuge Yuan. They were even weaker than the woman from before.

While their arrival added more figures to the landscape painting, it didn't change the overall situation. The Tianchen Kingdom seemed unaware of this, continuously sending more

people.

Li Huowang wanted to direct Zhuge Yuan through these areas to discover what was happening in the Tianchen Kingdom, but the enemy seemed very cautious. Whenever he approached, the changing environment would quickly disappear.

He frowned as he saw the landscape painting nearly become a depiction of the painting *Along the River During the Qingming Festival*.

[1]

Something's not right. These people aren't here to turn the tide. It's more like they're here to delay me.

Li Huowang realized the possibility of an ambush and prepared to retreat.

However, a voice filled with dramatic lamentations stopped him.

1. A painting by the Song dynasty painter Zhang Zeduan. 🖐

Chapter 871 - Theater

Theater singing? Li Huowang was taken aback. The Lu Family Troupe was gone, so he hadn't heard theater singing in a while.

He quickly assessed the situation and immediately deduced that the sound was coming from the huge landscape painting before him.

At that moment, the enormous landscape painting seemed to part like a beaded curtain, and a figure emerged from within.

This person had a red cord tied around his neck, a green tassel on his head, and a body draped with white feathers. His face had bright white stage makeup, making him look like a theater actor.

The problem was that this figure looked very strange. His sunken head was as large as his body, and he had a narrow face and eyes of different sizes, among other deformities.

His figure didn't seem human—it was more like a grotesque, imperfect form.

Their bizarre appearance, combined with their stage makeup, created a terrifying effect.

Li Huowang didn't pay attention to the person's appearance. Instead, he focused on their pair of jade hands.

Now that they were closer, he could see more clearly. The tips of the person's fingernails were almost transparent, gradually turning greener the further up they went. Eventually, they disappeared behind the person's clothing.

It's that thing! It can reach out and touch my creations from "Truth" cultivation! What exactly is it? A Tian Huang noble or the army of Unspeakable?

Zhugue Yuan stepped in front of Li Huowang, holding his fan and frowning at the figure.

Before Li Huowang could utter a word, the figure suddenly revealed a blood-red, gaping mouth with a single large tooth and two sharp teeth. Then, it began to sing.

“Speak~ What~ Flower-filled moonlit night and longevity. The mountains and rivers stretch with so much sorrow~!”

Li Huowang was even more disturbed when he saw the eerie figure singing. His bizarre feeling deepened, and his headache became unbearable. *What the hell is this?*

Zhugue Yuan was about to advance with his brush. However, before he could paint, he saw the figure lay back and turn into a portrait within the landscape painting.

While Zhugue Yuan was engaged in battle, Li Huowang suddenly heard a new disturbance from behind. It was a woman’s low and sorrowful crying.

He swiftly turned around and saw a woman with a large head and black hair covering her face. She quickly floated by, her back facing him, while her billowing white sleeves and tragic theater singing filled the air.

“Heaven and Earth, how can they fear the strong and bully the weak? Oh Earth, you don’t distinguish right from wrong. Oh Heaven, you mistakenly judge the wise and foolish.”

For some reason, Li Huowang felt that he had seen this scene before, even though he had never encountered such a thing.

Before he could figure it out, the woman was already singing while swiftly stepping towards him!

As Li Huowang shouted angrily, Zhugue Yuan, who was engaged in battle, descended from the sky. He made a brush stroke in front of the woman, forcing her back slightly. Then, he quickly turned and dipped his brush into heavenly colors, drawing a protective array on Li Huowang’s robes to prevent further sneak attacks.

“Resolve this quickly. If it drags on, I won’t be able to hold on much longer,” Li Huowang said, clutching his head tightly.

Cultivating “Truth” was challenging enough already, and materializing this version of Zhuge Yuan made it even more straining.

Zhugue Yuan nodded. However, when he turned back, he found that the two figures had now become five—Sheng, Dan, Jing, Mo, and Chou.^[1]

They ignored everyone else and surrounded Li Huowang, leaving him no room to escape.

With great caution, Zhuge Yuan glanced at Li Huowang and took out an old almanac from his pocket as he prepared to get serious.

“Brother Li, hold on. I’ll make an opening, and we’ll escape first. I have never seen such things in the Great Qi, so I’m unsure of their true nature.”

“This might be a trap. They could be lying in wait to deal with you.” Zhuge Yuan tore a page from the almanac, threw it into the air, and began writing.

At that moment, a gust of wind blew and opened the almanac, revealing the painted face of the Dan actress behind it.

“Look back at the splendor of that distant dream~ The life left to us is but a fleeting wave,” the woman sang and flung her sleeves at Zhuge Yuan.

Zhugue Yuan stepped forward and leaped to avoid her, but the lower part of his robe came into contact with the flowing sleeves.

Unexpectedly, the sleeves stuck to Zhuge Yuan’s robe. The force easily tore his lower body away, as if it had been pulled apart.

As the sleeves shook violently, Zhuge Yuan’s lower body shrank and eventually became a lump. The woman opened her mouth and swallowed the lump.

Seeing this, Li Huowang’s face turned grim, and he felt his headache ease. He understood what was happening—the Dan actress was eating his “Truth” cultivation. She could even consume

the “Truth” on Zhuge Yuan!

As the Dan actress retreated, the Sheng, Jing, Mo, and Chou actors quickly surrounded him, leaving Zhuge Yuan’s half-body defenseless.

Zhuge Yuan barely managed to toss his spine back to Li Huowang before he was torn in half.

“Brother Li, be careful. It seems like this thing can touch the heavens and change the Daos!” Zhuge Yuan’s last words faded as he completely vanished.

The actors stood firm and surrounded Li Huowang once more.

Li Huowang looked at them with an ugly expression.

Regardless of what those things were, It was clear that this situation would be difficult to handle.

Li Huowang called out, “Ji Zai! Help! If you don’t, you’ll be in danger too!”

No unusual responses came, and everything remained eerily calm.

"Hmm, hahaha!" laughed the old Sheng actor with a long beard. His hearty laughter echoed through the valley.

The Sheng, Dan, Jing, Mo, and Chou actors turned their heads to see a large crowd moving towards them.

Among them were the newly established Surveillance Bureau and military personnel from Great Qi, followed by the Great Qi citizens who had just finished their meals.

The crowd seemed endless from the valley’s edge. It was as if everyone from the You Capital had come.

“Benefactor, don’t panic. We’ve come to help you!” Chan Du shouted as he led the group.

Did the Great Qi really gather so many people without me realizing it? Li Huowang felt relieved. These five figures before him were challenging to deal with. However, the numerous people from Great Qi would be able to overwhelm them.

Suddenly, the surroundings turned into a forest again, with more actors representing the Sheng, Dan, Jing, Mo, and Chou roles slowly emerging from it.

Ten, fifty, a hundred!

They all had the same deformed appearance and wore the same theater costumes.

At this moment, Li Huowang finally understood their true identity. They were indeed the army of Unspeakable he had heard about!

1. The five various roles of Chinese opera. 🤔

Chapter 872 - Army Of Unspeakable

The deformed freaks in theater costumes with painted faces stood there, singing as if they were on a stage rather than on a life-or-death battlefield.

Some wore flat shoes, while others were on stilts, much taller than the other deformed beings. This scene was as horrifying as the demons in the eighteen levels of hell.

Li Huowang felt a chill as he looked at these grotesque actors—the so-called army of Unspeakable.

Just facing two of them had been difficult enough, but now there were so many.

Li Huowang now realized how laughable he had been for thinking he had no rivals. In this bizarre world, there would always be strange things he had never seen before!

Li Huowang turned slightly and looked at the people of the Great Qi people behind him. He felt a pang of bitterness when he saw their confident and indignant expressions.

If it were anything else, perhaps these people might have been helpful. However, against the army of Unspeakable, they were essentially walking to their deaths.

“Ah~~ya~~ya~~ya~~”

Li Huowang watched the army of Unspeakable make their appearances, and he silently cursed. He raised his hand and shouted, “Fire!”

Flames erupted instantly, gushing out from the cuffs and collar of his red robes.

He wanted to try to fight back, even if he might not win. He

refused to surrender easily!

That wasn't all. Li Huowang gripped the spine sword tightly and plunged it into his chest. He pulled hard and extracted his internal organs.

Five volumes of the Profound Records were laid on the ground, and they caught each of his organs in turn.

“Wood liver! Earth spleen! Metal lung! Water kidney! Fire heart! Five Elements Intercalation!”

The bamboo slips of the Profound Records wriggled and transformed into worms, rapidly filling Li Huowang's chest.

The flames on his body continued to burn and wrap around the worms, causing them to scream and sizzle as they burned.

At this moment, Li Huowang and the worms were interconnected, and he could feel what they felt.

He stomped his feet and roared before charging at the army of Unspeakable, with his body and the screaming worms ablaze.

As Li Huowang was about to collide with them, he grabbed his ribs and pulled them outward before thrusting himself forward. The burning worms scattered from his chest like flowers descending from the heavens.

Li Huowang was currently an empty shell—the worms were his true form.

The densely packed worms descended upon them like raindrops, their mouths wide open. They wormed their way into their costumes while the flames rapidly spread and set fire to anything that could catch fire.

As the costumes caught fire, the creatures flailed their long sleeves and desperately tried to extinguish the flames. The sea of fire quickly spread.

Just as Li Huowang was about to unleash his fury, the situation suddenly changed.

The other deformed figures who had not attacked them now

rushed in. Their flowing sleeves and short spears brushed against the worms, and Li Huowang immediately felt something missing from them.

When the worms stopped screaming and became still, he immediately understood. They had removed all the pain from the worms! The army of Unspeakable had directly removed all the pain!

At that moment, Li Huowang finally understood what Zhuge Yuan had meant by touching the heavens and changing the Daos. These beings could interact with any Heavenly Dao, whether it was his “Truth” cultivation or the Pain from the Ao Jing Sect. They could treat them as manipulable objects.

If something involved supernatural powers from Heavenly Daos, they could effortlessly neutralize it.

With the pain removed, the Ao Jing Sect’s ritual was now meaningless.

The worms were now free from pain and fell one by one, their flames extinguished. With that, they lay motionless on the ground.

Several deformed actors in green stepped forward and sang mournfully in a mocking tone. “Only waiting for someone to offer sacrifices to the green tomb, pity the souls trapped for eternity. Add another chapter to remember you. They will always accompany me.”

Impossible. Even the Five Elements Intercalation doesn’t work? Li Huowang didn’t want to accept it, but he realized the harsh reality. It was clear that they were beyond his current capabilities.

With their strength, it was no wonder they managed to betray the Heavenly Mater and steal her Heavenly Dao.

“Ji Zai, Ji Zai!” Li Huowang roared at his own reflection in the pool of blood, yet nothing happened. The final glimmer of hope he had clung to in this critical moment had proven futile.

Li Huowang gripped the spine sword with his fiery hand and felt a deep sense of helplessness. His “Truth” cultivation, the Ao

Jing Sect's rituals, and Ji Zai had all proven useless. He had no more cards to play.

This was the first time he had encountered such a formidable enemy since leaving the Zephyr Temple.

What to do? If I can't fight them, do I have to retreat and return to the Great Liang?

Li Huowang turned to look at the massive crowd of people from the Great Qi behind him, feeling a surge of reluctance.

He knew that if he retreated to the Great Liang, the army of Unspeakable would likely wipe out all these people. If they were all gone, the Great Qi would truly become a mere waypoint for the Tianchen Kingdom.

"Benefactor Li, don't panic! The monks from Righteous Monastery have all arrived."

Li Huowang forced a bitter smile. What good would Righteous Monastery do? The monks' blood and flesh Heavenly Daos would also be suppressed by the army of Unspeakable's strange abilities.

He turned to face the army of Unspeakable. They appeared unhurried, standing there as if waiting for the people of the Great Qi to surround them, much like a cat waiting by a door for a mouse.

"Have the military go in front!" Li Huowang drew the spine sword again. Since supernatural abilities were ineffective, it was time for a direct confrontation.

He wasn't sure if it would work, but there were no other options. It was a fight to the death.

If both the Great Qi and himself were unable to resist the army of Unspeakable, then the Great Liang would also be in danger. This situation could pose an even bigger crisis than the one caused by the Dharma Sect.

As Li Huowang gritted his teeth and prepared to charge forward, someone called out excitedly from behind, saying, "Bodhisattva Zhuge! We've come to help you!"

Li Huowang recognized the voice—it was Feng Bawan. As his voice rang out, a stream of False Qi gradually flowed into Li Huowang's dantian.

Feng Bawan's voice prompted others to join in. Cheers and words of encouragement began to rise.

Everyone was excited and proud to see their side becoming more numerous than the enemy, with the advantage clearly on their side.

As they shouted, streams of False Qi continued to flow into Li Huowang's dantian.

What use is this False Qi to me? Can the tricks of the Sitting Oblivion Dao help me against these beings?!

He froze suddenly, feeling the dense False Qi in his heart and a sudden, unexpected thought crossed his mind.

Chapter 873 - Siming

Li Huowang sensed the ever-increasing False Qi and then looked at the enemies he was powerless against. He quickly made a decision.

He turned his back to the approaching army of Unspeakable, quickly scanning the crowd to find Feng Bawan.

Li Huowang forcibly dragged him out and excitedly said, “Hurry, make them shout! Make everyone follow your lead and shout!”

“Shout... shout what?” Feng Bawan, who was holding half a brick, was momentarily confused.

“Shout what you just said! Get everyone to join in and shout! Quickly!”

Before Feng Bawan could react, a few students from the Minglun Hall understood Li Huowang’s intention and immediately bowed. “We’ve received your orders!”

The students shouted words of praise for Li Huowang, and everyone behind them began to follow suit. Each shout was echoed by thousands more.

“The Dao is selfless and virtuous. The compassionate Zhuge Yuan saves those in suffering!”

“The Dao is selfless and virtuous. The compassionate Zhuge Yuan saves those in suffering!”

The phrases used by Minglun Hall were naturally more refined than Feng Bawan’s crude speech, but Li Huowang didn’t care about the elegance of their words—his sole focus was the amount of False Qi.

As he felt the massive influx of False Qi, he knew he had found a way to win!

“Chan Du! Keep them occupied for a while! I still need more!”

Chan Du, the abbot of the Righteous Monastery, didn’t ask any questions. He calmly turned his prayer beads, decisively leading the Surveillance Bureau and military forces of the Great Qi toward the army of Unspeakable, even though he knew they weren’t a match for them.

“Don’t stop! Keep shouting!”

Li Huowang had convinced everyone that he was the Bodhisattva. He also used up a portion of the False Qi to appear several taller in their eyes.

Some of them became even more enthusiastic when they saw Li Huowang sitting cross-legged like a true Buddha. They continued to shout along with the students, their voices growing increasingly fervent.

“Bodhisattva Zhuge guides all to enlightenment, with a lotus throne and auspicious clouds, at the pure realm!”

“Bodhisattva Zhuge guides all to enlightenment, with a lotus throne and auspicious clouds, at the pure realm!”

“Bodhisattva Zhuge! Perform a thousand good deeds daily, accumulate three thousand merits, deliver great blessings, and embrace compassion in your heart!!”

“Bodhisattva Zhuge! Perform a thousand good deeds daily, accumulate three thousand merits, deliver great blessings, and embrace compassion in your heart!!”

In such an environment, even some skeptics in the crowd began to believe them. With Li Huowang’s various acts of devotion, they knelt and started to kowtow, treating him like a true Bodhisattva.

Everyone believed Li Huowang was the savior Bodhisattva named Zhuge Yuan, even though this Bodhisattva wore Daoist robes and the name Zhuge Yuan had no Buddhist associations.

With their fervent shouting, the continuous flow of False Qi surged towards Li Huowang, growing rapidly from a small stream

to a flooding river.

As the False Qi continued to increase, Li Huowang listened to the diminishing screams behind him and waited anxiously. *Not enough! Still not enough!*

As time passed and the screams behind him began to weaken, Li Huowang's eyes widened. *Enough!*

The spine sword behind him quickly grew flesh, forming a new Li Huowang. The two stood back to back and simultaneously opened their mouths to chant.

“Master of the True Void, Supreme Heavenly Mother. When the golden light shines, the sun and moon fade. When the treasure staff spins, ghosts and spirits lose their color. Manifest divine presence in the mortal world. Guard the sacred chariot and float...”

Although the chanting was not loud, it spread far and wide, causing even the unchanging sky of Great Qi to shift.

Before long, the heads of both Li Huowangs started to transform, gradually taking on the shape of dice.

The square dice heads became increasingly prominent and turned a deeper shade of purple as the chanting continued. Their bodies started to fade away from the world, as if they were mere illusions.

As Li Huowang disappeared, Shai Zi's chanting grew louder, eventually becoming the only sound in the world.

The army of Unspeakable seemed to sense something. They ignored the entanglement from the Great Qi Surveillance Bureau and military forces and charged towards Li Huowang.

However, Chan Du and the others knew that Li Huowang was performing a ritual. They were determined to stop their enemies, even if it meant sacrificing their lives.

While the people of the Great Qi couldn't defeat the foreign beings, they could still buy time with their lives.

Amidst the chaos, the chanting of the two Shai Zis began to

reach its climax.

“If beings in distress call your name, the Great One listens and relieves their suffering. Great compassion and vows, great holy mercy. The Holy Spirit, mighty light, the Heavenly Queen, Saint Marici, Sovereign Doulao!”

When the final title was uttered, the six-sided numbers on their faces detached from their bodies. They were wrapped in purple light, disappearing into the dark, gloomy clouds above.

In the next moment, both Li Huowangs looked up simultaneously and shouted in unison, “Doulao, come quickly! I’m returning the Heavenly Daos of Truth and Lies to you!”

This was the Heavenly Treasure of Deception of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. Since their abilities were so bizarre, he would summon the true Siming and see if these hundred-odd people had the power to defeat Doulao!

Whoosh! The dark clouds in the sky began to churn violently.

In contrast to the changes in the sky, the ground also started to change. Its texture became peculiar, as if it had turned into some kind of liquid.

Li Huowang looked up and saw a yin-yang taiji fish high above, resembling a sun in the sky.

Li Huowang knew Doulao was coming and shouted, “Everyone, get on the ground! Close your eyes and cover your ears tightly!”

At his command, everyone from the Great Qi immediately complied, promptly laying themselves down on the ground.

Those lying on the ground moved like seaweed on the water’s surface and drifted with the waves.

When Li Huowang looked up again, the sight became clearer—two vast seas of black and white intertwining. Doulao had truly arrived.

The vast seas on either side were not Doulao. What lay beneath the seas was Doulao.

Li Huowang could feel himself melting, and his senses gradually faded.

The two Li Huowangs covered their heads with pained expressions and cursed at the sky, “Why the hell are you looking at me? The enemies are those things! Get rid of them!”

Chapter 874 - Lies

Doulao, the Siming who controlled Lies, was now right before Li Huowang. Li Huowang had summoned Doulao through the Sitting Oblivion Dao's Heavenly Treasure of Deception.

Even though it was only an incarnation at this moment, the pressure it exerted was still immense.

Li Huowang felt his body continuously collapse as his consciousness faded. He looked up again and faced the yin-yang sea that covered the entire sky. "What are you waiting for?!"

The next moment, Li Huowang's body completely melted as it turned into a pool of blood on the ground. A hand reached out from the side and retrieved a spine from the blood. Li Huowang took up the spine and raised it fearlessly above his head.

He was about to say something but stopped. He turned his head slowly to look at the distant army of Unspeakable and laughed arrogantly.

"Hahaha! Did you really think the Siming I summoned would attack me? I have fooled you!"

Li Huowang quickly twisted his head, instantly turning his face into Hong Zhong's.

"Look at this! This is Doulao!! The Siming who controls lies! Our Sitting Oblivion Dao's leader!

"Hahahaha! Come on! Aren't you powerful? You've even defeated the Heavenly Mater? Then try this one!"

The army of Unspeakable remained motionless against Li Huowang's words. They stood on the undulating ground like statues.

"Cowards!! A bunch of useless idiots!" Li Huowang stomped his feet and confidently charged at them under the gaze of Doulao.

Li Huowang was halfway through his charge before the army of Unspeakable finally moved.

Some slender female actors were lifted high by the older actors and placed on stilts. They began to reach up towards the cloud-like Doulao.

As they were about to make a significant move, the army of Unspeakable suddenly scattered. Their distorted faces became filled with suspicion, and they scrutinized their companions.

“Hmm?” When Li Huowang saw these entities starting to attack their own, he immediately realized that Doulao was taking action.

As the Siming of Lies, Doulao could make any group develop doubts about their companions in an instant.

However, to Li Huowang’s surprise, the army of Unspeakable seemed to realize there was a problem with themselves. They all raised their hands and began to feel their heads.

As they raised their hands, they pulled out the Lies from their minds.

However, for every Lie they pulled out, Doulao inserted a new one. They were forced to stand still to prevent their thoughts from being disturbed, continuously pulling out various lies from their heads.

During this time, Li Huowang reached the front of their army and began a killing spree with his blade.

The previously formidable army of Unspeakable now appeared as insignificant as chickens and dogs before Li Huowang.

As Li Huowang was about to finish off the remaining foes, they stopped pulling out Lies from their heads. Doulao had inexplicably ceased its actions.

Li Huowang observed the gazes around him and the scattered Lies on the ground, then felt a surge of inspiration. He waved the bloodstained spine sword and shouted, “Quickly end your own lives! Your lives are linked with the Heavenly Mater! Only if you

die will the Heavenly Mater die! Your deaths are necessary for the sake of the Tianchen Kingdom!”

More False Qi surged into Li Huowang as the army of Unspeakable reached under their left armpits.

When they inserted their hands and squeezed, red and purple blood instantly exploded, which left them immobile and sprawled on the ground.

Since they had no Lies in their heart, they also lost the ability to discern if something was truthful. They would believe whatever others said to them.

The army of Unspeakable committed suicide one by one, and the area in front of Li Huowang gradually became filled with bodies.

As they were about to be completely tricked and killed by Li Huowang’s deceit, the surrounding illusion transformed into a forest once again.

The forest appeared and disappeared rapidly, bringing the slower members of the Unspeakable army back to the Tianchen Kingdom.

Li Huowang shifted his position and arrived at the edge of the forest. As the forest vanished, he saw a golden dragon appear vaguely in the white mist.

The forest quickly closed, and everything around him calmed back down.

A dragon? A real dragon? Not a fake dragon? Li Huowang was astonished by what he had seen earlier. *Was there really a true dragon? What connection did it have with the Dragon Veins?*

Now that he knew what the army of Unspeakable was, a thought crossed his mind—could the Tian Huang nobles be true dragons?

Li Huowang didn’t know the answer to this question. He took a while to come back to his senses.

He suddenly thought of his ally's actions and looked up and cursed, "Doulao! You just—"

Li Huowang's words abruptly stopped as the sky returned to its previous state. The chaotic sea of black and white had long since vanished without a trace.

"Damn it!" Li Huowang suppressed his anger and muttered under his breath.

Even though Doulao had assisted him during this crisis, Li Huowang was unsure if summoning it again would be helpful, considering its recent attitude just now.

"The Dao is selfless and virtuous. The compassionate Zhuge Yuan saves those in suffering!"

"The Dao is selfless and virtuous. The compassionate Zhuge Yuan saves those in suffering!"

"The Dao is selfless and virtuous. The compassionate Zhuge Yuan saves those in suffering!"

The excited shouting continued, and Li Huowang was jolted awake by the roaring cheers.

He looked up at the cheering people of the Great Qi. They shouted enthusiastically and bowed down in tears before him.

They didn't know what had happened. They only knew that the Bodhisattva had manifested and defeated the external enemies.

He felt the False Qi flow into him and murmured, "I didn't expect that these mortals would be the turning point in defeating the army of Unspeakable."

At that moment, Chan Du, with half his face missing, came over with his hands joined in prayer. "Amitabha. Under the Buddha, all sentient beings are equal. Countless beings come and go in an endless cycle, constantly flowing through the six realms of existence. Mortals are not ordinary."

Li Huowang frowned at him. "Do you know what I'm thinking? Do you just interrupt?"

Chan Du chuckled, looking pleased as the enemies were driven back. “We call them the Heavenly Daos, but if there were no Mortal Daos, what would the Heavenly Daos be? Mortals are far from useless—they are the basis of all fate.

“Benefactor Li, as I said before, the Great Qi is yours. Whatever you want them to believe, they will believe.

“They were able to help you this time, and they can help you even more in other places—it’s not limited to the False Qi of the Sitting Oblivion Dao.”

Chapter 875 - Night

Li Huowang understood Chan Du's intentions.

Chan Du wanted him to recognize the value of the Great Qi. Indeed, the Great Qi was very useful, and if Li Huowang had control over it, his supply of False Qi would be endless. However, it was not what he wanted.

Li Huowang gradually relaxed his furrowed brows. "Stop trying to win me over. Once again, I'm not helping them because they're useful to me—I just couldn't stand to see people starve."

With that, Li Huowang walked through the crowd and headed toward the You Capital amidst their shouting.

"Of course, I know that Zhuge Yuan is compassionate. However, it's our honor to assist Zhuge Yuan."

"Feeling excited now?" Li Huowang turned back and glared at him, but Chan Du was still calm. Li Huowang ignored him and continued forward.

"I know what you're trying to do. Stop trying to win me over with these tactics. I'll repeat myself—the matters of the Great Qi should be resolved by the people of the Great Qi! I won't involve myself with the Dragon Veins!"

"Benefactor Li, there's no need for you to handle the Dragon Veins. Still, it would be a good opportunity to kill two birds with one stone, as the enemies from the Diamond Realm actually came."

Li Huowang stopped again and looked at Chan Du, whose face had completely healed by now. "What do you mean by that?"

"Since we're already mortal enemies, when we invade the Diamond Realm and seize a few Dragon Veins, I'm sure the Buddha will not blame us either."

"Huh?" Li Huowang was surprised. He had previously turned

Chan Du away when he tried to discuss the matter of the Dragon Veins.

He hadn't even imagined Chan Du would have such ideas.

The Great Qi's Deputy Chief, Liang Yuxuan from the Minglun Hall, hurriedly added, "Daoist Li, that's great! This way, the Great Qi and the Great Liang can be completely bound together! It's not something that can be easily bought off with just food!"

"Do you think that seizing the Dragon Veins is as simple as just talking about it?" Li Huowang replied. He quickly came up with a solution in his mind. It was feasible—Gao Zhijian had once been the Great Qi's Dragon Vein, yet he could still serve as a Dragon Vein in the Great Liang.

"Benefactor Li, since the Great Qi rightfully belongs to you, any Dragon Veins seized by the Great Qi will belong to you. Once the Dragon Veins are in your possession, you will have the freedom to extract as much Dragon Qi from them as you desire.

Li Huowang stopped in his tracks, looking at Chan Du with a hint of amusement. He reached out and snatched the Buddhist beads that Chan Du was spinning in his hands.

"Abbot Chan Du, you usually seem inconspicuous, but you've been gathering a lot of information behind the scenes."

Chan Du joined his hands in prayer, closing his eyes slightly as he said, "Amitabha, I am but a humble monk. I don't know what Benefactor is referring to."

"Indeed, you don't know, and of course you wouldn't." Li Huowang slapped the Buddhist beads onto Chan Du's chest. He then drew his spine sword, slicing open a rift and slipping into it.

Chan Du placed the Buddhist beads back in his palm and slowly spun them again. "Amitabha. Heaven has the virtue of benevolence."

It was late at night. Zhao Wu held a lantern and leaned on a

cane, wobbling down the path in Cowheart Village with a letter in hand.

A peddler who had come to stay had just delivered the letter, which had been sent from Qing Qiu. The only person who could've written a letter from Qing Qiu to Cowheart Village was naturally that kid, Sun Baolu.

Zhao Wu wanted to find a well-lit area to read the letter and check on Sun Baolu's situation.

Their relationship was closer than that of real brothers since they had escaped from the Zephyr Temple together. It was normal for them to care about each other. Zhao Wu was now able to read and had no difficulty reading letters.

As he was about to reach home, Zhao Wu suddenly felt a strong urge to urinate. He looked around and immediately headed to the outhouse with his lantern.

After he relieved himself, he exited the outhouse. The light from his lantern illuminated the nearby woodshed. He spotted a flash of green between the wooden planks, making his heart skip a beat.

"What's this? Why is there something green in the woodshed?" He raised the lantern again and knocked, but the green color disappeared.

"Could it... could it be haunted...?"

Zhao Wu thought it over and felt something was off. "No, how could there be ghosts on Senior Li's territory?"

Mustering his courage, he used a stick to pry open the wooden door and cautiously held the lantern up in the woodshed.

The next moment, Zhao Wu froze in place. A pitch-black ghost dressed in a bright red and green ceremonial outfit was floating in the air.

"Ghost!" Zhao Wu's terrified scream echoed over Cowheart Village.

Zhao Wu was paralyzed with fear. When he finally managed to turn around and desperately tried to escape, Puppy appeared before him.

“Is there really a ghost?”

Zhao Wu quickly grabbed Puppy’s clothes and clung tightly to his back. “In the woodshed! Hurry up! There’s a ghost in ceremonial clothing!”

Puppy, who had just been fearful, immediately relaxed and walked toward the woodshed. “Oh, is that it? You startled me.”

“Don’t go! There’s a ghost!”

“Don’t pull me. That’s not a ghost. It’s just the ceremonial outfit I hung up.”

Puppy took out the bright red and green ceremonial outfit from the woodshed, which had gold coins painted on it.

He showed it to Zhao Wu. “See, this is the ceremonial outfit. I bought a coffin since Senior Li almost died once when we were traveling, and the shopkeeper threw this in. This thing was left over since he didn’t die later on. It cost quite a bit at 120 coins, so I kept it in case it could be used later.”

Zhao Wu erupted in anger. “You! Why did you leave it here? You should’ve kept it at home!”

“Oh, keeping it at home would be unlucky, so I put it in the woodshed. It’s no big deal. The kids who cook every day are used to it.”

“Burn it right now!” Zhao Wu looked disgusted. He tried to grab the ceremonial outfit, but Puppy pulled it away.

“No, no. How can you throw it away? I paid for it myself! If Senior Li doesn’t need it, whoever dies in the village later can use it first,” Puppy said, running outside with the ceremonial outfit.

Puppy ran ahead, and Zhao Wu chased after him.

Zhao Wu moved slowly with a cane, which meant was unlikely to catch up with the able-bodied Puppy. Unexpectedly, Zhao Wu

caught up quickly and grabbed the ceremonial outfit.

However, he quickly noticed that something was wrong with Puppy. He was trembling, and his pants were wet. He had wet himself from fear.

“What’s wrong with you?” Zhao Wu raised the lantern and followed Puppy’s gaze. The moment he did, he felt a chill all over. If he hadn’t just visited the outhouse, he might have wet himself too.

In the dimly lit village path, a dirty, tattered sack filled with something was hopping toward them.

There were many things inside, and it was bulging.

The sack was soaked with blood and filled with dismembered corpses.

Chapter 876 - Search

Dak dak dak dak dak~

Zhao Wu was afraid, his teeth chattering uncontrollably. His face had turned green from fright.

Zhao Wu's fear was reasonable. It was one thing to mistake the burial clothes for ghosts, but there was no way he would see a walking bloody sack and treat it as a regular object. It was a real ghost!

“There’s... there’s... there’s...” Zhao Wu was about to shout, but Puppy swiftly silenced him by placing his hands over Zhao Wu's mouth.

“Quiet! It has no eyes, so it can’t see us,” Puppy whispered urgently.

Zhao Wu stared at the bag with unmoving eyes as he heard Puppy's whisper. Puppy was right. The sack somehow ignored them, continuing to hop and leap.

“Quickly! We must run and call everyone!”

Both of them quickly ran back.

At that moment, a muffled voice emerged from the sack, making them tumble as they ran while shivering uncontrollably.

They got away quickly and promptly returned with reinforcements. Almost everyone in Cowheart Village followed behind them, holding brightly lit lanterns.

“Quick! Follow the trail of blood! That thing is just in front of us!”

Puppy was holding onto his needle wrapped in a white tassel. He felt much more confident with it.

The villagers followed him, a murderous aura radiating from the village militia as they gripped their weapons. Yang Xiaohai

trailed behind them, holding his scepter.

It could be said that they had mobilized the entire strength of the village.

If they could not fight against the ghost with this, they would have to send someone out to call for reinforcements in Shangjing.

Their torch and lanterns suddenly lit up an isolated sack in the middle of the path. Everyone was shocked by its sudden appearance and retreated slightly.

Suddenly, their torches and lanterns illuminated an isolated sack in the middle of the path. Its unexpected appearance shocked everyone, making them take a small step back.

The bloody sack suddenly jumped. What they witnessed was too bizarre, leaving everyone in shock.

Puppy, who was hiding in the middle of the crowd, shouted at the sack, "Youyouyouyouyou! You dare come and harm us? Do you think that you are unkillable? Do you know whose territory this is?"

The sack stopped after it heard Puppy's voice. Puppy saw this and slid further back.

The sack slowly turned, and an exhausted voice came from inside.

"Is it... Brother Er Jiu? It's me. Liu Zongyuan from Moongate."

The people of the village exchanged curious glances. They weren't familiar with the names Liu Zongyuan or Er Jiu, as nobody in the village bore such names.

"Er Jiu is Master's other name. That thing knows who my Master is."

Lu Xiucan walked forward on his crutches.

Both of his legs were replaced with wooden sticks. He could walk, albeit slowly.

Puppy was relieved when he heard that. He walked out from the crowd and looked at the sack. "To think that Senior Li knows this thing."

Seeing that it was an acquaintance of Li Huowang, Yang Xiaohai asked carefully, “Are you dead or alive? Can you not open the sack? Should we open it for you?”

The bloody sack jumped backward. “Don’t touch me!”

“I barely survived by using the gluing technique of the Moongate. If you open the sack right now, I will die for good!”

Liu Zongyuan continued to talk with his weary voice, “Everyone, I’m here to seek your Senior Li for help. I hope that he will help me.”

“Senior Li? We don’t know where he is. He’s been moving our food previously, but for some reason, he recently stopped. He’s like an Immortal, flying here and there every day. We currently have no idea where he is.”

Lu Xiucan stepped forward and looked at the bloody sack. He asked tentatively, “What can my Master help you with? We can help you by passing the message to him when we see him.”

Liu Zongyuan’s voice raised an octave. “What else can I do with my body like this? I’m looking for your Master to ask him to take revenge for me!

“We worked together in the past. I even helped him with finding a lot of information before. He cannot ignore what happened to me!”

Lu Xiucan asked, “Who... who turned you into this?”

Liu Zongyuan replied as firmly as he could, saying, “Who else? The White Lotus Sect! It’s that damned evil sect! They are the same as the Dharma Sect!”

“Impossible! That cannot be true!”

Lu Xiucan denied it vehemently. He was still a member of the White Lotus Sect. “I’ve worked with them before. Everyone in the White Lotus Sect is equal. Things have changed, and we aren’t who we used to be.”

He continued, “We no longer kill innocent people. We even

burned away the books detailing the techniques that involved human sacrifices. My Mistress was the one who did so.”

“Lies! A dog cannot stop eating turds! Would I go and look for them if they didn’t cause trouble? We would’ve overlooked them if they had just killed one or two people, but they are destroying village after village! They even lied to others, saying that there were plagues! Hmph! Do they think that they can fool the people from Moongate?”

“I don’t believe you! Where are they? Lead me there!”

The bloody sack shook a bit. “I can’t. They are very strong. Even Ji Xiang was killed. Only brother Er Jiu can do this.”

Liu Zongyuan paused a bit before saying, “It’s a good thing that he’s also friends with the Emperor. You must inform the Emperor that the White Lotus Sect must not be left alive!”

Lu Xiucan was angry as he walked forward with his crutches until he was just in front of the sack. “Bring me there! I’m a white donkey! As long as they are the real White Lotus Sect, they will not harm me!”

Liu Zongyuan fell silent, deep in thought after learning that Lu Xiucan was part of the White Lotus Sect.

“I will give you a location, and you can go there on your own. Two hundred Li away, towards the southeast of Cowheart Village. You will find them at a temple.”

Liu Zongyuan left promptly after saying that. He didn’t even wait or ask where Li Huowang was as he hopped away. It was as if he was afraid that someone was chasing after him.

Everyone in the village started discussing it after Liu Zongyuan was gone.

“Isn’t the White Lotus Sect the one Senior Bai and Senior Xiaoman had joined?”

“Are they really an evil sect? I don’t think so. I talked to them once. They seemed like regular people.”

“That might not be the case. Remember what we dug out from underneath the ancestral hall?”

The discussion annoyed Lu Xiucan, so he turned to Puppy and said, “Puppy, give me a carriage.”

“Huh? You only have a single arm left. Why are you still working hard? You can leave these kinds of things to Senior Li.”

Lu Xiucan recalled his dead brother and sister-in-law, as well as his crazy father and his nephew, who he had yet to find. The Dharma Sect had caused the demise of his family.

“No! I need to see it myself! The White Lotus Sect is definitely not a second Dharma Sect! That cannot be true!”

Chapter 877 - Temple

Lu Xiucan clenched his Profound Records with his single remaining arm. The trundling carriage could not stop him from feeling conflicted. He still couldn't believe the White Lotus Sect would become like the Dharma Sect.

After all, the White Lotus Sect had sacrificed its people to defeat the Dharma Sect.

How could the White Lotus Sect become their enemies in just a few months?

Lu Xiucan didn't think that the sack, Liu Zongyuan, would trick them. After all, he was looking for Li Huowang. Even if Liu Zongyuan dared to lie to the village, he would never dare to lie to Li Huowang.

"Ah, well. Xiucan, do you really want to go? You only have a single arm left. You will be completely crippled if you lose the other one," Puppy said, driving the carriage while trying to dissuade Lu Xiucan.

"I still need to check it out, even at the risk of losing my other arm. If there are impostors or even traitors, I need to report it to Mistress. If I report it, they will send someone to come and clear them up."

"You are already heavily crippled, and yet you still want to take care of things like these? Do you want to abandon your father and niece? Your father might be fine since we don't have a village idiot yet, so he could take that role. I'm sure he can survive if we feed him in turns, but what about your niece? She's only five years old. Her parents are dead and her grandfather is crazy. You are her only family left. Why don't we head back instead?"

"You're already crippled, and yet you still insist on taking care

of things like these? Are you trying to abandon your father and niece? Your father may be okay—we don't have a village idiot yet, so he could take that spot. I'm sure he could survive if we feed him in turns."

He continued, "But what about your niece? She's just five years old, with both her parents dead and her grandfather insane. You're the only family she has left. Why don't we head back instead?"

Lu Xiucan shouted in anger, "Do you want me to die that badly? I'm just here to check out what's happening! I'm different now, and even if I only have a single arm left, I'm still stronger than you!"

Puppy remained silent and focused on driving the carriage. A long time passed before he said, "You really are his disciple. Even your temper is the same."

Lu Xiucan did not retort. He looked up at the stars. "I used to think that my Master was intentionally hiding things from me just because he didn't want to teach me, but now I see that he just didn't want me to follow in his footsteps. It's a thorny path. It's very tiring, and it's riddled with pain."

"Hehe, and you just realized it? I already knew about it a long time ago."

Puppy chuckled out of excitement. "I don't like pain, and even if I can't read, I'm still smarter than you for noticing it earlier."

"But the world always needed an idiot."

Puppy didn't quite understand. "We have no idea what Senior Li is doing right now. He's not at home all the time. To think that you are the one who has to step up when he's not here."

Puppy didn't quite understand. "We have no idea what Senior Li is up to these days. He's hardly ever home. It's hard to believe that you're the one who has to take charge when he's away."

"I don't know, but Master is probably busy with something grand. As his disciple, I can handle this minor problem. That way, he won't have to deal with trivial matters and won't get frustrated."

“Hmph! You are strong and capable. If I were you I would’ve just sent a letter to Shangjing.”

“If you had done that, the culprit would’ve escaped by the time the letter arrived there,” Lu Xiucan said before urging Puppy to stop. “Stop here!”

Puppy pulled on the reins and the carriage came to a gentle stop. “What’s wrong? We are still two Li away.”

“If they’re actually evil they would’ve set up some guards along the way. You can go back now. I don’t want to get you involved.”

“Huh. Guess you do learn a thing or two after exploring the world.”

Lu Xiucan ignored him. With his only remaining arm, he climbed onto a horse and released the straps connecting it to the carriage. He shook the reins and rode onward.

Puppy looked at Lu Xiucan’s back and shouted, “Come back quickly if you survive! If you die, I will get to use the burial clothes when we collect your corpse!”

Lu Xiucan couldn’t balance himself well on horseback because he only had a single arm. He rode slowly as he approached the temple that Liu Zongyuan had told him about.

Lu Xiucan realized that the structure he saw was not a temple, but a mountain shaped like a temple.

He looked around the dark forest and saw no guards. There were no ambushes either.

Lu Xiucan tore off his clothes, revealing his dudou and the white donkey tattoo on his back.

He didn’t care if there were guards or if they saw that Lu Xiucan was one of them. He just spurred the horse forward toward the temple-shaped mountain.

The mountain road was steep and the air was tinged with the undeniable stench of blood. Lu Xiucan recognized it almost instantly.

When he was halfway up the mountain, he saw a White Lotus Sect banner on the side of the road, and his heartbeat quickened. The writing was messy but undeniably stated that the White Lotus Sect was recruiting. Strikingly, the words were written in blood.

With the end of the Red Sun's calamity, the rise of the White Sun is imminent. The silt originates from primordial chaos, and the appearance of the White lotus heralds the beginning of a prosperous age!

Lu Xiucan then pursed his lips and spurred the horse to continue forward. After a while, the horse suddenly stopped moving. Lu Xiucan looked down in confusion to find that the ground was completely black.

He picked up the black stuff on the ground with his bronze coin sword and realized that it was human hair! The entire mountain path was covered in it!

There's so much hair! Just how many people died to leave behind so much hair? Lu Xiucan trembled, recalling the human pillars buried beneath Cowheart Village.

He almost reached the top of the mountain when the horse stopped moving. The horse refused to move further as if there was something dangerous in front. It neighed and tried to head back.

Lu Xiucan decided to travel on foot. He jumped down with his bronze coin sword in hand, and his wooden peg legs stabbed deeper into his thigh. Nevertheless, he was already used to the pain.

He suddenly noticed another sack on the back of the horse. He opened it and saw Puppy's blowpipe along with several darts that had white tassels. Yang Xiaohai's scepter was also inside the sack.

Lu Xiucan smiled but did not take anything. Instead, he tied the sack on the back of the horse before slapping its rump. The horse galloped down the mountain back to Cowheart Village while Lu Xiucan ascended the mountain.

At the top of the mountain was a cave. Lu Xiucan thought it looked like the Zephyr Temple, the place Puppy kept talking about.

There was wind blowing out from the cave, and it was reeking with the stench of blood. Lu Xiucan was in the right place.

Lu Xiucan entered the cave and noticed a single statue in the middle of the cave. The statue depicted a golden Buddha sitting on top of a lotus.

Lu Xiucan took a closer look and realized that it wasn't a Buddha—it was a coiled-up yellow centipede!

Furthermore, the hundreds of legs of the centipede were clasped together as if it were praying!

“A centipede?” Lu Xiucan exclaimed in surprise before chuckling. “I knew it! It wasn't the White Lotus Sect! How dare these evil entities masquerade as the White Lotus Sect!”

Just then, he heard numerous cracking sounds. The centipede in front of him was slowly lowering its legs.

More importantly, the sound came from everywhere around Lu Xiucan.

Chapter 878 - White Lotus

“An Zhen Guang Zi Ling Li Da She!” Lu Xiucan swung his bronze coin sword to the left. The red threads elongated as the bronze coin turned into a whip and hit something to the left of the darkness.

Lu Xiucan heard the sound of something being torn apart and pulled his sword back. The tip of his blade revealed a strange, semi-transparent sphere with six eyes.

As Lu Xiucan looked at the strange eyeball, he realized it was still going to hit him despite being impaled on the bronze coin sword. He quickly turned and ripped the skin off his shoulder with his mouth. He no longer had teeth, but he had embedded nails where his teeth once were.

The Profound Records opened, and the piece of skin flew and wrapped around the eyeball with ease. The impact sent the eyeball crashing back into the darkness.

Sensing that he was surrounded by danger and strong enemies, Lu Xiucan dared not let his guard down. He sheathed his bronze coin sword and took out his serrated sword instead. He chanted as he hit his forehead with the serrated sword.

“I call for the round heaven and square earth. Please summon the deities to descend upon the altar and support the shaman. Heaven urges, earth urges; the Tiger Lord flies and rides the clouds back. My master flies and rides the horse here. Arriving at the altar, we assist the shaman. The shaman’s left eye transforms into the sun and the right eye into the moon, manifesting the clear illumination of the sun and moon. The disciple prays sincerely...”

Seeing that Lu Xiucan attacked them, something surged like water in the darkness. The few oil lamps in the cave began to flicker

ominously.

Lu Xiucan finished his chant and bit on his serrated sword. His eyes opened wide, and a tiger's growl came from his throat.

A strong wind blew around the cave, causing the flickering lamp to turn still and the darkness to retreat a little.

Lu Xiucan's single hand curled into a claw as he stomped on the ground like a tiger. Despite his injuries, he propped himself up with his single arm and two peg legs.

He looked around before quickly shifting around to look towards his back. He saw a strange arm extending out from the darkness to attack him. The strange arm had three abnormally long fingers.

When Lu Xiucan was on the verge of using the tiger spirit he had summoned to stop them, the situation took a sudden turn. The ground beneath him abruptly split open, and a massive centipede charged upward. It sank its fangs into Lu Xiucan's only arm, preventing him from moving.

At the same time, another centipede charged out from the darkness and used its mandible to chomp down on Lu Xiucan's lower back. The centipede on the lotus was gone, leaving only a single hole at the base of the lotus.

The two centipedes pulled in different directions to dismember him!

However, with the tiger spirit in his body, Lu Xiucan's body was as tough as steel. The centipede could not pull him apart at all.

"GROOOAR!" A tiger's roar came again, and Lu Xiucan used his clawed hands to crush the head of the centipede beneath him.

As the dying centipede screeched in pain, the second centipede that had been clamping onto his back screeched out too.

Lu Xiucan realized that the centipedes were linked together! They weren't regular centipedes that had grown and turned into monsters—they were evil entities that had learned secret

techniques!

Lu Xiucan shook off the dead centipede and prepared to kill the second one. At that moment, another centipede erupted from the ground and bit into his arm. This time, the attack was clever—instead of coiling and biting Lu Xiucan's arm, the centipede bit his wrist.

It wasn't over yet. More centipedes broke out from the ground and bit into Lu Xiucan.

Lu Xiucan was completely covered in centipedes before the sound of intense tearing could be heard. He was completely torn apart by the centipedes.

Lu Xiucan found himself completely engulfed in centipedes. Then, a sound of intense tearing filled the air. The centipedes completely tore him apart, making his organs rain down the hall and splatter across the entire cave.

The centipedes were about to eat the bits of flesh and organs when one of Lu Xiucan's lungs splattered down. A mysterious doll crawled out from his lung.

The doll grew when it came into contact with the air and soon reached the size of an adult. It was the Strayed One's skin doll that Li Huowang had given him!

The flattened Lu Xiucan sucked in the shadows of his dismembered body on the ground. Lu Xiucan's body remained flat despite consuming the shadow, but there was no time to think about it. If he didn't figure out a way to escape right away, he would die again.

Lu Xiucan realized that he was no longer crippled and smiled. With a swift motion, he cut off his entire left arm.

His broken left arm turned a purplish-black color as his bones grew. Meanwhile, the dismembered left arm burrowed into the ground to find the centipede's main body.

The nine centipedes above ground trembled and fell limp while

the ground turned white from the centipede's blood.

Lu Xiucan smiled—his arm had hurt the beast underground.

He placed his serrated sword into his mouth. He was ready to tear off all of his teeth again.

Suddenly, the centipede on the ground trembled violently and released a low rumble. Several pairs of eyes lit up in the cave—Lu Xiucan was surrounded.

They were all evil entities. This was their dwelling, their nest!

Whoosh! The light in the cave vanished completely as all of the eyes lunged at him.

“You think I’m afraid of you? I will exact justice for the people even if I have to die today! I shall avenge the people you’ve killed!”

Lu Xiucan placed the sword onto his chest to prepare for his fight to the death.

Just then, a strange scene occurred. A soft white light glowed and illuminated the entire cave. The evil entities revealed by the white light fell onto the ground and stopped moving.

To Lu Xiucan’s surprise, the white light came from the white donkey on his back. He excitedly and sincerely kowtowed toward the lotus seat in front of him.

“The almighty Heavenly Mother! I knew you were kind and would not let chaos take over the world!”

Lu Xiucan stood up and held his sword. He swung it towards one of the cowering centipedes and said, “You beast! I will kill you and stop your deceit!”

Just as he was about to chop off the centipede's head, a sudden, searing pain came from his back.

The white donkey flashed brightly, and Lu Xiucan fell to the ground. He could not get up.

Chapter 879 - News

Inside the dark cave, Lu Xiucan lay limply on the ground. He could barely move his single remaining arm to prop his body up.

He felt the weight of an actual donkey on his back, pressing him down. The white light coming from his back was as heavy as steel.

“Im... impossible! Heavenly Mother, why are you stopping me? Those are evil entities that eat humans! They are evil!”

Lu Xiucan felt his world collapsing around him.

As Lu Xiucan struggled to get up, one of the twitching centipedes regained its strength and lifted its head. Nearly the size of a carriage, it pounced toward Lu Xiucan.

Even Lu Xiucan's new body would be reduced to meat paste if he was hit by it.

At the last possible moment, the huge centipede miraculously twisted and missed Lu Xiucan. It slammed into the ground just in front of Lu Xiucan.

Both of them glared at each other.

Lu Xiucan only noticed the details of the centipede when it was close to his face.

There was a white donkey tattoo on the centipede's forehead. It had the same rank as he did!

Both of them stopped and looked at each other incredulously.

Only then did Lu Xiucan and the centipede understand why the Heavenly Mother had helped both sides. The Heavenly Mother did not want her disciples to fight amongst themselves.

As the white light on his back dimmed, Lu Xiucan struggled to stand up. He looked around and stared at the eyes in the darkness as well as the mangled centipede's body.

He was in disbelief. “So all of you are in the White Lotus Sect? How can this be? You guys ate people! How dare you pray to the Heavenly Mater?”

In Lu Xiucui's memories, the black cloth and white headscarf used by the Dharma Sect had now been replaced by the tattoo of the White Lotus Sect.

The evil entities did not answer Lu Xiucui. Seeing that the Heavenly Mater they revered did not allow them to kill the person in front of them, they slowly disappeared into the darkness.

Once the last centipede disappeared, the entire cave was as desolate as Lu Xiucui's heart.

Gao Zhijian sat on his throne while listening to Li Huowang's report. “So that’s what the people of the Qi Kingdom said? That they will ally themselves with us?”

“Yes. If you don’t believe me, you can send some eunuchs to talk to them in the Qi Kingdom.”

Li Huowang took out the spine sword in the hall, putting all the guards and eunuchs on high alert.

“No need. I trust that you won’t lie to me.”

Gao Zhijian's face, once filled with worry, brightened with joy upon hearing the news.

Since the Qi Kingdom wanted the Dragon Vein from the Tianchen Kingdom, there was no way they would ally with each other anymore. Gao Zhijian no longer needed to worry about the Qi Kingdom betraying them.

The Liang Kingdom could feel more at ease with the Qi Kingdom at the vanguard.

“That’s good. With the Liang Kingdom and the Qi Kingdom working together, we can defeat the Tianchen Kingdom without fail.”

Li Huowang replied, “it won’t be simple. We cannot block off

the Tianchen Kingdom with just the Qi Kingdom. Remember what I said about the strength of the Unspeakable army?"

Gao Zhijian's smile faded. Li Huowang had indeed described them to him. He would have dismissed the information as a mere rumor if Li Huowang hadn't been the one reporting it.

Li Huowang said, "I am certain there won't be just hundreds of them. They couldn't even defeat Doulao with just a hundred of them together. I doubt they could've stripped the Heavenly Dao of the Heavenly Mater with so few of them."

Li Huowang said, "I am certain that there will be more than just a few hundred of them. They couldn't even defeat Doulao with a hundred of them together. I doubt they could have stripped the Heavenly Dao of the Heavenly Mater with such a small number."

He continued, "Even with the army of Unspeakable aside, which was birthed by the Heavenly Mater, we still don't know who the grandchildren of the Heavenly Mater are."

Li Huowang had only won a minor skirmish, so he was treading carefully instead of celebrating.

Gao Zhijian frowned again. "You're right. The people of the Tianchen Kingdom are very strange. I can't believe that they could touch a Heavenly Dao.

"Senior Li, don't worry. The Liang Kingdom will fully help its allies. Not only that, I will persuade the other Emperors to help us out too."

"No, sending resources is not enough. We need people. A lot of people in the Qi Kingdom died this time. Ask the Surveillance Bureau to prepare some men. If the Tianchen Kingdom attacks us, we can use them to stave them off."

"Hmm... The people from the Qi Kingdom cannot come here, but can we cross over to the Qi Kingdom?"

"Of course. Even if that's the case, we can shroud our men with Dragon Qi before sending them. The Dragon Vein won't be affected

no matter which history they go to. Gao Zhijian, I know that the Dragon Qi is precious, but now is not the time to save it. Against the Tianchen Kingdom, we need to burrow the power of the Simings.”

While the other Simings wouldn't help them, at the very least, Ji Zai would.

“Hmm...” Gao Zhijian was worried. He could agree with the other conditions, but the Dragon Vein was, quite frankly, the lifeline of the Liang Kingdom.

The Dragon Qi had been accumulated by countless generations of Emperors. The only way to replenish it would be for him to die and become affixed to the Dragon Vein. Otherwise, the Dragon Qi would not replenish in the slightest. Using the Dragon Qi was essentially a permanent expenditure.

“Don't be stingy. Once we take over the Tianchen Kingdom, we can get as much Dragon Qi as we want. We can even recover some of the divisions the Liang Kingdom lost.”

Even so, Gao Zhijian didn't want to mess with the Dragon Vein. He could only accept it for now.

“Alright, but I will have to discuss it with the others first.”

“Hurry up and get it approved. The attack from the Tianchen Kingdom might've been foiled this time, but it won't stop them for long. I fear that they will go all out next time.”

“Alright. I understand, Senior Li.”

“Once you finish your discussion, tell Xuan Pin to contact me.”

Li Huowang turned to leave.

“Senior Li, why don't we have a meal first?”

“That's alright. I'm not used to your meals.”

Li Huowang walked out of the hall and took out his spine sword. He was getting ready to go back to the Qi Kingdom.

The Tianchen Kingdom could attack any time, so he needed to stay in the Qi Kingdom to guard it.

As he was about to move, a large procession entered the palace. Several consorts and eunuchs swiftly moved past Li Huowang.

“Are you Li Huowang?” A haughty and arrogant voice came from the middle of the procession.

Li Huowang turned and saw a charming lady with a crown slowly stepping down from a palanquin.

Two eunuchs trailed behind her, holding onto her long dress. They quietly followed their Mistress towards Li Huowang.

Chapter 880 - Disbelief

Li Huowang didn't know who the woman was, but based on her clothes, she appeared to be someone highly ranked, even among the consorts chosen by Gao Zhijian.

The woman donned a delicately embroidered red and yellow robe. The robe depicted celestial birds, brought to life by gold and silver threads. Her sleeves were embroidered with large peonies, and her skirt trailed the ground, its fabric adorned with silver clouds.

Her hair was held up with a hairpin shaped like a divine bird. In the bird's beak was a single pearl adorned with threads that hung down, further emphasizing her beautiful face.

While she might have looked prettier than the others, her beautiful clothes could not conceal her hatred towards Li Huowang. "Are you Li Huowang? Speak up! Did you perhaps become mute?"

Li Huowang remained silent as he continued to meet her gaze.

"I know my lord has several poor relatives. He treated you all with kindness because of your past, but you are just a damned Daoist! Remember your place and don't overstep your boundaries! Who do you think my Lord is? Who are you to not kneel down to greet him? How dare you be so mannerless? Remember to kneel next time you see him! It's up to him whether to let you sit or not!"

After hearing her out, Li Huowang finally said, "Shai Zi?"

Everyone froze upon hearing him. The woman ripped off her face and squished it like clay, turning it into a six-sided die.

"Not bad, Hong Zhong. It's hard to believe you recognized me so quickly this time. It seems that you did not abandon your cultivation!"

Li Huowang didn't think that Shai Zi was here to talk with him.

Li Huowang's hand was already on the hilt of his sword.

Using his cultivation of the "Truth," Shai Zi's face slowly turned from the number six to the number one.

Shai Zi moved to the side and used one of the consorts as a shield to block Li Huowang's gaze. "Don't be rash. Have you forgotten that I helped you in the Baiyu Capital last time? If I hadn't reminded you, you would've never remembered to use the Dragon Qi to mend the sundered Baiyu Capital."

Li Huowang gritted his teeth, his voice filled with anger and bloodlust. "What do you want?"

Shai Zi cheekily poked his head out from the back of the consort. "The Tianchen Kingdom is coming over? Hehehe. Although it may appear to be a crisis, deep down we both understand that this is actually an opportunity. The Liang Kingdom, the Qi Kingdom, and even you would benefit from this. I also want in."

"Is there something you want in the Tianchen Kingdom? What is it?"

Shai Zi pushed his finger into one of the indentations of his head and poked it around. "You don't have to worry about that. You can't use it anyway. It's just something between me and Doulao. If you agree, I can help you win against the Tianchen Kingdom. Why don't you stop trying to kill me for once?"

"You? You can't even go to the Qi Kingdom. How can you help?"

"Who says that I can't go there? Have you forgotten that there are Shai Zis in the Qi Kingdom too? One of the eighteen-sided Shai Zi is with me. I'm technically part of the Qi Kingdom right now. I could go back anytime I want, but I don't want to."

Shai Zi became transparent, as if he could disappear whenever he wanted.

"Don't think that the Sitting Oblivion Dao only deceives people. We could also put in some serious work. You are part of us, so you

should know that too. If the Tianchen Kingdom destroyed both the Liang Kingdom and the Qi Kingdom, who else could we deceive?"

"They are already going to attack us, and now you're saying you can help us? You guys are useless in frontal assaults! Also, your tricks are worthless—they can just pull your Lies out of their bodies."

"Hey, that's harsh. Don't scold yourself. Alright, let's keep the pleasantries aside and talk about something worthwhile."

Shai Zi looked around and whispered, "I know about the Tianchen Kingdom and their situation. Don't you think letting me help you win is worthwhile?"

Li Huowang frowned as a strange thought filled his head. "Is Bei Feng your spy?"

Shai Zi acted exaggeratedly when he heard that. "What?! Is Bei Feng still alive? Oh my!"

"Stop playing tricks! Just tell me the information if you want to show your sincerity."

Li Huowang didn't trust any of Shai Zi's words. Li Huowang had faced the Sitting Oblivion Dao so many times that he had his own way of dealing with them.

However, regardless of whether they were lies or not, Li Huowang still had to listen to Shai Zi because his lies were interspersed with truths.

Based on their conversation, Bei Feng being Shai Zi's spy was very likely. In that role, Bei Feng could obtain information about the Tianchen Kingdom more quickly.

Shai Zi finally revealed some information. "Everyone from the Tianchen Kingdom can touch the Heavenly Daos."

"We already know that. Don't tell me that's all you found out?"

"No, no, Hong Zhong, what I meant was that everyone in the Tianchen Kingdom has the ability to do it. However, only the really talented ones can do it easily. Those who dumbere can't do so

because they haven't learned how to do it."

"Everyone? Everyone in the kingdom could potentially do so?"

"Hehehe, do you think there are regular people in the Tianchen Kingdom? They are different from us. There are no Simings or gods over there. They are the ones in control of everything."

Li Huowang stood still and waited for Shai Zi to continue his explanation.

"They trust in nothing but themselves."

This was bad news. How could Li Huowang defeat the Tianchen Kingdom?

Li Huowang didn't know if the powers of the people from the Tianchen Kingdom came from the Heavenly Mater or from something else.

If Shai Zi was telling the truth, Li Huowang would be stuck in a difficult battle.

Li Huowang had considered that they might need to call the Simings for help, but now he was convinced that unless he called upon Ji Zai, their entire group would be wiped out.

Li Huowang was still thinking about how to deal with it when Shai Zi gave a suggestion. "There's a lot of people in the Tianchen Kingdom. You can't just rely on the limited people from the Qi Kingdom. Trying to unite the people in the Qi Kingdom is a mistake. You need to go for the person in the Tianchen Kingdom responsible for this mess.

"As the Emperor, you do not need to hold them back forcefully. You can always use the White Lotus Sect, though I doubt that they would be of much use. Wait, Hong Zhong, I've heard you have many friends in the White Lotus Sect, don't you?"

"Stop calling me Hong Zhong! I'm Li Huowang! Don't think that Hong Zhong will help you! I will never let him out!"

Shai Zi looked at Li Huowang with confusion. "What are you talking about? Aren't you Hong Zhong Li Huowang?"

Li Huowang's heart skipped a beat as he looked at himself. "Am I the Sitting Oblivion Dao's Hong Zhong?"

"What? Hong Zhong Li Huowang and regular Li Huowang. Do you... differentiate between yourselves?"

Li Huowang turned and saw Shai Zi grinning.

"Shai Zi, I almost fell for your tricks. Unfortunately for you, I already know the tricks of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. I don't believe you."

Chapter 881 - Conversation

Outside of the palace, the eunuchs and the consorts surrounded both Shai Zi and Li Huowang.

“What’s there not to believe? Hong Zhong, what are you talking about? I don’t understand you.”

Shai Zi looked at Li Huowang puzzledly.

“You know what I’m talking about. Stop trying to beat around the bush and tell me the details. What else do you know about the Tianchen Kingdom? Say... a golden dragon?”

Li Huowang still remembered what he had seen.

“A golden dragon?” Shai Zi appeared shocked. “Is there something like that in the Tianchen Kingdom? Could it be the Dragon Vein? I have never heard of it before.”

“A Dragon Vein...?”

If it was true, then every Dragon Vein in history was made using humans. The people of the Tianchen Kingdom weren’t just weird—even their Dragon Veins were weird, completely different from the others.

The Qi Kingdom, the Liang Kingdom, and the Tianchen Kingdom... I wonder how strange the other two worlds are. Thankfully, I don’t have to get in contact with them.

Li Huowang shook his head. “No. Your information is useless. I could also check it out on my own. If you want to help us, bring us something tangible and useful, such as the method to enter the Tianchen Kingdom.”

Li Huowang still didn’t believe Shai Zi, despite the latter talking a lot. Rather than relying on mere words, Li Huowang

preferred the cold, hard truth that he could see with his own eyes.

If Shai Zi could provide information about how to enter the Tianchen Kingdom, Li Huowang wouldn't mind working with him. Learning how to enter it would allow Li Huowang to be more proactive rather than passive and defensive.

He might be able to kill some of the people from the Tianchen Kingdom if he could catch them off guard.

If they could not avoid any fighting this time, then Li Huowang would rather move the battlefield into the Tianchen Kingdom.

Shai Zi was confused. "Why do you think I have the method to enter the Tianchen Kingdom?"

Li Huowang's words left Shai Zi with no room to back down. "How else could you have obtained your information? Did you make it up, then?"

Shai Zi raised his head and laughed. "Hong Zhong, you are becoming smarter. Fine, I will tell you. Come to my place in three days."

"Why three days? Can't you tell me now? What do you intend to do?"

"Hong Zhong, stop thinking that I'm the villain. I can't freely enter the Tianchen Kingdom—they're the ones in control of that. The people from the Tianchen Kingdom can touch both the Heavenly Daos and the Twisted Ones."

Li Huowang did not ask anything. He waited for Shai Zi to continue explaining.

"What I mean is that they can also take out the things inside a Twisted One's body and stuff it into a single person. That person becomes the bridge that connects the Tianchen Kingdom to the Qi Kingdom. I can't control them, but I know when they will reactivate the bridge."

Although Li Huowang could barely imagine what the "things" inside several Twisted Ones looked like, he now understood why

Zhuge Yuan couldn't control the bridge between worlds on his own, all while the people from the Tianchen Kingdom could come and go as they pleased.

The hands of the Unspeakable army could knead everything under the heavens.

"They will come in three days. You can use this chance to check the Tianchen Kingdom secretly. Now, is this much enough to let me join you?"

"You should've said this from the start if you were sincere."

Li Huowang ignored Shai Zi and passed the frozen consort and eunuchs before he left.

He had just walked out from the crowd when he saw the Imperial Preceptor looking at him coldly while leaning on a pillar.

Li Huowang ignored the Imperial Preceptor and walked past him. He slowly walked out of the palace.

After leaving the palace, Li Huowang didn't immediately go back to the Qi Kingdom. Instead, he walked towards the Surveillance Bureau.

Whether Shai Zi was telling the truth or not, his presence inside the palace posed a threat. It was not a matter to be taken lightly, so he needed to let Suisui know to develop countermeasures.

One needed to be highly vigilant when Shai Zi was there.

"I know, and His Majesty knows too."

Li Huowang almost stumbled when he heard Li Sui's answer. "What? You guys know?"

Xuan Pin explained, "Yes. His Majesty is collaborating with Shai Zi. To be fair, Shai Zi is technically part of the Surveillance Bureau right now. The Imperial Preceptor was the one who established this connection."

"Why didn't you tell me something about this major?"

"Father, you're always at the Qi Kingdom, and I couldn't find you. Also, this is between the Sitting Oblivion Dao and the palace.

It doesn't concern you."

"Gao Zhijian is crazy! He still wants to cooperate with the Sitting Oblivion Dao despite almost losing the Dragon Vein to them?"

"Father, didn't you cooperate with Shai Zi too?"

"I'm just testing him!"

"Father, don't worry. The Sitting Oblivion Dao wouldn't be able to do anything today. Doulao hated them a lot. If they angered us, they wouldn't be able to do anything here later on."

"Have we not suffered enough in their hands?"

"That's why I'm hoping to ease the tension a bit. Regardless of the circumstances, we can still make use of them, just like you did, Father."

"Nevermind. I don't want to care anymore. Once everything is over, just hook him up and kill him."

"Alright, but even if you kill Shai Zi, a brand new Sitting Oblivion Dao will appear with a new Shai Zi."

"That's fine. At least I won't have a grudge with the new Shai Zi. In any case, ignore him for now. I need something else from you today."

Li Huowang pondered before asking, "How much do you know about the Dragon Veins? Tell me everything, no matter how unbelievable it is."

"Hm? Father, why are you asking this?"

Li Sui was surprised that her father would ask about this.

"Because I need to learn more about the five worlds. I have come to realize that I barely know anything about this world."

"Also, I've learned that no matter how ridiculous a story may sound, whether it be the story of the betrayal faced by the Heavenly Mater or how the Five Dhyani Buddhas guarded the world, each story holds a kernel of truth."

"Well, maybe not all of them are useful, but there must be

some truth to the stories.”

Chapter 882 - Dragon Vein

Li Huowang didn't care about the stories before because they were often exaggerated and didn't match reality. However, he now considered them surprisingly helpful even though they were heavily distorted.

At the moment, he could ignore everything else and focus on the Dragon Veins, knowing that he would soon be infiltrating the Tianchen Kingdom.

The Dragon Veins dictated the number of divisions in a day, and its Dragon Qi could insulate everything else from the influence of the Simings, including the Dragon Veins themselves.

After seeing the Tianchen Kingdom's Dragon Vein, Li Huowang wondered what kind of existence the Dragon Veins were.

He had the peculiar feeling that the gold dragon he had seen wasn't simple.

"I know just about as much as you do, Father."

Li Sui poured a cup of tea for Li Huowang.

"Every Dragon Vein corresponds to a single division. Every time one dies, the corresponding division disappears too."

"No, I don't need to know about this."

Li Huowang put his cup down and asked, "I wanted to know where the Dragon Vein comes from. Why do they correspond with a single division? Every sect has its legends. Even Qing Qiu has a legend about the Immortal Heaven. Does the Dragon Vein not have an origin story? That shouldn't be right."

Xuan Pin patted Li Huowang's head. "Father, they don't have one. The Dragon Veins are time itself, and that has always been the

case. Has a division ever existed as it is, without a corresponding Dragon Vein?"

"Are you sure that this has always been the case? Also, who said time is tied to the Dragon Veins? Time should exist as an independent force..."

Li Huowang suddenly realized something.

"Father, what are you trying to say? Regular people may be unaware of the truth, but you yourself have witnessed how the divisions disappeared after the death of a Dragon Vein. Furthermore..."

"Wait, wait a minute!"

Li Huowang grabbed his hair as he tried to recall something important. "Wait a minute, I think I'm remembering something."

However, no matter how hard he tried, he could not recall it. Li Sui tried to help him by scratching his head, but it was useless.

Li Huowang finally let his hands down in defeat. "Damn it! I just thought of something important but I can't recall it now."

"Father, we are getting off track. I thought we were talking about the Dragon Veins?"

"Hmm. You are right. The Dragon Veins."

Li Huowang sat down again. "I'm trying to ask what the Dragon Veins are. As their name implies, the Dragon Veins should be dragons, so why are they humans?"

After telling Li Sui about the golden dragon he had seen in the Tianchen Kingdom, Li Huowang continued, "Shai Zi told me that it was most likely the Dragon Vein of the Tianchen Kingdom, but I think that the dragon is related to the grandchildren of Heavenly Mater.

"I don't know how strong the Tianchen Kingdom is, but I do know that since they can manipulate the Heavenly Daos so easily, they might be able to do the same with Dragon Qi. If that's the case, they will probably be formidable foes."

“Father, I’m not lying to you. There are really no legends about the Dragon Vein. Any speculation and dissemination about the origins of the Emperor is punishable by death.”

Li Huowang frowned and crossed his arms. Although he had finally obtained some data about his enemy, there was no further information or leads. It would be difficult for him to fight like this.

There were only three days left. He didn’t want to enter the Tianchen Kingdom blindly.

Li Huowang was still thinking about a solution when Li Sui stood up and pulled on Li Huowang’s sleeves to bring him outside.

Li Huowang trusted Li Sui, so he followed her.

Under her guidance, they went to the oppressive palace. They walked in circles until they reached the temple within the palace.

Li Huowang had been here more than once and knew the significance of the temple.

"Father, if you have questions about the Dragon Veins' origins, I fear this is the only place where you could find answers."

“Then what are we waiting for? Let’s go.”

Both of them entered the temple.

There were still people inside, mostly elderly eunuchs. They were dusting the ancestral plates displayed on a shelf, though the plates were already spotless.

The eunuchs were guarding the tombs of the dead emperors with great care. It was very likely that this would also be their own eternal resting place.

Li Huowang knew that the outside was just a smokescreen. He walked past them, heading toward a wall with a yellow tapestry.

He pulled it open, and a set of double doors fashioned out of black stones appeared. Nine sprawling golden dragons could be seen on the doors.

Li Huowang pulled the massive doors open, and a cold gust blew past his face.

Past the doors, there was a pit-like place. The sides were tall, while the center was low, like a Roman arena. The place was adorned by many jewels and gold.

In the center stood a colossal golden coffin, its size resembling that of a house. Nine sprawling dragons coiled around the chains that suspended the coffin by tying themselves around the surrounding pillars.

The Liang Kingdom's most precious asset was inside the golden coffin—the Dragon Vein.

The Dragon Vein was made of a chain of the previous emperors, with the emperor who died most recently being the head. They linked up and formed a dragon-like body that drifted into the darkness of the coffin.

The interior of the coffin was completely black. The emperors were hung in the middle of the coffin like a straight line of corpses.

When Li Huowang stared at the Dragon Vein, the emperors at the top responded and looked at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang said, "You think it's a good idea to ask them about the golden dragon?"

"I doubt that they would know anything about it. We need to find the oldest Emperor."

Li Sui brought Li Huowang towards the edge of the coffin before jumping down.

The coffin was very deep, but thankfully, Li Huowang could embed part of his body into the walls, so it wasn't that bad.

Li Huowang could see nothing in the darkness. He could barely make out the gold in the black shadows.

"Fire."

Li Huowang raised his hand, igniting it with fire, allowing him to see the deepest part of the Dragon Vein.

Still, the fire wasn't as bright as he had thought. Everything shimmered around him. It appeared that the place where the

Dragon Vein resided could affect its surroundings.

An ancient voice came from above. “Brat, you’re Li Huowang, right? Do you need something?”

Li Huowang did not even look up. “I’m not looking for you.”

He looked down and found the last Emperor at the tail end of the Dragon Vein. The first Emperor who had become the Dragon Vein had a face that was half-human and half-dragon. Even his golden robes were melded with his flesh.

Chapter 883 - Fate

Li Huowang extended his burning hand towards the tail of the Dragon Vein to see the last emperor more clearly.

He saw that the emperor's face was utterly inhuman. It was a half-dragon, but it wasn't entirely accurate either. The dragon-like face was distorted a lot.

The dragon's whiskers were like threads, snaking past the gaps in its golden scales and causing them to look messy.

The emperor had seven dragon claws with reverse joints. The number of his fingers also varied.

Li Sui explained to Li Huowang, "The Dragon Veins are segmented, with each emperor representing an era. If we want to know something about a particular age, we need to seek out the corresponding emperor on the Dragon Vein."

Li Huowang nodded. The emperors that made up the Dragon Vein weren't merely advisors for the current emperor—they were also people who had lived at a certain age and knew about the history of their era.

Shua! The dragon claw swung so fast that Li Huowang failed to react. The claws streaked past his face instantly.

The sound of tearing flesh could be heard, and half of Li Huowang's face slowly slid down, revealing his skull.

Li Huowang raised his right hand and pushed his face back with a snap.

Li Huowang lowered his hands and asked, "Senior, are you the first emperor of the Liang Kingdom?"

The old emperor roared. His roar reverberated inside the coffin.

The Dragon Qi exuding outwards affected the surroundings. Even Li Huowang was affected, and dragon scales appeared and

disappeared on his body.

“He’s deaf and crazy. You won’t be able to get any answers from him.”

Li Huowang looked up and saw a man with a disheveled face in the middle of the Dragon Vein.

He was unsure whether the golden threads were his beard or hair, but they completely veiled the emperor's face, making it impossible for even Li Huowang to recognize his true identity.

The emperor shook his head and saw Li Sui’s identity plate.

“Chief of the Surveillance Bureau? I can’t believe the Chief would escort you to meet us here. You are not someone ordinary...”

Just as the emperor with long hair finished speaking, another voice came from above. "I remember him! It was when Shai Zi stole the Dragon Vein. The boy in red robes is the one who killed Shai Zi and returned us to our rightful place."

“Doesn’t that mean he did the Liang Kingdom a great service?”

“Indeed! He has done a great service to us!”

“But he’s Ji Lin’s sword! He killed a lot of people from the royal family!”

“I don’t have the surname Ji, so I don’t care.”

More and more voices joined in on the conversation. Li Huowang had to raise his voice and shout, “Seniors!”

The ruckus gradually stopped, and Li Huowang finally asked, “This junior has come to find you to ask about the legends of the Dragon Veins.”

He quickly added another sentence to highlight his desperation, saying, “I’m sure you know that the Liang Kingdom has lost several divisions already. For the Liang Kingdom’s sake, I sincerely hope you will lend me your assistance.”

The murmur of discussion filled the coffins briefly and stopped shortly after—they had reached a decision.

"You have done a great service to the Liang Kingdom, and the

Chief of the Surveillance Bureau brought you here. Therefore, we will tell you."

Li Huowang wasn't surprised. He was their ally, so they had no reason to withhold such information.

The long-haired emperor explained to Li Huowang while the other emperors remained silent.

"When the Qi Kingdom was destroyed and left without an emperor, we from the Ji family were one of the largest noble households in the capital—there were thousands of us.

"However, for the sake of becoming the emperor, we killed our own kin—daughters, grandparents, grandchildren, and brothers. The conflict persisted until there was only one survivor left. He was the first emperor of the Liang Kingdom."

Li Huowang glanced at the last emperor, who was the tail of the Dragon Vein. "Seniors, I know about this. That's not what I wanted to know. I need to know where the Dragon Vein came from. A thousand years ago, the Qi Kingdom preceded the Liang Kingdom, but where did the Dragon Vein of the Qi Kingdom come from?"

"Oh, in that case, we must start from the very beginning. Long ago, humans were raised as livestock by the Witch. We survived by eating excrement, much like pigs. However, our ancestors desired a better life for us.

"Despite devising a plan to break free and escape, simply escaping was not enough, as the Witch would eventually discover us. As such, the ancestors sought a way to create a world of their own. The destiny tied to the Dragon Vein was the very essence that sustained this world."

Li Huowang recalled the veiled members of the Dharma Sect and asked, "Witch? Are they related to the Dharma Sect?"

"No. It's different. There was no Dharma Sect in ancient times."

"Then what is the Witch? Is it... Simings?"

Li Huowang's words sent out a massive ripple.

"No. They are not Simings. The Simings don't exist!"

"Indeed! There are no Simings. They're fake."

"This is the Imperial Temple! Do not utter those words!"

Li Huowang's next question silenced them. "Then what is the Witch?"

After some time, the long-haired emperor said, "We are the emperors of the Liang Kingdom. Before us, there was the Qi Kingdom, and even further in the past, the Beiyuan Three Kingdoms. Lastly, there was the Great Chen Kingdom. Our ancestors passed down this knowledge to us.

"Everything about the ancient times was passed down to us by our ancestors. We don't know what the Witch is, but I'm certain that the Witch is powerful. Otherwise, it wouldn't have been able to enslave everyone."

Li Huowang realized that this was important information. There was once a Great Chen Kingdom!

"Is the Tianchen Kingdom involved in this? Is the Tianchen Kingdom the history from a timeline where the Great Chen Kingdom remained intact?"

Li Huowang thought that was possible and asked about it.

"We don't know. There are several Dragon Veins in this world. Ask the Dragon Vein from Qing Qiu. I think some emperors from the Beiyuan Three Kingdoms are in that Dragon Vein."

"Li Sui, I don't have time right now. Can you send some men to check for me in Qing Qiu? See if it's related to the Great Chen Kingdom?"

"Alright, Father. However, I don't think it would make much of a difference. Even if the Tianchen Kingdom were once the Great Chen, they would still be our enemies."

"Let's just check and see what we can find. We might get some surprising information."

Li Huowang then turned to look at the Dragon Veins. “Senior, can you explain to us what Fate is? How did the first Dragon Vein come to be?”

“The first emperor took the fate from one of the Witches. Thanks to it, they could sustain a single world for themselves. This person was the first emperor.”

Chapter 884 - Fate

“Fate was taken from a Witch?”

Li Huowang ruminated on those words.

According to the Emperor, they could sustain the world because of Fate. However, he didn't know what the Witch was, so Li Huowang was confused too.

Still, Li Huowang didn't dismiss the Emperor's words. He knew there was truth to them and needed to consider the matter carefully. Legends like these were often heavily distorted, leaving only fragments of truth.

After considering it, Li Huowang concluded that Fate was most likely Time. Without Time, the world would teeter on the brink of destruction, just like the Qi Kingdom.

Li Huowang was still partially embedded in the wall as he looked at Xuan Pin. "They claim there is no Siming, but don't you think there could be a Siming who controls Time? Wouldn't that be plausible?"

Xuan Pin nodded silently.

“Seniors... do you know what the Witch looks like? Is it like a golden dragon?”

Li Huowang stared at the golden scales and asked his question.

If the golden dragon in the Tianchen Kingdom was indeed the Dragon Vein, then the Tianchen Kingdom was truly unique. It was hard to believe that their Dragon Vein wasn't formed by emperors.

“A golden dragon? I don't know.”

“We are the sons of dragons! We are the dragons!”

“Lingyang is a dragon, though not a golden one.”

The more they discussed, the more plausible Li Huowang thought it was.

If that were the case, Li Huowang would have a good understanding of what had happened in ancient times.

Back then, humans were livestock. To escape, they stole the Heavenly Dao of Time from the Siming that controlled it. Since a regular person could not handle it, they split it into sixteen Dragon Veins. That was why the Liang Kingdom originally had sixteen divisions.

However, the more Li Huowang pondered, the more nonsensical it seemed. This wasn't just limited to the Liang Kingdom—there were five different histories.

All five histories had time, which was also called the Fate of the Witch. If he were right, it would mean the people in all five histories had managed to snag and split the Heavenly Dao of Time from the Siming who controlled it.

At the start of every history, there were sixteen Dragon Veins. Since there were five histories, that also meant that there were 80 Dragon Veins now!

Li Huowang thought about the Heavenly Mater's past. The people in the Tianchen Kingdom had stolen her Heavenly Dao and distributed it.

He thought the Tianchen Kingdom was weird, but it appeared that something similar had happened in all five histories.

Everyone took it for granted due to how much time had passed.

“Father, if the golden dragon is indeed a Dragon Vein, you need to count how many divisions the Tianchen Kingdom has in a single day when you go there.”

Li Huowang understood what she meant and nodded. The number of divisions represented the number of Dragon Veins in the Tianchen Kingdom.

Since they could touch and neutralize the Heavenly Daos so easily, it was possible they could also easily neutralize the Dragon Veins of the Liang Kingdom.

If that were the case, then even tens of Dragon Veins would be unable to do anything, even if they pooled their Dragon Qi together.

Moreover, with so much Dragon Qi, the Tianchen Kingdom could easily create a group of elites immune to the Heavenly Daos by cloaking them with Dragon Qi.

If they could do something like that, Li Huowang was sure that even Doulao would be useless in the fight against the Tianchen Kingdom.

Li Huowang considered many things, but in the end, he decided to take things one at a time because he could do nothing with the information at hand.

Li Huowang contemplated various factors but ultimately chose to proceed step by step, as he could do anything with the information at hand.

Since the Tianchen Kingdom hadn't done so yet, Li Huowang thought that there might be some restrictions stopping them.

"Seniors, thank you for the help." Li Huowang bowed and climbed up the coffin.

"Father, was their information helpful? I don't think it will help us much right now."

Li Huowang nodded at Li Sui's question.

"It's erratic but still useful. There might be a day when it helps us, even if it doesn't amount to anything right now. We don't know what we will face in the future. At the very least, we won't be completely clueless."

Li Huowang raised his head and looked at the starry night. "Also, I learned something through our conversation just now."

"What is it?"

"Have you not realized that the world is not fixed? Our history and Heavenly Daos can be easily changed. Do you know what this means?"

Li Huowang raised his hands and covered the skies. He then clenched his fists, and his eyes lit up. "It means that if we work hard enough and are strong enough, we can shape the world as we please."

Li Sui looked up at the stars as well. "Father, what kind of world do you want this to be? Don't you think it's nice now?"

"It's not that it's bad—I just don't like it. Remember Dan Yangzi?"

Li Huowang and Li Sui left the palace quickly as they talked.

"I do. I remember you told me that he didn't even blink when he killed someone. He was also an illiterate idiot."

Li Sui was floating closely behind Li Huowang.

"Back in the Zephyr Temple, I hated him a lot. I wanted to kill him and even risked my life to do it. However, now that I've gone through so many things, I can understand why he became so evil. He wasn't always evil—this crazy world forced him to become evil. Otherwise, he would've died very early on. He simply made the best choices he could to survive."

After exiting the palace, Li Huowang and Li Sui walked along the large streets. They arrived at a crossroads and saw many people drawing circles on the ground while burning paper money and paper ingots for the deceased. It was the Qingming Festival once more.

The Liang Kingdom had suffered numerous disasters, resulting in the loss of many lives. As such, there were a lot of people burning offerings for the deceased.

They crouched down by the fire, burning their paper offerings and whispering the words they wished their deceased loved ones could hear. Li Huowang, with his keen hearing, could catch every word.

Most of them were asking their family members what the underworld was like. They also asked them to contact them through

dreams if they needed anything.

“Suisui, don’t you think that this world is wrong? Those who harm others can live until they’re old, while honest and good people die young. They don’t deserve it.”

Li Huowang approached one of the stalls that sold paper ingots and paper money. He bought some for himself.

Chapter 885 - Change

Li Sui trailed behind Li Huowang as they approached the crossroads, keeping a tight hold on the paper money and ingots.

Li Huowang drew two circles onto the crossroads with his spine sword and then threw the paper money into the circles. The paper burned up without needing a match.

Li Sui didn't ask who he was burning the paper money for. As she quietly assisted him in the burning process, she heard a silent chuckle from him.

"Suisui, if only there were an underworld. At least then, the two types of people wouldn't die for nothing," Li Huowang murmured, his gaze fixated on the flickering flames dancing in the center of the circle, their reflections reflected in his eyes.

He continued, "In the underworld, the king would have the power to judge every ghost, giving them appropriate rewards or punishments. Evil people would suffer in the eighteen levels of Hell, tormented by minor demons who would gouge their eyes, cut their tongues, or even deep-fry them.

"On the other hand, individuals who performed good deeds in their lives would be rewarded by being allowed to reincarnate into wealthy households. There, they would enjoy pleasant lives and reach the age of one hundred without experiencing any illnesses."

Li Sui raised a tentacle and threw a bunch of paper ingots into the fire. The paper ingots twisted and turned black from being burned. "Father, do you want every world to be like that?"

Li Huowang threw more paper money into the circle to keep the fire alive. "Don't you think a world like that would be much better than this completely crazy world?"

Just as he finished speaking, a gust of wind blew past them.

The ashes from the burned paper twirled and danced in the air.

Li Huowang swung his spine sword and returned to the Qi Kingdom.

He had just entered the Qi Kingdom when the surging False Qi almost suffocated him. There was too much of it.

Li Huowang looked up and saw a statue several stories tall. It was a depiction of him!

The large statue was tied by thick ropes. Many laborers were struggling to pull it upright.

As Li Huowang stared at the statue and then at the citizens chanting and praying, he finally understood where the False Qi was coming from.

There weren't a lot of people who could organize something like this. It was most likely Chan Du's doing, and Li Huowang had no intention of stopping it.

He was going to fight against the Tianchen Kingdom soon, so the more False Qi he had, the better.

He needed a lot of it because the techniques of the Sitting Oblivion Dao required the use of False Qi.

One of the soldiers saw that Li Huowang was back and greeted him. Li Huowang replied, "Call for Chan Du, the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau, and the generals. I need them to come and meet with me."

An ancient voice came from behind Li Huowang. "Benefactor Li, I am here."

Li Huowang turned around and saw Chan Du sitting on a straw mat while twirling his prayer beads.

"You still have time to chant your sutras? The Tianchen Kingdom is going to invade in three days."

Li Huowang approached Chan Du. By the time the others arrived—Chief of the Surveillance Bureau Liang Yuxuan and

General Chen Yurong—Li Huowang had already finished explaining.

“We finally obtained some information, so we need to use it to overcome our challenges. How many more people do we have in the Qi Kingdom that we can still utilize?”

The three of them frowned. A lot of men had died during the clash with the army of Unspeakable. The men that they had painstakingly gathered were gone again.

“Gather as many as you can. This concerns the survival of the Qi Kingdom. Chan Du, there’s a Buddha in the Righteous Monastery, right? Use it too.”

Chan Du’s hands trembled as he held onto his prayer beads. “Benefactor Li, that’s the root of the Righteous Monastery. We cannot sully it.”

“If the Tianchen Kingdom destroys the Qi Kingdom, or if we fail to get a Dragon Vein, then the Righteous Monastery will also be destroyed!”

Chen Yurong helped out by suggesting a plan. “Daoist, since this is an ambush, we can just distract and buy time with a smaller force. There’s no need to go all out.”

Li Huowang pondered before ultimately shaking his head. “No. Even if the information is accurate, with my understanding of Shai Zi, he could’ve sold the information to the Tianchen Kingdom too.

“We cannot be lax when dealing with the Tianchen Kingdom. We need the power to confront them directly—only then can your plan to distract them succeed.”

This time, Chan Du advised Li Huowang and said, “Benefactor Li, the Qi Kingdom is yours. We will naturally sacrifice ourselves if needed, but you must think carefully. We are all that’s left in the Qi Kingdom. If we sacrifice everything here, the Qi Kingdom would turn into a sitting duck.”

Li Huowang replied, “In that case, we don’t have to spend all

our strength fighting them. My goal is to create a distraction before infiltrating the Tianchen Kingdom. I need information because what we need to win.”

“But Benefactor Li, how will you return after heading there?”

Li Huowang patted the spine sword on his back. “I have this. I can come back at any time.”

“With that? Isn’t that sword...”

Chan Du was suddenly interrupted by someone. “You are right. You can return with that sword.”

Li Huowang turned and saw that it was Xuan Pin. He pinched her robes and discovered it was Xuan Pin herself, not a fake or an illusion.

Li Huowang was worried about his daughter’s safety. “Why are you here? Go back. It’s dangerous here.”

“I know it’s dangerous. That’s why I’m here to help you. I feel uneasy with you heading there alone.”

“No, go back! Please be obedient and go back.”

“What’s obedient?”

Li Huowang was about to say something, but dense tentacles shot out from the red robes the moment Li Huowang opened his mouth. The tentacles quickly entered Li Huowang’s body.

Li Huowang was about to open up his abdomen when a tentacle sprouted out from his belly button and wrapped around Li Huowang’s wrist.

“Father, I’m not going there just to help you. This concerns the entire Liang Kingdom. Don’t forget that I’m the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau. I can help you a lot—don’t try to shoulder everything on your own.”

Sensing that Li Huowang’s strength was slowly diminishing, Li Sui released her tentacles before patting Li Huowang’s hand. She then slithered back into his abdomen.

Li Huowang said, “I just didn’t want you to risk your life too.”

“Father, don’t think that your life is cheap. I will be sad if you die.”

Li Sui extended her tentacles and touched Li Huowang’s beating heart.

Feeling the familiar presence in his body, Li Huowang thought that Xuan Pin was indeed powerful. He begrudgingly nodded.

He decided that this time, he would just infiltrate and get as much information as he could. He didn’t want to risk confronting the people from the Tianchen Kingdom with Li Sui in his body.

He bent down to pick up Li Sui’s red robes when he saw the three people from the Qi Kingdom staring at him dumbfoundedly.

“What are you looking at? Go!”

Chapter 886 - Contact

In the Qi Kingdom, five hundred Li northeast of the You Capital, there was a lowland area with grass as tall as half a meter. The entire place was green, just like Qing Qiu.

No one would've expected that the elites of the Qi Kingdom were already waiting for the people from the Tianchen Kingdom to appear here.

Li Huowang lay on the ground while frowning, relying on his sharp hearing to detect any subtle changes in his surroundings. He had been in this spot for a full day, determined to find out if Shai Zi had been lying or not.

"Are you alright inside there? Do you need to come out for some fresh air?"

"Father, they are here."

Li Huowang became tense, and his heartbeat quickened the moment he heard her.

He soon heard the sound of heavy footsteps and the chirping of birds. However, there were no birds in the Qi Kingdom—the birds were from the Tianchen Kingdom!

Li Huowang slowly liquefied the ground beneath him, sliding down.

Li Huowang looked through the grass and saw the people from the Tianchen Kingdom dressed like those from the Qi Kingdom.

Li Huowang sighed in relief. "Thank goodness it's not the army of Unspeakable. They are sending in spies, so I guess they are trying to set up another ploy."

There were hundreds of them.

Li Huowang didn't know why they were sent here, but he didn't care. Since they had seen the spies appear, the Tianchen

Kingdom's plan was destined to fail.

Without warning, several large shadows flew through the air towards the people from the Tianchen Kingdom.

As the shadows drew near, everyone realized they were—the Buddhas of the Righteous Monastery. They opened their twisted mouths, chanting in unison with the monks embedded within their bodies. “Jie di jie. Di bo luo jie. Di bo luo jie. Jie di pu ti sa po he.”

The Buddhas crashed heavily onto the group of people and exploded like a watermelon falling onto the ground.

Those touched by the flesh of the Buddhas all shouted in pain as their flesh twisted and merged together.

There were many spies, yet all of them dispersed the moment the Buddhas of the Righteous Monastery attacked.

Still, they reacted swiftly. The sound of an instrument rang out, and black, rotting rice surged out from the rift and enveloped the Buddhas.

The fight in the lowlands was intense and vicious. However, no one from the Qi Kingdom had died yet.

We cannot keep this up! I need to head in there and cut off their roots!

Li Huowang swiftly approached the circular rift and looked through it. He saw a dense forest with many people in it.

The Tianchen Kingdom had prepared a lot of spies this time, though most of them looked burly and fierce.

Thankfully, Li Huowang noticed that the Unspeakable army and the golden dragon weren't in the rift.

At the very least, it didn't look like a trap, so Shai Zi wasn't setting up a trap for him.

Li Huowang saw the rift was becoming smaller and quickly projected his body to enter it.

As he arrived at the Tianchen Kingdom, he noticed something he had overlooked before. There was a sizable stage behind the

group of men. On that stage, an elderly man stood on stilts, his face adorned in makeup that made him look like a fox.

The old man's forehead had a red dot highlighted with a red blush. His hands and feet were balanced on the wooden stilts, and yet he could still move nimbly without any hint of instability.

Li Huowang immediately realized that the old man had to be the Twisted One connecting the Tianchen Kingdom to the Qi Kingdom. Every time the old man's eyelids twitched, a circular rift connecting the Qi Kingdom would appear near his body. They would then send people from the Tianchen Kingdom into the rift.

The entire place was a forest, with only the troops dispatched to the Qi Kingdom and tens of Unspeakable in the vicinity.

Li Huowang was even more confident after seeing the Unspeakable guarding the fox-faced old man closely.

"Go!" Several tentacles shot out from his body and forcefully struck the ground. Li Huowang curled his body up and shot forward like a cannonball, thrusting his spine sword towards the elderly man.

Just as the sword was about to reach the old man, a rift appeared in front of Li Huowang. There, he saw Chan Du using the scar on his forehead to eat the enemies.

Li Huowang understood that the rift connected to the Qi Kingdom. The old man was using his powers as a Twisted One to attack Li Huowang!

That wasn't the end of it. Another rift appeared above Li Huowang. The old man was trying to bisect Li Huowang in half with the two rifts!

Several more rifts appeared around Li Huowang. At this point, Li Huowang realized that the Twisted One was very good at using his powers.

Li Huowang didn't even wait for the rifts to hit him. He charged and entered the first rift before the second rift could hit

him. The moment he entered the first rift, he jumped high and quickly turned his body in the air.

He watched as the two rifts completely missed him. Then, he swiftly dove into another circular rift.

This time, he appeared somewhere different. By the time he entered the Tianchen Kingdom again, the old man had hidden himself and the tens of Unspeakable had surrounded Li Huowang.

They raised their jade hands and charged towards Li Huowang.

Li Huowang's Pain, Death, or even Rot would be stripped away if they touched him even one bit.

At the last moment, Li Huowang's red Daoist robes expanded, and he split himself into hundreds of himself.

His clones charged around like wasps leaving the nest as they surrounded the Unspeakable.

The jade hands swiped around furiously. Many of the clones managed to dodge the hands, but the few that were touched by the jade hands disappeared like smoke.

Li Huowang's tactic was to use clones to keep them busy. Since he already knew what kind of techniques they had, he used a different method to counter them.

Li Huowang had already escaped their encirclement by the time the Unspeakable had cleared up the clones.

Li Huowang stood at the crown of a tree and looked down. Everyone in the surrounding area ignored the Qi Kingdom and surrounded the tree.

They even fired flares into the sky, but Li Huowang couldn't even catch a glimpse of the trailing smoke before it vanished. He was confident that their reinforcements would arrive there shortly.

Chapter 887 - Tianchen Kingdom

The people from Tianchen Kingdom surrounded Li Huowang, but he did not run away. He sat calmly on the crown of the tree instead.

Another Li Huowang popped out from his back, and the two chanted simultaneously. “In the shining light, the sun and moon conceal themselves. When the treasures activate, the spirits shall tremble in fear. Manifesting in the mortal world, guarding the chariot in the realm of Hell...”

When the people from the Tianchen Kingdom heard him chanting, they were filled with immense shock. According to the Unspeakable army that had invaded previously, the Daoist in red could summon Doulao to fight for him!

While they vastly outnumbered Li Huowang, they could not fight against Doulao. Using their various techniques, they quickly escaped and vanished in front of Li Huowang.

Li Huowang completed his chant just as they disappeared. However, nothing happened.

Li Huowang chuckled and stood up. The Li Huowang on his back trembled and turned into a beautiful woman. It wasn't something from Li Huowang's “Truth” cultivation—it was Li Sui.

Li Huowang did not intend to summon Doulao, so he altered the chant. There was no need to summon Doulao against them when he could trick them and save his energy.

Despite the people in the Qi Kingdom continuously giving him False Qi through their prayers, the amount of False Qi needed to summon Doulao was still massive. There was no need to waste it on

a minor skirmish like this.

The crisis had been averted, and the Qi Kingdom was temporarily safe. Li Huowang looked around the dense forest and prepared to leave.

He was sure that the people in Tianchen Kingdom had been notified of his arrival. He had to gather as much information as possible before they caught him.

Li Huowang knew very little about the place. All he knew was that they held a grudge against the Heavenly Mater.

He needed to know how strong the people in the Tianchen Kingdom were and what price they were willing to pay to bring down the Heavenly Mater again.

The forest was dense, but thankfully, Li Huowang's sharp senses helped him spot fresh shoe prints on the ground.

Through the shoe prints, Li Huowang found several traps meant to catch wild beasts. Li Huowang deduced that the shoe prints belonged to a hunter. All he needed to do was follow the tracks to locate some kind of settlement.

However, the sky was slowly turning dark, and Li Huowang had yet to find the owner of the shoe prints.

When he saw the setting sun, Li Huowang remembered something important. "Suisui, help me count the time and see how many Dragon Veins are here."

"Alright."

Suisui nodded, and an hourglass appeared beside Li Huowang. The sand slowly fell to the bottom of the hourglass.

The hourglass represented a single division in time. A single cycle meant that a single division had passed. With the hourglass, Li Huowang would know how many Dragon Veins were in the Tianchen Kingdom.

By the time half of the sand had fallen, Li Huowang finally found a settlement in the dense forest. He saw a small village with

several lit bonfires in the dark forest.

Li Huowang observed the village for a long time, taking his time until he was satisfied there was nothing suspicious about it.

“Let’s see if we can get information about the Tianchen Kingdom from the regular people here.”

Li Huowang wiped his face and transformed his appearance into Yang Xiaohai's. He proceeded to make his way towards the village.

Li Sui's tentacles sprouted from Li Huowang's back. They then grew and transformed into a big rucksack.

As Li Huowang approached, he smelled the aroma of bamboo leaves being used as a spice. He quickly calculated the time and realized that it was dinner time.

Li Huowang had just entered the village when a woman confronted him. They locked eyes, both shocked by the unexpected encounter. The woman was surprised to see a stranger, while Li Huowang was taken aback by her appearance.

She had a humanoid figure and was adorned in a large shirt paired with a pleated skirt. Additionally, she had a deep blue apron with intricate embroidery depicting birds and fish.

However, her most striking feature was her elongated neck covered in silver hoops—it was twice as long as a regular person's!

The slightly intimidating sight of someone with such a long neck on a dark village path surprised Li Huowang.

“Father, she’s not an evil entity.”

“I can see that.”

Li Huowang cleared his throat and imitated Yang Xiaohai's voice. “Uhm... Excuse me, miss... May I know where this place is?”

The woman answered honestly, perhaps because she suspected nothing or because Yang Xiaohai appeared young and innocent. “This is Yixiong Village. Little boy, where did you come from? Why are you here?”

Her voice was normal. Aside from her long neck, she looked and sounded like a regular person.

“Yixiong Village? That means I’ve come to the wrong place. Where is the closest county?”

The woman pointed. “It’s in that direction, though you probably shouldn’t go there now. You need to pass several mountains and walk for at least two days.”

Their voices caught the attention of the other villagers, causing them to gather around. Li Huowang took notice of them just as they took notice of him. All of the villagers wore silver hoops on their long necks.

More importantly, most of them were women. The few remaining men were children.

“Miss, I’m an outsider, so can I ask you a question? Why do you wear those silver hoops?”

“Because it looks good.”

Li Huowang paused—the answer was too bizarre. *Did the Sitting Oblivion Dao trick them?*

He wanted to ask more questions, but an old woman gave him two pieces of bamboo before he could. He stood still in confusion as the woman split open the bamboo, revealing the fragrant rice hidden inside it. They were asking him to eat.

“Thank you, Grandma! Thank you, thank you! I haven’t eaten today!”

Li Huowang took the bamboo and ate the rice. He wasn’t afraid of them poisoning his meal—poison wouldn’t work on him.

As he ate, he realized that the meal was not only ordinary but also delicious. The fragrance of the bamboo and rice paired well, leaving a delightful fragrance in his mouth after he finished.

Chapter 888 - Reward

The women of the village stared at Li Huowang until he finished his meal.

Li Huowang used the bamboo leaf like a spoon to eat the rice.

As he ate, Li Huowang secretly used telepathy to converse with Li Sui. *Suisui, what do you think?*

Nothing much. They are just the regular people of Tianchen Kingdom. I doubt they would know much about this place.

After finishing his meal, Li Huowang wiped his mouth and returned the bamboo to the woman before him. “Thank you for the meal. If it’s possible, may I stay a night here? Of course, I will pay for it.”

Li Huowang reached into his sleeves and took out several broken pieces of silver. “It’s alright. You’re just staying for a night, so there’s no need to pay us.”

The woman seemed surprisingly excited as she led Li Huowang to a hut.

Is everyone in the Tianchen Kingdom so kind?

It was hard to imagine the Tianchen Kingdom betraying the Heavenly Mater and stripping away her Heavenly Dao if they were all so kind.

“Miss, it’s quite remote here.”

Li Huowang looked around at the surrounding short huts and realized they were either built from wood or bamboo.

“It is remote, but that’s fine. Our food is ours, and no one will come and take it from us.”

“Yours? Don’t you need to submit the food as tax to the palace?”

Li Huowang started to shift the conversation towards the

direction he wanted.

“Palace? What is that place?”

Li Huowang learned there was no palace or royal family in the Tianchen Kingdom, which meant there were no emperors. In that case, the golden dragon being the Dragon Vein was even more believable now.

Looking at the woman's confused face, Li Huowang quickly answered, “Oh, it’s nothing. It's just a normal thing where I'm from.”

Li Huowang looked at the woman’s back as they continued to walk. “Miss, when I was walking here, I saw someone wearing the robes of an Opera actor and walking on stilts. I saw that person running past the roofs.”

The woman turned back in surprise. “What? What did you see?”

Li Huowang looked at her Ten Emotions and Eight Sufferings to see if anything was out of the ordinary.

“What are you talking about? Don’t lie to me. There are no such beings in this world.”

However, Li Huowang was disappointed upon realizing that the woman didn’t know who the Unspeakable Army was.

Li Huowang asked more simple questions but didn’t get a single satisfactory answer.

Is it because it's too remote here? Do the people here lack information? Maybe I should ask something they might know.

Li Huowang decided to ask about the general geography of the Tianchen Kingdom. It turned out that the Tianchen Kingdom was huge.

From her explanation, Li Huowang determined that the Tianchen Kingdom was larger than the Liang Kingdom, though neither of them knew the exact size of the Tianchen Kingdom.

To the woman, the village she was born and raised in was her

entire world.

She didn't know the different regional names of the Tianchen Kingdom. Almost the entire northern half of the kingdom was flatlands with many rivers, and those who lived there were called northerners.

The southern half of the Tianchen Kingdom was covered in trees and forest, and the inhabitants were called southerners.

She knew almost nothing else. She knew nothing about the army of Unspeakable or the golden dragon. She had just been living peacefully in the village throughout her life.

If nothing were to change, she would spend her entire life within a hundred Li of her village.

Shai Zi tricked me! Li Huowang whispered in his heart to Li Sui, *There's no way they could touch the Heavenly Dao. I doubt that they can even read.*

To his understanding, the people of the Tianchen Kingdom weren't as fearsome as what Shai Zi had described, where anyone living in the Tianchen Kingdom could strip the Heavenly Daos away.

The people of the Tianchen Kingdom were no different from those in the Liang Kingdom. Only a handful would cultivate and learn techniques, while the majority lived in ignorance, simply being born, growing old, and eventually passing away.

Li Huowang sighed in relief. A small part of his stress was relieved just like that.

Father, Shai Zi did not lie. She could learn how to do so—she just hasn't.

Isn't that the same as not being able to do it? She couldn't do it even if she were to start learning now. Shh... be quiet. We are arriving soon. Once she leaves, we will escape into the darkness and head towards the county she mentioned.

Since there wasn't much that he could obtain from the small

village, there was no reason for him to stay here either.

Li Huowang needed to find some kind of scholar to learn more about the Tianchen Kingdom.

Even if there wasn't a palace or an emperor, there should be some kind of organization that controlled and managed the Tianchen Kingdom, possibly under a different name than "palace."

They weaved around the village and soon reached a small wooden hut propped up by branches.

"You stay here tonight. I hope you don't mind how old it is."

Seeing that the woman was climbing up the wooden ladder, Li Huowang quickly followed her and prepared himself to knock her unconscious.

However, when he reached the top, he was stunned by what he saw—the woman had taken off her top.

She gestured and pulled Li Huowang inside. "Here, lie down."

Li Huowang quickly shook off his arm and realized why there wasn't a single man in the village during the day and why they welcomed him. He had to pay a price!

"What's wrong? Do you think I'm too old? Let me call for my daughter, then."

"No need."

Li Huowang wiped his hand on the woman's face, and she froze.

"Father, am I interfering? Don't worry, I won't tell mother."

Li Huowang frowned. "You still have the energy to joke? Don't forget what we came here for."

He never thought the culture of the Tianchen Kingdom would be so bizarre.

"Father, it's not healthy to suppress yourself like this every day. You should smile and laugh when you can. You will snap one day if you continue this."

"Alright, that's enough. You don't have to teach me about it.

Let's go."

"Father, are you really not moved by her offer? She doesn't look ugly."

Li Huowang felt his skin crawling. He never thought his own daughter would say something like that.

He previously thought Li Sui was very inexperienced, but the current Li Sui was too bright!

"Stop saying nonsense before I throw you back into the Qi Kingdom."

Li Sui stopped talking when she saw Li Huowang reaching for the spine sword.

Snapping branches could be heard as Li Huowang continued to walk into the dark forest.

By the time the hourglass flipped again, Li Huowang reached an opening. A county appeared in front of him.

Chapter 889 - Bandits

Li Huowang found the county, but he was surprised to see that the city didn't have a wall. There was just a single white lantern swinging on the old gate.

"Keep your guard up. There might be someone who can see us."

Li Huowang sunk his projection into the ground, turning invisible as he walked towards the county.

Li Huowang thought the place was too rundown. There were abandoned houses everywhere, the roads were full of potholes, and litter was scattered all around.

If it hadn't been for the candlelight coming from some of the windows, Li Huowang would've thought that this was a mass grave instead.

Just then, Li Sui said, "Father, someone in the Tianchen Kingdom is trying to use divination to locate us."

They had acted quickly. Rather than sending people to find Li Huowang, they used divination.

Li Huowang felt his scalp go numb. "Did they manage to locate us?"

"No, I'm blocking them," Li Sui replied. "However, I can't sustain it for long."

"Block them as long as you can. We need to leave before they find us."

Li Huowang walked to the center of the county.

The center of the county was more lively. Even late at night, numerous shops were still open.

The options were somewhat limited, though. They were all either gambling dens, brothels, or theaters.

Li Huowang chose the theater with the highest chance of a scholar being present. He entered the place and realized that they were putting on a pink show.

This particular pink show was much more daring than the Lu family's. The singer on the stage was wearing nothing but a translucent shawl. The entire theater was rowdy as the customers drank wine, fought, and gambled while the singer performed on top.

Suddenly, one of the customers ripped off his shirt to reveal his hairy chest and jumped on the stage. He pushed down the singer, and they fornicated.

Li Huowang ignored the crowd's cheers and instead focused on the murderous aura they exuded. They were all the same.

They are... soldiers? Are they the soldiers of the Tianchen Kingdom?

Li Huowang stared at the diverse crowd. Many of them sported messy beards and dirty clothes.

Li Huowang knew that the Tianchen Kingdom had soldiers because they were the ones who had ambushed him the last time.

They were strong, and their incredible cooperation had almost made Li Huowang lose his spine sword.

Li Huowang looked around swiftly before looking at the second floor's center seat. There was a huge man with a large scar on his face seated there. He was holding onto two topless women while playing cards with the other men.

The huge man's murderous aura was the most intense. Li Huowang was confident that the man was their leader.

Li Huowang approached the man and tore off his face to plaster it onto the back of the man's head.

However, just before he did, he stopped.

Someone was speaking to the huge man.

"Deputy, are the faceless really asking us to hunt some

francolins[1]?”

Li Huowang realized that the men were speaking in codes! They weren't soldiers—they were bandits!

Li Huowang recalled how the people who had ambushed him didn't say “kill” but instead “stab.”

Li Huowang was right. They were indeed bandits—or rather, soldiers of the Tianchen Kingdom.

Father, there's no emperor here, so there's no soldiers. Instead, the soldiers all became bandits. It's a reasonable explanation.

Li Huowang nodded and continued to eavesdrop.

The huge man said, "It's not good news. The faceless invited people aside from ourselves. The old man that takes money from corpses and the razor clams that take the corpse's money were also called to help, but they didn't come back."

Li Huowang understood those codes. Both “the old man that takes the money of corpses” and “the razor clams that take the corpse's money” were the codenames for different groups of bandits.

They naturally didn't return because Li Huowang had burned all of them to death.

As for what “faceless” meant, Li Huowang had no idea for now. But according to what he had learned, “faceless” usually meant something along the lines of monsters or evil entities.

“The faceless must've encountered some tough thorns this time. Old Qian mentioned losing many men too. They're likely doing something serious if they're inviting all thirty-six caves to fight for them.”

This wasn't good news for Li Huowang. If the soldiers of the Tianchen Kingdom were bandits, that meant that the “faceless” were recruiting every single one to go to the Qi Kingdom.

“Deputy, this is a touchy mission. Should we take it?”

“Of course. If we don't give them face, then we will really

become faceless.”

The deputy’s voice suddenly became silent as he glanced at the theater below him before whispering to the man, “I’ve heard that the mission this time is related to ‘Moon Threads.’ We should go and see what it is about first.”

Someone suddenly shouted from below, “Deputy! Keep it short! An eagle just plunged into the oven!”

The doors to the theater slammed shut the moment everyone heard that.

Seeing that he had been discovered, Li Huowang chose not to hide anymore. He was certain the huge man knew something, so he decided to interrogate him.

The man threw the cards to the table and stared at Li Huowang, who was wearing Yang Xiaohai’s face. “Shoulders together, toss me a vine?”

Li Huowang blinked. “I’m tossing your fat ass!”

He instinctively reached for his sword but realized he needed to keep the man alive. Li Huowang smashed an hourglass onto the man’s head.

The hourglass warped from the impact, causing the man’s head to bleed. He stumbled for a moment before ultimately falling onto the ground.

“Stab him!” the man shouted.

A murderous aura filled the theater, and the angry bandits howled in anger as they ran towards Li Huowang.

“Allow me,” Li Sui said, causing the theater to shift randomly.

The ground and bandits warped uncontrollably, turning from tall to short and from long to narrow in different intervals.

The murderous aura that filled the area broke apart like wet noodles.

Sensing how strong Li Huowang was with Li Sui’s help, the huge man knelt on the ground and begged for mercy.

“Get up! We need to change locations!” Li Huowang told the man, kicking him and then trying to drag him away.

“Father, be careful!”

Just as Li Sui warned Li Huowang, a shriveled hand burst out from his chest. Li Huowang ignored his injury, instead focusing on the thing in the palm of the shriveled hand.

The palm held a dark yellow object. Li Huowang instinctively knew that it was his primordial breath. Someone had pushed it out of him!

1. A type of bird 🐦

Chapter 890 - Ambush

Li Huowang was quite confident that the primordial breath of Strayed Ones was why they could cultivate the “Truth.”

However, he hadn’t known that the people of the Tianchen Kingdom could also touch the primordial breath inside of him!

Li Huowang saw the yellowish object in the palm that had pierced his chest and knew it was the primordial breath. This was also the first time he had seen it.

He had been wounded many times, but this was the first time his wounds were this grievous.

Li Huowang could not cultivate the “Truth” without his primordial breath. Without it, he would be no different from an ordinary person.

The arm threatened to completely sever Li Huowang’s primordial breath.

At the last moment, several tentacles sprouted out from Li Huowang’s back and held onto the arm to prevent it from being pulled out.

Li Huowang could not relinquish the precious chance that Li Sui had given him. He swiftly unsheathed his spine sword.

However, the enemy was behind him. Every time he turned around, the enemy would turn too.

In a panic, Li Huowang chose to grab onto his head and turned it forcefully towards the left. He twisted his head all the way around, making a sound of snapping bones.

Li Huowang finally saw the person who had attacked him.

There stood an elderly man, his back hunched and his eyes oddly disproportionate. A single horn emerged from his head, parting his white hair and exposing his murky gaze.

The old man had plunged his right arm deep into Li Huowang while his left arm was holding onto a rod made from a tree root and covered with gourds tightly.

“Die!” Li Huowang roared.

He dislocated his joints, swinging his sword backward with his dislocated arm.

The sword hadn’t touched the old man, and yet the old man’s body started to twist. This wasn’t Zhuge Yuan’s spine sword but instead Li Huowang’s own spine sword.

Seeing that he couldn’t pull out his arm and Li Huowang’s attack had almost reached him, the old man swung his rod decisively. He detached his right arm and ran away like a lizard leaving its tail behind and then fleeing. He managed to survive Li Huowang’s attack.

Gritting his teeth, Li Huowang forcibly repositioned his head and glanced around the theater, noticing that the old man was not the only unexpected arrival.

There was the veiled woman who played the strange musical instrument, Po Da’er, and several others sporting bizarre clothes. All eight of them had Li Huowang surrounded.

It was clear that as soon as the Tianchen Kingdom was notified of his arrival, they all hastily rushed there to deal with him.

Li Huowang warily looked at the arm lodged in his chest. He hadn’t expected them to get there so quickly. More importantly, he hadn’t expected that they would learn his weaknesses so quickly that they would choose to ambush him instead.

This time, Li Huowang was facing an enemy he had never faced before—an entire world. The moment his weaknesses were exposed to them, he would face unforeseen dangers.

That ambush would’ve killed him if Li Sui wasn’t here. Li Huowang would’ve died if they had managed to snatch the primordial breath out of his body.

Po Da'er bowed to Li Huowang. "Daoist Li, we will meet again."

"What? Are you going to continue spouting nonsense?"

Li Huowang realized that the bandits had run away during the chaos. He wanted to escape after the ambush had failed, but he refused to leave without any results.

He didn't know how many Dragon Veins were present in the Tianchen Kingdom, and he had barely gotten any helpful information. If he were to return to the Qi Kingdom now, going back to the Tianchen Kingdom would be much more difficult next time.

Po Da'er didn't want to attack. Instead, he continued to question Li Huowang.

"Daoist Li, I've heard that you are very kind. Why do you help the evil sect, then? The White Lotus Sect is evil."

Li Huowang almost laughed out of anger. "The White Lotus Sect is evil now? Why didn't you call the Heavenly Mater evil when you betrayed her back then?"

Po Da'er was shocked. "Daoist Li, do you trust their nonsense? They tricked you! I don't know who's saying that, but they're lying! That did not happen at all. The evil Mater treated us like livestock, and the Tianchen Kingdom was like a living Hell."

He stared towards the south and clenched his fists. "We were forced to fight back. Daoist Li, do you intend to help the evil Mater and turn the Tianchen Kingdom back into a living Hell?"

Li Huowang looked around warily. "Hoh... Everyone has their side of the story. Why are you the good guys in your story? Didn't you want me to help you? Fine, I will help you, but don't touch the White Lotus Sect! I will guarantee that they will not enter the Tianchen Kingdom! I am a man of my word!"

Po Da'er remained silent. It was clear that he didn't trust Li Huowang's words.

Li Huowang said, "Don't try to trick me with words. It's useless! You've sent many spies into the Qi Kingdom to collect information, yet you still haven't found out why I am helping the White Lotus Sect? Li Sui, do it now!"

Li Huowang scattered like sand. However, Po Da'er and the rest saw through Li Huowang's tricks. The old man raised his rod of gourds and lightly swung it in front of him.

The theater was blown apart like curtains in the wind. Despite being mere fragments that were on fire, Li Huowang moved towards the old man.

The elderly man lifted his rod and struck Li Huowang, causing the plugs on the gourds to open. He intended to suck Li Huowang into the gourds.

Yet, Li Huowang phased through the gourds. The fragments were just an illusion.

By the time the old man realized what was happening, it was too late. The real Li Huowang was already standing behind him.

Li Huowang stabbed his spine sword deep into the old man's hump. The old man's hump burst open like a large pimple, and disgusting pus splashed towards Li Huowang. The pus evaporated when it came into contact with Li Huowang's fire, turning into white steam.

Li Huowang felt that there was something else inside the old man's hump, as there was a peculiar sensation when he pierced it.

He pulled the spine sword down and split the hump into two, revealing a stone statue of a deity hidden within the hump.

Chapter 891 - Tongue

Li Huowang was surprised to find a deity statue in the hump. Shai Zi had claimed that the people of the Tianchen Kingdom had no beliefs, so this was unexpected.

He wanted to discern which deity it represented, but the statue's face was smeared with thick pus, making it impossible to identify.

As he was about to strike down the one-eyed old man and split both him and the hump in half, the others arrived.

Out of nowhere, a whooshing sound filled the air, and a neatly peeled piece of skin materialized right above Li Huowang. It was positioned to cover his head, and its facial features still moved.

He had no idea what purpose the strange piece of skin served, but he was sure it was bad news.

He dodged quickly. However, a hand reached toward his chest, clearly trying to repeat the trick of taking his primordial breath.

This time, Li Sui was prepared. She reached out with seven or eight tentacles, tightly wrapping them around the enemy.

Unexpectedly, another hand appeared. It began to pluck things from Li Sui's tentacles.

While Li Huowang didn't know what the enemy took, he felt a surge of anger.

"Damn it!" Li Huowang ripped off his own face and slammed it onto the opponent.

A wave of rotten black rice surged like a tsunami, covering Li Huowang and his opponent. Even in this mess, Li Huowang forcefully tore off his skin.

The fight became increasingly difficult as the enemy exploited his weaknesses. They kept trying to find opportunities to sneak an

attack in or steal his spine sword.

Li Huowang had no effective counter. The enemy could easily strip away his powers, whether from his “Truth” cultivation or the pain techniques of the Ao Jing Sect.

The people the Tianchen Kingdom had sent were extremely powerful, nearly as formidable as the army of Unspeakable.

Li Huowang was worried for both himself and the Great Liang. If these enemies found a way to infiltrate the Great Qi, the entire Great Liang would be in grave danger.

Shai Zi had deceived him about other things, but not about this. The Tianchen Kingdom was indeed difficult to deal with.

Li Huowang knew he couldn’t delay this situation. The longer he stalled, the worse things would get.

This was the enemy’s territory. If he didn’t act now, more enemies from the Tianchen Kingdom would come, making it impossible for him to escape.

Li Huowang gripped his spine sword and prepared to cut open an escape path. He suddenly stumbled as he glanced at Po Daer, who was not moving at all.

A large hand had emerged from the ground and grabbed his leg, rendering it numb.

Li Huowang’s neck began to itch as he fended off the surrounding attackers. When he turned his head, he saw Po Daer’s huge face grinning at him.

“Daoist Li, it’s not too late to surrender,” Po Daer said, raising Li Huowang’s hand in a mocking gesture. Li Huowang had lost control of his body, and Po Daer could now drain his primordial breath at will.

“Why not surrender? There’s no shame in it. In fact, I don’t just control your body now. Everything about you is mine, whether it’s your tricks from the Sitting Oblivion Dao or your Strayed One’s ‘Truth’ cultivation.”

However, Li Huowang laughed. His mission in the Tianchen Kingdom had been completed.

“All of my body is yours? What about the pain and suffering I’ve endured all this time?”

Po Daer noticed Li Huowang's composure and instinctively knew something was out of place. As he tried to take complete control, Li Sui's four ribs suddenly snapped and plunged into Li Huowang's chest.

Po Daer screamed in agony from the intense pain. Under normal circumstances, he might have been able to endure it, but Li Huowang's torment was currently amplified by the Cang-Qiang Ascension.

“Fire!” Li Huowang roared, and flames engulfed his entire body.

Po Daer shared Li Huowang's excruciating pain. Li Huowang had long grown used to it, but Po Daer couldn't withstand it.

He could no longer care about the Heavenly Daos and primordial breath within Li Huowang. Po Daer tried to flee desperately, yet it was too late. Black tendrils came out from his facial orifices and wrapped tightly around his head, trapping him inside Li Huowang and making him feel like he was in a living hell.

This time, Po Daer couldn't escape. While he had previously leaped from the Great Qi to the Tianchen Kingdom and survived, there was nowhere left to run now.

Li Huowang grasped his opponent's tongue and knew his mission in Tianchen was truly complete. As if on cue, Li Sui cast an illusion that caused the sky to press down.

With this opportunity, Li Huowang created a rift with his spine sword and quickly jumped through it.

When he landed, everything around him was peaceful once more. The air was filled with the chirping of birds and the smell of flowers. He had returned to the Great Liang.

He held the charred and struggling head of Po Daer while making his way toward Shangjing.

This interrogation was best left to the professionals, like the Fangxian Sect. They could extract a lot of valuable information from him.

Li Huowang felt pessimistic. *I hope they can find a way to counter these enemies. We're doomed if the Tianchen Kingdom ever wages war against the Great Qi and the Great Liang.*

“Father, don’t lose hope. This isn’t just a crisis—it’s also an opportunity.”

“An opportunity? What opportunity? I don’t see it,” Li Huowang replied.

“If they can extract your primordial breath, they can naturally put something in.”

“What good is that? You could do that before.”

“It’s not just the primordial breath. I saw something else inside them. They can manipulate the inner sight that controls the primordial energy within you.”

Li Huowang’s mind raced. “So that means—”

“That means we can also add things and control what’s in their consciousness.

“The more inner sight in your body, the greater control you’ll have over the primordial breath. If you have enough ‘Truth’ cultivation, we can extract the inner sight and primordial energy from their bodies and transfer it into yours.

“We can do to Strayed Ones what they do to Twisted Ones.

“If we pull this off, your ‘Truth’ cultivation will improve greatly. Everything you think, dream, or imagine will become reality.”

Chapter 892 - Phone

Thump! A tightly clenched fist wrapped in bandages delivered a powerful strike to Li Huowang's left rib, resulting in the sharp sound of bones cracking.

It wasn't over. The bandages on the fist were quickly bitten open. Before they had fallen to the ground, they were pulled and wrapped firmly around Li Huowang's neck.

Blood rushed to his head, and his face turned bright red, with veins bulging on his forehead. The lack of oxygen made his consciousness begin to blur.

He was about to be strangled to death, so he threw his head back and slammed it into his opponent's face.

The bandages around his neck loosened slightly. Li Huowang gritted his teeth, planted both feet on the ground, and forcefully pushed.

Li Huowang shot upward and slammed hard on the enemy behind him.

When he landed and felt the enemy pinned beneath him, he rolled backward and stood up. He lifted his right foot and aimed a powerful kick at his opponent's head.

The enemy quickly curled up and used their back as a shield to block Li Huowang's kick.

She used the momentum and swept her leg forcefully at Li Huowang's other leg, causing him to lose balance.

"Dinner's ready." A calm voice interrupted the deadly fight, prompting them to stop.

Li Huowang took three steps back and glared murderously at Ba Nanxu as she stood up.

He rubbed his sore neck, finding it more challenging to

swallow. The force used against him had clearly had killing intent.

Ba Nanxu felt the spot where Li Huowang had kicked her and wiped the blood from the corner of her mouth. Her lipstick-painted lips parted, revealing blood-stained gums.

Her forked tongue flicked quickly from the bloody water and then retracted. "Damn it, I'm starting to like you more and more."

He clenched his teeth, pointed his middle finger at her, and then turned towards a takeout bag.

He opened the meal box, which contained Yangzhou fried rice, radish, and pork rib soup in a clay pot. Ignoring Ba Shengqing, who had brought the food, he grabbed a pair of disposable chopsticks and started eating heartily.

He glanced around as he ate. They were in an abandoned factory filled with rusty pipes and puddles of stagnant water.

He had been staying here for some time now. Zhao Shuangdian had said they would counterattack, but she had yet to appear since that day.

If not for the brother-sister duo interacting with him, Li Huowang might have thought they'd forgotten about him.

The sparring matches were Li Huowang's idea. He wanted to become stronger, and the Ba siblings truly had some skills. His progress in combat had been swift during this period.

"Hey maniac, you're on TV! That one-eyed look of yours is pretty photogenic," Ba Nanxu said, waving her phone at Li Huowang as she ate.

Li Huowang didn't even glance up and continued to wolf down his meal. "Any news from Zhao Shuangdian yet? I'm tired of just sparring with you every day. Weren't we supposed to act next month? There are only a few days left."

Ba Nanxu lit a cigarette with a click of her lighter. "Why the rush? She's sorting out fake passports. It won't be long."

"Passports? What for?"

“What do you think? To leave the country, obviously.”

Li Huowang paused in surprise. He hadn't expected Zhao Shuangdian's plan to involve that.

“Will getting a passport allow us to reach another elephant?” Li Huowang said. He felt like things couldn't be that simple.

He pressed further and said, “Where are we going?”

“Don't ask. Once we get there, you just need to take care of them. You don't really care, do you?”

Li Huowang slammed his chopsticks down, looking impatiently at the siblings. “Why shouldn't I care? Don't forget they tried to kill me before!”

“Call Zhao Shuangdian. I want to ask her what's going on.”

Ba Nanxu rolled her eyes and tossed her phone at him. “Call her yourself.”

Li Huowang grabbed the phone and quickly found Zhao Shuangdian's name in the contacts. After a few short rings, her composed voice came through,

—Hello, Li Huowang. What's up?

“When are we leaving? Give me a clear answer. Stop stringing me along.”

—We're leaving tonight. Don't sleep.

“Fine. If we're going to make a move now, you need to tell me more about this other elephant. We need to know our enemy to win.”

—There's nothing more to say. I've already explained. They're the same people who tried to kill you.

—I can't explain what they appear like to me. Even if I could, you wouldn't understand. You're touching the trunk while I'm touching the tusks.

—I'll take you to the location. Just see for yourself what they look like to you.

Her words reminded Li Huowang of the people who had once

monitored him.

After a brief pause, Li Huowang said, "I need weapons."

—Of course. I'll arrange that. However, I need you to promise me one thing: once we're there, follow my orders. No questions asked.

"Sure, sure, got it!" Li Huowang impatiently pulled the phone away from his ear, ready to hang up.

—Wait, this is important. I need you to confirm. If you display any doubts or disobedience once we're there, I'll consider it a betrayal of your own elephant.

"Any doubts or disobedience?" Li Huowang pondered her words. Something felt off. "What exactly is going on there?"

—I'll explain when we arrive. It's too complicated to explain now.

Zhao Shuangdian abruptly ended the call, leaving a lingering beep in Li Huowang's ear.

He tossed the phone back to Ba Nanxu, frowning as he mulled over Zhao Shuangdian's words. There hadn't been such strict rules before.

Over there, could I really betray my own elephant? And if I did, what would the consequences be?

It was hard to imagine how bizarre the world of god Yu'er might be.

As Li Huowang was thinking, two fingers painted in black nail polish snapped in front of him.

"Hey maniac, are you done eating? Ready for round two?" Ba Nanxu clicked her brass knuckles together, creating sparks.

Li Huowang looked at her and said, "Can I ask you something?"

Ba Nanxu shook her head immediately. "Don't give me any of your crazy talk. I'm not arguing with a lunatic. You in or not? If not, I'm heading back to my shop."

“I’m in!” Li Huowang gritted his teeth, clenched his fists, and stood up again.

Chapter 893 - Journey

That night, Li Huowang lay fully clothed on his bed, waiting for them to arrive.

As soon as he saw the clock on the wall striking midnight, a harsh scraping noise reverberated through the air, signaling the opening of the steel factory's door.

He grabbed his belongings and walked out of the steel factory, where two off-road vehicles awaited him. The high beams blinded him, making it difficult to open his eyes.

Zhao Shuangdian's voice came from behind the glaring white lights. "Get in."

When Li Huowang reached the car door, he noticed that besides Zhao Shuangdian and the Ba siblings, there were two unfamiliar men and a woman inside.

Li Huowang quickly glanced at them before opening the rear door and sitting down. However, as soon as he sat, he felt something beneath him.

He reached down and found two sheathed military knives.

Once Li Huowang unsheathed them, he realized they were his knives. They were still stained with dried blood.

"Thanks," Li Huowang said to Zhao Shuangdian, who was sitting in the front passenger seat.

The engine roared to life, and the off-road vehicle headed towards the airport.

"No need to thank me. Remember that we're on the same side. I wouldn't harm you."

Li Huowang slid the knives back into their sheaths and strapped them to his back. "A bulletproof vest would've been nice."

Zhao Shuangdian didn't respond. She massaged her forehead

gently, her brows furrowed as if deep in thought.

Li Huowang turned his attention to the other three in the car. The first man was driving and had a rugged look accentuated by a scruffy beard. Despite the chilly weather, he was wearing a short-sleeved shirt.

On the other hand, the man in the passenger seat had a stern expression and a slender, lanky build. He was skillfully flipping a coin with his fingers.

The last person was a girl who appeared weak and wore glasses. She looked frail, but there was something odd about her. Her face twitched intermittently.

Li Huowang eyed them cautiously, trying to figure out what Simings they were. The bearded guy seemed like a military Siming or some commander.

The stern-faced man turned his gaze from the window to Li Huowang. "You know it's rude to stare, right?"

"Li Huowang," he said, extending his hand toward the man. However, the man didn't shake his hand.

"I know who you are, Li Huowang. You're pretty famous. Everyone knows who you are," the man said slowly before turning to face the window again.

Li Huowang sensed their cold attitude and didn't bother responding. He turned to Zhao Shuangdian. "Is it just us? It seems like there are too few people. Aren't we just walking into certain death?"

"Don't worry, more people will meet us at the airport," Zhao Shuangdian replied, closing her eyes.

"How confident are you in this operation?"

"Sixty percent."

"Only sixty?" Li Huowang was reminded of Qian Fu's death and what happened to the other forty percent.

"Never expect anything to be a hundred percent. If something's

guaranteed, it's probably a trap."

Li Huowang's heart sank. He could only hope that the reinforcements at the airport would be more helpful.

The stern man tossed a mask to Li Huowang. "Put on the mask. You can't just walk into the airport with your face. It's simply inviting trouble."

After five hours, they finally reached another city's airport, just as dawn was beginning to break.

Li Huowang, now wearing the mask, reached the waiting area. He was stunned by the person he saw—Qing Wanglai.

Qing Wanglai, dressed in a suit, shook hands with Zhao Shuangdian. "It must have been a tiring journey."

Zhao Lei, Chen Hongyu, and Wu Qi were behind him, all slumped in chairs.

"Them?! They're the reinforcements?" Li Huowang was utterly shocked to see his former comrades.

"Who else? Not many people truly understand the situation they're in."

The two groups gathered together, leaving Li Huowang standing bewildered by himself.

By dawn, the first rays of sunlight pierced through, and the plane carrying Li Huowang and the others soared into the clouds.

Li Huowang sat in his seat, finally accepting the idea of reuniting with Qing Wanglai.

Although Qing Wanglai was a petty person who burned his bridges easily, Li Huowang didn't blame him for the things that happened to Nana that day. And even though he wasn't trustworthy, it was still better than dealing with complete strangers.

Qing Wanglai sat next to Li Huowang and extended his hand. "I didn't expect you to end up on Zhao Shuangdian's side."

"I had no choice. The last group I followed was too unreliable, so I had to switch."

Qing Wanglai didn't seem to catch the sarcasm in Li Huowang's words. He smiled pleasantly. "Really? That's good. I thought you bought into her theories."

Li Huowang glanced at Zhao Shuangdian, who was dozing off with an eye mask. "I don't believe in her elephant theory. Your projection theory feels more realistic."

"Oh?"

Li Huowang gritted his teeth and glared at Qing Wanglai. "Of course not! I don't care about your ridiculous theories! I don't want what happened previously to happen again! I simply want to solve this mess and not be labeled a lunatic anymore!"

After a moment of contemplation, Qing Wanglai replied, "You may not believe it, but I never gave up on you. If we survive this, I'll help you regain your freedom."

"Yeah, right," Li Huowang scoffed and turned away. "I'm wanted across the country. Tell me, how will you help me regain my freedom?"

"When you return to the country, turn yourself in immediately," Qing Wanglai replied.

Li Huowang looked at him like he was an idiot.

"Don't worry. It's just the first step. You're considered mentally ill. No matter how many times you've escaped from prison, your final punishment will be confinement in a psychiatric hospital."

"After you cool off in there for a while, I can buy out a psychiatric hospital and get you transferred there. After that, it'll be easy to do whatever we want."

"Oh wow, what a grand gesture by Boss Qing, buying an entire psychiatric hospital just for me. I'm so touched."

Qing Wanglai could tell that Li Huowang still didn't trust him and dropped the subject. He stood up and whispered something into Zhao Shuangdian's ear as she slept.

Li Huowang had not slept the entire night, so he planned to

close his eyes and recharge his batteries for what was to come.

As he was about to drift off, something caught his eye. There was a small white object below the seat in front of him.

He frowned, reached down, and picked it up. He held it up between his fingers, and his pupils narrowed. *A die?*

He glanced around and saw everyone acting normally. Holding the die close, he muttered, "Why are you here? Do you really think you belong in a battle between Simings?"

Chapter 894 - Plane

Li Huowang glanced at the scenery outside the window. From the plane, the houses looked as small as matchboxes.

He slowly brought his left hand up to his mouth, revealing a black-and-white die—the same one he had just picked up.

However, Li Huowang knew it wasn't just a coincidence. It was Shai Zi.

He admired the view as he whispered to the tiny die in his hand. "You secretly followed me. What exactly do you want?

"Don't answer. Even if you say something now, I can't hear it. No matter how powerful you used to be, you're just a tiny, immobile trinket in my hand right now.

"Shai Zi, I don't know if you helped last time or not, but I'm a Siming now. There's no going back for me, yet I can still influence things over there.

"We've had enough interactions by now. We're practically acquaintances. Why not stick to what you're good at?"

Li Huowang lowered his gaze, staring at the die in his palm. "You can't help me here, but over there, you can. Don't tell me that you can't even manage this as the leader of the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

"If you do it right, I'll give you some benefits. However, don't blame me for destroying you if you fail or try anything sneaky. Right now, you're nothing to me! I could crush you easily."

To demonstrate his point, Li Huowang opened his mouth and tossed the die inside.

His expression contorted as he gently pressed his teeth, causing the die to deform. It appeared that the die would break under any additional pressure.

He spat it back out and glared at the saliva-covered die with teeth marks. “Got it?”

At that moment, an air stewardess walked down the aisle. Li Huowang quickly clenched his fist, nodding and flashing her a polite smile.

Once she was gone, Li Huowang opened his palm again and whispered, “I don’t plan for you to do anything too difficult. Just ensure you take care of the people I care about over there.”

He paused for a moment before he added, “And Li Sui. Don’t play dumb. You know who and what I care about.”

Li Huowang sensed someone watching him. He quickly turned and noticed that Zhao Lei was staring at him. His mouth was slightly open, and he held his phone in shock.

Li Huowang whispered one last time to the die, “I know you’ve made plenty of enemies. Neither side likes you, so it’s settled. If you can handle this, I’ll protect you. From now on, you’ll be my Twisted One.”

He stuffed the die into his pocket and glared at Zhao Lei. “What are you looking at?”

Zhao Lei’s lips quivered slightly, but he said nothing and turned back to his phone.

Outside, the landscape was drawing closer, which meant they were nearing their destination.

“Alright, that’s enough. You’ll take this plane back to our elephant when we land. This mess isn’t something you can handle.” Li Huowang flicked the die, letting it roll beneath the seat in front of him.

Li Huowang had no idea where they were after getting off the plane, as he couldn’t understand the local language. Still, the place was undeniably hot, like a tropical region.

Zhao Shuangdian had changed into a short-sleeved shirt and proceeded to walk ahead. She quickly dialed a number to contact

someone.

Qing Wanglai approached Li Huowang. “We were supposed to have another ally, but unfortunately, she couldn’t make it. If she had, our chances would’ve been better.”

“Who? Why didn’t she come?”

“You didn’t let her. You sent her back to her hometown and had her parents closely monitor her, ensuring she couldn’t leave.”

“Yang Na?!” Li Huowang’s expression darkened. He jabbed a finger into Qing Wanglai’s chest. “Don’t drag her into this. I’ll kill you if you involve her in any way.”

“Li Huowang, let’s be reasonable. Why do you always make decisions for others? Shouldn’t this be her choice to make?”

Li Huowang clenched his teeth, and his expression twisted with rage. “She’s ill! Her thoughts aren’t even her own right now! I’ll say it one last time: keep her out of this.”

“Fine, I get it. No need to repeat yourself. You made it very clear when you took her away.”

Despite Qing Wanglai’s attitude, Li Huowang didn’t want to stir up trouble at the moment. He yanked the rubber mask off his head and revealed his actual face.

The sound of car horns filled the air as a number of SUVs driven by foreigners appeared ahead of them.

“Let’s go.” Zhao Shuangdian nodded toward the vehicles and walked toward them.

After leaving the airport, Li Huowang realized the place was even more desolate than he had imagined. Airports were typically situated in big cities, but this one only had a small town nearby, visible in its entirety with just a single glance.

A few minutes later, the SUVs left the town and drove off the asphalt road into a desert.

Li Huowang instinctively reached behind him and gripped the familiar handles of his knives.

“Are they supposed to be here? How can anyone even live in a place like this?” Li Huowang asked Zhao Shuangdian, who was sitting in the front passenger seat.

“Who says they’re even human?” Zhao Shuangdian said, crossing her arms. She opened a hidden compartment, took out a pair of dark red sunglasses, and put them on.

Time passed, and the sky grew darker. The SUV’s headlights lit the way until they reached a low-lying area in the desert and came to a halt.

“Get out and grab your gear,” Zhao Shuangdian said. Everyone immediately disembarked and opened the trunk.

The group remained serious and focused despite traveling all day with little rest.

Li Huowang saw Zhao Shuangdian assembling a black sniper rifle. He frowned and drew his two knives. “Hold on, you get that while I’m stuck with these?”

“Want to trade? Can you even use this?” Zhao Shuangdian offered him the rifle, but Li Huowang didn’t take it.

He had never used one before, and an unfamiliar weapon wouldn’t be more effective.

“Li Huowang, over here,” a voice called out. Li Huowang turned towards the voice and spotted Wu Qi and Chen Hongyu, who were unloading a bulky suit and helmet from the trunk of their SUV.

Li Huowang recognized it immediately. It was his old bulletproof suit.

Chapter 895 - Strike

“Thanks.”

Li Huowang quickly put on the bulletproof vest with their help. It gave him peace of mind since they would soon confront an unknown enemy.

“Don’t thank us. Qing Wanglai was the one who prepared it for you. You obviously wouldn’t bring one.”

Li Huowang looked at Qing Wanglai, who was loading a magazine into his handgun. Qing Wanglai smiled and nodded back at him.

Wu Qi seemed like the most ordinary person in Qing Wanglai’s group, so Li Huowang turned to her. “Sister Wu, do you really trust Qing Wanglai? You’ve seen what kind of person he is. You must be aware by now.”

“Of course I know,” Wu Qi said, placing a helmet on Li Huowang’s head.

“But don’t you think dealing with someone like him is pretty simple? As long as you understand what makes him tick.” Wu Qi knocked on Li Huowang’s helmet. “Li Huowang, don’t assume that Zhao Shuangdian is any better. No one here is normal.”

Li Huowang remained silent, turning his attention to Wu Qi and Zhao Shuangdian’s weapons instead.

Wu Qi appeared unarmed, carrying only a medical kit. She seemed prepared to serve as a field medic this time.

As for Chen Hongyu, she pulled a nail-covered spiked mace from the trunk,

“We’re about to go into combat, and that’s what you’re bringing?” Li Huowang asked.

Chen Hongyu shrugged indifferently. “No worries, I don’t rely

on this. I have special abilities.”

Li Huowang sighed deeply and walked away from her.

He approached Zhao Shuangdian, who was adjusting the sights on her sniper rifle. “What’s the plan?”

“Follow her,” Zhao Shuangdian replied, pointing with her painted red nails at the frail, twitchy girl nearby.

The girl was unarmed, unlike the others. She pulled out a tablet and started to tap quickly.

Once everyone was ready and gathered, Zhao Shuangdian repeated the plan. “Remember, from now on, follow my instructions—no doubts or disobedience.

“No matter what the world looks like to you, the first thing to remember is that we’re all on the same team. Never betray your comrades.

“Don’t hesitate. Eliminate any signs of hostility.

“One last thing. We’re currently outside the elephant while they are inside.”

Zhao Shuangdian nodded to the girl, prompting her to put on a pair of VR glasses connected to the tablet.

She started to scan the dark desert as the group moved forward.

It was nighttime, but not pitch black. Their surroundings were in a strange state—barely visible, yet shrouded in obscurity.

Li Huowang walked at the front, dragging his heavy gear. He gripped his knives, ready to charge at the enemy at any moment.

“Is this going to work? Can we really get to another elephant this way?”

Despite his doubts about Zhao Shuangdian’s plan, Li Huowang was determined to give it his all and wait for tangible results.

Until he saw actual proof, everything they said was merely a theory to him, not reality.

To his surprise, the search took much longer than expected.

They still hadn't found anything after about an hour of walking across the desert.

Suddenly, Li Huowang spotted something. He grabbed Zhao Lei's flashlight and shone it on the ground. "Wait!"

Everyone gathered around.

"Look! There are footprints here, and they're ours! We've been walking in circles!"

Zhao Shuangdian pulled her sunglasses down slightly and stared at Li Huowang's face hidden inside his helmet. Her words came slowly and deliberately. "Follow orders."

Li Huowang didn't say anything else. He tossed the flashlight aside and continued walking.

He couldn't understand how circling around outside the elephant would get them inside.

Another hour passed, and Li Huowang began to feel exhausted. Although they were walking slowly, his gear was incredibly heavy.

A gunshot rang out, and Li Huowang's exhaustion dissipated instantly. He turned to see Zhao Shuangdian lower her sniper rifle, which she had previously rested on Ba Shengqing's shoulder.

Li Huowang tightened his grip on his weapons and charged in the direction where the rifle was pointing.

He was shocked to see a vast pool of blood on the ground. Judging by the amount, it appeared as though someone had lost almost all of their blood. However, against all odds, they had somehow managed to escape. It was unbelievable.

Zhao Shuangdian dipped a finger into the blood, then put it in her mouth and tasted it. "They know we're here."

"Be alert. Our enemies are not just on one side. We still don't know from which side they'll attack."

Zhao Shuangdian turned to the girl with the glasses. "Ling, how's it going? Are we close?"

"The elephant is formless--"

Before she could finish her sentence, a bullet shredded her tongue and exited through her mouth.

Her head exploded, and half of her terrified face landed at Li Huowang's feet.

"Get down! They've got an anti-materiel rifle!"

As the girl's headless body fell, everyone except Chen Hongyu immediately dropped to the ground. She was standing in place and channeling her energy.

"Mm... mm...!!" Chen Hongyu, who was concentrating her energy on her dantian, was tackled by Li Huowang.

"Do you want to die?!"

"Let me go! Let me use my power!"

Li Huowang held Chen Hongyu down while cursing Qing Wanglai in his mind for bringing a useless lunatic with them.

"Let her go. She can handle it," Qing Wanglai said calmly. Zhao Shuangdian echoed the command, and Li Huowang finally rolled off Chen Hongyu after a moment of hesitation.

He lay on the ground and watched as she stood up again, curious about how she intended to solve this crisis.

Clack, clack, clack. Multiple flashlights flickered and illuminated Chen Hongyu, making her an easy target in the dark desert.

Gunshots rang as Chen Hongyu levitated while channeling her powers, and she fell to the ground.

"Enemy at eleven o'clock!" Zhao Shuangdian's voice rang out. Everyone with a gun immediately opened fire in that direction.

Once the shooting stopped, they tossed over a red flare, which revealed two corpses in the distance.

Li Huowang looked at Chen Hongyu's lifeless body on the ground. He clenched his teeth in rage as he glared at Zhao Shuangdian and Qing Wanglai. "So this was your plan? To use her as bait?"

“No, she had special abilities. I simply chose to believe in her,”
Qing Wanglai replied with a smile.

Chapter 896 - On The Way

Li Huowang stood frozen in place, his gaze fixed on Qing Wanglai. He trembled, trying his best to suppress his anger.

Qing Wanglai looked so sincere that if Li Huowang hadn't known his true nature, he might have believed him.

Although he had long known that Qing Wanglai was a wolf in sheep's clothing, every time he revealed his true colors, Li Huowang still found himself surprised. Qing Wanglai could use his companions as bait to deal with the enemy without batting an eyelid.

"You... you!" Li Huowang shook his head, trying to say something. In the end, no words came out.

He turned away and approached Chen Hongyu's corpse, her face a mangled mess. He reached out with his trembling hands to lift her body.

"Sister Chen, how could you just die like this? You were the Siming in charge of decay!"

"You can't die! If you die, decay will vanish too..."

Li Huowang couldn't help but think of the Abbess when he saw Chen Hongyu. She was now gone, just like Qian Fu. The sight of someone he had previously chatted with dying like that filled him with pain.

"Enough. Get ready, we're moving on."

Li Huowang felt someone pat him on the shoulder and flung the hand away forcefully. He turned to glare at the person who had tapped him—Zhao Shuangdian.

Zhao Shuangdian didn't offer an explanation. She simply

looked at Li Huowang. “What did I tell you before we started? Follow orders, no matter what happens. We don’t have time for grief.”

Li Huowang stared into her eyes and slowly laid Chen Hongyu’s body down. “All of you are the same! You’re just like the others! You’re responsible for Chen Hongyu’s death too!”

Click! Zhao Shuangdian pressed the barrel of her black sniper rifle against Li Huowang’s chest. “Don’t forget what I said earlier. Li Huowang, let me ask you one more time: are you refusing to follow my orders?”

“If you refuse to comply, whether you realize it or not, you’re already one of them.”

As she spoke, her team coldly looked at Li Huowang and surrounded him. This included the two men they had recently met as well as the Ba siblings.

Li Huowang gritted his teeth and gripped his knives’ handles tightly.

As the tension peaked, Qing Wanglai stepped in and positioned himself between Li Huowang and Zhao Shuangdian.

He smiled, patting Li Huowang on the shoulder as he guided him out of the encirclement.

“Li Huowang, this won’t work. It’s alright if you offend me, but if you offend Zhao Shuangdian, you won’t have any friends left.”

Qing Wanglai’s voice was filled with sincerity. “I remember you once said we’re friends, right? So, as a friend, could you do me a favor?”

“Who the hell is friends with you?”

Qing Wanglai remained calm in the face of Li Huowang’s temper. He smiled and said, “Just don’t oppose Zhao Shuangdian for now. Let’s work together to get through this crisis. Once we’re back, we can think about dealing with her.”

Li Huowang coldly mulled over Qing Wanglai’s words for a

moment. Then, he shoved him aside and wordlessly returned to the group.

The others saw the change in his attitude, and they dispersed back to their previous positions as if nothing had changed. Only Chen Hongyu remained lying lifelessly on the ground.

“Sister Zhao, I checked the two dead bodies over there. They’re poachers,” said a bearded man carrying a heavy-looking gun as he returned from the distance.

“Poachers? Using anti-tank weapons to poach?”

Li Huowang’s question went unanswered. Zhao Shuangdian knelt on one knee and quickly typed on the laptop resting on the ground. “We’re close, just a bit further.”

Li Huowang silently walked up behind her and peered at the screen, where a blue 3D wireframe map rapidly shifted with each keystroke.

Zhao Shuangdian closed the tablet and stood up. “We need to move quickly before their reinforcements catch up.”

“Which way do we go?” Qing Wanglai asked.

Zhao Shuangdian didn’t respond. Instead, she looked at Li Huowang.

“Why are you looking at me? How the hell would I know which way to go?”

“You do know. I have told you that you’re special. Lead the way.”

Her words drew the attention of everyone present.

Li Huowang found the situation absurd. “I don’t even know where we are! How am I supposed to lead you anywhere?”

“You don’t need to know. Just trust your instincts.”

Zhao Shuangdian’s reply left Li Huowang speechless. He thought the others would reject this ridiculous idea, but none of them objected.

“I must have been out of my mind to have trusted you all,” Li

Huowang muttered, stepping into the dark unknown. The rest of the group followed closely behind.

In the pitch-black desert, Li Huowang could only trust his instincts and keep walking. Whether he trusted his instincts or not made no difference since he couldn't see a path anyway.

Dawn slowly broke. Despite walking all night, they were still in the same desolate desert. The surrounding landscape hadn't changed at all.

Li Huowang shoved past the others and struggled to remove his helmet, which revealed his sweat-soaked face. "I'm tired! Let's rest for a bit!"

He lay down right where he was without waiting for a response.

Spending a night stumbling in heavy gear had drained him, especially after their exhausting journey to wherever they were.

Wu Qi walked over and handed him a bottle of clear liquid from her medical kit. "Drink this. Don't get dehydrated."

"What is this?"

"Saline solution for cleaning wounds."

Li Huowang gulped it down, not caring about the saltiness. His body felt much better after that.

Li Huowang sighed deeply and looked at Wu Qi with a complicated expression. "Sister Chen Hongyu is dead."

"I know," Wu Qi replied.

She took the bottle from him and drank a large gulp. A hint of sadness appeared on her face as she gently patted Li Huowang's sweat-drenched hair. "It's okay. Don't be afraid."

"Sister Wu, I'm not afraid. I just don't understand them, and I don't understand you either."

"If you can't understand, then don't try to. Just focus on yourself. Empathy can lead to depression."

"Focus on myself...?" Li Huowang muttered.

He took another big swig from the bottle. He looked around at the barren desert and mumbled to himself, “Why is the place where god Yu’er exists so strange? Is this really the elephant where the Simings live?”

Chapter 897 - Decay

After a short rest, Li Huowang lifted his helmet and resumed walking. Whether it was real or not, they were already halfway there, and he had to continue forward.

As the sun rose, the temperature in the desert increased, making it even more unbearable than at night.

Everyone's faces showed signs of exhaustion, exacerbated by the fatigue of not sleeping or eating all night.

Li Huowang pressed forward in this tired state. By this point, the sun was high up in the sky.

Upon noticing something up ahead, Li Huowang and the others stopped. "Is that... Chen Hongyu?"

Li Huowang froze, looking at the familiar figure ahead. A flicker of joy crossed his face. "Could it be true? Does she possess supernatural abilities? Is she really alive?"

Li Huowang quickly rushed over, slowing down as he got closer.

It was indeed Chen Hongyu, but she hadn't come back to life. Her body had begun to decay under the intense heat, with large flies crawling in and out of her facial orifices while devouring her corpse.

After a day and night of decomposition, Chen Hongyu's corpse gave off an overwhelming stench. Although Li Huowang had killed many people, he had never imagined that a corpse could have such a disgusting smell.

The smell was so overwhelming that it was almost like an invisible wall, stopping Li Huowang from getting closer. It infiltrated his nostrils, causing his stomach to churn. It threatened to make him vomit everything inside.

Even with his helmet on, Li Huowang's eyes stung, and tears flowed uncontrollably. He tried to get closer, but he could not do it.

"Hey, madman! What's going on? Why did you bring us back here?" Ba Nanxu raised her pistol and shot Li Huowang in the back of the head.

Li Huowang stumbled forward a few steps and then turned around furiously. "Shoot me again if you dare!"

Ba Nanxu shot him again. "I'm asking you a question. Can you do this or not?"

"You're asking for it!" Li Huowang charged at Ba Nanxu while the others quickly grabbed him and pulled him back.

Smack! A loud slap echoed as Zhao Shuangdian hit Ba Nanxu across the face. "Don't cause trouble."

Ba Nanxu paused briefly, then tilted her head and chuckled. She stuck out her forked tongue and licked the air in the direction of Zhao Shuangdian before taking a step back.

Zhao Shuangdian ignored her and walked to Li Huowang. "Ignore her. I believe in you. You are the most special one. Keep searching."

Li Huowang paused for a brief moment, silently paying his respects to the lifeless body of Chen Hongyu. Then, he walked around her, determined to leave some marks behind to prevent himself from going in circles again.

After a few steps, he stopped abruptly. If the Siming of Decay had died, why hadn't decay disappeared?

Li Huowang suddenly turned back, rushing toward Chen Hongyu while enduring the overwhelming stench. As he drew near, a cloud of flies rose from her body.

He looked up at the swarm of flies in the air and laughed. "I knew it! I knew it!"

"Li Huowang! What are you doing? Come back!"

"Get away from there! Breathing in too much of that stench can

cause a lung infection!”

He ignored their shouts and focused entirely on the movement of the flies. While most of the flies returned to Chen Hongyu’s body, a few veered towards the east.

“I found it! Let’s go! Decay hasn’t disappeared yet!”

With Li Huowang in pursuit, the flies flew even faster.

Everyone ran behind Li Huowang for a long time, almost exhausting their stamina before he finally stopped.

He stood at the edge of a shallow depression, watching two flies disappear into a hole in the ground.

The opening was just big enough for someone to crouch and crawl inside.

“We’ve found the way into the elephant.”

Once everyone had caught their breath, they prepared their weapons and entered.

The desert heat was intense, but it felt cool and refreshing inside the cave. In fact, some shade-loving plants and mushrooms were even growing in the corners.

The cave showed signs of human construction. It resembled a tunnel, though narrower than typical ones.

After quickly inspecting the structure, Qing Wanglai said, “This is probably part of an ancient Karez water system. It collapsed over time, which exposed the opening.”

“What’s your point?”

“Nothing, just explaining the technical information about the projection in this environment. While Karez tunnels are generally not wide, they can extend over very long distances. A single tunnel can even be comparable in size to multiple football fields. We should be prepared for enemies.”

Li Huowang did not pay any attention to their conversation. He spotted a gray rat crawl along the wall and couldn’t help but smile. His earlier negative emotions faded away.

Suddenly, a squeaking sound echoed through the tunnel from the direction where the rat had disappeared. Li Huowang's heart sank, and he charged into the darkness. "Light a flare!"

A red flare illuminated the dark tunnel. Li Huowang was already in motion, lunging toward a shadowy figure with his military knife.

A black umbrella came from the shadows and blocked his knife, sending sparks flying.

Li Huowang was about to counterattack when gunfire erupted and forced him back.

He looked at the figures emerging from the darkness and shouted back, "What are you waiting for? Help me!"

"Help with what?" Qing Wanglai asked, puzzled.

"What do you mean? Can't you see them? There are so many of them! Are you all blind?"

"No, we can't see anything."

Li Huowang turned around in shock and noticed the bewilderment on their faces. "You guys can't see them? You really can't see them? Could it be..."

As the realization dawned on him, the shadowy figures disappeared into the darkness.

Li Huowang paced back and forth while he panted heavily. He occasionally slammed his fist against his helmeted head.

The image of the swarm of flies and the gray rat flashed repeatedly in his mind. He felt a wave of suppressed anger and sorrow growing inside him.

Finally, Li Huowang stopped in his tracks. He raised his head and smashed it against the wall. "I knew it! I told you I wasn't okay, but you insisted I was! I'm insane! How could I lead anyone anywhere?!"

Chapter 898 - Contact

In the dim underground culvert^[1] of the Karez system, Qing Wanglai reached out to catch the dust that gently fell from above due to the vibrations. The unstable structure made everyone feel uneasy.

Qing Wanglai tried to calm Li Huowang, who was hysterically banging his head against the wall. “Li Huowang, you’d better stop. We don’t know how old this Karez system is. If you collapse this culvert, we’ll all get buried here.”

Li Huowang suddenly froze in place like a statue. It wasn’t because of Qing Wanglai’s words. It was because Zhao Shuangdian pressed a finger to her lips.

Zhao Shuangdian hushed him, and the noise gradually died down.

She seemed to have noticed something. His heart started to race as he became confident that she had unearthed something beyond his hallucinations.

Ba Nanxu saw Zhao Shuangdian crouch down silently and immediately threw herself over. She kneeled on the ground and used her back and hips to support the rifle.

Zhao Shuangdian stared into the pitch-black culvert ahead for a long time before suddenly pulling the trigger.

Bang! Blood appeared to seep out from the distant darkness.

Was I right? Could it be that what happened earlier wasn’t entirely my hallucination?

Li Huowang felt a surge of joy at the possibility, motivating him to charge forward. The gunfire behind him didn’t slow him down—it spurred him to move even faster.

When he emerged from the darkness again, he grabbed a

terrified black man with both hands. “Can you all see him? Can you see him now? Is this man real or just another of my hallucinations?”

Everyone nodded, acknowledging that they could see the man. Li Huowang burst into laughter before raising his knife and stabbing it into the man’s neck.

As Li Huowang yanked the knife out of the man’s neck, a chunk of his trachea still clinging to it, a powerful force suddenly struck him from behind and sent him flying.

The force was so strong that Li Huowang was launched into the air. He saw the uneven ground below and knew that if he hit the ground, he would sustain serious injuries.

Li Huowang didn’t want to get injured right after finding the enemy. He used all his strength to position the corpse beneath him as he fell.

Thud! Li Huowang landed heavily on the corpse, its face and skin grinding onto the rough ground below.

Li Huowang panted as he stood back up and returned to the side of his comrades. Everyone focused ahead, and more people began to emerge from the darkness.

They were human and primarily black people. They all held various firearms, though many of them were injured, likely from the earlier confrontation.

At the forefront was a towering black man. He looked at the body of his fallen comrade with a hint of restrained anger. Instead of lashing out, he furrowed his brow and looked at Li Huowang. “Nafurahi kukuona[2].”

Qing Wanglai stepped forward past Li Huowang, smiling as he replied, “Jumbo na gomvi maridhawa[3].”

The man’s expression softened slightly since Qing Wanglai could communicate. He stepped closer and continued, “Rafiki, mungu wetu na mfalme wetu[4].”

The next moment, Qing Wanglai raised his hand and shot the

man in the head. The element of surprise had allowed him to get rid of their leader.

“Nye[5]!” Furious shouts erupted as the enemy raised their weapons.

Without hesitation, Qing Wanglai turned and hid behind Li Huowang, pushing him forward with both hands.

“Get out of the way!” Li Huowang kicked backward, using the momentum to charge forward with his knife.

Li Huowang’s sharp blade sliced through flesh. Sensing the vibration of the blade, he slid it to the joint and cut off the enemy’s arm with a resounding crack.

As he saw a heavy weapon aimed at him from afar, he roared and used his knives to impale the man. Li Huowang used him as a shield and advanced on the others.

Gunfire erupted, and Li Huowang’s human shield was quickly torn into shreds. He had crouched just in time to dodge the attack.

Li Huowang gripped his knife and hurled it at the shooter, hitting them with pinpoint accuracy.

It wasn’t over yet. He couldn’t let that weapon fall into enemy hands. His bulletproof vest wouldn’t stop that kind of firepower.

As Li Huowang was about to charge forward and clear a path, a dark object rolled to his feet.

A grenade?! Li Huowang lifted his right foot and kicked it away.

Before it could get far, a massive explosion shook the ground.

Li Huowang bore the brunt of the blast since he was the closest to it. If it weren’t for his equipment, he might have died.

Even so, when the dust settled, he found himself buried in debris, with only one hand exposed.

In the darkness, he felt someone pat his hand to signal him to stay calm. After a while, his surroundings lit up as he was rescued from beneath the rubble. He finally felt a sense of camaraderie as he watched his companions work together to clear the debris from

him.

“Are you okay? Can you hear me? Li Huowang, how many fingers am I holding up?” Wu Qi’s face swayed before him while his head buzzed.

Li Huowang turned around and looked at the collapsed culvert, now filled with rubble. There were no more enemies in sight.

The buzzing in Li Huowang’s head subsided a bit, and he could hear Qing Wanglai’s voice nearby.

Qing Wanglai said, “They intentionally did this to block our way and prevent us from getting closer.”

He took out a compass from his pocket and shook it briefly. “But it’s fine. This will only delay us. Karez systems are long, with access points at various intervals. If we follow this direction, we’ll find another entrance.

“Alright, let’s not waste any more time. Judging by their reaction, we’ve found the right place.”

Li Huowang, lying on the ground, suddenly reached out and grabbed Qing Wanglai’s ankle tightly. “Three Pure Ones! I’ve been meaning to ask you this for a while. How come you speak their language? Are you close to them?”

-
1. A structure to channel water past obstacles. 🤔
 2. Swahili: I’m glad to see you. 🤔
 3. Swahili: Great and wonderful friends. 🤔
 4. Swahili: Friend, our God, and our king. 🤔
 5. Swahili: No 🤔

Chapter 899 - Culvert

Qing Wanglai chuckled and adjusted the bridge of his glasses with one of his fingers. “It’s a secret.”

Qing Wanglai and Wu Qi helped Li Huowang stand up.

“You can communicate with them, so why not try to negotiate and make peace? What do they want? Or do you have some other purpose?”

“If things were that simple, I would’ve done it long ago. It’s too late now. After what happened before, there’s no way for us to coexist peacefully.”

Just then, Wu Qi glanced at Qing Wanglai. “Be careful, his ribs are broken.”

“It’s fine. This wasn’t from the rocks—it was from being smashed by a lunatic earlier. I can walk by myself.” Li Huowang pushed them away forcefully and staggered along with the others to leave the area.

Although Li Huowang was injured, he seemed more composed than before. He now knew that not everything he had seen was a hallucination. Chen Hongyu hadn’t died—she was now another kind of existence.

Li Huowang began to notice a pattern emerging, albeit vaguely. Certain aspects of these peoples’ worldviews were untrue, while others held true to reality.

For example, Qing Wanglai’s projection theory had been confirmed in Chen Hongyu’s case.

Li Huowang quickened his pace, bent down, and picked up a fat, gray rat lying on the moss. “Are you okay?”

The shockwave left it stunned, but it was still alive.

Li Huowang placed it on his shoulder and walked out, ignoring

the hushed comments coming from behind.

They returned to the hot desert, with Qing Wanglai taking the lead this time. Fortunately, the paths he had mentioned earlier were there. After about an hour of traveling toward the collapsed area, a dark wellhead came into view.

“The collapse should be about a kilometer away. If we enter from here, we won’t be blocked,” Qing Wanglai said, slipping the compass into his pocket.

He continued, “There’s just one problem. We don’t know if those people are waiting to ambush us below. So, we need someone to scout ahead.”

The well was deep and dark, and its interior was completely unknown.

Everyone looked at each other, and eventually, all eyes fell on Li Huowang.

“Why me? Do I have ‘sucker’ written on my face?”

Qing Wanglai said, “Li Huowang, this isn’t just for everyone else—it’s also for yourself. Your gear is better than ours, and if you help us, I’ll agree to do one thing for you—anything within my power.”

“Sorry, I don’t buy into empty promises. If you want to be fair, let’s draw lots.”

Li Huowang had lost all trust in them, having witnessed how they manipulated Chen Hongyu. While thinking about this, he glanced down at the rat he was holding. It had woken up and was sniffing around.

He gently stroked the rat’s head, but a look of panic suddenly crossed his face.

He hurried over to Zhao Lei and lifted the rat to his face. “Can you see this? Tell me, can you see this rat?”

Zhao Lei jumped back, startled. “Yes, I see it! I see it! Li Huowang, what’s gotten into you? You’re acting crazier and

crazier!”

“If you can see it, I know it’s not a hallucination,” Li Huowang said, gently patting the rat’s head and taking a long breath.

He paused for a second before walking over to Qing Wanglai and Zhao Shuangdian, who were discussing their next steps.

“I can go down and scout the path, but there’s something I’ll need you to do for me when we return.”

“What is it?” Zhao Shuangdian asked.

“I need you to help me get the prescription meds Yi Donglai gave me regularly.”

Li Huowang knew he couldn’t continue like this, confusing reality with hallucinations.

If he was genuinely ill, he needed to keep taking his medications. Although they wouldn’t cure him, they could at least help stabilize his condition and prevent further hallucinations.

Qing Wanglai and Zhao Shuangdian exchanged glances and nodded. “Alright.”

Li Huowang wasted no time. He headed straight to the well.

He placed his feet against the sides of the well and peered into the pitch-black darkness below. A cold wind whistled up from within, adding to the sense of danger.

“Light a flare.”

As he reached out to take the flare stick, the rat in his hand suddenly wriggled free and leaped into the darkness below.

Li Huowang tried to stop it. However, the rat had already disappeared into the darkness.

After a brief pause, Li Huowang shouted, “Sister Chen! How’s it down there? Are there any ambushes?”

Faint squeaking echoed up from the depths. Li Huowang relaxed his legs and swiftly descended.

As soon as he landed, he raised the flare stick high. The bright red light illuminated everything around him.

Li Huowang scanned the surroundings, finding no trace of any enemies. He waved the flare stick, signaling for the rest of the group to descend.

While waiting for them, Li Huowang said, "Sister Chen, thank you. You don't need to help me next time. I can handle it myself."

At that moment, Wu Qi climbed down the rope and looked at Li Huowang with concern. "Who are you talking to?"

Li Huowang shook his head and did not offer any explanation. He knew that no one would believe him anyway.

"Stay on high alert," said Zhao Shuangdian, taking the lead. "We have already alerted the enemy, so they will be on high alert now."

Li Huowang had believed their side had the advantage, but now it seemed like they were walking into a death trap. "Are you sure there are enough of us? It looks like they have way more people."

Zhao Shuangdian shook her head. "They're not as strong as you think, and we're not as weak as you think. Last time, we hurt them badly. They're scared now."

She turned to Li Huowang. "There's no need to force yourself to understand me. It's fine. You can interpret things through your own worldview.

"Whether it's the elephant's tusk or leg, both are parts of the same elephant. Everything is interconnected.

"However you perceive me in your world, that's exactly what I am."

Li Huowang looked at her delicate profile. "I'd like to know, but right now, I really don't understand what kind of Siming you are."

The culvert grew quieter as they advanced. They even switched off their flashlights, moving forward in complete darkness to avoid detection.

After about half an hour, the air became thick with the acrid smell of burning metal and chemicals. The stench was unbearable, even through Li Huowang's helmet.

Qing Wanglai's soft voice reached his ears. "That's the smell of methamphetamine. We're almost there."

Chapter 900 - Fight

Li Huowang panted heavily, his breath causing the bulletproof glass to repeatedly fog up and then quickly dissipate.

The air in the culvert was stagnant. Li Huowang felt increasingly irritated, especially after walking for so long with nothing to show for it.

“That smell in the air is getting stronger. Qing Wanglai, what was that thing you mentioned earlier?”

Qing Wanglai didn't answer Li Huowang's question. He gripped his gun and stood behind Li Huowang as if he were a human shield.

“Shh... We're almost there...” Zhao Shuangdian walked past Li Huowang, deliberately lowering her voice as she spoke.

Her fingers rapidly moved across the keys of her laptop as if she were playing the piano. Only she could understand whatever was displayed on her screen.

After walking through the chilly tunnel for about twenty more minutes, Zhao Shuangdian abruptly extended her hand and snatched Zhao Lei's crossbow. She aimed the weapon into the darkness ahead.

The sound of metal tore through the air. There was no immediate movement, but Li Huowang knew something had died in the dark.

They approached slowly and illuminated the area with their flashlights, revealing a man lying beside the tunnel with a bolt through his neck. A large iron door protruded from the wall beside him.

This man had been guarding the door, but Zhao Shuangdian had taken him out before he could raise the alarm.

“Shh...” Li Huowang stepped forward and pulled the door open

a crack.

Bright light poured out from the crack, making it hard for him to keep his eyes open after being in the dark for so long. Once his eyes adjusted, he was stunned by the sight of an empty factory within.

There was a factory beneath this desolate desert. This was something he hadn't expected.

The area had been completely hollowed out, creating a space approximately the size of half a soccer field. Various items were scattered haphazardly throughout, with bags of raw materials, jars, and freezers being the most numerous among them.

In the distance, there was a railway track with several minecarts parked on it, suggesting it had been used for transporting goods.

Li Huowang couldn't tell what this factory produced. However, he felt a sense of familiarity, as if he had seen a similar scene on television before.

He quickly pieced everything together. This place had been used to produce drugs, and these people were drug lords. It explained why the sentry outside was armed with an anti-material rifle.

The factory seemed to be closed. Black-masked workers frantically loaded goods onto the minecarts while armed men paced nervously and shouted orders.

It was evident that the earlier disturbance had alarmed them.

Li Huowang quickly counted the people and was startled to see at least one or two hundred of them. He knew that his group was no match for such a large number.

The others had also seen what was happening through the crack of the door. Without hesitation, Zhao Shuangdian said, "See that generator? That's their power source. On my count, fire at it."

Her tone was calm. It was as if she had anticipated this, even

though the enemy outnumbered them ten to one.

“What’s the point of charging in? We’re sending ourselves to our deaths. Didn’t you see their firepower?” Li Huowang whispered. He knew that they were outmatched in every way.

When Zhao Shuangdian mentioned a counter-attack, he initially thought the two sides would be somewhat evenly matched. But now, it was clear that the enemy far outclassed them.

With their current group, they could not win against so many Simings. To have a chance, they needed to bring reinforcements from the Simings in the Baiyu Capital.

“Remember what I said earlier? Let me ask you again.” Zhao Shuangdian’s chilling voice emerged from behind. “Are you refusing to follow my orders, Li Huowang?”

Li Huowang stared intently at Zhao Shuangdian, carefully studying her expression. He could tell that she was being sincere and not joking around.

Does she have some hidden trump card I don’t know about? It made sense. While she may not value his life, she couldn’t be reckless with her own.

Even more surprisingly, Qing Wanglai hadn’t objected to such a crazy order.

“Fine, if you’re willing to die, I’ll be happy to dig the graves,” Li Huowang muttered. He stepped aside to allow more guns to point through the door.

“4, 3, 2, 1!” A rapid burst of gunfire filled the air, causing the once vibrant light behind the door to dim instantly. Li Huowang quickly kicked the door open and charged in.

In the pitch-black darkness, Li Huowang couldn’t tell friends from foes. Still, he knew that his allies were all behind him, which meant that anyone in front of him had to be an enemy.

Whenever he ran into someone in the dark, he decisively stabbed them in the heart.

Gunfire suddenly broke out from his left, and a series of bullets painfully struck his vest.

“Take action! What are you standing around for?!” Li Huowang shouted.

The gunfire intensified, surrounding him from all sides. He felt like he was in the middle of a storm of bullets.

At the moment, the darkness had become Li Huowang’s shield, offering him some protection from the barrage of bullets flying all around.

Just as Li Huowang was wreaking havoc, a sharp pain exploded in his back, sending him stumbling to the ground.

He struggled to his feet and looked around at the chaotic scene. The darkness that protected him also concealed the enemy, and he had no idea what had hit him.

He cautiously touched his back and discovered a slight depression. It felt as if he had been struck by a blunt weapon, which his bulletproof vest failed to stop.

Since he couldn’t see anything, he decided not to bother. If he couldn’t see the enemy, they couldn’t see him either.

He crouched down and slashed at any legs he encountered. Every time they screamed and fell, he’d follow up with a knife to silence them.

He wasn’t attacked with any blunt weapons again, suggesting his strategy was working.

The battle had descended into chaos—everyone was killing blindly, unable to see or know who they were killing.

The sharp sound of glass shattering echoed. Moments later, Li Huowang’s mind felt hazy.

It wasn’t just him. He could hear the sounds of people collapsing around him. Fortunately, his helmet slowed the effects.

He reached out and touched a broken test tube. He immediately realized that Qing Wanglai had thrown in some

anesthetic gas.

He had thrown it in without waiting for Li Huowang to move out of the way, aiming to knock out as many people as possible.

“Damn!” Li Huowang fought to stay conscious. Li Huowang ripped off his helmet and drove his military knife into his shoulder blade, using the pain to stay awake.

Chapter 901 - Big

The intense pain jolted Li Huowang back to a state of partial consciousness, but it wasn't sufficient. As the anesthetic took hold, the pain slowly diminished.

He stumbled backward, faintly hearing Wu Qi's voice. Finally, his consciousness slipped away, and he collapsed to the ground.

Li Huowang had no idea how much time had passed, but he gradually regained awareness. The flickering lights on the ceiling made him realize he was still in the factory, and the quiet surroundings indicated that everything was over.

The pain in his head was so intense that Li Huowang could barely lift his hand to touch it, feeling as if his skull might crack open.

"Here, drink some water. Don't worry—this is just a side effect. It'll pass soon," Wu Qi said, helping him up.

"Is it over? Did we win?" Li Huowang turned to see corpses lying around in disarray.

"They escaped, but Zhao Shuangdian said we accomplished our objective. It's time to retreat."

"Retreat?" Li Huowang looked at the others. They were draining the engine oil from the machines and pouring it over everything in the factory. It seemed that they were preparing to set it all ablaze.

Li Huowang had many questions that he wanted to ask Zhao Shuangdian. However, now wasn't the time for questions. He probably wouldn't get any answers now.

With Wu Qi's help, he stood up and retreated into the dark culvert. "Since it's over, let's get out of here."

Li Huowang didn't fully understand what this place translated

to. Based on his experience, this underground factory was likely similar to the Baiyu Capital, and the people they had encountered were the Simings in charge of this place.

However, the more he thought about it, the less sense it made. *God Yu'er is very powerful, so how come the Simings on its side were so weak? They couldn't even take down a small group like this.*

Am I wrong? Could they have torn down the Baiyu Capital? Li Huowang pondered while they retreated further into the darker part of the canal.

Wu Qi propped Li Huowang against the wall and went to help the others.

Li Huowang shook his head violently and glared at Qing Wanglai, who was rummaging through a freezer.

Before he could release his anger, he heard a strange sound coming from the left side of the tunnel. Looking in that direction, he saw many eyes staring at him from the darkness.

Suddenly, a light flickered on. A flashlight rolled across the floor, stopping at Li Huowang's feet and illuminating him—just like what had happened to Chen Hongyu.

"Enemy ambush!" Li Huowang shouted with all his might and threw himself toward the door. At that exact moment, Ba Nanxu flicked a cigarette butt, igniting the factory in flames.

With enemies behind and fire ahead, Li Huowang and the others were trapped.

Li Huowang picked up a helmet, quickly putting it on as the enemies burst through the iron gate.

They were all black people dressed in camouflage uniforms. They erupted in fury at the sight of the burning factory, raising their guns and shouting in a language Li Huowang couldn't understand.

Gunfire erupted, and someone tossed ten grenades toward Li Huowang and his group.

Li Huowang's heart skipped a beat as he watched the black balls of death flying through the air toward him. He was sure he was done for.

Li Huowang lunged forward without hesitation, grabbing two of the grenades before sprinting toward the enemies.

They spotted him holding the grenades and panicked, shooting at him as they retreated toward the door.

Thump! The door slammed shut. Li Huowang looked down at the grenades in his hands and ran toward the door.

As he did, the grenades cracked open, revealing something yellow inside of them.

At that moment, everything came to a standstill. Li Huowang stared in disbelief at the mooncake in his hands, momentarily unable to comprehend what was happening.

"Eat it! This is the result of everyone's hard work," a nurse said, lightly patting Li Huowang on the back.

Li Huowang glanced around at the peaceful break room. *Mooncake? White Tower Prison? I'm back here again? What's going on...*

Suddenly, he recalled something. He took a bite of the purple yam mooncake and discovered another piece of paper inside. He unrolled the paper and saw the same words as before.

Smack! Li Huowang slapped himself hard across the face. The stinging pain confirmed that this wasn't a dream, and he began to understand something.

Forcing himself to stay calm, he swallowed the paper and headed to the restroom, where he once again saw a person disguised as himself.

Li Huowang found that everything that followed was exactly as he remembered. The rubber gloves were the same, and Yi Donglai questioned him again.

After Li Huowang used the access card to leave White Tower,

he immediately got into Ba Nanxu's car. "Take me to Zhao Shuangdian! Hurry!"

"Oh? You in a rush? I thought you'd want to visit your little girlfriend first." Ba Nanxu kicked the driver's seat, making her brother speed up.

Before long, Li Huowang found Zhao Shuangdian at the Bloody Bonfire tattoo parlor again. "What's going on here? Why am I back again?!"

Zhao Shuangdian looked puzzled. "Sorry, I don't know what you're talking about."

Li Huowang suppressed his unease and recounted everything that had happened. Only then could Zhao Shuangdian explain it all.

Zhao Shuangdian looked surprised. "I don't know how you found out, but I did want to recruit you for a counterattack. However, what you're describing doesn't make sense."

She continued, "The timing is off. We acted on February 6, not February 3. According to our calculations, we wouldn't need a flight to reach the other elephant. It's at sea—we would have taken a boat."

"How can this be?!" Li Huowang was utterly shocked. He stumbled back half a step. "No! Something's not right!"

The shock on Li Huowang's face turned into confusion. "This isn't the first time... There was the ship! The Abbess's son really exists! And... there was another time! What was the second time? I forgot! But there was definitely a second time! This is the third!"

His expression twisted into a mix of fury and struggle. He clenched his fists and began to pound his head, trying to force out the details he had missed.

"Big... big...[\[1\]](#)."

Zhao Shuangdian watched Li Huowang with great interest. "The elephant is formless?"

Li Huowang shook his head violently and rejected that idea.

Then, his eyes suddenly lit up.

“No! That’s not it! It’s not the formless elephant—it’s the Grand Siming! There are no boundaries! I finally get it!

“There is no before or after! It’s all happening at the same time! The reason you changed the plan now isn’t because that place doesn’t exist anymore—it’s because we have already destroyed it in another timeline! That factory! That factory was the projection of the Siming!

“We destroyed the factory, so everything about it—its related time and history—has been erased! Everyone forgot, except for me! Just like the last two times!”

1. In Chinese, “elephant” (大象 dàxiàng) begins with the character 大 (dà), which means “big” 🐘

Chapter 902 - Fake Skill

“Father, a little more to the left? Is it straight now?” Li Sui asked, extending a tentacle. She tilted her head and followed the instructions from behind while pasting the spring couplets on the wall.

The aroma of meat in the air and the distant crackling of firecrackers brought a joyful smile to Li Sui’s face. She loved the lively atmosphere, and the New Year was the most exciting time of the year for her. Celebrating it brought her immense joy.

“Suisui, can you recognize all the characters in the couplet?”

She felt her mother gently stroke her head and nodded proudly. “Yes! I recognize all of them!”

“Really? That’s impressive. Then tell me, what do the characters in the couplet say?”

“The upper line says: ‘Wealth flourishes in a prosperous place.’

“The lower line says: ‘Blessings shine upon the home, to bring fortune and glory!’”

“Very good. And what about the horizontal inscription?”

“The horizontal inscription says, ‘May all wishes come true!’”

“You’re amazing, Suisui.” Li Sui squinted her eyes joyfully as her mother hugged her from behind.

“But Suisui, isn’t the horizontal inscription a little crooked?”

“Is it crooked?” Li Sui took a few steps back and carefully examined the horizontal plaque beneath the inscription.

After observing it thoughtfully for a while, she still couldn’t find any signs of the red inscription being crooked. “Mother, it’s not crooked. Father, do you think it’s crooked?”

However, there was no response.

“Father? Mother?” Li Sui called out in confusion, turning

around to find no one behind her. Nobody was there, and at some point, the smell of meat and the sound of firecrackers had completely vanished.

She saw two figures, one dressed in white and the other in red, gradually walking away in the distance. Li Sui panicked and struggled to run toward them. “Father! Mother! Where are you going?”

However, no matter how fast Li Sui ran, the figures only seemed to get further away.

As Li Sui’s desperation grew, her human form began to crumble. More than ten tentacles emerged as she transformed and rapidly moved towards them.

“Father! Mother! Please don’t leave me! I promise I’ll be good! I won’t make you angry anymore!”

No matter how fast she ran, the figures in the distance stayed just out of reach, eventually disappearing at the far end of the road.

Li Sui finally collapsed. She stumbled to the ground, where she sat and sobbed uncontrollably.

As she cried, she slowly woke up and glanced tearfully around the cave. She realized it had all been a dream.

Several days had passed since she had fallen from the sky, and she still hadn’t found the You Capital.

Li Sui couldn’t hold back her sorrow and cried loudly once more.

However, crying wouldn’t change anything, and she needed to complete her journey. Half an hour later, Li Sui emerged from the stone cave and continued along the path toward You Capital.

She wasn’t sure if she was going the right way, as the road seemed to split off in many directions.

More importantly, a lot of time had passed. She wondered how her father was doing. Li Sui didn’t know if he still needed Dragon Qi or if she would make it in time.

After several hours of walking, the small path gradually expanded into a wider road, and Li Sui continued on.

She caught wild animals in the forest to satisfy her hunger and quench her thirst. Two days later, she finally arrived in a town.

Li Sui looked around curiously at the bustling town. In the past, she would have run around excitedly and joined in the fun, but now her mind was occupied with other thoughts.

“I wonder how much farther I have to go. I need a map.

“Should I buy a cart like Father did? Walking is so tiring, but I don’t have any money.

“Good thing I didn’t throw away those animal pelts. I should be able to trade them for some money.” Li Sui reached inside her skirt, where she had secured some animal pelts with several tentacles.

She wore the skin of a woman, allowing her to wear a skirt and carry more things.

Li Huowang had always been the one making decisions for her in the past, but it was time for Li Sui to take charge and make her own choices. She decided to follow his example.

As she walked, she noticed a crowd gathering ahead. She tiptoed to peek at the scene and saw a few shirtless men performing with spears and staffs.

A gong echoed as a boy around eleven circled the crowd. He banged the gong, flipping around and shouting.

“A little gong spins round and round! Friends from all around! From the south to the north, from the east to the west, we’ve wandered everywhere, and now we’ve come to Luoshan! Dear audience, it is said that mere talk is cheap, so today, we’ll show you our true skills! Witness the feat of breaking a stone upon flesh!”

Soon, a long bench was placed in the center of the performance area. A strong man lay down on it while two others placed a large stone on his stomach. An old man raised a hammer and approached him eagerly.

“Hey-yah!” The hammer began crashing down onto the stone.

The shocking scene caused some young women in the crowd to close their eyes in fear.

The stone shattered with a crack, but the man underneath was unharmed. The crowd erupted in cheers.

Feeding off the crowd’s excitement, the performers launched into their acts—breathing fire, swallowing swords, and walking on tightropes. Each feat drew a round of applause.

Li Sui had initially planned to leave, but she was still a child at heart. She became engrossed in the performances and forgot about everything else.

The performers worked tirelessly, putting on a performance that captivated the crowd. The bearded old man sensed the atmosphere was right and signaled to the young boy.

The boy lay down reluctantly on the ground and turned his palm upward.

The old man stepped on his hand while the boy straightened his legs. He screamed as his hand was twisted and dislocated.

The boy ignored the pain, grabbing a bowl and begging for tips from the crowd while dragging his dislocated hand along.

Once the collection started, the crowd began to disperse quickly. Only a few compassionate souls remained and tossed a few coins into the bowl.

When the bowl reached Li Sui, she thought momentarily and placed a rabbit skin into it.

She lingered, hoping to ask the performers for directions. Their show had stirred memories of the Lu Family Troupe, making her feel oddly at home.

She remembered her father had once asked the Lu Family Troupe for directions. They were well-traveled and knowledgeable.

However, unlike the Lu Family Troupe, this group of performers did not include any women.

Chapter 903 - Same Path

Li Sui observed the performers closely, and they returned her gaze. Their eyes widened in astonishment—they had never encountered a girl of such striking beauty.

“What are you looking at? Never seen a woman?” The old man flicked each of them on the head.

After glancing at the bronze coins resting in the bowl, the old man grabbed the boy’s shoulder, giving it a twist before reattaching his hand. “Let’s step out of the city. Despite our efforts, we barely made enough for a meal.”

They packed up their belongings and drove their cart out of the city gate, only to notice Li Sui following closely behind them.

The younger men in the group immediately became restless, wondering if the girl had taken a liking to one of them.

The old man kicked them swiftly and pushed them aside. He clasped his hands respectfully toward Li Sui. “Miss, you’ve seen the performance. It’s getting late, so you should hurry back home before your family starts to worry.”

At the mention of family, Li Sui’s expression dimmed slightly. “Grandpa, is this road the way to the You Capital?”

“Yes, it is. However, there are a few forks in the road along the way. It’s not far, but it would take about ten days on foot. Miss, you’re traveling empty-handed. I’m afraid you might not make it,” Chen Bin said before continuing on with his apprentices.

But soon after, he saw the girl following them again. “Are you also heading to You Capital? Can I go with you? I’m afraid I’ll take the wrong path.”

“Sure, sure! We’re going to You Capital too! It’s on the way!” Several young men, around eighteen years old, responded eagerly.

“What do you mean’ sure”? Are you the master now?” Chen Bin said, then solemnly clasped his hands again toward Li Sui. “Miss, it’s improper for men and women to travel together. The road is long, and if you need to go to You Capital, it’s better to travel with your family or hire guards for protection.”

Chen Bin was not as lustful as his apprentices. It was too unusual for a pretty young girl to want to follow this group of men. There had to be a catch somewhere.

“But I can’t find my family...” Li Sui’s voice trailed off as she looked down. The young men felt their hearts ache, and they stumbled over their words as they rushed to comfort her.

Their sympathy was of no use. Chen Bin pushed them aside, grabbed the rabbit pelt she had given them earlier, and offered it to Li Sui with a bow. Without saying another word, he hurriedly led his apprentices away.

They ran for two hours straight and only stopped when the sky began to darken.

“Master, wasn’t that a bit much?” Lin Qishan, the fourth apprentice, asked while wiping the sweat from his chin.

“Better safe than sorry. It’s always best to be cautious. Something feels off with that girl. Anyway, start the fire and cook dinner.”

Dinner wasn’t much. There were just some coarse grain buns and a pot of wild vegetable soup. The only real flavor came from a small jar of vinegar, but even that was rationed carefully.

Each person was only allowed seven dips with their chopsticks. That was Chen Bin’s rule.

They couldn’t afford to let the boys eat too much. If they were allowed to eat freely, the vinegar wouldn’t last a single day.

As they were eating, the youngest apprentice wandered to the edge of the forest to relieve himself, still chewing on his bun.

As soon as he reached the forest, he let out a bloodcurdling

scream, much louder than when his hand had been dislocated earlier.

Everyone immediately dropped what they were doing. They grabbed their weapons and rushed over.

“What happened? What is it?” Chen Bin asked. The boy pointed a trembling finger toward the dark forest. Chen Bin threw his torch in that direction.

They all froze at the sight before them. The girl, who had asked for directions, now stood in the forest as she held a bloody lump of flesh in her hands. She gently squeezed it while she took small bites from it.

Li Sui’s cheeks were puffed up. She wiped the blood at her lips with the back of her hand and pleaded, “I didn’t mean to follow you, but I really do have something important to do in You Capital. It’s safer to travel together. If we run into any demons on the road, I can help fight them off.”

Chen Bin opened his mouth but was at a loss for words. His hands trembled as he reached into his pocket.

“Please?” Li Sui took a step forward. Seeing this, Chen Bin clenched his teeth and pulled out a string of something, raising it high in the air.

It was a string of bronze coins, a protective artifact passed down from his grandfather to ward off evil.

As Li Sui’s gaze fell upon the bronze coins, memories of her father and the bronze coin sword he always carried on his back flooded her mind. Tears welled up in her eyes.

As she burst into sobs, Chen Bin and his apprentices collapsed to the ground in fear. Lin Qishan, the most quick-witted of them, threw himself flat on the ground and kowtowed. “Deity, please spare me! Don’t eat me!”

After a while, under Li Sui’s tearful pleading, Chen Bin readily agreed to let her travel with them.

He didn't even bother to pack up the pot or let anyone sleep. They hitched the horses and set off under the moonlight, trembling with fear as they led the way, with Li Sui following behind.

As daylight broke, they would have stopped to rest under normal circumstances, but Chen Bin didn't dare. The image of that bloody lump of flesh haunted his mind. He feared they might end up as the next meal she stuffed into her mouth.

"Master, we shouldn't go this way. Isn't this Kai Shanbao's territory? We could be robbed if we pass through here," the eldest apprentice said.

Chen Bin glared at him and then glanced back at the girl, who was staring intently at the protective artifact. He whispered, "That's exactly why we're going this way. Let the wolves fight the tigers. Remember, when they start fighting, we run for our lives!"

Silently cursing his grandfather for the useless artifact, Chen Bin continued on.

Three hours later, a large tree suddenly fell across the road and blocked their path. Several burly men with knives approached them. Chen Bin's heart leaped with hope—this might be their chance!

"This mountain is mine, and this tree I planted! If you want to pass, leave... Huh? This girl is quite something," the bandit leader said as groups of bandits appeared.

They eyed Li Sui with a lecherous grin, who was lost in her memories. When she snapped back to her senses, she saw the man in front of her starting to undress.

She blinked in confusion, then stepped back and waved her hands frantically. "Thank you, but I'm not hungry right now."

Chapter 904 - You Capital

Li Sui sat dejectedly on the belly of a dead horse. She lowered her head and pursed her lips, lost in thought. The corpses of the bandits were scattered haphazardly around her. They had died gruesome deaths.

Chen Bin stood with his troupe of street performers, frozen in terror. At this point, running away was out of the question. They didn't dare move a muscle.

He had miscalculated. The bandits weren't a match for this thing! They couldn't even harm a single strand of her hair. This girl was something otherworldly!

After venting her frustrations, Li Sui turned around and rummaged through the bandits' belongings, collecting any valuables she could find.

"Deity! Let us help you! We'll help!" Chen Bin had now fully surrendered to her power. He had no will left to resist and had completely submitted.

"Thank you."

"Our pleasure!" Chen Bin nervously waved his hands, hoping he and his disciples could be useful enough to avoid being eaten.

"Master, maybe this girl isn't some evil spirit. Why would a demon even need silvers?"

Everyone instinctively turned their eyes toward Li Sui. Just then, Li Sui lifted her skirt, and a few black, fur-covered tentacles slipped out.

The sight caused everyone's faces to pale, and they hurriedly began rummaging through the corpses, desperately searching for money. They were too terrified to think any further.

After a while, Chen Bin nervously held some silver and bronze

coins in his trembling hands. He presented them to Li Sui, forcing a fawning smile onto his wrinkled face. "Deity, this is all we found. We wouldn't dare keep a single penny for ourselves. These bandits are here to rob people, so they wouldn't carry too much silver with them."

Li Sui pushed the silver back into Chen Bin's arms and furrowed her brows with determination. "Take me to the You Capital! I need to go there!"

Chen Bin did not dare to refuse and nodded repeatedly. "Of course! To the You Capital! We'll go to the You Capital right away!"

At Li Sui's command, everyone hurried to pack up and set off.

They rushed day and night, reducing a ten-day journey to just seven. Their sole purpose was to escape this deity as soon as possible.

"Deity, look! We've arrived," Chen Bin stammered, his lips pale as he pointed at the bustling city gate with trembling fingers.

Li Sui saw the familiar gates, and her spirits finally lifted. "Wonderful! I can finally see my father!"

After enduring so many grievances throughout this journey, she was determined to pour her heart out the moment she laid eyes on her parents.

"Oh, right! I need to find the Emperor of Great Qi! My father still needs Dragon Qi!" Li Sui shouted before dashing toward the city.

The You Capital was vast and bustling, with shops selling various goods lining both sides of the streets. Li Sui ignored these distractions and headed straight for the imperial city at the center.

Before Li Sui could even approach, a group of people blocked her path. Their clothing differed, but they all wore the badge from the Surveillance Bureau, which Li Sui recognized from playing with her father's badge.

She turned around and saw more people closing in behind her.

They had surrounded her.

A burly soldier stepped forward and spat on the ground before her. “You’ve got guts, coming to the You Capital in broad daylight like this! Do you think we’re here just for show?”

Li Sui had been monitored the moment she entered You Capital.

She hurriedly explained, “Don’t stop me! I have an urgent matter. Is Xuan Pin here? I need to see Xuan Pin.”

“Who the hell is Xuan Pin? Never heard of him!”

Li Sui blinked in confusion for a moment. Xuan Pin was the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau. How could they not know him?

She quickly realized her mistake. Xuan Pin belonged to the Surveillance Bureau of the Great Liang, and this was the Great Qi. It made sense that they didn’t know him.

“Sorry, I misspoke. Let me try again. Is your Chief here? I have urgent business with him. It’s about the Dharma Sect. My father is helping you fight against the Dharma Sect!”

They didn’t care about her explanation. Their weapons and magic artifacts were already flying towards her.

“What are you doing?! I don’t want to fight you! We’re on the same side!” Li Sui cried and dodged the attacks, but she was overwhelmed by their sheer numbers. A silver vajra flew at her with lightning speed and pierced her left arm.

“You’re all bullying me!” Li Sui cried out. Her human form began to split apart as she sobbed. A bloody, dog-like head emerged from beneath her skirt, accompanied by black tentacles that burst out from her clothes and flailed around in all directions.

“Don’t kill her! Keep her alive! We need to find out who she’s spying for!”

The Surveillance Bureau agents replied as they closed in from all sides. “Understood!”

A blind nun was the first to strike. Her whisk swept like a steel

hook, instantly severing three of Li Sui's tentacles and spraying blood everywhere.

That was only the beginning. Two burly men dressed in tight-fitting outfits rapidly stretched a dripping black ink line into a massive net, which they then cast over Li Sui.

Li Sui refused to give up. She reached out with her remaining tentacles and attempted to draw symbols on turmeric paper. However, in the distance, a Daoist with a painted face made a hand gesture. All of her talismans burst into flames, reducing them to nothing but ashes.

Li Sui couldn't use her talismans without turmeric paper. She was no match against the soldiers in physical combat, and the situation became desperate in an instant.

The sharp-eyed Surveillance Bureau members sensed her growing weakness. They quickly tightened the encirclement, determined to finish her off.

Whoosh! Her tentacles were sliced off one after another and writhed on the ground.

The pain brought tears to Li Sui's eyes, but the attacks didn't stop even as her tears flowed.

Now that she had no tentacles left, the soldiers stepped forward and formed a Flying Dragon formation to charge at her.

Their killing intent wrapped around their gleaming sabers. They pierced Li Sui's heart, inflicting a chilling pain.

She saw the wall of blades coming toward her and cried desperately. "Get away from me! I want to go home!"

The next moment, something unexpected happened. It was as if the Flying Dragon formation had hit an invisible barrier—it completely broke down, and the soldiers were sent flying.

These were the imperial guards of the royal city. How could their formation be broken so easily?

"Be careful! This demon still has tricks up her sleeve! Don't let

your guard down!”

Chapter 905 - Goodbye

Everyone around Li Sui grew tense. A horn rang out in the distance as more soldiers gathered toward them. Everyone started to prepare their trump cards.

A playful, androgynous voice cut in. "Oh, stop it, all of you."

The atmosphere gradually calmed down. The crowd parted, and Li Sui saw a man step forward. He had a round face, appeared to be in his thirties, and was dressed in green silk.

He looked at the injured Li Sui, twirling a strand of hair by his left temple with his finger. "A Black Taisui Strayed One? Oh my, how interesting. You speak so fluently. It's been a thousand years since I've seen something like this."

Although he looked like a man, there was something feminine about him. It reminded Li Sui of the eunuchs in the palace, but this person seemed even more feminine.

"Excuse me... are you a eunuch serving the Emperor? Do you know the Emperor?" Li Sui thought the Emperor of the Great Qi would surely know her father.

The person, who appeared to be neither entirely male nor female, snorted and replied, "Not all androgynous people are eunuchs. When I was six, I did want to enter the palace for work, but they didn't want me because I allegedly wasn't qualified. What could I do? People need to eat, so now I'm just serving as the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau."

"You're the Chief of Great Qi's Surveillance Bureau? Really?" Li Sui became excited. She felt she had finally found someone who could help.

"Please help my father! He's in danger!"

She quickly recounted the entire story to him. The Chief of the

Surveillance Bureau hesitated for a moment and studied her closely. It all seemed too strange.

After some time, he glanced at the chaotic streets around him. He pulled a handkerchief from his sleeve to wipe away his nonexistent sweat, then turned down a side alley. "Come with me."

Li Sui quickly followed, trailing behind him through the bustling streets. Eventually, they arrived at a small courtyard. It wasn't large, with only a grape arbor, a rocking chair, and a stone table beneath it.

This place felt exceptionally quiet compared to the streets outside. The Chief of the Surveillance Bureau reclined on the rocking chair, crossed his legs, and squinted as he observed Li Sui carefully, trying to deduce what she truly was.

Could she be lying? How could a Black Taisui know about the Great Liang and speak so clearly about it? But if she was telling the truth, how could her father be helping the Simings? That's even more absurd!

"Can you send me back to Great Liang? Something urgent is happening there, and my father is waiting for me." Li Sui couldn't wait any longer.

"Hold on. You need to explain everything in detail before I can think of a way to help you. Start with the Dharma Sect. Did they really wipe out all of the Great Qi?"

During their brief interaction, the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau recognized Li Sui's naïve nature. He took advantage of this and tried to gather as much information as possible.

"But my father..."

"Your father's in the heavens. What's there to worry about? As the saying goes, one day in heaven is ten years on earth. Relax, I guarantee your father's fine."

Li Sui felt a little more at ease and began to share everything she knew about the Great Qi, the Great Liang, and the Dharma Sect.

The Chief of the Surveillance Bureau couldn't remain calm. If this was all true, it was too bizarre. Yet, the more he asked, the more credible her answers seemed.

Suddenly, he raised his hands and interlaced his fingers. Two white threads appeared between them. He smiled and said, "Li Sui, your face is quite dirty. Let me fix it for you."

The two crisscrossed threads slid swiftly across Li Sui's bloodied dog-like face, slicing off tiny bits of flesh and scabs with precision. The blood-soaked threads were stained red when they were retracted.

The Chief of the Surveillance Bureau collected the threads and thought to himself. *Not bad, at least she's not from the Sitting Oblivion Dao.* His suspicion eased a little.

"Li Sui, tell me, when the Dharma Sect was causing trouble in Great Qi, what era was it?"

"Era? I don't know. My father never taught me that."

"Hmm... then surely you know the name of the Emperor at the time?"

"Yes, I know that. His name is Gao Zhijian."

"Gao Zhijian? Good name."

The Chief of the Surveillance Bureau began to calculate. After a while, he stopped and furrowed his brow. "Strange. Why can't I calculate anything? Could it be that the name wasn't based on the Eight Characters and Five Elements?"

Li Sui looked around at the serene environment, hesitating briefly. "Sir... may I ask something? The Great Qi was supposedly occupied by god Yu'er. Why is everything back to normal now?"

She had been wondering about this ever since she fell from the sky, but there hadn't anyone to ask until now.

Now that the Great Qi's Chief was before her, she had to ask.

"As for that..." The Chief of the Surveillance Bureau was also a bit puzzled. How could the Great Qi have been destroyed? What

kind of Natural Disaster could have caused that?

He continued, “Don’t worry. I’ll fetch the Imperial Preceptor of Great Qi to help save your father.”

Li Sui didn’t have to wait long before an elderly man, donning a Nuo Opera mask, was brought into the courtyard on a wicker chair. The man’s hands were so frail that they resembled bones covered in skin, and his veins were nearly transparent.

Before Li Sui could react, the Imperial Preceptor of Great Qi grabbed her hand, and the Nuo Opera mask was placed over her dog-like face.

Li Sui struggled frantically. After some pulling at the mask, she finally managed to tear it off.

Once she pulled it off, she heard the Imperial Preceptor’s voice. “She’s telling the truth, but it’s not now. It’s three sexagenary cycles from now.”

Li Sui shuddered upon hearing this. She understood what a sexagenary cycle was, having heard Lu Zhuangyuan explain it before. Three cycles equaled 180 years! She was now 180 years in the past...

She didn’t know why or how this had happened. All she knew was that she might never see her father again.

Li Sui was dazed for a long time before slowly gathering herself. She trembled and tried to comfort herself. “It’s fine... as long as my father is okay. I have time. I just need to wait 180 years to see him again.”

As she spoke, tears kept flowing down her face, despite her constant efforts to wipe them off.

Li Sui stared blankly at Li Huowang. He was anxiously shouting at her as she recalled the memories she had nearly forgotten.

“Li Sui! Li Sui! I’m talking to you! Are you even listening?”

“Huh?”

“What do you mean ‘huh’? The sky is practically falling, and

you're spacing out!"

Chapter 906 - Intelligence

Li Huowang scratched his head in frustration. He stared at Xuan Pin before him. He had been explaining for a long time, but it seemed like it had all been for nothing. His temper would have flared long ago if this weren't his daughter.

"Suisui, focus! This is no time to be distracted! The leader of Fangxian Sect has already pried open Po Daer's skull!" He walked over and grabbed his daughter's shoulders, shaking her forcefully.

He had gone through all kinds of trouble to travel to the Tianchen Kingdom, and it was all for what was hidden inside Po Daer's skull.

"Is that so? That's great. Let's go then," Xuan Pin replied flatly, as if she were merely going out for a meal.

Xuan Pin had finally come to her senses. Li Huowang hurriedly led her out towards the Surveillance Bureau.

The Surveillance Bureau of the Liang Kingdom operated underground. On every previous visit, Li Huowang feared someone would uncover his true identity as a Strayed One. However, things were completely different now.

As Li Huowang led Li Sui through the streets, everyone they passed bowed their heads and made way for them.

The Surveillance Bureau's prison was located on the lowest level. When they arrived, everyone who needed to be there had already gathered, making the place very crowded.

All of the highest officials of the Great Liang were packed into this dark and damp prison. Their attention was fixed on the severed head of Po Daer, which lay in a vase on the table.

This was the work of the Righteous Monastery. Po Daer no longer needed his body—his head was enough.

An elderly Daoist with white hair and a scraggly beard stood opposite Po Daer's head. He recited incantations and gestured at the spot between Po Daer's eyebrows.

Li Sui glanced at Gao Zhijian before turning his attention to the Daoist dressed in purple robes. "Now that everyone's here, recap the situation again."

The Daoist nodded, turned around, and bowed to Gao Zhijian. "Your Majesty, the Tianchen Kingdom has many points of interest. Where would you like this humble servant to begin?"

Gao Zhijian sat on his dragon throne, thinking for a moment. "How many soldiers and generals does the Tianchen Kingdom have?"

"None."

"Hmm?" Gao Zhijian's eyes widened slightly.

"The Tianchen Kingdom doesn't even have a court, so naturally, there are no soldiers or generals," Li Huowang said.

"Their military forces consist solely of bandits, outlaws, and robbers. However, don't underestimate them—they're quite powerful. The people who tried to steal my sword were a group of bandits."

"No court? Does that mean the Tianchen Kingdom doesn't even have an emperor?" the Imperial Preceptor of the Liang Kingdom asked.

The person from the Fangxian Sect shook his head and continued, "There is no royal family, but the Tianchen Kingdom has a patron.

"From Po Daer's memories, I learned that this patron has absolute authority there. No one dares to defy him, and that patron was the one who proposed seeking revenge against Heavenly Mater."

"A patron? What's this person's name?" Gao Zhijian clenched his fists. He would finally know who his opponent was.

“He is called Zuoqiu Yong. Po Daer only caught a glimpse of him from afar. His status was too low to speak with the patron.”

“Hmm. And how powerful is this patron?” Gao Zhijian asked.

“Uh...” The Daoist glanced at Po Daer’s head. “Your Majesty, Po Daer doesn’t know. From what he saw, the patron’s strength is unfathomable. He has never shown his full abilities.”

“He must be incredibly powerful. According to Po Daer’s memories, the entire army of Unspeakable may be under his command. The patron might be a Tuan Huang noble who betrayed the Heavenly Mater.”

Li Huowang’s words made Gao Zhijian furrow his brows in confusion, “Senior Li, what is this army of Unspeakable you’re talking about? And what do you mean by a Tian Huang noble?”

After giving a brief explanation, Li Huowang continued, “Zuoqiu Yong orchestrated everything that has happened. He and his people are the main force behind the current conflict. In fact, it could be said that the entire plan to deal with the Heavenly Mater was his idea.

“He may not be an emperor, but his authority in the Tianchen Kingdom surpasses that of any emperor.”

Gao Zhijian’s face darkened. His enemy this time was someone who could touch the Heavenly Daos. If they were to fight, there would be bloodshed on a massive scale, similar to the conflict with the Dharma Sect.

The weight of this realization hung heavily in the room, not only on Gao Zhijian. The atmosphere grew heavy.

Xuan Pin said, “Your Majesty, there’s no need to panic. We haven’t reached that point yet. They still haven’t managed to steal Li Huowang’s sword, so they can’t cross over yet.”

Gao Zhijian’s expression lightened slightly, but Li Huowang’s face grew darker.

He reached behind him and drew his spine sword. “Zhuge Yuan

is not the only Twisted One in the Great Qi. While they are targeting me, they've also sent people to look for other ways in.

"Based on Po Daer's memories, even if they don't get my sword, it won't be long before they find another Twisted One."

Li Huowang's words were like a rock that weighed heavily on their minds. If they were watching from the sidelines before, they were now directly in the line of fire.

Li Sui finally understood why her father had been so anxious earlier, and what he had meant by the sky was falling.

Gao Zhijian frowned deeply, clinging to a sliver of hope as he asked, "Brother Li, you managed to hold off Tianchen's forces on your own in the Great Qi. As long as you're here, they surely won't be able to cross over so easily."

"Me? Just me?"

Gao Zhijian nodded. "Senior Li, whether it was Shai Zi or god Yu'er, they were no match for you. Surely you can handle them again."

Li Huowang had always reassured Gao Zhijian, whether during their travels or after he ascended to the throne. As long as Li Huowang was around, he felt at ease, regardless of how dire the situation was.

Li Huowang gave him an odd look. "What are you thinking? Have you forgotten what I just said? The Heavenly Mater was torn apart by the people from the Tianchen Kingdom!"

Li Huowang was not confident, having only gained a slight advantage with his Doulao incarnation. He understood very well the type of enemy he faced this time.

Li Huowang pointed to his chest. "Do you think the Heavenly Mater was stronger, or am I stronger? Don't forget, they still have the Heavenly Dao that belonged to the Heavenly Mater!"

Everyone fell silent as the atmosphere grew even heavier. Each person pondered how to break the deadlock.

After a long pause, the Liang Kingdom's Imperial Preceptor, Huangfu Tiangang, said, "There's no need for an all-out fight. They want to take down the White Lotus Sect, not destroy the world as the Dharma Sect did."

"If they want the White Lotus Sect, why don't we just hand it over to them?"

Whoosh! Xuan Pin swiftly appeared behind Li Huowang, spreading her wide red Daoist robe and tightly embracing him.

Chapter 907 - Motivation

When Li Sui hugged Li Huowang, he became intangible. He phased right through Xuan Pin's robes and then appeared before Huangfu Tiangang.

Everyone in the room instantly tensed up. However, Li Huowang didn't make a move this time. He stood less than three inches away, watching silently.

Although Huangfu Tiangang was blind, he could clearly sense Li Huowang's killing intent. His mustache trembled slightly, but he maintained his composure and said, "Li Huowang, think carefully. Which is more important: the White Lotus Sect or the lives of the people of the Great Qi and the Great Liang?"

"The Great Qi only had a few deaths from starvation, which you found unacceptable. However, if a fight breaks out, at least half of the population of the Great Liang will die, no matter who wins. How is that any better?"

Li Huowang's murderous intent dissipated instantly. He looked at Huangfu Tiangang and enunciated each word. "Use your brain and think. Are they truly after the White Lotus Sect? No, they want the Heavenly Mater dead!

"Also, don't forget that they once stole the Heavenly Mater's Heavenly Dao! Have you forgotten what it was like when death ceased to exist? Do you want to experience that again?"

"If they truly seize the Heavenly Mater's Heavenly Dao, it won't just be Death that disappears. Benevolence[1] will vanish too!"

The thought of a world devoid of death or benevolence filled Gao Zhijian with fear.

The Imperial Preceptor refused to relent. "If losing the Heavenly Dao of Death and the Heavenly Dao of Benevolence for a

while means we can avoid half the casualties, it's worth it."

"How many believers are in the White Lotus Sect now? How is sending all of them to their deaths any different from losing half the population? You're putting your life in someone else's hands, hoping that they will spare you."

"Enough," Gao Zhijian said, breaking the heavy atmosphere in the room. "Send word to Hou Shu, Si Qi, Qing Qiu, Nanping, and An Xi. Inform their emperors and Surveillance Bureaus to prepare for a fight to the death."

He continued, "We can't avoid the calamity. If they want to take our very lifeblood, there's no point in further negotiations."

Li Huowang walked a few steps toward Gao Zhijian. "To be honest, these people aren't of much help. If you really want to assist, I need more Dragon Qi."

His best option was to go to the Baiyu Capital and approach the situation from the Simings' perspective.

Li Huowang's request made Gao Zhijian seem troubled. After a moment, he said, "Alright, I'll discuss it with the other Dragon Veins. Once they respond, I'll give you an answer."

"Do it quickly so we can minimize the deaths," Li Huowang said.

Without bothering to speculate on whether Gao Zhijian was being serious or simply making excuses, he turned to leave.

Li Huowang finally felt a sense of relief as he emerged from the suffocating atmosphere of the underground prison.

The information from Po Daer was valuable—he now knew much more about the Tianchen Kingdom. However, the more he learned, the less hopeful the chances of victory seemed, which was not a good sign.

"Fifteen," a familiar voice said from behind Li Huowang.

He turned and saw Xuan Pin standing there. Her tentacles were wrapped around the vase that held Po Daer's head. "What?"

“Tianchen Kingdom has fifteen divisions in a day.”

In the past, this information would have piqued his interest. Now, it barely stirred any emotion.

“Got it. If we win, the Great Qi will have a solution to its lack of divisions. By the way, is Tianchen’s Dragon Vein alive?”

“It is, but Po Daer never interacted with it. He only knew that the golden dragon is the Dragon Vein and serves as Zuoqiu Yong’s mount.”

“Heh, using the fifteen divisions of the day as a mount. That’s quite a show of status.”

“Father, what do you plan to do next?”

“What else? In their eyes, the Great Qi is full of vulnerabilities. They can come and go as they please. If we can’t defend, then we have to attack. Hopefully, we can buy some time.

“If possible, persuade the other emperors to be less stingy. If the situation becomes critical, I won’t be as accommodating as I am now.”

“Father, don’t you think something feels off?”

Li Huowang reviewed everything in his head but found nothing unusual. “Hmm? In what way?”

“It’s too fast. The timing doesn’t add up. According to Po Daer’s memories, they began preparing as soon as the Heavenly Mater returned,” Xuan Pin said, closely examining Po Daer’s head.

“I don’t think there’s anything strange about that. Maybe they have a way to monitor the Heavenly Mater,” Li Huowang replied.

Xuan Pin shook her head, and several tentacles emerged from her red robe to pull the head closer. “The Heavenly Mater must have been cautious. She possesses the Heavenly Dao of Death—if she wanted to fake her death, no one would be able to tell, and that’s exactly what she did.

“Even if the Tianchen Kingdom has supernatural powers, it’s impossible for them to have discovered it so quickly from two

realms away.”

Li Huowang realized Xuan Pin had a point. His focus had been entirely on the Tianchen Kingdom’s strength, and he had overlooked this detail. “So you’re saying we have a traitor feeding them information?”

Li Huowang’s eyes suddenly narrowed. “Is it Shai Zi?!”

“It’s not him. He’s genuinely helping you now.”

“True. It’s not the Sitting Oblivion Dao’s style to play such a boring game.”

“Father, I don’t think it’s an insider, but another party giving the Tianchen Kingdom information,” Xuan Pin said and briefly paused. “If they want the Tianchen Kingdom and the Great Qi to fight to the death, there must be something in it for them.”

This made the situation even more confusing. “Another party? Who else could it be besides the Great Qi and the Great Liang? Are you saying it’s someone from another timeline?”

Li Huowang continued, “I’ll keep that in mind. When I catch another informant of the Tianchen Kingdom, I’ll interrogate them thoroughly.”

He pulled out his spine sword and prepared to return to the Great Qi. As the rift opened, something red inside immediately set off alarm bells in Li Huowang’s mind. “What’s going on?”

Li Huowang stepped into the rift and was immediately struck by the sounds of battle.

The recently established city of the You Capital had completely fallen. It was currently engulfed in flames and blood.

Li Huowang quickly scaled the city walls and was met with a shocking sight: endless waves of bandits charging toward the city.

The Tianchen Kingdom had launched its attack. They intended to take over the Great Qi.

Li Huowang drew his spine sword and swung it back. “Li Sui! Get over here and help!”

A shadow darted from the rift, pulling Li Huowang's abdomen open and climbing in.

“Li Sui! This isn't enough! There are too many of them! Use your illusions to notify the others in the Great Liang! We need everyone's help!”

1. This was previously translated as the Heavenly Dao of Kindness, but Benevolence is more accurate. 🤔

Chapter 908 - Fight

Li Huowang swung open a rift, slicing through a bandit on horseback and instantly cutting him into several pieces. His internal organs scattered on the ground as he screamed in agony.

Li Huowang roared, and the ground within dozens of meters around him instantly turned into a swamp, trapping the bandits.

Liquid sand and stone filled their mouths and noses, and the swampy land returned to its original form.

This was the You Capital of the Great Qi. The forces of the Tianchen Kingdom were launching a full-scale attack, and the entire area had become a battlefield.

It wasn't just Li Huowang fighting; Li Sui was also giving it her all. Tentacles emerged from Li Huowang's back and darted at odd angles. They went from bandit to bandit, entering through their left ears and exiting through their right ears.

Dozens of tentacles strung people together like a skewer. With a quick pull, all the bandits impaled by Li Sui's tentacles turned on their comrades, raising their weapons to attack them.

Dealing with these bandits was overkill for them. The bandits and thieves from the Tianchen Kingdom were no match for them.

The bodies kept piling up, with each fallen bandit being replaced by another—there was a seemingly endless number of them. The Tianchen Kingdom clearly intended to use them as cannon fodder.

They had to use a more efficient method to deal with them.

Li Huowang let out a resounding chant, igniting himself in an instant. The flames swiftly traveled along Li Sui's tentacles, creating a breathtaking and blinding spectacle—a human bonfire that emerged at the heart of the battlefield.

The flames he conjured at the cost of his own skin carved a massive, fiery trench across the You Capital.

Li Huowang charged forward amidst the chaos. The bandits spontaneously combusted wherever he went, experiencing the agony he had endured.

Seeing the flames engulf everyone around him, Li Huowang stomped his feet and leaped onto a catapult. “Launch me! Aim for the densest crowd outside the city! Let’s see how many can burn!”

The taut rope was quickly cut with an axe.

Whoosh! The catapult launched Li Huowang high into the air. Li Sui’s tentacles unfurled from his body mid-air, and Li Huowang spread like a blazing net while flying toward the crowd below.

As Li Huowang was about to land, a rift suddenly opened in the sky. Long, delicate, flowing sleeves emerged from within. They spun rapidly and stripped the flames from Li Huowang, gradually extinguishing them.

The flames and Li Huowang’s intense pain were taken away. The army of Unspeakable, who could touch the Heavenly Daos, had arrived.

“You dare come again?” Li Huowang immediately crossed his legs and prepared the Heavenly Treasure of Deception[1].

However, it seemed the army of Unspeakable had found a way to counter him. The moment they saw him sitting down, the newly opened rifts closed, and the army of Unspeakable retreated to the Tianchen Kingdom.

Li Huowang stretched out his hands, ready to burn the endless hordes of bandits. However, the army of Unspeakable reappeared through the rifts and suppressed his attack. Their mastery of the Twisted One’s abilities was flawless, and Li Huowang found himself unable to act.

“Father, the Surveillance Bureau and the military of the Great Liang have arrived. They’re at the Altar of the Great Liang right

now.”

“Good! I’ll go get them! Hold the line here. I’ll be right back!” Li Huowang quickly pulled Li Sui out of his body, stomped hard, and shot toward the altar.

The army of Unspeakable was about to give chase, but the illusion of Shangguan Yuting got in their way, constantly multiplying and blocking their path.

By the time the illusions were dispelled, Li Huowang had already returned to the Great Liang through the rift.

Li Huowang descended from the sky and crashed heavily into the ground, causing the white jade tiles beneath him to shatter. A crowd had already gathered at the Altar of the Great Liang, with members from various sects and groups. Li Huowang recognized a few familiar faces.

It wasn’t just the Chief present—palace guards and some elderly eunuchs holding whisks were also there. The Great Liang had quickly summoned all their available forces.

With their help, the You Capital wouldn’t fall to the bandits and thieves, although dealing with the army of Unspeakable would still be tough.

As the Surveillance Bureau members bowed to him at the altar, Li Huowang said, “There’s no time for formalities! Follow me!”

Just like when he was delivering grain, he sliced open a rift and quickly grabbed people by the arm before throwing them through. “Pay attention! Our enemies are soldiers from the Tianchen Kingdom, and they reek of death!”

Now that the Great Liang’s Chief and the soldiers from Great Liang had arrived, the situation began to stabilize.

They quickly cleared the city of bandits and thieves. Then, they sealed the four gates once again.

However, the situation soon took a turn for the worse. The Tianchen Kingdom had a countermeasure. There were over a

hundred faceless figures painted in theatrical makeup scattered throughout the You Capital, and they began to steal the Heavenly Daos from the Great Liang's Surveillance Bureau.

Soon, a Lama whose Ten Emotions and Eight Sufferings had been completely extracted fell like a dried corpse.

This was just the beginning. The Surveillance Bureau was no match against the faceless enemies who could steal the Heavenly Daos.

They would be doomed if this situation continued. If the Surveillance Bureau were to be wiped out, they would lose before the real fight even began.

This is a trap! Their target isn't me! They are targeting the Surveillance Bureau! Li Huowang pressed his face against a nearby ally's, crossed his legs, and began to cast the Heavenly Treasure of Deception.

The faceless ones realized what was happening and quickly opened rifts to the Tianchen Kingdom to escape.

At that moment, Li Huowang suddenly stopped. He peeled off his face, revealing Li Sui's disguised face as Shangguan Yuting.

The one casting the Heavenly Treasure of Deception was a fake. The real Li Huowang had slipped into the crowd and followed one of the faceless ones back to the Tianchen Kingdom.

Li Huowang realized that passively reacting to the enemy wouldn't work. He needed to seize the initiative!

As the saying goes, capture the ringleader to win the fight. When dealing with the Tianchen Kingdom, neither the army of Unspeakable nor anything else truly mattered—the key was their Twisted One, who could open a path between the Tianchen Kingdom and the Great Qi.

Li Huowang scanned the area as soon as he arrived in the Tianchen Kingdom. His gaze locked onto a man in a red robe with a fox mask, walking on stilts in the distance. That person was the

Twisted One.

1. The technique from the Sitting Oblivion Dao that he had used to summon Doulao. 🤔

Chapter 909 - Zuoqiu Yong

In a clearing intentionally made in the forest of Tianchen Kingdom, Li Huowang stared intently at the man with the fox face standing on stilts in the distance.

Although the Tianchen Kingdom was powerful, it also had weaknesses. Li Huowang knew he still had a chance of victory. If he could take out this man, he could sever the connection between the Tianchen Kingdom and the Great Qi, thus averting the current crisis.

“It’s him!” The man’s eyelids twitched rapidly as various portals quickly opened and closed.

Li Huowang moved like lightning and dashed towards him. His movement set everything into motion. The faceless ones who had just returned and the guards around the fox-faced man all rushed to block his path.

The clearer their anxiety became, the more Li Huowang understood how important this Twisted One was to them.

Li Huowang’s expression turned cold. Without hesitation, he sat down cross-legged and began to chant loudly.

“Golden light shines, the sun and moon lose their brilliance, and the treasured staff rotates. Ghosts and gods tremble. Reveal your presence in the mortal realm. The holy court of Yanfu...”

If Li Huowang were to cast the Heavenly Treasure of Deception in the Great Qi, they would be able to escape to the Tianchen Kingdom. However, if he were to cast it in the Tianchen Kingdom, where could they possibly run to?

Another Li Huowang quickly formed from his spine as False Qi

rapidly flowed out of him.

An abnormal phenomenon appeared in the sky, and Li Huowang could feel an otherworldly presence gazing at him. It was Doulao, who was about to arrive!

At that critical moment, a needle threaded with silk flew toward him at incredible speed. In just an instant, it sewed shut Li Huowang's eyes, nose, and mouth.

An ordinary silver needle had easily interrupted Li Huowang's ritual. The swirling clouds above quickly dissipated.

Li Huowang trembled with rage and strained his body, causing blood to splatter as he forcefully ripped his sewn mouth open. "Who is it?!"

He tore the stitches from his eyes, then finally saw who had done it.

The golden dragon he had faintly seen before was now being used like a beast of burden, pulling a carriage through the sky.

This was the first time Li Huowang had encountered someone who truly resembled an immortal in this bizarre world—someone who could genuinely ride the clouds and mist.

Li Huowang's sharp vision allowed him to finally spot the person who controlled the noble vehicle. He saw them through the pink veils billowing out of the carriage windows.

The figure was dressed in green silk and seemed strange, with a round face and rosy lips. They were holding a silver needle in a delicate gesture, and it was hard to tell whether they were male or female. However, their exaggeratedly effeminate demeanor reminded Li Huowang of the eunuchs in the palace.

Once he looked at the dragon pulling the carriage, their identity became clear—Zuoqiu Yong, the patron of the Tianchen Kingdom.

The carriage circled in the sky a few times before slowly descending. An effeminate voice came from inside. "Oh my, so the

rumors were true! You really are Li Huowang, and quite the handsome fellow too!”

Li Huowang glanced at the army of Unspeakable surrounding him and the fox-faced man on stilts in the distance, who had stopped moving. “You’ve heard of me?”

“Mm-hmm, I’ve heard quite a bit about you,” Zuoqiu Yong said. “But that was all long ago.”

The carriage door opened, and Zuoqiu Yong stepped out while lightly embracing a stunning woman.

Zuoqiu Yong gave Li Huowang a sly smile. “Li Huowang~ I’d like to have a little chat with you.”

Li Huowang sneered and glanced at the enemies surrounding him. “At this point, is there anything left to talk about?”

Though he appeared calm, Li Huowang could sense the disparity in strength between them.

His mind raced as he pondered how to escape back to the Great Liang, harness the Dragon Qi, and reach the Baiyu Capital again.

In this situation, he would have to rely on Ji Zai’s abilities for any hope to turn the tide!

“Oh dear, let’s not be so hasty. We’re all reasonable people here, aren’t we? Let’s talk this out instead of fighting,” Zuoqiu Yong said, pulling a pink handkerchief from his sleeve and dabbing imaginary sweat from his forehead.

“Tell you what, why don’t you bring the Saintess of the White Lotus here? We can all sit down and have a nice chat.”

Li Huowang nodded and agreed readily. “Fine, wait here a moment. I’ll go get the Saintess of the White Lotus.”

He pulled out his spine sword and slashed open a rift to return to Great Liang.

As he approached the rift to step through, the fox-faced man’s left eyelid twitched, and another portal instantaneously replaced the rift to the Great Liang.

When Li Huowang stepped out, he found himself standing just inches away from Zuoqiu Yong.

“Oh, you’re naughty~ Did you plan to get away?” Zuoqiu Yong lightly tapped Li Huowang’s chest with the pink handkerchief.

“That won’t do~ If you go back, the Heavenly Mater won’t come.”

This time, Li Huowang intently studied the strange person before him. “Do you know who the White Lotus Saintess is to me?”

“I don’t, actually. What, do you have a deep connection to her?”

“Yes, a very deep one—she’s my wife. If you’re targeting her, you’re targeting me. There’s no negotiating this.”

Li Huowang paused and then looked directly at Zuoqiu Yong. “Another thing. I want to see if the renowned patron of the Tianchen Kingdom is as powerful as they say.”

Before Zuoqiu Yong could react, Li Huowang’s spine sword had already pierced through his chest.

Zuoqiu Yong could only watch as Li Huowang delivered a powerful kick to his side, forcefully retracting the sword.

Li Huowang took several steps back to catch his balance and looked up again. He was shocked to find there wasn’t a single wound on Zuoqiu Yong’s body—not even his [\[1\]](#) clothes were torn.

Zuoqiu Yong flicked the dust off his robe with a finger, his previously gentle smile gradually fading. “This is quite amusing.

“Li Huowang, don’t be ungrateful. Since you’ve come to the Tianchen Kingdom, neither you nor your sword will be leaving.”

Li Huowang surveyed the enemies around him and clenched his teeth, trying to figure out a way to break free from this predicament. “Come on, then!”

“Li Huowang, such big talk. Do you even know what Heavenly Dao the Heavenly Mater lost?” Zuoqiu Yong said, reaching out a hand toward Li Huowang’s head.

Just before he made contact, he turned slightly to see a large

twisted hole appear in the sky to his left. A young girl with a white lotus mark on her forehead emerged from the rift. “Senior Li, we’re here to save you!”

Li Huowang’s eyes shrank when he saw her. *What kind of game is this Shai Zi trying to play?*

1. The author uses both male and female pronouns for Zuoqiu Yong, and it's not entirely clear if it's intentional. We've standardized them to male pronouns for readability, but we may revise them depending on how future chapters go. 🤔

Chapter 910 - Growth

“Senior Li, are you alright? You’re not hurt, are you?” Bai Lingmiao said, her eyes covered by a white silk cloth. She hurried to Li Huowang’s side, pulling on his sleeve with a face full of worry and concern.

Li Huowang opened his mouth to respond but was unsure what to say. He could tell that this wasn’t the real Bai Lingmiao—it was a disguise by Shai Zi, a master of deception.

Shai Zi’s performance was flawless in every aspect, except for its inability to capture Bai Lingmiao’s profound grudge after the death of her entire family.

The act might deceive some people, but Li Huowang had already seen through it. Having dealt with the Sitting Oblivion Dao for such a long time, he was not easily fooled.

Shai Zi knew that Li Huowang had seen through the act but continued the charade nonetheless. Bai Lingmiao stepped forward and placed herself between Li Huowang and Zuoqiu Yong.

She angrily scolded Zuoqiu Yong with a frown and said, “If you want to hurt Senior Li, you’ll have to step over my dead body!”

Zuoqiu Yong stared at Bai Lingmiao, momentarily lost in thought. Soon, a smile crept onto his lips, turning from a faint smirk into full-blown laughter.

He slapped his thigh and pointed at Bai Lingmiao as he laughed. “Hahaha! Double happiness! Isn’t this just perfect? I was worried you’d be hiding somewhere hard to find, and here you are, delivering yourself right to me!”

The surrounding troops and bandits closed in on Li Huowang and Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang tightened his grip on his spine sword and glanced

at the silver-haired Bai Lingmiao before him. He couldn't figure out Shai Zi's exact plan, but it seemed like he intended to help.

Otherwise, from a liar's perspective, why would he walk into a trap to die?

"Be careful, don't let your guard down. These people can extract everything from inside you, and Zuoqiu Yong might even be able to use the previous Heavenly Dao of the Heavenly Mater." Li Huowang's warning seemed like it was directed at Bai Lingmiao, but it was actually meant for Shai Zi.

"Don't worry, Senior Li. I'm aware. The Heavenly Mater has already issued a divine decree and revealed this villain's secrets."

Zuoqiu Yong's smile faded, slowly replaced by a touch of anger. "Tough talk. Let's see how long you can keep it up!"

He waved his pink handkerchief, which instantly dissolved into threads as thin as needles that flew toward Li Huowang.

Li Huowang stomped the ground, propelling himself forward toward Zuoqiu Yong. As he passed Bai Lingmiao, he whispered, "I'll hold him off. Hurry and do whatever you came to do!"

Before Bai Lingmiao could react, Li Huowang had already engaged with the thin threads.

Li Huowang swung his sword, creating a rift that collided with the incoming threads. To his surprise, rather than cutting through them, the lines rattled as if they were made of metal. This was a first for Li Huowang.

The threads fell like rain, but they didn't hinder Li Huowang in the slightest.

His body flickered as he approached Zuoqiu Yong. He had dodged, and only his afterimage had been pierced.

Just as they were about to clash, Li Huowang swiftly sank into the ground. His sword rose up from beneath the earth, targeting Zuoqiu Yong's legs.

The moment his sword struck, Li Huowang felt the familiar

sensation of cutting through flesh.

Clang! A sudden force nearly disarmed him.

Li Huowang poked his head out of the ground and saw Zuoqiu Yong gently land nearby.

He was certain he had severed Zuoqiu Yong's legs, yet he stood unharmed—just as he had after Li Huowang stabbed him in the chest.

“Wow, Li Huowang! Is this all you’ve got? I’m starting to look down on you,” Zuoqiu Yong said.

Li Huowang cast a quick glance at Bai Lingmiao, who was currently locked in a chaotic battle with the surrounding army of Unspeakable. He gritted his teeth in frustration. “You filthy eunuch! Enough talk. Let’s fight!”

Zuoqiu Yong remained unfazed by Li Huowang’s insult and flashed a condescending smile. “Eunuch? So what? Eunuchs can be emperors and kings! You mortals need descendants because you’re destined to die. I, however, won’t need heirs once I achieve immortality.”

He spoke with great pride, as if he were extremely pleased with his own status.

“Alright, enough chit-chat. Let’s get serious now.” Zuoqiu Yong lifted his right hand, and only then did Li Huowang notice the white jade finger guards on three of Zuoqiu Yong’s fingers. They were intricately carved in the shape of dragons and phoenixes, the kind that only noblewomen in the palace would wear.

Zuoqiu Yong raised his hand. Li Huowang swiftly dodged past the direction it pointed.

However, before Li Huowang could launch a counterattack, something strange happened. His body, which had been burned by fire earlier, was now rapidly healing.

Before he could feel relieved, his body began to change uncontrollably.

The hair on his chin, the hair on his head, and even his fingernails started to grow uncontrollably at a concerning speed.

“This... Is this the Heavenly Dao that the Heavenly Mater once controlled?!” Li Huowang exclaimed, watching as his nails twisted like vines, wrapping around his sword and becoming a nuisance.

“Pure Yin in solemnity, Pure Yang in grandeur. Solemnity emerges from the heavens. Grandeur arises from the earth. When the two harmonize, all things are born~” Zuoqiu Yong chanted proudly. He watched as Li Huowang’s hair was dragged on the ground, confident he had won.

“Is this all you’ve got?” Li Huowang shouted with a burst of anger. Every strand of hair and every nail were severed at once, freeing him from their constraints.

Li Huowang lifted his sword and charged at Zuoqiu Yong again. However, after only a few steps, pain surged through his hands.

A quick glance revealed that his nails were now retracting into his fingers at an alarming rate, leaving his hands bloodied and raw.

It wasn’t just his nails that were shrinking—everything that had grown out of his skin was shrinking into his body.

Old wounds reopened, and every bone that had ever been broken now seemed to snap back to its fractured state.

Chapter 911 - Borrow

Everything happened too fast. Li Huowang had barely approached Zuoqiu Yong, yet he was already on the verge of death.

Li Huowang looked ghastly. There was no difference between him and a skeleton!

“This is... Growth! That bastard holds the Heavenly Dao of Growth!”

Li Huowang glared at Zuoqiu Yong with his one remaining eye.

I am... fine! I am fine! Li Huowang tried to use his “Truth” cultivation to turn himself back to normal, even if it was for a short period of time.

He succeeded. However, Zuoqiu Yong continually stripped away Li Huowang’s cultivation of the “Truth,” resulting in the abnormal growth of more tumors and flesh.

The strength gap between them was immense. Zuoqiu Yong stood out from the sects he had faced, as they merely relied on a fraction of the Heavenly Daos to acquire power. Zuoqiu Yong, on the other hand, used the Heavenly Dao itself. He was like a Siming that had descended upon the mortal realm.

Even when Li Huowang fought against the Dharma Sect’s Siming, he didn’t despair. This was the first time he felt so helpless—he couldn’t escape or fight back and had no chance to flip the situation around.

Zuoqiu Yong wasn’t in a rush. He looked at Li Huowang with interest.

“Li Huowang, you’ve caused a lot of trouble. I overlooked your actions in the past because I didn’t care. However, that doesn’t mean you can continue causing trouble for us without consequences.”

“Senior Li, are you alright?”

As Bai Lingmiao escaped from the army of Unspeakable, she saw Li Huowang getting hurt.

She caught him before he could collapse. Then, while supporting his weight, she slapped a piece of Hong Zhong into the back of Li Huowang’s skull.

A surge of information flowed through his mind, and Li Huowang stared at Bai Lingmiao in shock.

“Senior Li, what’s wrong with you? Don’t scare me.”

Bai Lingmiao’s tears drenched her eye covers, her face clouded by intense sadness.

“Hmph~” Zuoqiu Yong frowned when he saw them. “Don’t worry—I’ll send you both to hell together. You can start your next lives at the same time.”

Li Huowang suddenly laughed despite his grievous injuries. His laughter was filled with arrogance and mockery.

“You think you’ve won? You think I fought this long just to die here?”

Zuoqiu Yong was surprised. “Hm?”

He eyed Li Huowang suspiciously. What could someone weaker than him possibly do? Where did such courage come from?

“You conspired against the Heavenly Mater in the past, and now you’re openly trying to suppress her. Do you think the Heavenly Mater did not devise any plans to stop you? Don’t you know what a diversion is? The fact you’re here implies that you’ve left a certain place unsupervised.”

Li Huowang smiled proudly and hugged Bai Lingmiao’s waist.

Zuoqiu Yong’s face froze. He swung his right arm, embedding several needles and threads into Li Huowang and pinning him down.

Zuoqiu Yong stared at Li Huowang and laughed. “I heard you had some connections to the Sitting Oblivion Dao, but I never

thought you would try to trick me like this. Aren't you looking down on me? I'm much more experienced in this regard."

Li Huowang clutched his belly and burst into laughter. "Hahaha! Perfect! That's exactly what I needed you to believe. Now, I highly doubt you'll be able to do anything when the Siming takes action."

Just as Li Huowang spoke, the skies changed. Li Huowang felt the Pain in his body disappear, followed by Rot.

"Hahaha!" Li Huowang extended his arm and laughed at Zuoqiu Yong. "You damned eunuch! Do you believe me now? We've won this time!"

Zuoqiu Yong hesitated when another Heavenly Dao disappeared. This time, it was Benevolence.

Zuoqiu Yong no longer hesitated. He yanked his arm, cutting Li Huowang into pieces with the threads.

He ignored Bai Lingmiao, the Twisted One of the Heavenly Mater—there was a more pressing matter at hand. Zuoqiu Yong leaped onto his golden dragon and flew towards the east.

Zuoqiu Yong's departure and the changing skies indicated that something major was going on. The army of Unspeakable and the fox-faced Twisted One raced after him.

Soon, only "Bai Lingmiao" and Li Huowang's corpse were left in the area.

A small doll emerged from Li Huowang's corpse, growing rapidly as it ate Li Huowang's shadow. Li Huowang revived once again.

Bai Lingmiao hugged her chest and looked at Li Huowang. "Look, they might be able to control the other Heavenly Daos, but they cannot do anything to the Heavenly Dao of Lies. Only the Sitting Oblivion Dao can use it freely! No matter how strong they are, they'll still fall for deception."

Li Huowang bent down and picked up his spine sword from the

pool of blood. “We need to go. If Zuoqiu Yong realizes we tricked him with the Heavenly Dao of Lies, we’ll be trapped here forever.”

The Heavenly Mater didn’t do anything at all—It was just a ruse to scare Zuoqiu Yong away. In fact, Li Huowang didn’t know what Zuoqiu Yong was afraid of.

Li Huowang opened a rift to the Liang Kingdom, and the two of them returned.

Compared to the chaotic situation in the Tianchen and Qi Kingdoms, the Liang Kingdom was peaceful. They were back in the garden inside the royal palace. Some of the ladies were drinking tea and admiring the flowers with the other consorts and eunuchs.

The tranquility shattered when they spotted Li Huowang—completely naked. Shrieks of shock echoed through the garden.

Li Huowang tore off one of the eunuch’s robes and wore it. He then looked at one of the women, who was wearing a crown. “Are you one of Gao Zhijian’s wives? Where is he? Call him and tell him that the trouble has been temporarily averted.”

The woman ran away in tears. Li Huowang sighed and collapsed onto the ground, feeling the rush of adrenaline leaving his body.

That battle had been too close. One wrong move, and he would’ve died.

“Yeah, though we only forced them back temporarily. They will come back.” Bai Lingmiao said, sitting in front of a table as she drank some tea.

“Change your damn face! I’m getting irritated just by looking at it!”

“Bai Lingmiao” transformed her face into a twelve-sided die.

Li Huowang glared at him. “How did you know there was going to be a Natural Disaster?”

Shai Zi took a sip of tea and chuckled. “Don’t worry about that. I have my connections.”

Chapter 912 - Plan

“Connections?” Li Huowang stared at Shai Zi, feeling a strange irritation blossom in his heart.

“You’re still hiding things from us despite the war? What’s going on with the Natural Disaster? What else do you know?”

Shai Zi chuckled. “Hong Zhong, what good would it do to tell you? Do you even have the energy to handle it? I thought you were busy devising a plan to deal with that eunuch. You’ve seen how strong he is.

“For now, you’ve only managed to trick him temporarily. Once he sees through it, it won’t be easy to fool him again.”

Li Huowang frowned, remembering how helpless he had been against Zuoqiu Yong. He was a Siming that controlled flesh, so Li Huowang had to rely on Ji Zai’s power to deal with him.

“Don’t place your hopes on Ji Zai. He’s very busy right now.”

“So you’ve heard the news from Ji Zai?” Shai Zi’s question made Li Huowang look up.

Shai Zi continued, “Oh, you have a sharp mind. See? There’s no use in telling you right now—it wouldn’t do you any good.”

The number on Shai Zi’s face turned to one.

Li Huowang grabbed onto Shai Zi’s collar. “What else did I say? What’s the key to killing Zuoqiu Yong? Tell me quickly!”

Shai Zi shrugged. “He never said anything about that. Maybe he didn’t know who Zuoqiu Yong was.”

“Stop lying to me! He’s me from the future! How could he not know who Zuoqiu Yong is?”

“Wait.” A look of joy spread across Li Huowang’s face. “That means the future me is still alive. I’ll survive this.”

Shai Zi’s words hit like cold water. “Don’t be so sure. History

can change at any moment. If you die now, Ji Zai will cease to exist.”

Li Huowang pushed Shai Zi down out of anger. “What else can you do except talk? What else?! Are you here just to watch us fail?”

“Of course, I could be helpful in many ways. If it weren’t for me, you would be dead. Your powers as a Strayed One are useless against that eunuch. Li Huowang, you owe me one.”

As Li Huowang opened his mouth to speak, footsteps came to his left. He turned, expecting Gao Zhijian, but it was Li Sui.

Seeing that Li Huowang was wearing the robes of a eunuch from the palace, Li Sui removed her red robes and covered Li Huowang. “Father, what’s wrong? What happened in the Tianchen Kingdom?”

It appeared that the siege on the Qi Kingdom stopped after Li Huowang scared Zuoqiu Yong away.

Li Huowang pulled on his sleeves tiredly and sighed. “It’s a long story...”

He kept his explanation short. In the end, he said, “Who would’ve thought that there would be a Siming in the Tianchen Kingdom that controls flesh? I never thought I would fight against someone like that.

“Tell Gao Zhijian to stop preparing for war. Regular troops are useless against the Simings. I need another Siming to deal with him.”

Shai Zi interrupted him, saying, “Don’t look for Ji Zai right now. He’s very busy and doesn’t have time for this. You need to think of another way.”

“Enough!” Li Huowang said. “I heard you the first time! I’m not deaf! Instead of repeating yourself, why don’t you help me stop their plans?”

Shai Zi had indeed helped him this time, but he looked more like he was just here to watch their struggle than to help earnestly.

Shai Zi chuckled, and he shrunk before disappearing completely. As he did, his voice lingered in the air like smoke.

“Hong Zhong, you know better than this. We of the Sitting Oblivion Dao should stand together. Time marches on whether you’re happy or not. Why exhaust yourself? You should find joy even when you’re dying.”

“Look at his damned attitude!” Li Huowang said, pointing at the empty space in front of him.

Li Sui didn’t answer—she was trying to digest what Li Huowang had told her. She paced around the place before answering, “Father, I might have a plan to fight against Zuoqiu Yong. Maybe we can try something.”

“What?” Li Huowang wanted to ask what the plan was, but he figured it out. “Do you mean stuffing the primordial breath and inner sight of other Strayed Ones into me? You want me to complete my cultivation?”

Li Sui nodded. “Yes. It was impossible last time because we had no one who could touch the Heavenly Daos directly, but now we do.”

Several people appeared from the doorway. They were members of the army of Unspeakable. Li Sui’s tentacles were embedded in their brains, making them look like walking kebabs when they approached Li Huowang.

Li Huowang stared at them with a complicated feeling in his heart. Li Sui had caught many people when he wasn’t there.

“I don’t know how strong I would be if I complete the final step. Can I fight against Zuoqiu Yong like this?”

Li Huowang had another concern, even with the path to becoming stronger lying right before him.

He still remembered how he couldn’t differentiate between truth and lies, and that was back when he had only completed the second stage. If he completed the seventh stage, he might end up

unable to distinguish reality from delusions, as Li Sui warned.

It was a strong power, but the side effects were detrimental too.

Li Huowang had to use Hong Zhong to barely balance his cultivation of “Truth” and “Lies.” However, if he became stronger, the balance would be broken. Who knew what would happen then?

Still, if he didn’t get stronger, he wouldn’t be able to stop Zuoqiu Yong’s massacre.

“How will we ever know if we don’t give it a shot? It’s not as if we have any other options. Father, please don’t hesitate. Yes, he is a Siming, but you are too.

“I know what you’re worried about, and I understand the possible side effects. To get around that, all we need to do is kill Shai Zi when the time is right. If we extract a portion of the Lies inside of him, we can put them inside of you and prevent the crisis.”

Li Huowang stared at Li Sui with shock. The difference between the Li Sui he knew before and the Li Sui standing before him was massive. He was certain that the Li Sui who had lived in his stomach would’ve never said that.

“Suisui, are you hiding something from me? If so, you need to tell me everything.”

Li Sui nodded lightly, her voice still as soft as before. “Alright, Father. So, do you want to try the plan?”

Li Huowang considered it briefly before agreeing. “Fine! It’s not like we have a choice.”

The memory of Zuoqiu Yong toying with him made Li Huowang’s blood boil. Bloodlust leaked out of him.

“Come! Let’s see who’s stronger!”

Chapter 913 - Trust

Crunch! Chen Hongyu munched on a bag of chips loudly as she watched TV. She glanced to her side and noticed Qing Wanglai, Zhao Shuangdian, and Li Huowang talking incessantly.

“Why is he going crazy again?” she asked.

Zhao Lei had been furiously tapping on his phone, but he paused to look at Li Huowang. “He’s saying that he can reset the flow of time and is trying to convince them.”

“Hm?” Chen Hongyu was surprised. “I thought his special power was conjuring things out of nothing? When did he get an upgrade? How come I didn’t know about it?”

Zhao Lei remained silent, his attention still fixed on his phone, though he couldn’t help but hear Li Huowang’s words.

“I’m telling the truth. I know it happened—I was there! Why don’t you believe me? That factory is the Siming, and everything about it disappeared when we killed it, even your memories of it!”

Qing Wanglai whispered to Zhao Shuangdian when he noticed Li Huowang’s excitement. Soon, Zhao Shuangdian nodded.

Even though they said nothing, Li Huowang could tell what they were thinking from the looks they were giving him. He’d seen them before.

“Are you thinking that I’ve gone crazy? I’m not ill!” Li Huowang paused. “Well, maybe I am, but they’re just hallucinations! They can’t erase everyone’s memories of the Siming!”

Qing Wanglai raised his hands and patted Li Huowang. “Alright, Li Huowang, don’t be hasty. We said nothing about your illness. It’s just that this is very difficult for us to understand.”

Li Huowang took two steps forward and glared at Qing

Wanglai. “What’s there to understand? The factory is a Siming’s projection. Once the Siming perishes, everything about it disappears!

“A Siming has no past or future. They merely exist, and everything about them is erased once they cease to exist! It also explains what Zhuge Yuan had written on his fan!”

“Hmm... Who’s Zhuge Yuan? Why is there a new character?” Wu Qi asked in confusion.

With a cigarette in her hand, Ba Nanxu looked at the excited Li Huowang, her face etched with irritation. “What’s a Siming? Did you call us here to show off how crazy you are?”

“I understand. I think I know what he is trying to say,” Qing Wanglai said, clearing his throat. “He’s talking about his own world. It seems like he just grasped a very important rule within it.”

“Tsk. Do we need you to explain that? Isn’t it the same as him becoming crazy again?” Ba Nanxu said, exhaling her cigarette smoke toward Li Huowang.

Li Huowang replied, “Shut up! I’m doing my best to understand everyone’s world, so you should try to understand mine too! This is important—it will change how we will fight our enemy!”

“You’re right, but you did say time itself was reset. I think that’s a bit too far-fetched even within our world.” Zhao Shuangdian said, highlighting the inconsistency in Li Huowang’s narrative. “I’ve studied the worlds of other people, and none of them have claimed that their timelines were reset.”

“Is what you perceive the truth? This is not the first time I’ve experienced it—it’s the third! I only realized what was happening after the third time!”

Li Huowang was still in the middle of explaining when Zhao Shuangdian cut him off. “Okay, we get it. No need to go into more detail. So, just to clarify, you’re confirming that you’ll be collaborating with us on the sixth of next month, right?”

“That’s not the point! What I mean is—”

“Yes or no?”

“Yes.”

Li Huowang felt that his words were ineffective. Even if he continued explaining, he was sure they wouldn’t believe him.

“Fine, we will stop here today. I have a meeting later. Feel free to contact me on WeChat if there’s anything else.”

Zhao Shuangdian passed a smartphone to Li Huowang before exiting Qing Wanglai’s mansion with the rest of them.

“Oh, you are leaving now? Are you not staying for a meal? Qing Wanglai is great at cooking,” Wu Qi said.

Zhao Shuangdian reached for the door. “No need. I’m on a diet and don’t eat lunch. We’ll see each other next month.”

“Wait!”

Zhao Shuangdian frowned and turned to Li Huowang. He had called out to her to stop her from leaving.

“Your... your weapon is a sniper rifle, isn’t it?”

The hall fell into silence, save for the sound of the television.

Zhao Shuangdian froze, and Li Huowang smiled. The timeline had been deleted, resulting in a different outcome. None of them remembered anything except for Li Huowang, who still retained all memories from the deleted timeline.

Li Huowang smiled confidently. “You never told me about it before. Can you guess how I knew about it?”

Zhao Shuangdian immediately turned to Qing Wanglai. “Did you tell him?”

Qing Wanglai’s smile disappeared as he shook his head. “No, I never told him anything about you.”

Just as Qing Wanglai finished speaking, Li Huowang revealed more information. “That’s not all I know. I also know that you have a companion called Ling. She used a computer to lead us through a route. Her face occasionally twitched, which made me believe she

was sick.”

The words of Li Huowang shook Zhao Shuangdian’s confidence while strengthening his own.

In a normal timeline, Li Huowang wouldn’t have known any of this. Yet here he was, aware of things he shouldn’t have known. This indicated that Li Huowang was telling the truth, and Zhao Shuangdian’s actions proved it.

Li Huowang said resolutely, “I’m not lying! I experienced all of it—it actually happened!”

“Wait for me.”

Zhao Shuangdian exited the mansion and returned after a while. This time, she had a laptop with her.

She turned on the laptop and quickly typed something on it. Li Huowang realized that she was serious and trusted him now.

Chapter 914 - Idealism

“Here, take a look at this.”

After spending quite a while on her laptop, Zhao Shuangdian showed the screen to Li Huowang.

Li Huowang felt his head swimming when he saw a complex mathematical formula. “What is this? I don’t understand any of it.”

Zhao Shuangdian frowned and looked at Li Huowang. “Then, are you willing to learn from scratch? I can teach you. If what you’re saying is real, there are only three explanations.”

“Why should I adapt to your world? Is your world the truth? Why can’t you adapt to mine? What if your world is fake?”

Zhao Shuangdian replied, “Our world is in conflict. My world is healed, but your world has many inconsistencies and contradictions. Shouldn’t we start from your world?”

“I don’t want to learn! This is the truth, and I’ve told you about the contradictions. Whether or not you trust me is up to you.”

Ba Nanxu scoffed from the side. “You want us to adapt to your world? Are you trying to turn us all into crazy bastards?”

“Shut up.” Zhao Shuangdian glared at Ba Nanxu, who shrugged and sat on the sofa to watch TV.

Zhao Shuangdian quickly opened a new notepad on her laptop. “Alright, Li Huowang, I trust you. Now, please tell me about your world in as much detail as possible.”

Li Huowang sighed in relief after seeing that Zhao Shuangdian trusted him. He calmed down and started telling his story. “Alright. I’ll have to talk about the Zephyr Temple first. Back then, I was still being treated in the hospital and thought it was fake...”

Li Huowang spent the next few hours telling her about everything he had experienced in the bizarre world. By the time he

finished, it was already nighttime.

“Eat something before you continue. Your dishes are cold, but I saved you a portion,” Ba Nanxu said, taking out a couple of beer bottles for Zhao Shuangdian.

“Shh, be quiet. I need time to think and sort this out.”

Zhao Shuangdian was busy scrolling through Li Huowang’s statement.

“Hey, did you leave food for me too? I’m hungry.” Li Huowang stood up. He had calmed down now that a few hours had passed.

Ba Nanxu scoffed and wrinkled her nose when she looked at Li Huowang. “Hoh? The crazy bastard knows when it’s time to eat?”

Ba Nanxu turned to leave, but Wu Qi gestured for Li Huowang instead. “Sit here. We left you a portion too.”

“Li Huowang, I’ve sorted through your statement. While I trust you, I still find that your world has a lot of contradictions. In fact, it’s even worse than the others. I also found a lot of instances where it’s too idealistic.”

Li Huowang replied as he munched on some chicken, “You still don’t understand? That world is bizarre, and anything could happen. Also, is your so-called ‘healed world’ the truth? Maybe my world is real too. It’s just that we haven’t realized it yet.”

Zhao Shuangdian paused to think carefully as she typed, appearing to perform a series of calculations.

Li Huowang was almost done with his meal when she stopped. “Alright. You’ve convinced me.”

“Hm?!” Li Huowang was shocked. *She’s so easily convinced? That’s out of my expectations. She’s the first to believe me this easily ever since I left the Zephyr Temple.*

Li Huowang had made preparations to refute her if she still didn’t believe him.

“Uh... What do you mean? Does my world convince you? Is our world also the ideal world?”

“We don’t have a macro world, but we have a lot of micro ones.”

Zhao Shuangdian proceeded to shut down her laptop.

“Ideal?” Li Huowang stared at the chandelier above him. He looked at the leather sofa before staring at Zhao Shuangdian’s pretty face. Nothing had changed.

“Don’t worry. Even if it’s ideal, we can still bravely develop a hypothesis. We just need to be careful when we gather evidence. Thank you for your help. It will help me a lot with my research.”

Li Huowang continued eating his meal. “Don’t worry about it. My main concern is the possibility of the timeline resetting again if we kill the Siming on the sixth of February. If that does happen, I would have to explain everything to you again.”

“Don’t worry. If that happens, you can just align with my other self again.”

“Alright, as long as you are convinced later on.”

Li Huowang put down his plate and thought carefully. “Since my world is real, we need to reconsider certain things, including your hypothesis about the elephant. Maybe the elephant isn’t divided into separate parts but rather drawn on a single piece of paper.

“The tusk, legs, and nose could all exist on this one sheet along a single timeline. This would explain why we can resolve our crisis by jumping to another elephant’s tusk. And if we want to deal with a problem on the nose of the elephant, we need to reset the timeline by going back to the original elephant.”

“This is plausible and a reasonable hypothesis.”

“But... is the elephant still alive by this point?” Li Huowang asked, shoving the rest of his meal into his mouth.

“It’s still early to say that. We need more evidence, but no matter what, I have to thank you for your story,” Zhao Shuangdian said and turned to leave.

However, Li Huowang stopped her again. “I don’t care how many hypotheses there are. Just how much longer do we have to continue this? I’m exhausted.”

“I can’t answer that. We now have a new variable. If you want to end it quickly, you need to find a way to help us.”

She turned to leave once more. This time, Li Huowang did not stop her.

Li Huowang had finished his meal, yet he remained seated at the table, his empty plate before him. He was lost in thought.

Although he understood that part of the world was real, it didn’t help him. His situation was still as troublesome as ever. If Zhao Shuangdian was right, it meant that the Simings on the other elephant were still lurking around and staring at them.

If he couldn’t deal with them once and for all, he would forever be labeled as a patient with a mental illness.

He didn’t want that. He had finally learned more about the world, and he wanted to live normally.

Chapter 915 - Living Together

Even though Li Huowang had found answers to most of his questions, he was still in deep trouble. Still, he could now see his issues in a different light.

Li Huowang swore to fight back to his last breath. *Isn't it just god Yu'er and Sir Arrogant Stone? Come on, then! You succeeded last time, but don't you dare think your schemes will work again!*

No matter how many Simings he had to kill or how many times the timeline reset, Li Huowang would persevere until he accomplished his goal. He had no fear of death, let alone failure.

Just then, a fresh bowl of food was placed in front of Li Huowang. It was a steaming bowl of white rice topped with fried eggs and tomatoes.

Looking up, he saw Wu Qi had brought it over. "Thank you, but one serving is enough for me."

"Who said it's for you? I need you to give it to someone else."

This left Li Huowang perplexed. He was sure everyone had eaten. Also, why was he the one who needed to deliver the food? "Who is it for?"

"Your girl. She's still upstairs right now. Did you forget that you have a girlfriend?"

"Yang Na?" Li Huowang realized that Yang Na was still at Qing Wanglai's house since the timeline had been reset. He had originally come here to bring her back.

"I meant to tell you earlier, but you were talking non-stop with Qing Wanglai and Zhao Shuangdian. I didn't even get a chance to interrupt you."

“I don’t want to pry too much into your relationship, but your girlfriend seems off. She doesn’t have an appetite. See if you can get her to eat the meal, or I might have to sustain her through IVF.”

“Thank you, Wu Qi...”

Li Huowang felt a weight on his chest when he remembered how Yang Na had been acting. He took the bowl of food and walked up with a heavy heart.

Yang Na was still in the third room. Li Huowang opened the door and saw her in the bed at the corner of the room. She looked malnourished and disheveled.

“Nana, are you hungry? Let’s eat first.”

Li Huowang carefully lifted her up and set her down next to the table.

Yang Na held onto his wrist tightly, as if she was afraid that he would escape. “Huowang, is that you?”

She then noticed Li Huowang’s empty eye socket. She touched his face gingerly. “Huowang, where is your eye? Why is it missing? I’m sorry, is it because of me? Did I cause it?”

“No.”

Li Huowang carefully held her hands and checked her scarred wrists. “No, it’s not because of you. Don’t worry about it. You did not cause any harm to me. I’m the one who harmed you.”

“I’m relieved to hear that. But seeing you with just one eye... it breaks my heart.”

Yang Na suddenly smiled without any warning. “Huowang, I trust you. I really do. No matter what you say, I will trust you. I am the Heavenly Mater, and I’m a Siming, just like you.”

Yang Na’s words pierced Li Huowang’s heart, causing a searing pain that he couldn’t shake off, despite having gone through it before.

Li Huowang tried his best to conceal his expression. He didn’t want her to think she was hurting him. He forced the most genuine

smile he could. “That’s good. That’s good.”

This time, Li Huowang decided not to send her back. Since the timeline would reset again, he wanted to make Yang Na as happy as possible.

He regarded it as a dream, one that he could wake up from at any moment. Unlike him, everyone else in his vicinity would soon forget what transpired.

Yang Na snuggled against Li Huowang’s chest dreamily as she mumbled, “Huowang, I am the Heavenly Mater. I am a Siming. I can help you now. I won’t drag you down anymore.”

“You are not dragging me down. You can help me too. Nana is the best. Come now, let’s eat first.”

Li Huowang comforted her like a child as he took a spoonful of rice and placed it close to her mouth.

He slowly fed her and saw that she was slowly becoming better. Li Huowang was relieved to see that she was eating.

“Huowang, don’t worry about me. It’s not your fault. I feel much better, and I can move now.”

She tried to push him away so she could stand up, but Li Huowang held onto her.

“That’s fine. Let’s just rest for tonight since it’s already quite late. We can talk more tomorrow.”

After finishing his meal and comforting Yang Na, Li Huowang took the empty bowl and left the room.

As he exited, he noticed Qing Wanglai standing before the door. He had been waiting for him.

Li Huowang clenched his fist upon seeing Qing Wanglai’s smiling face. However, he ultimately released his grip.

“Do you want to stay here tonight? I’ve prepared your room.”

As long as no one threatened his plans, Qing Wanglai remained as perfect as everyone thought him to be.

“No need. I will stay in the same room as her. I need to stay by

her side.”

Li Huowang walked past Qing Wanglai and went down the stairs.

“Yang Na is awake. This is good news. We now have one more ally.”

Bam! In the end, Li Huowang still punched him. “I’m warning you—keep her out of this. If you don’t, I will kill you.”

Qing Wanglai chuckled and rubbed the bruise on his face. “Li Huowang, I don’t think that’s rational. Don’t you think it would be a waste if she doesn’t help us? She has the power to do so now.

“Besides, have you even bothered to ask for her permission? Maybe she doesn’t want to squander her talent. Even if she refrains from killing, having another ally by our side would still be good.”

Li Huowang smashed the bowl on the railings, and the broken pieces scattered on the stairs. Li Huowang picked up a sharp piece and pushed it against Qing Wanglai’s neck. “I said no. Are you deaf?”

“I’m not, but what are you afraid of? You’re the one who said that time would reset again as long as we kill another Siming. In that case, what’s wrong with losing our lives? We don’t have enough allies right now. Every single one matters.”

Li Huowang’s anger almost boiled over when he stopped and let go of the shrapnel.

“Alright, I will bring Yang Na to Zhao Shuangdian. I will let her join their alliance instead.”

Qing Wanglai frowned. “Hm?”

Li Huowang chuckled and looked at Qing Wanglai playfully. “Didn’t you say every single ally counts? I will let Yang Na ally herself with Zhao Shuangdian. That should fulfill your conditions, right?”

Seeing Qing Wanglai remain silent, Li Huowang walked down the stairs with pleasure.

He finally found a way to communicate with Qing Wanglai. A physical threat wouldn't work on him, but Wu Qi was right. As long as he understood what made Qing Wanglai tick, dealing with him was easy.

Chapter 916 - Medicine

“Huowang, you don’t need to feed me anymore. I’m not paralyzed,” Yang Na said, taking the spoon from Li Huowang’s hand. She scooped up some porridge and brought it to her mouth.

After a couple of bites, she looked up at Li Huowang, who was sitting across from her. “Why are you just staring at me? You should eat too.”

Li Huowang had been standing there in a daze. He smiled and nodded, then sat down to have breakfast as well.

“Hey, you’re not bad at all. You’re quite skilled at looking after people. I had my doubts initially, but it seems like I underestimated you a bit. Have you studied this before?” Wu Qi asked as she walked over.

Li Huowang shook his head and continued to eat. “No, I haven’t. I just picked up a few things during my time in the hospital.”

Yang Na looked noticeably healthier compared to before. She hadn’t been blaming herself so much, and her emotions seemed a lot more stable. She appeared much better, at least to others.

Only Li Huowang knew the truth. She wasn’t actually better—her condition was getting even worse. It was just that her logic had become more consistent with her beliefs, which made her appear normal.

Footsteps echoed as Qing Wanglai approached with a cup of coffee in one hand. “Doesn’t she share the same worldview as you? If her condition is considered an illness, what would you call your condition?”

Li Huowang glared at him angrily. “Get lost!”

Li Huowang noticed the sorrow etched on Yang Na’s face and

the tears brimming in her eyes. Ignoring Qing Wanglai, he embraced Yang Na and gently carried her into the house.

After comforting Yang Na, Li Huowang walked back outside, where Qing Wanglai awaited. "I'm just trying to help you. You can't keep deceiving yourself like this.

"If you believe your worldview is real, then you should also believe she is the Heavenly Mater. You can't claim it's a battle of Simings when it involves you but dismiss it as mental illness when it involves your girlfriend. Isn't that a double standard?"

Li Huowang replied, "None of this matters. Like I said before, don't expect her to get involved. Besides, If she really wanted to, she'd probably join Zhao Shuangdian's side!"

Regardless of whether Yang Na was the Heavenly Mater, Li Huowang didn't want her to get hurt any further. She had already suffered enough.

"Whatever," Qing Wanglai said, abruptly changing his tone. "Tomorrow is the day we take action. If she decides to join Zhao Shuangdian's faction, it would still increase our chances of winning."

It seemed he had realized that Li Huowang was trying to provoke him. This time, he didn't fall for it.

"She's depressed! How could she possibly help?"

"You never know. From what you said before, isn't the Heavenly Mater supposed to govern Benevolence and Death? If she's the goddess of death, she could be helpful."

Li Huowang recalled Chen Hongyu's tragic situation and knew all too well what Qing Wanglai meant by "helpful."

"So you know we're taking action tomorrow? Do you think antagonizing me right now is a good idea?" Li Huowang asked coldly as he stepped closer.

"Li Huowang, we're on the same side. I'm just trying to help you."

“Thanks, but there’s no need! You’ve ‘helped’ me enough times already! I’m sick of having this conversation over and over again! If you’re so bored, why don’t you pay your respects at Qian Fu’s grave!”

Li Huowang left the villa and headed to the underground garage. He got on his motorcycle and revved the engine a few times. However, it was out of gas.

He looked around and then set his sights on Qing Wanglai’s luxury car.

Soon enough, he inserted a hose into the car’s gas tank. He sucked hard with his mouth from the other end, and premium gasoline started flowing into his motorcycle’s tank.

Li Huowang put on a full-face helmet and sped away from the villa.

He rode down the road, returning to the city from the outskirts. He stayed on high alert, knowing full well that people were tracking him.

Though the motorcycle was the same, he had changed the license plate and repainted the black bike with a red-and-white pattern, making it less conspicuous [1] .

Li Huowang wasn’t taking such a risk for a casual ride. He was out to get some medicine to treat his hallucinations.

The plan was set for tomorrow, and he had no way of knowing the kind of projection the Siming would throw at him. He had to find a way to deal with his hallucinations before the battle started, or they would be a huge problem during the fight.

Zhao Shuangdian had forgotten about the deal they had made before time was reversed, but she didn’t go back on her word when Li Huowang reminded her. She said she’d figure something out.

In the pedestrian street, Li Huowang looked up at the Bloody Bonfire Tattoo Parlor run by the Ba siblings.

He pushed open the door and saw Ba Nanxu lounging on the

sofa with her legs crossed. She was tattooing her own neck with a tattoo gun. The shop was dead quiet, and there was no business today.

“We’re closed. No tattooing today.”

“Where is the medicine?” Li Huowang asked, his lips pressed tightly together as he walked over.

“It’s in that bag on the table. The label will tell you the dosage and how often to take it.”

Li Huowang picked up the bag and opened it to check the bottles and jars inside.

Most of the medications were familiar since he had taken them before. His rough assessment suggested that Zhao Shuangdian hadn’t tricked him.

“You’re free, so why don’t you just deliver it to me? Don’t you know it’s inconvenient for me to be out right now?”

Ba Nanxu scoffed. “You’ve got some nerve. Why would I deliver it to you? Have we slept together?”

Li Huowang paid no attention to her. He swiftly unscrewed the medicine bottles and peeled off the foil seals before taking the daily prescribed dose.

He couldn’t stand the feeling that everything he saw could be a hallucination.

After taking the medication, Li Huowang was unsure if the hallucinations had stopped, but he did feel worse physically. He couldn’t concentrate well, his reactions were sluggish, and sweat broke out across his skin.

“You alright? If you’re gonna die, do it outside. Don’t die in my shop.”

Li Huowang shook his head forcefully, grabbed the bag, and then headed for the door. “I’m fine. Medications for mental illness always have side effects. I’ll adapt.”

Whether it was an overreaction or not, Li Huowang could

clearly see figures walking past him, only to vanish just as quickly.

He took a seat on the steps outside and took a long rest. After some time, he started to feel more at ease and the after-images faded away. With that, he hopped back on his motorcycle and set off for home.

He kept his speed down since he didn't want to risk an accident. He made his way cautiously from the city to the outskirts.

Now that he had handled one of his problems, he felt a bit better. Life would be much simpler if all problems could be solved as easily as this one.

As he was nearing home, a car suddenly swerved into his path, sending cold sweat down his spine.

1. The raws describe it as less conspicuous, but we think it makes more sense as *more* conspicuous. 🤔

Chapter 917 - Order

Li Huowang was furious at suddenly being stopped like this. “Are you trying to crash into me? Learn how to drive!”

Li Huowang saw the car door open and was shocked to see who the driver was—Doctor Yi Donglai from the White Tower Hospital!

He never expected to see his attending doctor in a place like this.

“Did you really think I wouldn’t notice someone snooping through your medical records?” Yi Donglai explained. It was clear that he had been secretly following him.

Li Huowang gripped the handlebars of his motorcycle and quickly scanned his surroundings, wary of any orderlies who might suddenly appear to drag him back.

“Stop looking around. It’s just me today. I want to talk, Li Huowang. I’m genuinely curious—how did you escape from the White Tower Hospital? That’s a maximum-security facility.”

Yi Donglai was eager to learn how Li Huowang always managed to break free, no matter how tight the security was. This wasn’t the first time he had escaped.

“How did I escape? I had help. How so? Because everything that happened was real! None of it was just a hallucination!”

“Dr. Yi, you’re a good doctor, but you’re wrong about this. Terribly wrong!” Li Huowang said with conviction.

Yi Donglai responded to Li Huowang’s outburst with a simple smile, showing no signs of being bothered. His focus remained on bringing Li Huowang back, curing him, reclaiming his own reputation, and regaining what he believed he deserved.

“Do you truly believe that? Would you say the same in front of your mother?”

Yi Donglai raised his phone, and Sun Xiaoqin, Li Huowang's mother, appeared on the screen. She was crying and had visibly aged. "Huowang, where are you? Please come back. I beg you. Seeing your eye like this breaks my heart."

Li Huowang's headache intensified. His face contorted in agony as he gripped his head tightly.

Yi Donglai approached with the phone in hand, but the screen went black with a soft pop.

"Damn it! Why now?" Yi Donglai cursed and angrily tapped the phone.

When he noticed that Li Huowang had stopped struggling, he tossed the phone aside and composed himself. "Li Huowang, no matter what you've been through, remember one thing—you are ill.

"All your logic—all the bizarre things you've experienced—might just be your delusions."

"No! You're wrong! Terribly wrong!" Li Huowang shouted. "Come with me. I'll show you what's real! As absurd as it seems, it's the truth!"

He grabbed Yi Donglai and dragged him toward Qing Wanglai's villa. He wanted to prove that the people he had encountered were real.

As they hurried along, Li Huowang incoherently recounted everything he had experienced to Yi Donglai.

"Ha! You think killing Simings will let you reverse time? Does that even sound believable?" Yi Donglai's voice dripped with skepticism.

However, he was rational enough to not put up a fight, opting to continue walking alongside Li Huowang. "If you're saying that time can be reversed and that the world is purely idealistic, you might as well say the whole world is fake."

He continued, "Even in a world with magic, there has to be logic, right? Everything has to follow strict rules. If time and

causality could be altered at will, the world would be so chaotic that it wouldn't function. It wouldn't hold together at all."

Yi Donglai's words hit Li Huowang like an electric shock. Fear flickered in his eyes as he stared at Yi Donglai. "What nonsense are you talking about?"

"I'm saying there are only two possibilities: either everything you've seen is fake and a result of your delusions, or you're right, and the entire world itself is fake.

"By your logic, you're not the one who's wrong—the entire world is.

"Li Huowang, which possibility do you think is more likely?"

Li Huowang clenched his teeth, and Yi Donglai adjusted his glasses with a confident smile.

Just as Yi Donglai was about to continue, a test tube dropped in front of him, shattering on the ground and spilling its contents.

The next moment, Yi Donglai blacked out.

Qing Wanglai stepped forward and stood over the unconscious Yi Donglai. "Don't let Order come near us. Their presence will destroy everything."

His expression was serious, devoid of his usual friendly smile. "I told you that Order won't help you. Even if you don't believe in me or Zhao Shuangdian, you need to believe in yourself."

Qing Wanglai knelt and searched Yi Donglai's belongings. He found a recording device and multiple tracking devices. Yi Donglai had clearly come prepared.

"We need to move up our plan. Order is closing in. Let's get through customs first."

Li Huowang glanced at Yi Donglai, propped him against a wall, then got on his motorcycle and sped away.

Perhaps due to Yi Donglai's earlier scare, Li Huowang felt more mentally stable than before. If nothing else, his headache had disappeared.

Leaving ahead of schedule wasn't a problem for Li Huowang, but he couldn't leave Yang Na alone—someone needed to take care of her.

Fortunately, Zhao Shuangdian stepped in to help. "I can have my nanny take care of your girlfriend for a while. Still, since you're bound to return to the same point in time sooner or later, what's the point of all this?"

Her words didn't stop Li Huowang from whispering to Yang Na. He eventually convinced her to let the Heavenly Mater help from a distance. With that, they prepared to leave.

"We don't need to rush. We could just kill that doctor and bury him somewhere," Ba Nanxu said. Her suggestion drew everyone's attention.

"No, temporarily cutting off Order won't help. It will only attract more of them. We need to go," Qing Wanglai said, making the final decision.

Everyone got into the car and went to the dock. Li Huowang was lost in thought, thinking about everything that had happened, including Yi Donglai's words.

Zhao Shuangdian's voice broke through his thoughts.

"Li Huowang, regarding what you said about reversing time, I have another theory. Have you heard of parallel worlds?"

"Maybe you're not reversing time. Maybe the people you interacted with were in a different parallel world. Perhaps due to some event, maybe a Siming's death or something else, you were pushed into another parallel world. As such, you met new versions of ourselves and everything started over."

Chapter 918 - Accident

“Parallel worlds?” Li Huowang said, his expression filled with hesitation.

“Yes, parallel worlds,” Zhao Shuangdian said, her bangs lifted by the salty sea breeze. “it’s another self-consistent hypothesis.”

“Where’s the evidence? What makes you think this?”

“There is no evidence, which is why it’s just a hypothesis—a bold guess.”

Li Huowang looked down at the frothy waves stirred by the ship’s propellers. “If this is just a hypothesis, what’s the point of telling me? Are you expecting me to help you prove it?”

“No, I just want you to understand more. A person’s knowledge is linked to their cognition. The more you know, the closer you might get to the truth.”

“What are you implying? That I don’t know enough? I might not know everything, but at least my worldview holds up! In contrast, what you’re talking about is just a hypothesis!”

Zhao Shuangdian’s brow furrowed slightly before relaxing, “Li Huowang, there’s no need to be so defensive. You don’t have to be so certain that your current worldview is the ultimate reality. Gaining a better understanding can be beneficial.”

“So you’re saying that even if I showed you evidence, you’d still believe my world isn’t real?”

“Why does it have to be black and white? The world itself isn’t necessarily divided so clearly between right and wrong. Can’t you consider the possibility that the world we glimpse—the real world of the elephant—isn’t singular but rather exists in a strange entangled state?” Zhao Shuangdian said, trying to reason with him.

“What are you really trying to say?”

Footsteps approached Li Huowang from behind. “What she means is that maybe the actual world that projects all of us resembles Schrödinger’s cat, existing in a state of both being alive and dead until the box is opened.”

Li Huowang turned to see Qing Wanglai speaking.

Li Huowang found the idea ridiculous. “So what? According to you, we’re in this world, existing in a state of both being and not being?”

“No, that’s not what I meant. Let me think about how to explain it,” Qing Wanglai said and rubbed his nose.

“Forget it—no need to explain. You guys can keep thinking about it. Just don’t drag me into it. It’s just confusing me,” Li Huowang said. He turned and walked away from the deck.

He didn’t want to further complicate his worldview by listening to their nonsense, which only made his mind more chaotic.

“The Greater Siming has no future, no past. The heralds of the Simings come into existence as the Simings come into existence and get erased as the Simings are erased.”

This was the secret that Zhuge Yuan had previously exchanged with Shangji Guankou. He already understood what it meant and had the evidence to back it up, so he was convinced that this was real and would help him achieve his goal. That was enough.

Since the death of the Simings could sever the cause and effect, it was better to have it continue to be severed. Once all the Simings were eliminated, he could finally heal himself and reintegrate into society.

His worldview was sufficient for now, and he didn’t really care about what this world was really like.

Li Huowang began to search the ship while sorting his thoughts.

“What are you looking for?” Ba Shengqing asked as he watched Li Huowang lift a lifebuoy and glance at the floor.

“I need to check if Shai Zi has followed us.”

Last time, Shai Zi had shown up unexpectedly. He wasn't sure if it would happen again.

“Shai Zi[1]? This isn't a gambling ship. Where would Shai Zi come from?”

“You wouldn't understand even if I explained. Instead of wasting time, why not help me look?”

This time was different from the last. Li Huowang couldn't find any dice anywhere on the ship.

Did it really not sneak along this time? Has Shai Zi backed off?

This thought crossed his mind briefly before he shook his head and headed toward the cargo hold.

He had searched the entire ship except for that. Li Huowang knew he needed to take Shai Zi seriously. This wasn't easy to deal with, and he must have his own agenda since he even dared to get involved in the battle of Simings.

If he wanted it to help him, he had to keep a firm grip on it. He needed to ensure he could find it anytime, anywhere, and take its life at any moment.

When he entered the cargo hold, Li Huowang was surprised to find cargo containers along with several cars tied down, which resembled an underground garage.

Could Shai Zi be hiding here? Li Huowang crouched down and carefully inspected every detail.

As he looked under one of the cars, he suddenly felt like someone was watching him. However, no one was there when he quickly stood up to check.

“Is someone there?” His voice echoed in the hold, but no one responded.

Then, he hesitantly asked, “Shai Zi? Is it you?”

Li Huowang took a few more steps forward, then stopped suddenly. He raised his head slightly and sniffed the air. His face

darkened.

He quickly pulled out his phone and dialed for Zhao Shuangdian on the deck. "Hey, I'm in the cargo hold. You and Qing Wanglai need to come down. I have something to discuss with you."

After a short while, they arrived along with everyone else.

"What's going on?" Qing Wanglai asked.

"You're asking me? Shouldn't you first explain what you've done?"

Li Huowang turned his head and looked at the cargo containers secured to the floor. "Nana, come out. I know you're here."

After a few seconds, the front of a large container opened like a door. Yang Na was pouting and had her head down. She walked over to Li Huowang and grabbed his clenched fist.

"Care to explain? What's going on?" Li Huowang asked the two of them sternly. "I told you I didn't want her involved, yet you still went against me?"

He continued, "In that case, I might as well quit. You all do your thing, and I'll go by myself!"

His words made the others nervous. If it had been earlier, it wouldn't have mattered. However, now that they were certain Li Huowang could reverse time, his importance had been elevated.

"Huowang, it's not their fault," Yang Na anxiously said, pulling at his hand as she tried to explain. "I snuck aboard by myself because I wanted to help you."

She quickly noticed that Li Huowang wasn't listening. "Did you two knowingly let another Siming tag along? You expect me to believe you didn't notice? That's nonsense! I may be crazy, but I'm not stupid!"

"Ji Zai!" Yang Na suddenly raised her voice. "Ji Zai! As the Heavenly Mater, who governs Death and Benevolence, who are you to forbid me from joining the battle of the Simings?!"

1. Shai Zi is the Chinese word for dice. 📏

Chapter 919 - Festival

When Yang Na called Li Huowang Ji Zai, he froze as if struck by lightning.

At that moment, Zhao Shuangdian approached and whispered, “Honestly, she finally found something she wants to do. Just let her do it.

“You can see how much better she’s doing now. Do you really want her to go back to how she was? Curled up at the foot of the bed, consumed by thoughts of ending her life?

“And don’t worry about her safety. Since everything will eventually rewind, what’s there to fear about her safety?”

Yang Na said, “You are a Siming, and I am a Siming too! I am not your object! I don’t need your protection!

“This concerns the fate of all Simings in the Baiyu Capital! I can’t run away from this! Look at me. I am a Siming who governs both Death and Benevolence!”

Yang Na’s voice gradually softened. “Huowang, in the past, I wronged you. Let me be of some use, please. It’s the only way I’ll feel better.”

“Otherwise, I’ll always feel like I’m the one who caused you to end up like this. If I hadn’t called the police then, you wouldn’t have...” Yang Na choked with emotion.

Li Huowang embraced her, his hand softly smoothing her hair. His words got caught in his throat several times before he finally managed to speak with forced cheerfulness. “Okay! Ji Zai welcomes the return of the Heavenly Mater! With you on our side, the opposing Simings won’t stand a chance!”

He continued to hold Yang Na and turned coldly toward Zhao Shuangdian and Qing Wanglai. Then, he took out his phone and

sent both of them a message.

Fine, you guys win. You used Yang Na to achieve your goals. But don't forget, the initiative is no longer in your hands—it's in mine. Especially the next time the timeline rewinds and you guys know nothing.

Next time, I want to see if I can deceive you by mixing truth and lies when I tell you I can reverse time. Will you two be able to tell the difference?

“Here, does your father look like this? I made this clay figurine.”

Li Sui's gaze remained fixed on a lantern nearby, her mind lost in thought. A lifelike clay figure was then presented to her, capturing her attention. The figure portrayed a person in red robes, whose face was concealed by a bronze coin mask. They also had a spine sword on their back.

“Yes! That's my father!” Li Sui excitedly grabbed the chopstick handle at the bottom of the figure, unable to let go. She missed her father terribly, and even a clay figure was enough to provide temporary comfort.

Zuoqiu Yong smiled and shook his head. “Ah, you're just like a child. That boy Li Huowang sure knows how to raise a kid.”

“Remember, I'm called Zuoqiu Yong. From now on, just call me Auntie.”

“I'll remember, Auntie. Weren't you going to take me to Great Qi?”

“Ah, you little kid,” Zuoqiu Yong poked her forehead teasingly. “I heard you like festivals, so I brought you here to have some fun. There's no need to stay cooped up in the house all the time.”

“What's the rush to go to Great Qi? We still have 180 years to wait. We can talk after the festival.”

Li Sui nodded and laughed innocently, “You're right, Auntie. I

have so many years before I can see my dad again.”

After a brief pause, Li Sui seemed to think carefully and then shook her head. “Wait, no. I don’t need 180 years. My dad looks like he’s in his twenties. In 150 odd years, I can go find the newborn him!”

“I’d advise against it. If you interfere and your dad doesn’t get captured by Dan Yangzi, he won’t eat you to suppress his hallucinations. You could mess up the cause and effect, and you may not even learn how to speak again.”

Li Sui was frightened by this and nodded quickly. “Mm! I won’t go looking for him early! I won’t mess things up.”

“Ah~ Good girl. For today, stop thinking so much and just have fun.”

Li Sui nodded once more, her gaze filled with longing as she looked at the clay figure cradled in her hands. “Auntie, now that I have my father, could you also make two mothers for me?”

“Sure! Come with me. The clay figurines shop is over here. By the way, you have two mothers? Your father sure is lucky.”

“Really? But I don’t think my father has been fortunate. He’s had a hard life these past years.”

When they arrived at the clay figure shop, the old man quickly molded two figures according to Li Sui’s description. In no time, a white-haired girl with two torsos was crafted.

Lastly, Zuoqiu Yong had him make a figure of Li Sui herself, allowing the family of four to be together.

Once the figures were finished, Zuoqiu Yong took Li Sui to a temple fair. They solved lantern riddles and enjoyed the night market.

By late evening, Li Sui had played to her heart’s content. She held onto Zuoqiu Yong’s hand as they headed home.

She looked at the three lifelike clay figures in her hands, then carefully buried them in her tentacles. “Auntie, you’re such a good

person.”

“Oh, what are you saying, kid? I’m a Chief, after all. Being a good person is a requirement for this job.”

As she spoke, Zuoqiu Yong gently patted Li Sui’s head. “Ah, you poor child. What an irresponsible father you have—abandoning you in this distant place, not even bothering to search for you.

“From now on, I’m your family. If you ever need anything, just look for me. I’ll help you.”

“Mm! In 180 years, I’ll tell my father how good Auntie was to me! I’ll let him know Auntie is a wonderful person!”

“Alright, I’d love to meet the guy who raised an evil spirit as his daughter.”

The two continued to chat as they walked, and they eventually returned to the Surveillance Bureau in Great Qi.

Li Sui was sent back to her room to rest, while Zuoqiu Yong went to his residence.

Though the Surveillance Bureau were underground, his personal chambers as the Chief were lavish and grand.

He walked through the corridor, and entered his treasure room. He glanced at the treasures hanging from the beams, then kneeled at a low table, and tapped his finger on the brush holder thrice.

A small monkey, about the size of an infant’s fist, crawled out, knelt by the inkstone, and quickly started to grind ink.

Once the ink was ready, it lifted a calligraphy brush with great effort, then offered it to Zuoqiu Yong.

Zuoqiu Yong expressionlessly took the brush and carefully recorded everything Li Sui had mentioned today.

After he finished, he tossed the brush to the little monkey, who was sneakily licking the ink. Then, he pulled out a few pages of notes he had written days before and began to organize them.

Anything that happened 180 years from now could contain vital information, and even the smallest detail could be valuable. At

the very least, being able to foresee the future was an enormous advantage.

Chapter 920 - Xuan Pin

“Hmm...” Zuoqiu Yong carefully examined the document, reading everything Li Sui had said. When he reached the part where the Great Qi was completely destroyed by god Yu’er and the entire Great Qi was engulfed in that strange liquid, his brows furrowed slightly.

“Hmm... A catastrophe in the Great Qi 180 years from now... Could it be that even the Great Qi’s Surveillance Bureaus couldn’t prevent it? I need to start planning for the future...”

After thinking deeply for a moment, he reached for the pen from the ink monkey. He circled the section and continued reading.

He circled the information that he found useful. However, since these were all events 180 years in the future, there weren’t many points worth circling.

Soon, he discovered a passage describing how a Twisted One had exchanged a fan with the Shangji Guankou, and his eyes lit up with interest.

Although he had heard tales of the Shangji Guankou, he had always dismissed them as mere legend. He hadn’t imagined that finding it would involve fengshui practices.

This was a valuable item. If one could trade enough secrets, this thing would be far more useful than any divination method.

“If my guess is right, this Zhuge Yuan must be the Twisted One of the Three Pure Ones. Otherwise, no ordinary person could have found the Shangji Guankou so easily.”

Zuoqiu Yong couldn’t help but feel pleased. After so many years of bad luck, he had finally stumbled upon something valuable. “I can’t let her leave. I need to find a way to keep her here. The fewer people who know about this information, the more valuable

it is..."

The next morning, Zuoqiu Yong brought breakfast to Li Sui as soon as she got out of bed.

"Here, eat up. This lamb bone stew is quite tasty," Zuoqiu Yong said with a warm smile, placing a bowl of meat and bones in front of Li Sui.

"Thanks, Auntie," Li Sui said. Her skin split open from the middle, and a faceless dog head emerged from within, gnawing on the bones with a crunch.

Li Sui had discovered that Auntie seemed to know exactly what she liked to eat and was always willing to take her to festivals. She really liked her.

"In the past, no one took care of you. Hearing how pitiful your situation was broke my heart. From now on, Auntie will look after you, even if your father doesn't take care of you," Zuoqiu Yong said, affectionately patting Li Sui's dog head.

"Mm!" Li Sui nodded vigorously, her mouth stuffed with food. "Auntie, when are we going to the Great Liang?"

Zuoqiu Yong pretended to feel hurt. "What? Don't you like staying with Auntie?"

Li Sui quickly shook her head. "No, I love staying with you, Auntie! I just want to see the Great Liang."

"Alright, alright, I'm just teasing you. Eat up, and then I'll take you to Great Liang's Chief. The Great Liang's Chief is called Xuan Pin, right? He has six arms and likes to wear red Daoist robes?"

"Mm!"

"I've already contacted him. Trust Auntie. Would I lie to you?"

Li Sui nodded eagerly and gulped down the lamb bones as quickly as possible. She was eager to meet Xuan Pin.

Li Sui had never expected that she would still have acquaintances 180 years ago.

Soon, Li Sui finished her lamb stew and impatiently tugged on

Zuoqiu Yong, ready to leave.

Under Zuoqiu Yong's guidance, Li Sui left the Surveillance Bureau and boarded a carriage heading out of the city.

"Don't worry. Xuan Pin heard about your situation a long time ago and is patiently waiting outside the city."

"Really? That's great!" Li Sui exclaimed, peering out of the carriage window in anticipation.

Although her father had been skeptical about the mysterious Xuan Pin, Li Sui felt a sense of closeness knowing there was still someone familiar from so far in the past. This way, she wouldn't be alone across time.

The carriage approached a bamboo grove and stopped as Li Sui watched. The wind rustled the bamboo leaves, creating a serene and picturesque setting.

Li Sui caught sight of Xuan Pin's tall figure inside a small, green bamboo pavilion. Cloaked in a red Daoist robe, Xuan Pin exuded a sense of familiarity and comfort.

Li Sui excitedly jumped out of the carriage and rushed toward the red-robed figure.

As she ran, her pace gradually slowed, and the initial excitement on her face began to fade. Eventually, she came to a stop, her expression now tinged with a hint of fear, and her gaze fixed on Xuan Pin.

"What's wrong? Why are you just standing there?" Zuoqiu Yong frowned slightly and supported Li Sui from behind. "Weren't you eager to see Xuan Pin? Xuan Pin is right there. Why don't you go over?"

Li Sui tugged on Zuoqiu Yong's sleeve and hid behind him. "Auntie, did we find the wrong person? This doesn't seem like Xuan Pin..."

Zuoqiu Yong's expression tightened. "What do you mean? Doesn't Xuan Pin wear a red Daoist robe?"

Li Sui hesitated, then shook her head slightly. “Xuan Pin does wear red, just like my father, but... his robe usually has many moving characters. This one doesn’t.”

“What moving characters? Why didn’t you mention this before?”

Li Sui flailed her tentacles in the air and tried to explain. “I don’t know the characters. My father never taught me, so I didn’t know how to tell you.”

Zuoqiu Yong pondered for a moment before bursting into laughter. Playfully tapping Li Sui with a silk cloth, he casually remarked, “You silly child, why are you so fixated on this? Do you think people wear the same clothes for 180 years?”

“After so many years, isn’t it normal to change clothes? Whose wardrobe stays the same?”

Li Sui had a sudden realization, and a smile formed on her face. “Oh, of course! After 180 years, Xuan Pin must have changed his attire! My mom bought me lots of different outfits too!”

“Good! Now that you understand, tell him everything you need to.”

Li Sui entered the bamboo pavilion and looked at Xuan Pin. She suddenly felt nervous again.

She took a moment to gather her thoughts before saying, “You have to help my father! One hundred eighty years from now, the Siming of the Dharma Sect and my father will face off in the Baiyu Capital. If my father loses, not only will the Great Qi be doomed, but so will the Great Liang!”

Once she uttered her first sentence, her words flowed effortlessly, and she promptly told Xuan Pin everything she knew.

After finishing, she waited patiently for Xuan Pin’s response. Although her father often complained about him, Xuan Pin had always seemed like a good person to her.

As the Chief, this should be his responsibility. However, since

one hundred eighty years separated them, Li Sui had no idea what kind of person Xuan Pin was at this time.

After a long pause, Li Sui finally saw Xuan Pin slowly nod his head, cloaked in the red Daoist robe. "I understand. I will handle it."

Chapter 921 - Contact

Li Sui didn't suspect anything about Xuan Pin's changed voice. After all, there was a gap of 180 years—it was only natural for his voice to be different.

Li Sui felt excited, having finally explained everything to Xuan Pin.

“Oh, really? Yay, that's great news! Could you possibly take me back to the Liang Kingdom? I would like to wait there for my father. By the way, my father needs a significant amount of Dragon Qi. We need to have a lot of it ready to help him.”

Li Sui was shocked to see Xuan Pin shaking her head. “No, you cannot come.”

“Huh? Why? I want to go back!”

Li Sui thought she could finally return now that she had found Xuan Pin. She never expected Xuan Pin to reject her like this.

“You know too much, and you are still immature. Taking you back to the Liang Kingdom will only disrupt the timeline there. It's best if you stay here.”

“I won't tell anyone anything! I will seal my mouth shut!” Li Sui said.

Zuoqiu Yong approached the two of them. “Tsk, tsk. You're still a little girl. You can barely keep your mouth shut, and you nearly revealed your secret to everyone you met along the way.

“Well, I've sent some men to handle them, so there's no need to worry. For now, stay here with me. I'll teach you how to stop others from deceiving you.”

“But...”

Xuan Pin insisted, “No excuses. Consider it as a favor for your father. I'll return to pick you up in 180 years.”

Having said his piece, Xuan Pin disappeared like smoke.

“You better not come back here! If I see you again, I will beat you up!” Li Sui pouted with tears in her eyes. Although Xuan Pin was right, she still didn’t like how Xuan Pin didn’t trust her.

The current Xuan Pin was too rigid.

“Alright, let’s go back now. We still have a wait of 180 years ahead of us. What’s the difference between staying here and staying in the Liang Kingdom?”

Zuoqiu Yong patted Li Sui’s head.

“I will treat you as my daughter from now on. I don’t have any children, so I hope you don’t mind seeing me as part of your family.”

Li Sui wiped off her tears. “No, I don’t mind. You’re a good person.”

“Alright, you can go back using the carriage. I have something to do, so I won’t see you off. You know how busy being the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau is.”

Li Sui unwillingly sat on the carriage before she returned. Zuoqiu Yong, on the other hand, stood in the bamboo forest. He stared at the leaves while waiting for something.

Only after the carriage’s sound had completely disappeared did Zuoqiu Yong speak up, saying, “Come out.”

A large red Daoist robe fell down from the skies. It was Xuan Pin!

Xuan Pin took off the red robes to reveal three people standing on each other’s shoulders. Two men and a woman. They looked like siblings, and they had masqueraded as Xuan Pin.

The three of them separated and quickly kneeled on the ground, “Chief!”

“What are you doing? Do you really need my assistance for such a trivial matter? Did a cat get your tongue, or should I get your tongue?”

The three of them started sweating from Zuoqiu Yong's threats. Their mouths would've been gone for good if they had said the wrong thing.

"Chief, we..."

"Enough. Go back now. Remember, this is the last time. There's no next time."

Zuoqiu Yong then turned to leave the place. "Don't throw the robes away. We might need to use it if we want to control that little evil entity."

The trio sighed in relief. "Yes, Chief! We'll be ready at all times!"

"Soon, I will get all of the information I need from her. You can then refine her into an artifact."

"Thank you for the reward, Chief!"

A Strayed One was a walking treasure, and even more so when it was an evil entity too.

Li Sui soon got used to life in the Qi Kingdom under the care of Zuoqiu Yong.

Li Sui realized that Zuoqiu Yong was strangely interested in the things that would occur 180 years in the future, so she told Zuoqiu Yong everything.

She even tried her best to recall some of the past that she had forgotten.

At first, Li Sui was reluctant to stay in the Qi Kingdom. She felt she could've been closer to her father if she were to stay in the Liang Kingdom instead.

However, she soon got used to life here.

She felt that Zuoqiu Yong was correct. Her father would come here frequently in the future. She could wait for her father whether she was in the Liang Kingdom or the Qi Kingdom.

One day, Li Sui entered the room with a grin, hiding something behind her back after lunch. Zuoqiu Yong, who had been sewing,

rolled his eyes and asked, “What are you doing?”

“Auntie, close your eyes.”

Zuoqiu Yong showed the needle in his right hand. “What if I pick myself with the needle when I close my eyes?”

“Come on, Auntie, just close your eyes.”

Zuoqiu Yong closed her eyes because she couldn’t win against Li Sui’s endearing request. When he opened his eyes, he saw a clay figurine fashioned into her appearance in front of him!

“Aunt, I love you! You take care of me just like my father did. You are my family now!” Li Sui’s happiness was overflowing. She joyfully jumped into Zuoqiu Yong’s arms and shoved the clay figurine into his hands.

“Wait, wait! The needle! Be careful of the needle! You little runt...” Zuoqiu Yong hurriedly moved his needle and embroidery to the side.

“Alright, that’s enough. Please get off me—it’s very hot. Are you hungry? I left some food for you in my study, so go and get it.”

Upon hearing that there was food, she quickly released Zuoqiu Yong and sprinted to the study.

“Don’t run! And don’t play with my ink monkeys! Their knees shake a lot every time they see you.”

“Alright!”

Zuoqiu Yong smiled as he continued embroidering while listening to Li Sui’s disappearing footsteps.

When he bit off the final thread, the three siblings appeared and kneeled before her. “Chief, we are ready for your orders at any time.”

Zuoqiu Yong’s smile slowly faded, and he realized what he needed to do. “Oh, look at how forgetful I am. I’ve already asked her almost everything I needed, so it’s time to remove her from the equation. It’s best if the others remain unaware.”

He took the clay figurine and inspected it. He hesitated

momentarily.

“Chief?”

“Go.” Zuoqiu Yong threw the clay figurine. “Make it painless for her.”

Just after the siblings departed, Zuoqiu Yong wept. He dabbed away his tears and resumed his embroidery. “Sigh... Saying goodbye after sharing a life together is not easy.”

Chapter 922 - Fuse

Li Sui sat in Zuoqiu Yong's study while munching on raw flesh. She was also toying around with the ink monkeys sleeping inside the brushes.

She looked at the three figurines that Zuoqiu Yong had made for her and touched them.

"Father, don't worry. I'm fine here. Auntie is a good person, and she takes good care of me. I will wait for you to come back. 180 years is... how many months is that again?"

Li Sui set aside the raw flesh and attempted to count the months with her tentacles when, out of nowhere, the lanterns in the room were snuffed out. In an instant, the room was engulfed in darkness.

"Huh? What's going on?"

Li Sui had barely reacted when she felt her neck going cold. The next second, Princess An Ping's head flew high up in the air.

Several tentacles sprouted out from her neck, but someone in the dark knocked Li Sui away!

The bloody dog skull sprouted out beneath her skirt, sensing the impending danger from the dark. Li Sui panicked. "Auntie! Auntie help! Someone's trying to kill me!"

However, Zuoqiu Yong didn't respond, even though he was just in the room beside Li Sui.

"Oh no! Why isn't Auntie here? Is there danger? I need to escape with him!"

"Ban Luo Jie Di! Mo Ah Wan Luo Ren Li!" a complex mantra resonated through the air. Li Sui's head throbbed with piercing pain, as if something were digging its way into her mind.

She tried to retaliate, but her enemies came prepared. Li Sui

couldn't see anything in the darkness. She didn't even know who was attacking her.

"Aunty! Help! Help me..."

Li Sui used the last of her strength to escape the study.

Just as she had almost reached the door, the entire study room extended. The door, which had been just inches away from her, was now positioned on the horizon!

Simultaneously, a wave of intense pain emanated from her back, making Li Sui involuntarily freeze up. She reached out to her chest only to discover a massive hole.

I cannot die! Father still needs me!

Li Sui's tentacles surged out from her tattered body. However, in a matter of moments, she sensed a force pulling at her tentacles from all directions. The sound of tearing flesh filled the air as Li Sui was ripped apart, leaving the study silent once again.

Li Sui was powerless against the three siblings—they had learned everything about Li Sui's powers.

"Brother, is that thing dead?" asked the sister.

The lanterns in the study lit up, revealing the three siblings standing around.

The eldest brother grumbled to his younger brother, saying, "Why did you tear it to so many pieces? Don't you know how much pure lifespan we can get if we sell that thing?"

The sister tried to break them up. "Brother, let's stop fighting and clear up this mess. This is the Chief's study, after all."

"Should we ask the Chief to come and see?"

"No need. The Chief is too kind and doesn't want to see the mess here."

The eldest brother took out a burlap sack and shook it. Li Sui's flesh, which had been scattered all over the room, was vacuumed into the bag.

The three of them exited the study and bowed to the room

where Zuoqiu Yong was. Then, they quickly left.

They exited the Chief's residence with wide grins on their faces. They had scored big this time.

"This is something the Chief has given to us. We can't let the others know, especially Zhang Tude. Let's scatter first. We can meet up at the old place outside of the city."

The youngest brother appeared irritated. It seemed he had a grudge against Zhang Tude. "Hmph! I don't believe he would take our stuff so openly! He's so arrogant, thinking that he's the one in control of the Surveillance Bureau!"

"No need to be angry with him. We are still the Chief's closest aides. Soon, we'll be the ones ordering him around! Let's disperse for now."

The other two nodded. They each chose a different exit and left.

Since the eldest brother was the one carrying the sack, he might have been targeted first. To avoid this, he opted for the most inconspicuous route available and reached their rendezvous point by nightfall.

It was a dilapidated temple, but only the three of them knew there was a hidden chamber beneath it. A rat-like evil entity had dug it out in the past.

The two younger siblings had been anxiously waiting and immediately greeted their elder brother when they saw him climbing down with the sack.

"Brother, why are you so late? We would've thought you ran away if we weren't siblings."

As soon as they made contact with their older brother, he opened his mouth. From his mouth, numerous flattened tentacles swiftly emerged, entering his sister's body through her openings.

"Why did you kill me?!" the eldest brother shouted as the sack on his back wriggled. Li Sui was still alive.

Taking advantage of the surprise, Li Sui attacked the final sibling. The youngest brother tried to escape, but it was futile. He was consumed by the flattened tentacles too.

After resolving everything, the eldest brother gently placed the sack on the ground, revealing a large hole in his back.

Li Sui had poked a hole in the sack and extended her tentacles through it to take control of the eldest brother's body. The latter didn't even realize that Li Sui had completely spread her tentacles into his body.

The eldest brother was now dead, and Li Sui had taken over his body as a new host.

Li Sui controlled the broken body to dump out the sack's contents. Bloody pieces of her previous corpse fell out.

She sucked the shadow of her dismembered corpse, filling and engorging her flattened tentacles once more.

Li Sui controlled her new body to search for her previous body. Amidst the fragments of her former body, she discovered wrinkled, curled human skin—her father's skin doll. It was a life-saving treasure Li Huowang had given her. He had once told her that after Bai Lingmiao, he was the one who worried about her the most.

Her father's concern for her had saved her life.

Li Sui cried as she controlled her new body. She continued to look around and finally found the three clay figurines. She grabbed them and clinged onto them tightly. "Father, why is Auntie trying to kill me? I liked him so much. He said that I was part of his family. Was he lying?"

The future version of Li Huowang did not have the answer—Li Sui did.

As she assimilated the memories of the eldest brother with hers, she slowly let go of her naivety and found the apparent contradiction in her memories.

It was Xuan Pin. Could the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau

from the Liang Kingdom really travel to the Qi Kingdom so easily? Furthermore, could the Chiefs of the different kingdoms really be on good enough terms to call each other just like that?

Li Sui then noticed some of the minor inconsistencies, such as the absence of runes on Xuan Pin's robes and the differences in his voice. After carefully analyzing these clues, Li Sui concluded that Zuoqiu Yong had lied to her.

Chapter 923 - Help

“That person is not Xuan Pin! It was a fake planted by Zuoqiu Yong! He deceived me instead of helping me! He was just using me for information!

“Why? Why would he do this... Why?”

Li Sui struggled to get up with her new body.

As she laid her eyes upon the corpses on the ground, a wave of panic surged through her. “Why? Why did I kill my own siblings? What have I done?!”

Li Sui froze, stunned by her own words. She held her head and shook it rapidly. “No... I’m not him. I’m Li Sui! I’m Li Sui!”

She tried to break free from the person’s body but found herself trapped. Gazing at the corpses scattered around her, a wave of grief washed over her.

She had instinctively merged with the eldest brother to save her own life, just like she had done with Bun before. The eldest brother did not die—he became a part of her.

Wiping away her tears, Li Sui scanned the cave for an exit. She was no longer the naive girl she once was. She needed to escape—one wrong move could cost her everything.

The three siblings were working for Zuoqiu Yong. If he found out the three siblings were missing, Zuoqiu Yong would immediately suspect Li Sui was still alive.

She needed to escape before Zuoqiu Yong realized what had happened.

As the Chief of the Qi Kingdom’s Surveillance Bureau, Zuoqiu Yong controlled the entire Bureau. It would be difficult for Li Sui to live.

“I can’t stay in the Qi Kingdom, and the An Xi Kingdom to the

west isn't an option either. My only hope is to take a boat and set out to sea."

Li Sui didn't hesitate and ran for the exit.

However, just as she appeared in the dilapidated temple, she froze. When had she become so clear-headed? Something had fundamentally changed within her.

Li Sui realized what had happened. She had absorbed the eldest brother, making him a part of herself, just as she had assimilated Bun before. Back then, she had grown more affectionate for her father and developed a peculiar love for bones.

Li Sui trembled as she took out Li Huowang's clay figurine and stared at it.

"Father, the Black Taisui's assimilation is too strong. The people I assimilated became part of me. I can even gain half of their intelligence, but I cannot continue doing this. I fear that I will stop being your daughter if I assimilate more people.

"Father, don't worry. I'm smarter now. I can definitely help you in the future—in 180 years."

Li Sui then ran out from the temple and escaped into the darkness.

Li Sui slowly opened her eyes as she shook herself from her daydream. She looked at the three people in front of her. Although they were of different ages, they all looked at her with the same fearful gaze.

The Strayed Ones, who had been imprisoned and raised by certain sects, wore a variety of clothes and had different disabilities. The sects had shaved some of their body parts when they needed them.

"You're all here because you're Strayed Ones. But today, we'll use our methods to set you free."

Li Sui's words did little to cheer them up. She understood their skepticism. "I know that Strayed Ones who've lived as long as

yourselves can't trust others easily. However, I don't need your trust. Just follow me. It's not like you have a choice."

Li Sui brought the three of them into the Surveillance Bureau. After walking in the confusing underground path for a while, Li Sui brought the three of them to Li Huowang's cultivating room.

Li Huowang had been cultivating, which distorted the room beyond recognition. Various bizarre things were unfolding in the room.

Bricks would occasionally sink and dissolve into springs of water, which would then float and metamorphose into a weeping woman. Moments later, the woman turned into a statue.

Li Sui walked over and patted Li Huowang to shake him out of his cultivation.

Li Huowang opened his eyes and looked at his daughter. "What's wrong?"

"The Strayed Ones are here."

Li Sui moved to the side, and Li Huowang finally saw the three people in front of him.

"There's just three of them? I don't think I can reach the seventh stage with them."

Li Huowang frowned, feeling anxious. Zuoqiu Yong could arrive at any moment, and he was worried.

"It's not that easy to find Strayed Ones. Two of them were in our vaults, but we had to raid an evil sect to find the third one. Most of my men are also constantly searching for more."

"Didn't you give me a lot of primordial breath last time during my fight with Shai Zi? Where did you get it?"

"Father, I spent over one hundred years preparing those. I didn't have so much time to prepare them this time. Also, those weren't meant to be used against Shai Zi—they were supposed to help Ji Zai return to his status as a Strayed One."

Li Huowang knew that Li Sui was right. Ji Zai was the key, not

Shai Zi. Without Ji Zai, everyone would've been killed by the Dharma Sect.

Li Huowang sighed and approached the three Strayed Ones. "What about the other places? Are the other Surveillance Bureaus looking for the Strayed Ones too?"

"I've ordered them to do so. They will send any Strayed Ones they find to Shangjing, but there have been no replies."

Li Huowang faced the three Strayed Ones. "I'm one of you. I've lived through exactly what you're experiencing now. Letting me strip away your primordial breath and inner sight would be best for all of us."

Li Huowang then looked at their broken limbs. "I won't say much. When you become regular people once more, head to a place called Cowheart Village. You can live out the rest of your lives there peacefully."

Li Huowang then gestured at Li Sui. "Let's start immediately. We don't have much time."

Li Sui nodded. Several Unspeakables entered the room. Their heads were skewered together by Li Sui's tentacles, making them look like a massive flesh spider as they walked in.

The three Strayed Ones were filled with panic. However, before they could react, Li Sui took control of the Unspeakables, retrieving the primordial breath from the Strayed Ones and stripping the inner sight from their eyes.

After the two things had been extracted from their bodies, the three Strayed Ones became skinnier, as if something had stolen their vitality.

The Unspeakables shoved the primordial breath and inner sight into Li Huowang, and everything around him started to change uncontrollably.

His thoughts were manifesting around him without his control.

Li Huowang felt everything around him crumbling and turning

into a manor.

He carefully sat down and began controlling the inner sight he had just obtained, using it to push the primordial breath toward his seventh chakra point.

Chapter 924 - Cultivation

The seven chakra points were the Root Chakra, Sacral Chakra, Solar Plexus Chakra, Heart Chakra, Throat Chakra, Third Eye Chakra, and finally, the Crown Chakra.

This was the method to cultivate the “Truth” Doulao had given him. Strayed Ones could cultivate “Truth” because of the primordial breath inside their body. Whenever Li Huowang used his inner sight to push the primordial breath into one of the seven chakra points, his control over the cultivation of “Truth” increased.

When Li Huowang controlled the Root Chakra, he could temporarily turn a stone into an apple.

When he controlled the Sacral Chakra, he could turn the ground into water and even twist arrows to miss their mark.

When he controlled the Solar Plexus Chakra, he could conjure fire out of nowhere and turn someone into mud with just a glare.

When the inner sight and primordial breath from three different Strayed Ones entered his body, he started pushing his primordial breath toward the next chakra point.

With more inner sight, he could move more of his primordial breath.

His cultivation started to grow faster. However, Li Huowang felt that the power was slowly slipping out of his control, as it wasn't his to begin with. He dared not let his guard down.

Li Huowang lost track of time, oblivious to everything happening outside. His focus was entirely on cultivation.

Li Huowang locked in as he focused on using his inner sight to move the primordial breath. Thanks to the three Strayed Ones, his cultivation speed had increased significantly.

His primordial breath, once as heavy as a skyscraper, slowly

moved up to the next chakra point. The moment it did, Li Huowang felt his mind explode, and his consciousness spread out thinly. He then lost consciousness altogether.

When he finally regained consciousness, he found himself suspended in midair, with Li Sui glaring at him as if he were an enemy.

The old furniture in the room had disappeared entirely, and the entire room was painted completely white. Everything around him had completely changed.

Li Huowang looked around, and as he willed, the rafters, chairs, and floorboards returned. He restored the room to its former glory.

Li Huowang was stronger than before, and his range had improved dramatically. He was confident that he could now influence things tens of meters away.

“Father, it looks like my method was correct. You only spent...”

“Wait!”

Li Huowang interrupted Li Sui, his forehead glistening with sweat. “Hold on, don’t say anything just yet. Give me some food and water first.”

He soon ate and drank his fill before laying on the floor to sleep.

It took some time before Li Huowang woke up again. This time, he felt much better. He explained, “In the future, don’t tell me how long I’ve been out after cultivating. If it’s too long, I might actually starve to death.”

Li Huowang had to eat, sleep, and drink before the others told him how long he had been cultivating. Only then could he prevent his death.

“Alright, you can talk now. What were you trying to say?” Li Huowang said, plucking out one of his hairs and using it as a

toothpick.

“I wanted to say that you only took two days to finish your cultivation. At least my plan worked.”

Li Huowang shook his head. “No, it’s not enough. Shai Zi and I tricked Zuoqiu Yong last time, but it will not work next time. Zuoqiu Yong could utilize the entire Tianchen Kingdom next time. Having a Siming that controls the Heavenly Dao of Growth and an entire world as our enemy is not a joke.

“Since this plan works, we need to quickly find more Strayed Ones and raise my cultivation to the seventh stage before Zuoqiu Yong attacks! I’m only at the fourth stage right now.”

Still, a quiet worry lingered in Li Huowang’s mind—he wasn’t sure he could defeat Zuoqiu Yong, even if he reached the seventh stage of his cultivation.

Thankfully, he wasn’t alone this time. Both the Qi Kingdom and the Liang Kingdom were on his side.

Li Huowang patted Li Sui’s shoulder before he resumed his cultivation. “I need more Strayed Ones. Find a way to search the entire world.”

Cultivating “Truth” required more than primordial breath and inner sight, but it was the best option right now.

“Father, are there Strayed Ones in the Qi Kingdom? Maybe they can help.”

“Ha. Almost everyone is dead there. I doubt that there are any Strayed Ones there. Tell Gao Zhijian not to plan everything in detail. Don’t hope for the Qi Kingdom alone to fight off the Tianchen Kingdom. It’s impossible.

“I know that the Dragon Veins are precious and that it takes a long time to accumulate Dragon Qi, but we need to use it now. If we fail here, we won’t ever get to use it in the future. The Dragon Veins will become Zuoqiu Yong’s mount if we are conquered.”

Li Huowang believed that he needed to go to the Baiyu Capital

to win this time. He refused to believe that the Simings he had saved last time would ignore his plea. *What are they doing to begin with?*

“Alright, Father. I will find more Strayed Ones now. I’ll take care of everything while you cultivate.”

Seeing Li Sui exit the room, Li Huowang sat down to start cultivating again, but before he could, he realized that he had forgotten something very important.

“Wait, what am I forgetting?”

Li Huowang pondered a moment before he reached for his head.

With a light swipe of his fingernails, his scalp opened like a flower. Li Huowang did it again, and his skull split open. He reached into his brain to search around before he found Hong Zhong’s mahjong tile inside his brain.

Shai Zi had initially placed the mahjong tile into his brain to let him know about the incoming Natural Disaster in the Tianchen Kingdom, which he used to trick Zuoqiu Yong. However, Shai Zi had intentionally left it there. Shai Zi couldn’t have forgotten something like this.

“He’s a bastard that refuses to give up on either side. I need to be careful when I deal with him next time.”

Li Huowang proceeded to crush the mahjong tile into dust.

Li Huowang continued his cultivation once more.

Unbeknownst to him, Li Sui stood outside the cultivation room to observe him. Compared to the insides, the outside of the room had been completely twisted. Old rotting wood had fused with brand-new boards.

Li Huowang’s cultivation caused this. Even Li Sui didn’t know how Li Huowang did it. Rather than being unstable to the brink of collapsing, the room stood firm and breathed like a beast.

“Tell the others to evacuate this region. Don’t leave anyone

behind.”

This was only the fourth stage. Who knew what would happen when Li Huowang reached the seventh stage?

Xuan Pin didn't want the entire Surveillance Bureau of the Liang Kingdom to be destroyed by her father before the fight even began.

One of the pillars beside Xuan Pin answered, “Yes, Chief.”

Chapter 925 - Important

Just as Xuan Pin nodded, she looked up. She floated and passed through the ground before reaching the surface.

Li Sui greeted Bai Lingmiao and asked, "Mother, why are you here?"

"I've ordered the entire White Lotus Sect to find Strayed Ones. They are scattered everywhere, and we will soon have the information we need."

"Thank you, Mother."

Now, everyone in the Liang Kingdom was searching for Strayed Ones. Xuan Pin doubted that the Strayed Ones could hide for long.

"We are family. No need to thank each other. Has your father eaten? I've brought some food for him," Bai Lingmiao said, holding out a food box.

"He's busy cultivating. Let's eat without him."

Li Sui took the food box and held Bai Lingmiao's back. She guided Bai Lingmiao to the rooftop of the Surveillance Bureau. When Li Sui opened the box, she noticed it was filled with Li Huowang's favorite dishes.

One of Li Sui's arms sprouted out from her robes. She took a pair of chopsticks and picked up a winter melon before eating it.

"Mother, is there something you need to discuss with Father?"

Bai Lingmiao smiled as she tucked some of her hair behind her ears. "I've heard about the situation in Tianchen Kingdom. Your father must be worried, right? I understand him, and I know he will try to handle it all by himself.

"I came to tell him that the Heavenly Mater is sending a signal to stop him from being so rash. If the Tianchen Kingdom were coming already, the Heavenly Mater would not sit idly."

“Oh? Has the Heavenly Mater given out her sacred decree?” Li Sui replied.

Bai Lingmiao shook her head.

“No, but it’s better than before. I’m certain that the Heavenly Mater will soon help us.”

“That’s good news. I’ll let Father know.”

Li Sui ate her meal, enjoying the stir-fried meat with chestnuts. “This is delicious.”

“Is that so? Suisui, if you like it so much, I will bring you a portion next time.”

Bai Lingmiao tried to pat Li Sui’s head, but she soon gave up after seeing how tall Li Sui was.

“Mother, do you want to stay with Father forever?”

Bai Lingmiao’s smile slowly disappeared. “Why are you asking that?”

“I just want to make it clear. You can’t keep dragging this.”

“We can talk more next time. The Tianchen Kingdom is knocking on our doorstep. We don’t have time for this now.”

Bai Lingmiao stood up to leave.

“You always run away when we bring this up.”

Shangguan Yuting’s illusion floated from beneath the tiles, stopping Bai Lingmiao from leaving.

Shangguan Yuting displayed a paper filled with words before Bai Lingmiao.

“What... What is this?” Bai Lingmiao took several steps back when she saw the familiar names.

“These are the names of the Bai family and their sins. We’ve recorded their every transgression and the names of the people they’ve killed. A disciple of Moongate recorded this, so their information is accurate.”

Xuan Pin put down her bowl and approached Bai Lingmiao. Shangguan Yuting smiled, and her illusion floated into the large red

robes.

“Mother, you’re kind. You even became the head of the White Lotus Sect to protect it from being oppressed. Don’t you think that those who have committed such heinous sins should be executed?”

“According to your teachings, do you think your family could enter the Heavenly Mater’s Void Home?”

Bai Lingmiao took another step back out of shock. Her voice trembled. “Suisui, what are you trying to do?”

“Nothing. I’ve tried advising both sides, but both of you refused to give up on one another. As your child, I just want to help you get over your trauma and see if we can repair your relationship.”

Bai Lingmiao found herself pursing her lips as she read about the lives that her family had taken, the words written in red ink. She struggled to reconcile her warm memories with her family and the contradicting cold words on the paper.

“Mother, as the Saintess of the White Lotus Sect, I know that you would not give your family special treatment, especially after they’ve committed such atrocities.”

Bai Lingmiao’s eye cover was wet with tears. She shook her head rapidly.

Li Sui approached and hugged her. Her red robes wrapped around Bai Lingmiao like a warm blanket. “Mother, let it all go. Father did the right thing, and so did you.

“It’s not either of you that’s wrong—it’s this world.

“If you want to do something for your family, let’s work together to change the world and prevent such a tragedy from happening again.”

Feeling the warmth enveloping her, Bai Lingmiao broke down. Her tears overflowed tears as Li Sui held her tightly.

Li Sui extended her six arms and hugged Bai Lingmiao, holding her close. She gently stroked her back, offering what comfort she could.

Though Bai Lingmiao had grown stronger, Li Sui saw through her facade. She was barely eighteen—far too young to bear such crushing weight.

Since her father wasn't exactly reliable, Li Sui had to do it herself.

After a while, Bai Lingmiao pulled away from Li Sui's embrace. "Suisui, thank you. However, we should focus on the Tianchen Kingdom first, rather than my relationship with your father."

"Why not? We're not like Father, stuck thinking of one thing at a time. We can do both things at once."

Bai Lingmiao shook her head and pulled off her white silk eye cover, wiping away her tears. "Suisui, you don't get it. The issue between me and your father—it's not important. It's just a relationship. Whether we stay together or split up, it means nothing. What truly counts are the lives of everyone in this world.

"Suisui, I'm not the only one thinking of this. Your father is thinking about this too. It's just that he hides everything in his heart and does everything on his own. He tells no one about it, but I understand him well."

Xuan Pin froze. Her voices slowly superimposed on each other until returning to Li Sui's own voice. "But this is important to me. I just want the both of you to live better."

Bai Lingmiao covered her eyes again and smiled before extending her arm into the darkness of Xuan Pin's red robes. "Suisui, don't worry. We will be fine. We are both working hard for our goals. This is good enough.

"Go home now. I know you're working hard too. I'll try to establish contact with the Heavenly Mater as soon as possible. That way, she can help when the Tianchen Kingdom attacks."

Bai Lingmiao turned and slowly descended from the roof.

Just as she was about to reach the lower floors, the Second Deity sprouted out from her back.

The Second Deity fixed her beast-like eyes on Xuan Pin.
“Suisui, be careful when you and Li Huowang face Zuoqiu Yong.
The Bai family’s live sacrifice ritual means the previous Heavenly
Mater held onto more than just the Heavenly Dao of Growth. I’m
certain Zuoqiu Yong didn’t take just one Heavenly Dao. She must’ve
kept some hidden cards up her sleeves.”

Chapter 926 - Target

“...Glory over 18,000 lands, all earth turning golden. All life in six realms under a single light... free from the dust of the mortal world. Today, hearing this scripture chanted in person, realize that every verse is a treasure...”

In the deepest part of the hall belonging to the White Lotus Sect, the 36 White Donkeys chanted continuously. Amidst them, Bai Lingmiao sat upon the enormous lotus throne, her legs crossed in a meditative position.

She was utterly transformed from her earlier demeanor with Li Sui. Now, her face was filled with compassion and divinity, and even the Second Deity’s fearsome face was the same.

She had two torsos, with four gracefully extended arms. Her twenty slender fingers were positioned in lotus seals, resembling the branching of a tree.

The white lotus marks on Bai Lingmiao’s forehead flickered amidst the chanting, and her consciousness drifted beyond.

Bai Lingmiao sensed the emotions of the Heavenly Mater. She opened her heart completely and strove to merge her compassion with the Heavenly Mater’s boundless mercy.

Bai Lingmiao began floating in the air, exuding compassion that radiated outwards and enveloped the White Donkeys nearby. They now wore expressions of pure benevolence.

In the chaos, Bai Lingmiao felt a deep connection with the Heavenly Mater. Their emotions blended into one, becoming indistinguishable from each other.

Unlike before, the overwhelming sense of death that had almost materialized vanished, leaving only compassion.

Bai Lingmiao knew that this feeling hadn’t disappeared

entirely. It had simply been concealed.

Bai Lingmiao carefully gathered her memories of today's events and offered them reverently to the Heavenly Mater.

She hoped to reestablish contact and attempted to implore the Heavenly Mater to intervene with divine powers. That way, the White Lotus Sect could help fend off the Tianchen Kingdom.

Tianchen Kingdom harbored a deep-seated enmity against the Heavenly Mater and mobilized a massive force specifically to fight her.

The Heavenly Mater would surely act out of self-preservation, but Bai Lingmiao remained uncertain without any explicit confirmation.

Despite her pleas, Bai Lingmiao received no concrete answer from above, only some vague emotional feedback.

There was neither explicit acceptance nor rejection—it seemed as though the Heavenly Mater was distracted.

Bai Lingmiao tried to push further, but her connection with the Heavenly Mater began to fade. When she opened her eyes again, she found herself back inside the hall.

Looking around at the gazes of the White Donkeys, she took a deep breath. With her four hands raised, she proceeded to attempt another ritual.

The Tianchen Kingdom and the Heavenly Mater shared a deep grudge. Bai Lingmiao needed to ensure that the Heavenly Mater would lend her assistance when the kingdom launched an attack.

Somehow, the Heavenly Mater of the past seemed different from the one now.

A voice suddenly interrupted Bai Lingmiao's ceremony. "Saintess."

Bai Lingmiao sensed who it was and realized it was Lian Zhimei. She had helped her ascend to the position of Saintess.

With the growing influence of the White Lotus Sect, Lian

Zhibei's status had also risen, and she was now Bai Lingmiao's right-hand woman within the sect.

Though Lian Zhibei appeared to be a woman in her 30s or 40s, she showed no disrespect toward the young Bai Lingmiao. She bowed deeply. "Saintess, there's news regarding the Strayed Ones. There are four of them, and I've already sent people to bring them back."

Bai Lingmiao nodded lightly, "Good. Don't use force right away. Speak to them gently first. Tell them there's a way to help them find clarity and rid themselves of their bewilderment.

"If they still refuse to listen, we'll think of other methods to bring them back."

This would actually benefit both sides, but the living Strayed Ones were unlikely to fully believe it. Even Senior Li would probably have doubted them.

"Yes," Lian Zhibei replied with a bow.

"Still, to mobilize the entire White Lotus Sect and only find four Strayed Ones... I wonder how many Suisui has found. It still doesn't seem like enough."

Four Strayed Ones might not be sufficient for the seven chakra points of "Truth" cultivation to succeed.

Upon hearing this, Lian Zhibei hesitated momentarily. "Saintess, some of the disciples have heard rumors from the elders. It is said that some of the Strayed Ones have conspired together to go into hiding."

"Hiding? Does that mean there are more?"

"There may be more, but their hiding place is very difficult to locate. I've heard they've concealed themselves within the karmic obstacles of a Muddled One."

"Muddled One?" Bai Lingmiao's heart skipped a beat. The Muddled One was not easy to deal with—they belonged to the same family as the Strayed One.

They had a unique ability: forgetfulness. They could make people vanish entirely from the recollections of every person in the world, banishing them to a lost realm.

That place was not good. It was utterly dark, with no Heavenly Dao of Death. No matter what happened there, one would never die. More importantly, once someone was forgotten by the Muddled One, it was nearly impossible to escape.

They had to be remembered by someone. Otherwise, even killing the forgotten individual wouldn't release them.

Communication with the Muddled One was nearly impossible—they would forget everything even as they spoke.

However, Bai Lingmiao was vastly more powerful than before. The Muddled One was troublesome but no longer so dangerous.

Bai Lingmiao just hadn't expected that some of the Strayed Ones had voluntarily chosen to be forgotten by a Muddled One to survive.

The Second Deity cut in from behind. "Is the information reliable?"

Lian Zhibei carefully explained, "Yes, I confirmed it with the masters of the Fangxian Sect. It's true, and several others have heard the same."

Bai Lingmiao pondered the matter carefully. "There's one issue. Even if we know the Strayed Ones are hidden, we still don't know which Muddled One has forgotten them."

Lian Zhibei hurriedly explained, "Saintess, that's not a problem. All the realms of forgetfulness of the Muddled One are interconnected. No matter which one we use, it'll lead to the same place."

"Interconnected?" Bai Lingmiao was surprised. If that were true, then being forgotten by any Muddled One would result in banishment to the same realm.

Bai Lingmiao thought seriously for a while. "Do we have a

Muddled One?”

“We don’t, but the Surveillance Bureau has one. They captured a living Muddled One two years ago. With the relationship between Saintess and the Surveillance Bureau, we should be able to borrow it.”

Bai Lingmiao rose from the lotus throne without hesitation.

“Go to the Surveillance Bureau and borrow the Muddled One. We’ll retrieve those hidden Strayed Ones.”

The Tianchen Kingdom could attack at any moment. The sooner they acted, the better their chances.

“Yes, Saintess,” Lian Zhibei said, then bowed deeply with both hands raised above her head.

Bai Lingmiao glanced at the 36 White Donkeys, her demeanor completely different from when she was with Li Huowang. “Prepare your weapons and artifacts. We’re going to claim the Strayed Ones.”

“Yes, Saintess!”

Chapter 927 - Muddled One

Lian Zhibei left and returned just as quickly. When she returned, eight strong young White Lotus followers carried a tall black coffin into the hall behind her, grunting as they worked.

The Muddled One was clearly inside the coffin, sealed to prevent mishaps.

This entity was dangerous and couldn't be released in the hall. Under Bai Lingmiao's instructions, the coffin was relocated to an underground chamber initially intended for the Heavenly Mater's statue.

"Remember, once the Muddled One comes out, it could erase your memories of me. That's why I suggested you write it down on paper or even etch it into your skin," the Second Deity impatiently said.

The people on the periphery nodded and gripped their brushes tightly, hurriedly recording everything on paper.

They would vanish if the Muddled One forgot them, but they could force it to remember them and release them when the time came.

The timing was crucial. If it was too early, they might not find what they needed, and if it was too late, something worse could happen.

"Miaomiao, maybe... let the White Donkeys go instead. You don't need to go in there. I've heard it's terrifying. What if something happens to you?" Chun Xiaoman said with concern. She was in charge of coordination outside.

Bai Lingmiao glanced at the coffin and shook her head gently.

“Sister Xiaoman, I’m not that weak anymore. Besides, how will the others bring out all the Strayed Ones if I don’t go in? I have plenty of experience with them, so don’t worry.”

The coffin’s nails were pried off, releasing black mist. As the lid fell open, a man with a large birthmark covering half his face emerged, crawling out in tattered clothes.

He looked around in confusion, his eyes filled with deep bewilderment. It was as if he’d forgotten who or where he was.

“Everyone, leave. Shut the door. Don’t let him see you. In three days, show him our portraits to remind him, and then force him to release us,” Bai Lingmiao said, leading a group of White Donkeys toward the man.

“Where... where am I? Why am I here?” the Muddled One asked Bai Lingmiao.

Bai Lingmiao walked before him and carefully observed him. She ensured her reflection appeared fully in his eyes, then placed a red veil over his head.

When the Muddled One removed the red veil, the surroundings were empty, and his face showed no surprise. He had completely forgotten about Bai Lingmiao and the White Donkeys.

“Where... where am I? Why am I here?” He circled in confusion and repeated, “Where.. Where am I? Why am I here?”

By this time, Bai Lingmiao and her group had already left the dark room. However, the outside of the hall and the entirety of Shangjing had transformed.

The sky hung in pitch blackness, and everything was caught between being visible and invisible. Large sections of buildings had crumbled, creating a desolate and bleak atmosphere, as if the Great Liang had already fallen. This was the world of those forgotten by the Muddled One.

“Let’s go. Stay alert. The people trapped here have been tormented a lot. They are caught between life and death, and they

are neither humans nor ghosts anymore. They can be very hostile toward the living.”

Bai Lingmiao guided the White Donkeys through the ruined imperial city, intending to capture someone for directions.

Given their unique abilities, if there were any Strayed Ones here, they would likely be well-known among those trapped here.

Their journey was short-lived. Bai Lingmiao’s keen senses had quickly noticed frenzied murmurs echoing from within the three palaces.

“Ha ha ha! Strange, weird! The grandson marries the grandmother...”

“This way. The voice is coming from over here,” Bai Lingmiao said, leading the White Donkeys toward the sound.

“Pigs and sheep sit on the stove—six relatives boil in the pot... Women eat their mother’s flesh—sons beat their father’s skin... heh heh heh...”

The strange voice didn’t seem to expect anyone to come. Bai Lingmiao approached and saw the source of the voice.

It was from a monk sitting upside-down on a lotus seat. His shoulders twitched as he spouted incomprehensible words.

“Everyone comes to celebrate, but I see only suffering... suffering... heh heh heh...”

With a wave of her hand, two White Donkeys wearing robes with talismans rushed forward. They took some chains out and wrapped them around the monk, pulling him to the ground before Bai Lingmiao.

The monk looked emaciated, barely skin and bones. He seemed long gone mentally, and he had used his claw-like hands to pull out his intestines and spin them like prayer beads.

“Master, have you seen any Strayed Ones around here? If you can help me, I’ll free you from this agony after it’s over,” Bai Lingmiao said.

The monk ignored her enticing reward and continued his gibberish, saying, “Pigs and sheep sit on the stove—six relatives boil in the pot. Women eat their mother’s flesh—sons beat their father’s skin.”

After several more attempts, the Second Deity said, “It’s no use. This guy’s completely mad. Who knows how long ago he’s been here.”

She continued, “If we want any real answers, we’ll have to find someone who ended up here more recently.”

Bai Lingmiao didn’t reply. She quickly retreated into the safety of the White Donkeys. “Be careful! There are a lot of people coming from behind the ruined temple!”

The tattered curtain of the temple was ripped open as a swarm of bloated, naked figures with bloodshot eyes surged toward them.

Men and women were amongst them, all driven mad by their endless torment in this forgotten world.

They became even more frenzied when they saw Bai Lingmiao’s face, throwing themselves at her with reckless abandon.

“Formation! Protect the Saintess!” The White Donkeys, possessed by various spirits, easily held the crazed attackers at bay.

However, even decapitating them didn’t stop them. There was no death here.

It was unlike the world outside, where the Heavenly Dao of Death had vanished. The people here were still consumed by madness and a desire for slaughter.

A voice suddenly called from outside. “This way! Hurry! If you stay here, they’ll only keep coming!”

Bai Lingmiao was surprised to recognize the person who spoke. It was Tuoba Danqing, the former superior of Senior Li in the Surveillance Bureau.

He had been left behind back when Li Huowang and other members of the Surveillance Bureau fought against the Muddled

One.

From his expression, Bai Lingmiao deduced that he hadn't been here long enough to lose his sanity and could still communicate.

“Retreat southeast! Follow that man!”

Chapter 928 - Information

“*Dong dong dong~* Beneath the high mountains of the Hong and Huang sects, four large pythons and snakes leave the serpent mountain, and a gust of wind departs from the high tomb.”

As rhythmic drumbeats and chants filled the air, a sharp claw swiftly tore a person in half.

Twisted beast faces hidden beneath red veils surrounded Bai Lingmiao, encircling her to prevent sneak attacks from the insane creatures around them.

There were too many of these beings. Despite the defense of the White Donkeys, a few still managed to slip through and reach Bai Lingmiao.

Bai Lingmiao led the White Donkeys on the wide road, following Tuoba Danqing from behind as they dodged the crazed mob that had lost all reason.

More and more lunatics gathered behind them, surging toward Bai Lingmiao like a tidal wave.

Although their individual strength was weak, their overwhelming numbers made them dangerous. More importantly, they were immortal in this place.

The two people that the Second Deity had just torn in half were now dragging their spilled intestines and crawling toward her on all fours like spiders.

“Take the small path! Hurry, this way!” Tuoba Danqing said. He urgently led the way forward, his hair disheveled and whipping through the air.

After a tense but brief chase, Tuoba Danqing took a sharp turn and crawled into a drainage hole.

Bai Lingmiao used her senses to quickly scan the area, ensuring

there was no ambush lurking within. Satisfied with her findings, she wasted no time and hurriedly followed him inside, urging the others to keep up.

The tunnel was dark and narrow. After a short while, Bai Lingmiao felt the space before her widen unexpectedly. It was connected to a cellar.

As the thirty-six White Donkeys crawled out from the tunnel, Bai Lingmiao lashed her ritual whip at the entrance, causing the entire passage to collapse and crush the creatures that had just begun to emerge.

Dust filled the air as Bai Lingmiao and her group stepped back, covering their noses. Finally, silence returned.

Before Bai Lingmiao could catch her breath, Tuoba Danqing rushed toward her excitedly. "I... I wasn't mistaken, was I? You're Er Jiu's wife, right? We met a few years ago, didn't we?"

She greeted him with a bow. "Senior Tuoba, long time no see. I am Bai Lingmiao."

Tuoba Danqing's voice trembled. "Did you come here to save me? You must have come to take me out of here, right?"

"That's right, Er Jiu sent me to rescue you." Bai Lingmiao had no reason to refuse—saving him was just a secondary task. In fact, by helping him, she might even obtain the information she needed about the Strayed Ones.

Tuoba Danqing seemed to deflate. He collapsed to the ground, his hands pressed against his face. His shoulders shook with raw, uncontrolled sobs.

Bai Lingmiao recognized he was emotionally overwhelmed. Though he hadn't gone mad yet, he was dangerously close to breaking down after being trapped in this place for so long.

She handed him a handkerchief and gently said, "Senior Tuoba, I know you've suffered a lot, but my purpose here goes beyond just getting you out."

Tuoba Danqing looked up at her while holding the handkerchief to stem his tears and snot.

“Senior Tuoba, you’ve been here for quite some time now. Do you know of any Strayed Ones in this place? Have you heard rumors about them?”

Tuoba Danqing hesitated before urgently standing up. “Let’s get out first. We can talk about Strayed Ones later. Forget the Strayed Ones for now—there are plenty of them outside! I’ll help you catch some once we’re out!”

“No, there are none outside anymore. I’ll explain everything to you from the beginning.”

Bai Lingmiao spent half an hour explaining the situation outside to Tuoba Danqing. Upon learning everything, Tuoba Danqing sat in stunned silence. His mind struggled to process the sheer volume of events that had unfolded in just a few short years.

“In short, to defend against the Tianchen Kingdom’s attack, we must find the Strayed Ones. Do you understand, Senior Tuoba?” Bai Lingmiao asked, her tone growing more serious.

Tuoba Danqing had calmed down now. He nodded. “I understand, I understand. It’s not that I don’t want to help. But after all these years in this damned place, I honestly don’t know where to find Strayed Ones here.”

Tuoba Danqing quickly changed his tone when he saw Bai Lingmiao’s expression change. “Wait, don’t worry! Although I don’t know, there’s someone here who’s well-informed!”

“Who?”

Tuoba Danqing immediately started to rummage through the cellar and prepared to leave. “Come with me. I’ll take you to them.”

Bai Lingmiao followed him cautiously as they headed toward the city’s outskirts. She did not want to be entangled by those creatures again.

Soon, Bai Lingmiao saw what Tuoba Danqing meant. There were withered human heads hanging down from a willow tree.

These decapitated heads should have been dead, but in this place, they remained alive.

While Bai Lingmiao wasn't surprised that they were still alive, she was shocked that the heads hadn't gone mad.

Tuoba Danqing whispered, "Miss Bai, you can ask them. These heads are the most well-informed beings in this place. If there are any Strayed Ones here, they'll know."

One of the heads hanging from the tree took over the conversation. "Strayed Ones? You mean those daydreaming lunatics? Heh heh... of course I know."

Bai Lingmiao immediately stepped forward and asked urgently, "Where are they now?"

The heads on the tree burst into laughter, filled with mockery and glee. Bai Lingmiao couldn't tell if it was the heads laughing or the enormous tree itself.

The White Donkeys quickly formed a protective formation around Bai Lingmiao. They scanned the surroundings in case the laughter attracted other threats.

Finally, the laughter subsided. "Why should I help you? What's in it for me?"

"How about this? Give me the heads of half of the thirty-six people behind you, and I'll tell you. It's been so long since I had any new company."

Bai Lingmiao's refusal was firm. "No!"

The heads slowly turned away. "No? Fine, then search on your own. I won't be helping."

The White Donkeys gathered around and said, "Saintess, we are willing to offer ourselves!"

"Silence! This is not your decision to make!" the Second Deity said.

Bai Lingmiao frowned in deep thought for a moment. “My subordinates are human—I will not use them as bargaining chips. However, I can offer something else in exchange for your information.”

“Hmph... In this wretched place, other than new heads for amusement, I need nothing else,” the heads retorted without looking back.

“No, you do need something. I can offer you death.”

All the heads turned to face her at once. “What?! You think you can kill me? I’d love that, but this place has no death.”

“True, there’s no death here, but that doesn’t mean the Twisted One of the Siming of Death can’t grant you death.”

Bai Lingmiao finished speaking and then gently reached up, plucking a human head from the tree as though she was picking a fruit.

Chapter 929 - Contact

“Transcend the three realms. Break the cycle of reincarnation...”

Bai Lingmiao gently brushed her slender fingers over the top of the head, causing it to close its eyes forever. A slight smile curled on its lips, signaling its liberation from this infernal prison.

Bai Lingmiao gently cradled the dead head, then turned to the willow tree again and asked, “Can I exchange this for information?”

“Yes! Absolutely!” the voices from the tree chimed together, anxious that Bai Lingmiao might change her mind if they didn’t respond quickly enough.

Everything that existed here was willing to trade anything for the eternal peace of death. In this realm of karmic obstacles, death was deemed the most precious thing.

“The Strayed Ones are in the east!”

“There’s a river to the east!”

“Not far, just thirty miles!”

“After crossing the river, follow the mountain path into the large mountain!”

“Once you’re in the mountain, you’ll likely find them!”

“There’s around a dozen of them! They’re not easy to deal with!”

The heads competed to share information about the Strayed Ones, and Bai Lingmiao’s heart brimmed with joy upon learning that there were twelve of them. She realized coming here had been the right decision.

“We’ve told you! Now, kill us! Quickly! We want to die!”

“Don’t go back on your word! If you don’t let us die, we will haunt you forever!”

The heads began falling from the tree like hailstones, rolling around Bai Lingmiao's feet like a pack of puppies begging for food.

As Bai Lingmiao's hand brushed over their heads, they quieted down, and their faces showed serene smiles.

Tuoba Danqing stood and watched from nearby. There was a deep longing in his eyes. Over the years, he had always yearned for death. Day and night, he had endured starvation and the torment of hunger, yet he couldn't die.

Death would free him from all suffering—it was an enormous temptation for him.

However, just as he was about to approach Bai Lingmiao, he shook his head violently and turned away. "No! I can't! I must live! I must find Feng Erniu and get my revenge!"

Suddenly, he began to laugh hysterically. "Hahaha! Feng Erniu! You never thought I'd make it out, did you? Just wait! I'm going to kill you! I will definitely kill you!"

As the heads gradually died, the once lush willow tree quickly withered, eventually turning black and splitting apart.

Bai Lingmiao now understood that the heads hadn't gone mad—the tree itself was alive. The heads were merely tools for it to speak.

After finishing the deal with the heads, Bai Lingmiao and her companions set off to the east.

They made swift progress with a clear goal and reached the river the heads had mentioned in less than one day.

The calm waters were marked by a lonely floating bridge, with a sign beside it that read "Bridge of Oblivion." [1]

"Bridge of Oblivion?" Bai Lingmiao pursed her lips, leading the others across the floating bridge with increased vigilance.

Much to her surprise, nothing happened as they safely crossed to the other side. Ahead of them loomed the massive mountain, home to the group of more than ten Strayed Ones.

The dark mountain loomed like a sleeping giant, exuding an overwhelming sense of oppression. A gravel path extended from Bai Lingmiao's feet and led deep into the mountain.

"Be careful, it's over ten Strayed Ones... If they go mad, it'll be quite a show."

Bai Lingmiao nodded in agreement as they made their way into the mountains. She thought about Li Huowang and how other sects had kept him under control.

As soon as they entered, Bai Lingmiao had the White Donkeys call out into the forest to assure the Strayed Ones that they had no ill intentions.

"Everyone! Come out, I can help you escape this endless torment, whether it's the torment of the Strayed One or the Muddled One!"

She wanted to make it clear she had no hostility and sincerely wanted to make contact with them.

She didn't plan to treat the Strayed Ones like others had, perhaps because Li Huowang was a Strayed One. She believed they were still capable of reason. A win-win situation didn't require tricks. Any sensible person would know how to choose.

After walking about two miles on the gravel path, they were stopped by a disheveled woman.

She hoarsely rasped at Bai Lingmiao, saying, "Go back..."

Her attitude made Bai Lingmiao clench her fists tightly inside her sleeves.

"We're here to help you. Don't be afraid—I'm here to help you." Bai Lingmiao took a step forward.

"Get lost!" the woman roared, and the ground suddenly swelled. A massive boulder rolled toward Bai Lingmiao and her group, causing the earth to shudder as it moved.

The White Donkeys quickly stepped forward. All thirty-six of them squatted simultaneously, sending the boulder flying away

with a mighty heave.

They stopped in their tracks as they were about to surround the female Strayed One. It was not because of fear but because another ten people had appeared beside her.

These people varied in height and gender. They were dressed in ragged clothes like beggars.

The White Donkeys remained on high alert. These were Strayed Ones, capable of creating something from nothing. It was rare to see ten of them gathered together—every single one was priceless.

“Miss Bai, maybe we should retreat. These Strayed Ones might have already gone mad. Let’s go back and plan this carefully,” Tuoba Danqing said.

“We’re not mad.”

Bai Lingmiao looked up. There was a dark-skinned man with bone rings in his hair who was clearly from Qing Qiu. He was the leader of the Strayed Ones.

“If you’re not mad, then why are you acting crazy?! Can’t you understand? Come with us! We know how to get out! Or do you plan to stay here forever?” the Second Deity shouted.

The Strayed One from Qing Qiu retorted, “Go out? For what? To be hunted like rats by humans?”

“We can remove the primordial breath inside you—you can live like normal people,” Bai Lingmiao said.

“Hmph! Normal people? So we went through all this suffering just to become ordinary people?”

Bai Lingmiao grew anxious. “If you don’t leave, will you stay here forever? There’s no death here. What do you intend to do here?”

“What do we intend to do? We want to become the Ten Kings of Hell!”

Bai Lingmiao and her companions were stunned into silence, unsure of how to respond.

The Strayed One from Qing Qiu pointed to the ground. “Do you think this is just some random place? This is the Underworld! It only looks like this because nobody cares!”

He continued, “As long as we become the new Kings of Hell, we will join the ranks of immortals!”

1. In Chinese mythology, Meng Po is the goddess of oblivion. She serves soup on this bridge to make people erase their past lives before they are reborn. 🙌

Chapter 930 - Yuan Er

“The Underworld? King of Hell?” Bai Lingmiao’s mouth fell open slightly. She stared at the Strayed Ones, her disbelief etched across her face. She truly hadn’t expected these people to come here just for something like that.

She tried to understand what they were saying, but their words were too shocking. What Underworld? And joining the ranks of immortals?

The Second Deity hesitated momentarily. “You guys didn’t get tricked by the Sitting Oblivion Dao, did you?”

Her words struck a nerve with the leader of the Strayed Ones. His face twisted with rage. “Don’t mention those frauds! They couldn’t possibly deceive us! Now get lost, or don’t blame us for being rude!”

Sensing the hostility from the Strayed Ones, Bai Lingmiao and the Second Deity quickly conferred in their minds.

In the current situation, persuasion seemed unlikely. They needed to stabilize things first. Force wasn’t an option with so many Strayed Ones present. They would have to take a different approach to deal with them.

After a moment’s thought, Bai Lingmiao spoke again. This time, she followed the leader’s lead instead of contradicting him.

“Since you want to become Kings of Hell, you’ve been here for a long time and still haven’t succeeded. There must have been some difficulties. If it stumped eleven Strayed Ones, it must mean it’s no easy task.”

Bai Lingmiao said this with confidence because she knew they couldn’t become Kings of Hell. The dead belonged to the place underneath Qing Qiu, so this couldn’t be the Underworld.

Moreover, the Heavenly Dao of Death was governed by the Heavenly Mater. If there were a King of Hell, it would be her.

Regardless of whether they had been deceived by the Sitting Oblivion Dao or something else, they would not leave willingly unless their obsession was shattered.

Force was out of the question—it was no simple task to subdue eleven Strayed Ones.

“How about we strike a deal? We help you overcome your difficulties and help you become Kings of Hell. In return, once it’s done, you come out with me. Think of it as a favor to me.”

“We don’t need you!”

The leader of the Strayed Ones flatly rejected her. He retreated along with the others, his eyes filled with profound hostility.

He clearly didn’t trust the strange woman with two upper bodies and had no intention of negotiating.

As they prepared to leave, Bai Lingmiao clenched her fists and stepped forward. “How much longer do you plan to stay here? You might be able to waste your time here, but what about your families in the world outside? Can they afford to wait as long as you can? Have you ever thought about how they’ve been doing all these years?”

The Strayed Ones, who had just turned to leave, stopped abruptly and glared at Bai Lingmiao. Their expressions had completely changed, clearly affected by her words.

Bai Lingmiao wasn’t speaking out of nowhere. She had been by Li Huowang’s side for long enough to understand some things about Strayed Ones.

She gazed into the eyes of the Strayed Ones and noticed the exhaustion and numbness hidden beneath their determined expressions. It became evident that they were barely holding on, much like Tuoba Danqing. These Strayed Ones weren’t as resolute as they seemed.

Bai Lingmiao and the Second Deity quickly devised a new strategy.

“Haven’t you suffered enough here? After all these years, I know you must have regrets. You had no choice before, so you were forced down a dark path. However, you have a choice now.

“Look at how we’re dressed. We voluntarily came in here just yesterday. If we could come in, we can certainly leave.

“Let me help you. I can take you out of here and remove your primordial breath. That way, you’ll never have to suffer from bewilderment again. Once you’re no longer Strayed Ones, you can live the life you want!

“And you don’t need to worry. Even though Strayed Ones are immensely valuable, the eleven of you together are far beyond our abilities.”

The Second Deity chimed in, “Exactly, give it a try. What do you have to lose? It’s better than wasting away here.”

Bai Lingmiao’s encouragement gradually eased the tension, and everyone’s attention shifted to her.

Yuan Er saw the shifting expressions of the Strayed Ones and realized things couldn’t continue like this. If they continued listening to her, their unity would falter!

“Don’t trust her! She’s lying! She might even be with the Sitting Oblivion Dao! Once we become Kings of Hell, we’ll control the world over there too!”

Bai Lingmiao replied, “Is that really true? Is that just your own belief, or do others think that as well? How can you be so certain that everyone wants to become a King of Hell? And how can you be sure that becoming the King of Hell will allow you to control the Underworld of the other world? Have you ever seen a soul from the other side?”

She continued, “Why are you forcing your own beliefs on others? Can’t you listen to their thoughts? Or do you see them as

mere tools for your own gain?"

The Second Deity added, "And you're so confused that you doubt whether this world even exists, so how can you be so sure of what you say?"

Bai Lingmiao's words were sharp and unrelenting, making Yuan Er's face darken.

He couldn't kill her. Making a move would only sow further division among his companions.

"Enough! I won't let her keep leading us down this path!" Yuan Er said, waving his hand. "Fine! You don't believe me, right? Well, come along and see for yourself! We've encountered difficulties, and if you help us solve them, we'll help you in return!"

After years of fruitlessly searching for a solution, Yuan Er doubted that this young woman could truly help. Whether she made him a King of Hell or died trying, it was a win for him either way.

"We have a deal." Bai Lingmiao stepped forward resolutely.

Yuan Er cast a quick glance at the other Strayed Ones before turning around and starting to ascend the mountain. "Come with me."

Bai Lingmiao nodded and followed. She wasn't concerned about the Strayed Ones turning against her—they wouldn't discard another option without a good reason.

Besides, without the Heavenly Dao of Death, they couldn't kill her even if they tried.

As they walked up the rocky path, Yuan Er casually explained their predicament.

"To become King of Hell, we need to obtain the Book of Life and Death, but it's hidden in the Underworld Palace.

"However, the Underworld Palace is extremely dangerous. We arrived with hundreds of people, but only eleven remain."

Bai Lingmiao's voice rose in surprise. "Hundreds of Strayed One?!"

“Not all were Strayed Ones. Some were patrons, some servants, some family.”

“And where are they now?”

“Dead.”

Bai Lingmiao shook her head slightly. “That’s impossible. This place has no Heavenly Dao of Death. No one can die here.”

Yuan Er sneered and said, “When the King of Hell calls for you at midnight, no dares live until dawn. The Book of Life and Death is in the hands of the Judge. Once the Judge writes your name, no Heavenly Dao can save you. You will be dragged into the eighteenth level of hell!”

Yuan Er smirked. “Now, do you still want to continue?”

Chapter 931 - Underworld

The Book of Life and Death? Could it actually call for someone's soul?

Bai Lingmiao doubted Yuen Er's words.

If that was the case, that meant the Underworld Palace was real.

Despite Yuen Er's apparent confidence, Bai Lingmiao remained skeptical. If Yuen Er was telling the truth, then where would the Heavenly Mater, who controls the Heavenly Dao of Death, be positioned?

Ultimately, the Second Deity voiced the questions that lingered in Bai Lingmiao's heart. "Is it really the Underworld Palace?"

"Of course! If not, I wouldn't have allowed you to help us. It's not only the palace but also the eighteen layers of hell! Do you know what we're stepping on right now? It's the Yellow Spring Road^[1].

Tuoba Danqing was taken aback, his gaze shifting downward to the stone path beneath his feet. He glanced around, questioning whether his presence here was a mistake.

Afterward, there was silence as they pressed on. The group remained vigilant, keeping their senses sharp as they advanced.

The road was long, but it still had an end. Soon, a pitch-dark cave appeared in front of them.

On both sides of the cave, a couplet caught the eye: *Only you can decide when to harm others. This applies to all three worlds in the land of the living.*

The Underworld Palace had never let anyone go. There was another couplet at the top: *You are here.*

The cold wind blowing out from the cave made everyone

tremble.

Noticing Bai Lingmiao's shocked gaze, Yuen Er chuckled. "This is the door to the underworld. What's wrong? Do you dare to enter?"

Bai Lingmiao checked the couplets and shook her head lightly. "This isn't the door to the underworld. If it was, the couplet is wrong. There's no such thing as punishment in this world."

She led her followers into the cave. It was filled with stalactites and stalagmites resembling little demons.

Green smoke rose out of nowhere and enveloped everyone's legs. The dark road led everyone deep into the cave.

The cave was also very spacious, making Yuen Er's voice echo. "Continue downwards, then. We've cleared almost everything around the entrance. Our true enemies are in the Feng Capital. The Underworld Palace is inside the Feng Capital too."

They continued walking and saw several corpses and skeletons on the ground. Clearly, they were the people who had previously followed the Strayed Ones.

"It seems like they were telling the truth. Something really did grant them death."

Bai Lingmiao frowned and put her guard up as she continued to walk forward.

They were unsure of how long they had walked, but they were certain they had arrived at Feng Capital when a colossal wall dotted with glowing green lights appeared from the depths of the darkness.

In contrast to the strange black holes that Li Huowang had described, the Feng Capital that Bai Lingmiao encountered seemed real. At the very least, it was a city.

At that moment, accompanied by the pounding of everyone's hearts, the massive metallic door emitted a deep groan as it swung open.

Green smoke spewed forth as beings walked out of the city.

“Sh! Lie down! Don’t let them see you!”

Upon hearing Yuen Er’s words, the Second Deity twisted and forced Bai Lingmiao onto the ground like a prowling beast.

Through her beast-like eyes, Bai Lingmiao saw strange, emaciated people walking out in rows. Each person held a broken yellow lantern and wore tattered robes. They were incredibly tall, with their shoulders disappearing into the darkness above.

It was clear that the Strayed Ones feared those beings. They didn’t even dare to breathe until the giants had left.

“What are those?” asked Bai Lingmiao.

A Strayed One with an unruly beard answered her question. “Those are the soldiers of the Underworld Palace! Haven’t you heard of them before?”

“Are they strong? Why are you afraid of them?”

“We aren’t afraid of them, but we cannot provoke them. The little demons on the city walls would sound the alarm if we did. By then, everyone in the city would know we’re here. If that were to happen, how could we possibly steal the book?”

Yuen Er pointed at the gates. “I thought you were here to help? Come, this is our problem. Go and deal with it for us.

“Those soldiers are swarming the Feng Capital! If you can help us, we will help you!”

“Still, you guys are Strayed Ones. Even if they all poured out from the city, I doubt they’d be able to defeat you,” Bai Lingmiao said. In her eyes, a group of eleven Strayed Ones were nigh unstoppable.

“So what if we can fight? There’s no death here, and we can’t kill them! They’d surround us and keep us here until we eventually lose all our strength. If it weren’t for the three comrades who helped us escape last time, none of us would still be alive today.”

Yuen Er recounted the events that had taken place, noting that while the soldiers had the power to kill them, they were unable to

kill the soldiers. Given the unfair nature of the fight, it was no surprise that they found themselves trapped.

“No.” Bai Lingmiao shook her head firmly. “As long as I’m here, there will be death. Just fight.”

The Strayed Ones didn’t trust Bai Lingmiao, so they refrained from acting. Bai Lingmiao commanded her thirty-six white donkeys to charge into the Feng Capital, using their techniques simultaneously.

Several demons emerged from the darkness, each about half the size of an average human. They were naked and had large pot bellies.

The demons struck their gongs with all their might, and the entire Feng Capital soon buzzed with life.

The city gates opened again, revealing a large minotaur wielding a heavy chain. It charged forward in the direction of the white donkeys.

“The disciples carry the thirty-three heavens. The masters surrounded them along with the eighteen Arhats and the twenty-four celestial beings! Turn our body into bronze and our bones into metal. Mold us into Mount Tai. We wear the twelve metal hats and the twelve armors. Wrap us in three layers of bronze and three layers of metal!”

The large chain crashed into the white donkeys, producing sparks and making the minotaur’s hands go numb.

It wasn’t over. With their reinforced bodies, the white donkeys turned their palms into knives and cut into the minotaur’s legs.

The minotaur cried in pain and crashed down. The white donkeys surrounded it and cut off its neck.

A wave of joy swept through the Strayed Ones as they realized the minotaur had truly died. The woman hadn’t lied—she was able to kill the soldiers!

1. The road that the dead walk on as they travel to the underworld. 🗨️

Chapter 932 - Hellhounds

“Everyone, charge! Kill those soldiers and snatch the Book of Life and Death! This place is ours!” Yuen Er shouted, leading everyone to charge into the city.

Bai Lingmiao was surprised to see them use techniques from various sects rather than cultivating “Truth.”

They were just like Li Huowang, learning techniques from other sects.

Soldiers poured out nonstop from the city, and Bai Lingmiao's doubts increased. “The Cow-head, Horse-face, and even the Black and White Impermanence... Is this really the underworld? Is my family here, then?”

Bai Lingmiao halted her wandering thoughts, noticing the others were engaged in a fierce battle. She retrieved a bunch of prayer beads made from human bones. Every time she rotated it, a soldier who had been severely wounded would die.

As Bai Lingmiao chanted, the Second Deity took control of her lower body.

Her snarling face split open as she rapped her black fingernails on her drum.

“Step firmly and stand tall! Wear your armor while you hold the whip! I call for the Red family before the Yellow! I call for the pythons and spiritual ferret to bring the King of Sadness!”

In no time, her beast-like features melded together, and multiple organs extended out of her body. With her limbs contorted inside out, the Second Deity charged forward, leaving a trail of blood in her wake.

Despite the relentless steam of soldiers pouring from the city gates, Yuen Er and the others had finally glimpsed a glimmer of

hope in the fallen soldiers littering the ground. This breakthrough invigorated them and motivated them to fight even harder.

As more and more bodies piled up around them, something unexpected happened. The wind carried down a judge of the dead, split in half. One half had a snarling beast face, while the other had a rotting face

The Second Deity stopped chanting from the shock. "There's actually a judge of the dead here! This is the underworld!"

Bai Lingmiao momentarily halted, then quickly resumed her chanting while tightly gripping her prayer beads.

The judge stood atop a roof and observed everything below it. It stared with an unblinking eye at them, and its voice resembled an actor in the theater. "Ehm, such impudence~"

It raised its brush and wrote furiously in a purple book.

As it did, the corpses on the ground revived and surrounded Bai Lingmiao's group.

Bai Lingmiao's chanting came to an abrupt halt, her lips trembling. Her gaze was fixed on the book held by the judge.

"That thing is real! They are telling the truth! It's the Book of Life and Death! I can revive my entire village with it!"

The Second Deity howled and shouted, "Grab it!"

Everyone, from the Strayed Ones to the white donkeys, ignored their enemies and rushed towards the judge.

The judge scoffed and raised its brush. It looked at one of the white donkeys before crossing something in the book. Without warning, the white donkey collapsed, lifeless.

The moment the judge looked at the Strayed One with the unruly beard, Bai Lingmiao appeared behind the Strayed One.

The judge crossed another name off his list, and Bai Lingmiao placed her hands on the Strayed One's head.

With a swift stroke, the judge crossed out the name, but the bearded man was still alive. The book had not taken his soul.

Bai Lingmiao held onto the Heavenly Dao of Death, so she would've been embarrassed if she hadn't been able to intervene.

"Do not be afraid. It cannot decide your fate with me here! Grab the book!"

Upon hearing her, everyone stopped defending themselves. They charged recklessly at the judge, allowing the soldiers to attack them relentlessly. Since they couldn't die, there was no reason to defend themselves.

Now that the book had become useless, the judge panicked. Despite crossing off name after name, no one died. It floated upwards to retreat.

"Immortal Families! Don't forget to bring the three treasures when you are here! Find the Immortal-Shackling Chains, the Horse Saddle, and the Soul Imprisoning Bottle! Toss them towards the enemies to stop them from fleeing and escaping!"

The sound of the drumbeat paused as the Second Deity raised her drum whip and swung it towards the judge floating in the air. Then, she made a pulling motion downwards.

The judge fell down, as if it were truly bound by something.

The judge tried to get up, but it was too late. The white donkeys had already hurled their Saintess into the air, sending her soaring toward it.

The Second Deity let out crazy laughter as she sunk her black fingernails into the judge's face. She pulled and tore out the judge's cheek.

As the Second Deity attacked, Bai Lingmiao held onto the Book of Life and Death and pulled it hard.

She wept with joy as she held the Book of Life and Death in her hands. Though it was slightly larger than she was, its weight didn't matter—she could finally bring her family back to life!

Her triumph lasted only a single moment. The soldiers began retreating like a tide as another judge floated down with another

Book of Life and Death.

Moments later, a second judge appeared and floated down, then a third, and so on, until there were nine judges before her.

Bai Lingmiao clutched the Book of Life and Death against her chest, her voice trembling with shock. "What's happening?"

Yuen Er approached her while leading the other Strayed Ones. "There are ten palaces, so naturally, there are ten judges! Don't you know that?"

"Who told you that there are ten judges?"

"My grandmother! Everyone in my village says that. How could you not know that?"

A terrifying thought gripped her as she processed his words.

"Sorry, I underestimated you. I never thought you could actually kill the judge. I suppose you could do it nine more times?" Yuan Er said, firmly gripping his own weapon.

The Second Deity heard Bai Lingmiao's question in her heart and immediately warned Yuen Er. "We can deal with nine judges, but we cannot deal with the hellhounds of the Underworld Palace."

"Hellhounds?"

Chapter 933 - Strayed Ones

“Hellhounds?” Yuen Er asked, dumbfounded.

“Yes, hellhounds! We obtained that information from the archives of the Surveillance Bureau. Regular people wouldn’t know about this,” the Second Deity said. “It has three heads and devours the souls of people. None of us will survive when it appears!”

The Second Deity suddenly turned and stared into the darkness with fear. “Look! It’s appearing! The hellhound is coming!”

As the Strayed Ones stared into the darkness with fear, a hellhound emerged from the black fog. It was rotting and emanating the air of death, striking fear in everyone’s hearts.

When Bai Lingmiao saw the hellhound appear out of nowhere, she understood everything. She looked at the Book of Life and Death in her hands with despair.

She released her grip. The book slipped from her fingers, tumbling to the ground with a soft, devastating thud.

“She’s lying...” Bai Lingmiao said.

“What?”

Bai Lingmiao pointed at the hellhound with her trembling fingers. “There’s no such thing as a hellhound here. It’s just something she made up. Have you not noticed that the things she’s making up are becoming reality?”

Bai Lingmiao closed her eyes and clasped her head in pain. “There’s no underworld! There’s no Book of Life and Death! You were all deceived! The dog, the book, this entire place—you created it all! You are all Strayed Ones! Whatever you think is real will become real! If you think that this is fake, then everything will

disappear!”

Her words were like a beating hammer that struck their hearts. A wind blew past, and the bodies of the nine judges slowly turned translucent. No one died, even as the judges continued to cross out names on the books. Soon, they disappeared in front of them.

The judges weren’t the only ones disappearing. The soldiers, the city, and even the hellhound disappeared.

Bai Lingmiao looked at the disappearing Book of Life and Death and cried. Her tears stained her eye mask, and they dripped onto the ground.

The Second Deity felt irritated, but in the end, she sighed and turned around to give Bai Lingmiao a gentle hug.

The two of them shared the same body, bearing the burden together.

Bai Lingmiao sobbed. “I... I thought it was real... I thought I could revive them using the book... Now... it feels like they died again in my heart...”

“I understand. I know. Don’t be sad. Be happy for a bit. See, we get to take back eleven Strayed Ones.”

The Second Deity couldn’t do much except lick the tears off Bai Lingmiao’s cheek with her snake-like tongue.

Bai Lingmiao’s heart felt like it was being torn apart. However, she quickly composed herself, remembering the dire situation outside.

She took a deep breath before speaking. “Let’s go out. We can help you escape your suffering. You won’t be stuck between two worlds anymore. No matter who deceived you before, I’m sure no one will trick you again once you become regular people.”

The Strayed Ones found themselves uncertain about what to do next, as their years of perseverance turned out to be nothing more than dreams. They silently trailed behind Bai Lingmiao.

They walked back out and saw that the entrance to the

underworld and the Yellow Spring Road had disappeared. They had confirmed everything.

A lone Strayed One couldn't accomplish it all, but the presence of all eleven was enough to achieve this.

What exposed this as a sham was that none of the eleven Strayed Ones knew what the underworld looked like. They had simply fabricated it based on hearsay.

They returned to the place where Bai Lingmiao had originally come from. However, Bai Lingmiao stopped in front of the underground chamber.

“Wait here. I will chant and conduct the ceremony right now. Once it’s done, the exit will appear. We can use the exit and get out from the Muddled One’s Karmic Obstacle.”

Bai Lingmiao sat down and started the chant. “The rain of Mandalas, the red spider lilies, and the sandalwood fragrance that pleases the hearts... Everything is but karma. The earth is pure and serene... At that time, the four assemblies were all joyful, their bodies and minds at ease, experiencing what had never been before... A light between the eyebrows illuminates the east, and the eighteen thousand worlds appear golden...”

Her chanting caused the space before her to quiver, with two different forces colliding.

As she continued to chant, the vibration grew stronger and stronger. Once she completed her chant, the sound of shattering glass filled the air. Right before her, a circular hole materialized, leading to the main branch of the White Lotus Sect in Shangjing.

As soon as everyone went into the hole, it disappeared.

The Second Deity was confused and intrigued. *I didn’t know that the Lotus Sutra of Wondrous Dharma had such power. I remember it was used to calm one’s heart.*

Bai Lingmiao shook her head and looked at the eleven Strayed Ones behind her. *It doesn’t matter. This will work as long as they trust*

me, especially since we have eleven Strayed Ones.

Bai Lingmiao had learned a lot about Strayed Ones from spending so much time with Li Huowang. She made sure none of them suspected her words.

Since they could construct an entire underworld, forming an exit would be a piece of cake.

"Miaomiao, you're back! How did you get out?" Chun Xiaoman's voice rose in shock as she guided a group of White Lotus Sect devotees to encircle Bai Lingmiao.

Bai Lingmiao didn't want to talk much and shook her head, her voice tinged with exhaustion. "Put the Muddled One back in the coffin. I'll take the Muddled One and the Strayed Ones to the Surveillance Bureau."

Bai Lingmiao was about to say something else when she turned around and saw Tuoba Danqing struggling painfully on the ground.

She rushed to help him up, horrified to see his muscular frame withering at an alarming pace. He was rapidly turning into a skeleton.

"He's dying from hunger," the Second Deity said.

The consequences of prolonged starvation within the Muddled One's Karmic Obstacle were becoming horrifyingly clear.

Tuoba Danqing was fundamentally different from the eleven Strayed Ones—if they believed they weren't hungry, they wouldn't feel hungry.

Chapter 934 - Expected

“I cannot die... I... I cannot die... Feng Erniu!”

Tuoba Danqing grappled weakly on the ground, his emaciated arms clawing desperately at the earth. Death was not an option—not now, not when he was so close.

Feng Erniu had been the one to trap him within the Muddled One's Karmic Obstacle. For all this time, Tuoba Danqing's mind had been consumed by thoughts of revenge.

Now, he was finally out, but he was going to die soon.

Tuoba Danqing refused to succumb to his fate. However, he didn't have much time left. All he could do was say his last words. “Bai... Madam Bai! Tell my son that he must never join the Surveillance Bureau!”

Bai Lingmiao watched Tuoba Danqing with deep concern. “Don't worry. You won't die while I'm here.”

She made a Lotus Seal with a single hand before lightly tapping Tuoba Danqing's forehead. A black lotus appeared briefly on his skin.

Tuoba Danqing felt his body stop decaying. While he hadn't revived, he also hadn't succumbed to death. It seemed as though he was suspended in a state between life and death.

“You are neither dead nor alive. I can only maintain you like this for twenty years or so. You should seek the masters from the Righteous Monastery before coming to find me again.”

Tuoba Danqing looked at himself, shocked by Bai Lingmiao's powers.

He never thought Er Jiu's wife would be so powerful. The only people he knew with similar abilities were the Lamas from Qing Qiu.

He recalled she had once been barely qualified as a Shaman. *What could have possibly transformed her so drastically in these past few years?*

“What’s wrong with him?” Yuen Er said, leading the other Strayed Ones.

Bai Lingmiao's heart raced as she heard footsteps approaching from behind. She quickly lifted Tuoba Danqing with her four arms. “It's nothing. He's just dealing with internal injuries, and we were tending to him. Let's move on.”

They grouped all of the Strayed Ones into a single carriage. They departed from the White Lotus Sect and headed towards the Surveillance Bureau.

When they arrived, they were all shocked by the twisted room where Li Huowang was cultivating. As Li Huowang continued cultivating, his surroundings twisted and changed even further.

“You’re here?” Xuan Pin floated out from the ground.

Tuoba Danqing fell onto the ground limply and kneeled when he saw the big red robes. “I greet the Chief!”

He was very nervous. He didn’t have the qualifications to approach Xuan Pin in the past.

Xuan Pin remained silent after glancing at Tuoba Danqing. Instead, she pushed open the door to Li Huowang’s cultivation room. “Come, follow me in.”

The room wasn’t any better. Various scenes and objects swam around Li Huowang. He also flickering in and out of existence.

“Wait for a moment. I’ll go wake Father up. It’s actually a bit difficult right now, even for me.”

Xuan Pin phased past the floating motorbike and approached Li Huowang.

“Father...?” Tuoba Danqing froze in place. He felt that his world was crumbling.

He recalled that Er Jiu was supposed to be his underling. How

did he make the Chief call him his father?

After working for the Surveillance Bureau for so long, Tuoba Danqing had seen many bizarre things. However, this was the first time he had encountered something like this.

If the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau addressed Er Jiu like that, what should he call him then?

While Tuoba Danqing was wrestling with his thoughts, the people from the Surveillance Bureau brought in eight more people with yellow talismans placed on their foreheads.

Bai Lingmiao knew those were the eight Strayed Ones the Surveillance Bureau had hunted down.

The palace, the Surveillance Bureau, and the regular people had been hunting for Strayed Ones. Even so, they had only managed to find eight. Unless more of them were born, there were no remaining Strayed Ones.

Li Huowang frowned when he opened his eyes and saw the group of Strayed Ones in front of him.

“There’s so many of them this time!” With that amount of Strayed Ones, Li Huowang could strive for the next two chakra points.

“Yes. Mother helped us a lot.”

Li Huowang looked at Bai Lingmiao. Both of them nodded at the same time.

Li Huowang then saw someone familiar. He was Tuoba Danqing, emaciated beyond recognition. If it weren’t for the prayer beads on his arms, Li Huowang never would’ve recognized him.

Without waiting for Li Huowang to say anything, Tuoba Danqing stumbled over. “Brother Er Jiu! Where is Feng Erniu? Where is he?!”

“Who’s Feng Erniu?” Li Huowang had never heard that name before.

“It’s the Ji Xiang who has ordered us to go hunt the Muddled

One! That damned bastard that used the abacus!”

“Oh! I remember him. He’s dead. His wife is dead too,” Li Huowang said plainly.

He ignored the frozen Tuoba Danqing and approached the Strayed Ones. “Time is short. Let’s start now.”

The other Strayed Ones became agitated upon seeing Li Huowang approach, but they relaxed when they realized that other Strayed Ones were still alive even after losing their primordial breath and inner sight.

The woman had not lied to them. They could live properly from now on.

“Feng Erniu is not dead,” Xuan Pin whispered to Li Huowang as she stuffed the primordial breath and inner sight into Li Huowang.

Li Huowang gritted his teeth, controlling the external primordial breath and inner sight. “Feng Erniu is still alive? I thought his death had been documented.”

“It was to fool you. You were fighting against us last time, remember?”

“Hmph! What a bunch of sly old foxes. Don’t tell Tuoba Danqing, or they will fight to the death. Both of them are very vindictive.”

Xuan Pin nodded as she controlled the Unspeakables. This time, they reached for the Strayed One with the unruly beard.

Once they touched him, Xuan Pin realized that something was off. Confused, she asked, “Why don’t you have any primordial breath?”

The man chuckled and tore off his face, revealing the Lan Hua mahjong tile. “That’s because I’m from the Sitting Oblivion Dao! Haha!”

Staring at the strange mahjong face, the Second Deity growled. “I knew it! There was no way all eleven Strayed Ones would

randomly want to become the Kings of the Underworld!”

The Strayed Ones instantly surrounded the poor bastard. “You bastard!”

They ripped him apart, tearing him in bits and pieces. However, Lan Hua didn’t stop his laughter, even in his last moments.

Chapter 935 - Truth

No one had thought the Sitting Oblivion Dao would infiltrate an entire group of Strayed Ones.

After Bai Lingmiao informed him about the origins of the Strayed Ones, Li Huowang organized his thoughts. “The Sitting Oblivion Dao hid ten Strayed Ones in the Muddled One’s Karmic Obstacle. They were probably trying to accomplish something, but we reaped the fruits of their labor instead.”

Xuan Pin nodded but corrected him. “Father, this is Shai Zi’s way of helping us.”

“What? Him? Help us?”

“Ten Strayed Ones hiding in the Muddled One’s Karmic Obstacle. I doubt that the regular folks of the White Lotus Sect could discover such a hidden resource. No one would’ve learned about it if Shai Zi hadn’t disclosed it.”

Li Huowang wasn’t in a hurry to absorb all the primordial breath. He meditated on the strange events. “Is he the one who revealed the information to us? I have a bad feeling about this.”

“Father, you don’t need to be suspicious of him all the time. Things are different now—he wouldn’t be able to win against us even if he tried. He’s not that stupid.”

Li Huowang nodded. “Frankly, I would feel more at ease if he had some hidden agenda. I was worried that Shai Zi was genuinely trying to assist us.”

He continued, “It’s quite troubling. Just how dire must our circumstances be for even our enemies to extend a helping hand?”

Li Huowang pondered momentarily before tossing his spine sword into the darkness of Xuan Pin’s robes.

“While I’m cultivating, help me check on the Qi Kingdom. Send

some men if you need to. Don't let the Tianchen Kingdom attack it. Let me know the moment they attack the Qi Kingdom."

"Alright," Li Sui said as she extended several tentacles from her robes, tightly grabbing onto the spine sword.

Li Huowang looked at the remaining Strayed Ones and took a deep breath. "Come, let's continue. We need to reach the seventh stage before Zuoqiu Yong comes here."

As Li Huowang absorbed the primordial breath and inner sight of the Strayed Ones, he started to deform uncontrollably. Veins bulged on his forehead, and his brain expanded to the point of imminent rupture.

Li Huowang waved his arm, urging them to leave despite his pain. "Leave! Run as far away as you can!"

Bai Lingmiao and the others quickly exited the pulsing room. Once outside, Yuen Er and the others turned to Bai Lingmiao with grateful expressions. "Thank you, Miss Bai! We were deceived a lot of times in the past, but now we've finally found someone trustworthy."

Bai Lingmiao shook her head. "Don't worry about it. The White Lotus Sect focuses on accruing good karma, so we merely did the right thing. Do you have any other plans?"

Yuen Er and the others exchanged glances, uncertain of what to do next.

"Why don't you head to Cowheart Village? My people are there. It's a good place to stay while you figure out what to do."

"Thank you, Miss Bai! You are a real living Bodhisattva!"

At that moment, a powerful suction force emerged from the cultivating room, drawing everyone uncontrollably towards it.

Just as abruptly, the force vanished, replaced by a thunderous explosion that threw them into the air.

What was once an underground room had been transformed. Li Huowang's cultivation had violently displaced the earth, ripping

away the ceiling and exposing a vast expanse of the sky.

Bai Lingmiao turned in the air and landed safely on the ground. “Save them! Take them and distance yourself from Senior Li!”

Fortunately, each person present had their own cultivation techniques. They all survived, even though they had been sent flying into the air.

Still, the aftermath was not without consequences. The blast impacted the room to the left—a repository of histories and ancient records. The books and scrolls lay scattered on the ground.

Bai Lingmiao stood at the crater's edge and looked down to see what had happened. They were shocked to find something weird down in the crater.

Something was slowly growing upwards from the crater like a distorted tree. It kept replicating and pasting itself repeatedly.

A distorted tree was slowly growing upwards from the crater, replicating itself repeatedly.

The tree had flesh, blood, grass, flowers, wood, and various other things that Bai Lingmiao could not identify.

The tree stopped growing an hour later, though its roots kept growing underground.

Bai Lingmiao stared at the large “tree” in front of her. It was both chaotic and majestic. She reached out and plucked an apple from a flat piece of a black mirror.

She stared at the apple for a long time before the Second Deity chomped into it.

“This is something Senior Li conjured. Don’t eat it.”

The Second Deity swallowed with delight. “Don’t you understand? This isn’t a conjuration or an illusion. This is the real deal. From now on, everything that Li Huowang conjures will be real. It will never fade away, even if he stops channeling his power. This is the true power of his cultivation.”

Bai Lingmiao frowned as she looked at the chaotic crater.

Maybe the others had forgotten, but she had not forgotten the side effects of “Truth” cultivation.

“Li Huowang, let’s talk.”

“I’m listening.”

Li Huowang hugged his chest and stared at Qing Wanglai and Zhao Shuangdian.

“I understand that you aren’t trying to break up with us at this moment, especially since you reached out to discuss this. Regardless of our current situation, we are all literally and figuratively tied down in the same boat.”

Li Huowang turned to look at the seagulls flying past their boat.

He wasn’t worried—they should be the ones worrying. Once the timeline reset, he would be the only one to retain his memories.

By then, Li Huowang would be in control of the situation.

Of course, since they were in an alliance to fight against a common enemy, Li Huowang would still tell them about his ability to reset the timeline.

However, he planned to mix false information with real information. No one would be able to tell the difference.

“We understand what you’re thinking, but you must also know where we’re coming from.

“We worked hard to fulfill some of your demands, such as bringing you the medicine to suppress your hallucinations.

“We also understand that you’re worried about your girlfriend. We promise that this is the first and last time. We will not bring your girlfriend next time.

“We can even share some of our secret codes with you. This way, you’ll quickly prove your ability to reset the timeline the next time it happens, and we won’t bring your girlfriend along then.”

Li Huowang looked at them silently as they talked. At the same time, Yang Na opened the door and entered the room.

She sensed the tension in the room and realized that the negotiations were going poorly. She bowed apologetically to the two before tugging at Li Huowang's sleeve, urging him to step outside with her.

However, Li Huowang remained still. Yang Na had to drag him out by force.

Li Huowang was confused. "Why are you helping them? Can't you see that they are using us? I'm finally sorting out the relationships between us Simings. If you don't want to be used by them, you need to use them instead!"

The wind on the sea blew through Yang Na's hair, causing it to flutter wildly. "I'm not helping them—I just want to help you. It's better to have another Siming, after all.

"Huowang, I know you're worried about me and don't want me to risk my life, but you need to think ahead. What if all of you died because I wasn't here? Would I really be able to defend the entire Baiyu Capital by myself?"

Chapter 936 - Desert

Li Huowang was momentarily stunned by Yang Na's words. He wanted to argue but soon realized she was right.

If Ji Zai, Ba-Hui, the Three Pure Ones, the Five Dhyani Buddhas, Doulao, and the others were unable to win, then the enemy must be extraordinarily powerful. The Heavenly Mater could not defeat them either, and his current attempts to keep her out of the conflict were ultimately meaningless.

Something isn't right. Li Huowang shook his head vigorously, attempting to clear his thoughts from her perspective. His head began to throb slightly.

"It's not like that. You don't have to worry about any of this. You can just... leave! Go home and get better! You're not the Heavenly Mater! Nana, you're just ill!"

Yang Na looked confused. "Get better? Are you saying I'm mentally ill? If I am, what about you? Are you saying you're also mentally ill? Are Ji Zai, the Simings, and everything else just figments of your imagination?"

While speaking, Yang Na reached out and gently held Li Huowang's hand, her eyes filled with concern. "Huowang, you have to decide whether the Simings are real or not. You can't claim that I'm mentally ill while believing the Simings are real for you."

"But..." Li Huowang frowned, standing still with pursed lips.

Yang Na burst into laughter. She embraced him, wrapping her arms around his waist and planting a kiss on his lips.

Then, she turned around, cupped her hands around her mouth, and shouted out into the deep blue sea, releasing everything she had bottled up inside.

She raised her scarred wrists with joy, letting the sea breeze

gently rustle through her hair. At that moment, she let out a burst of passion and energy that suited her age.

“I’ve decided not to commit suicide anymore! Since I’m in charge of death, I will deliver death to our enemies!

“Whether it’s a Siming or a Greater Siming standing in our way, we’ll kill them without mercy, whatever they might be!”

Li Huowang looked at her as she smiled. He wanted to say something but couldn’t find the right words.

Compared to her past self, Yang Na seemed much happier, as if she had let go of many of her burdens.

After thinking for a long while, Li Huowang sighed deeply. He opened his arms and hugged her tightly from behind.

“Alright! Let’s deal with them together! Let them come! Let them taste the consequences of messing with us, the Simings of the Baiyu Capital!”

After saying that, he pulled out a military knife from behind and handed it to Yang Na, then guided her hand to grip it firmly.

The best defense was a good offense. Since there was no way to avoid it, the only option left was to do everything possible to eliminate those who wished them harm!

Li Huowang heard a knock on the metal door. He turned around, still holding Bai Lingmiao, and saw Zhao Shuangdian. “The coordinates are almost set. It’s time to discuss our strategy.”

Li Huowang’s expression gradually became serious. He led Bai Lingmiao into the cabin.

A tablet displayed a map of the ocean. Zhao Shuangdian rapidly moved her fingers to zoom in on the map.

“There was a miscalculation before. I originally thought it was on the island, but it turns out it’s underwater.”

“Underwater? Do you mean we’ll have to dive this time?”

“Exactly. The environment is extremely harsh this time. Although we’ve prepared diving suits, everyone must be very

careful.”

“Under the deep sea, huh...” Li Huowang furrowed his brows, his gaze fixed on the deep-sea map displayed on the tablet.

What kind of projection is this illusion? Could the place where this Siming lives truly be so bizarre? Maybe the Simings of the Baiyu Capital have to prepare for this.

“There will be headsets in the diving suits. This time, Ling’er and I won’t be going down. We’ll be guiding you from above using your cameras. Once underwater, follow my instructions. If communications are cut off, follow Qing Wanglai’s orders.”

“And Li Huowang, your bulletproof vest won’t work underwater, so don’t be too reckless.”

“If my vest won’t work, will your firearms work underwater?”

“Don’t worry about that. Ours won’t work, but neither will theirs,” Qing Wanglai said.

“Are you sure the projections we’re dealing with now are still human?” Li Huowang’s words sent a chill through everyone present.

Li Huowang didn’t believe there would be some kind of illegal drug factory underwater this time.

He began to observe the people in the room. The girl whose lips twitched was naturally there, just like Chen Hongyu, who had returned to life.

Since she was here, the two men had naturally arrived as well.

One was a cold-faced skinny man, and the other was a burly man with the word “courage” tattooed on his shoulder. They seemed like mere spectators, rarely offering any opinions.

Li Huowang couldn’t figure out what Simings the three of them were. However, since they were Zhao Shuangdian’s people, they were surely Simings from the Baiyu Capital.

Still, there was no point in speculating without seeing it for himself.

Everyone put on their diving suits and began to descend the

metal ladder.

Li Huowang removed the oxygen mask from his mouth and looked up at Yang Na. "Once we're down there, stay close to me."

"I'm not that weak. After all, I'm the Siming of Death! I can't die."

Li Huowang didn't have a chance to explain the story of the previous Siming of Death, Qian Fu. Yang Na jumped into the icy water before he could.

The water was extremely cold. Li Huowang shivered when he jumped in, and Zhao Shuangdian's voice immediately came through his earpiece.

"Hello? Can you hear me? If you can, please cross your hands in front of the camera."

Li Huowang crossed his hands and then lowered them. He carefully observed everything underwater.

He trembled at the sight of the seabed. It was a desert. There was an entire desert underwater.

Golden dunes rose and fell, appearing dreamlike under the shimmering reflection of the water.

What is going on here? Is this the strange place where god Yu'er lives?

As Li Huowang observed the scene below, Qing Wanglai pulled out two sticks from behind and broke them apart. A thick green mist began to dye the surrounding water green.

What is he doing with his Heavenly Dao? Li Huowang watched the scene cautiously, realizing that the Three Pure Ones had come well-prepared.

At that moment, Zhao Shuangdian's voice explained through his earpiece. "This is shark repellent, meant to prevent attacks from sea creatures. Stay close to Ling'er, and don't fall behind."

While they were all wearing diving suits, Ling'er's occasional twitches were still very noticeable.

Even underwater, she continued to type away at her small computer. However, the keyboard was now embedded in the sleeve of her diving suit.

Chapter 937 - Danger

Li Huowang moved his flippers in the cold seawater. With his military knife clenched in one hand and Yang Na's hand held firmly in the other, he followed closely behind Ling'er.

Glancing downward, he found himself hovering just above the desert-like seabed. Oddly enough, it felt as if he were floating instead of swimming.

Could their Simings really be in a place like this? Last time, the Siming's projection was a factory. What could it be this time?

Li Huowang looked around for anything that could be the projection of the Siming.

The area was barren, allowing them to see far into the distance. There was nothing apart from the occasional fish and the large expanses of sand at the seabed. It didn't seem like there was anything substantial enough to serve as a Siming's projection.

If it was the projection of a Siming, it should at least be able to move and pose a threat.

It would be like the drug factory from last time, where the drug lords were likely the limbs of the Siming.

At that moment, Li Huowang felt someone tug his arm. It was Yang Na.

She couldn't speak with her oxygen mask on, so she pointed upwards toward the surface.

Li Huowang carefully examined the water and noticed ripples forming on the surface of the inverted water. *It's raining.*

Zhao Shuangdian's anxious voice rang in their ears, saying, "Attention! Everyone, return to the ship immediately! A typhoon is heading this way. I repeat, return to the ship!"

They abandoned their search and turned rapidly toward the

surface. Ocean weather was notoriously unpredictable, and this typhoon was closing in faster than anticipated.

Li Huowang removed his mask upon reaching the surface. The sight that greeted him was shocking—dark clouds loomed in the distance like a collapsing sky, accompanied by the deep rumble of thunder.

His face paled. *What's going on? Could this be the Siming's projection? Why is this Siming so powerful?!*

He was a Siming himself, but his projection was a human. The terrifying force before him was beyond human, so what could it be?

“Hurry!” he shouted desperately. “Get on the ship! We’ve been discovered. It’s a trap!”

It was clear that after the successful ambush last time, the Simings from the other elephant would not fall for the same trick.

It had been lying in wait for them, whatever it was.

Ignoring the downpour, they pressed on, swimming toward the distant ship as the waves crashed around them.

The storm was intensifying. Fortunately, they still had their diving equipment. When swimming on the surface became impossible due to the wind, they could dive underwater to get closer to the ship.

However, it was dangerous even underwater. The undercurrents posed a threat, threatening to drag them away multiple times.

The sight of the ship’s barnacle-covered hull spurred Li Huowang to swim hard, breaking the surface and reaching for the metal ladder.

Creak! Just as his hand was about to grasp the ladder, the ship began to lift, accompanied by an eerie creaking sound. It was as though a large invisible hand had grabbed it.

As the ship bobbed in the water, Li Huowang glimpsed what was concealed behind it—a towering waterspout reaching between

the sky and sea.

“Waterspout!”

There was little Li Huowang could do. He pushed his companions’ heads back underwater. “Don’t surface! Head to the seabed and bury yourselves in the sand!”

There was no escaping now. Their only chance was to dive to the seabed and minimize the impact from above.

Li Huowang felt a shadow above him. When he looked up, he was hit by a wave of suffocating fear.

The ship, which had been spinning in the air, was now directly above him and plunging down with the rain.

A sharp ringing sound filled Li Huowang’s ears. He reacted instinctively, diving as deep as possible into the water.

Before he could swim far, a powerful shockwave from above flung him away.

Luckily, the area was free of hard objects. Li Huowang crashed into the sand dunes below, and a deafening roar replaced the ringing in his ears.

Li Huowang struggled to regain his strength, eventually managing to crawl out of the sandy pit. As he did, he came face-to-face with the severed head of Ba Shengqing.

Ba Shengqing seemed alive, and his tattooed eyes blinked slightly at Li Huowang. “The Sacrificial God... is dead?”

Li Huowang suddenly thought of something and immediately started to look for Yang Na.

The ship had completely disintegrated, and its parts sank to the sandy seabed like a dying whale.

Li Huowang searched frantically and suddenly noticed movement in the upper left corner. To his dismay, it was Ba Nanxu, crushed in half. She had likely been hit by debris from the shipwreck.

Without her mask, she continued to struggle to swim away as

though searching for something in the shipwreck.

Although she was still moving, Li Huowang knew such injuries were fatal. Ba Nanxu wouldn't live long. The two Simings that controlled pain were dead.

Next, Li Huowang spotted Qing Wanglai, who was still alive and uninjured. Qing Wanglai was dragging Zhao Lei to an area free of debris.

He noticed Chen Hongyu's large frame rolling continuously in the water, so he quickly swam over.

He steadied Chen Hongyu's body but noticed a steel plate impaled through her face. Decay had also perished.

Yang Na! Yang Na! Li Huowang was consumed with worry. No matter how desperately he searched, he couldn't locate her.

It was Yang Na, but not as he remembered her. Her body had been severed at the waist, and her lower half was gone, replaced by a crimson tail formed by spilling intestines and blood that mingled in the water. She looked like a grotesque parody of a mermaid.

Yang Na had clearly died. Her skin was pale from blood loss, making her look like a withered rose. It was a beautiful embodiment of death.

The ocean currents shifted Yang Na's corpse, circling around Li Huowang while moving its tail.

Chapter 938 - Projection

“Hurry up! We’re going to miss the bus!” Dressed in a blue school uniform, Yang Na shouted impatiently at Li Huowang, who had just opened the door.

Yang Na smiled brightly at Sun Xiaoqin, who was in the back wearing an apron.

“Good morning, Auntie.”

“Nana, here to pick up Huowang for school again? You’ll be starting middle school next year, right? Will you still be going to the same school as our Huowang?”

“Yes, Auntie.”

“If you’re late, why aren’t you running?” Li Huowang shoved her aside and bolted down the stairs. “Hurry up, Yang Erlang!”

“How dare you shove me!” Yang Na grabbed the railing and raced down the steps after him.

She crashed heavily onto Li Huowang’s backpack, causing him to stagger forward. She wrapped her arm tightly around his neck.

They wrestled and laughed, racing to the bus stop just in time to catch their ride.

Both of them sighed in relief as they finally sat down. Without exchanging a single word, they silently retrieved something from their bags—one took out a handheld game console, while the other pulled out a romance novel.

They immersed themselves in their worlds, side by side, as the bus rumbled along.

Good times were short-lived. They reluctantly put their things away at the seventh stop and prepared to get off the bus.

“Wait, you’re crying? You actually teared up from reading a book? Hahaha!” Li Huowang said, noticing Yang Na’s reddened

eyes.

Yang Na hooked her right arm around his neck and gave him a swift knee to the stomach.

“You don’t understand. The novel is touching and well-written. It’s about two people who have a crush on each other but ultimately miss their chance. It’s easily one of the top five stories in my heart.”

Clutching his stomach, Li Huowang stood up. “What? If they liked each other, why didn’t they just say so? That’s just stupid!”

“I’m never going to be like that when I grow up!” he quickly added.

At that moment, their eyes met. Yang Na blinked and pointed a finger at his nose. “Oh? Did you just say a bad word? I’m telling the teacher!”

She turned and ran, with Li Huowang chasing after her. While watching her run, he couldn't help but notice her smile, the dimples on her cheeks, and the radiance of her grin.

It dawned on Li Huowang that Yang Na, who had played with him since childhood, was actually very beautiful.

As the years passed, Li Huowang noticed how Yang Na became increasingly beautiful. Little did he know that the most beautiful moment would come after her death.

Yang Na's lifeless body was completely severed in two. Her long hair spread out in the icy seawater, its beauty so stunning that it shattered his heart.

Yang Na was dead. The girl he had grown up with was dead, just like that.

“Na... na...” Li Huowang’s mouth opened in despair as seawater flooded into his throat, making him cough violently.

Clutching the oxygen tube between his teeth, he rushed forward, his tears streaming down his face. He grabbed Yang Na’s half-body, hugging her tightly to his chest.

His mind buzzed as he felt the coldness of her skin against his

own. His heart throbbed with pain, but it felt as if the rest of his body had ceased to exist.

No! I refuse to accept this reality! I won't accept it! I am Ji Zai, and I control Bewilderment, Truth, and Lies! I am a Siming! I am a deity! If I want someone to live, they must live!

Li Huowang desperately grabbed onto the mermaid's tail and tried to shove it back into Yang Na's body.

She would come back to life if he could stuff it back! He could fix her!

However, the tail was very slippery. It slipped away with the current every time he grabbed it.

He reached out and wrapped a strand of intestines around his arm, but a huge force knocked him several meters away.

A porcelain toilet came crashing down right where he had been standing, narrowly missing his head.

Wu Qi had saved him. Then, she gave him a hard slap to snap him out of it.

Qing Wanglai floated over and glanced at Yang Na's corpse. He grabbed her by the neck and tossed her aside.

Li Huowang yanked on the intestines and pulled her corpse back toward him, holding it tightly in his arms.

His eyes filled with fury, and he raised his knife toward Qing Wanglai. "It's all your fault! You caused all of this!"

A voice rang in his ear, causing Li Huowang to freeze. "Is this really the time for infighting? Don't forget you can still rewind!"

His congested mind cleared, and reason returned. He trembled as he gently stroked Yang Na's snow-white cheek.

It's okay! It's okay! I'll bring you back! I'll bring you back! As long as I kill this Siming, I can bring you back!

He looked up at the sea above him. The surface was in chaos. Waves crashed at an alarming speed, churning the waters into a violent frenzy.

From underwater, it looked like a view from the sky—a boiling tsunami consuming the water's surface.

Li Huowang kicked his flippers and swam toward the surface. When his head emerged, a massive wave hit him and disoriented him.

He broke through the surface once again and finally caught sight of the Siming's projection. Beneath the pitch-black sky, his view was filled with towering waves and a swirling waterspout.

It felt as though he was about to confront the entire world, not just a Siming. This was nothing like the last Siming's projection.

At that moment, Qing Wanglai appeared beside him and pulled off his oxygen mask. "There's nothing we can do in this situation! Whatever that projection is, it's far more powerful than us!"

He continued, "The most sensible choice now is to retreat! Leave this sea!"

Li Huowang lowered his head and kissed Yang Na's forehead. His eyes were filled with obsession and determination. "It's okay! No matter what this projection is, I will kill this Siming! I will kill him!"

Li Huowang raised his knife, pointing it at the dark clouds above. "Did you hear me? I'm going to kill you! I will give up everything, even my own life, to kill you!"

Crack! Lightning split the sky, and a bolt of silver struck the knife in his hand.

Chapter 939 - Eye

Li Huowang was suddenly overcome by a constant ringing in his ears, causing him to lose all sensation. Convulsing uncontrollably, he sank into the water.

“Huo.. Huo..” Several faint voices seemed to come from the distance.

His hearing suddenly snapped back, and the voices became incredibly loud. “Li Huowang!”

Two large hands burst from the water and laboriously pulled him up.

“Li Huowang! Are you crazy? Holding up metal in a thunderstorm? Do you have a death wish?!” Wu Qi shouted furiously at him.

Li Huowang glanced downwards, his eyes landing on the knife in his hand. It had turned completely black. Burn marks traced their way along his veins, starting from his hand and spreading everywhere.

He replayed the events in his foggy mind and realized he had been struck by lightning.

He wiped the seawater from his face and lifted his gaze to the vast, swirling black clouds overhead.

Li Huowang took a deep breath, then tilted his head back and unleashed a hysterical scream toward the sky. “You want to kill me? No way!”

He hoisted Yang Na’s corpse with some difficulty, clutching her tightly. “Death is on my side! If you’re so powerful, strike me down!”

“You can’t fight it! Now is not the time to go crazy. We need to go!” Qing Wanglai grabbed Li Huowang’s shoulder and tried to pull

him underwater, but Li Huowang violently pushed him away.

His face twisted in rage as he shouted, “No! I can’t leave! If I go, it’s all over! Yang Na will never come back!

“We still have a chance! If we retreat, they will seize the Heavenly Daos of Decay, Pain, and Death. It will be the end for us if we let them!”

Zhao Shuangdian’s voice echoed in Li Huowang’s ears. “Li Huowang, I understand how you feel, but you need to look around.

“This time, the enemy is a spiraling rainband. It’s nothing like the factory we faced the last time. You can destroy a factory, but how can you destroy a typhoon?

“It isn’t even alive. It has no life. How could you kill something like that?”

Li Huowang’s rage subsided. He looked down at Yang Na and said, “Nana, did you hear that? This Siming isn’t alive. It doesn’t even have Death.”

He flashed a sudden, gentle smile. “But that’s alright. We have you. You are the Siming of Death. You can give it Death!”

“Exactly!” The realization hit Li Huowang like a thunderbolt. Disregarding the raging waves, he grabbed Yang Na and plunged underwater, rushing toward the distant waterspout.

Even as he got close, the fierce winds prevented Li Huowang from breaking through the surface.

Li Huowang took off his oxygen mask while still underwater. He held Yang Na close, kissed her passionately, and then pushed her towards the surface with both hands.

Yang Na reached the water’s surface, and the strong gusts of wind quickly swept her upward, flinging her toward the sky like the cruise ship.

As he watched Yang Na sway in the wind like a ragdoll, a wave of reluctance washed over him. *It’s okay, don’t be afraid. I won’t let you face this alone. I’ll be with you!*

Li Huowang kicked hard with his flippers and burst through the water's surface. The violent wind and rain instantly swept them up toward the towering waterspout.

The fierce wind chilled Li Huowang, soaked to the bone, yet he could barely feel it. The lightning had already numbed him.

"It's alright, Yang Na, don't be afraid!" Li Huowang squinted through the fierce storm, gripping his military knife tightly with both hands as they approached the waterspout.

"I figured it out!" Zhao Shuangdian's voice suddenly rang in Li Huowang's ear. "It's topology! I was approaching it from the wrong direction earlier!"

As the waterspout loomed closer, Li Huowang roared, "What the hell is topology?!"

"Li Huowang! Listen carefully!" Zhao Shuangdian's voice turned uncharacteristically urgent. "I'll guide you! Don't do anything rash! Let go of Yang Na and grab her again after one second!"

Li Huowang hesitated briefly, then released his grip.

Though he didn't fully understand her reasoning, he trusted her. Zhao Shuangdian was on his side and wouldn't betray him now.

Yang Na drifted from his grasp and floated leftward like a kite in the wind.

"Now!"

Li Huowang's hand shot out and grabbed the "kite string" tightly.

With the lift from the kite, Li Huowang was instantly pulled higher, narrowly skirting past the left side of the waterspout.

"Let go of Yang Na and strike it!"

He tightly gripped his knife with both hands, letting out a fierce roar before slashing at the swirling waterspout.

A powerful force instantly engulfed him, causing the world

around him to spin rapidly.

When Li Huowang's vision stabilized, he found himself upside down, plummeting down with a terrifying sense of weightlessness.

Thump! Li Huowang crashed into the water. Intense pain shot through him, as if he'd been smashed to pieces.

He summoned his last reserves of strength and dragged himself onto a nearby shipwreck, despite his multiple fractures.

He panted heavily and looked around. The sea was eerily calm and quiet compared to before.

Although the thunderclouds still loomed low and the sky was dark, there was no wind at all. The sea was so calm that it resembled a mirror.

"Where... where is this? Why is it so strange?" Li Huowang muttered as he reached into the water and pulled Yang Na up.

Yang Na had done it. Death was now in place. Soon, he could kill the Siming.

"This... the eye... of the typhoon..." Zhao Shuangdian's voice cut off with a crackling sound in his earpiece.

"The eye of the storm? I see! So this is the Siming's weak point!" Li Huowang stood up, aching all over. He looked at the calm sea around him and gripped his military knife tightly. Then, he plunged it into the water with all his might.

However, nothing changed. He had merely made a small splash.

Li Huowang froze and stood still in confusion. He climbed back onto the shipwreck and looked around blankly.

In the distance, black clouds loomed like towering mountains, pressing ever closer.

Chapter 940 - Death

Li Huowang gazed at the distant black mountains, realizing the eye of the typhoon was approaching. If he could not resolve the situation before the mountains arrived, everyone with him would likely perish.

Isn't this the eye of the typhoon? This should be the Siming's weak point, right? If it isn't, why would Zhao Shuangdian send me here?

Li Huowang jumped into the water and frantically slapped the surface with all his strength.

However, no matter how many times he struck the water, the surface always returned to its original state.

No... something's wrong. This has to be the place. It's just that I'm too weak to hurt it!

A trace of despair arose in Li Huowang's heart.

His enemy's weakness was right before him, but he still couldn't kill his enemy. The gap between them was too big.

Could it be that... I'm about to lose?

His expression hardened with unwillingness as he glanced at Yang Na's pale face.

No, there must be a way. I can find a way! They can't be that strong! If they were that powerful, we would've lost the last time! These projections are fake! They're bluffing!

As Li Huowang frantically searched for potential counterattacks, he suddenly focused on the black scar that spread along the veins of his arm.

An idea flashed in Li Huowang's mind. He climbed back onto the wreckage of the cruise ship. Lightning trembled in the clouds above him, roaring like a beast.

He took some time to calm himself down. With one arm

holding Death, he used his other hand to raise the military knife toward the sky. “Come on! If you’re strong enough, kill me! I am Ji Zai! Do you want the Heavenly Dao of Bewilderment? Then come and take it!”

Crack!

A powerful bolt of purple lightning descended from the sky, heading straight toward Li Huowang. It was noticeably stronger than the previous one.

Just as Li Huowang was on the brink of annihilation, he roared and gripped his knife. He fiercely stabbed at himself, with lightning coursing through him.

“Die!”

In the blink of an eye, everything around him turned white. He felt his remaining eye burst, much like the salted egg yolk within a mooncake.

“Egg yolk?”

Li Huowang stared blankly at the salted egg yolk mooncake on the table. He was now seated inside the White Tower Prison.

He realized what this meant. Time had rewound, and he had won.

“Hahaha!”

Li Huowang’s sudden laughter startled the other patients and caregivers around him, making them shrink away in fear.

“Hey, Li Huowang, calm down. It’s the Mid-Autumn Festival today,” a nervous orderly said.

Li Huowang was notoriously difficult to deal with, and unfortunately, the orderly had been assigned to him today.

“Hahaha...”

Tears of joy rolled down Li Huowang’s face. He was elated.

He lowered his head and rummaged through the mooncake box, searching until he found the purple yam mooncake—the one with the hidden note. He stuffed it into his mouth and began

chewing in big bites.

“Crazy...” the other patients muttered.

They gradually lost interest in him and returned to watching the TV programs.

Three... two... one.

Li Huowang silently counted down, and the band of inmates with serious crimes commenced their performance in the prison yard as if on cue. The majority of the people in the room gravitated toward the exercise area.

Once Li Huowang saw that most people had left, he stood up and headed to the men’s restroom, following the same steps as before.

This time, after putting on his disguise, he deliberately waited a few more minutes to avoid running into Yi Donglai again.

Thump!

The car door slammed shut.

Li Huowang ripped off his mask and coldly spoke to Ba Shengqing at the wheel, saying, “Drive to Qing Wanglai’s villa!”

With the Simings dead, the siblings who had died in the water returned to life. Everything was back.

Sitting beside Li Huowang, Ba Nanxu gave him a teasing look. “Do you really know who pulled you out? Do you think getting someone out of a psychiatric hospital is that easy? You should show some gratitude, Huowang.”

“Dial Zhao Shuangdian’s number. I’ll talk to her,” Li Huowang said.

Ba Nanxu frowned slightly and licked her lip piercing with her forked tongue. Something felt off about Li Huowang. He seemed different from the crazy person he used to be.

“Hello, it’s me. Li Huowang just left the psychiatric hospital, and now he wants to go to Qing Wanglai’s place.”

Li Huowang snatched the phone from her hand before she

could finish. “Hey, Zhao Shuangdian, this is topology. You were thinking in the wrong direction earlier.”

Li Huowang could feel Zhao Shuangdian’s shock even through the phone.

After a long silence, Li Huowang added, “Have your people take me to Qing Wanglai’s place. You should also come quickly. I’ll explain when we get there.”

He returned the phone to Ba Nanxu. She spoke a few words in acknowledgment to Zhao Shuangdian before hanging up and looking at Li Huowang with a strange expression.

“What are you looking at?! Drive!”

Ba Nanxu kicked her brother’s seat, and the car started moving.

As they drove, Ba Nanxu kept glancing at Li Huowang. He was staring out the window, deep in thought.

This expression was something she had never seen on him before. She had expected him to be more agitated. After all, he had spent months confined in a psychiatric hospital.

And what was that “topology” he mentioned? If she wasn’t mistaken, wasn’t that a mathematical term?

Given what she knew about him, how could he possibly understand something like that?

When the car entered the area of the villa in the suburbs, Li Huowang didn’t even wait for it to stop. He threw the car door open and rushed inside.

He ignored Chen Hongyu, who was watching TV in the living room, and headed straight to the third floor.

With a single kick, he broke down the door of a room and rushed in. He tightly hugged Yang Na, who was curled up at the foot of the bed.

He stroked her soft hair repeatedly, his hand trembling. His heart finally felt calm.

“Huowang, you’re finally back. I’m so glad. I’ve waited so long

for you. Why are you crying? Did I do something wrong? I'm sorry, it's my fault. I shouldn't have called the police..."

Li Huowang shook his head. He let go of Yang Na and carefully examined her face for a moment. Then, he hugged her tightly again, laughing through his tears.

"No, you're perfect, Nana. You're amazing. Your death saved us all."

Chapter 941 - Explain

“Shouldn’t you ensure the room is empty before getting intimate?” Wu Qi said, holding onto a bowl of food. She had been trying to feed Yang Na the food when Li Huowang barged in.

Li Huowang had been so focused on Yang Na that he failed to notice Wu Qi’s presence.

“Wu Qi, thank you for taking care of her for the past few days.”

Noticing the changes in Li Huowang’s appearance, Yang Na asked, “Huowang, what happened to your eye? Why are you missing one eye? What happened?”

Li Huowang took a deep breath and carried her out of the room. “Nana, don’t worry. I will explain everything that has happened to you later.”

They bumped into Qing Wanglai as they were exiting the room.

“Oh? You’re out of prison! Congratulations. I was just thinking about how to rescue you.”

Li Huowang glanced at Qing Wang's smile before spitting on him. Without giving him another thought, Li Huowang headed downstairs.

Qing Wanglai could only be counted on outside of critical situations. He always seemed to go missing during important times, and Li Huowang had overestimated him in the past.

Li Huowang sat on the sofa, holding onto Yang Na. He began to recount the events in a quiet whisper.

Yang Na was clearly in disbelief—the story was too ridiculous.

Still, Li Huowang didn’t need her to understand. He simply wanted to hear her voice and confirm that she was truly alive again.

Li Huowang was just about to finish his story when he heard the sound of screeching tires outside. Zhao Shuangdian had arrived.

Zhao Shuangdian greeted Qing Wanglai before sitting in front of Li Huowang. This time, she appeared very serious. “Why did you think I was wrong? And regarding the topology—is it point-set or algebraic topology?”

Li Huowang frowned, completely lost. He didn’t even know what topology was.

Sensing his confusion, Yang Na whispered, “Huowang, topology is the study of space or geometric shapes that retain certain properties even after changing.”

“No,” Li Huowang shook his head before standing up. “That’s her world. There’s no reason for me to learn. She should calculate it herself.”

He turned and faced all of the Simings. “Is everyone here? Good. I have some good news to announce—we’ve just won a significant battle!”

Shocked expressions swept across the room.

Ba Nanxu, munching on something, whispered to Zhao Shuangdian, “I think we should send him back.”

“I know this might not make sense right now,” Li Huowang said, “but I’m certain you’ll understand once I explain what happened.”

He proceeded to recount the events. While many did not believe him, Qing Wanglai and Zhao Shuangdian became serious after Li Huowang said certain keywords. They came to believe in the truthfulness of his account after confirming some details.

“Li Huowang, you mentioned we went to the ocean to find another Siming on a different elephant. Can you describe that Siming’s projection again?”

“That Siming’s projection? Isn’t it simple? It’s... that Siming’s projection is...”

Li Huowang was left in a state of shock. He vividly remembered his fierce struggle against it, yet its appearance had

completely vanished from his memories, replaced by fuzzy white spaces.

“Li Huowang, you can’t just make stuff up.”

“No! Something’s wrong! Quiet down and give me time to think!”

Li Huowang scratched his head furiously, pacing around the hall.

He analyzed the differences between the different encounters. Ultimately, he looked at Yang Na.

“I understand now!” he exclaimed. “The Siming has completely disappeared from my memories, which means Yang Na must have killed it for good!

“I think I found the rule for it. To kill them, we must destroy every trace of their existence, not just their flesh. We must completely erase every record and memory of them, even within their allies. Only by bringing Death can we truly kill them!”

Li Huowang quickly recalled what the factory looked like and frowned. “The Siming with the factory projection is not dead—it’s just injured!”

“Why do you say so?”

“It’s because it’s still in my memories! As long as they exist in any form or in any shape, they are not truly dead!”

He returned to Yang Na, gently stroking her hair as he looked at her. His previous experiences had hardened his resolve—he would never again risk her life.

Unfortunately, Yang Na would need to accompany him from now on. He needed to take Death to the enemy Simings to truly kill them.

“Pfft!”

Li Huowang turned around to find Ba Nanxu laughing.

He slammed the table, his voice rising. “I’m telling the truth! Don’t try to twist this around. I don’t mind if you don’t trust me,

but don't poison others with your doubts!"

The atmosphere grew thick with unspoken tension. Then, a woman with an elegant black umbrella suddenly walked into the house.

"Sorry, I'm late. Is there any reason you were looking for me so urgently?"

She looked elegant—probably in her twenties, with long black hair and a pretty face. Li Huowang was certain he had never encountered her in any of his previous loops, and yet...

Something about her made him feel like he had met her before.

Wait, umbrella? The umbrella. That was it.

Back when he had first been discharged and was staying at home, this same woman had been monitoring him.

The Simings from the other elephant were no longer just defending—they were launching a counterattack.

Chapter 942 - Cultivating The “Truth”

Li Huowang sat cross-legged on the cushion, slowly cultivating. He used his inner sight to guide his primordial breath toward the final chakra point slowly.

He had much more primordial breath now, having absorbed a substantial amount of primordial from other Strayed Ones. If the initial amount of primordial breath within him could be compared to a cloud, the present amount would be akin to the size of a mountain.

The primordial breath within him felt incredibly heavy. Slowly pushing that much primordial breath through his chakra points required a lot of effort.

He tried pushing it for a long time, but the primordial breath didn't seem to move at all.

A lot of time passed before Li Huowang opened his eyes. He couldn't help but feel frustrated since he was still stuck at the sixth chakra point.

While he had made a lot of progress thanks to the primordial breath of other Strayed Ones, he was now stuck at the final part.

He glanced around, unsure of how much time he had spent cultivating. Still, he didn't want to know. It'd be bad to immediately learn that he had cultivated for a very long time.

Li Huowang waved his arms, and several waiters showed up with many dishes. They carried braised fish, chicken stewed with potato, seaweed soup with ribs, and a large rice bucket.

Li Huowang devoured the food with astonishing speed. He hadn't conjured it himself—Li Sui had arranged it. Knowing Li

Huowang's tendency to go hungry, she had prepared it in advance to ensure he wouldn't starve.

Li Huowang didn't dare think about how long he had been cultivating. He was already at the sixth stage, so he knew how deadly his thoughts could be.

These days, he put a lot of effort into avoiding random thoughts. One wrong move, and he could turn them into reality.

Now, the things he conjured would endure perpetually instead of disappearing once he ceased thinking about them.

"Senior Li, have this instead. I put some lard in it."

Li Huowang grabbed the bowl of rice and started eating it.

"Thank you."

He looked to the left listlessly, and the sound of a performance came out of nowhere. "Wind blowing~ Stars shining bleakly~ The people are shouting~ The mountain is rumbling~ The sounds of murder cover the lands~ We travel far until it is dark~"

The Lu family troupe, which was supposed to be long gone, had unexpectedly reappeared, performing exclusively for Li Huowang.

Lu Zhuangyuan showed up on stage, and cheering could be heard everywhere.

There were the voices of Abbess Jing Xin, Ji Lin, Gao Zhijian, Lu Zhuangyuan, Zhuge Yuan, and the various people who had been his illusions in the past.

Li Huowang didn't realize that his surroundings were now filled with people, like a crowded shop.

The voices irritated him. As his irritation grew, his surroundings started to shake and tremble.

Bam! Li Huowang smashed the bowl onto the table angrily. "Enough! Scram!"

Everything around him turned white.

Li Huowang grabbed his head and panted. He had power now, but he could not fully control it.

Just then, a slender white arm extended and gave him a green bamboo slip.

“Senior Li, your heart is in turmoil. Here, read this silently. This is the 'Heart Calming Mantra' from the White Lotus Sect. It should help.”

Li Huowang took it and started chanting, “Snow freezes everything, and all is still. The heart is calm and gazes in serenity. The heart and spirit are one, while the energy follows. Remain undisturbed even during unending changes. Free from delusions, anger, lust, desires, possession, and abandonment. Free from actions and self...”

As he chanted, Li Huowang’s breathing started to calm down. He wasn’t sure if it was a natural effect of the mantra or not.

“Senior Li, your ‘Truth’ cultivation requires unparalleled mental fortitude and spirit. I’ve asked the Surveillance Bureau to look for anything that could help you.”

Li Huowang shook his head while massaging his temples. “No, what I really need at this moment is to become stronger and reach the seventh stage. I have this nagging feeling that I am still too weak to confront Zuoqiu Yong.”

The threat of Zuoqiu Yong invading their world was more pressing than his mental state.

“Miaomiao, are there still any Strayed Ones? I need more primordial breath.”

Even though Li Huowang wasn't sure about how much more he needed, he had confidence that with ten more Strayed Ones or so, he could reach the seventh stage.

Bai Lingmiao shook her head. "There aren't any left. It's unlikely we'll find any others for now. The Surveillance Bureau has sent people overseas to search for hidden Strayed Ones. However, even if they do find one, it will take some time for them to return."

Li Huowang sighed, aware that everyone had done their best.

Strayed Ones weren't vegetables that grew by the road and could be plucked anywhere.

"Alright, you can leave first. I need to start cultivating again."

There wasn't much hope, but Li Huowang still wanted to pursue the small chance of reaching the seventh stage through cultivation.

Li Huowang sat back down as Bai Lingmiao left the place. At that moment, a familiar voice came from beside him.

"Father?"

"Hm?" Li Huowang looked around him.

He witnessed Bai Lingmiao's back being torn apart like a tapestry as Li Sui walked right through her body.

Li Huowang then realized that the Bai Lingmiao he had been talking with was indeed real. However, he had created her with his imagination—she was not the original Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang took out the "Heart Calming Mantra" from his robes and slammed it onto the table. The bamboo slip popped like bubbles and disappeared without a trace. The "fake" Bai Lingmiao disappeared too.

Although he had figured something like this would happen, he never thought it would be so frustrating.

Li Sui refrained from asking about his weird actions and instead delivered crucial news. "Father, they are here. The Tianchen Kingdom is moving."

Li Huowang felt his back going cold. "Are you sure? Zuoqiu Yong is moving?"

Li Sui nodded. "Yes. The Qi Kingdom is getting ready for war. The Natural Disaster in the Tianchen Kingdom is ending, so I think they finally have the time to deal with us."

Chapter 943 - Zuoqiu Yong

Unfortunately, not everything went as he had planned. Li Huowang scratched his head, trying to devise a plan.

“Father, are you not at the seventh stage yet?”

“No, I’m just one stage away, but I don’t have time to cultivate now.”

Li Huowang lowered his hands and said, “Call the Dragon Veins to prepare the Dragon Qi. This is not a request—it’s an order. Also, all of the techniques of the Surveillance Bureau should be used. I know you’re withholding classified ceremonies used only for emergencies. This is an emergency.”

Li Huowang had to use everything to fight against Zuoqiu Yong.

“I understand.”

Li Huowang stood up and steeled himself. “I’ll have to fight, even though I’ve only reached the sixth stage. Let’s go confront Zuoqiu Yong!”

Just as he lifted his leg, the world around him shifted. He teleported to the Qi Kingdom almost instantaneously.

He could now travel between the Liang Kingdom and the Qi Kingdom at will as long as he thought he could.

“Bodhisattva! Bodhisattva Zhuge is back!”

“Bodhisattva Zhuge! You are finally back!”

“Bodhisattva Zhuge has not abandoned the Qi Kingdom!”

As the people from the Qi Kingdom knelt in worship, a lot of False Qi entered his head.

Li Huowang looked around until he found Chan Du, the person

responsible for managing the place when Li Huowang himself wasn't there.

Chan Du looked the same as ever. He bowed to Li Huowang.
“Amitabha”

“Tell me about the recent situation.”

Li Huowang waved his arms, and the scenery around him changed like tapestries.

They were now back in the garden of the Righteous Monastery, surrounded by yellow walls, green roofs, and tall green trees.

The three of them sat down on a stone stool to talk.

Chan Du sighed deeply. “Benefactor Li, the Qi Kingdom is very unstable now. There are too many spies from the Tianchen Kingdom. I’ve tried to figure out how to deal with them, but it’s futile. I fear that the Qi Kingdom will fall if the Tianchen Kingdom attacks now. The spies infesting our cities would rebel, forcing us to split our forces...”

“I never intended for the Qi Kingdom to fight to its last breath,” Li Huowang said. “You mentioned that the Tianchen Kingdom is on the move. What are they planning?”

Li Sui answered instead, “They found a Twisted One that will allow them to travel between the Liang Kingdom and the Qi Kingdom.”

“What? They’ve found it?”

“Yes, and they can now travel directly from the Tianchen Kingdom to the Liang Kingdom.”

Though everything seemed calm, Li Huowang understood why Li Sui had woken him up.

The situation was dire. No one knew what the Tianchen Kingdom would send into the Liang Kingdom.

“No, we can’t simply be on the defense. We need to disrupt their plans.”

After a moment’s contemplation, he declared, “Tell your men

to get ready. We're taking the initiative."

Li Huowang was confident he would lose to Zuoqiu Yong even though he was already at the sixth stage. Thankfully, he wasn't fighting alone.

"Alright." Li Sui nodded. "Don't worry about it. I've told every sect about the Tianchen Kingdom. They understand that they need to work together in this situation. They have agreed to fight for the sake of the Liang Kingdom."

As he listened to their conversation, Chan Du felt a growing unease. "Benefactor Li, you might be right in acting first, but how do we get to the Tianchen Kingdom?"

Li Huowang clenched his fist decisively. "If I say we can go, then we can go! Gather your strongest men and get ready. Zuoqiu Yong will be our biggest enemy."

They quickly formulated a plan, agreeing that taking down Zuoqiu Yong was their best path to win the war.

Zuoqiu Yong was still unaware of Li Huowang's significant improvement in cultivation. He had become capable of bringing people to the Tianchen Kingdom.

Even though Zuoqiu Yong was the Siming that governed Growth, Li Huowang was confident that he could put up a good fight since he could borrow the power of a Siming too.

Zuoqiu Yong would face not just one but two distinct timelines at the same time.

Li Huowang returned to the Liang Kingdom to make the final preparations.

All the sects had assembled in the Liang Kingdom, presenting Li Huowang with a combination of sects he was both familiar and unfamiliar with.

Li Huowang approached one of the nuns. "Shai Zi, where is Zuoqiu Yong right now?"

"I don't know."

“Stop lying. If you want to help, you better help all the way. You have spies in the Tianchen Kingdom, after all!”

Shai Zi chuckled. “Zuoqiu Yong had the same idea as you. He’s already closing in on the headquarters of the White Lotus Sect. He plans to kill the Twisted One of the Heavenly Mater first.”

“What did you say?!” Li Huowang didn’t have time to be angry with Shai Zi. He swiftly closed the distance between him and the White Lotus Sect headquarters, reaching it in just one step.

He reached the White Lotus Sect headquarters just as its roof exploded skyward. Bai Lingmiao’s dual bodies burst through the roof while the white lotus markings on her forehead blazed with an intense light, desperately trying to hold back the abnormal tumors growing on her.

Li Huowang swept in, positioning himself protectively before Bai Lingmiao. He stared directly into Zuoqiu Yong’s eyes.

However, Zuoqiu Yong completely ignored Li Huowang and instead looked at Li Sui. “Oh~ And here I was wondering who you were. Aren’t you Li Sui? So you are the Chief of the Liang Kingdom’s Surveillance Bureau?”

“Aunt, long time no see,” Li Sui said, her voice calm.

“Li Sui, do you like red a lot? It’s very tacky.”

“My father likes red, so I’m just following his example,” Li Sui replied, moving to stand beside Li Huowang.

Zuoqiu Yong fished out a silk handkerchief to wipe the sweat off her forehead. “So you want to fight me this time? I spared you last time when you were trying to stop me from taking some of the Qi Kingdom’s Dragon Veins. I will kill you for real this time.”

Li Huowang felt a surge of anger due to their conversation. “You damned eunuch, are you ignoring me?”

“Yes.”

Without another word, Zuoqiu Yong launched himself toward Bai Lingmiao. The Twisted One of the Heavenly Mater was his sole

objective.

Bai Lingmiao did nothing. She simply chanted and made seals with her hands.

“Wall!” Li Huowang let out a fierce roar as multiple earth walls erupted from the ground, effectively blocking Zuoqiu Yong’s path.

He halted inches from the wall, plucking something from her body and throwing it on the ground with disgust.

“Ho~ Who plastered the Heavenly Dao of Death onto me? So disgusting.”

Chapter 944 - Wait

Zuoqiu Yong turned and looked at Bai Lingmiao playfully. “I see that the Heavenly Mater has the Heavenly Dao of Death again. Unfortunately, it’s useless against me. I am not a mortal, after all.”

He snapped his fingers toward Bai Lingmiao. Trees and bushes burst out from the ground to envelop Bai Lingmiao.

Li Huowang snarled and swung his arm. The plants magically disappeared as if they had never been there.

Li Huowang’s action finally caught Zuoqiu Yong’s attention.

“Tsk tsk tsk, now who have we here? To think that you would grow so much in just a few days.”

Zuoqiu Yong spoke with arrogance, still dismissing Li Huowang as a threat.

Li Huowang couldn’t tell if Zuoqiu Yong was serious or pretending, but it didn’t matter.

Surveying their surroundings, Li Huowang realized they couldn’t fight in the middle of Shangjing. Millions of people were there, and the collateral damage could be catastrophic.

“Change!” Li Huowang pushed his arms forward, and everything around him changed rapidly. Now, everyone was back in the Tianchen Kingdom.

The prosperous Shangjing had turned into the forests of the Tianchen Kingdom.

“Oh, ho~ Not bad, kid. It looks like you’ve learned quite a lot,” Zuoqiu Yong said.

Li Huowang did not waste his breath and glared at Zuoqiu Yong’s burgeoning form.

Under his gaze, Zuoqiu Yong quickly disintegrated. With his cultivation, he only needed a short amount of time to reduce

someone into nothingness.

However, Zuoqiu Yong's body continuously regenerated, mending itself faster than Li Huowang could break it down.

Zuoqiu Yong had the Heavenly Dao of Growth. Any wounds that could be healed by growing back her flesh weren't a threat to her.

He smiled as his body regenerated. "Unfortunately, you're still too weak. You were smart last time and managed to trick me, but tricks cannot last forever. Today, I'll show you the true gulf between our powers."

Zuoqiu Yong raised his arms into the air and appeared to struggle, holding onto an invisible weight.

"Wait!"

A voice interrupted their fight. They looked to the left and saw a familiar sight running out from the forest. It was Shai Zi.

He didn't wear any disguises. He had his distinctive dice-shaped head.

Standing between the two, Shai Zi gestured for Li Huowang to step back.

Then, Shai Zi turned to Zuoqiu Yong. "Stop, they tricked you. We're on the same side here."

His words confused both sides.

Li Huowang saw Zuoqiu Yong's confusion and realized that Shai Zi was up to something.

Who is he talking about? What does Shai Zi know? Wait, since he's from the Sitting Oblivion Dao, he might be lying again!

While Li Huowang was thinking, Zuoqiu Yong replied to Shai Zi, "Who told you that?"

Shai Zi looked at Li Sui and chuckled. "It was the Chief of the Liang Kingdom's Surveillance Bureau. She said you were moving too quickly—the Heavenly Mater had just been reinstated, and yet you were already on the move. It was too strange, so she sent me to

check.

“And lo and behold, my spies discovered something interesting. You somehow caught wind of the news when the Heavenly Mater had yet to be reinstated. You were making preparations long before the Heavenly Mater had been reinstated.

“Who would be kind enough to warn you that your enemy is about to be resurrected? Have you considered what their goal might be?”

Zuoqiu Yong stood still with a blank face. No one knew if he was listening to Shai Zi or not.

“Hehehe... “Shai Zi approached Li Huowang and placed his arms on Li Huowang’s shoulder. “Can’t figure it out? Think carefully. The Dharma Sect had invaded both the Liang Kingdom and the Tianchen Kingdom.”

Li Huowang’s pupils shrank from the realization. “Do you mean the people from Fu Shengtian?!”

Seeing that Li Huowang was smoothly working with him, Shai Zi clapped vigorously. “That’s right. It’s them!”

He turned and looked at Zuoqiu Yong. “No matter how dire our current situation, it pales in comparison to the threat from Fu Shengtian. Surely you can see that we’re still on the same side here?”

“Fu Shengtian tried to attack us last time but failed. They are still trying to invade us. After learning about your old history with the Heavenly Mater, they sent some people to secretly sow discord among us.

“Zuoqiu Yong, don’t let them deceive you. They are playing dirty this time. They are disguising their men as ours and trying to make us fight each other.”

Zuoqiu Yong’s expression remained unreadable, while Li Huowang’s mind was overwhelmed with the influx of information.

Could it be true? Did Fu Shengtian plant the seeds of discord between us months ago? Was the previous fight between the Simings just

the start, not the end?

Li Huowang tried to calm himself down, knowing better than to take Shai Zi's words at face value. *Wait, this could all be another of Shai Zi's schemes. Maybe it's just a ploy to prevent Zuoqiu Yong from making the right decisions.*

Shai Zi was presenting everything as if it were the absolute truth, but when had Shai Zi's words ever been that straightforward? They had always appeared to be truthful.

Li Huowang understood the Sitting Oblivion Dao. No matter how truthful their words might seem on the surface, one could never let down their guard.

Regardless, Li Huowang realized the wisest course was to play along, at least for now.

"Shai Zi, are you telling the truth?" Li Huowang asked.

Shai Zi nodded vehemently. Even his expression looked serious. "It's true! You should know that I never lie. Fu Shengtian's fight with us isn't over yet. The Simings at the Baiyu Capital are still fighting hard. The fight began a long time ago!"

Chapter 945 - Fight

“Zuoqiu Yong! While I don’t know much about your past grudges with the Heavenly Mater, we currently face a much bigger threat. Are you still planning to fight with us? Do you not realize what the priority should be?”

“The Heavenly Mater is fighting against the Simings from Fu Shengtian. If we were to disturb the Heavenly Mater today, we would interrupt their fight. If our Simings lose, are you confident in fighting against Fu Shengtian alone?”

“And remember, the Heavenly Mater is risking her life alongside the other Simings. If you kill her now, you’ll be sabotaging their efforts as well. What do you think the Simings will do to you once their fight is over?”

Shai Zi laid out the stakes, attempting to persuade Zuoqiu Yong by mentioning the benefits and risks.

If Li Huowang had been in Zuoqiu Yong’s position, he might have trusted Shai Zi and verified the news before attacking the White Lotus Sect.

Still, Li Huowang knew that his own thoughts didn’t matter—Zuoqiu Yong’s decision was the key.

Zuoqiu Yong stood silently, fiddling with his pink handkerchief as if weighing his options.

While he contemplated, Li Huowang approached Li Sui. “Suisui, is Shai Zi really following your orders? Is he telling the truth?”

Li Huowang wasn’t entirely convinced by Shai Zi. However, he trusted Li Sui.

Xuan Pin said nothing, but words materialized on the surface of Li Huowang’s Shimmer Mirror.

It's the truth. Father, he's on our side. We must trust him. If we can't trust him, we can't trust anyone else.

Li Huowang hesitated but nodded, even as a separate thought lingered in his mind.

A hazy image suddenly flickered before his eyes. He saw himself holding something in his arms, chasing after a yellow blur.

What is that? Li Huowang pressed his head and murmured, "I can't have random thoughts... not now!"

The more he fought to calm down, the more his thoughts spiraled. A lot of things began to pop around him.

"HA!" A heavy metal ball appeared in his hand, and he smashed it against his head repeatedly. Blood ran down his face, and his skull was visibly dented. Li Huowang only stopped when Bai Lingmiao intervened, trying to stop him.

He grabbed her arms and shook his head. His head throbbed from the pain on the side of his skull.

"It's fine. I'm feeling better now," Li Huowang murmured.

To regain clarity, Li Huowang resorted to the most primitive method: Ba-Hui's pain.

He refused Bai Lingmiao's help and stood up alone. He looked at Zuoqiu Yong, observing his every movement. Li Huowang couldn't afford to make any mistakes, not now.

Finally, under Li Huowang's watchful gaze, Zuoqiu Yong made his move. He pouted and sighed before looking at Shai Zi.

"Hmph~ Little Shai Zi, your argument is compelling—I even hesitated. However, why should I trust someone from the Sitting Oblivion Dao? Besides..."

Zuoqiu Yong paused, a white cloud forming beneath his feet as he began to levitate.

"...do you really think you have the standing to talk with me about this? None of you can stand as my equals. I've fought tooth and nail—from the Qi Kingdom to the Tianchen Kingdom—so that

no one could speak to me without kneeling!”

Bam! A massive pressure descended upon Li Huowang, causing his legs to sink into the ground.

Zuoqiu Yong smirked at the sight. “Only the Simings are worthy of opposing me. Who are you to try to stand in my way?”

Zuoqiu Yong took out a spine sword from his sleeve and swung it lightly. The scene around them warped, and they were suddenly back in Shangjing.

Shangjing was now in chaos. The army of Unspeakable and the bandits from the Tianchen Kingdom were searching for something within the city, killing anyone from the White Lotus Sect without mercy.

The city became plagued by the sounds of killing and murder, prompting the soldiers and Surveillance Bureau of the Liang Kingdom to take action.

Shangjing had turned into a battlefield.

Zuoqiu Yong floated in midair as he looked down at the fleeing civilians with glee. “You’ve forgotten something. I’ve invested a lot of resources, and not just to kill the Saintess of the White Lotus Sect. I plan to destroy the entire White Lotus Sect!”

A rift opened up in the sky. People from the Tianchen Kingdom rained down from above.

Li Huowang saw the man with the fox face and stilts through the hole. He seemed taller now that he had absorbed the Twisted One who could travel between the Qi Kingdom and the Liang Kingdom.

“It’s a diversion! That bastard is targeting the entire White Lotus Sect!” Li Huowang roared, taking out his spine sword. He stomped hard before launching himself toward Zuoqiu Yong.

Li Huowang persistently murmured to himself, expressing absolute confidence in his ability to kill Zuoqiu Yong.

The blade sliced him in two, but both halves of his body smiled

as they regenerated, creating two versions of him.

“Little runt, kneel!” Zuoqiu Yong shouted, pointing at Li Huowang’s body. He began aging rapidly, his face quickly melting.

Just as Li Huowang tore off his oversized eyelid, he caught sight of Li Sui’s massive frame shielding him. She was taking the brunt of Zuoqiu Yong’s attack!

Li Sui’s red robes gradually fell off, revealing her massive frame covered in black tentacles.

Her body was covered in it as her tentacles splayed outwards. The decapitated heads she had been propping up with her tentacles started bubbling out.

The heads were all preserved after being covered by Li Sui’s tentacles. There were the heads of Shanguan Yuting, a dog, a bear, a youth, and many others.

As her tentacles danced wildly, a tower of heads rose from her body, standing between Li Huowang and Zuoqiu Yong.

Chapter 946 - Change

This was the first time Li Sui showed her actual appearance to Li Huowang. In the past, she had relied on illusion techniques to conceal her real face.

Her suspense eased as she met Li Huowang's gaze. What had to happen eventually was finally unfolding.

Immediately after, Li Huowang saw Bun's dog head open its mouth and speak to him.

"Father, I'll hold them off here. You gather help from the other sects and the other Chiefs of the Surveillance Bureaus. You're the only one who can pull this off."

Li Huowang saw the Shimmer Mirror by his side expand rapidly, transforming from a mirror into a door. Various scenes appeared inside the door. There were temples, Daoist monasteries, caves, and yamens with stone lions at the entrance.

"Can you handle this?" Li Huowang shouted to the figures before him.

"I can barely hold them off for a while. The faster you return, the safer I'll be," Li Sui said, her voice coming from all her heads.

"Alright, I'll get reinforcements. Miaomiao! Shai Zi! Help out!" Li Huowang shouted.

He knew that getting more allies would improve their chances. At the very least, they needed more people to block the army of Unspeakable from assisting Zuoqiu Yong.

Once Li Huowang had dived into the Shimmer Mirror, all of Li Sui's eyes turned back to Zuoqiu Yong.

"Well, well, Li Sui. You've possessed so many people, huh?" Zuoqiu Yong said with a smile. It was as though they were just having a simple chat, just like the conversations they had over one

The ground beneath Zuoqiu Yong cracked open, and black tentacles wrapped with various heads shot out, quickly surging toward the two Zuoqiu Yongs.

They wrapped around both of them but didn't tear them apart. Instead, they burrowed into their flesh.

Since simple attacks were ineffective, Li Sui planned to absorb Zuoqiu Yong like she had absorbed the others, making Zuoqiu Yong's flesh part of herself using her power as a Black Taisui.

The next moment, Zuoqiu Yong's gaze focused slightly. Li Sui's tentacles withered and turned into dried skin. This trick was not worth even mentioning to Zuoqiu Yong.

"Li Sui, I'm giving you face here. If you don't accept my respect, then you'll have to endure my punishment," Zuoqiu Yong said, her voice raspy.

Long needles threaded with silk shot toward Li Sui, accelerating the fusion of her flesh and blood.

At that moment, the chanting of the White Lotus Sutra echoed across the battlefield.

"Here lies the dry field, with flowing canals. These small streams are covered with green grass. There are lotus pools full of joy. The sound of mandarin ducks in the air is covered with mandala flowers. White and blue lotus..."

Bai Lingmiao sat cross-legged, a Twelve Merit Jade Lotus gently rotating above her head. Soft white light spread outward, enveloping the battlefield as the devotees chanted.

Zuoqiu Yong remained unmoved at the sight of the white light. However, the surrounding army of Unspeakable retreated in fear as though facing their nemesis.

Bai Lingmiao sat there emotionlessly, just like a divine white jade sculpture. The mercy and kindness that radiated from her affected everyone in the area.

Anyone who heard the White Lotus Sutra felt a surge of

compassion and dropped their weapons, refusing to see more bloodshed.

“Heavenly Mater?” Zuoqiu Yong hesitated before smiling. “No, you’re not her. If you were, you should be thanking me. After all, I wiped out all the Tian Huang nobles who held a grudge against her. Now, the Tianchen Kingdom belongs to me.”

Zuoqiu Yong raised a hand, and Bai Lingmiao was instantly pulled toward Zuoqiu Yong. The solemn chanting of the White Lotus Sutra was abruptly cut off.

Just as she was about to collide with Zuoqiu Yong, the heavens suddenly shifted. A beam of light shot down from above towards Zuoqiu Yong.

Zuoqiu Yong looked up and saw two vast seas of yin and yang occupying the skies, one black and one white. Doulao had arrived.

“Hmm?” Zuoqiu Yong glanced to the left and noticed that Li Huowang had returned. He was sitting cross-legged and chanting the Heavenly Treasure of Deception.

“It doesn’t take long to bring a few reinforcements,” Li Huowang said. He stood up and looked at Zuoqiu Yong in the distance.

Behind him, experts from different sects hurried towards the chaotic battlefield, lending their aid to stabilize the crumbling Shangjing city.

The reinforcements included members from various sects as well as Chiefs from other countries. They understood the interdependent nature^[1] of their various countries.

1. The idiom literally means that without the lips, the teeth feel cold. It illustrates the interdependence between the lips and the teeth. 🤔

Chapter 947 - Death

As Li Huowang arrived with reinforcements, the precarious situation began to stabilize. This was atop the manifestation of Doulao, summoned by Li Huowang's vast False Qi and the Heavenly Treasure of Deception technique.

With Doulao's appearance, the ground began to ripple like water, and everything in the world became increasingly abnormal.

Under Li Huowang's efforts, the enemy forces quickly diminished.

"Doulao! I am Ji Zai!" Li Huowang shouted furiously toward the black-and-white ocean above.

"I know what happened up there from Shai Zi! Since you're allied with the Heavenly Mater, and this person here wants to kill her, you should know what to do as an ally!"

It was unclear whether Doulao understood Li Huowang's words or simply reacted to Zuoqiu Yong's hostility. The Taiji diagram that filled the sky began to spin as countless Heavenly Daos of Lies rained down on Zuoqiu Yong.

Zuoqiu Yong chuckled, even though suspicion continued to grow in his heart. He was unbothered despite internally questioning whether his army of Unspeakable would betray him.

"Looks like you still don't understand what you're facing. I knew you'd try this tactic. Attack!"

At Zuoqiu Yong's command, the soldiers of the Tianchen Kingdom in Shangjing City dragged up the White Lotus Sect followers and tied them up like livestock. They did not even show mercy to pregnant women.

Throats were slit, and their bodies were buried at various points within the capital.

There were tens of thousands of victims, and they looked like random piles of graveyards. However, they were actually prepared to assist Zuoqiu Yong.

Bai Lingmiao sensed the death and despair of her devout followers. Her eyes, hidden behind her white veil, shrank in horror. Rage and murderous intent surged within her, but soon turned into despair and grief.

She shouted out in pain to release her emotions. Her family had suffered similarly, and she hated them as much as she hated her inability to forget them.

“It’s an exorcism! Be careful!” The Second Deity loudly warned everyone.

“I’m not sure what he’s doing, but this large-scale exorcism array is definitely related to the Fengshui and luck of the land!”

“We’ll handle it! I’m going to... we’re going to stop them! We’re going to kill them!” Bai Lingmiao wept as she charged toward Zuoqiu Yong’s army of Unspeakable, who were maintaining the array.

As she moved, the White Lotus Sect followers in the city also mobilized. The trees outside rustled ominously. Evil spirits marked with white lotus symbols joined the battle under the dark, chaotic sky.

The White Lotus followers, seemingly spiritually linked with their Saintess, clashed with the forces performing the exorcism, and fierce combat ensued.

However, despite the resistance, the corpses that surrounded Zuoqiu Yong formed a vast exorcism array that covered the entire capital.

The Fengshui immediately shifted in favor of Zuoqiu Yong. The doubts and lies were erased from his mind.

If the heavens were said to belong to Doulao, the earth now belonged to Zuoqiu Yong. Even the powerful Doulao could do

nothing against him.

Zuoqiu Yong slowly looked up at the black-and-white Taiji diagram above. “What are you? A Siming defeated by mortals dares to challenge me?!”

In the next moment, two versions of Zuoqiu Yong, one black and one white, stepped on clouds and floated toward Doulao.

Li Huowang didn’t give up and followed closely behind. The three forces clashed fiercely between heaven and earth.

Whenever Li Huowang attempted to restrain Zuoqiu Yong with his “Truth” cultivation, inexplicable obstacles thwarted his efforts.

The White Lotus followers were dismantling the exorcism array, but Zuoqiu Yong’s purpose had already been achieved.

A strange displacement in time and space occurred, and water began to pour from the black-and-white oceans above.

With the chaos, lies across the kingdom of Great Liang turned unstable. Some people grew suspicious of everything, while others believed everyone without question. Some even became compulsive liars. It was a Natural Disaster.

Zuoqiu Yong defeated Doulao’s manifestation, then hovered in midair and laughed maniacally. “Hahahaha! Who still dares call me a eunuch who wets his pants? Who dares call me a barren, childless trash?!”

“If I want someone dead, they must die. Even Simings will bow before me! I will be the king of this world, the ruler of all!”

“You castrated loser!”

“What?!” Zuoqiu Yong’s eyebrows shot up as he glanced down. He immediately spotted Li Huowang’s grinning face.

“You’re dead, you little pest,” Zuoqiu Yong dived toward Li Huowang.

Li Huowang immediately tried to flee, but the entire Shangjing seemed to conspire against him, throwing obstacles in his path.

Wherever he went, something would block him, trip him, or hit

his head.

After a few moments, Zuoqiu Yong had caught up with him. He slashed Li Huowang's neck with his hand, which had a dragon phoenix ring on it.

Li Huowang's head flew into the air, flipping several times before transforming into a twelve-sided die and landing back in place.

Shai Zi sniggered at Zuoqiu Yong. "Haha! You've been tricked."

The next moment, a spine sword pierced through Zuoqiu Yong's chest. A look of disdain crossed his face, "This trivial wound from an ordinary mortal won't harm me."

"Is that so? You might want to check who's holding the sword."

Zuoqiu Yong froze and turned to look behind, only to see Li Huowang's face.

The spine sword was pulled out, and Zuoqiu Yong tried to heal the wound with his Growth supernatural ability. For the first time, his abilities failed.

The pain intensified as blood poured out and drained his vitality.

"Impossible! I removed death from my body. He can't kill me!" Before he could finish, Li Huowang's face peeled away to reveal Bai Lingmiao's determined expression. Her forehead was marked with a glowing white lotus.

"You don't have death, but I can return it to you. After all, the Heavenly Mater governs the Heavenly Dao of Death."

Bai Lingmiao gritted her teeth and swung her sword, decapitating Zuoqiu Yong in one clean strike.

His lifeless body collapsed as vitality left him, and he was unable to move ever again.

Everyone around looked up simultaneously and focused on the remaining Zuoqiu Yong.

Chapter 948 - Dragon Vein

Zuoqiu Yong floated mid-air and gazed down at Li Sui, Li Huowang, Bai Lingmiao, and Shai Zi.

Despite having executed their plan to kill his other half, there was still no trace of seriousness on Zuoqiu Yong's face.

“Oh~ I admit I underestimated you earlier. I didn't expect you to cooperate like that. But if you think that little trick is enough to defeat me—this Siming's physical body—you're sorely mistaken,” Zuoqiu Yong said.

Li Huowang looked intently at Zuoqiu Yong. “You may be a Siming, but do you think I'm not?”

Without hesitation, Li Sui moved behind Li Huowang, lifting the skin on his back to squeeze herself inside him. Her writhing mass of tendrils and human heads slithered through.

The black tendrils covered in heads emerged from different parts of Li Huowang's body and writhed in the air.

“Go!” He tugged on Bai Lingmiao's sleeve, and they shot forward at Zuoqiu Yong. They planned to use the same tactic that had worked on the previous Zuoqiu Yong.

However, Zuoqiu Yong was prepared. He raised his hands toward the sky, and a dragon's roar echoed through the air.

Sixteen golden dragons surged from all directions, coiling around both Zuoqiu Yongs. They transformed into intricate golden tattoos that spread across his skin.

Li Huowang's face darkened. The sixteen golden, shimmering tattoos would block any Heavenly Daos, including Bai Lingmiao's Heavenly Dao of Death!

This wouldn't work. If Bai Lingmiao couldn't inject death into Zuoqiu Yong, he would never die.

"We need to strip the Dragon Veins from him first!" Li Huowang said.

The tendrils from his body shot out to entangle Zuoqiu Yong. Li Sui's tendrils flattened like murals, adhering to Zuoqiu Yong and coiling tightly around the Dragon Veins.

However, with a mere wave of his hand, Li Sui's tendrils crumbled into dust and disintegrated bit by bit.

Zuoqiu Yong quickly morphed into a half-dragon, causing everything within a radius of one hundred feet to freeze in place.

Zuoqiu Yong smiled slightly. "It seems you don't understand the origin of these Dragon Veins. These come from the Heavenly Dao of the Siming of Order, Panchi. Do you think you can challenge me when I control sixteen Heavenly Daos of Order?"

"Should I call you brave fools, or pigs too dumb to know better?"

Li Huowang struggled desperately in the air, but he couldn't move an inch. It was as though he had turned to wood, incapable of motion.

His eyes widened right as he was about to be beheaded. A fiery Peng Longteng appeared beside Zuoqiu Yong, riding a massive horse. She rose her blazing halberd up high, ready to strike down.

That wasn't all. Zhuge Yuan, dressed in white and brush in hand, leaped out from behind her, charging toward Zuoqiu Yong.

Li Huowang's mind reeled as more allies materialized—everyone he had ever fought with appeared one by one, rushing toward Zuoqiu Yong.

Yet, under the influence of the Heavenly Dao of Order, they could freeze at any moment, transitioning from a state of life to one of death.

However, every time this happened, the immobilized person

gradually turned transparent and vanished. Then, they reappeared again, fresh and whole.

Though their strength varied, none of them could match Zuoqiu Yong. They were simply buying Li Huowang time to break free.

Abbess Jingxin's massive, greasy body came crashing down onto Li Huowang and the others.

She rolled them away like a meatball, propelling them far beyond Zuoqiu Yong's hundred-foot domain.

Regaining control of his body, Li Huowang looked up to see a downpour of flesh and blood. Every ally he had conjured, including Dan Yangzi and Zhuge Yuan, had been torn apart, their remains scattered to the ground.

These people were real. They were blood and flesh.

Zuoqiu Yong's power was beyond anything Li Huowang had ever encountered.

"Father, don't panic. He may have the Dragon Veins, but so do we."

"Senior Li!" A familiar voice called from behind. Li Huowang turned around and saw five Dragon Veins slithering toward him. They were led by none other than Gao Zhijian.

Draped in dragon robes, Gao Zhijian lay on top of the stacked Dragon Veins as they moved toward Li Huowang.

"Senior Li, we've come to help!" Gao Zhijian said.

Gao Zhijian had already sensed the gravity of the situation from the palace. He had mobilized the other Dragon Veins to assist without hesitation, arriving just in time.

Li Huowang could sense the dense Dragon Qi around them. He gave Gao Zhijian a firm nod and pressed his hands to the ground.

The earth quaked, and a massive bronze tree shot up from the soil, lifting the five Dragon Veins. Li Huowang and Li Sui's countless tendrils began to form gestures and cast the Dragon-Slaying

Immortal-Killing Array.

Two dragon horns sprouted from Bai Lingmiao's forehead, while scales appeared and shed from Li Huowang's skin. Even the heads on Li Sui's tendrils grew dragon whiskers.

Zuoqiu Yong smirked, stepping closer. "Well, well. I never imagined the Dragon Veins of the Great Liang would be so close to you."

Li Huowang exhaled deeply, and two puffs of white steam escaped from his mouth. He raised his right foot and took a step toward Zuoqiu Yong, followed by another step.

The previous feeling of paralysis had vanished, and even the Heavenly Dao of Growth and exorcism array no longer affected him.

"Now that we both have the Heavenly Dao of Order, I guess it's down to a head-on clash?" Li Huowang gritted his teeth. He raised his fist high, the tendrils mirroring his motion.

"And it seems like I have more people on my side," Li Huowang said. Countless figures materialized around him—his new allies.

He had successfully attained all six chakra points, and in doing so, he had truly accomplished his objective of turning his thoughts into reality.

"Hehe~" Zuoqiu Yong chuckled, casually picking up a broken bone and scraping the flesh from his hand as if he were peeling noodles. "Really? I don't quite see it that way."

Chapter 949 - End

Zuoqiu Yong continued to slice away at his flesh with the broken bone. The pieces that fell to the ground quickly wriggled and grew. In just a few seconds, a few Zuoqiu Yongs appeared on the ground, writhing and regenerating.

Thanks to the power of the Heavenly Dao of Growth, every piece of flesh and bone he cut off grew into another Zuoqiu Yong.

“Turning flesh into soldiers?”

Li Huowang’s face turned grim. While the Heavenly Dao of Growth no longer worked on him, it still worked on Zuoqiu Yong.

Over ten Zuoqiu Yongs had risen from the ground in just a short time. With a stomp of his foot, Li Huowang charged at Zuoqiu Yong to stop his cutting further.

The half-formed Zuoqiu Yongs rushed forward to block him, but Feng Erniu charged up to shield Li Huowang from them with his abacus.

A fierce battle erupted between both sides, each with their unique abilities. Li Huowang paid no attention to the others. His focus remained solely on the Zuoqiu Yong with the Dragon Veins.

The other Zuoqiu Yongs were insignificant. What mattered was the one with the sixteen Dragon Veins!

Li Huowang swiftly projected his image. This time, instead of shifting a short distance, he appeared directly in front of Zuoqiu Yong.

Li Huowang clamped on Zuoqiu Yong’s hand, with the broken bone clenched within it. As he did, he quickly coiled around the Dragon Veins on Zuoqiu Yong with his tentacles.

At that moment, two fully-formed Zuoqiu Yongs jumped out from the side and rushed at Li Huowang.

“Die, Li Huowang!” They lunged at Li Huowang, but their hands twisted and stabbed towards Zuoqiu Yong instead.

“Huh?” Zuoqiu Yong couldn’t believe what was happening. The next instant, their faces quickly melted, and their heads turned into Shai Zi.

The two Shai Zis attacked from both sides, reaching for Zuoqiu Yong’s Dragon Vein tattoos. One of them shoved a fake Dragon Vein inside while the other forcibly pulled a real one out of Zuoqiu Yong.

The sound of dragon roars filled the air, and the surrounding space trembled.

Shai Zi realized that brute force wouldn’t work and quickly switched tactics. They pulled out several more dice and forcefully pressed them into the heads of the Dragon Veins.

The Dragon Veins on Zuoqiu Yong seemed to take on a will of their own, as if they wanted to escape from him.

Zuoqiu Yong wasted no time and started chanting a spell to regain control. However, Li Huowang had already closed in on him, cutting off any chance to complete it.

Li Huowang’s mouth stretched open wide, emitting a retching sound. He spewed out a mixture of blood and Li Sui onto Zuoqiu Yong’s mouth.

The bloated body of Li Huowang shrank rapidly. Zuoqiu Yong, on the other hand, swelled up.

Pop! Two black, slimy tentacles burst from Zuoqiu Yong’s eye sockets and thrashed wildly.

Li Huowang’s expression hardened. Those fighting the other Zuoqiu Yongs vanished and reappeared by his side to restrain the main Zuoqiu Yong.

In the past, his “Truth” cultivation would have dispersed once upon encountering the Dragon Veins, but things were different now. These allies were undeniably real in Li Huowang’s heart.

Li Huowang and the others seized the opportunity while

Zuoqiu Yong was restrained by Li Sui. They quickly ripped out all sixteen Dragon Veins.

Finally, Bai Lingmiao injected Death back into Zuoqiu Yong.

The chaos in Shangjing City stopped.

The Twisted One closed the passage from the Tianchen Kingdom to the Great Liang. The weakened Tianchen forces retreated under the onslaught of the Great Liang's soldiers, who had returned to aid in the defense.

The Dragon Veins lay pinned to the ground as Li Huowang gazed at them, exhaling deeply. With these Dragon Veins, the sky of the Great Qi could finally survive.

After all the turmoil, there would be some peace.

"I didn't help for free. I want one of those Dragon Veins. I made a deal with your daughter," Shai Zi said, walking over to Li Huowang.

Li Huowang wiped the blood from his face. He looked at Shai Zi, his gaze filled with a multitude of emotions. "Why did you help? I just can't figure it out."

Zuoqiu Yong was dead, and Shai Zi had not played any tricks, at least in this matter.

Shai Zi laughed and said candidly, "I help whoever wins."

His honesty left Li Huowang speechless.

"You can have a Dragon Vein and consider it your payment. But next time, don't wait until the last moment to share any news."

"Of course, Lord Ji Zai!" Shai Zi grinned and went off to pick a Dragon Vein.

Meanwhile, Li Huowang stared at the remaining fifteen Dragon Veins, troubled by their amount. While there were plenty of Dragon Veins, they wouldn't be enough. The Great Qi had none of its own, after all.

Moreover, they couldn't take all the Dragon Veins from the Tianchen Kingdom, as there were still people living there. If they

took everything, the people of the Tianchen Kingdom would face the same disaster the Great Qi had just experienced.

Li Huowang was deep in thought when a shadow suddenly appeared overhead. He looked up and saw a tower of heads wrapped in countless tentacles.

It was Li Sui, his daughter.

Li Huowang smiled at her. “Suisui, we won.”

“Yes, we won,” Li Sui repeated.

At that moment, Bai Lingmiao quietly leaned against Li Huowang. Just then, one of Li Sui’s tentacles reached into Bai Lingmiao’s ear.

Bai Lingmiao paused briefly, nodding slightly before walking toward the White Lotus Hall.

“Why did you send her away? Is there something you want to say to me?”

Li Huowang looked at the heads on Li Sui before looking back at the Dragon Veins. “Look at these Dragon Veins. You’re also a Chief, so help me figure out how to distribute them across the three timelines.

“How many Dragon Veins are left in the Great Liang? Do we have enough divisions? Do we need to restore it to eleven Dragon Veins?”

“And what do you think is the minimum number of Dragon Veins needed to maintain the first timeline?”

Thump! The tower of heads slammed down in front of Li Huowang, interrupting his train of thought.

“Father, seeing me like this, don’t you want to ask anything?”

Li Huowang’s heart trembled. He looked at the heads and opened his mouth, but no words came out. He didn’t know where to begin.

Li Huowang and Li Sui—father and daughter—stared at each other in silence.

Finally, Xuan Pin broke the silence. “I’m sure you’ve already guessed, even if I don’t say it out loud.”

“Let’s talk later. The city is in chaos right now, and there’s no time for idle chat,” Li Huowang said, turning to leave.

However, a single sentence from behind stopped him in his tracks.

“Father, I’m afraid I haven’t been your Li Sui for a long time now.”

Chapter 950 - Xuan Pin

Li Huowang trembled at Li Sui's words. He lifted his head again, looking at the figure of Li Sui before him.

After a moment, his trembling hand reached out, finding Shangguan Yuting's head amidst the tower of heads.

Li Sui had inhabited many different bodies, but this was the one Li Huowang was most familiar with.

He opened his arms and held Shangguan Yuting's head, trembling as he looked at her delicate face, recalling all the moments they had shared when Li Sui was by his side.

As the face in his memories overlapped with the head before him, Li Huowang's breath turned a little erratic. He gently hugged his daughter. "Don't talk nonsense. You're my daughter.

"I know you've changed a lot, but you're still Li Sui. You might be a little different now, but that's called growing up. Look at me—I'm not the same Li Huowang I used to be either. People change."

As Li Huowang finished speaking, all the heads before him began to speak in unison. Their voices overlapped, creating an eerie, resonating echo.

"Li Huowang, stop lying to yourself.

"Li Sui once tried not to possess others. She wanted to remain as Li Sui until you came back.

"But it's been 160 years. She knew nothing. All she had was the possessive instinct of a Black Taisui."

Li Huowang's breathing quickened, his voice rising in desperation. "No, my daughter isn't dead! Your name is Xuan Pin, and my name is Xuan Yang! You wear a red Daoist robe, and I wear a red Daoist robe too! You are my daughter!"

Slowly, the heads of Xuan Pin shook in unison. "Li Huowang,

I'm not Li Sui anymore. I didn't tell you until now because I was afraid you wouldn't be able to handle it.

"160 years is a long time. Li Sui wanted to live long enough to see you again. But to do that, she had to possess others, using their abilities and memories to survive.

"And when she possessed others, they also possessed her. This was the path she chose.

"She remembered that her father was still up in the heavens, needing Dragon Qi to survive. She had to stay alive until that moment, no matter the cost."

Black tentacles drilled into Li Huowang's ears, and images flooded his mind.

It was Li Sui, her back hunched, still bearing Shangguan Yuting's face. Candlelight flickered, casting shadows over the weary and numb side of her face.

"Please, I beg you," Li Sui said, clad in a red Daoist robe. She knelt on a cushion and bowed deeply to two white-bearded old men.

The old men were strange, with deformed limbs and blind eyes. One of them was even on a basket, carried by a fool with a deformed head.

"Are you sure you want this? Our seas of consciousness are vast. If we merge with you, you may cease to exist, becoming nothing more than our vessel."

Li Sui's numb expression flickered slightly. She tore off her robe and revealed her hunched back, covered with a mass of human heads.

"I'm not myself anymore. I don't even know if I'm still Li Sui."

It had been a long time since she had fallen from the sky, and a lot had occurred during that time.

Tears fell from her face. She didn't want this. She had truly hoped to wait 160 years and return to her father's embrace, but it

hadn't turned out that way.

"My lord, I'm willing to be your vessel as long as you promise me one thing. When my father ascends to the heavens, you must bring enough Dragon Qi to save him."

As her memories blurred, the past became harder to recall.

Li Huowang's situation was her only lingering concern. She feared that if she continued to possess others, she would forget this as well, leaving no one to help her father.

She had to prepare for that possibility, ensuring that she wouldn't forget her mission.

Li Sui thought of many solutions and eventually found one from the Chiefs. It was a win-win.

"Don't worry, it is our duty as Chiefs. We won't stand by idly."

"Also, Zuoqiu Yong will no longer be a problem once we possess you. If she dares to come to the Great Liang, we'll ensure she never returns."

Li Sui gradually disintegrated, her form breaking apart as countless tentacles enveloped the two Chiefs before her.

"Please, when you see my father, tell him I miss him dearly. I miss him so much... but I can't quite remember what he looks like..."

When the Black Taisui's possession was complete, the red robe was donned, and Li Sui was gone. Now, Xuan Pin stood before Li Huowang.

Li Huowang took a half-step back as the tentacles withdrew from his ears. An overwhelming sense of unfamiliarity washed over him when he looked at the figure before him.

He may have tried to deceive himself before, but the truth was undeniable now. Li Huowang could no longer look away from the reality before him.

The tentacles withdrew from Li Huowang, leaving him standing alone, lost and empty inside.

He wanted to cry, to release all the bitterness within him, but no tears came out. The overwhelming emotion built in his chest, suffocating him.

After a few moments, Li Huowang's eyes turned bloodshot. With a trembling voice, he shouted, "Then why couldn't you just keep pretending? Why?! Why does this always happen to me?!"

Xuan Pin remained calm despite his agitation. "You saw my true form, so it was about time to tell you.

"Besides, I'm not from the Sitting Oblivion Dao. My acting isn't that good. You should have noticed the difference between me and the Li Sui you knew."

"Li Huowang, there are some things that you can't avoid forever. Li Sui is dead.

"Now, there's only Xuan Pin, the Chief of the Great Liang."

Veins bulged on Li Huowang's forehead as he stared at Li Sui. "No... no! You are Li Sui! You must be Li Sui!"

Li Sui's appearance began to change. The multitude of heads gradually faded away, leaving only the heads of Shangguan Yuting and Bun.

However, with a wave of her tentacles, Xuan Pin quickly reverted to her true form.

"Li Huowang, it's useless. I'm a Strayed One too. Your cultivation doesn't work on me."

The broad red Daoist robe drifted slowly over Xuan Pin, enveloping her.

"I once possessed two Chiefs. To be precise, they willingly allowed me to possess them. They wanted to merge with my power, and they succeeded.

"The will of those two Chiefs was incredibly strong, overpowering all other influences, including Li Sui. Now, they are who I was, not Li Sui."

The cold, indifferent Xuan Pin Li Huowang had first

encountered stood before him once more. Li Huowang clutched his chest and cried out in anguish.

His daughter was dead. Li Sui was gone.

“Father, can I eat this?”

“Father, I’ll help you!”

“Father, I’m so scared. Can I stay inside you forever?”

Chapter 951 - Siming Of Flesh

After explaining everything to Li Huowang, Xuan Pin felt a wave of relief wash over him. He had been preparing for this moment for a very long time.

Turning around, he saw that the White Lotus Sect members had surrounded them, forming a barrier to prevent anyone from overhearing their conversation.

Bai Lingmiao had given these instructions, but she herself wasn't too far away. She had clearly heard their conversation. She was sobbing, but at least she knew everything now. Xuan Pin wouldn't need to repeat himself.

"That's all. Now, let's talk about how to assign the Dragon Veins."

Once their private matters had been sorted out, Xuan Pin started to talk business.

"The Dharma Sect destroyed a lot of Dragon Veins, so the Liang Kingdom must take some to replenish them. Still, we will naturally consider the other places in need of them. The Liang Kingdom will only take two since Shai Zi already claimed one. Now, the Qi Kingdom and the Tianchen Kingdom can take the remaining twelve.

"We can split them evenly and keep six Dragon Veins for each timeline. Although having only six daily divisions is very little, it's alright. At most, they will have to live their days a little faster.

"Fu Shengtian is closely watching us, so getting more people on our side is critical now."

Xuan Pin's words fell on deaf ears. Li Huowang was still lost in despair over losing his daughter. He didn't hear what Xuan Pin had

told him at all.

Li Huowang clutched his chest, overwhelmed with intense pain. Xuan Pin quickly reached behind him to take the spine sword. He didn't want to waste any time.

However, Li Huowang tightly held onto the sword. He looked at Xuan Pin with reddened eyes. "No! There's still a chance. Li Sui isn't dead yet! She just became a part of you! She's still inside your body!"

Li Huowang repeatedly said that Li Sui was still alive, trying to convince himself.

"Since possessing other people is what made her become what you are today, all I need to do is find a way to make her regurgitate the people she possessed over the years! That way, she can revive!

"I know I can do it! I am Ji Zai, the Siming in control of the Heavenly Dao of Bewilderment!"

Xuan Pin sighed. "Li Huowang, stop lying to yourself. Li Sui would remain dead, and you would even harm me. How can you find the first drop of water in a water-filled basin?"

Despite cutting Li Huowang's palm, Xuan Pin unhesitatingly took the sword from his grip. Xuan Pin swung it, revealing the rift that connected the Liang Kingdom with the Qi Kingdom.

However, a strange pulsation came from the other side of the rift.

"Wait—something's wrong!"

Xuan Pin pulled Li Huowang into the rift and arrived at the Qi Kingdom.

Xuan Pin realized that the Heavenly Daos within the Qi Kingdom were completely irregular.

The Qi Kingdom, which was supposed to be stuck in eternal daylight, was currently enveloped in a lush forest. Even the You Capital, which the Mo family had restored, was covered by it.

"Li Huowang, you need to get a hold of yourself. This is not the

time to think about familial matters. Something is very wrong.”

Li Huowang took a deep breath and calmed himself down.

“Zuoqiu Yong is dead, and he was the Siming that controlled the Heavenly Dao of Growth. It’s only natural that there’s a Natural Disaster right now.”

He didn’t want to give up so easily. He had to rescue Li Sui once more, no matter what. The problem was that he didn’t have a plan at the moment.

“No... This is not a Natural Disaster...” Xuan Pin muttered, leading Li Huowang to inspect their surroundings.

At a clearing, they encountered a monstrous sight—a colossal flesh Buddha towering as high as the Righteous Monastery and sitting just outside of it.

Li Huowang suppressed his emotions when he saw the massive flesh Buddha. *It’s not over yet!*

The hair of the flesh Buddha was made up of multiple monks. Chan Du was embedded at its forehead, like a jewel.

The monks who formed the Buddha changed in unison. As they did, a blood-red light ring shimmered behind the Buddha’s head.

There was a rift just in front of the flesh Buddha. Various beings poured out from the rift, spreading outwards.

Li Huowang noticed that the thing coming out from the rift resembled a massive centipede wriggling in the air.

Li Huowang could sense that the sudden appearance of a forest was a result of the Heavenly Dao of Growth emanated by the rift.

As the chanting continued, the verses of the chant became actual flesh. The fleshy words wrapped around the rift like a chain in an attempt to seal it shut.

The Righteous Monastery was trying to seal the rift shut, but the being behind it clearly didn’t want them to do so.

Suddenly, a single large eye appeared behind the rift and glared at Li Huowang.

Its appearance affected the entire Qi Kingdom. Everything, both living and dead, started to grow uncontrollably.

The fleshy mantra burst open, and the rift expanded. It quickly grew, tearing the world in half as it did.

A massive foot the size of a mountain stepped out from the rift. A few more seconds passed before another foot passed through.

Finally, the entire giant figure stepped into the Qi Kingdom. It was none other than Zuoqiu Yong! Li Huowang thought they had killed her just now!

Li Huowang now understood the Siming of Growth's true nature. He also understood why Zuoqiu Yong had quickly retreated when Li Huowang deceived them with a made-up Natural Disaster.

The Zuoqiu Yong he fought against was just a small fraction of his true body! His true body had always been lying in the Tianchen Kingdom!

He was able to control the Heavenly Dao of Growth because he could grow his body to that size.

Zuoqiu Yong stood still, and the entire Qi Kingdom began gravitating towards him. It was as if he was pulling everything towards him.

“Li Huowang!” Zuoqiu Yong shouted, causing strong wind to blow everywhere. “I shall show you the difference in our strength today. I will show you the consequences of opposing me!”

Zuoqiu Yong lowered his head, parting the clouds as he looked down.

Pain erupted from Li Huowang's feet, and suddenly, he felt the intense pain of being torn apart. Bloodied bamboo shoots burst from his throat and ripped through his flesh. The growth pushed him upwards, impaling and pushing him high into the air.

The bamboo kept on growing, tearing apart his flesh.

Chapter 952 - Siming

The bamboo shoots had impaled Li Huowang, leaving him completely motionless. He could feel them continuously growing within his body.

Suddenly, Bai Lingmiao appeared beside him. The Second Deity cut the bamboo poles in half with her black fingernails.

Xuan Pin also intervened, quickly waving his tentacles. He drew a single red line across the middle of Li Huowang's face.

He used four of his arms and pulled Li Huowang apart, splitting him in two without waiting for him to say anything.

Xuan Pin quickly removed the bamboo shoots that were still growing inside Li Huowang. Once he did, he glued him back as if nothing had happened.

With just a single swing of his arm, the blood-red line that bisected Li Huowang was utterly gone.

Xuan Pin pulled Li Huowang away from the front lines to create as much distance as possible from Zuoqiu Yong, minimizing the influence of the Heavenly Dao of Growth.

Everything happened within a few breaths. In that brief span of time, Li Huowang freed himself from the bamboo shoots and recovered from his wounds.

Even though he was safe for now, Li Huowang was far from happy as he looked at the mountain-sized Zuoqiu Yong.

Their enemy was too strong this time. He felt pressured, finding it hard to breathe. He knew his chances of winning were slim.

Despite that, he refused to give up. Zuoqiu Yong wanted to kill Bai Lingmiao, and Li Sui was already gone. Now, Bai Lingmiao was all he had.

After quickly looking at the Siming of Growth in front of him,

Li Huowang realized that he had to rely on the strength of the other Simings to win this.

“Xuan Pin! Xuan Pin! Tell me, is Suisui really dead?”

“Yes. How many times must I tell you that your daughter is dead?”

This time, Li Huowang chose to accept those words wholeheartedly. He tore open his body again and spread coarse salt into his body cavity as he raised both hands upwards to summon Ba-Hui.

When he accepted that Li Sui would never return, his facial features merged as he shouted in despair. He felt as if one million burning needles had pierced his heart.

He pushed both hands into his mouth and tore off his tongue with his bare hands, spraying blood everywhere.

He then slammed his tongue onto the glowing Profound Records.

The moment Li Huowang’s tongue touched the Profound Records, it came alive.

“A tongue to turn the wheel of reincarnation! An eyelash for the boundless universe! Words cannot describe the intricacies of the realm! The sinister Heavens reveal what was hidden! My Master, the highest authority! Who dares disturb it?!”

When the chant was completed, Li Huowang’s five senses superimposed on each other. The pain from his physical flesh and mental anguish turned into something else.

Li Huowang exuded an overwhelming air of despair, one that did not stem from the mortal realms.

Everything around Li Huowang creaked and bent as something spread out with him as the center. It was pain, extremely intense pain.

The Cang-Qiong Ascension allowed Li Huowang to temporarily wield the Heavenly Dao of Pain. The plants growing on Li

Huowang's body howled in pain and tried to distance themselves from him.

Any immobile living beings caught by the Cang-Qiong Ascension tried to kill themselves due to the overwhelming pain. Death seemed a better option than enduring their torment.

He looked at Zuoqiu Yong in the distance and raised his head in pain, meeting the gaze that was staring back at him from the heavens.

“Ba-Hui, come down... Come down and help! I was the one who saved Baiyu Capital last time! All of you owe me!”

Just as Li Huowang spoke, the gaze disappeared. Ba-Hui had only temporarily given him the Heavenly Dao of Pain. It did not want to help.

“Shit!”

Li Huowang did not want to give up. He felt the massive amount of False Qi in his body and tried to use it to summon Doulao.

To defeat Zuoqiu Yong, he had to call down a Siming no matter what.

Zuoqiu Yong moved before Li Huowang could finish his chant. As he did, many mini Zuoqiu Yongs sprouted from his body and burrowed into the ground.

The more Zuoqiu Yong's clones burrowed into the ground, the more control he held over the world. He was gradually turning the ground itself into his flesh.

The mountain-like foot stepped down. Li Huowang's chanting voice and an entire mountain range disappeared.

Zuoqiu Yong thought he had won. However, he suddenly felt an intense pain coming from the base of his legs.

It was as if he had stepped on a needle rather than a person. The pain began to creep upward, affecting his calves.

Despite the bone-breaking pain, Zuoqiu Yong remained

relaxed. “Hahaha, Li Huowang~ Are you that weak? You’re done now.”

Numerous bone spikes grew on Zuoqiu Yong, traveling downwards before stabbing Li Huowang, who was currently embedded inside his flesh.

However, Li Huowang was still performing the Cang-Qiong Ascension. He could not die. He did his best to push his physical pain into Zuoqiu Yong.

The Cang-Qiong Ascension, which had been extremely strong in the past, had become useless. Zuoqiu Yong’s body was too large, and Li Huowang had too little pain.

Li Huowang used his cultivation to turn everything within several Li into seawater.

Li Huowang quickly grew scales and fins to swim away from Zuoqiu Yong.

Li Huowang escaped and stood atop a mountain, but Zuoqiu Yong did not chase after him. Instead, he looked at him like a cat toying with a mouse.

“Little brat. You are slippery and hard to catch. Don’t worry, I will deal with you later. Just wait.

“I know you don’t fear death, and you will never yield even if I kill you. Unfortunately, I know what you care about the most. I shall show you the consequences of your transgressions!”

Zuoqiu Yong’s massive left palm slammed down and caught Bai Lingmiao. Bone spikes grew inside his fleshy arm, impaling Bai Lingmiao.

Bai Lingmiao and the Second Deity were impaled, their limbs, heads, and organs all pierced through.

Chapter 953 - Truth

“Miaomiao...”

Li Huowang felt at a loss for words when he saw Bai Lingmiao in Zuoqiu Yong's hands.

Zuoqiu Yong didn't stop there. Fleshy tumors grew in Bai Lingmiao's body.

The ball of flesh exploded. Bai Lingmiao exploded along with the bone spikes.

Whether it was intentional or not, a single bone spike impaling Bai Lingmiao's head fell in front of Li Huowang.

“Miaomiao!” Li Huowang shouted in despair.

Zuoqiu Yong laughed. “Hahaha! Savor this well, for this is just the start. You have a lot of people you care about in the Liang Kingdom, don't you? All of them shall die.”

Zuoqiu Yong turned around and grabbed the fox-faced Twisted One in his palm.

As the Twisted One danced, a rift connecting the Qi Kingdom to the Liang Kingdom appeared before Zuoqiu Yong.

Zuoqiu Yong was too big for the rift, but it wasn't an issue. He only needed a path into the Liang Kingdom.

He stuck two fingers into the rift and pulled it apart. The rift slowly widened like the rift that Chan Du had desperately tried to seal shut just now.

However, Li Huowang remained standing in place, his gaze fixed upon Bai Lingmiao's head.

Xuan Pin stood beside him but did not stop Zuoqiu Yong. He knew that he could not stop a Siming's rampage.

He was still thinking about what to do when he heard Li Huowang's voice. “Xuan Pin! Xuan Pin!”

He looked down and noticed that Li Huowang was abnormally calm.

Li Huowang said, "Miaomiao isn't here with us. The one in front of us is fake."

The moment he uttered those words, Bai Lingmiao's head disappeared, as if it had never been there.

"I used the Sitting Oblivion Dao's methods to buy us some time," Li Huowang explained, staring intensely at Zuoqiu Yong's back.

"You've only bought a little time. Is that enough? Can we defeat the Siming with this much time?"

Li Huowang didn't respond to Xuan Pin, as he didn't know either. He'd tried every trick in the book, including the Cang-Qiong Ascension, but nothing worked. He still couldn't defeat Zuoqiu Yong.

Xuan Pin sighed. "I never thought Zuoqiu Yong would be able to take over the Tianchen Kingdom and even control a Heavenly Dao with just his physical body."

"You are the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau! If Zuoqiu Yong reaches the Liang Kingdom, everything will be over. Use everything at the disposal of the Surveillance Bureau!"

Xuan Pin shook his head. "The Surveillance Bureau's method is to use the Dragon Veins to set up a barrier and prevent the Simings from entering our plane in the first place. However, Zuoqiu Yong is already a Siming in our world. The Surveillance Bureau cannot do anything to him."

Li Huowang felt helpless. He didn't want to sit and do nothing. They hadn't lost yet, and they still had a chance.

"Ji Zai! Ji Zai!"

Li Huowang shouted into his shadow to find a solution, but there was no response from his future self. Perhaps he no longer had a future.

Neither Doulao nor Ba-Hui wanted to help, and even Ji Zai proved to be useless.

“No... I haven’t lost! I haven’t lost!” Li Huowang said, glaring at Zuoqiu Yong.

His head started to grow uncontrollably. This was the first time he had used so much strength after reaching the sixth stage of his cultivation.

Li Huowang clenched his teeth and forcefully stomped on the ground. He tore a large hole in Zuoqiu Yong’s chest.

What would typically be a mortal wound was nothing more than a scratch to Zuoqiu Yong, who laughed it off.

“Disappear!” Li Huowang howled.

Zuoqiu Yong’s head exploded, and his fleshy form also disappeared completely.

However, Zuoqiu Yong regenerated slowly, and his blood, flesh, and bones grew layer by layer.

While Li Huowang could make Zuoqiu Yong’s physical body disappear, he could not do anything to his Heavenly Dao. He was the Siming that controlled the Heavenly Dao of Growth and would continue to regenerate as long as he held onto it.

Li Huowang fell to the ground and saw that half of Zuoqiu Yong’s body had already regenerated. He felt helpless, unable to do anything substantial despite using everything he had.

Li Huowang angrily shouted, “Maybe if I was at the seventh stage, I could defeat her! As long as I can reach the seventh stage!”

He abruptly glanced up at Xuan Pin. “Wait, aren’t you a Strayed One too? The Black Taisui assimilates its victims. After eating so much of my flesh, you must be a Strayed One too, right?”

Li Huowang’s plan completely took Xuan Pin by surprise. He had never imagined Li Huowang would think of something like that.

Xuan Pin nodded thoughtfully. “Take it back then. I suppose it’s

a form of repaying her parents.”

One of the heads of an Unspeakable popped out from the tower of heads. Xuan Pin reached into his own body and extracted his own primordial breath and inner sight. His tentacles were already trembling from the ordeal.

Looking at Zuoqiu Yong, who was trying to enter the Liang Kingdom, Li Huowang embraced his last hope and absorbed the primordial breath.

He started cultivating immediately.

This was his final chance. If he didn't take it, Bai Lingmiao would truly die. It would no longer be an illusion.

He didn't know how long it took, but when he stood up, he realized he hadn't reached the seventh stage.

Zuoqiu Yong was gone, and Li Huowang found himself back in the Liang Kingdom. Li Huowang dared not think about what was happening because one stray thought could wipe out the Liang Kingdom.

“Why? What's going on? Why isn't it working? I'm already so strong, but I still can't protect my family!” Li Huowang shouted, his mental state crumbling.

Everything around him swiftly changed.

The people and scenery changed randomly.

Zhuge Yuan suddenly appeared in one of the scenes and stopped him. “Junior Li, remember that you are not cultivating the seventh stage. You are cultivating the ‘Truth’!”

The words of Zhuge Yuan hammered into Li Huowang's mind, revealing the reason behind his inability to reach the final stage. He had always believed he was stuck in the sixth stage, which had prevented him from ever progressing to the seventh stage.

“I'm not cultivating the sixth stage. I am already at the seventh stage,” Li Huowang declared firmly in his heart.

As he spoke, several familiar scenes flashed before his eyes.

Chapter 954 - Superimposed

“Li Huowang, what are you doing?”

“Stop! She’s your family!”

“I knew that he was unreliable. Why must we still rescue him from the prison?”

Li Huowang shook his head at the annoying voices, but the voices persisted.

Although Xuan Pin appeared to be saying something, Li Huowang could not hear him. The voices were too loud.

It wasn’t just the voices. The world started to unravel as strange sights flashed by, as if two worlds were getting superimposed onto each other.

The strange changes gradually overlapped, eventually merging into a world that was both strange and bizarre.

The elephant became whole as the world transformed into a higher dimension—a projection of both worlds.

However, Li Huowang had something more important to do. He didn’t have time to deal with them.

“I’ve... succeeded in my cultivation! I must go and rescue the Liang Kingdom... I must... I must stop Zuoqiu Yong and kill her!”

Li Huowang shook his head, and everything around him stabilized. With a single stomp from his right leg, he returned back to the Liang Kingdom.

The world turned dark, and Li Huowang looked up. Zuoqiu Yong’s massive frame was blocking out the sun.

Zuoqiu Yong laughed maniacally as he crushed the hall of the White Lotus Sect. The snapping of bones filled the air as the people

inside were crushed to death.

The other places were also in bad condition. Zuoqiu Yong's Heavenly Dao had started to influence the Liang Kingdom.

Leaves sprouted from rafters, and buds popped out from chairs. Everything in the Liang Kingdom was slowly turning into a forest.

It only took minutes for a seed to bud, grow, bloom, bear fruit, and wilt.

The disaster also affected the people of Shangjing, and strange sights filled the city. Shangjing had become a living hell.

Zuoqiu Yong had only just appeared, but the effects were already significant. Everyone aged twenty years, and corpses grew new life.

Li Huowang knew he had to stop Zuoqiu Yong quickly. If he let this continue, everyone would die.

"What do you intend to do?" Xuan Pin asked, uncertain of what to do. He could only place his trust in Li Huowang. "The Surveillance Bureau will cooperate with you."

Li Huowang remained silent, his attention fixed on Zuoqiu Yong, who was trying to catch Bai Lingmiao. There was a single thing in his mind—to kill Zuoqiu Yong.

Li Huowang shouted, grabbing his weapons and stabbing them into Zuoqiu Yong.

The woman hit Li Huowang with her yellow umbrella, but Li Huowang did not stop at all.

Li Huowang even increased his strength to drive his weapon deep into her. However, several arms pulled him back.

"Let me go! She's the spy! She's one of Fu Shengtian's Simings! You don't know anything. We killed them last time. That's why they are attacking us now!"

Zuoqiu Yong took a few steps back, his expression a mix of shock and wariness as he gazed at Li Huowang. His power had grown too rapidly.

Feeling the arms grabbing onto him, Li Huowang struggled and shouted, “Trust me! I’m telling the truth! Trust me! This woman never appeared in the past at all! She was never our ally! She’s Fu Shengtian’s Siming, secretly sent to sow discord!”

Some of the arms let him go. Two pairs of the arms had tattoos, while another pair were pale with long and slender fingers.

With six of the arms letting go of him, Li Huowang seized the opportunity to shake off the remaining ones. He grabbed onto his knife and ran after the wounded woman in the yellow skirt.

Li Huowang relentlessly chased the panicked woman. He kicked the door open with his right leg, and a large field of white brain matter appeared in front of him.

He knew that it was just a tiny trick placed by his opponent. The woman was inside, and he had to find her.

Li Huowang dove into Zuoqiu Yong’s brain and grew fins. He swam inside to find the spy.

At first, he searched blindly, but a bright light soon started shining from behind. He squinted and turned around, only to see the woman attempting to crash into him with her car. She had driven there to begin with.

Still, Li Huowang wasn’t afraid of the speeding car. He jumped and crashed squarely into the car’s windscreen.

Li Huowang's knife scraped loudly across the window, leaving a deep scratch.

Bam!

Li Huowang’s head hit the windscreen and cracked it open. Even then, he was still glaring at the woman without looking away.

“You madman! You crazy bastard!” the woman screamed.

Crying in fear, the woman frantically swerved her car, attempting to shake him off.

As they were locked in their struggle, a sudden honking sound pierced the air from the left.

Glancing to the left, they saw Qing Wanglai trying to crash into them with his own car!

Bam!

A loud explosion filled the air as Qing Wanglai's car collided with the woman's car. The force of the impact sent Li Huowang flying.

Li Huowang sustained injuries, but so did the woman. The force of the impact caused her car's engine hood to open, with smoke billowing out from the engine.

Ignoring his wounds, Li Huowang grabbed his knife and stood up. He approached the car and grabbed the woman's neck before pulling her out of the wreck.

He stopped just as he was about to kill her and shouted towards the mansion, "Miaomiao, come out! We need you to place Death into her before I can kill her!"

The Simings of Fu Shengtian didn't have Death. Only by injecting part of the Heavenly Dao of Death into them could he kill them for good.

"Wait... Wait!" The woman clutched onto Li Huowang's wrist and attempted to negotiate. "Li Huowang, you can't win! We have something you want. Work with us!"

Chapter 955 - Spy

The women's offer did not make Li Huowang hesitate. He knew for a fact that she was a spy.

“The only thing I want from you is your death!”

Li Huowang stabbed his knife into the woman's mouth, twisting it around until he cut off her tongue.

Yang Na was stumbling over at this point. She held Li Huowang's hands, shocked by the bloody scene in front of her. “Li Huowang, what are you doing?”

“Trust me! She's a spy! She's Fu Shengtian's spy! Nana, trust me!”

Li Huowang was howling at them at this point.

Yang Na was stunned by his outburst. She looked at the pitiful woman in a yellow skirt and then at Li Huowang. At that moment, something clicked in her mind.

“Li Huowang, I trust you, no matter what.”

Yang Na took out another knife and then slowly stabbed it into the woman's chest.

Yang Na did not release her grip until the woman had breathed her last. She looked at her trembling, bloodied hands before smiling radiantly.

Yang Na's actions surprised Li Huowang, but he quickly nodded. “Yes, you're right. You are amazing, and we have won!”

“Yay!” Yang Na hugged Li Huowang and jumped happily. “I managed to help you! I'm the Heavenly Mater!”

Li Huowang let go of the corpse and patted Yang Na's head to calm her down. “Let's go. We've stopped Fu Shengtian's attack. We can head back and talk in peace now.”

They walked towards the estate, and Li Huowang opened the

door.

“Alright, the spy is dead. We can talk properly now,” Li Huowang said, still covered in blood and brain matter.

Zuoqiu Yong sat on a stone stool with his pink handkerchief in his mouth, deep in thought.

He had been fighting to the death just moments ago, but now it was as if he had changed entirely. They were still in Shangjing, but everything had been reversed. There was no chaos anywhere, and the people of Shangjing carried on with their daily routines.

There was no massive Siming in the city, and no one was affected by the Heavenly Dao of Growth. All traces of the information Fu Shengtian had leaked to Zuoqiu Yong had vanished.

Zuoqiu Yong nodded after some time. “Alright, let’s talk. I will first agree to your proposed truce. I will not trouble the Heavenly Mater before we deal with Fu Shengtian.”

Li Huowang wasn’t surprised by his proposal. Now that the spy was dead, every event that had occurred thanks to her intervention had been reverted, including Zuoqiu Yong's decision.

Li Huowang slowly said, “Another thing is that I’d never met that woman, even in the past few times I went back in time. She was the one who had been monitoring me ages ago when they were trying to kidnap me. She was a Siming from another elephant.

“I’d already expected them to retaliate since we killed some of their Simings, but I never thought they would send someone to create internal strife.

“Thankfully, I managed to stop them before any major problems occurred. If we had fought against each other, we would’ve fallen for the spy’s trap. A fight between Simings is not something simple.”

Zuoqiu Yong understood the situation after Li Huowang explained.

“I see. If there’s nothing else, I will go back. I’ll contact the

other Simings to see what I can do. However, I need to make this clear—I cannot go to the Baiyu Capital. I can't help at all if they are fighting up there.”

“I understand. Qing Wanglai was right, but I never thought that you siblings would actually trust my words.”

Li Huowang stood up to send Zuoqiu Yong away, but Shai Zi appeared from far away, slowly approaching them.

“That is...”

“He's an ally and also has a lot of information. Let's see what he has to say.”

Li Huowang's words made Zuoqiu Yong stop.

Shai Zi bowed to Li Huowang before approaching Zuoqiu Yong to whisper something.

Before Shai Zi said a single word, a strange, iridescent black liquid erupted from his head, splashing onto Zuoqiu Yong's chest.

No one had anticipated Shai Zi's betrayal. Neither Zuoqiu Yong nor Li Huowang reacted in time.

It was too late. The tar-like substance grew rapidly on Zuoqiu Yong's body.

“Shai Zi, what are you doing?!” Li Huowang immediately chopped Zuoqiu Yong's head off.

However, Zuoqiu Yong's regenerated body still had the strange tar.

“What am I doing? Hehehe~ Didn't I tell you that I would help the winner?”

Shai Zi quickly retreated as he said, “I was telling the truth—I think that Fu Shengtian will be the winner, hahaha!”

“Hong Zhong, did you believe me? Did you actually believe that I was helping you?” Shai Zi held onto his stomach and laughed. “Hahaha! You actually believed me! Hahaha!”

Shai Zi raised his head, looking at the skies as he laughed.

“Ji Zai, did you really think I would care about that little offer?”

Too bad the other party's offer is much better."

Li Huowang shook with rage. He leaped up and grabbed the dice on the table.

He glared at the dice in his hands. "Shai Zi, I think you've misunderstood. I wasn't trying to turn you into my ally—I was threatening you! If you don't do as I say, I will kill you."

Li Huowang threw the dice into his mouth and bit down forcefully, leaving teeth marks on the dice.

He bit down harder, shattering the die and releasing a silvery liquid.

Chapter 956 - Changes

“Hey! What are you doing? Are you crazy? Why are you biting the dice? That’s a dice used for cheating! There might be mercury in it!”

Chen Hongyu sprinted over and shoved her hand into Li Huowang’s mouth to take out the dice.

“Quick! Spit it out and rinse your mouth! Liquid mercury is deadly! Are you trying to kill yourself?” Wu Qi said, quickly grabbing a carton of milk from the fridge and giving it to Li Huowang.

Although everyone tried to stop Li Huowang, he refused to stop. He bit so hard that even his gums were bleeding. He had to kill Shai Zi today at all costs.

“Huh. There’s something interesting happening again,” Ba Nanxu said, looking at the others frantically trying to save Li Huowang while her brother scrolled on his phone.

While everyone was panicking, Qing Wanglai walked over and gently held Li Huowang’s shoulder before punching his stomach hard.

Bam! The strong impact sent Li Huowang flying. Even the cracked dice flew out from his mouth.

Qing Wanglai hastily picked up the cracked dice, holding it in his palm. “Li Huowang, don’t be irrational. You still have us no matter what you are encountering.”

He took the milk from Wu Qi and gave it to Li Huowang. “Here, drink the milk. The protein in the milk will absorb the liquid mercury. This isn’t a joke—you could die from this.”

Li Huowang smacked the milk away, glaring at the dice in Qing Wanglai’s hands.

Li Huowang tried to grab the dice, but Qing Wanglai didn't let him, fearing that Li Huowang might put it in his mouth again.

"Shai Zi, do you think you can do anything just because you have a new backer? A Siming will always be a Siming. You will only become their pawn!"

Shai Zi was still smiling despite his grievous injuries. "That's rich coming from you. Everyone needs to have a dream, right? Rather than being a dice thrown by others, I want to become the one throwing the dice. To live without dreams is to be as good as dead.

"Also, I would rather collaborate with someone other than you. Don't forget how untrustworthy and crazy you are. Even Zhuge Yuan did not trust you."

"Die!" Li Huowang roared, tearing Shai Zi apart.

However, Shai Zi's head rolled on the ground with no hint of fear. "Hehehe~ Li Huowang, I'm afraid you're out of time. Look, Zuoqiu Yong is dying."

Li Huowang turned around. An iridescent tar-like substance had replaced Zuoqiu Yong's body.

Li Huowang recalled the source of the liquid—Fu Shengtian. In the past, it had enveloped the Qi Kingdom, causing everything to die there.

"Oh no! It's not trying to kill just Zuoqiu Yong's clone. It's trying to kill the massive original body of Zuoqiu Yong too!"

Now that the spy had been dealt with, Zuoqiu Yong was his ally. If anything happened to him, his fighting forces would be reduced significantly.

Li Huowang quickly made a portal connecting to the Tianchen Kingdom.

Before he left, he looked at Shai Zi's head hesitantly. The situation was dire, and Shai Zi could not be left alive. Li Huowang made a quick decision and threw his spine sword onto the ground.

Without waiting for it to touch the ground, Li Huowang used his cultivation and turned the spine sword into another Li Huowang.

“Kill Shai Zi for me!” Li Huowang briefly instructed his clone before running into the Tianchen Kingdom.

Once there, Li Huowang knew something was wrong. There was a massive hole in the sky, and something had clearly fallen there.

“Dammit!” Li Huowang made haste and shortened the distance between him and the ground beneath the hole. Soon, he saw the dark skies and felt the ground shake.

Li Huowang steadied himself and witnessed the immense body of Zuoqiu Yong tumbling down with a resounding crash.

There were millions of holes in Zuoqiu Yong’s body. His face was almost completely gone, covered by dense black holes like a seedless lotus pod.

The sight was astonishing. Despite his massive size, Zuoqiu Yong trembled uncontrollably as if a plague had hit him.

Time and again, Zuoqiu Yong tried to get up, but to no avail.

Zuoqiu Yong had held onto the Heavenly Dao of Growth, so minor wounds shouldn’t have harmed him, but the holes didn’t heal and were instead spreading.

Zuoqiu Yong's body was not the only thing riddled with them. The surrounding leaves, trees, stones, and soil were gradually being covered by the holes, as if they were contagious.

It wasn’t just simple holes. Something was hiding within them.

Fu Shengtian had clearly come prepared, and this was their backup plan. After their spy had been dealt with, they immediately sprung into action.

Li Huowang didn’t bother with the overall situation. He dove into Zuoqiu Yong’s left ear.

He was relieved to find that there weren’t any spies on his

brain.

Thankfully, that Siming is really dead. At least Zuoqiu Yong won't help them.

Li Huowang burrowed out from his head and stood on Zuoqiu Yong's face to examine the holes in it. If he was right, the holes fell from the skies.

As it turned out, there were indeed beings residing in those holes. They resembled ovoid organisms, and their bodies were fleshy and repulsive, with numerous folds of meat.

Long hairs were growing from between the folds of flesh. On closer inspection, Li Huowang realized that they weren't hairs. They were dark antennas or maybe even young hair.

The strange iridescent tar-like liquid seeped out as it contracted and expanded, gradually covering Zuoqiu Yong's massive frame.

Chapter 957 - Attack

Zuoqiu Yong's massive body lay beneath the sky of the Tianchen Kingdom.

Li Huowang saw him struggling to get up with his mountain-like body. As the holes in his body squirmed, he lost control and crashed onto the ground again.

Are they Shai Zi's backers? Are the weird things another Siming? What kind of Heavenly Dao is it controlling? How is it that strong?

Li Huowang's shock deepened as he witnessed Zuoqiu Yong's intense struggle. Though he didn't fully grasp what was happening, one thing was clear: the incredibly tough Siming who governed the Heavenly Dao of Growth—Zuoqiu Yong—was being thoroughly suppressed by the enemy!

The beings that fell from the hole in the sky were incomparably stronger than Zuoqiu Yong.

"Qing Wanglai! This isn't a coincidence!" Li Huowang shouted urgently. "Fu Shengtian's Simings already had a backup plan!

"They immediately sprung their backup plan the moment their spy died! Don't think that you are smarter than them! Since we can enter their elephant, they can enter ours too! Prepare yourselves for their counterattack!"

Li Huowang prepared to fight back. He didn't know what those things were, but since he had completed his cultivation of the "Truth," they should be powerless in front of him as long as they had a physical body.

Closing his eyes, he raised his arms to seal the gaping hole in the sky. But before he could act, a raspy, ancient voice interrupted him.

"Who goes there!"

Li Huowang turned to his left and saw an old beggar. The beggar was holding a broken wooden bowl and standing with a cane.

The beggar, with a broken left leg, hobbled toward Li Huowang. His clothes, seemingly never changed before, were so small that they barely covered his body and appeared to be made from various rags.

The beggar's dirty face was covered in wrinkles. He looked just like the beggars in Shangjing, but Li Huowang knew that the man was no regular beggar.

Zuoqiu Yong was the Siming who controlled the Heavenly Dao of Growth. How could a regular beggar be unaffected by the abnormal growths despite standing on the Siming itself?

The beggar's eyes suddenly bulged, revealing several iridescent flesh worms inside. Li Huowang was more than sure that the beggar was another Siming from Fu Shengtian's side.

Aside from the weird things in the holes, the beggar was the second Siming.

Li Huowang looked at the holes in Zuoqiu Yong's body and then at the beggar. "Did Fu Shengtian only send the two of you?"

Li Huowang remained cautious, unsure of the techniques or Heavenly Dao possessed by the old beggar.

To be able to defeat Zuoqiu Yong was no simple feat. Li Huowang knew that the Heavenly Daos from Fu Shengtian's world were unique, so he really didn't know what kind of Heavenly Dao the beggar had.

Even after mastering his cultivation, Li Huowang couldn't help but believe that he wasn't entirely safe.

"Don't worry. We're here."

Li Huowang relaxed a bit after hearing the words of Zhao Shuangdian and the others.

The old beggar took a deep breath. Li Huowang could hear the

gurgling of heavy phlegm coming from the beggar. “Two is enough.”

The beggar reached into his clothes, indicating that he would attack.

Li Huowang could not let him move, so he immediately tried to turn the old beggar’s body into mush. The old beggar’s body quickly dissolved into mush and died.

However, that did not stop the old beggar. Despite his head being reduced to mush, his body continued moving, flinging the object hidden in his clothing toward Li Howang.

Li Huowang shielded his face with his right palm and took several steps back.

But there was nothing—no overflowing Heavenly Dao, and no destruction of heaven or earth. The enemy’s attack had been much lighter than he had thought.

The old beggar’s rotten arm finally fell off. The item inside his palm rolled towards Li Huowang.

“This is...”

“Don’t look!” an unknown voice said. However, it was too late. Li Huowang had seen it.

The attack wasn’t deadly, and there was no danger. The item was a simple red button regularly seen on female coats.

“A... button?” Li Huowang murmured, looking at it in disbelief. Something about it tugged at him. It was as if the button had a deadly, mesmerizing effect.

“What’s wrong? Are you alright?”

Xuan Pin arrived, gripping the spine sword, with the others close behind. They all paused at the strange sight before them.

Li Huowang couldn’t hear their voices. His attention remained fixed on the button. The superimposed images around him started to waver.

He bent down and picked up the button. “Wait, I recognize

this. This is the button on my mother's blouse. She liked the blouse a lot."

His pupils constricted. Slowly, he raised his head to look at the hole in the sky.

It all came flooding back.

When he was at the Benevolent Nunnery, he had deliberately hidden the button to distinguish the real world from the false one. But when he returned, the button was gone, convincing him the other world was an illusion.

"Wait... If I actually brought this button over, does that mean the other world is real too? Wait, which world? Which world am I talking about?"

Various thoughts exploded in his mind as the stream of information surged into his brain.

He remembered everything. Yi Donglai had hypnotized him to forget everything in the past, but he finally remembered everything!

"I'm not someone from here! I transmigrated from the other world!"

A sharp, unbearable pain erupted in his skull as something snapped. He collapsed to the ground, clutching his head.

When he opened his eyes again, he realized that his cultivation had fallen from the seventh stage to the sixth stage. The changes around him had disappeared.

"No! I cannot regress now! Fu Shengtian's Simings are just beside me! I can't win against them if I'm not at the seventh stage!"

Chapter 958 - Escape

The enemy's attack was too weird. Li Huowang had never thought a single button could regress his cultivation from the seventh stage to the sixth stage.

The enemy was right beside him, and his cultivation had plummeted. If things stayed this way, he could die.

Fighting them at his current stage was impossible, especially since there were two of them.

Li Huowang tried to convince himself that he was at the seventh stage. As long as he believed it, he would naturally be in the seventh stage.

He kept murmuring to himself, and his surroundings gradually changed to their superimposed state.

However, the Simings from Fu Shengtian were not going to let him succeed so easily, especially after going to great lengths to drag him down a stage.

While Li Huowang was trying to bring his cultivation back to the seventh stage again, a finger-sized black hole appeared on Li Huowang's head. Soon, the black hole spread like a plague.

In mere moments, tiny black holes covered his entire head. Each time he tried to think, his thoughts liquefied, dripping out of the holes and pooling at his feet.

No matter how hard he tried to focus, his thoughts leaked out, and his cultivation slipped back to the sixth stage.

Li Huowang tried to dig out the things inside the hole, but it was futile. They were spreading faster than he could dig them out.

In the end, worms suddenly emerged from the holes in his head. Li Huowang's head inflated and looked terrifying.

Boom! A massive, house-sized flesh worm erupted from Zuoqiu

Yong's face, sending viscous slime crashing onto Li Huowang.

Li Huowang's bones snapped. Even the white worms on his face were crushed and squeezed out.

The nightmare continued. As worms filled his body, black humanoid figures began to emerge from the holes in his flesh.

The small humanoids stumbled around. Every time their feet touched the ground, a small black hole would form, and more worms would come out.

Sensing that they were about to attack him, Li Huowang tried to use his cultivation to fight back, but he simply could not focus. Whenever he did, his thoughts would leak out from his head and drip to the ground.

Li Huowang grunted in pain as he reached down to the puddle of his thoughts and tried scooping them back into his head.

The Simings didn't let him. The black humanoids reached out and touched Li Huowang's arms. As they did, they scooped out his flesh using the holes in their hands.

They shaved Li Huowang's body away little by little until Li Huowang lost his chance to fight back.

If Li Huowang's body completely disappeared, he would be dead for real this time.

"Zhao Shuangdian! Qing Wanglai! Wu Qi! Chen Hongyu! Where are you? Help me!"

Li Huowang shouted into the sky for help.

But the people who swore to help him didn't reply.

Li Huowang was really about to die when an angry voice came from afar. "Scram!"

A strong wind blew, causing the black humanoids to distort and fuse into a single amalgamated being.

Using this chance, Xuan Pin appeared and quickly brought Li Huowang to safety.

The flesh worms crawling on Zuoqiu Yong's body launched into

the air and rained down to stop Xuan Pin.

The strange wind blew them away, their bodies twisting into different shapes.

After Xuan Pin brought him to safety, Li Huowang finally saw who had helped him. It was his clone, holding onto his spine sword.

Another Li Huowang had saved him, the same one he had asked to kill Shai Zi.

“Why are you here? Is Shai Zi dead?”

Li Huowang pressed onto his head, filled with painful holes.

“Ignore him for now. The situation here is more dire. Xuan Pin saw that you were in trouble, so he brought me here to help you.”

Li Huowang’s clone looked at Zuoqiu Yong’s massive body and saw how she had changed entirely.

The small holes had completely covered his body, and strange worms crawled out from them as they secreted slime.

Zuoqiu Yong had been transformed into a fleshy hive for the worms.

While the two of them were speaking, Zuoqiu Yong’s massive mountain-like body collapsed, and uncountable worms fell off it and charged toward them.

Anything the worms touched was dyed with the strange iridescent liquid. They weren’t just attacking Li Huowang—they were trying to devour the Tianchen Kingdom too.

“Help me remove the worms in my head! I can’t reach the seventh stage with them on my body!”

The clone glared at the worms, but no matter how hard he tried, the worms continued to pour out incessantly. His cultivation was useless here.

“Allow me.”

Xuan Pin waved his right arm and cut off Li Huowang’s head, which was riddled with holes.

Then, he kicked the head away without waiting for it to touch

the ground.

“How about now?”

After the worms were gone, Li Huowang could finally focus. The headless Li Huowang sighed deeply. “Much better.”

He then clenched his fist and muttered in his heart. The seventh stage faintly reappeared in his mind, and the strange superimposed state appeared once more.

He turned and scolded both Zhao Shuangdian and Qing Wanglai, saying, “Are you guys just waiting and watching a show? Is this how you help? Are the words of a Siming that fickle?”

Li Huowang’s outrage left them completely clueless.

“What do you want us to help with? You seemed to lose it just now, and we have no idea what you are talking about.”

Chapter 959 - Enemy's Counterattack

Li Huowang deflated. He didn't know what to say.

"Let's put that aside. I don't have time to explain—they're already here! Prepare yourself!"

The moment he finished speaking, a faint clicking sound came from outside the door.

"Shh! It's dangerous outside! That's the sound of someone loading their magazines!"

Qing Wanglai quickly took out his gun and opened up the safe.

"Why did none of us notice that before? How come everything he says ends up happening? What a jinx."

Ba Nanxu stood up, chewing something with visible annoyance.

Zhao Shuangdian said nothing. She looked at Li Huowang with interest.

"Li Huowang, your condition is still unstable. Stay here and don't move. I will bring the others up front," Qing Wanglai said, picking up his weapon and exiting the mansion with the others.

"Now that's more like it," Li Huowang said, chuckling before bringing his clone towards the mountain of worms.

With their help, Li Huowang could fight against the two Simings on his own without worrying about getting intercepted by the other Simings from Fu Shengtian's side.

Fu Shengtian's Siming were gravely mistaken if they thought they could enter this world as they pleased.

After fighting for a while, Li Huowang and his clone realized that the two Simings weren't pushovers. No matter how hard they tried to use their cultivation, the holes continued to spread, and the

fleshy worms continued to devour the Tianchen Kingdom.

“Shit!” Li Huowang stopped and called Qing Wanglai using his phone.

“Hey! It’s me. Where’s your insect repellent? Don’t question me about it. Just tell me if you have it or not!”

After getting the answer, Li Huowang threw the phone aside before reaching for the shoe cabinet.

He opened it and saw the yellow insect repellent. Li Huowang shook it vigorously before spraying it.

“Nana! Come and give it Death! We will kill Fu Shengtian’s Simings here right now!”

With a hiss, the massive worm mountain slowly disintegrated, revealing Zuoqiu Yong’s massive body covered in holes.

Li Huowang looked at the holes and didn’t know what to do.

The other Simings had suppressed Zuoqiu Yong. Dealing with the worms was easy, but not with the holes. The worms would persistently grow out if he didn’t remove the holes.

Li Huowang looked at the disgusting holes in Zuoqiu Yong’s body before figuring something out. He quickly grabbed his phone again and called Qing Wanglai, “Ask Chen Hongyu to come here! I need her special abilities!”

Soon, the fleshy worms hidden inside the holes were expelled from Zuoqiu Yong’s body, like pimples were popped. They were washed out by the pus, just like the ones on Chen Hongyu’s face.

Now that the worms were gone, Zuoqiu Yong’s body started to rot. Her melting flesh fused together, and her body soon became a rotting mountain.

The rotting flesh was gone soon after, and Zuoqiu Yong regenerated herself. As long as the holes were gone, an injury on this level wouldn’t be able to harm her.

Li Huowang sighed in relief. Then, he heard the window shattering, and a black object rolled before him.

Li Huowang hissed in surprise. "Grenade! Run!"

Li Huowang grabbed Yang Na and ran into the washroom.

They couldn't get very far before it exploded. The explosion blasted Li Huowang off his feet.

The hall was now filled with dust. Yang Na winced in pain, holding her bleeding head. Her eyes widened when she saw Li Huowang lying in front of her, his back a bloody mess.

He had used his own body to shield her.

Tears welled in her eyes. She couldn't bear to see him like this. She frantically tried to pull him up, but she didn't know what to do.

Yang Na kept patting his face, attempting to wake him up.

Li Huowang was still unconscious, and Yang Na was afraid. She was terrified that he was dead this time.

"Li Huowang, you can't die! You don't have permission to die!"

"Cough cough!" Li Huowang coughed and reached for his waist to pull out a shard of glass embedded into his body.

Li Huowang weakly fell into her embrace. "It's ok... It's ok... I can't die for now."

"Why did you shield me? I control the Heavenly Dao of Death. I can't die."

Yang Na was very worried and felt guilty because of it.

Li Huowang smiled bitterly and tried to steady his breath. "Go find the first aid kit in Wu Qi's room."

Since the enemies decided to attack them face-on, the battle would surely take a long time. Li Huowang dared not rest even though he was hurt.

"Alright, sit here and don't move!" Yang Na said before quickly running into Wu Qi's room.

"Damn, there's so many people outside, and yet they threw the grenade into the house. They are trying to kill me!"

Li Huowang continued to pull off the glass shards embedded in his body.

Qing Wanglai's home was pretty, but the glass shards were deadly.

"Thankfully, the wounds are not fatal."

Li Huowang forced himself to reach the wine cabinet and took a bottle of strong alcohol. He drank a large gulp for himself before pouring the rest onto his back.

The intense pain made his body shiver. Li Huowang almost broke his teeth by biting too hard, but it worked. His head was no longer buzzing, and he felt much better.

Li Huowang called Qing Wanglai again, but no one picked up this time.

He tried calling the others, but none of them picked up either.

"They must be in the middle of a fight. Just... why aren't there any gunshots outside?"

Li Huowang dragged himself towards the door. However, before he even got close, another black object rolled towards his feet.

His mind went blank. It was too late to run, so Li Huowang instinctively picked it up before throwing it out of the window.

Chapter 960 - Wounded

Boom!

The explosion shattered the window and rocked the entire room.

Though Li Huowang had managed to hurl the grenade away, it had detonated far too close. The force of the blast slammed into him, sending him flying backward until he crashed into the wall. His back, which had barely scabbed over, tore open again from the impact. He started bleeding profusely.

“Shit! What the fuck are they doing!”

A ringing filled Li Huowang's ears as he pushed himself up with his right arm.

His right arm didn't touch the ground. He stumbled and fell onto the ground again, realizing his body was different now.

When he glanced at his right hand, he discovered that all of his fingers had been completely blown off. Yet strangely, there was no pain, even as he stared at the bloody, mangled remains.

Li Huowang acted quickly. With his left hand, he loosened one shoelace and tightly tied it around his wrist to stem the bleeding, about three inches above the injury. Then, he untied his second shoelace and secured his knife to his left hand.

He was severely injured, but he was also very worried about the situation outside.

The battle outside was too bizarre. Although the Simings of Baiyu Capital had intercepted them, the Simings from Fu Shengtian had somehow managed to lob grenades into the house.

The situation was far worse than Li Huowang had anticipated. It wasn't just a skirmish—Fu Shengtian could be trying to wipe them out completely.

The best-case scenario was that Qing Wanglai and the others hadn't been quick enough to block the grenades. The worst-case scenario? That everyone outside was already dead.

Li Huowang assumed the latter. He'd lived long enough to always expect the worst.

Still, this reassured Li Huowang that their previous actions were steps in the right direction. Zhao Shuangdian's plans to destroy the drug factory and the forgotten Siming on the sea had indeed threatened them.

Li Huowang ran into Wu Qi's room and saw Yang Na. She was about to run out with a first-aid kit.

"Huowang, your hand—"

"Ignore it. Listen to me. I will rush outside in a moment. When you hear explosions, I want you to escape through the back window. Got it?"

Li Huowang recalled Yang Na's figure in the sea and shuddered. He didn't want it to happen again.

Li Huowang planted a kiss on her lips before mustering the strength to drag his battered body and sprint into the messy hall.

His hearing slowly came back, and he was soon able to hear the sounds of fighting up ahead.

He sighed in relief—his side hadn't been completely wiped out yet.

Fu Shengtian's Simings had attacked them in their own home. There was no point in overthinking the situation, so Li Huowang ran outside and hid in a bush.

He soon located the source of the sounds. Li Huowang noticed that most of the enemies were hidden in the bamboo forest, so he stealthily approached them from behind.

As he was about to attack one of them, his scalp tingled. He bent down and narrowly dodged a bullet.

There are hidden sentries!

Li Huowang rapidly located the shooter and ran toward him.

Before the shooter could fully reload, Li Huowang chopped off three of his fingers.

He stabbed mercilessly at the shooter's stomach, but the enemies had anticipated his attacks and prepared stab-proof vests. Li Huowang's knife didn't manage to wound the shooter.

Li Huowang and the shooter fought viciously in the bamboo forest. Li Huowang had lost an arm, while the shooter had lost three fingers.

The shooter tried to disarm Li Huowang, but Li Huowang had already tied the knife to his hand. Neither was able to harm the other.

Seeing an opening, Li Huowang swung at the shooter's exposed neck. But the Siming grabbed the blade with gloved hands, stopping it inches from their throat.

They grappled viciously until, suddenly, a knife pierced through the shooter's neck from behind.

The shooter looked down with shock before slumping and dying.

As the shooter fell to the ground, Li Huowang looked up and saw Yang Na covered in blood in front of him.

She was panting, her knife still dripping with blood. She had stabbed the Siming from the back and saved Li Huowang.

Yang Na steadied herself before smiling. "I am the Heavenly Mater. I cannot run. Without me, you cannot kill them."

She then looked at Li Huowang and said naturally, "Ji Zai, stop getting distracted. They are fighting so hard outside. You need to help them."

Li Huowang was indeed distracted. Yang Na's figure seemed to shift, blurring into a different entity.

Bam! The sound of a gunshot snapped him back to reality. He pulled Yang Na down onto the ground. "Follow me!"

“Alright!” Yang Na replied without a hint of fear. In fact, she was excited due to Li Huowang's apparent encouragement.

Li Huowang took note of everyone's location.

It was clear that their enemies came prepared. They were all in places that were easy to defend, and they coordinated well.

Fu Shengtian's retaliation was fierce. To destroy the Baiyu Capital, they used fifteen Simings in total.

However, the biggest problem was the two Simings situated on the roof of the mansion opposite Li Huowang.

They could just lie down on the roof and shoot continuously, so Qing Wanglai and Zhao Shuangdian struggled to return fire. Their predicament forced them to remain passive.

Li Huowang called Qing Wanglai again.

“It's me! Yang Na came out to help. This place isn't safe. I need you to create a diversion at ten o'clock. I'll try to deal with the snipers on the roof across us.

“Stop bullshitting me! Three Ancient Ones, let them destroy your home if you dare!”

Li Huowang hung up.

Chapter 961 - Exchange

Li Huowang lay low in the bamboo forest, using the stalks as cover while waiting for Qing Wanglai to make his move.

Time crept by, and the pain in Li Huowang's injured hand grew sharper and harder to ignore.

Yang Na, gripping the enemy's gun, noticed something was wrong with him. "What's wrong? Are you alright? I can bring you out of here for now."

Li Huowang shook his head and slammed his broken arm onto the ground. The intense pain shook him up.

"No, I can't trust them. If we lose now, the Baiyu Capital is finished. Where could we even escape to if it's destroyed?"

Li Huowang got closer to Yang Na to shield her a little. "Don't worry, it just hurts a little. I won't die as long as you're here."

Seeing her concern, he forced himself to reassure her, as if his wounds weren't serious. "Besides, my hand will return as long as we kill Fu Shengtian's Simings."

However, he wasn't truly confident. He wasn't sure which of Fu Shengtian's Simings had been responsible for the events leading to his broken arm.

Yang Na's face brightened. "And what about your eye? Will it grow back if we win?"

Li Huowang froze momentarily before touching his empty eye socket. "I don't know. Maybe."

Yang Na nodded happily. "Yes. It will return for sure!"

She clenched her fist, convincing herself to do whatever it took to restore his lost eye—an eye that represented Chaos.

Suddenly, they heard loud noises in the air. Three drones with blinking green lights flew past them, attracting everyone's

attention.

Li Huowang felt a surge of joy. *The Three Ancient Ones have made their move.*

He quickly rolled on the ground while dialing them on his phone. He also directed Yang Na to run to the mansion's first-floor window.

"I'm moving now! Cover me. The Heavenly Dao of Death is with me! The people you kill won't die unless we are the ones who kill them!"

Gunshots whizzed past the sky and shot down the drones, but it was too late. Li Huowang and Yang Na already reached the mansion.

Li Huowang gripped his knife tightly before breaking the glass window and jumping into the darkness.

It was both dark and dirty. It appeared that renovation works had stopped halfway.

Li Huowang heard the sound of gunshots coming from above. He gripped his knife even more tightly as he slowly approached the stairs.

As adrenaline coursed through his veins, the pain in his body faded, and his senses sharpened.

They were about to reach the upper floors, but the sound of approaching police sirens suddenly cut through the air.

"We need to move faster! The Rules are here!"

He refused to accept that things would end right then and there.

Li Huowang made haste and found the attic. He climbed up and saw an open window. The two shooters had climbed through the window to reach the roof.

He steeled himself and slowly approached the window to launch a surprise attack on the two Simings.

He had just raised his head when he touched a strand of almost

invisible line. It broke on contact, and he immediately shouted, "There's a trap!"

Just then, the sound of a gunshot rang out. The bullet shattered a part of Li Huowang's skull, and he flew backward from the impact.

Thankfully, Yang Na was there to grab him, stopping his fall.

"I'm... fine!" he said, his blood streaming from his forehead and obscuring his vision in a crimson haze.

"Damn it! They know we're here. We need to act now!"

Li Huowang took off his shirt and threw it out of the window.

Bullets rained down and tore his clothes to pieces. When the gunshot stopped momentarily, Li Huowang jumped out of the window.

Through his bloodied vision, he saw a blurry figure. Without hesitation, he drove his knife into their neck. Warm blood soaked the shoelace on his arm, and the shooter collapsed. He had finally killed one of them.

Li Huowang swiveled around to find the second person, but no one else was on the roof.

Just then, a wire suddenly looped around Li Huowang's neck. The other shooter was trying to choke him.

Struggling desperately, he heard a gunshot, and suddenly, the wire slackened. Yang Na had taken the shot.

Li Huowang sighed in relief now that the two shooters were dead. He pulled the wire off that had been partially embedded into his neck and started coughing.

The two shooters are dead now. Qing Wanglai and the others should be able to fight more easily now that the pressure is gone.

Li Huowang walked toward the edge of the roof. As he thought, Qing Wanglai and the others were having an easier time now that the shooters on the roof were gone.

The sirens were getting closer, but at the very least, the Simings from Fu Shengtian hadn't achieved any notable results.

Their ambush had failed.

Li Huowang looked down, wiping the blood from his eyes. He was getting ready to help them below.

Suddenly, someone pushed him off the roof!

Li Huowang waved his arms around until he caught onto the drain pipe on the roof. If not, he would've fallen onto the ground.

"Nana, be careful! There's one more person!"

Just as Li Huowang shouted, he caught sight of the person above him. It was an old beggar with a rod.

Bam! The old beggar hit Li Huowang's hand, cutting it up with the sharp edges of the drain pipe.

Li Huowang refused to let go. The old beggar reached into his pockets to bring something out.

Li Huowang tried to climb up, but his other arm was broken. He didn't have the strength to pull himself up.

In the final moments, his blood once again obscured his eyes, casting his vision in a crimson hue.

Li Huowang saw Li Sui, dressed in red Daoist robes, standing between him and the old beggar.

Li Huowang shouted urgently, "Suisui, what are you doing? Go away! Run away!"

"The Chief of the Surveillance Bureau heeded the orders of Zhuanxu, commanding Nan Zhengzhong to oversee the Heavens and manage the Simings!"

Xuan Pin's red robes flew high in the air, revealing his true form. "The Surveillance Bureau was established for the sake of this very day!"

All of Xuan Pin's heads chanted in unison, "The standards of generals and ministers cannot be questioned when it is difficult to attain righteousness! It may be found among the Immortals and Simings, in the suffering of the mortal realm, or in the uprightness of those ascending to Immortality and Divinity!"

Xuan Pin raised two tentacles with tiger skulls high up into the air. An extreme amount of murderous aura poured down from the Heavens, enveloping Li Huowang.

The sound of thunderous war drums could be heard while soldiers came from all different directions. They were chanting and howling in unison with Xuan Pin.

“Grant me the sword of the Superior Divine Beings to guard the four corners of the Heavenly Jade Gate!”

Without anyone noticing, millions of soldiers equipped with armor and swords stepped into the Tianchen Kingdom, bringing an incredibly intense murderous aura.

Chapter 962 - Jiang Xiangshou

There were so many soldiers that they covered every inch of land around them. In addition to the soldiers of the Liang Kingdom, there were soldiers from Qing Qiu, Hou Shu, Si Qi, An Xi, and even the Qi Kingdom.

Each soldier raised a blade behind their head and severed their hair ties in unison, their long black hair cascading down like flowing capes.

The soldiers' eyes were cold and resolute as they faced the Simings. Although they were mortals, they had no fear.

Even the heads of Xuan Pin had their hair flowing in the wind.

“With the body standing tall and with black hair flowing in the wind, all the generals and ministers will come and greet me. The heavenly constellations and Taiyi shall follow around me! The twin souls of Jia and Gang shall follow me!

“I care not if they are Door Gods and the Gate Guardians. I care not if they are the various wicked evil entities and wicked gods. I care not if they are the mountain gods and the misfortunated souls. I care not if they are evil demons or evil deities!”

With the rhythm of the war drums, the soldiers' swords inched closer to their necks.

“Place your praise onto the altar! Sever the heads and turn the bodies to dust! I serve the people, not the master! The broken Heavenly Dao...”

The soldiers paused. Then, they shouted their final verse with all their strength, saying, “THE BROKEN HEAVENLY DAO SHALL BE MENDED BY US!”

Splatter! The millions of soldiers beheaded themselves, including Xuan Pin. Xuan Pin beheaded all of his heads at the same time.

A dense cloud of burning murderous aura and blood rose into the air. The huge plume rapidly condensed into a gigantic, roaring, chaotic head.

Li Huowang finally realized what the Siming was, as his own anger and bloodlust were affected. It was the Siming of the soldiers, Jiang Xiangshou!

Fu Shengtian's Simings and Jiang Xiangshou crashed into each other viciously. As they did, heaven and earth started to unravel along with the divisions. The rampaging Heavenly Daos were destroying the Tianchen Kingdom.

Although Jiang Xiangshou was injured in the clash with Fu Shengtian's Simings, its power did not diminish. As the Siming that controlled Massacre and War, its existence vastly differed from that of the other Simings.

It appeared anywhere strife and hatred existed.

The more intense the battle was, the stronger it was. Fights between Simings were one of the most intense clashes the universe had to offer.

Li Huowang's sanity couldn't contain his bloodlust. He swung his broken arm at the beggar's leg and managed to knock him down.

Li Huowang's veins bulged as he hoisted himself up with one hand, harnessing the power of his newfound strength.

"DIE!"

Li Huowang ignored the beggar shooting at him. He was shot in the abdomen many times, but that didn't stop him from carving the beggar into pieces.

Li Huowang only stopped when his knife broke on the beggar's bones. By then, he was already completely drenched in blood. He

wasn't sure if it was his own blood.

The gunshots and sirens had entirely stopped, as if they had disappeared.

Snapping out of his frenzy, Li Huowang ignored his injuries and frantically began searching the piles of headless corpses.

There were too many headless soldiers. Their bodies became mountains, and their blood became rivers.

"Suisui! Suisui!" Li Huowang shouted while panicking. He dug around the mountain of corpses and the rivers of blood, holding onto the faint hope that he would be able to find his daughter.

"Suisui, where are you?!"

At last, his fingers brushed a limp tentacle. He followed its trail, digging through the carnage until he unearthed a pile of tentacles with a pair of eyes nestled within.

Li Huowang jumped and hugged the pile of tentacles tightly.

"Suisui, don't be afraid. Your father is here! Don't be scared!"

"Father?"

Joy washed over him, but Xuan Pin's calm voice shattered it.

"Li Huowang, Li Sui is dead. How many times must I tell you?"

Li Huowang shook his head in denial. "It's alright! It's alright! As long as you're alive! I will find a way to turn you back. I just need to remove the things devouring you from the inside!"

"Li Huowang, there's no chance of saving me. I will die soon."

Xuan Pin's voice was very calm, without any hint of sadness or anxiety.

"Summoning Jiang Xiaoshou to help comes at a price—human lives. What kind of war doesn't have casualties? That would just be putting on a show."

Xuan Pin's tentacles started to shrivel, with fluid seeping out.

"No... No! Miaomiao, come quick! Suisui is dying! Take Death out of his body!"

Bai Lingmiao rushed over and placed her hands on Xuan Pin's

body.

“No... It’s no use... He doesn’t have the Heavenly Dao of Death anymore...” Bai Lingmiao’s voice trembled as she spoke.

“It’s useless. I now belong to Jiang Xiangshou and not the Heavenly Mater.”

Xuan Pin’s body gradually grew weaker, and his voice became quieter. “It’s time to talk about official matters, Li Huowang.

“You might be Ji Zai’s Twisted One, but I know you are different from the other Simings. Ji Zai is different from the other Simings because he doesn’t even know what he is.

“Maybe he’s different, just like Jiang Xiangshou. Perhaps he can help us navigate through these difficult times, but I fear that it’s not enough. Fu Shengtian would never stop. I fear that the suffering our ancestors went through will occur again.

“If you don’t want the people here to return to how they once were—incoherent, not knowing right from wrong, not knowing truth from lies—we must fight back hard.

“Do not trust the other Simings. They are not tied down to us. We alone can control our own lives. We let the people prosper and breed so that we can use their lives for ceremonies like these. Do not be afraid of sacrificing people. As long as some people survive and as long as the Heavenly Dao of Lust is still here, people will continue to give birth and multiply again.”

But Li Huowang wasn’t listening. He was holding onto Xuan Pin while mumbling something fervently.

“I don’t have much time left. Once I die, go and find the Imperial Preceptor of the Liang Kingdom. He will tell you everything you don’t know. Also, my advice is still... the same... We can... use Simings... but we cannot... we cannot...”

“Enough! Stop talking, Li Sui! You won’t die! You won’t die!”

Li Huowang shouted, persistently using his cultivation at the seventh stage to try to revive Li Sui. It wasn’t working. Only his

surroundings were being affected.

“I really... am not... Li Sui. Li Huowang... You cannot... fool yourself... The bonds between the child and the parent... are insignificant... You must... let go...”

Xuan Pin’s body slowly crumbled. The pile of tentacles slowly withered and went limp. As it did, something appeared from the deepest part of the pile of tentacles.

They were the three clay figurines.

The clay figurines looked ancient. The color had faded and there were cracks on it, but Li Huowang could still make out the faces of the figurines.

They were the three clay figurines of Li Huowang, Bai Lingmiao, and Li Sui.

“I am not Li Sui... I am not... I am... not her...”

A single black tentacle hugged Li Huowang’s clay figurine, struggling to pass it to Li Huowang with its final strength.

Li Huowang was about to accept it, but the tentacle went limp.

The cracked clay figurine fell onto the ground and shattered into pieces.

Chapter 963 - Escape

Rain poured from the sky, drenching the ground. Leaves bent under the downpour as the forest swayed violently in the wind.

The path was muddy from the rain, making it very difficult to traverse.

Even so, someone was running on the path.

The small figure was covered in a coat and a veiled hat. The person looked back occasionally, as though afraid that someone was chasing after them.

A wind blew past and parted the veil a little, revealing Shangguan Yuting's face. Her face was dripping with rainwater by this point.

Several black tentacles extended out from her clothes to wipe off the rain.

"Hahaha..."

Hearing the laughter behind her, Li Sui felt a surge of panic.

"Shit! Hahaha! After all these years of trying to be a scholar, luck finally smiles on me! To think I've stumbled upon a Strayed One!"

The person's laughter was rough and dissonant, as if it could be seen through wood.

The sound of bell chimes could be heard as a strong wind blew past. A massive tree fell in front of Li Sui, blocking her path.

Li Sui turned around and saw the man chasing after her, his form covered with excess flesh. He chuckled. "It's useless. You've taken my drug—you can't use your techniques as a Strayed One."

The scars on his scalp betrayed his past as a monk, but the tufts of hair now sprouting from his head revealed he was no longer one.

More importantly, if he were a monk, he wouldn't be holding

onto a butcher's blade right now.

"Damn, you have a good face! I never played with a Strayed One before."

"Go away! Don't come here!"

Li Sui's cries of panic only fueled the man's excitement.

With a flash of steel, he cut both of Li Sui's arms off. Blood flowed out as she cried in pain.

"Hahaha! Shout louder! The louder, the better!"

The man chuckled, grabbing Li Sui's legs and pulling them apart.

However, just as Li Sui's skirt parted ways, a dense layer of tentacles surged out and enveloped the man's face.

The man roared angrily as he tore off the tentacles, but Li Sui had a good hold on his face. All the man did in the end was tear his own flesh away.

After traveling alone for so long, Li Sui wasn't the same helpless girl she once was.

Although the man was grievously injured, he refused to fall. Murderous intent radiated from him as he raised his butcher's blade and swung it at Li Sui.

Li Sui swung a dark golden-colored rod to block the blade. As she did, she used another tentacle to paste a silver talisman onto the man's forehead.

The man's skull cracked open, and the silver talisman slipped into his skull. The man's bones became bloated, and his joints locked.

The man froze due to the talisman. He couldn't move a single joint in his body.

Li Sui quickly swung a dagger and cut down the man's ears.

She wasn't done. She revealed ten more tentacles, each holding onto a bladed object. She shaved the man down little by little.

She worked until nothing remained but a bloody skeleton.

Finally, she drove a dagger into his heart, ending his life.

Li Sui nodded with satisfaction at her handiwork. She took a piece of the man's heart and ate it.

As she was savoring the taste, she saw her bloody surroundings and suddenly panicked. "No... This isn't me! This isn't me."

Li Sui spat out the heart and ran.

She ran for four divisions straight. By the end, the rain had stopped, and the blood on her coat had been washed clean.

Li Sui calmed down and continued to travel.

The more people she assimilated, the more she felt she was changing. Ever since she'd assimilated the first person, a lingering question haunted her: Would she lose herself completely?

Would she cease to be Li Sui?

Would her father still recognize her?

However, her safety was more important. She had to protect herself and had no choice but to assimilate people. The Surveillance Bureau of the Qi Kingdom had sent out warrants, and everyone was looking for her.

Zuoqiu Yong publicized the information that she was a Strayed One, enticing people to kill her.

This made it difficult for Li Sui to work with anyone. Now, anyone she encountered could be hunting her down. It wasn't just the Surveillance Bureau she had to be wary of anymore.

To stay alive, she had to grow stronger. Assimilation was her only path. By taking their memories, she could glean information about the Bureau's movements.

I wanted to head back to the Liang Kingdom, but it seems that's impossible for now. I need to find a way to hide my identity as a Strayed One, just like my father did. It's too annoying. But how? I don't have the bronze coin veil or the black spindle.

Li Sui was still trying to figure out how to proceed.

Her mind churned with ideas as she trudged forward.

Eventually, she spotted a village through the morning fog.

She was tired. She used her techniques to scan the village and found nothing unusual. She braced herself and walked into the village carefully.

At the entrance, a boy was playing with a ball.

Li Sui changed her face from Shangguan Yuting's to a kind-looking middle-aged woman.

"Who are you? What are you doing here?" the boy asked, clutching his ball. "Are you a performer? Or... a kidnapper?"

"I'm neither. I'm just a facial hair trimmer[1]. I've been walking in the rain, and I'm cold. I'd like to rest in your village if I may."

Li Sui revealed a kind and welcoming expression with her new face.

This was one of her identities. She'd changed her identity multiple times and assimilated multiple abilities to evade her pursuers.

1. An ancient occupation. Someone who threads on a bride-to-be so that her facial hair is well groomed. 📖

Chapter 964 - Make-Up

The child's eyes lit up with excitement upon hearing that Li Sui was a facial hair trimmer.

“Really? Can you do that? My sister's about to get married, and my mother has been searching for someone to help her. Can you do it? With that, my sister will finally get married, and I'll get to have some wedding candies!”

“Sure, but my price is expensive. I need at least half a Dou^[1] for fresh rice.”

Li Sui pretended to be very careful when it came to money.

“I have rice at home, and my future brother-in-law is a landowner! He has a lot of rice in his house! Come with me.”

Still holding his ball, the child brought Li Sui to his house.

Li Sui tried to get some information from the child and learned more about the village. The child was called Chen Junyu, and the village was Chen's Family Village. The closest county was roughly a hundred Li away, so it was quite remote.

Based on what Li Sui had learned, she deduced that the Surveillance Bureau's spies hadn't reached this area yet. Knowing she was safe, she relaxed a bit.

“Little lady, sit on the stool. I need you to take a seat so I can help you clean your face.”

Li Sui grumbled at the young lady in front of her.

A tanned lady pinched her daughter's arm. “She's calling you to sit over there. Are you deaf?”

Once the girl took her seat, Li Sui took out a small bundle from her robes, pulling out a wad of cotton and some fine powder. She dabbed the cotton lightly in the powder and tapped it against the girl's face.

Then, Li Sui took out a thin thread and crossed it, holding the ends with her thumb and index finger. She held one end with her left hand while biting the other end with her mouth.

As her right thumb moved, the threads glided lightly across the girl's face, neatly removing the fine hairs along with the powder. Soon, the girl's face looked bright and clean.

The mother's eyes sparkled with joy as she saw her daughter's transformation. "Wow! Your handiwork is amazing. Half a Dou of new rice isn't expensive at all!"

"Dear lady, could you give me an empty room to rest in? I'm tired from traveling and would like to stay here for a night. You can keep my rice payment as the young lady's bridal gift. "

"Alright!"

Overjoyed at not needing to pay, the mother cleaned one of the empty rooms. Letting a stranger stay for one night was far cheaper than forking out money to buy half a Dou of rice. It was a deal even an idiot wouldn't refuse.

After the woman left, Li Sui tried to gather some information from the young girl. Unfortunately, she was younger than her brother, so she didn't know much either.

Li Sui licked the threads and started to trim the young girl's eyebrows. "Little lady, what kind of brows would you like? Crescent brows or a consort's brows?"

"Anything is fine..." the girl murmured, her voice barely louder than a mosquito.

"Since you're going to get married, I will give you a consort's brow."

As she worked, Li Sui continued her gentle questioning. Although the girl didn't like talking and sometimes ignored Li Sui, the scraps of information she shared further reassured her that the Surveillance Bureau hadn't reached this remote village.

It was safe here, and she could finally rest before she started

traveling again. Nearly two weeks had passed since she'd last had a good night's sleep. Fearing the Surveillance Bureau would track her down, she'd opted for several short naps rather than one long sleep.

After trimming the hair on the little girl's face, Li Sui did her hair too.

Like that, Li Sui finally earned a night of good rest in one of the empty rooms.

Li Sui opened the bedsheets and dug out the straws. She placed them in a pile before taking off her skin.

Li Sui slept in the middle of the straw pile while holding onto Li Huowang's clay figurine.

She didn't like beds. She preferred the feeling of being buried in warmth.

"Father, I am doing fine. I've lived here for three years. Another 177 years more before I can meet you again."

Li Sui stared at Li Huowang's clay figurine from inside the stack of straw.

She then took out a clay figurine of her mother and murmured her frustrations, "Mother, I've assimilated too many people. I can barely keep them under my skirt. What should I do if I can't hide them anymore?"

The figurines couldn't respond, but talking to them brought her some comfort.

She could only remind herself that she was Li Sui by talking with the clay figurines.

She was about to hug the clay figurines and go to sleep when the wooden door was slowly pushed open.

Li Sui quickly threw her clothes and skin into the straw pile and patiently waited to see what was happening.

She was already clutching her weapons in case of an ambush.

A young girl cried in the dark room, saying, "Madam, please take me with you! I will learn how to trim facial hair from you! I

don't need money. I just want some food when we travel together, that's all!"

Li Sui peeked out from her pile of straw. She saw that it was the young girl whose facial hair she had just trimmed off. Thankfully, it wasn't the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau.

The young girl was groveling on the ground with several bronze and silver pieces in her hands. She was offering them to Li Sui.

"Madam, please help me! I can't get married right now. If I do, I will die!"

Li Sui appeared out from the pile of straw after listening to the young girl. "Little lady, what are you doing? Tell me everything."

Li Sui consoled the young girl as she explained everything.

Her name was Chen Zhaodi. Her mother was trying to marry her off to an older man. However, it was more of a transaction than a marriage. The man had previously married five wives, but all of them died.

No one knew how they died, but the young girl was sure that if she married the man, she would also die soon.

Li Sui didn't know what to do after hearing the story. She couldn't even protect herself right now. It would slow her from escaping next time.

Just then, the girl's mother yelled from outside, "Where are you, stupid daughter of mine? The pigs in the sty are already calling. Can't you hear them? Quickly go and feed them!"

Li Sui didn't move, and the young girl's eyes died down as if her soul had been lost. She turned to leave the room.

"I'm sorry, Madam. I will hang myself soon."

Staring at her back, Li Sui couldn't bear to see someone so young die. "Wait, let me think about how I could help you."

In the end, Li Sui chose to help. While her situation wasn't ideal, she was sure her father would have helped the young girl.

“How about this...” Li Sui looked at Chen Zhaodi's eyes, filled with renewed hope. “Go and feed the pigs. Come find me again late at night.”

1. A measurement unit for grains 📏

Chapter 965 - Father

Chen Zhaodi's face lit up with joy when she realized that Li Sui was willing to help her.

"Auntie! You are my savior!"

Dropping to her knees, Chen Zhaodi kowtowed to Li Sui several times before darting out.

"Sigh..."

Li Sui dove back into the straw pile before looking at the clay figurines in her tentacles. "Father, I will help her find a good family once we reach a county. I can do that much, I suppose."

Li Sui was confident in her ability to quickly do a simple background check on a family. No matter who she chose, they would be better than the old man with the five dead wives. At the very least, marrying someone from a county would increase her chances of surviving.

As Li Sui inhaled the scent of the straw, she slowly closed her eyes and drifted off to sleep. It had been a long time since she had slept so peacefully.

Li Sui had only slept for a few hours when Chen Zhaodi quietly entered her room in the dark, carrying a sack filled with her personal belongings.

"Auntie, I'm here."

Li Sui said nothing. She gently held Chen Zhaodi's hands and walked out of the house at night.

Chen Zhaodi's heart raced—this was her first time disobeying her parents. If she were caught, she'd be punished.

A dog's sudden barking startled them. "Woof! Woof woof!"

Li Sui silenced the dog with a single glare. The dog whimpered and sulked.

Under the cloak of night, they left the village and headed south along a dirt path. They continued until dawn, finally resting by a river.

Chen Zhaodi splashed her face with cold water, a smile breaking across her lips. "Auntie, thank you so much for saving my life! I will take care of you when you are older!"

After being granted a second chance at life, Chen Zhaodi hugged Li Sui tightly and held onto her arms.

Li Sui felt uneasy. She hasn't felt genuine gratitude ever since she had been separated from her father. The people who approached her had always tried to kill her.

"Eat something first. Then we can head to the county." Li Sui took out some jerky and shared it with Chen Zhaodi.

Chen Zhaodi spoke a lot during their journey. She kept talking about her hopes for her future too.

Soon, Li Sui let her guard down and even laughed while talking with Chen Zhaodi. The feeling was strange, almost reminiscent of the first time she had met Bun.

They soon reached the county, but Li Sui was hesitant to let Chen Zhaodi go. Maybe she wouldn't be so lonely with Chen Zhaodi beside her during her journey.

However, Li Sui ultimately chose to leave Chen Zhaodi in the county. She had to make certain choices, no matter what.

Once there, Li Sui started finding a new husband for Chen Zhaodi as soon as possible. The county was crowded. Every second here increased the risk of her being discovered by the Surveillance Bureau.

Soon, Li Sui found an older merchant selling glutinous rice cakes on the street. The merchant was an honest man with a house inherited from his ancestors.

After finding a suitable candidate, Li Sui told Chen Zhaodi about the person. But Chen Zhaodi's reaction wasn't something she

had expected.

“Auntie, I’m not getting married. I want to learn your craft from you.”

Chen Zhaodi was adamant about following Li Sui around.

“You can live a good life here. Why do you want to travel and suffer with me?

“I can’t trust anyone. I can only trust you.”

Chen Zhaodi hugged Li Sui tightly.

On that day, Li Sui experienced new emotions and understood the truth behind certain past events. She attempted to push Chen Zhaodi away but found herself unable to do so.

“You wish to follow me? Do you know what I am?”

Li Sui let her go and revealed the tentacles in her own body. Chen Zhaodi screamed extremely loudly.

But even though her face was pale, she still braced herself and chose to hug Li Sui in the end.

“I’m... I’m not scared! Even if you are a monster, I won’t be scared! You are a good monster!”

Li Sui sighed. “Very well. You can follow me, then. You should be able to help me find information...”

Before she could finish her sentence, a chakram ripped through the paper window.

“Careful!”

Li Sui pushed Chen Zhaodi to the side, but the chakram still cut off Chen Zhaodi’s left ear.

Rage surged through Li Sui as she ran out with Chen Zhaodi, only to find themselves surrounded.

Tens of people in black spun their chakrams as they surrounded the building. They stood on the roof while waiting for Li Sui.

Li Sui had overstayed and attracted the attention of Zuoqiu Yong’s informants.

“You evil entity! You are a Strayed One that killed thousands of

people! The Chief of the Surveillance Bureau has orders to kill you on sight!”

Without waiting for her response, they lunged.

Li Sui used her tentacles to hold onto Chen Zhaodi as she retreated. However, the people had come prepared and did not give her time to escape.

A Daoist in yellow robes stepped forward. He held onto two yellow flags and made seals with his hands before pointing at the sun above.

“Veiled in mist and haze lies the hue of blue and green. The yellow road and the purple palace shall stand apart! The crimson dawn and pure soul shall follow their doom!”

Li Sui’s body started to melt, revealing the tentacles beneath her. Chen Zhaodi was also melting.

Li Sui unleashed all her techniques upon the people surrounding her, but they had a counter to her every move.

Just as Li Sui slowly adapted to this world, the Surveillance Bureau of the Qi Kingdom also slowly adapted to her.

In the end, the first friend she made, the first person who showed her kindness, slowly melted into a puddle before Li Sui.

“No! No!” Li Sui wrapped her tentacles around the wriggling blood puddle.

It was still moving. Chen Zhaodi had melted, but she was still alive.

Ultimately, Li Sui had to assimilate Chen Zhaodi and turn her into a part of herself.

Li Sui felt her body change, but it was in a good way this time.

Even though she saved Chen Zhaodi, the situation was still dire. It wasn’t long before Li Sui melted too.

As her melted tentacles fell limply and her consciousness slowly faded, she murmured, “Am I dying...? I don’t want to... Father... I can’t die... When I am in danger, my father will come

and save me... Father will definitely come and save me..."

Her consciousness threatened to fade forever.

"What the fuck are you doing?!" A thunderous shout rang out, stopping Li Sui from melting.

"Father?" Li Sui picked up an eyeball in the puddle and saw a streak of red circling around her. Everywhere it went, blood and viscera followed.

"Father!"

Chapter 966 - Ji Zai

“Father?”

Li Sui, already half-dissolved, raised her head to see Li Huowang standing amidst the bloodbath.

Through the haze of pain, she recognized the familiar bronze coin veil and blood-red Daoist robes. Tears streamed down her face. Her father was here. She was safe.

It was really him! Her father had come to save her! The pain coursing through her body confirmed it wasn't a dream—this was real!

Li Sui cried and shouted to Li Huowang, “Father! I missed you!”

Li Huowang consoled her while killing the people from the Surveillance Bureau, saying, “Don't worry! Suisui, I am here! No one can bully my daughter when I'm here!”

The enemies retreated. None of them could fight against Li Huowang.

Li Sui was on the brink of safety when one of the enemies suddenly detected something amiss. It dawned on him that Li Sui was employing her abilities as a Strayed One, so he attempted to interfere.

“You damned monster! That's not your father! He's fake! You conjured him! If he was your father, why didn't he help you years ago? Why is he appearing only today?”

Strayed Ones were strong and weak at the same time. It all depended on what they believed.

Li Sui froze up as she carefully thought about it.

It was a fatal mistake. Li Huowang slowly changed, and Li Sui's unease increased as she entertained the thought that the Li

Huowang in front of her was fake.

Li Huowang slowly turned transparent.

She panicked and tried to convince herself. “No! He’s my father! He’s really here to save me! My father is real! He’s not something I’ve conjured myself!”

It took Li Sui too long to realize what they were trying to do. She tried to convince herself repeatedly to ensure the Li Huowang in front of her was real. Even if her father were fake, it would be sufficient if he could help her this time.

However, all she could do in the end was lie to herself. A fake was a fake. No matter how hard she tried to convince herself, the Li Huowang in front of her ultimately disappeared.

The people from the Surveillance Bureau closed in, and they were angry. They had suffered losses, and now their vengeance was personal.

Li Sui was in danger again.

One of them spat on Li Sui. “I hate Strayed Ones! Don’t you have a good imagination? Don’t you think you can escape? Go ahead! Try again.”

A sharp blade flew past, severing several tentacles. “Aren’t you able to conjure your saviors? Go on, then! Show us again!”

Pain wracked her body as they attacked relentlessly. Yet, this time, Li Sui didn’t cry. She had realized that she had been ignoring one of her powers.

Her father was a Strayed One, and she was a Strayed One as well. He had used the powers of a Strayed One to save himself many times in the past. Now, she had the opportunity to do the same. This was her last chance to save herself.

She only needed to think about what she could do to rescue herself.

Still, self-deception was no easy task. The powers of a Strayed One relied on genuine belief, so she had to convince herself

completely.

As her injuries worsened, her consciousness faded again. On the brink of collapsing, she suddenly recalled the reflection in the water she had once seen! It was a Siming, Ji Zai. It was the Siming that her father had constantly talked about.

“My father is Ji Zai! A Siming has no past nor future! As long as I believe that Ji Zai is real, my father will come and rescue me!”

It was both a lie and the truth. She didn’t know which was which.

All she needed to do was believe. She needed to survive.

Li Sui murmured over and over. Her consciousness slowly turned blurry, but she didn’t stop. The situation only changed when her life was on the brink of being snuffed out.

Nothing happened, but for some reason, everyone looked confused and dazed. It was as if everyone had forgotten what they were doing.

“Ji Zai! Ji Zai was real even one hundred and eighty years ago!”

Li Sui shot up in excitement. She was saved! She would survive until her father appeared again!

This was a perfect opportunity for her to escape, as everyone around her was still confused. Taking advantage of their distraction, Li Sui managed to drag her injured body away and flee.

She didn’t know how long Ji Zai’s powers would last, so she escaped desperately. After half a day, she finally stopped running and confirmed she was safe.

This time, she tried her best to avoid inhabited places.

She took over the cave of a bear as a temporary resting spot. The bear ended up becoming her dinner.

After feasting, Li Sui slept in the cave peacefully. She could finally rest here.

Once she had rested enough, Li Sui started to plan for the

future again.

She suddenly recalled Ji Zai and ran out to pick up a log. She shaved it into a praying tablet using a small knife and carved several words on it.

“Ji Zai, the Siming of Bewilderment.”

Li Sui placed the tablet inside the cave and lit up three pine needles before praying. She stuck the three lighted pine needles in front of the tablet.

Then she kowtowed and prayed.

“Since the others could pray and obtain the powers from their respective Simings, I shall pray to you from today onwards. I will be your disciple, Ji Zai.

“If I’m your disciple, will you impart some knowledge and techniques to me? I don’t need anything strong for now. Just something to protect myself. I just need a technique to hide my identity as a Strayed One!”

Li Sui had just finished her prayer when she noticed the tablet softly flashing. It was then that she realized a technique had been bestowed upon her, its knowledge now embedded within her mind.

After checking it, she realized it was an illusory technique that could conceal her identity.

She felt warmth in her heart. Her father had not forgotten her. He was still helping her even though he had become a Siming. As long as her identity as a Strayed One wasn’t discovered, she would no longer be hunted down on sight.

That meant she didn’t have to assimilate the others constantly. She could finally wait for the day to reunite with her father again. She wouldn’t have to turn into someone else.

Li Sui smiled happily. Her future finally seemed a little brighter.

Chapter 967 - Funeral

It felt weird to worship her father as a god.

Still, Li Sui didn't mind. She preferred it this way—it meant that her father was constantly watching over her.

“Father, wait for me! I will come back and meet you again as Li Sui! I swear!”

Li Sui's intelligence was growing from the people she had assimilated. She started planning for when things went wrong, and she was no longer overly optimistic.

But Li Sui hated it. She preferred to remain as she once was, where everything was simple.

Looking down at the clay figurine, she murmured sadly, “If only... If I weren't me... If I stop being myself in the future, I'll hide it from you, Father. That way, you won't have to be sad too.”

“Li Sui! Come back! May your soul return!” Li Huowang shouted, dressed in mourning robes.

Li Huowang tossed white paper money [\[1\]](#) high into the air.

The paper money floated before falling onto the massive black coffin behind him.

Bai Lingmiao continued to cry. She held a red thread and followed the black coffin.

On the other end of the red thread was a piece of meat. It was the flesh of Li Huowang, Li Sui's favorite meal when she was still alive.

This was a custom of the Liang Kingdom. When people died, their loved ones tied a red thread to their favorite food or item while they were alive, carrying it until it was buried in the coffin.

Though the instruments played loudly behind the procession, Li

Huowang remained unfazed. He was just walking in a daze, revealing no emotions. He continued scattering the paper money as they approached the mountain behind Cowheart City.

The grave had been dug prematurely, and the best Feng Shui master of the Liang Kingdom had decided on the burial site.

Everyone from Cowheart Village looked on solemnly as the coffin reached the grave. According to their customs, it would then be lowered down.

Bai Lingmiao, who had long regarded Suisui as her child after deciding not to have her own, collapsed in grief. Tears streaked her face as she cried. “Suisui!”

Bai Lingmiao tried to jump into the coffin, but Li Huowang held her back. He wanted her to stop from making a mess out of everything.

The Second Deity sprouted from Bai Lingmiao’s back and scratched Li Huowang, leaving deep wounds on him.

Despite his wounds, he remained silent, his gaze fixed on the coffin as it was lowered.

“Are you mute? Speak!”

In the end, Bai Lingmiao stopped the Second Deity. She sat down on the ground and wept silently beside Li Sui’s grave.

There was someone else crying aside from Bai Lingmiao. It was Qiu Chibao. She held onto her rotten baby as she repeatedly tried to drag Li Sui out of the coffin, but it was destined to fail.

The burial was completed—the coffin was lowered, the grave was filled, and the tombstone was set.

Li Sui could finally rest in peace.

Everyone returned to Cowheart Village. With the funeral over, the atmosphere relaxed a little.

Yang Xiaohai and the other chefs worked hard to serve a large banquet.

However, Li Huowang ate nothing. He sat at the main seat and

continued to drink wine, cup after cup.

He used to have a low tolerance for alcohol, but now, regardless of how much he drank, he couldn't feel anything. He couldn't get drunk.

He drank a lot, but the wine in his pot never diminished. He could drink as much as he wanted. The more he drank, the more Qiu Chibao cried.

He drank from evening until late at night. Even after the banquet, Li Huowang was still drinking.

As he was about to drink more, Bai Lingmiao took Li Huowang's cup and smashed it on the ground.

"Stop drinking!"

Li Huowang nodded. "You're right. We shouldn't drink anymore. It's time to deal with the official matters."

Li Huowang stood up and took one step forward. He shortened the distance and instantly appeared in Shangjing.

He stepped into the palace and saw the Liang Kingdom's Imperial Preceptor, Huangfu Tiangang, playing chess with Gao Zhijian. Huangfu Tiangang was still blind.

Li Huowang sat between the two of them.

"Xuan Pin is dead."

Huangfu Tiangang nodded. He picked up a black piece with two of his fingernails and placed it on the chessboard. "I know. The funeral is very grand."

"She told me that you know something and requested me to ask you about it."

Gao Zhijian noticed Li Huowang seemed different, placing a white piece down.

"Senior Li, are you alright?"

Li Huowang ignored Gao Zhijian and stared at the blind Huangfu Tiangang.

"It's nothing major," Huangfu Tiangang said. "Xuan Pin wanted

to remind you that as long as there's a Chief for the Surveillance Bureau, we can hold our ground. If Fu Shengtian's Simings invade again, we'll repel them, just as we did the day before yesterday."

"Almost every soldier is dead," Li Huowang said.

"No." Huangfu Tiangang shook his head. "What do you think a soldier is?"

Huangfu Tiangang stroked his beard. "As things stand right now, we must sacrifice a lot to survive whenever the world is thrown into chaos due to the Simings.

"No matter how strong the soldiers are, they are still humans. All humans can be turned into soldiers. All we'd need to do is expose them to murderous aura. Then, everyone in the world could become a soldier."

Li Huowang's breathing changed when he heard that. He never thought that was one of their plans. "Then everyone would die."

"Yes." Gao Zhijian nodded before placing his white chess piece onto the board. "Senior LI, I know you are kind, but some people have to die. Even the royal family dies."

A bulky young child laughed and ran over to them. Gao Zhijian grabbed the boy easily.

"This is my son. I chose him to be my successor. I have many sons, but only one can live. The rest must die."

Gao Zhijian's tone was so cold that it was as if he wasn't talking about his son.

"Fu Shengtian's Simings... The Baiyu Capital Simings... We cannot trust any of them. To survive, we can only trust ourselves. This is how the world works. Human lives are worthless. Everyone can die, and we can give birth to more people as long as we don't go extinct."

"Human lives... are worthless...? Do you know what this means to them?"

Li Huowang recalled many faces: Abbess Jing Xin, the Lu

family, Zhuge Yuan, Suisui... Their faces flashed past his mind.

Li Huowang's face twisted as his teeth cracked under the force of his bite.

“Enough! I’ve had enough! Why?! Tell me why!”

Li Huowang punched the chess board and shattered it.

1. Fake money used for ceremonies 🤔

Chapter 968 - Conversation

The black and white chess pieces within the palace scattered across the ground. The only sound that remained was Li Huowang's laborious breathing.

Li Huowang's anger slowly intensified, causing everything around him to change. The scenery shifted, and the people changed.

Li Huowang suddenly raised his head and looked at the empty skies. He shouted at the sky, "Da Nuo! What do you want me to do? I've requested nothing but for them to continue living! I just want them alive! Why must everybody die? What do you want me to do?"

As Li Huowang shouted, a faint thunderclap could be heard from the faraway clouds.

Li Huowang continued to shout at the sky, but soon, his angry shouts turned into sadness and despair.

The weight of reality pressed down on him. He was caught in a daze while Li Sui's funeral was ongoing, but it wasn't until now that he truly understood that Li Sui was gone. His daughter was gone forever.

"Was it not enough? What did I fail to do? Tell me! Why do they die no matter what I try? I can't save them... I can't stop them from dying... What did I do wrong?"

Li Huowang reached into his robes and took out a palmful of dust. Under his gaze, the dust quickly gathered into a clay figurine. It was the one Li Sui had given him before her death.

Li Huowang cried, and his tears dropped to the ground. A tentacle reached over and wiped the tears off his face.

Li Huowang trembled and looked up to find Li Sui smiling at him, carefully holding three clay figurines. She pointed at them one by one. "Father, look. This is you. This is Mother. And this small one is me."

Li Huowang knew that the Li Sui before him was fake, yet he couldn't suppress his emotions and hugged her tightly.

When he let go, he saw nothing in his embrace.

When he saw what was happening, Gao Zhijian sighed and stood up. He steadied Li Huowang and carefully plopped him down onto a chair before consoling him.

"Senior Li, you did nothing wrong. This isn't your fault. It's how the world works. Think about our master, Dan Yangzi. Was he born evil? No, he was driven to evil to survive. The world is much more evil."

Gao Zhijian sighed. "What can we do? Crying is the first thing we do when we are born. Humans are destined to suffer in this world. Everyone is suffering. Even an emperor like me cannot escape this fate."

Li Huowang shook his head. "I hate Dan Yangzi, but I hate this world even more."

He crushed the clay figurine in his palm. "Disgusting! This world is disgusting."

"Still, what can you do? This is how the world works."

"No! This is wrong. The world isn't supposed to be like this! The world is wrong!"

Li Huowang looked up. This time, rather than sadness, he only had a strong sense of unwillingness.

"You want me to give up, but it will never be that easy! Nothing will stop me until I'm dead! I will turn this world into what I wish for it to be!

"Not only will I become a Siming, I will become a Grand Siming, one without a past or future. I will save everyone!"

It sounded ridiculous, but Li Huowang was resolute. He would believe it forever.

Qiu Chibao cried, tightly embracing her child when she heard Li Huowang's words.

She cried and shouted and jumped and danced until she smiled. She laughed, then slowly turned transparent before disappearing.

Li Huowang was finally alone. He no longer had any illusions beside him.

As his emotions settled, he looked around. Qiu Chibao and the Shimmer Mirror were gone. Ever since Li Sui's death, everything strange in his life had faded away.

Gao Zhijian frowned at his words. "Senior Li, I don't care what you think, but we must first deal with Fu Shengtian's Simings."

He knew that Li Huowang's condition wasn't the best today, but some things couldn't wait, especially if they involved the lives of everyone in the world.

"I know! I know!" Li Huowang snapped, his eyes blazing with hatred. Even without Gao Zhijian's reminder, he had already vowed to destroy Fu Shengtian and its Simings. They were responsible for Suisui's death.

"They tried to ambush us and even used spies. They even tried an all-out attack to kill all of us, but there's nothing to be afraid of! They should be the ones to be afraid! They've suffered even more than us this time. We've hit them hard!"

Both Gao Zhijian and Huangfu Tiangang were confused by Li Huowang's words. They had no idea what he was talking about.

"Senior Li? I thought... I thought your illness was cured. Why is it..."

"I'm not ill!"

Li Huowang shouted, "I'm Ji Zai! Ji Zai is me! I am at the sixth stage just because it's convenient! I can connect to Ji Zai whenever I believe I'm at the seventh stage, and I can know what's happening

in the Baiyu Capital!

“Wait! That’s incorrect! That’s not the Baiyu Capital! That’s a projection of the Baiyu Capital! Through the projection, I can know what’s happening there!”

Li Huowang then shared what he had learned with Gao Zhijian and Huangfu Tiangang. They didn’t have to understand—simply being exposed to the information would suffice.

“Are you sure?”

Gao Zhijian was surprised. Knowing what the Simings of Baiyu Capital were doing would greatly benefit them.

However, Gao Zhijian still doubted him. “Senior Li, are you certain about this? Is that the truth? Or is that something you’ve learned because you are ill?”

Chapter 969 - Murderous Aura Command

At this point, Li Huowang's anger flared from Gao Zhijian's continued skepticism. "How many times must I say that I'm not ill!"

Li Huowang stood abruptly, his voice ringing through the room. "Do you trust me or not? If you don't, I'll handle it myself!"

"I trust you," Gao Zhijian said, trying to calm Li Huowang down. "Still, this is an important matter that must be shared with the others. The Saintess of the White Lotus, the other Dragon Veins, and the other Chiefs of the Surveillance Bureau must learn about it too."

Li Huowang couldn't argue with that. This was valuable information that could benefit everyone. It was important for the others to know as well.

If he could rally their support, their combined strength would be more reliable than what Zhao Shuangdian or Qing Wanglai could offer.

They were scattered across the world, and gathering them in Shangjing would ordinarily take ages. However, Li Huowang could solve that.

The necessary people were gathered at Shangjing at a moment's notice.

Bai Lingmiao wasn't the only one who came. There were also the other Dragon Veins, the Righteous Monastery, the Mo family, the Minglun Hall, the Ao Jing Sect, and the Luo Sect.

Everyone had gathered. The only exceptions were those who were caught in exceptional trouble.

The main hall where Gao Zhijian usually held his morning

meetings was filled to the brim.

Jiang Xiangshou's appearance wasn't exactly low profile, so almost everyone knew what had happened.

Before Gao Zhijian could say anything, murmurs filled the air, with many casting glances at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang did nothing to hide his status as a Strayed One. He revealed it to everyone.

Still, no one dared to do anything. His standing was now higher than theirs.

Gao Zhijian lifted his arm, and an old eunuch waved a golden horse-tail whisk in the air. "Silence."

The hall became quiet. Everyone looked at Gao Zhijian and the other emperors on the thrones. The atmosphere was solemn.

"I have summoned everyone here for one reason," Gao Zhijian said. "I trust you understand this concerns our survival."

Everyone in the hall quietly listened to Gao Zhijian.

Gao Zhijian stopped his speech momentarily. He waited for the eunuchs to hand him a golden decree and started writing on it. "Nearly all our soldiers have given their lives to shield us, yet the enemy is still on the offensive.

"To protect our world, I, Gao Zhijian, Emperor of the Liang Kingdom, hereby use my authority to declare the activation of the Murderous Aura Command."

With those words, he stamped the decree with the Liang Kingdom's jade stamp.

The other Dragon Veins didn't object. They stood up simultaneously and stamped the golden decree with their respective kingdoms' jade stamps.

But it wasn't over. The emperors even dripped their own blood onto the decrees.

Most of the people in the hall didn't fully comprehend the severity of the ceremony, but some of the oldest knew about the

Murderous Aura Command.

An old crone walked forward with a cane shaped like a phoenix's head. Her body was covered in tattoos depicting cracks seen on a porcelain vase. Her voice trembled. "Your Majesty, is the situation that dire? We didn't even use it when the Dharma Sect almost invaded us."

"The Dharma Sect? They didn't even get past Qing Qiu. The situation today is not the same. The peace we enjoyed last time was earned from the sacrifices of Senior Li and the Chief of the Surveillance Bureau.

"Since the situation is so dire now, I will not hide it further. The Dharma Sect was nothing but a scout from our enemies!"

Everyone felt the crushing weight of Gao Zhijian's words. They still recalled how fierce their battle had been with the Dharma Sect.

If the Dharma Sect was only the scout, just how strong was the main force of their enemies?

Unrest spread amongst the people. Li Huowang stood forward to calm them down.

"Do not panic. We can win! They are not as strong as you think. If we unite and give it our all, we will prevail!"

"Daoist Li, who are you to speak to us like this?" The Ao Jing Sect's grand elder, Yan Jianxi, spoke up.

"Me? Who am I?" Li Huowang showed him the identity plate on his waist. "I am the Chief of the Liang Kingdom's Surveillance Bureau! What about it? Do I not have the right to talk here?"

Gao Zhijian didn't know about this. He and the others looked at the identity plate in Li Huowang's hand with shock.

The plate had been Xuan Pin's. Li Huowang took it from his corpse.

Li Huowang's voice rang with conviction. "There is no need to fear them! Their elephant is roughly the same size as ours! Use every technique, every hidden weapon, every treasure! Together,

we will annihilate them!”

His words didn't resonate with the others, but with the emperors' guarantee, they had no choice but to admit that Li Huowang was the Chief of the Liang Kingdom's Surveillance Bureau.

It was clear to everyone what those words meant, as all the emperors had summoned them here.

It was do or die now.

Once the royal decree had been passed, the ministers and officials started working hard for the sake of the Murderous Aura Command.

While some evil sects chose not to help, they were sensible enough not to cause any trouble for the time being.

Li Huowang turned to Gao Zhijian. “Do you intend to expose everyone in this world to the murderous aura?”

“Everyone.” Gao Zhijian's voice allowed no room for doubt as he sat on his throne.

Li Huowang's voice trembled. “Including our juniors at Cowheart Village?”

The faces of Puppy, Yang Xiaohai, Zhao Wu, Sun Baolu, Lu Xiucui, and Chun Xiaoman flashed in Gao Zhijian's mind. However, as a good emperor, he still chose the most logical path. “Everyone.”

Bai Lingmiao and Lu Xiucui had both been exposed to murderous aura before, so Gao Zhijian knew what would happen.

If everyone in the world were exposed to the murderous aura, it would become a man-made disaster.

Li Huowang's didn't want that to happen, but he could not say anything. The world was in danger right now, so he had to use every method at his disposal. He could argue about it later.

Li Huowang whispered, “Don't use it right away. Use it only at the last possible moment to summon Jiang Xiangshou.”

He had finally acquired some helpers, which should have been

good news for him. However, the price to be paid was too high.

“Of course. They are all my people. They are my mountains and my fields. I love them more than you.”

Li Huowang wanted to rebuke Gao Zhijian, but a woman's voice interjected, saying, “We won't be relying only on the people!”

Chapter 970 - Help

Li Huowang turned and saw Bai Lingmiao approaching them. She bowed to Gao Zhijian.

She now looked significantly better, as though nothing had happened.

“Your Majesty, please acknowledge the White Lotus Sect as the nation’s religion. The White Lotus Sect doesn’t just accept humans but also evil entities. They can all follow your command!”

Gao Zhijian looked at her solemnly before speaking slowly, saying, “Approved.”

“Thank you, your Majesty.”

Bai Lingmiao walked past Li Huowang and pulled him out of the hall.

“Evil entities worship the Heavenly Mater too? Since when? Can they withstand the murderous aura and help summon Jiang Xiangshou?”

Li Huowang hoped it was true. If so, his chances of victory would increase.

Bai Lingmiao did not answer him. Instead, she said something strange: “Li Sui can be saved.”

Li Huowang’s heart started to beat irregularly. “What?”

“I said Li Sui can be saved. Our Simings cannot do it, but that’s because we don’t have the Heavenly Dao of Revival. Fu Shengtian’s Simings might have it.”

Bai Lingmiao’s voice trembled with excitement as she revealed her plan. “As long as we rob their Heavenly Dao, we can bring Li Sui back! Not only that, we can bring back anyone we like!”

“Miaomiao, are you alright?” Instead of feeling joy, Li Huowang was worried.

“Me? I’m fine.”

“But you...” Li Huowang didn’t know how to explain it. Bai Lingmiao wanted the Heavenly Dao of Revival, but Li Huowang’s method of killing them outright was the safer plan.

Bai Lingmiao shook her head, tugging his robes with her small hands. “I’ve cried enough. It’s time to act. Don’t forget—I’m her mother, and I only have one daughter. I will take their Heavenly Dao to save Suisui, and I will kill anyone who dares harm her!”

Bai Lingmiao and the Second Deity growled simultaneously when they spat those words. The twin beasts had been angered.

“Suisui...” Li Huowang took out the clay figurine from his robes to inspect it before tucking it back again.

“You’re right. Crying won’t revive Suisui! We will kill them! We will bring Suisui back!”

Li Huowang hugged Bai Lingmiao and patted her back several times before releasing her. Their hearts were linked as one now.

The Murderous Aura Command was in motion. Weapons from fallen soldiers were collected and distributed to the commoners.

As more and more commoners were exposed to the murderous aura, the number of fighting incidents increased in Shangjing. Even the sky above Shangjing gradually became thick with a murderous aura.

This was just the start. Soon, the entirety of Shangjing, the Liang Kingdom, Qing Qiu, Hou Shu, and the others would be covered with murderous aura.

This was a suicide method. To defeat Fu Shengtian, they had to rely on Jiang Xiangshou.

Li Huowang stood in the fourth vault, reading the most classified documents of the Surveillance Bureau. He now had the authority to read everything here.

He wanted to know why Jiang Xiangshou was so strong.

Li Huowang was reading a book called *The Leader’s Opera*,

which recorded information about Jiang Xiangshou.

According to the book, Jiang Xiangshou was different from the other Simings. It had no form, no thoughts, no sentience, and no desires. It existed wherever conflict arose, serving as a tool for others to wield.

Special Simings like it were rare, but not non-existent. The Immortal Heaven was one of them.

According to the records within the Surveillance Bureau, special Simings were either rarely ever worshiped or worshiped by almost everyone. However, most of them only worshipped the superficial part of the Siming.

Through the book, Li Huowang realized that Qing Wanglai's words weren't lies. It was real.

Qing Wanglai had once claimed to have sought out everyone he could, leaving only the unreachable or untraceable behind. He now realized what that meant—Qing Wanglai couldn't contact the special Simings at all.

"We can request for their help, but we have to fulfill their conditions..."

Li Huowang recalled when Jiang Xiangshou appeared. Even the bloodlust and anger in him spilled over and was out of his control.

"If I could use Jiang Xiangshou, that means I could also use the other special Simings by fulfilling their conditions too.

"Doesn't that mean our chances of winning would be greatly increased if we could bring them into our fold?"

Although the other side was merely a projection of the Simings, there were very few clues he could find. This meant that he had to find the clues on this side.

Li Huowang felt his heartbeat quicken. If they could secure their help, their chances of winning would be nearly guaranteed!

Just as Li Huowang asked the eunuchs who worshiped the God of Wealth to search for the necessary documents, he heard many

footsteps behind him. Gao Zhijian entered with his entourage of consorts and eunuchs.

“Great timing. Help me contact the other Dragon Veins. They are very knowledgeable, and I wish to learn more about the other Simings!” Li Huowang said.

“Senior Li, we can delay that for a bit. I’m here because I found you a great helper.”

Li Huowang turned around and continued looking for the documents. “No need. I’m already at the sixth stage. I’m just one step away from becoming a Siming. Your helper might not be able to help me much.”

“That might not be the case.”

Numerous voices, each superimposed onto another, came from the back.

Li Huowang looked back with puzzlement and saw a massive wall of faces before him. They were white and covered with white tassels.

“The Lion Dance Palace?”

Li Huowang recognized them. They lived beneath Qing Qiu and cultivated the Dao of Fusion.

“The world is in danger. We can help you.” Just as the enormous, round faces of the Lion Dance Palace spoke, numerous organs covered in white tassels urged towards Li Huowang.

“Stop. I know of your methods. No need to try that.”

The Lion Dance Palace stepped back, but somehow, several eunuchs and consorts had already disappeared.

“Senior Li, how about it? With their help, your cultivation can grow stronger.”

“Is that so?” Li Huowang wasn’t interested. “Thank you, but what I need are ‘Lies.’ Find Shai Zi, and let me swallow him. You’d be able to help me that way.”

“Shai Zi...”

Gao Zhijian frowned before nodding. "I understand. I will send my people to locate Shai Zi."

Li Huowang didn't have much faith in Gao Zhijian's words. He knew that Shai Zi was not an easy opponent. If he were, they wouldn't have had such a hard time trying to kill him.

Shai Zi was still alive and was now helping Fu Shengtian's Simings. This was troublesome.

"We can set it aside for now. The world is in danger, and I need your help, Senior Li. Only you can do it."

Chapter 971 - Black

“What is it? I’m busy. If it’s nothing important, find someone else.” Li Huowang waved Gao Zhijian off without looking up and turned the page.

Since he couldn’t find anything useful about the Simings, he decided to focus on the books again. The more he understood about the Simings, the better his chances of winning.

“Senior Li, this is something you must do. We cannot go to the Tianchen Kingdom.”

Li Huowang slowly turned around and looked at Gao Zhijian. “Is this related to Zuoqiu Yong?”

Gao Zhijian nodded. “Yes. The Tianchen Kingdom cannot sit this out. Since he is the lord of the Tianchen Kingdom, he must also use the Murderous Aura Command when the world is in danger. The Tianchen Kingdom must work with us.”

Gao Zhijian spoke naturally, as if the people were his.

“Do you really think it would work? Do you really think the Tianchen Kingdom would activate the Murderous Aura Command? They are roughly the same size as the Qi Kingdom, although they do have more people. Do you think Zuoqiu Yong would believe you?”

Gao Zhijian shook his head.

“I don’t think my words will sway her, but you could convince her. Senior Li, the number of people in the Tianchen Kingdom is comparable to the past Qi Kingdom. We’ll have a better chance of winning if we also use the Murderous Aura Command on them.

“We want to win. Do you not? If we lose, the people in Tianchen Kingdom will all die too.”

Li Huowang closed his book and walked out of the vault

silently. Arguing with Gao Zhijian now was pointless. Against the threat of Fu Shengtian's Simings, everyone either lived or died.

"I will talk to Zuoqiu Yong. They should still have some soldiers there."

Gao Zhijian bowed to Li Huowang. "Senior Li, thank you. I'm counting on you."

Li Huowang rolled his eyes before punching Gao Zhijian. "Stop trying to use me! You're starting to get on my nerves!"

Gao Zhijian raised his arm and stopped his guards and the eunuchs.

"Senior Li, it's as you've said. A good emperor has never been someone popular."

"You really want to be a good emperor, don't you? Fine, I'll take you to the Tianchen Kingdom! Go and talk to Zuoqiu Yong yourself! I won't do anything if she kills or maims you!"

Grabbing Gao Zhijian by the shoulder, Li Huowang teleported them from Shangjing in the Liang Kingdom to a forest in the Tianchen Kingdom.

Before them stretched a horizon dominated by a black mountain range.

"Senior Li," Gao Zhijian said, calm despite being thrown into a foreign land, "she won't harm me. Zuoqiu Yong knows that even as a Siming, she isn't safe from Fu Shengtian's forces. She'll ultimately agree.."

"Shh! Be quiet! Something's wrong!"

Li Huowang looked around and scanned his surroundings carefully.

The Tianchen Kingdom looked normal, but something felt weird to him. Something had changed.

"What's wrong? Did Fu Shengtian's Simings take over this place? Is there an ambush?"

Gao Zhijian immediately thought about the worst-case

scenario.

“No...” Li Huowang suddenly focused on the mountains. He had a feeling that they weren’t mountains but a human. As far as he knew, the area around here should’ve been covered by trees and only trees. There wasn’t supposed to be a mountain range here.

“Let’s go!”

Li Huowang grabbed Gao Zhijian and shortened the distance between them and the mountain.

Li Huowang’s frown deepened as he drew nearer.

The black mountain was moving.

They reached the base of the mountain, and Li Huowang almost vomited from the ridiculous stench.

In front of him was an entire mountain of buzzing flies.

Black flies covered the massive body of Zuoqiu Yong. That was why she looked black from afar.

“What’s going on?!” Li Huowang shouted, startling the flies.

The swarm lifted into the air, revealing a sickening sight: a mountain of maggots burrowed into her decaying flesh.

Li Huowang didn’t want to believe it, but the truth was in front of him. Zuoqiu Yong, the Siming that controlled the Heavenly Dao of Growth, was now enveloped in the Heavenly Dao of Rot.

She died, just like an unfunny joke. Her massive mountain-like corpse was rotting.

“Impossible!” Li Huowang took several steps back, his eye fixed on Zuoqiu Yong’s corpse. “We won! How could Zuoqiu Yong die?”

Li Huowang would never learn how she died. He had defeated Fu Shengtian’s Simings and even killed some of them.

“What’s going on?”

Li Huowang looked at Gao Zhijian, but he knew as much as Li Huowang. Gao Zhijian had no idea what had happened.

Li Huowang glanced at Gao Zhijian, but Gao Zhijian was equally clueless. He had no idea what had happened.

Xuan Pin, the one person who might have had an idea of what happened, was already dead. Li Huowang was next in line, and he was privy to the secrets of the Surveillance Bureau. If even he didn't know what happened, no one did.

Li Huowang plunged into Zuoqiu Yong's corpse to search for clues. He started with her brain and then moved through her body, scrutinizing every detail.

It was a long time before Li Huowang exited the corpse. Gao Zhijian rushed to meet him. "Senior Li, what happened here?"

"The Heavenly Dao of Growth..." Li Huowang said, shaking his head. "It's gone. I looked for it, but it's gone!"

Did Fu Shengtian ambush Zuoqiu Yong and take away the Heavenly Dao of Growth?

Li Huowang shook his head. *No, that can't be right. If he forcefully took it, it wouldn't have been so discreet. This is a Heavenly Dao we are talking about.*

Taking away the Heavenly Dao of Growth would have caused a natural disaster. The Heavenly Dao of Growth would have disappeared entirely from the five worlds.

However, both the Qi Kingdom and the Tianchen Kingdom are still experiencing growth. That means the Heavenly Dao is still in the Baiyu Capital.

Chapter 972 - Change

Gao Zhijian looked on anxiously, observing the confusion etched on Li Huowang's face. Zuoqiu Yong had been one of their most valuable allies.

Zuoqiu Yong was a powerful Siming, yet he was now dead without any warning. This was a perilous situation.

"Senior Li, send me back quickly!"

"Wait! Just give me a moment! I know who to ask! I need answers."

He sat down, gripping his head as if he was trying to crush it. He began to chant, "I am at the seventh stage. I am at the seventh stage. I *am* at the seventh stage!"

Reaching the seventh stage this time proved to be much more difficult than before.

He didn't know how long had passed, but when he opened his eyes, he saw Qing Wanglai and the others staring at him.

"Three Ancient Ones! You control the Heavenly Dao of Secrets. Tell me how Zuoqiu Yong died. Where did the Heavenly Dao of Growth go?"

Qing Wanglai did not answer him. Instead, Qing Wanglai whispered to Zhao Shuangdian.

Li Huowang realized something was wrong when he saw Qing Wanglai's reaction and the look on the others' faces.

He looked down and froze in shock.

"Why are you tying me up? Let me go! What the hell are you doing?"

It felt like he had returned to the time when he was ill. Bound so tightly that he couldn't even move a finger, Li Huowang's panic shifted from Zuoqiu Yong's death to his own predicament.

“Just sit still!” Ba Nanxu said, slapping the back of Li Huowang’s head. “We had to tie you up! You kept spouting crazy stuff and even ran out to steal a child’s book to read it. We finally got you out, and now you want to go back to the prison again?”

“What?”

Li Huowang was in disbelief, and a terrifying thought popped into his mind. “Did my illness relapse? Am I not able to tell the real side from the fake one?”

Strapped to the bed, he had no choice but to accept the possibility. It was as if he had returned to the past, with everything he did on the other side being mirrored on the other. All because of that one button.

“Is it because I separated myself too clearly this time?”

Li Huowang remembered how he had once accepted Yi Donglai’s treatment. He remembered the two different sets of memories in his brain. The more he pondered, the worse his headache became.

“No! I can’t merge them! I need to separate them!”

He hadn’t expected Fu Shengtian’s methods to be so weird. To think that the button was like a poison that could slow him down like this.

Li Huowang was Ji Zai, the Siming controlling the Heavenly Dao of Bewilderment. He had to maintain it at all times, but Fu Shengtian’s way of undoing it was surprising.

With war on the horizon, Li Huowang knew he had to regain control. If he couldn’t, confronting Fu Shengtian would be nothing short of suicide.

“What’s wrong? What happened on the other side?”

Zhao Shuangdian asked. Her serious expression clearly indicated that she didn’t think Li Huowang’s illness was regular.

“It’s Fu Shengtian’s attack! That old beggar’s button... Even though it’s dead, its attack is still affecting me. I never thought it

would affect me for so long.”

Li Huowang told Zhao Shuangdian about his current situation and Zuoqiu Yong’s death.

After grasping his situation, Zhao Shuangdian began calculating something on her laptop.

The others helped untie Li Huowang, realizing he was coherent again.

Li Huowang’s heart remained heavy. He could feel himself slipping further into his past self

“Zhijian, find something to tie me up, just like how we did last time.”

He could see Gao Zhijian, but his figure was blurry, and it continued to dissipate.

Gao Zhijian found some vines and bound Li Huowang tightly. Only then did Li Huowang breathe a sigh of relief and turn to Zhao Shuangdian. “How about it? Did you calculate anything?”

Zhao Shuangdian stopped tapping her keyboard, showing no sign of agreement or disagreement. “I’ve calculated something about the Zuoqiu Yong you’ve mentioned. I will handle it.”

However, Li Huowang had already set aside the issue of Zuoqiu Yong’s death. He was more worried about his predicament.

Zuoqiu Yong was dead, but he was still alive. He didn’t know what kind of Siming Zhao Shuangdian was, but since she said she would take care of it, then he would just leave it to her.

“Alright, you will deal with Zuoqiu Yong. But what about me? Could you solve it?”

Zhao Shuangdian answered him with a question instead. “What did you do to solve it last time?”

“Last time? I accepted Yi Donglai’s treatment.”

“Then you would have to do it again. Since he could treat you last time, he can treat you this time too. Go and find him.”

Li Huowang frowned. “I know he can treat me, but would he

help me this time?”

He showed her his broken arm.

Despite the bandage on his arm, the loss of his hand was still very clear.

Li Huowang could already envision Yi Donglai's reaction to his injuries—he'd probably be dismissed as a madman again. He would likely believe that Li Huowang was beyond any hope of recovery.

“It's not a big deal to ask someone for help. We can help you form a plan,” Wu Qi said.

Before she could continue, Ba Nanxu said, “Does he have a family member? Can we kidnap someone and threaten him?”

“What are you talking about? Are we kidnappers? Do you want to attract the attention of the Laws?”

Li Huowang huffed. Yi Donglai was helping him out of kindness. How could they treat Yi Donglai like an enemy?

Li Huowang pondered before explaining his plan. “I can try to lure him here to meet everyone. Maybe he would understand us and know what's happening. I trust him, and I know he will find us.”

Yi Donglai had always thought that Li Huowang's other world was a hallucination. If he could show Yi Donglai proof, Li Huowang might be able to convince Yi Donglai.

Chapter 973 - Yi Donglai

Li Huowang was reluctant to implicate Yi Donglai, remembering his past help.

Still, there was no choice now. If he failed, everything would be destroyed.

He was certain Yi Donglai would assist them once he understood their predicament.

Having made up his mind, Li Huowang stood up and turned to Zhao Shuangdian. "Let me know the moment you find out anything about Zuoqiu Yong."

Li Huowang then departed for the underground garage.

Yang Na followed until Qing Wanglai called out, "Where are you going?"

"Where else? I'm going to the White Tower Prison to find Yi Donglai. I will bring him here so you guys can explain everything to him," Li Huowang replied.

"How will you go there?"

"With the motorbike."

"You want to ride a bike with just a single arm?" Qing Wanglai pointed at Li Huowang's broken arm. "Never mind that. Let me help you."

Qing Wanglai took out his phone and started dialing.

As Qing Wanglai started talking, Li Huowang reassured Yang Na, trying to get her to relax.

"Hello? Boss? Hi, how are you? Who am I? Ah, have you forgotten me? I'm Cui Feng. Yes, that same Cui Feng..."

Li Huowang frowned. Qing Wanglai was leveraging his connections again, though whether it would work remained uncertain.

After speaking to the person on the other side of the phone, Qing Wanglai hung up and reassured Li Huowang, saying, “Done. I just obtained Yi Donglai’s address.”

“Why do we need to go to his house? I want him to meet everyone here so you can explain to him!”

“Then we can follow you, but he cannot come here.”

“Why?”

Qing Wanglai reclined further on the sofa. “Since Yi Donglai can treat you... what projection do you think he is? Don’t trust others too much. He might not be aligned with us.”

“Yi Donglai? Projection?”

Li Huowang shook his head. “He’s not involved with us. Maybe he’s not a projection.”

“No. Everything on earth is a projection of something. It’s just that most people don’t realize it. Do you know what I’m afraid of? I’m afraid that he’s the projection of the Laws.”

Li Huowang realized what was going on. Qing Wanglai’s worldview contradicted itself, but now wasn’t the time to argue. He could set it aside as long as he received treatment from Yi Donglai.

“Fine, you’re right. Still, even if he’s the projection of the Laws, we have to find him. He’s the only one who can treat me, and Fu Shengtian’s attack could come at any moment. We need to move now.”

They set off immediately. Wu Qi’s RV, Qing Wanglai’s luxury car, and Zhao Shuangdian’s car all departed simultaneously towards Yi Donglai’s house.

During the drive, Li Huowang contemplated what to say and which evidence to present to convince Yi Donglai.

While he was thinking, the three cars stopped in front of a residential area. It was called Dragon Lake Residential Area.

“Block 16, second tower, 18th floor, unit 1803. He’s off duty today, so he should be at home.”

Qing Wanglai stated Yi Donglai's address with a scary accuracy.

Putting on caps and face masks, they avoided security cameras as they entered the building.

The elevator was cramped since everyone entered at the same time. Li Huowang stood in the corner, protecting Yang Na with his broken arm.

Breaking the silence, Zhao Shuangdian remarked, "Their tactics were tricky this time, but it proves your claims were true. They're targeting you now. However, you don't need to worry. We know how special you are, and we'll protect you. You're not alone."

Despite her words, Li Huowang wasn't reassured. He looked at her carefully before averting his gaze. Zhao Shuangdian's actions on the boat had revealed her true nature. No matter how kind her words sounded, he couldn't forget what he'd seen.

Compared to Zhao Shuangdian, Qing Wanglai was much more straightforward.

"Relax. You're a vital tool for fighting other projections. We won't let you break so easily. We'll fix you up as best as we can."

Li Huowang looked at Qing Wanglai and sneered. "Aren't you free from the burden of being compassionate?"

Li Huowang still couldn't figure out why Zhuge Yuan, a compassionate person, was Qing Wanglai's Twisted One. Qing Wanglai was the exact opposite.

Ding. The elevator opened, interrupting his train of thought. He walked out with the others before finding Yi Donglai's apartment.

He rang the doorbell.

Yi Donglai opened the door as expected.

Li Huowang found it strange to see Yi Donglai in casual clothes, as it was only the second time he had encountered him outside the White Tower Prison. In the prison, Yi Donglai had always donned a white doctor's coat.

The apartment was minimalist, dominated by gray and blue tones. The shoe rack by the door suggested he lived alone.

“Li... Li Huowang?”

Yi Donglai could not believe his eyes. He never imagined that Li Huowang, a missing hospital patient, would appear at his doorstep.

“Doctor Yi, I need your help. I’ve relapsed and need your treatment again,” Li Huowang said earnestly.

Yi Donglai laughed. “So now you realize you’re ill? That you need treatment? I never thought I’d hear those words from you!”

He grabbed Li Huowang and took out his phone. “Hey, it’s me! Call Mr. Yang to bring an ambulance...”

Qing Wanglai snatched Yi Donglai’s phone before he could finish his sentence. The others entered Yi Donglai’s house and started inspecting everything. They turned off every single electrical appliance that could potentially send out messages.

They checked every nook and cranny to ensure they didn't miss anything.

Zhao Shuangdian even took out her laptop and started calculating something.

Forced onto the sofa, Yi Donglai watched them anxiously.

Li Huowang poured a cup of water and gave it to Yi Donglai. He then pointed at Qing Wanglai. “Doctor Yi, that person is Qing Wanglai. He’s the postdoc student that I told you about.”

Chapter 974 - Convince

Inside Yi Donglai's house, Li Huowang recounted everything that had happened to him, insisting it wasn't just in his head.

"See, they aren't hallucinations. They are real. You can touch them!"

With a cup in hand, Yi Donglai surveyed the room. "Where did you meet them?"

"Doctor Yi, I've told you before. They're the Simings from Baiyu Capital! Have you forgotten? I told you they existed! There really is another world."

Yi Donglai looked around. "Who's the leader here?"

"I am," Zhao Shuangdian replied.

Yi Donglai narrowed his eyes. "Do you think it's amusing to manipulate a mentally ill man? Do you believe that if someone with his condition kills, they won't face any consequences? Is that why you're using him to kill people?"

"Let me make this clear. According to the law, each one of you would be held responsible. Any crime committed by Li Huowang would fall on you!"

"Wait! They're not deceiving me!" Li Huowang protested, but Yi Donglai remained unconvinced.

"Li Huowang, my thesis is public. Anyone could use it to impersonate your hallucinations and deceive you. They're using you!"

"You think he's Qing Wanglai? He's not! He's just some fraud calling himself that! Qing Wanglai is just a name—anyone could claim to be him!"

"No! That's not true! He's the real Qing Wanglai!" Li Huowang pressed his hands to his temples. He didn't know how to explain it.

“Why are you having trouble with it? Why do you need to convince him? Just threaten him so he can start treating you.”

Ba Nanxu unsheathed a dagger, driving it into the table before Yi Donglai. Her tattooed finger jabbed toward Li Huowang. “Treat him, or we’ll skin you alive.”

Yi Donglai adjusted his glasses, shaking his head in disbelief.

Ba Nanxu wasn’t bluffing. She picked up the dagger and slammed its hilt into Yi Donglai’s little finger.

“What are you doing?!” Li Huowang stood up, shoving her away.

He examined Yi Donglai’s hand. His nail was nearly detached, and his bruised finger was bleeding heavily.

Undeterred, Ba Nanxu stepped forward again. “Treat him, or I’ll break every finger and toe you’ve got.”

Yi Donglai hissed and spoke in disbelief, saying, “Treat him? You want to use him while asking me to treat him? Isn’t that contradictory?”

“No,” Zhao Shuangdian replied calmly. “We don’t need you to cure him entirely. Just treat him enough to get results, like you did before. We’ll pay whatever it takes.”

Yi Donglai’s phone dinged. He picked it up and saw a bunch of zeros on the message. He was utterly stunned.

He looked at the ragtag group before him, their mismatched appearances undermining any sense of organization.

“Doctor Yi, please, I’m begging you,” Li Huowang said. “This is serious. Everything I’ve told you is true!”

Li Huowang tried to explain, but Yi Donglai couldn’t believe it. “Li Huowang, you’re my patient. I know your history better than anyone. You don’t have to explain it to me.”

“No, it’s not the same. I wasn’t a Siming last time! Fu Shengtian didn’t attack us last time either! Everything has changed now!”

“Oh? Fine, I can trust you, but on one condition. Repeat

everything you've just said to your parents. If you can do that, I'll trust you."

"Why are you dragging them in? They are not involved in this!"

Li Huowang recalled something and pulled Yang Na beside him. "Ask her! She knows that I'm telling the truth!"

Yi Donglai sighed when he saw Yang Na nodding. "You two are too young. There are a lot of bad people outside. Don't get tricked by them."

Zhao Shuangdian spoke up after seeing that Yi Donglai still didn't trust them. "Doctor Yi, let's be rational. If you think we are using Li Huowang's identity as a mental patient to do our deeds, why do we want you to treat him? Isn't it better for us the crazier he is?"

"Also, what kind of crime organization would give you so much money without any conditions?"

Yi Donglan couldn't answer. Regardless, he still had reservations and couldn't believe them.

Zhao Shuangdian took two steps back and touched her earlobes.

Ba Nanxu broke the silence, her forked tongue flicking at a photo frame. "Doctor Yi, this little girl must mean a lot to you, right?"

Everyone turned and saw Ba Nanxu licking a photo frame. In the photo, they could see Yi Donglai smiling with a young girl holding a balloon. The girl was about eight years old.

"What are you doing?!" Yi Donglai's voice cracked with panic.

Ba Shengqing took Yi Donglai's phone and handed it to his sister.

"She's important to you, isn't she?" Ba Nanxu smirked. "I doubt it'd take long to find information on her through your phone."

"Fine! You win!" Yi Donglai's composure shattered, his face

pale. He didn't know who they were, but he didn't dare to take any chances. "What do you want me to do?"

Ba Nanxu threw the photo frame to the ground, causing it to shatter into countless pieces. "Treat that damned crazy bastard."

"Fine! I'll do it. I'll do it."

Ba Nanxu scoffed and looked at everyone else. "Are you guys so free that you could slowly talk it out? You should just be as straightforward as me."

Li Huowang felt guilty because they were threatening Yi Donglai, but the situation was dire. There was no time to waste. He needed to get treatment now.

"Sorry, Doctor Yi. Once everything is over, I will come and apologize to you formally."

Li Huowang approached Yi Donglai to receive his treatment.

Chapter 975 - Treatment

Li Huowang took a deep breath and looked at Yi Donglai with anticipation. He needed the treatment immediately.

Li Huowang couldn't see the blurry Gao Zhijian anymore. His situation was critical.

Yi Donglai glanced around at everyone and then sat before Li Huowang. "Little Li, tell me everything you've experienced, and don't leave out any details. To cure you, I need to know everything."

Li Huowang nodded. "Once I received your treatment, I became Ji Zai, but it wasn't as easy as that. The me from the other world was real too.

"I was split in two. Over there, I am my past self, while here, I am my future self."

Yi Donglai raised a hand to stop Li Huowang. "Wait, I need you to elaborate. I'm not sure I understand what you're talking about."

"To put it plainly, I'm the Siming in charge of Bewilderment. I'm supposed to always remain bewildered, but Fu Shengtian's Siming stopped me from doing so. I'm the only one who can reset time without forgetting what happened before. That's why they are targeting me."

Yi Donglai frowned as he listened to Li Huowang's explanation. He tried his best to piece the information together.

At first, he struggled to make sense of it, but slowly, the threads of Li Huowang's experiences began to weave into a coherent picture.

Instead of diving straight into treatment, Yi Donglai stood and rummaged through his home, gathering an assortment of objects: an apple, a bowl, a fork, and a succulent from his balcony.

“What kind of treatment is this? Don’t think you can fool us. If you try anything, we’ll make sure you regret it,” Ba Nanxu said, waving her dagger across Yi Donglai’s face.

“You’re free to doubt me, but these items are essential for the treatment. Feel free to find another doctor if you like. However, I’m certain I’m the only one who can treat Li Huowang.”

Yi Donglai was abnormally adamant when it came to his specialty.

“You have guts. I think I like you a little.” Ba Nanxu stepped back and stood beside Zhao Shuangdian, who was busy typing on her laptop.

Li Huowang was also curious about the purpose of the items Yi Donglai had gathered.

Yi Donglai, on the other hand, stared at Li Huowang while he placed the items down.

Yi Donglai held onto Li Huowang’s hand, which was missing a couple of fingernails. He looked at Li Huowang with disappointment when he saw his missing arm and eye. ”Li Huowang, did you find them to play the bad cop while you play the good cop? Would you threaten me with the same method if they weren’t here?

“I’m already regretting taking your case. Locking you away forever might’ve been the smarter option.”

Li Huowang was clearly displeased with Yi Donglai’s words. However, as he remembered the countless soldiers who had lost their lives and Xuan Pin’s sacrifice, he clenched his teeth. “Yes, you’re right! I cannot lose. If I lose, everything’s over!”

“Very well.” Yi Donglai nodded. He seemed unsurprised by Li Huowang’s reaction. “Li Huowang, look at me. Look into my eyes.”

Li Huowang complied.

“Ji Zai,” Yi Donglai spoke slowly, “do you know who I am? Do you know why I helped you and turned you into a Siming?”

Li Huowang shook his head, uncertainty clouding his expression.

Suddenly, Yi Donglai stood, holding the apple and succulent up. "That's because I am Da Nuo! I am the five worlds themselves!"

"Pfft!" A loud snicker broke the tension.

Both of them turned to see Ba Nanxu. "Sorry, please continue."

Ba Nanxu laughed when she saw their faces. She turned around, but her shoulders were still shaking from her snickering.

Yi Donglai resumed his treatment plan. "Ji Zai, look closely. I am the world itself—I am the Grand Siming!"

Li Huowang hesitated, his expression doubtful. "Are you sure? Are you really Da Nuo? But Da Nuo has been crazy since the beginning!"

"Hahahaha!" Ba Nanxu's shrill laughter interrupted them again. She rested her head on her brother's shoulder and laughed so hard that she almost fainted.

Yi Donglai put down the items in his hands, visibly upset. "I can't continue my treatment like this. I need a quiet environment to do this."

Zhao Shuangdian kicked Ba Nanxu as a reminder. "Continue. This is just an accident."

Yi Donglai looked around and sighed. "It's too spacious here. Let's move to my study."

Yi Donglai picked up the apple and succulent, while Li Huowang picked up the fork and bowl. Then, they both walked towards the study.

Yi Donglai suddenly placed the apple and succulent in Li Huowang's arms. "Go ahead to the study. I need to use the restroom."

Just as Yi Donglai had entered, Ba Shengqing followed him inside to monitor him.

Li Huowang curiously held onto the four items. *Is Yi Donglai*

really Da Nuo? If so, what do the four items I'm holding represent? What did he give me? Wait, what if he's not Da Nuo and is just trying to treat me? And if he's not Da Nuo, whose projection is he? How is he going to treat me?

Yi Donglai's study was approximately twenty square feet in size. The left wall was adorned with a collection of medical books, while a khaki-colored couch could be spotted on the right. The room had a minimalist aesthetic, with no other furniture or decorations.

Li Huowang was still troubled by the question he had. *He's treating me now. If I want it to work like last time, does that mean I have to trust his words?*

Despite waiting a considerable time, no one else entered the study. He looked up to find that they were still outside. "What's going on?"

Li Huowang placed all four items on the sofa and reached for the entrance.

Just as he got up, he saw them entering the study.

A faint voice could be heard the moment Yi Donglai and Li Huowang brushed shoulders.

"Li... quick... wake..."

Chapter 976 - Switch

“Li... wake... up...”

Li Huowang's trembled all over. He stumbled backward, his eyes wide with disbelief as though confronted by a monstrous beast. His gaze darted to Yi Donglai, panic written across his face. “What did you just say?!”

“What?” Yi Donglai frowned, confused by Li Huowang's outburst.

“It wasn't you? Didn't you just speak?”

“No,” Yi Donglai replied firmly.

“If it wasn't you, then there's only one explanation. That voice... it was Gao Zhijian's! This is bad. He's in danger!” Li Huowang exclaimed, his voice rising sharply.

“Dr. Yi! Think of something! Hurry, find a way to send me back! Gao Zhijian is the Dragon Vein, and he's my junior! He can't be in danger!” Desperation gripped Li Huowang as he lunged forward, grabbing Yi Donglai by the collar.

“I haven't even started treating you yet! How can I make you experience delusions again?!” Yi Donglai staggered back with a trace of fear in his eyes.

Li Huowang stood anxiously, his mind racing for a solution.

Suddenly, he stopped and shouted, “I don't care who you are! If you dare touch the Dragon Vein of Great Liang. Try it if you have the guts!”

“Hahaha~” A piercing laugh echoed, causing Li Huowang's ears to throb painfully.

However, Li Huowang ignored the pain entirely. He looked up at Zhao Shuangdian. “Check your computer! See if it's someone from Fu Shengtian attacking!”

Zhao Shuangdian slowly shook her head. “Senior Li, I’m fine. No one is threatening me.”

Li Huowang froze and stared blankly at Zhao Shuangdian.

“No threats? There’s no one from the Tianchen Kingdom threatening Gao Zhijian right now. Then whose voice was that just now?”

Li Huowang looked back hesitantly at Yi Donglai. *Was it his voice? Why would he want to wake me up? Could it be that I’m not actually awake right now?*

Or... could it be that the world I’m perceiving now is fake?

“Wake...” The harsh voice returned, causing Li Huowang to wince in pain as he clutched his ears.

Ba Nanxu laughed again, sounding extremely unpleasant. Li Huowang had never seen her laugh so much before.

“No... Something’s wrong! Why is she laughing? Ba-Hui, you who controls pain, why are you laughing?! What are you laughing at?!” Li Huowang lunged forward, pinning her down.

“What are you doing? You’re going mad.”

“Let her go!”

“So troublesome.”

The others rushed to restrain him, struggling to pull him away. But as he stared into Ba Nanxu’s face, a realization struck him like lightning. “I understand now! I finally know why you’re laughing! Somewhere, something extremely painful is bringing you joy! Ba-Hui, I understand you! Because I used to do the same thing!”

The kind of agony that could make Ba-Hui laugh like this was no ordinary pain—it was something unimaginable.

Ba Nanxu didn’t seem angry at being pinned down. She merely smirked, her laughter taunting him. “Hahaha, trying to entertain me? You’re just a high school student, so that’s a tall order.”

“Cut the crap! What are you doing? Answer me! What happened, and where? Where is this pain coming from?!”

Li Huowang was about to look around. However, the entire study and everyone in it turned into piles of sand, scattering across the floor.

Gao Zhijian stood nearby, staring at the frantic Li Huowang with wide eyes. “Senior Li... are you okay?”

He was back. Somehow, the scene had switched again.

“Shh... wait a second... Let me think! Li Huowang's expression showed torment. He raised both hands and repeatedly hit his own head, trying to use the pain to clear his mind.

As his head began to bleed, his figure flickered and disappeared, only to reappear before Gao Zhijian once again.

“Where are the fifteen Dragon Veins now? They haven’t been sent away yet, right?!”

“Not yet. Senior Li, only you can deliver them. They’re still coiled at the imperial temple. Why are you asking about the Dragon Veins?”

“I’m going to the Baiyu Capital! I need to figure out what’s going on here!” Li Huowang shouted hysterically. He grabbed Gao Zhijian by the shoulders and, with one swift step, returned to the imperial city of the Great Liang.

They were now before the imperial temple. Li Huowang slammed his hands against the ground and roared.

A deafening crash followed, and an enormous bronze tree erupted from the earth, shattering the temple as it rose. The writhing Dragon Veins were hung around it.

Six arms grew from Li Huowang.

He chanted and began to activate the Dragon-Slaying Immortal-Killing Array.

The invisible Dragon Qi swirled around him, gradually being absorbed into his body. The Dragon Qi had once transformed everything it touched into dragons. Now, it had no effect on Li Huowang, who was very proficient in his “Truth” cultivation.

With a powerful stomp, Li Huowang shot toward the heavens while surrounded by Dragon Qi. He pierced through the clouds and the stars beyond, breaking into the outer world.

Strange, indescribable, and grotesque creatures emerged from the vastness of space as he journeyed among the stars.

When Li Huowang arrived, these chaotic beings all turned to look at him.

However, they seemed to sense something and quickly vanished. A colorless jade tablet was suspended in the void, drawing in the chaotic beings.

The tablet seemed to be tethered to something deep in the extreme darkness. The tablet rose and fell as those formless beings writhed and flowed.

Through its doorway, Li Huowang saw something moving inside the Baiyu Capital. Many things were moving. The Simings of Baiyu Capital were all there!

Wrapped in Dragon Qi, Li Huowang gritted his teeth and charged inside.

However, to his shock, as he passed through the hole in the jade tablet, he came out the other side. *What?! How can this be?!*

Suspended in mid-air, Li Huowang looked at the massive, mountain-like Ox Tail Gate before him. He could not believe that there was now a day when he couldn't enter.

He had been able to enter when he had followed Dan Yangzi, but he was now barred from entering.

"Let me in! I'm Ji Zai!" Li Huowang roared, then charged toward the Ox Tail Gate again.

This time, just as he was about to enter again, everything around him became transparent. A strange sense of stasis enveloped his entire self.

Li Huowang once more found himself ejected from the other side of the Ox Tail Gate.

Chapter 977 - Qing

Li Huowang turned around after going back and forth several times. The massive Ox Tail Gate floated in the air, unchanged.

Li Huowang didn't try again. He finally understood. It wasn't that he couldn't enter, but rather that someone was deliberately preventing him from going in. Something was happening inside the Baiyu Capital.

Who is it? Is it the Siming from Fu Shengtian who came over to ambush me? Li Huowang shook his head, quickly dismissing the idea. If a Siming from Fu Shengtian were inside the Baiyu Capital, the Simings there wouldn't have time to sit idly by and watch him.

Could it be one of the Simings inside the Baiyu Capital? But who could it be, and what exactly are they trying to do?

After pondering for a moment, he suddenly came up with an idea. He looked at the massive jade gate and shouted, "Zhao Shuangdian! Qing Wanglai! Can you hear me? I'm talking to you now!

"Don't reply! I don't know what you're saying right now! What I need is for you to watch each other closely. Pay attention to any unusual behavior! I need to figure out who's stopping me from entering the Baiyu Capital!"

To avoid misunderstandings, he quickly added, "Don't get me wrong. I'm not suspecting you. I'm just using the process of elimination. If you're not the problem, then one of the other Simings in the Baiyu Capital has to be blocking me!

"Help me this time if you want me to help you in the future!"

Li Huowang took a deep breath and waited silently for a few seconds. Then, he dashed toward the Baiyu Capital again.

This time, just as he was about to make it inside, that strange

sensation of stasis reappeared.

Feeling himself slipping through again, he shouted, “Keep an eye on everyone else! Find out who’s messing with me!”

The feeling of being held back vanished, and he finally broke into the Baiyu Capital.

The area around him instantly transformed into a kaleidoscope of marvelous and shifting scenes.

There were more than a dozen enormous figures, each as massive as a mountain. They were melting, twisting and writhing in agony as their haunting wails filled the air.

Even as their flesh and forms continually liquefied, they somehow managed to heal themselves, enduring unimaginable pain.

“Zuoqiu Yong?! Wasn’t he dead?” Li Huowang quickly realized that it was Zuoqiu Yong’s ten emotions and eight sufferings.

Zuoqiu Yong’s physical shell lay rotting on the ground. The real Zuoqiu Yong had long been dragged into the Baiyu Capital.

Zuoqiu Yong’s form had already been massive, but now there were eighteen of him. They tangled together, twisting and melting into a monstrous mass that resembled a molten, flesh-covered planet.

Zuoqiu Yong wailed as his ten emotions and eight sufferings slowly melted away. Li Huowang finally understood. Ba-Hui was reveling in Zuoqiu Yong’s suffering. Only the torment of a Siming could make her laugh uncontrollably.

Zuoqiu Yong’s figure continued melting as wisps of white substance filtered out of him and gradually dissipated into the air.

That substance was unique. However, Li Huowang recognized it immediately since he was a Siming himself—it was the Heavenly Dao of Growth.

Although the space around him seemed empty, it was clear that something had ambushed Zuoqiu Yong.

Now, It was trying to seize the Heavenly Dao of Growth.

No! I must help Zuoqiu Yong! Li Huowang rushed toward him without further thought.

As he ran, he shouted to the others, “Can’t you see the enemy? What are you doing?! Fight back!”

As Li Huowang neared Zuoqiu Yong, he felt something brush against him in the empty space around him. Reaching out instinctively, he grasped at the sensation—a fleeting, hair-like feeling slipping through his fingers.

At that moment, a shadowy figure shot out from the side with an afterimage. It crashed into Li Huowang, sending him flying out of the Baiyu Capital and back into the star-filled sky.

Before he could react, the world around Li Huowang shifted again. He was back in Yi Donglai’s study, with everyone staring at him.

Ba-Hui’s piercing laughter continued, but Li Huowang fixed his gaze on Qing Wanglai.

He raised his right hand, the sensation of touching something still lingering. “You may have stopped me, but I touched you. Three Pure Ones! It was you! You did it!”

“Li Huowang, what’s wrong with you? You can’t be like this right now,” Qing Wanglai said with concern.

“Don’t play dumb! I saw it clearly—it was you! You killed Zuoqiu Yong, and you’re trying to steal his Heavenly Dao of Growth! I couldn’t see you, but I felt you!”

“Qing Wanglai! What are you trying to do?! You already control the Heavenly Dao of Secrets, so why are you after Zuoqiu Yong’s Heavenly Dao of Growth?!”

“Aren’t you supposed to be smart?! Fu Shengtian is watching us, yet you’re stirring up internal strife at a time like this!”

Qing Wanglai pushed up his glasses and looked at Yi Donglai with dissatisfaction. “Dr. Yi, what did you do to him? Did you feel

threatened by us? Are you trying to sow discord with some psychological trick?”

Pulling out a handgun from his pocket, he continued, “I’m telling you, it won’t work. And if Li Huowang doesn’t get better today, I’m afraid things won’t end well.”

Li Huowang’s face twisted with anger. He stepped forward, shielding Yi Donglai. “Stop trying to change the subject! Qing Wanglai, you owe me an explanation!”

Li Huowang had already suspected Qing Wanglai was up to something. Qing Wanglai had hardly done anything during their fights with Fu Shengtian.

Li Huowang previously believed that Qing Wanglai was incompetent. Now, he was more worried that he had secretly joined forces with Fu Shengtian long ago.

“Li Huowang’s completely lost it. Let’s tie him up. Zhao Lei, Sister Chen, give me a hand.”

As Qing Wanglai moved forward with the others, Yang Na stepped in front of Li Huowang, knife in hand.

Zhao Shuangdian, holding a laptop, joined her as the second line of defense. “Qing Wanglai, I’m also curious about Li Huowang’s questions.”

Qing Wanglai smiled helplessly. “Seriously, Zhao Shuangdian? Don’t tell me you actually believe him.”

Zhao Shuangdian looked at Li Huowang and nodded. “Yes, I believe him. At the very least, the information he provided adds up. On the other hand, I can’t see through you.”

Chapter 978 - Questioning

Zhao Shuangdian and Qing Wanglai faced each other, their respective followers standing firm behind them. The atmosphere in the study grew tense.

As an outsider, Yi Donglai hesitated as he watched the situation unfold. He seemed to be contemplating the implications of what was happening before him.

Qing Wanglai suddenly chuckled and turned to Zhao Shuangdian. "I have my secrets, and I am within my rights not to share them. I suggest we set this matter aside for now. After all, no matter who dies, it will only weaken us in future battles.

"Zhao Shuangdian, don't forget about our previous collaboration. Let's not jeopardize the bigger picture over a minor, unsubstantiated issue, shall we?"

Zhao Shuangdian remained silent, as if weighing something in her mind.

Since she didn't speak, Li Huowang stepped forward. "You didn't just kill Zuoqiu Yong, did you? Wasn't the death of Qian Fu, the Siming of Death, also related to you?"

Li Huowang approached Qing Wanglai and locked gazes with him. "You're also after the Heavenly Dao of Death, aren't you? Qian Fu was on your side, but you didn't hesitate to take action just for the Heavenly Dao.

"Qing Wanglai, you're truly cold-blooded.

"Unfortunately for you, Qian Fu wasn't as foolish as you thought. When Zhao Shuangdian came to help, he passed the Heavenly Dao of Death to the Heavenly Mater!" Li Huowang said, gripping Yang Na's hand tightly.

"Three Pure Ones, how greedy can you be? Why do you want

everything? What are you planning to do with all these Heavenly Daos? Whose side are you really on?"

Qing Wanglai slightly lowered his head, his glasses reflecting the dim light and obscuring his eyes. "I'm naturally on our side, no doubt about that. However, I have plans that I can't share with you."

"Why? I just want to know why! Do you always talk in riddles because you control the Heavenly Dao of Secrets? The enemy is at the gates, and you're still hiding things!"

"Because I don't trust you," Qing Wanglai replied. "Why should I? You're a madman."

The words struck Li Huowang, leaving him frozen.

"Haha... you don't trust me..." Li Huowang shook his head, slowly backing away. "You don't trust me... I should have known..."

"That's right, I don't trust you. Satisfied now?" Qing Wanglai asked with a smile.

"I have my own plans. Besides, the only reason we're even working together is because of the circumstances, isn't it? It makes sense that I wouldn't share my plans with you.

"Besides, now that you've joined Zhao Shuangdian's side, do I still need to get your approval for everything?"

Noticing that Li Huowang's expression was growing increasingly twisted, Chen Hongyu stepped in to mediate. "Alright, alright, let's stop this. We haven't even fought yet, and you two are already at each other's throats. How is that going to work?

"We're here to treat Li Huowang, aren't we? Why are we getting more and more off track? Let's focus on the main issue."

With that, everyone turned to look at Yi Donglai. He was sitting while holding a notebook, seemingly jotting down notes on everyone.

"What are you writing? Stop it. Let's get this treatment over with so we can leave."

As the conversation shifted to Li Huowang's condition, a voice suddenly called out, "Wait!"

It was from Li Huowang. The same Li Huowang who had just been shaking his head now wore a look of intense hatred and disgust as he stared at Qing Wanglai.

"It wasn't just Zuoqiu Yong or Qian Fu! What you've done goes far beyond that! You've been preparing for this for a long time! I finally understand!"

Qing Wanglai smiled faintly. "Whatever I'm planning is none of your business, Li Huowang."

"Not my business? Really? Then why did you change my name? Why did you steal the 'Wang' from my name?"

"You didn't just target Zuoqiu Yong and Qian Fu. You've been plotting against me for a long time!" Li Huowang's expression became increasingly ferocious. "And you did it by using your Twisted One Zhuge Yuan! Tell me! What did you take from me?!"

Li Huowang was sure that having a Siming's name altered wasn't as simple as losing part of it. The Three Pure Ones had greater ambitions, and the removal of the "Wang" from his name surely represented something important.

"Hey, calm down. We're all on the same side. Let's sit down and talk," Wu Qi intervened to calm the situation.

"Sister Wu, are you really helping him? Are you overwhelmed with managing five worlds as a Siming? The Three Pure Ones even placed Zhuge Yuan's statue in the Righteous Monastery! And you're still helping him! Don't you realize that he's also secretly tampered with your Heavenly Dao?"

The thought of the statue of Zhuge Yuan with the cinnabar mark on its forehead made Li Huowang seethe with rage.

Zhuge Yuan was his brother, but the Three Pure Ones had manipulated him like a puppet. The Three Pure Ones exploited Zhuge Yuan's reputation for saving the Great Qi even after his

death, all to seize the Heavenly Dao of the Five Dhyani Buddhas.

He had insulted Zhuge Yuan and toyed with Li Huowang like a fool!

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, Li Huowang. Your condition is worsening. You should get treated soon.”

Li Huowang shook his head. “No, your schemes are far more important than my illness! If we don’t deal with you, the entire Baiyu Capital could be destroyed!”

“Growth, death, bewilderment, flesh... Do you think I haven’t noticed? You’ve been systematically stealing all our Heavenly Daos! You’re willing to kill us all if necessary! You’ve wanted everything from the start!”

Zhao Shuangdian began calculating rapidly, and the sound of tapping filled the room.

Everyone turned their eyes to Qing Wanglai, waiting for his explanation.

“I truly don’t know what you’re talking about. Everyone, do you really believe him over me?” Qing Wanglai adjusted his glasses. “Do you really think I would sacrifice all of you for the sake of some Heavenly Dao?”

Ba Nanxu approached Li Huowang with her brother, laughing softly. “He may be mad, but he couldn’t make up something this elaborate. He’s not smart enough.”

Wu Qi hesitated and looked at Qing Wanglai. “Qing Wanglai, could you explain your plan? Is it really related to the Heavenly Daos, like Li Huowang said? If there’s a misunderstanding, clear it up.”

Under everyone’s gaze, Qing Wanglai took out two dice and began swiftly spinning them between his long, pale fingers.

Chapter 979 - Shai Zi

Shai Zi?

Li Huowang stared at the constantly spinning dice in Qing Wanglai's hand, recalling what Shai Zi had said before. *I'll help whoever's winning.*

Shai Zi had indeed spoken the truth. The one he had believed would win wasn't Li Huowang—it was Qing Wanglai!

There were two Shai Zis, which meant that the Imperial Preceptor of the Great Liang was also one of Qing Wanglai's people!

No, it's worse than that! Qing Wanglai stole Doulao's Heavenly Dao long ago!

Li Huowang abruptly looked at Zhao Lei, who appeared to be fading into the background more and more.

Qing Wanglai gently pushed his glasses up on his nose, his gaze sweeping over the room. A slight smile appeared on his face.

"It seems I can't leave without an explanation, can I?"

He turned to Li Huowang. "You're right. It was me. In fact, I've done much more, but it seems you haven't figured that out yet.

"From the very beginning, you were just one of many pawns under my control. Everything was in my grasp.

"But you've always been restless, repeatedly slipping out of my control. It's been quite the headache.

"My original plan was to create a competent assistant, nothing more. Yet here you are, managing to get this far. Sometimes, I can't understand what goes on in your head. You consistently bypass the optimal choice, leaving me at a loss on how to guide you.

"Of course, your stubborn progress isn't entirely your doing. Certain people have interfered at every turn." His gaze moved to the siblings, Ba Shengqing and Ba Nanxu.

Qing Wanglai's gaze shifted again and finally settled on Zhao Shuangdian. "I painstakingly set up my pawn, only for it to become someone else's gift. Zhao Shuangdian, I underestimated you."

Li Huowang stared in disbelief at the Three Pure Ones.

Ba-Hui belonged to Zhao Shuangdian, and Doulao was under Qing Wanglai! Under Ba-Hui was the Ao Jing Sect, and under Doulao was the Sitting Oblivion Dao.

From the very start, he had been entangled with these two sects after leaving the Zephyr Temple.

Pain and Lies had always surrounded and constantly tormented him. This made him feel as though he had died and come back to life several times. And now, he realized that all this was just a power struggle between two Simings.

Li Huowang had always thought that a battle between Simings must be earth-shattering.

However, Qing Wanglai's words made Li Huowang realize that battles between Simings were imperceptible to mortals. The results of their struggles were nothing more than ordinary events in a mortal's life.

Zhao Shuangdian replied, "I don't understand what you're saying. Could you elaborate?"

Qing Wanglai suddenly gripped the two dice between his fingers and pointed directly at Zhao Shuangdian. "Of course you don't understand. You're just a projection. I'm speaking to the true entity beneath the projection!"

Li Huowang stepped forward, his breath quickening. "So you know about the Da Nuo world? You can even control the things happening there? You've known all along what was happening there!"

The schemes of the Three Pure Ones and his attempts to seize other Simings' Heavenly Daos made one thing clear—he could do it all along and had kept it hidden from everyone.

“No, I don’t see it the way you do. After all, we are in different positions, and we’ve received different levels of education.”

Qing Wanglai remained calm, with a faint, kind smile. “Still, you are correct. I can indeed do that. So can all of you, actually. The difference is that you do it subconsciously, whereas I do it consciously.”

“Three Pure Ones!” Memories from the Da Nuo world surged in Li Huowang’s mind: the three clay statues in the Zephyr Temple, the reason the Abbess’s son went mad, the eerie familiarity of Hong Zhong’s memories, Shangji Guankou, the Sitting Oblivion Dao’s ambush against the Great Liang’s Surveillance Bureau, and the death of Zhuge Yuan.

All of it was real. But now he realized that in a higher dimension, everything had a cause.

Suddenly, an image of a button popped up in Li Huowang’s mind, and the fury in his eyes turned into a fierce killing intent.

“Three Pure Ones! What do you want? You manipulate everything for your own goals! You helped the Siming of Fu Shengtian against me! If not for you, Li Sui wouldn’t have died!”

Back then, only the Abbess had known about the button. After her death, the secret should have disappeared entirely. It shouldn’t have been possible for the Siming of Fu Shengtian to use it.

The button reappearing again could only mean one thing—the Siming of the Baiyu Capital who managed the Heavenly Dao of Secrets had betrayed them! Qing Wanglai had given the secret of the button to Fu Shengtian’s Siming!

Qing Wanglai didn’t deny it. “Li Huowang, do you really think you’re well-informed? Do you truly believe your theories about Simings and Heavenly Daos capture the full picture?

“You’re wrong, Li Huowang. Do you really think Fu Shengtian is our enemy? You’re wrong again.”

Qing Wanglai’s expression hardened, his tone turning icy.

“You’re blinded, caught up in the minor issues in front of you, unable to see the source of the real conflict. Only I know this hidden secret.

“Have you ever considered the possibility that the terrifying Fu Shengtian you perceive may not actually be a massive elephant, but merely a projection of a wrinkle on the elephant’s skin?

“Have you ever considered that their so-called ‘invasion’ might not even be a deliberate act, but rather the unintentional manifestation of a higher being passing by?

“Do you know what true despair is? True despair is realizing that the enemy you’ve fought so hard against is merely a passing breeze caused by someone idly waving their hand!”

Qing Wanglai finally dropped his usual friendly smile, revealing a cold and menacing expression. This was, perhaps, his true self.

“You have no idea what reality is! Reality is far more terrifying than any of you could ever imagine!”

Fear flickered in his eyes, growing deeper with each passing moment.

“Our projections have developed some contradiction, and not just once. Just their unconscious proximity is already interfering. When the contradictions become big enough, the entire world will collapse! Everything will turn into a lie!”

Zhao Shuangdian interjected, “Qing Wanglai, what’s the difference? Whether our enemy exists in one form or another, wouldn’t working together be better than fighting alone?”

“Rely on you?” Qing Wanglai laughed. “Rely on you? A bunch of infighting lunatics? I never relied on you. Communicating with you is inefficient. I only trust myself.”

With a flick of his hand, he tossed the dice. The door burst open, and a young man in reflective sunglasses stepped in, snatching the dice midair.

“Hehe~ Here I am~” The newcomer grinned, fixing his gaze on Li Huowang.

Chapter 980 - Pursuit

Li Huowang locked eyes with the young man wearing reflective sunglasses.

He had slicked-back hair. A leather jacket clung to his frame, and slightly worn jeans completed his look. His otherwise unremarkable face had a few irregular black moles.

Li Huowang was certain they'd never met before, yet there was something familiar about him.

That feeling made Li Huowang instinctively open his mouth. "Shai Zi?"

The man with the sunglasses didn't answer. Instead, he reached into his coat with one hand, pulling out three grenades.

Without hesitation, he bit down on the pin of one and hurled all three directly at Li Huowang and his group. "Kaboom!"

Everything happened so fast that no one had time to react.

As the grenades flew toward him, Li Huowang gritted his teeth and charged forward. He swung his severed arm at the explosives with all his strength.

To his surprise, the grenades didn't explode on contact. Instead, the grenades expanded, and a loud sound filled the air. They released thick black smoke that instantly engulfed the entire room, blinding everyone inside.

Li Huowang had been tricked. They weren't explosives—they were smoke bombs designed to deceive and intimidate.

"Hahaha!" The man's arrogant laughter faded into the distance.

Li Huowang's heart sank. *Damn it! He's just here to buy time for the Three Pure Ones to escape!*

He opened his mouth, but the sharp, pungent smoke filled his lungs and choked him. The blinding, stinging sensation made it

impossible to see or breathe properly.

“Three Pure Ones! Don’t think of running!” Li Huowang covered his mouth and nose, rushing toward the sound of a car engine starting up.

He burst out of the smoke with tears streaming down his face. Once he did, he saw a roofless Jeep with its headlights on speeding straight at him. The sunglasses-wearing man was at the wheel, and in the backseat sat Qing Wanglai.

Li Huowang gritted his teeth and leaped to the side as the Jeep swerved away. It sped down a narrow path through a bamboo grove, quickly leaving the villa behind.

Wiping his face, Li Huowang turned and sprinted to the underground garage. Moments later, the roar of a motorcycle engine filled the air. Li Huowang shot out of the garage, hot on the Jeep’s trail.

On his way out, he spotted Yang Na by the roadside, choking on the tears caused by the smoke. She clutched a military knife in one hand, raising the other to give him a thumbs-up.

As they passed each other, Li Huowang reached out with his severed arm.

Yang Na grabbed on, using the momentum to leap onto the back of the bike. She steadied herself, wrapping her arms tightly around his waist.

Vroom! The motorcycle roared as Li Huowang pushed it to its limits, quickly closing the gap between them and the fleeing Jeep.

Qing Wanglai’s Jeep sped ahead on the suburban roads while Li Huowang pursued closely behind.

Though his bike was fast, the Jeep gained an edge on every curve, maintaining a stalemate.

Yang Na grew anxious. She quickly assessed the distance between them, sheathed her military knife, and pulled a handgun from her waist. Then, she took aim.

Bang! A miss.

Bang! Another miss.

“Huowang, stop moving! I can’t aim properly!”

“This is a motorcycle! How do you expect it not to move? Don’t aim for the people. Shoot the tires!”

After several more shots, the Jeep suddenly shook violently, its speed dropping sharply.

“We got them! ”Li Huowang said, twisting the throttle even harder. They quickly pulled up alongside the Jeep.

Qing Wanglai leveled a gun directly at Li Huowang’s bandaged head.

Bang! Qing Wanglai’s hand exploded, his blood spraying everywhere. Yang Na had fired a perfect shot.

“Nana! Take over!” Li Huowang grabbed her hands and placed them on the handlebars before vaulting off the motorcycle and onto the Jeep.

He crashed into the vehicle and lunged at Qing Wanglai, seizing him by the throat. Within moments, Qing Wanglai’s face turned purple as he gasped for air.

“I don’t care what you’re up to! I don’t even want to know! I only care about one thing—you killed Suisui! My daughter is dead because of you!”

Li Huowang remained unyielding, his grip tightening. The man in sunglasses struck him several times on the back, but Li Huowang didn’t loosen his hold.

Just as Qing Wanglai’s head was about to be crushed by Li Huowang’s grip, Qing Wanglai reached out and grabbed Li Huowang’s arm. A faint, confident smile formed on his purple face.

With the last of his air, Qing Wanglai rasped, “Brother Li... help me.”

In an instant, the surrounding environment shifted. Li Huowang found himself back in the devastated world of Da Nuo,

holding the severed head of Zhuge Yuan in his hands.

Zhuge Yuan and Qing Wanglai's faces merged into one. The events that had occurred in the past now overlapped with the present.

Qing Wanglai took advantage of Li Huowang's momentary distraction. He bent his knee and drove his foot into Li Huowang's stomach.

The force sent Li Huowang flying and knocked him off the Jeep. As he hit the ground, he saw Qing Wanglai leaning against the window, looking at him with his signature smile.

Thump! Li Huowang's back slammed against the ground. The feeling of bones breaking and organs shifting left him paralyzed on the ground.

Li Huowang lay still, covered in dirt and dust. He raised his head, his lone eye capturing the sight of the Jeep shrinking into the distance.

Yang Na had initially planned to pursue on the motorcycle, but when she noticed Li Huowang lying on the ground, she decided that attending to him was more important.

She twisted the brakes sharply, and the motorcycle's tires screeched to a halt, drawing a black arc in front of Li Huowang.

She jumped off the bike and quickly helped Li Huowang to his feet. "Huowang, are you okay? Where does it hurt?"

Li Huowang's eyes blazed with hatred as he looked in the direction where the Jeep had vanished. "Qing Wanglai!"

Thirty minutes later, Li Huowang limped back into Qing Wanglai's villa with Yang Na's help, battered and bruised.

Everyone else was there. They were acting as if nothing had happened. Some were watching TV, others were eating, and some were discussing various matters.

Li Huowang walked past them and approached Zhao Shuangdian. With his severed arm, he slammed her laptop against

the wall and shattered it.

“Why didn’t you help? Why?! Qing Wanglai would not have gotten away so easily if your people had acted!”

Chapter 981 - Untitled

Zhao Shuangdian looked at Li Huowang and said calmly, “What should we have done? Go down and fight him to the death?”

“And then what? If we destroy each other, other elephants will come after us. We’d just be waiting to die together.”

Zhao Shuangdian glanced at Wu Qi, who was on the phone. “Relay a message to Qing Wanglai for me. Regardless of his past actions, we can still sit down and talk. The previous cooperation agreement between us is still valid.

“My only condition is that he tells me everything he knows. I need more parameters for my calculations.”

Wu Qi felt rather annoyed at the moment. She turned away and casually waved her hand in Zhao Shuangdian’s direction.

Noticing Li Huowang’s incredulous expression, Zhao Shuangdian stood and patted his shoulder. “I dislike Qing Wanglai too. I understand how you feel, but I hope you understand that the overall situation is more important.”

“No! You don’t understand! You haven’t lost a daughter because of him! How could you possibly understand my feelings?” Li Huowang’s voice rose, his veins bulging on his forehead.

“And what will killing Qing Wanglai accomplish? Will your daughter come back? Qing Wanglai’s death will not bring your daughter back. In fact, not having his help could lead to us being wiped out when the other elephants attack.”

“No, Qing Wanglai isn’t the real focus,” Yang Na said. “We should be focusing on the Heavenly Daos he controls. We don’t need him—just his power. If we kill him, we can absorb his Heavenly Daos, just like he did with the other Simings.”

Despite their peculiar explanations, Zhao Shuangdian kept a

serious expression. “You don’t get it. Do you think I value Qing Wanglai for his power? No, it’s his intelligence I value!

“He knows things we don’t, and he can even manipulate the aspects of other elephants. These are vital parameters, ones that might rebuild the whole model. This is crucial!”

“I can’t even build a logical mathematical model of our enemy because we know too little about these other elephants.”

Yang Na’s face showed a hint of conflict. She didn’t know what to do next. She turned to Li Huowang. “What do you think, Huowang?”

Li Huowang was lost in thought and remained silent.. After a long pause, he buried his face in his hands and let out a bitter, silent laugh.

“Li Huowang, I’m telling you, this is the optimal solution. It’s the only way we can maximize our chances of winning.”

Li Huowang heard Zhao Shuangdian’s words and lowered his hands. “I’m fine, Zhijian, don’t worry. Have the others fall back.

“Hmm, I was just dealing with some things. For now, divide one of the Dragon Veins between the Tianchen Kingdom and the Great Qi. Keep the rest for later, as I might need them.

“I have other matters to handle. I’ll be going,” Li Huowang said.

He brushed off Yang Na, who was holding onto him. Then, he started pacing aimlessly around the hall.

After a few laps, he stopped before a potted money tree. He stared blankly at it. “There’s no one around now. Zhao Shuangdian, I’m speaking to you.

“Qing Wanglai’s matter is not done. It’s not just about the fact that he stole a part of my name. He killed my daughter. If not for that button forcing me back from the seventh stage to the sixth, I would have killed him already. My daughter didn’t have to sacrifice herself to summon Jiang Xiangshou!”

Li Huowang paused, then spoke to the money tree before him again, saying, "We don't need to worry about what happens after the Three Pure Ones die. When he's gone, his Heavenly Daos will become ours. Our strength will actually increase. At most, there might be a brief period of Natural Disasters."

His words echoed Yang Na's earlier sentiment.

"At the end of the day, I can take over his duties. Besides, with all that's happened, he hasn't contributed much."

"No, that's not the point. What I mean is—" Zhao Shuangdian started to respond but stopped herself, realizing Li Huowang wouldn't listen to her in his current state. She felt rather troubled.

Li Huowang said, "Negotiating with you like this is inconvenient. Next time I come back, I'll go to Yi Donglai for treatment to get rid of this bothersome situation."

"During this time, keep a close eye on Yi Donglai. Don't let him run away. He's the only one who can treat me. Thanks."

Ba Nanxu grabbed a cold beer from the fridge as she observed from the sidelines. She took a sip and scoffed. "Idiot."

In Cowheart Village, the day's work was done, and a few villagers began to gather under the big tree at the village entrance. Some had their dinner bowls in hand.

This was Cowheart Village's social spot for chatting and cooling off. People boasted and gossiped here.

Those with hearty meals proudly displayed them, while others with simpler meals tried to hide theirs.

Close friends would even taste each other's food and comment on the cooking skills of one another's wives.

Puppy rolled up his sleeves, holding a bowl piled high with braised pork over rice. He squatted between the tree roots and asked, "Why isn't Xiaohai here?"

"He doesn't even cook now. He's too busy with his pregnant

wife. It's probably a boy, judging by the pointed belly. He's been treating her really well lately."

Since his wife was about to give birth, he didn't have time to cook for the village anymore. Cowheart Village had returned to a system where each person cooked for themselves.

"What's the big deal? I'm telling you, boys aren't as good as girls! When they grow up, boys are not as sensible as girls." Puppy didn't even touch his pork. Instead, he smeared his lips with oil as he spoke.

"Things have been peaceful these past few years. No wars, no Natural Disasters," added a teacher, sipping his cornmeal porridge with preserved meat.

"That's true," others chimed in. Life had been easier since the fall of the Dharma Sect.

"Well, naturally! That's all thanks to my Senior! You know who he is?" Puppy grinned, waiting for a response.

"Here we go again."

"Exactly, who asked him?"

"We know, we know! He's the Emperor of the Great Liang! Will you be miserable if you don't say it every day?"

"Are you going to brag about this your whole life?"

Puppy kissed a piece of braised pork before setting it down and scooping up a spoonful of rice. "What? Can't I speak the truth? Since he's my senior, I'm practically royalty!

"Back then, he insisted I become the prime minister because of our bond, but I refused."

Chapter 982 - Cowheart Village

The teacher heard Puppy's bold claim and gasped in shock, scalding his tongue. He glared at Puppy with indignation.

"You! How absurd! How dare you insult the wise ones like this! Do you even know the importance of a prime minister's role? How dare you think you're fit for it?"

"Do you realize how much knowledge is required for such a position? You, who can't even recite the basics of the Three Character Classic, dare to say such things?"

Puppy sneered. "What's the big deal? If simpletons can be emperors, I can be a prime minister."

While Puppy argued with the teacher, a frail-looking woman walked past the village entrance, looking exhausted.

She carried a basket from which a piece of lotus root peeked out from the covers. She spotted the gathering of villagers, then quickened her pace toward the village, almost colliding with three monkey children coming her way.

The monkey children, who had been brought by Yang Xiaohai, looked much better now. Although they still had some monkey-like mannerisms, they appeared more human and bowed respectfully to the woman.

Zhao Wu observed the scene and whispered to the others, "Did you hear? These new arrivals supposedly had the same illness as Senior Li. They're better now, so they were sent here."

This comment sparked a discussion about the newcomers in Cowheart Village. These odd folks kept to themselves and rarely interacted with the villagers. They even occasionally burst into

laughter while walking alone.

Puppy used his chopsticks to stop a monkey child from snatching a piece of braised pork from his bowl. He asked in disbelief, "Is Senior Li's illness actually curable? That's nonsense. I've never seen him get better."

"Aren't you just an accountant? How do you know anything? Did Chun Xiaoman from the White Lotus Sect write to tell you?"

At the mention of Chun Xiaoman, Zhao Wu's face darkened. "Mind your own business. Why are you so nosy?"

Puppy smirked smugly, holding his bowl close to himself.

An old, lone carriage appeared on the road into the village. It was pulled by an old horse. When they looked closer, they realized it was Lu Xiucui's family carriage.

"Where's Xiucui heading?"

"He's probably off to take the imperial exams."

Puppy defended his friend. "Stop talking nonsense. He's been holed up at home since returning, without studying, farming, or practicing martial arts. Who knows what's wrong with him? I asked him about his hands and feet growing back, and he wouldn't answer."

"Maybe he's possessed? Should we get someone to check?"

As Lu Xiucui approached the villagers, Puppy said, "Xiucui, where are you headed?"

Puppy noticed the Lu Family Troupe's theater trunk in the carriage. Juan'er and Lu Xiucui's eccentric father, Lu Zhuangyuan, were also in the carriage.

"Wow, bringing everyone? Are you moving out?"

Puppy joked, but a realization dawned on him, and his face grew serious. "You're not actually moving away from Cowheart Village, are you?"

Lu Xiucui smiled silently and shook his head. "I'm just taking Juan'er and my father out for a bit. We're also looking for my

missing nephew, Lu Tongsheng.”

“You’ll never find him by yourself. You should ask Sister Bai. She’s the head of the White Lotus Sect now, overseeing the entire sect.”

Lu Xiucui’s face darkened as he remembered the gruesome practices of the White Lotus followers and the sometimes frenzied Bai Lingmiao.

“No need. She’s changed, and so has the White Lotus Sect. I don’t understand it, and I don’t want to. I’ve written to my master, so it’s out of my hands now.”

Lu Xiucui disregarded the others and continued down the path. Soon, the village disappeared from view.

His deranged father lay against the theater trunk, muttering disjointed theater lines.

“Father, you were right. We’re just traveling performers—simple commoners. The great affairs of the world don’t concern us.

“Now that the Dharma Sect is gone and we’ve avenged my brother and sister-in-law, we only need to mind our own business.

“Let the Emperor be, let the White Lotus Sect be. None of it matters to us. Let’s live our lives in peace.

“Father, rest assured. If Tongsheng wasn’t found, then he’s still out there. He is not dead. We’ll find him.

“When we do, I’ll teach him all about theater. We’ll revive the Lu Family Troupe and save up bit by bit to buy our own theater, without any handouts. Won’t that be nice?”

He glanced back, but Lu Zhuangyuan remained slumped and unresponsive. Juan’er stood up and carefully wiped his mouth with a cloth.

“Alright. Now it’s my turn to take charge,” Lu Xiucui said, leading the carriage forward.

Suddenly, familiar footsteps sounded behind them, overlapping with the horse’s trot.

A resentful female voice called out softly, "Xiucan, did you forget that you have a wife? Are you planning to leave me behind?"

Lu Xiucan didn't turn around. "The Lu Family Troupe is no longer around. The fields we split are all yours. You have everything you need. Live well here in Cowheart Village.

"I'm not much of a husband, and I was rarely around. I bought you long ago. The contract's burned, and you're free now.

"Xiucan! But I'm your wife!"

"I am a White Donkey. I swore to the Heavenly Mother never to marry, or she'll never forgive me."

Lu Xiucan shut his eyes tightly, his expression conflicted. "Go back. You're young, so find someone else. The theater troupe isn't a place for women. I won't let you suffer like my sister-in-law did."

Chapter 983 - Murderous Aura

As Lu Xiucan retreated without turning back, the woman's voice trembled, her emotions overwhelming her.

"Fine, you said it! You think I don't have other options? I'll feed another man with the crops I grow from your land! By the time you come crawling back, you'll regret it!"

Her sobs and footsteps faded away. Lu Xiucan sighed deeply and continued on.

As he walked through the green woods, he began singing a verse his father had taught him. "On my journey under autumn skies~ I come to pay respects in Zhuanzhu Alley!"

An old voice from behind joined him, singing, "A true man will create a world-shaking enterprise~"

Tears glistened in Lu Xiucan's eyes. He turned to see his father, Lu Zhuangyuan, singing the familiar lines. Though he was still mad, he continued the verses by instinct.

Lu Xiucan continued, "Turn the world around~ Wash the sun in the Milky Way!"

The voices of the old and young overlapped, echoing down the road. "Heroes gather, and stars in the sky exchange words!"

"Dragons and snakes of the great marsh rise~ March joyfully down the road!"

The night grew deep, and Lu Xiucan reached a small town before midnight.

He walked through the silent streets, searching for an open inn. He glanced back and saw his elderly father and young niece asleep on the cart. Then, he continued onward.

Suddenly, he heard the crash of ceramics breaking, followed by an angry woman's voice from a nearby house. "Chen! I've had it! I can't live like this!"

"Crazy woman! You think I'm afraid? I'll write you a divorce letter right now!"

Recognizing it as a domestic quarrel, Lu Xiucan relaxed and kept walking. However, only a few steps later, another argument reached his ears.

"Are you trying to kill me? Have you ever done a day's work after coming into this family?"

"Blind old hag! Can't you see what I've done? My hands are chapped from washing clothes in the river all winter! All you care about is that I haven't given you a grandson! My body, my choice. Try having one with your son!"

Before the two women had finished arguing, another gruff male voice cut in, saying, "Damn! Can't you people stop bickering? Some of us are trying to sleep!"

The noise of quarrels surrounded him, and the air grew heavy with hostility. Lu Xiucan frowned. *Why are the people here so temperamental? No one would want to listen to theater here. We'll rush off after staying the night.*

He continued forward but felt that something was off. There were too many people with hot tempers here.

It would be one thing if it were just people arguing late into the night. However, even those asleep seemed to be cursing in their dreams.

When he reached the small town's main road, a dense murderous aura pricked at his senses. He immediately became vigilant, drawing the bronze coin sword strapped to his back. He prepared to lead the carriage out of this strange town.

Soon, the night's calm vanished as shouts of rage and cursing filled the air. Shadows of people fighting appeared under the

candlelight, and faint traces of blood began to appear. It seemed the whole town had gone mad.

A surge of murderous aura slammed into him as he turned a corner. Lu Xiucan looked up and saw the murderous aura almost become something material, spewing out from a small cart.

There was a small black coffin on the cart, its lid open. The murderous aura spread out from there, infecting the people around it.

Lu Xiucan was about to cover the coffin, but a dark figure stepped into his path.

Lu Xiucan brandished his bronze coin sword to fend off his foe. With a clattering sound, a red thread with bronze coins lashed out towards the figure.

The figure suddenly flipped his robe around, wearing it backward and revealing rows of rusty knives hanging from it. The makeshift armor deflected Lu Xiucan's attack.

Before he could retract his sword, a woman with bronze coins tied around her eyes leaped down from a rooftop. With a flick of her sleeve, she snatched the bronze coin sword away from him.

"Take this!" she shouted, throwing a rusty cleaver at him. Lu Xiucan narrowly caught it and flung it aside.

He pulled out the Profound Records and laid it on the ground.

Before he could do anything, the opponent spoke with a haughty and rather impatient tone, saying, "Ao Jing Sect? Your elders approved the Murderous Aura Command. Do you dare defy your sect's elders? The Surveillance Bureau is operating here. Leave!"

"Surveillance Bureau?" Lu Xiucan stared at her in disbelief.

He would have never imagined that the people sneaking around in the middle of the night and harming the people here were the Great Liang's Surveillance Bureau!

The Great Liang's Surveillance Bureau, meant to help the

empire protect the realm, orchestrated this chaos.

Glancing at their waist badges, Lu Xiucan asked in disbelief, "Why are you doing this? Do you understand the consequences of infecting this town with this murderous aura?"

The group exchanged glances, then looked at him with puzzled expressions. "Of course. The murderous aura will lessen their fear, driving them into a rage and making them seek revenge for their past grievances. The town will descend into chaos, and a few hundred will die.

"Leave now, or you'll find yourself in trouble. This is an imperial order. Every place in the Great Liang is to be infected with the murderous aura. No exceptions!"

"An imperial decree? By Gao Zhijian?"

Even after recalling the evil acts of the White Lotus Sect's spirits, Lu Xiucan struggled to understand why.

He wondered why his previous acquaintances became so cold-blooded and distant. *Do they not view people as living beings anymore? Don't they know how many people are going to die here?*

"Hold on, did you say the entire Great Liang will be infected with the murderous aura?

"Even Cowheart Village?"

A lump caught in his throat.

"Cowheart Village? The one at the back? Of course, my Senior has already taken his bloodthirsty blade there."

Chapter 984 - White Yang

“Infection of murderous aura?!” Lu Xiucan looked around at the chaos caused by the murderous aura. It had caused drastic changes to the personalities of those affected.

He broke out in cold sweat when he imagined his wife and friends suffering the same fate.

Lu Xiucan was overcome with anxiety. Ignoring everything else, he quickly hopped onto his carriage, made a sharp turn, and sped back towards Cowheart Village.

Although the journey out had been swift, the return felt agonizingly slow. He didn’t know if he’d make it in time, but he could only press onward. He tossed out all his theater tools and belongings to make his return faster, keeping only Lu Zhuangyuan and Juan’er with him.

As the carriage raced down the dusty road, Lu Xiucan spotted a figure standing by the roadside. It was a man who looked like an ordinary farmer, yet somehow exuded an air of peculiarity.

The man clutched a kitchen knife, his body and mouth smeared with blood. It was impossible to tell if the blood was his own.

He stood motionless, glaring at Lu Xiucan with seething hatred. The murderous aura had consumed him, giving him the courage to commit acts he wouldn’t have done before.

The cart sped past, but the man’s gaze burned deeply into Lu Xiucan’s memory.

He realized this wasn’t an isolated incident. The same madness was erupting throughout the Great Liang. The entire Great Liang had gone mad.

“Gao Zhijian, what are you trying to achieve? Open your eyes and see what you’ve caused! You tyrant!”

“Faster! Go faster!” Lu Xiucan whipped the horse continuously until it foamed at the mouth.

He couldn’t control the events happening elsewhere, but he was determined to help Cowheart Village, home to everyone dear to him.

After rushing the entire way, Lu Xiucan finally arrived just before dawn. The exhausted horse collapsed to the ground in exhaustion.

Lu Xiucan stood on the edge of the village, still shrouded in morning mist. He hesitated, fearing a repeat of the horrors he’d seen in the small town.

His face paled as he finally forced himself to walk into the mist.

As he ventured further, he sensed wisps of murderous aura seeping out of the fog. His heart sank lower and lower. “No... no, no!”

He rushed into the fog desperately and headed straight into Cowheart Village.

Finally, he broke through the mist and froze. He saw a towering red blade radiating murderous aura, spreading in every direction.

The blade was not inside the village itself. It was embedded in the ground near Bai Lingmiao.

Bai Lingmiao sat quietly on a stone opposite the blade, dressed in white. She silently watched Cowheart Village awaken to a rooster’s crow.

She gently said, “Don’t worry, I knew they’d come today. I stopped them.”

Her expression grew conflicted. “Logically, I shouldn’t have done it. All followers of the White Lotus Sect were summoned to be infected by the murderous aura. However, I used my authority to shield my fellow disciples...

“I know I should be impartial, but the thought of everyone

becoming a soldier and being sacrificed was unbearable. Even if we lose, I want them to live a little longer...”

Lu Xiucan stepped forward and said, “Mistress, I don’t know what others might say, but I know you did the right thing.”

He continued, “There’s no point in worrying so much about right or wrong. Someone strong will always rise to hold up the falling sky. Our priority should be protecting our own people. We can figure out the rest later.”

Bai Lingmiao turned toward Lu Xiucan. “But what if you’re the one meant to hold up the sky?”

Lu Xiucan had no answer. He stood there in silence.

Bai Lingmiao rose as the Second Deity emerged from her back, pulling out the massive red blade from the ground and wrapping it tightly with white silk.

Lu Xiucan noticed she was planning to leave and moved to follow her. But before long, his wife stopped him. “I knew you couldn’t bear to leave me! I knew it!”

Ignoring the commotion, Bai Lingmiao strolled through the village where she’d grown up. It was filled with people again, almost as if it had returned to its former glory.

She walked to the Bai Family’s ancestral hall and looked at the ancestral tablets on the wall. She took three incense sticks from the offering table, lit them carefully, and kowtowed nine times toward the tablets.

She knelt on the mat, deep in thought as she gazed at the ancestral tablets. After a long time, she took a deep breath and picked up the blade wrapped in white silk.

I may have spared my kin this time, but I won’t send others to do what I’m unwilling to do myself. That would be shameless.

As she slowly unwrapped the blade from the silk, the murderous aura filled the air, causing the tablets on the wall to vibrate.

I cannot be soft-hearted if I want revenge for Suisui.

The confusion on her face faded as she gripped the blade, replaced by a look of fierce determination.

Simultaneously, the expression of the Second Deity softened. Their four hands firmly grasped the blade, while a palpable hostility manifested on their faces.

The two of them simultaneously curled their lips, revealing cruel smiles.

With great force, they swung the enormous blade, firmly gripping it with their right hands. The sharp blade severed the candle's wick, spilling the melted wax onto the incense.

The incense was lit, and the flames began to ignite the offering table. The flames from the table set the entire wall of ancestral tablets on fire. When Bai Lingmiao walked out of the ancestral hall, thick smoke had already begun to billow inside.

"Get water! Quickly put out the fire! There's a ton of grain stored below! Enough to feed us for decades!" Puppy shouted in panic, leading the others from Cowheart Village to extinguish the fire.

After Bai Lingmiao walked out of Cowheart Village, the followers of the White Lotus Sect, marked with White Donkey tattoos, gradually gathered behind her. This group included various people and elderly Lamas. Their numbers swelled into a massive force.

Bai Lingmiao held the red blade in both right hands, picked up a drum from her waist with her left hand, and grasped a spine sword with her last hand.

This was Li Huowang's spine sword, though he no longer had any use for it.

Bai Lingmiao sensed a connection between the Great Qi and the Great Liang through the spine sword she held. Both mouths opened simultaneously, saying, "Prepare the sect. We must quickly

spread the murderous aura across the entire Tianchen Kingdom!

“Today, the Tianchen Kingdom has no ruler. We must help the Heavenly Mater reclaim her Void Home!”

“Yes, Saintess! As the Red Yang’s calamity ends, the White Yang shall rise!” the White Donkey followers replied in unison.

Chapter 985 - Counterattack

A gentle breeze tousled Li Huowang's hair as he stood motionless, gripping Shai Zi's bloodied head in his right hand. The lifeless, headless body of the Imperial Preceptor of Great Liang lay crumpled on the ground beside him.

Although the Imperial Preceptor had concealed himself well, once Li Huowang learned that the Three Pure Ones had planted Huangfu Tiangang, he had no choice but to kill him.

His attention was not on the corpse. He was standing on the city walls of Shangjing, staring at the chaos unfolding below.

Even from this height, he could feel the thick murderous aura spreading across the city.

The city had descended into utter chaos. People turned on each other over the slightest provocations. It was as if the entire social order was on the brink of collapse, with everyone consumed by wrath.

Li Huowang's keen eyesight allowed him to witness the countless conflicts below. Constant fights and deaths were occurring at every turn. The city was nearly a battlefield.

The Murderous Aura Command was not a mere term. It bore heavily on every citizen, weighing on them like a mountain.

However, it was clear that Gao Zhijian's aim wasn't to curse the people and leave them to fend for themselves. The rhythmic clang of gongs filled the air.

A soldier bearing two triangular flags galloped down the main road, shouting, "Come for the emperor's food! Eat from the emperor's stores!"

“Men and women aged eight to seventy! Two guans[1] of coins every month, three dous of[2] rice and meat with every meal!”

The offer was irresistible to most of them. The offer was essentially a lifeline for the masses. While enlistment was dangerous, it was nothing to those infected by the murderous aura.

The gong echoed through the city while the people of Shangjing surged towards the military headquarters, driven by the promise of food and money.

This wasn't limited to Shangjing alone. Similar events unfolded across the entire Great Liang, Qing Qiu, and Hou Shu.

Gao Zhijian was right. The common folk had indeed become soldiers, and soldiers were but commoners. Whether the people were citizens or soldiers was entirely his choice. A new and vast army would soon rise, larger and more formidable than before.

How many people are there in the world? How many times can we summon Jiang Xiangshou?

Jiang Xiangshou seemed less like a Siming and more like a manifestation of the Heavenly Dao itself, its power accessible to those willing to pay the price.

Li Huowang looked up towards the heavens, his thoughts drifting to the other Simings whose ways of existence remained shrouded in mystery.

Footsteps echoed behind him. Gao Zhijian, flanked by eunuchs, approached him on the city wall. “Senior Li, it won't be long now. The new army will be ready soon.”

“Good,” Li Huowang said, his gaze dropping from the turmoil below. “While we're free, let me tell you something. You see, I can communicate with other Simings beyond the Baiyu Capital. I've been opposing Fu Shengtian with them all this time.”

Gao Zhijian hesitated, looking at Li Huowang. “But Brother Li, haven't you been here this whole time? You haven't been to Baiyu Capital.”

"I didn't say it's the current me. That's because it's the other me, which is also me. Whatever he does, I do as well."

Gao Zhijian remained silent. He looked confused, clearly having trouble understanding.

"I know it's hard to believe, but it's the truth. Since I hold the Heavenly Dao of Bewilderment, even I don't fully understand how it works."

Li Huowang chuckled wryly when Gao Zhijian remained quiet. "You don't believe me? Maybe you think I'm going crazy again? I won't blame you."

"No, Senior Li, I believe you. Go on."

"There isn't much more to say. Soon, mortals and the Simings of the Baiyu Capital will unite and fight Fu Shengtian together.

"The Dragon Veins in the mortal world prevent the Simings from intervening directly. Any attempt through other channels is distorted. I'm the exception—I alone can perceive what truly unfolds in the Baiyu Capital.

"When it's time to face Fu Shengtian, the Simings of the Baiyu Capital will decide on the course of action, and the mortals will follow their lead."

Mortals could not approach Simings. Even approaching them would incur the influence of the Heavenly Dao.

"In short, I'll decide how the world supports them and when Jiang Xiangshou is summoned from now on. Do you understand?

"It's not that I want to take over your authority, but the battle above shifts rapidly and requires swift action. We can't afford to wait for you emperors to deliberate slowly."

Gao Zhijian shook his head. "That's fine. With you bearing the responsibility, my load feels much lighter. I'll talk to them, and we'll follow your lead."

"That's good."

With Gao Zhijian's reassurance, Li Huowang knew he could call

upon Jiang Xiangshou's aid the next time they faced Fu Shengtian, which would give him a powerful advantage.

This was why the Murderous Aura Command was necessary despite its cruelty.

"Senior Li, do you know what Junior Bai's people are up to?"

Li Huowang nodded slowly. "Yes, she told me. I even gave her the spine sword."

Gao Zhijian nodded and turned to leave the city wall.

As he took his first step, Li Huowang's expression changed. "It's a Natural Disaster."

This time, the Natural Disaster was silent. No one noticed it because it was the disappearance of Growth itself.

Li Huowang realized immediately what this signified. The Heavenly Dao of Growth had likely been lost. Zuoqiu Yong seemed to be gone from the Baiyu Capital, and the Three Pure Ones must have seized the Heavenly Dao of Growth.

This wasn't good news. The Three Pure Ones became stronger, and his next move was uncertain. Including Doulao's Heavenly Dao of Lies, the Three Pure Ones now controlled at least the Heavenly Daos of Secrets, Lies, and Growth.

He didn't know if Qing Wanglai had any other hidden Heavenly Daos. At the very least, Qing Wanglai must have taken something from Li Huowang and the Five Dhyani Buddhas.

A sudden idea struck Li Huowang. He stepped out with his right foot, instantly transporting himself from the city wall to the Righteous Monastery.

The monastery was now eerily quiet, with only a handful of visitors. When the murderous aura had infected everyone, they stopped fearing death and lost all reverence, so no one came to worship.

Li Huowang ignored the monks, who greeted him with folded hands. He quickly moved through the various halls and finally

reached a specific shrine.

He had been here once before. Today was his second visit. A statue of Zhuge Yuan stood atop a grand lotus pedestal, clad in yellow with cinnabar marked on his forehead.

The shrine was once well-cared for, with an overflowing incense burner and Zhuge Yuan's figure coated in gold.

This statue of Zhuge Yuan was the first one, which served as a model for replicas in other temples.

Qing Wanglai had used this to do something to the Five Dhyani Buddhas.

No matter what the Three Pure Ones intended, Li Huowang would try his best to stop him since they were now enemies.

Li Huowang lifted his hand. The massive beam above the shrine snapped, making tiles and rubble crash down on Zhuge Yuan's statue.

As the statue of Zhuge Yuan was about to shatter under the weight, Li Huowang suddenly raised his right hand. The falling beam and rubble froze in mid-air.

Li Huowang shakily withdrew his hand and looked up at the stone statue of Zhuge Yuan. "Heh... Three Pure Ones, did you foresee this? Did you think of this too?"

The Three Pure Ones' counterattacks were always so silent. To Li Huowang, each one made him feel an unbearable discomfort.

Li Huowang gritted his teeth, with his breath trembling. After a moment's hesitation, he forcefully pulled his clenched fist downward.

The suspended beam came crashing down with a heavy thud, causing the stone statue of Zhuge Yuan, sculpted in the image of Buddha, to shatter into countless pieces. Amongst the swirling dust, Zhuge Yuan's broken head wobbled and rolled right in front of Li Huowang.

1. A guan is a unit of measurement for coins. 🤖

2. A dou is a unit of measurement of roughly about 10 liters.



Chapter 986 - Treatment

Li Huowang opened his eyes. The sunlight coming from the window made him wince.

He waited several days before returning, but he didn't slack off. He had been clearing out the influences of the Three Ancient Ones.

Li Huowang vowed to stop any schemes hatched by the Three Ancient Ones in the Baiyu Capital as long as he drew breath.

As his eyes adjusted to the sunlight, Li Huowang noticed his surroundings had changed.

Qing Wanglai's beautiful mansion has been replaced with a dingy old house. The scenery outside of the window indicated that he was in the countryside.

Looking down, Li Huowang noticed someone had tightly bound him with some cloth.

He turned his head to the side, finding a disheveled Yang Na asleep beside him. She had been tending to him.

"Yang Na," he murmured.

She woke up at the sound of her name. She untied his bindings, kissed him gently, and promptly drifted back to sleep.

Li Huowang carefully draped the blanket over her body before putting on his shoes and stepping out of the room.

The scent of breakfast greeted him as he found Yi Donglai and the others eating together.

"You're up? Here, have some food."

A bowl of porridge, a salted egg, and two fried dough sticks were all they had for breakfast.

As he ate, Li Huowang asked, "Why are we here?"

"The elephant on the other side used the Laws to ambush us, so we moved base preemptively," Zhao Shuangdian replied, typing on

her laptop while everyone else was enjoying their meal.

Li Huowang's heart sank. Their enemies were still trying to kill them.

This time, they'd evaded the danger. Next time, he was sure their luck would run out.

"You predicted their movements on the other elephant? What else can you predict?" Li Huowang asked, glancing at her laptop.

If Zhao Shuangdian could predict the movements of Fu Shengtian's Simings, they'd have a chance to plan accordingly.

"I'm still observing them. I'm not sure if my model is correct or if there are errors. Qing Wanglai's dissertation has only made things more complicated," Zhao Shuangdian said, frowning as she spoke.

Li Huowang snarled when he heard Qing Wanglai's name. He tried to suppress his anger. "Don't worry. We'll be fine, even without Qing Wanglai. I've found a lot of helpers this time."

Zhao Shuangdian propped her chin on her hand. "Strength isn't the issue—information is. What worries me is what he said before leaving."

Li Huowang's voice rose sharply. "Don't trust him! Shai Zi works for him. The Heavenly Dao of Lies is on his side. Everything he says is a lie!"

"Is there proof?"

"What?"

"If he's lying, what's his motive? I've thought about it, but I can't find a reason for him to deceive us. It doesn't make sense for him to lie about our common enemy unless he's from the other elephant.

"However, if that were the case, it'd be more logical for him to tell the truth. By sharing accurate information, he can use us to divert the attention of his enemies."

Li Huowang replied, "So you agree with him that there are existences stronger than the Simings? A Grand Siming? And that all

these attacks we're enduring are just breezes from their movements? Is there nothing we can do but wait for our deaths?"

Zhao Shuangdian thought for a long time before shaking her head. "I don't know."

"I don't care if you trust him, but I will say this: *I* don't trust him at all." Li Huowang said. "I don't trust Qing Wanglai, and I don't trust Shai Zi!"

"If we truly stand no chance, what is making the Three Ancient Ones work so hard? Why go to such elaborate lengths over so many years? Is he bored?" Zhao Shuangdian said.

"He's mixing truth with lies! Trust me. I have more experience in dealing with the Sitting Oblivion Dao!"

Li Huowang poured another bowl of porridge and grabbed some buns before returning to his room. He swore that he wouldn't trust the Three Ancient Ones until he witnessed the truth with his own eyes—he'd treat everything else as an illusion.

After placing a meal in his room for Yang Na, he walked out and turned to Yi Donglai. "Doctor Yi, are you done with your meal? Could you treat me after this? I'm so sorry about the past few days."

No matter what he had to face in the future, he needed to treat his illness first. He needed to become his strongest self to claim victory in future battles.

As for feeling sorry for Yi Donglai... He was no longer so hesitant after seeing the Murderous Aura Command being activated and how swathes of citizens perished.

Everyone had to pay a price to win, including himself and Yi Donglai. Li Huowang had to win—if he failed, every sacrifice made would be meaningless.

Yi Donglai wiped his mouth with a napkin and nodded. "Come, let's go to the warehouse. It's quiet there."

Yi Donglai picked up his notebook and stood up.

Li Huowang followed, puzzled by his calm demeanor. Once

inside, Yi Donglai gestured for him to sit.

“Li Huowang, I must admit that I judged you too harshly last time. I think I understand what you’re going through now that I got to know these people.”

Li Huowang frowned. “Are you getting Stockholm Syndrome and agreeing with their viewpoint?”

Yi Donglai opened his notebook and started scribbling. “Isn’t that good? If I do, that means you get another ally. To be honest, I think you can bring more people into the fold if you can get them to sympathize with you. The more allies you have, the higher the chances of winning.”

Li Huowang knew that Yi Donglai was using him as research material. To begin with, Yi Donglai was never in the fold.

“Impossible. There are not that many projections of Simings in the Baiyu Capital. Doctor Yi, let’s ignore that for now. After I’m treated and we handle Fu Shengtian, we can talk as much as we want.”

Yi Donglai sighed and nodded. “Fine. Here, look at this pen.”

He held up a pen. “Listen closely. You need to follow my instructions carefully. This is important. Do you understand?”

“I understand.”

“Good. Now listen to me. Look at this pen and close your eyes.”

Li Huowang listened as Yi Donglai continued, “You will feel your body becoming relaxed and naturally lie down. You will sense your body gradually sinking downwards, without any perception of its end.”

As Yi Donglai’s voice grew fainter, Li Huowang’s body slowly went numb. He felt lighter, and his surroundings turned darker.

Just then, he heard Yi Donglai’s voice next to him. “Li... Huo... Wake... Wake up.”

Chapter 987 - Tower

In the unkempt warehouse, Li Huowang leaned against the wall, his eyes snapping open in shock as he stared at Yi Donglai.

The voice still echoed in his ears, and cold sweat drenched his body. “What did you just say? What did you try to do?”

Li Huowang dared not think about the voice just now. Every time he did, a strange, intense fear emerged from his heart.

His agitation drew the attention of the others, who turned toward the commotion with confused expressions.

With everyone present in the warehouse, Yi Donglai snapped his notebook shut.

“Li Huowang, there’s no need for such a dramatic reaction. I’m treating you. Isn’t this exactly what you asked me to do?”

“Is waking me up part of the treatment?”

“What do you mean waking you up? I didn’t say anything. Li Huowang, what are you talking about?”

“No, something’s not right! Something isn’t right! This isn’t the first time!” Li Huowang ran to the window and looked outside.

He scanned the warehouse, looking at the roof and then the floor. He even touched the ground with his hands.

A deep, irrational fear gripped him, spreading like wildfire through his mind.

Why did he ask me to wake up? I am awake. Am I dreaming?

“Huowang, are you alright? What’s wrong? Is something happening in the Baiyu Capital?”

Yang Na stepped forward, her concern evident, but Yi Donglai held her back.

“Don’t approach him. It’s fine. Let me do it.”

Yi Donglai lifted his glasses before approaching Li Huowang.

“You may have heard something, but don’t forget about your condition. You have a severe mental illness. Auditory hallucinations are normal for someone like you. What you heard might not be real.”

“Is it really? I had the same hallucination twice! Can you even believe what you’re saying? Also, I’m not ill! I’m just temporarily trapped in the cracks between the two worlds!”

Yi Donglai sighed helplessly. “We’ve been over this. Even if what you’re saying is true, you’re still a mentally ill Siming, Li Huowang. Remember when you hallucinated three companions in the White Tower Hospital? You’re genuinely ill—that’s just the truth.

“If you’re ill, you need treatment. Isn’t that the entire reason you went through the trouble of bringing me here?”

Li Huowang was stunned. He had believed himself without doubt, but now he started to waver.

Li Huowang froze. His unwavering belief wavered, and cracks began to show. After glancing at the others, he slowly made his way to a stool and sat down.

There were two possibilities in front of him. Either his mind was playing tricks on him and none of it was real, or that voice he’d heard was real—and if it was, it meant trouble.

Thankfully, Li Huowang had a way to uncover the truth.

“Alright, Dr. Yi. Let’s put this argument aside for now. I’ll cooperate with your treatment. But if I’m cured and that voice remains, we’ll know it’s real. And if it’s real, something’s very wrong.”

Li Huowang turned to Zhao Shuangdian. “Help me check the outside. I’m not afraid of anything, but I suspect that this could be an attack from Fu Shengtian.”

Their common enemy was Fu Shengtian and its Simings. The Heavenly Daos they controlled were very bizarre.

Li Huowang could sense that their ambushes would be very bizarre too. They would always find unconventional angles to strike from, effectively driving their opponents to the brink of madness.

Doubt gnawed at Li Huowang. *Was the voice real?*

If everything I've fought so far is fake, what's the point of risking my life?

Despair washed over Li Huowang, but he quickly shook his head. *No! I can't think like this! This is not the time to be thinking about this. Whatever happens, I must rid myself of Fu Shengtian's influence first. I won't give up, no matter what.*

Li Huowang inhaled deeply, steadying himself. "Everyone, step outside. I need to focus on the treatment."

As everyone started to leave, Li Huowang caught Yang Na's arm. "Nana, stay here."

There was also another possibility that Yi Donglai was the one who had actually whispered. Maybe Yi Donglai bore resentment for being kidnapped. While the chance was minuscule, the possibility still existed.

Li Huowang pulled Yang Na to the corner of the room. "Nana, help me watch Yi Donglai. If anything's wrong with him, wake me up immediately."

"Alright."

Yang Na nodded and gently touched the handgun behind her back.

Yi Donglai restarted his treatment once the three of them were alone in the warehouse.

"Li Huowang, close your eyes once more and calm your heart. Now tell me what you are feeling."

Li Huowang complied, closing his eyes and steadying his breath before describing what he felt.

Yi Donglai proceeded, "Picture yourself standing atop a tower, prepared to descend the stairs and reach a grassy plain below. This

tower consists of ten levels, and I will guide you step by step as we go down floor by floor. With every floor you descend, you will find yourself entering a deeper state of your dream. Slowly, you will feel your body relaxing and your heart growing calmer.”

Li Huowang stood at the top of the tower and slowly made his way down to the grassy plains. He stood on the plain and felt his mood turning better immediately.

The grassy plain was like a paradise. Li Huowang wanted to stay there longer, but he had to keep moving forward.

He walked for an unknown length of time until he came across two paths before him.

One path was larger than the other. The smaller path was shrouded in darkness and had a quiet appearance. The larger path was covered in thorns, yet it appeared much brighter.

Li Huowang hesitated before ultimately choosing the larger path.

After walking for an unknown length of time, he suddenly encountered a dog. As the dog approached Li Huowang, it shifted into a mask.

The mask was engraved with an expression of pain. It tried to tell Li Huowang something, but no voice came from the hole depicting its mouth.

It grew larger, filling Li Huowang’s vision until nothing else remained.

The grooves of the mask shifted, forming a large dirt road ahead. Li Huowang stepped onto it and continued forward.

Chapter 988 - Bell

As Li Huowang continued walking, darkness began to fall. The ground flattened, revealing a broken grave ahead. The graves were overgrown with grass, yet puzzlingly, three lit incense sticks stood in front of one.

The white smoke didn't dissipate, instead enveloping the grave like an illusion.

He approached the grave and tried to read the inscription carved into the headstone, but he couldn't recognize the characters of the words. He strangely felt he'd known this before, yet now he didn't. As he looked at the inscription, the words shifted form, constantly rearranging themselves.

Under his gaze, the words slowly merged and consolidated into two words. One formed into the character “穰” while the second formed “鬱” instead.

The two words began to move and attack each other. Each word ripped lines from the opposing character and incorporated them into their own.

Unfortunately, it was clear that “穰” was losing. Most of its lines were ripped away, and its form started thinning.

In a desperate gambit, “穰” severed part of itself and hurled it toward “鬱.” While “鬱” paused to seize the fragments, “穰” fled.

Li Huowang bent down, following “穰” as it scurried to the lower half of the gravestone. It traversed past mountains, rivers, ravines, and even strange white lights. Ultimately, it reached the ground and slipped by Li Huowang.

He gave chase, noticing “鬱” in pursuit as well. As the gap between the two characters narrowed, both of them began to resonate. Their forms expanded, their lines transforming into

something different.

Li Huowang moved backward and allowed space for the two characters to grow.

Startled by their growth, Li Huowang stepped back to give them space, but the speed of their growth exceeded his expectations. In just an instant, the characters stretched beyond the sky, enveloping Li Huowang completely before vanishing.

Li Huowang looked up and saw the sky filled with Chaos.

He extended his arms and wiped the sky, causing the sky to slowly grow brighter.

Li Huowang looked down. The grave had become larger than a mountain, but the two words had disappeared.

He shifted his gaze forward and saw a path on the mountain. He followed it and climbed up. After an unknown length of time, he finally reached the top. By then, the sky was already bright. He looked around at the increasingly bright forest.

Ding~ A bell chimed. A cold wind blew past Li Huowang, carrying a fallen leaf and sending a chill through him. He hugged himself to keep warm while trudging forward, sneezing as the temperature dropped. Gradually, he began to shiver uncontrollably.

The bell chimed again, drawing his gaze to several camels sitting beside a makeshift stall. Their owner sat inside while eating. Drawn by the warmth and aroma, Li Huowang entered the stall.

Inside, several patrons sat at rough-hewn tables. They turned toward him in eerie unison at the sound of his footsteps. Their faces were featureless, their chopsticks were fused to their hands, and where their bodies met their clothes, the boundaries blurred.

Li Huowang found an empty table and sat. The others resumed their meals, and soon, the owner brought him a bowl of food. However, the border between the bowl and its contents was blurry. He ignored it and began eating, immediately feeling a warm

sensation spread through him.

He wiped his mouth and prepared to leave.

At that moment, the owner tugged Li Huowang, leaving him confused. Li Huowang tried to touch the owner's hand, but the owner crumbled and scattered like sand.

In an instant, the stall, the camels, and the other patrons disintegrated, scattering into the wind. Li Huowang stood alone in a vast emptiness.

Ding~

The bell chimed once again. Li Huowang followed the sound of the bell, and a green forest slowly replaced the white surroundings.

Li Huowang's unease mounted with every step he took toward the sound of the bell. His surroundings were eerily familiar to him.

"I think I've been here before."

The moment he spoke, the forest turned into a dark green color. The path became muddy, making it difficult to walk.

He felt cold and sticky. He wanted to leave badly. He quickened his pace toward the sound of the bell.

The more he walked, the more familiar the scenery became. He started to recognize the trees and the stones.

His surroundings became more real too. Even the chime of the bell seemed painfully familiar.

"Who am I? Why am I here? Am I heading back?"

The ringing of the bell became clearer and faster. The source of the ringing shifted from the front to the back.

Li Huowang turned around and saw nothing.

However, everything had changed. Li Huowang was no longer the one chasing after the sound of the bell. He was being chased.

There was nothing behind him, but Li Huowang felt an irrational fear. He started running aimlessly. Soon, the sound of the bell was replaced by footsteps.

Suddenly, Li Huowang felt something kicking him from the

back, causing him to stumble and begin falling down.

In the nick of time, a wrinkled hand caught Li Huowang's shirt and pulled him up. He looked up and finally saw the person that had been chasing after him.

"Hahaha. I can't believe I randomly found one in the forest. I'm so lucky!"

The man was none other than Dan Yangzi. He had been ringing the bell that summoned the Wandering Gods.

"AH!"

Li Huowang woke up in shock and looked at the empty warehouse. He stared at Yang Na and Yi Donglai but didn't recognize them.

Chapter 989 - Change

Li Huowang sat at the bottom of a dried-up well. He gazed up at the circle of white light above before looking down to find himself surrounded by talismans and red threads. A smile broke across his face. “I did it. I finally returned.”

However, his smile quickly faded. “Wait, I did what? What exactly did I do? Why was I so happy?”

Li Huowang’s attempt at recalling was met with a disconcerting emptiness in his mind. He recalled once being superimposed with... something. He tried and tried, but to no avail—he couldn’t remember anything.

All he could recall was Dan Yangzi catching him.

But that wasn’t the pressing matter. The lingering question that really gnawed at him was the reason for his happiness moments ago.

Fu Shengtian was at their doorstep, and the Murderous Aura Command had tainted almost everyone in the world. Just what reason did he have to feel joy?

Climbing out of the well with some effort, Li Huowang emerged to a strange sight. A group of people wearing oversized masks dancing with a Lion Dance. They made a large bamboo net with bamboo poles and danced on them, jumping and twirling in the air before landing on the bamboo net.

There were several burning bonfires beneath the bamboo net. The fires burned bright and smoke rolled upwards, making the people dance and twirl even faster.

Li Huowang recognized what was going on. This was the Nuo Opera of Hou Shu.

“Stop dancing. Someone tell me what’s going on!”

With a wave of his arm, Li Huowang sent the fire and the bamboo net flying upwards. The surroundings became much clearer.

As Li Huowang huffed, one of the performers walked forward. "The Liang Kingdom's Emperor ordered us to rescue you. What you've done is very rude."

"You? Rescue me?" Li Huowang couldn't help but feel it was ridiculous. There was no way they could have saved him by performing.

"How could the Nuo Opera save me? Who are you trying to call to save me? Da Nuo? Da Nuo has gone crazy! It's a Grand Siming! If it has the time to respond to you, why isn't it destroying Fu Shengtian? Save me? It should save itself first!"

Li Huowang pushed the performer and jumped up to the highest point of the palace before shouting as loud as he could, "Where are you? Tell me what is going on!"

Li Huowang's voice spread throughout Shangjing, and someone soon answered him. It was none other than the Liang Kingdom's Emperor, Gao Zhijian.

Gao Zhijian was shocked to learn that Li Huowang had forgotten everything. "Senior Li, have you really forgotten everything? Weren't you the one who talked with the Simings of the Baiyu Capital? You were the one who said that you joined up with them to fight against the Simings of Fu Shengtian."

"Is that so?" Li Huowang stammered, puzzled. "Then why can't I remember anything? How did I contact them? How did I ally myself with the Simings to fight against Fu Shengtian?"

"Li Huowang, are you okay?" A gentle voice jolted him from his thoughts.

Li Huowang turned to see Yang Na looking at him with deep concern. He looked at her face in a daze before recognizing her as his girlfriend.

He extended his arms and hugged her tightly.

“Li Huowang, what’s wrong? What happened?” Yang Na worriedly asked question after question.

Li Huowang remembered everything leading up to his encounter with Dan Yangzi. He felt troubled and lost, unsure of what was happening. “I don’t know. I just felt that I was connected to something.”

Yang Na gently touched the back of Li Huowang’s head before letting him go. “Are you alright now? Is the trouble with Fu Shengtian over? Can you go back to who you were previously?”

Li Huowang thought carefully before turning to look at Yi Donglai. Doctor Yi, am I cured?”

Yi Donglai pushed his glasses and closed his notebook. “This is your illness. You should know if it’s been resolved.”

Li Huowang shook his head and raised his hands. “I don’t know. I don’t know what’s happening on the other side. However, if I don’t go back there soon, it would mean the issue with Fu Shengtian has been resolved.”

“Then we can just wait,” Yi Donglai said. “If it doesn’t work, we can start your treatment again. One day, your illness will be gone for good.”

However, Yi Donglai’s words only worsened Li Huowang’s anxiety. “Doctor Yi, this isn’t the first time this has happened! I need to return to who I was. Otherwise, I’ll lose if I switch back at a critical moment.”

If he was genuinely unable to switch back and get in touch with Gao Zhijian and the rest, it meant that he wouldn’t be able to summon the army of the Liang Kingdom to help him.

Yi Donglai looked at the door behind him before whispering, “I’m being monitored, so I can’t say much. But as your doctor, I have to give you some advice. To get better, you must have a clear goal in your heart.

“The treatment won’t help you if you don’t follow it, no matter how long it goes on or how skilled I am. You need to understand one thing—whatever happens on the other side is a hallucination. It’s not real. Accepting this is the first step to recovery.”

Li Huowang felt his heart go cold, but he refused to acknowledge it. “Doctor Yi, I didn’t have that kind of understanding in the past. How did you treat me last time?”

“That’s because I had the time to slowly get to know you and your symptoms. We don’t have that luxury right now.

“Li Huowang, trust me. You won’t end up well if you stay with them. They tricked you by reading my thesis and obtaining information about you. Everything on the other side is a hallucination.”

“Everything is fake?”

Li Huowang let out a bitter laugh as Yang Na looked on in confusion.

“Doctor Yi, I *want* to believe it’s all fake. But I can’t! That world is real! This isn’t just about me—it’s about the entire world!”

Yi Donglai sighed. “I can’t treat you if you refuse to cooperate.”

Li Huowang hesitated before deciding to gamble. “Do you trust me?”

“How do you want me to trust you? I only trust science. You’d need to somehow prove that the bizarre world is real using science.”

Li Huowang bit his lips before taking something out from within his clothes.

They were pills roughly the size of a small glutinous rice ball. Golden words spelling out “lifespan” swam inside them.

“What are those?”

“Lifespan pills. I grabbed them from the Surveillance Bureau’s vault.”

Chapter 990 - Nuo

“Lifespan Pills?”

Yi Donglai studied the pills carefully. They looked oddly familiar, as if he’d seen them somewhere before.

“Li Huowang, are you serious? Are you out of your mind?”

Li Huowang’s breathing quickened, his pupils shifting erratically. “You don’t believe me? Fine, I’ll show you. I’ll prove that the other world is real and not just a hallucination!”

Without another word, he bolted out of the warehouse and dragged Chen Hongyu inside. She was still munching on potato chips.

“Look closely!”

Li Huowang gave Chen Hongyu a lifespan pill. She swallowed it without any hesitation.

Chen Hongyu casually cleaned her teeth with her fingernails.

“What did you just feed me?”

“A lifespan pill. It can restore your youth!”

The moment he said it, something miraculous happened. Chen Hongyu began to transform. She lost weight at an incredible speed, and her features reverted to her younger self.

In mere moments, the aunt-like Chen Hongyu became a young lady, still snacking on potato chips.

Chen Hongyu was visibly shocked by her body’s transformation. “Hey! What is this? Li Huowang, I thought your ability was to conjure gold. Since when did your ability change?”

Her astonishment, however, was nothing compared to Yi Donglai’s. His eyes were wide with shock.

His unshakable heart began to crumble as he witnessed the impossible unfolding before him.

Li Huowang approached him eagerly. "Doctor Yi, do you see it now? Do you finally believe me? Can you empathize with the torment I've been enduring all these years? Can you finally understand what I've been going through?"

"Impossible. Impossible! How could this be? This is illogical! Yes, this must be magic!"

Desperate for answers, he grabbed Chen Hongyu and started inspecting her closely, even pulling at her clothes in disbelief.

Yi Donglai stood his ground, refusing to back down even after Chen Hongyu slapped him. He looked down and began inspecting the ground for any signs of a hidden trapdoor.

No matter how thoroughly he searched, reality gave him no escape—there were no tricks.

"Stay calm! I have to stay calm!" Yi Donglai said, trying to stabilize his mind with psychological reasoning. "This world... is the only world..."

Li Huowang held up the remaining seven pills in his hand. "Doctor Yi, I know you still don't believe me. You think it's a trick, right? Then try them yourself."

Fear and excitement warred on Yi Donglai's face. Eventually, he took all seven pills and swallowed them.

Moments later, a miraculous sensation surged through his body. His skin tightened, and his body rejuvenated. He was young again.

He ran out of the warehouse and started lifting heavy objects found around the house.

"Impossible! This cannot be!"

Seeing how frantic Yi Donglai was, Li Huowang retrieved a make-up mirror from Yang Na's bag, handing it over to Yi Donglai.

Yi Donglai saw a familiar-looking youth in the mirror and finally broke down.

"No! Impossible! This cannot be!"

Li Huowang took the mirror and returned it to Yang Na. “Doctor Yi, do you understand me now? Everything I’ve gone through is real. The things you documented in your thesis are real. These aren’t illusions—they’re living, human beings.”

Li Huowang pointed at the others behind him. “They are not liars either. They are the Simings of the Baiyu Capital.”

Yi Donglai froze, staring around him. His psyche broke down completely.

Li Huowang helped him stand up slowly. He turned to Yi Donglai and said, “I didn’t want to involve you, but I had no choice. You must realize the severity of the situation.

“This impacts the lives of everyone across three different historical timelines. I don’t know their exact population, but every single one is doing their best to survive. They just want to live.

“I know you’re a good person, and I’m certain that you don’t want to see them die. You wouldn’t want to see so many families torn apart, would you?

“Help me. Treat me. We need you for the battle ahead.”

Yi Donglai shook off Li Huowang and grabbed the mirror in Yang Na’s hands before stumbling into the warehouse.

Ba Shengqing, who had been loading his gun, chuckled and elbowed his sister. “Heh. We have one more lunatic on board.”

Ba Nanxu turned to Zhao Shuangdian. “Hey, it looks like we have one more ally. Let’s eat something nicer today.”

“Stop talking nonsense. I don’t think it’s that simple. Go bring my computer for me.”

Zhao Shuangdian followed Li Huowang into the warehouse. They pushed the door open and were greeted by the sight of Yi Donglai, holding onto a pocket watch and swinging it in front of his own reflection in the mirror.

“Look at the watch and follow it. Concentrate. While doing so, feel your body as it relaxes. Anytime you feel sleepy, you can close

Chapter 991 - Baiyu Capital

The Nuo Opera droned on without pause. The bamboo stage creaked as the fire below roared.

Li Huowang sighed and shook his head. Facing Fu Shengtian's power, the locals clung to every method they could think of, no matter how futile.

There were still people who believed in Da Nuo, and there were many of them in Hou Shu, but it was not wise to rely on the help of a Siming that had gone crazy.

"Do you think it will work just because they think it will? They are not Strayed Ones. It's all just superstition. Let's go."

Li Huowang gestured for Gao Zhijian to follow him to the temple of the Liang Kingdom's palace.

Gao Zhijian followed Li Huowang and tried to make him reconsider his plan. "Senior Li. Is this really what you're planning to do? The Baiyu Capital is very dangerous. You might not be safe even with the Dragon Qi protecting you."

"Do you have another plan? Should we wait for them to attack us while we sit and do nothing?" Li Huowang replied.

Li Huowang looked up and stared at the skies above him. "Even if this were a simple war, we would still need to send spies, wouldn't we? Don't worry. The Simings of the Baiyu Capital are on our side. They still owe me a favor."

Although Li Huowang had lost some of his memories, he still remembered that Fu Shengtian was targeting them.

He couldn't just strategize below here. He needed to go up and check to see if the Baiyu Capital was fine.

He had to see if the crack was still there or not. He couldn't fight without information. Li Huowang firmly believed that information on his enemy was vital and that fighting blind was not an option.

The Baiyu Capital didn't follow the rules of linear time. If he could glean anything about the future, it might prove invaluable.

Gao Zhijian nodded. "Then I wish you a safe journey. I will protect our world with Senior Bai down here."

"Zhijian, I know you want to save the Dragon Veins, but that's not something we can focus on right now. Fu Shengtian also has Dragon Veins, so we can secure as many as we want when we win.

"I also think the Dragon Veins are part of the Heavenly Dao of Order. Since there is a Heavenly Dao of Order, then there must be a Siming in charge of it.

"If we can't use Fu Shengtian's Dragon Vein, we can at least take the Heavenly Dao of Order from that Siming and create new Dragon Veins. We can return some of them to the Qi Kingdom, the Liang Kingdom, and even the Tianchen Kingdom to have seasons again."

"Senior Li, I trust you. Also..." Gao Zhijian hesitated while thinking about how to discuss with Li Huowang.

Li Huowang frowned. "What? Speak your mind."

"It's nothing. It's just a minor issue. Our survival comes first."

Li Huowang looked at him curiously before making haste for the temple. "Just tell me what you are thinking!"

"Senior Li, let me ask you this. Am I considered a good emperor now?"

Li Huowang looked at him seriously before answering, "Yes."

Gao Zhijian was a good emperor. He dedicated his life to his nation, even though he had been naive. Still, even under the best leadership, some citizens would always lead bad lives.

Gao Zhijian laughed heartily. "That's good to hear. At least I'm

not a burden anymore.”

But his laughter quickly faded into worry. “Senior Li, everything depends on you now. You cannot die.”

“What kind of nonsense are you talking about? Hurry up!”

Li Huowang grabbed Gao Zhijian’s robes and pulled, causing the scenery to shift. They arrived at the temple almost immediately.

The large bronze tree stood unchanged, its branches pinning down the fourteen Dragon Veins while they wailed in torment. They had not been released since his last visit.

Li Huowang cracked his fists, and two more arms sprouted beneath his armpits. He then made a seal and chanted. Li Huowang was using the Dragon-Slaying Immortal-Killing Array to ascend to Baiyu Capital.

Li Huowang cracked his fists, and two more arms sprouted beneath his armpits. He then made a seal and began to chant. The Dragon-Slaying Immortal-Killing Array activated, drawing Dragon Qi from the Dragon Veins and making them shrink.

Sensing the Dragon Qi enveloping his body, Li Huowang looked up, and Peng Longteng appeared beside him.

Peng Longteng used her halberd to launch Li Huowang high up into the air.

Li Huowang flew past the clouds, the skies, and the weird beings living in the sky. Soon, he reached the massive Ox-Tail Gate.

Li Huowang took a deep breath and looked at the chaos of the large gate before stepping through.

He could not discern whether it was dark or bright, but he could perceive it as peaceful and spacious.

He didn’t know which side was up or down. The vast, timeless space was silent, eerily so.

The silence took Li Huowang aback. “What’s happening? Where are the other Simings?”

Li Huowang used his fingernails and cut a small wound on his

arm. Small droplets of blood sipped out from his wound.

He felt no pain despite the wounds. He didn't know if the others were here, but he was now certain that Ba-Hui and the Sacrificial God weren't here.

Li Huowang clasped his hand on the wound and zipped it up. He was healed again.

He waved his arm around to move into the Baiyu Capital. He needed to figure out what was wrong.

Li Huowang's body started flashing as he used his "Truth" cultivation to propel himself forward.

However, he had to halt his progress after a few minutes since he lacked any landmarks to guide him. He wasn't even sure if he was going forward or backward.

"What's going on? What's happening?" The strange scene made Li Huowang nervous.

"Ji Zai! Ji Zai!" Li Huowang shouted into the void.

Something reacted to him. Something was coming for him.

He couldn't see, but he somehow managed to feel it.

"Who's there?"

The question had barely left his lips when hair-like strands brushed against his scalp.

Looking up, he saw nothing, but an icy chill crept up his spine, from his tailbone to his skull.

"Three Ancient Ones!"

Chapter 992 - Three Ancient Ones

Li Huowang sat outside the house, covering the wound on his forehead with his bangs. He stared aimlessly at the forest ahead, letting his gaze rest while thinking about his problems.

“Here.” A can of cola appeared in front of Li Huowang. He took it and realized that it was still cold.

“Where did you buy it?” Li Huowang drank a sip before passing it back to Yang Na.

She smiled proudly. “A small convenience store. I didn’t expect to find one out here in the countryside. It’s simple, but it has the basics.”

She then looked at how grumpy Li Huowang was and consoled him, saying, “Don’t worry. We can win this. We’re Simings who govern the Heavenly Daos. Fu Shengtian threw so many of his Simings at us and still lost. They’re no match for us—we’re stronger than we think. We’ve taken down many of their Simings, and only a few of us have fallen. This time, we’ll win.”

Yang Na had become more relaxed and cheerful since embracing Li Huowang’s worldview, and she had overcome her depression.

He knew she was trying to cheer him up, but her words couldn’t lift his spirits. His mind kept circling back to what Qing Wanglai had told him.

Li Huowang couldn’t fully believe or dismiss the words of the Sitting Oblivion Dao. Their truths were always mixed with lies, making it hard to discern truth from deception.

And then there was the matter of the Three Ancient Ones’ plan.

His intentions remained a mystery, even when the enemy was practically at their doorstep.

Qing Wanglai was his enemy now. A regular enemy wasn't a threat, but Qing Wanglai was someone who understood their strengths and weaknesses. He was a major threat.

"Stop thinking and come inside for a meal. We need to be full if we want to deal with our problems. The chicken in the countryside is amazing. I snuck a few pieces while they were cooking."

Yang Na pulled Li Huowang into the house and seated him on the table. Various dishes were being served, and one of the dishes was mushroom braised chicken.

The delicious scent made Chen Hongyu salivate uncontrollably.

Yang Na was correct. The chicken was delicious, tender, and juicy. It was well marinated, and even its bone was fragrant. It was completely different from the chicken they bought in the supermarket.

Li Huowang washed down a bite with a sip of cola, relishing the cold fizz. Looking around, he noticed someone was missing. "Where's Doctor Yi?"

"He's still in the warehouse, trying to hypnotize himself," Ba Nanxu mumbled, her mouth full of chicken. "But hey, thanks to him, we've got this amazing meal."

Li Huowang sighed when he heard how Yi Donglai was still losing his mind. He didn't want to do it, but there was no time. He needed to ensure everything was going right to fight against Fu Shengtian.

"Save him some chicken," Li Huowang said, taking a piece of bamboo shoot. "I'll bring it to him and check on him later."

Although Yi Donglai had treated him to a point where he no longer uncontrollably traveled to the other world, neither he nor Yi Donglai could be sure that he was fully cured

"He's just a prisoner. Why bother? We should just leave him

some vegetables. We barely have enough chicken for ourselves,” Chen Hongyu grumbled, pouring the chicken’s sauce over her rice. It was the most fragrant way to eat her meal.

The others continued eating until barely any chicken remained.

Yang Na stood up and grabbed the last chicken wing before placing it into Li Huowang’s bowl.

She had just sat down and ate a few mouthfuls when she saw Li Huowang frozen in place. He didn’t touch his chicken at all.

“Huowang, why aren’t you eating it? I thought you loved chicken wings?” Yang Na bit her chopsticks while asking Li Huowang.

“Give me if you don’t want it.” Chen Hongyu happily tried to take the chicken wing from Li Huowang’s bowl.

Just then, Yang Na saw Li Huowang’s face lighting up in surprise before giving in to fear.

“Three Ancient Ones!” Li Huowang shot up and shouted.

While Chen Hongyu was distracted by Li Huowang’s shout, Zhao Lei quickly took the chicken wing away.

“Qing Wanglai, what are you doing here!”

Li Huowang’s angry shout reverberated throughout the entire house.

Chen Hongyu clicked her tongue and continued eating her rice. “Sheesh, why so noisy? Go outside if you’re going to shout.”

Li Huowang grabbed his sword and snarled. “Why are you back in the Baiyu Capital? We’re all here, and yet you dare to come back?”

Li Huowang swung his blade furiously in front of him.

“Li Huowang, what are you talking about? There’s nothing in front of you,” Wu Qi said in confusion.

“Of course, you can’t see it! What is seen but not perceived is called ‘invisible’; what is heard but not heard is called ‘rare’; what is grasped but not obtained is called ‘subtle.’ I’ve said this before—we

cannot see the body of the Three Ancient Ones!”

Li Huowang had just said that when he rolled backward.

His frustration mounted as the others continued eating, oblivious to the danger. They couldn't sense what was happening in the other world.

Only Li Huowang and Qing Wanglai could influence both worlds.

Li Huowang never thought Qing Wanglai would attack them from the other world.

Although this confirmed that Yi Donglai's treatment was working, there was no time to celebrate. If the Three Ancient Ones succeeded in snatching him away, part of Ji Zai would be stolen as well. They would be in deep trouble later on.

Li Huowang glared at the empty void in the Baiyu Capital. He was on the verge of risking his life. Suddenly, Yang Na grabbed her gun and fired at the empty space in front of him.

Chapter 993 - Secret

Amid the chaos of Baiyu Capital, Li Huowang felt the space around him growing unstable. This disturbance didn't stem from his cultivation of the "Truth." It came from the influence of the Three Ancient Ones.

Li Huowang felt that the Three Ancient Ones were very close to him right now.

A snarl crossed his face as he remembered what the Three Ancient Ones did last time. He gripped his blade and swung forward, but his blade did nothing, even though he could feel the strands in front of him.

A gunshot rang out as Li Huowang prepared to use a different attack against the Three Ancient Ones. Something in front of Li Huowang trembled and flashed briefly.

What appeared was a massive being with no end. It looked like an amoeba with faint flashing lights.

In that fleeting moment, Li Huowang realized that this being was entirely composed of interwoven secrets.

Li Huowang read the secrets, and they unraveled in his mind without conscious effort. Having grasped all the secrets, He started to learn what the Tree Ancient Ones had tried to take from his body. However, before he could fully comprehend, a scorching heat grazed his head.

Bang! Another gunshot rang out. Li Huowang felt his sweat dripping down his chin but didn't have time to register what was happening—the Three Ancient Ones was trying to run away!

"Nana, chase after him! Your attack is working!" Li Huowang shouted, running to chase after the Three Ancient Ones.

As he ran, Li Huowang scanned his surroundings to ensure the

Three Ancient Ones did not lay any traps for them. Qing Wanglai must've come prepared, as he wouldn't have appeared in front of Li Huowang without a reason.

Yang Na drove past Li Huowang with her motorbike. She stopped a few meters in front of Li Huowang and started shooting the space before her.

“Attack now! I blocked him!”

“Good!” Li Huowang lunged for the Three Ancient Ones while Yang Na continued shooting.

Splat!

The blade, which was stained with Li Huowang's blood, had successfully wounded the Three Ancient Ones. Secrets continuously leaked out.

The Three Ancient Ones reacted instantly, fragmenting into countless pieces that scattered in every direction. Li Huowang refused to let him escape after finally landing a blow. He chased after one fragment, shouting, “Nana!”

Yang Na looped back on her motorbike, and Li Huowang hauled himself onto the seat behind her. As they closed the distance, Li Huowang finally sensed the leaking secrets. One small secret, no larger than a ping-pong ball, struck Li Huowang's blind eye.

A chill swept through him as a scene flashed in his mind: an old, blind Daoist sat cross-legged before a statue of the Three Ancient Ones, kowtowing reverently.

The Daoist was whispering, but his trembling voice echoed clearly in Li Huowang's ears. “Supreme One, I've overheard a secret. I don't know if it's true, but I beseech you to reveal the answer.

“Why is everyone suffering? Why do Natural Disasters plague us? Why are there so many sects?

“I found a jade tablet, which revealed the answer to me.”

The old Daoist's eyes dilated with fear, his voice trembling as if he could not believe what he would say next. "It's... it's because this is our karma! We're not in the world of the living, but rather the world of the dead! We're not humans—we're ghosts repaying karmic debts!

"The process of reincarnation has stopped because Da Nuo has gone mad. That's why everything is so twisted right now. Humans aren't humans, and ghosts aren't ghosts."

The old Daoist chuckled weakly, as if he had used up all his strength. "Supreme One. If we're all ghosts, how can we cultivate and ascend to immortality?"

The scene faded. When Li Huowang snapped back, he realized he was back in the Baiyu Capital.

"What's going on? Is that why the world is so crazy? Is it because the Liang Kingdom used to be the underworld?!"

He recalled the Flesh Buddha of the Righteous Monastery, the Bodhisattva composed of flies in the Benevolent Nunnery, and the charred Sacrificial God of the Ao Jing Sect. He realized that it made sense.

The strange revelation stunned him and gave the Three Ancient Ones more time to escape.

Li Huowang shook his head and cursed. It was a secret, but it could be fake. It might not be the truth.

This was Qing Wanglai's attempt to shake him off. It was something that only the Three Ancient Ones could do.

Li Huowang saw him escaping and knew that there was no time. Who knew where the Three Ancient Ones would lead him?

He stood up and launched himself from the back of the motorbike.

Just a short distance away from the Three Ancient Ones, he materialized Peng Longteng and used her halberd to throw him even farther.

It was more than enough. Li Huowang raised his blade and stabbed the Three Ancient Ones ruthlessly.

He stabbed numerous times until the Three Ancient Ones almost dissipated. Suddenly, the Three Ancient Ones lashed out with threads, using them to grab Li Huowang's head and force it upwards.

Li Huowang froze when he saw what was on top of him. The Baiyu Capital was supposed to be chaotic, without any darkness or light.

Now, there was something different above him. The very same iridescent black liquid that had submerged the Qi Kingdom had appeared.

The strange, oily, iridescent color now stained the skies of the Baiyu Capital.

Li Huowang hadn't forgotten where he was. He was still within the Baiyu Capital, and Fu Shengtian somehow turned a portion of it into itself.

This time, there was a noticeable difference. In the past, it had only tried to squeeze through a crack. Now, it had fully incorporated a chunk of it into itself. In fact, half of the Baiyu Capital's sky—if it could even be called that—had been assimilated.

In the strange, iridescent darkness, the color pumped like a heartbeat, as if it was nurturing a terrifying lifeform.

Chapter 994 - Creep

In the turbulent Baiyu Capital, Li Huowang observed the skies consumed by Fu Shengtian.

The iridescent darkness contracted and expanded. Every time it did, it grew stronger.

Fu Shengtian was attacking Baiyu Capital. A chill ran down Li Huowang's spine as a heavy pressure settled over his chest.

Fu Shengtian had never stopped attacking. Whether striking head-on or launching ambushes, the assault was relentless.

"We need to act now!"

Li Huowang looked down to find nothing beneath him. The secret that had leaked out had disappeared.

The Three Ancient Ones had escaped by distracting Li Huowang with Fu Shengtian. That was why he had lured Li Huowang here.

"Three Ancient Ones, I will find you one day!"

LI Huowang roared and ran towards the sky with his bloody blade.

"Nana, help me!"

Yang Na nodded and raised her gun to shoot the skies.

Gunshots rang out, but the sound of thunder soon replaced it as heavy rain fell down from the skies, drenching everyone.

The rain battered Li Huowang, blurring his vision and making him uncomfortable.

The rain pummeled everyone's umbrellas. They ran outside and saw two couples going crazy.

Zhao Shuangdian was busy typing on her laptop and calculating something. Her typing noise resonated with the sound of the rain.

Yang Na approached them anxiously and asked, “Who still has more bullets? Give me some! I ran out of them!”

She asked again and again, but no one replied. “Hurry up! Huowang is fighting against Fu Shengtian alone! I need to go help him!”

Yang Na used her hand to shield her eyes as she glared at the dark clouds above her with animosity.

The sound of typing suddenly stopped. Zhao Shuangdian grabbed two loaded magazines from the back of Ba Shengqing and gave them to Yang Na without hesitation.

Zhao Shuangdian’s actions surprised everyone. Ba Nanxu stared in disbelief. “Did their insanity rub off on you?”

Zhao Shuangdian nodded. “Why not? His model fits mine. I trust him.”

Ba Nanxu gaped in shock but said nothing. When she realized Zhao Shuangdian wasn’t joking, she chuckled, taking out her own gun and firing it at the skies.

“Fine. If you want to die, I’ll bury you. Now what? Should I return as the Siming of Pain and use the Heavenly Dao of Pain to strike down Fu Shengtian’s Simings? To make them die from pain?”

Zhao Shuangdian stared at the equations on her laptop before shaking her head. “We cannot follow their plans. They have theirs, and we will follow ours.

“For now, we cannot influence the Baiyu Capital. Just leave it to Li Huowang here. Go and start our cars. Since they are here, that means that they have a gathering point. We just need to find it and infiltrate it.”

Three off-road vehicles emerged from the muddy path, and everyone entered them. With a cigarette still in hand, Ba Nanxu rolled down the windows and shouted, “Hang in there, Huowang! We’re going to the Baiyu Capital to help you!”

Li Huowang wiped his face with his sleeves. “Hurry up!

They've already absorbed a large portion of Baiyu Capital! I don't know if they still have any hidden aces!"

Ba Nanxu nodded and stepped on the gas pedal. The vehicle roared to life and drove on the muddy path.

However, nobody noticed the arrival of Yi Donglai. He stood in the rain without moving, his lips tightly pursed. He still had the pocket watch in his hands.

Li Huowang sighed when he heard the engines disappearing. This time, he wasn't alone.

"Three Ancient Ones! Show them the path, or you won't have a Baiyu Capital to live in!"

Li Huowang didn't care if Qing Wanglai heard him or not. All he could do right now was to stab his blade numerous times into the dark skies. As he did, the black liquid poured out, engulfing Li Huowang.

The black liquid was capable of causing growth on most surfaces. Thankfully, the Dragon Qi on Li Huowang's body protected him, making the black liquid simply slick off his face.

Li Huowang continued to attack without worrying about his own safety.

After some time, he realized that it wasn't working. It was too slow. In the face of the black liquid, he was powerless.

Li Huowang wiped the water off his face. "No, this isn't working. I need to find another way to stop it!"

Li Huowang swiftly made a decision and sprinted towards the left. He increased his speed with his cultivation.

In just a few minutes, he reached the border between the Baiyu Capital and the black liquid. Li Huowang saw that Fu Shengtian was still growing and assimilating more of the Baiyu Capital.

In just a few minutes, he reached the border where the black liquid continued its relentless assimilation of the Baiyu Capital.

Li Huowang knew he was out of time. Without hesitation, he

used his blade to sever a section of the Baiyu Capital, isolating it from the encroaching menace.

Since he couldn't do anything to the liquid, he would rather cut off a part of the Baiyu Capital.

He saw that the black liquid did not continue to spread beyond the place he had separated. Relief surged through him—his method had worked.

But then, an ominous hissing arose from the depths of the black liquid. An overwhelming wave of uneasiness washed over Li Huowang.

The hissing sound was far from simple, with multiple overlapping noises. It gradually became louder, reaching a point where Li Huowang could hear nothing but a deafening roar.

Yi Donglai's voice suddenly broke past the loud noise. "Li Huowang, there's thunder and lightning! Throw the knife away, or you will get electrocuted!"

Chapter 995 - Battle

“Thunder?” Li Huowang felt his scalp go numb and quickly dodged left.

Suddenly, the entire black, iridescent sky split open. A flash of platinum emerged from the darkness, carrying a nearly tangible gaze.

He felt an odd, almost inexplicable sensation emanating from the platinum gaze. It transcended his ordinary senses.

It was just a ray of light, but it tainted his eyes and turned them black and iridescent. As his eyes transformed, the black, iridescent liquid started to seep out from his eye socket.

That attack had visibly hurt his eyeball. Realizing something was wrong, Li Huowang snarled and clawed at his eye, attempting to dig it out.

“Li Huowang, stop! You can’t gouge it out—this is your last eye! If you do, you’ll be completely blind!” Yi Donglai shouted, grabbing his arm at the last moment.

“Scram! Don’t try to stop me! If I don’t do this, it will affect me!” Li Huowang shouted, throwing Yi Donglai away.

Just as he raised his hand to tear at his eye again, a sudden gaze from afar appeared. Li Huowang felt his body opening up like a flower blossoming. The pain overwhelmed him, halting both his movements and the black liquid’s flow.

Li Huowang’s senses melded together. He recognized the presence approaching: Ba-Hui, the Siming who governed the Heavenly Dao of Pain. And Ba-Hui wasn’t alone—he felt the others reaching around him.

“You’re all here! Attack now!”

Li Huowang raised his arm and pointed at the dark cloud to his

left.

The Simings, which had fused together, floated like a large mountain towards the black sky.

The black sky began to bubble like hot metal plunged into oil.

An explosion sent a powerful heatwave blasting out from the impact. This intense heatwave burned off a layer of Li Huowang's skin.

Gazing up at the cracked sky, Li Huowang caught sight of the darkness that lay beyond. Without a moment's hesitation, he joined the other Simings and followed them toward the crack.

They were all fighting against Fu Shengtian and its Simings. He couldn't remain behind.

As he was about to enter the dark hole, an inverted tree fell through the hole. Its twisted, rotting form gleamed with an iridescent sheen.

The sharp crown of the tree pierced through his chest, pinning him down. It grew endlessly and pushed Li Huowang down.

Li Huowang struggled but couldn't move at all.

Suddenly, Li Huowang felt a glow behind him. When he looked back, he saw the floating Ox-Tail Gate.

The tree burst through the Ox-Tail Gate and stabbed down through the clouds.

It grew so fast that the Ox-Tail Gate was far above it. However, Li Huowang's melded senses let him perceive that the Ox-Tail Jade had shattered.

The large tree crashed into the ground and raised a large plume of dust.

The tree's branches spread outwards, as though it intended to take over the entire world.

It wasn't over yet. Its sprawling form stretched across the place, forming a strange connection between Heaven and Earth. It resembled a massive mushroom.

With a roar, the bottom part of the tree exploded. Li Huowang emerged from the wreckage, his body ablaze.

He floated upward and glared at the tree angrily. The tree had broken the Ox-Tail Gate.

Li Huowang could sense the Heavenly Daos going out of control without the Ox-Tail Gate. The world was now undergoing a lot of Natural Disasters, and even Li Huowang couldn't discern which Heavenly Dao caused which calamity.

"It's all because of you!" Li Huowang exclaimed in anger. Simultaneously, a colossal piece of jade descended from the heavens, narrowly missing him.

He grabbed it and fashioned the jade into a massive ax. He couldn't move it, but he had a plan.

He reached out his left arm and grabbed something.

Li Huowang caught it and fashioned it into a massive axe. It was too heavy to wield, but he had a plan. He extended his left arm to grab something, phasing past the Liang Kingdom, Qing Qiu, and the ground. Finally, he grasped the Lion Dance Palace hidden far below.

"It's time for you to help me!"

The white tassels complied, entering his body. His organs began to grow outward while new organs sprouted in every direction.

Li Huowang's body swelled beyond recognition. It became impossible to distinguish the front, side, back, up, and bottom of his body. He became one with the Lion Dance Palace.

Through his bulging large body, he let out an incoherent roar as he grabbed the large ax and tried to cut down the tree.

With an incoherent roar, Li Huowang lifted the colossal axe and struck the tree. The impact sent tremors across the battlefield, leaving a deep gash in the trunk. He swung again and again, each strike more furious than the last.

Finally, he cut down the tree. However, it quickly fell and reconnected the part he had chopped off. The wound healed swiftly, and the tree was whole once more.

Li Huowang chopped the tree repeatedly, but it would fall down and heal each time. He couldn't do anything to it.

Then, the world seemed to ignite. A titanic head, vast enough to eclipse both sky and earth, roared and lunged at the tree. Gao Zhijian had summoned Jiang Xiangshou.

Li Huowang pounced toward Jiang Xiangshou and grabbed it. The white tassels behind his body worked hard to fuse them together.

The Dragon Qi within him fused with Jiang Xiangshou's murderous aura. Li Huowang channeled their combined power into the axe. Together, they charged at the tree with a deafening roar.

In the pouring rain, Yi Donglai stood frozen in stunned silence, watching Li Huowang's distorted form. His crimson body was twisted, his mouth was crooked, and his veins were bulging. He repeatedly swung at the empty space around him with his bloodied blade.

The sight was both eerie and bizarre. Li Huowang appeared to be performing the strange dance of the Nuo Opera in the rain.

Chapter 996 - Come In

Within the territory of the Great Liang, a colossal pillar stretched between heaven and earth, its surface sprouting and writhing with twisting branches. These warped extensions reached into every available space, as though seeking to consume all in their path.

An immense, distorted figure floated amidst the clouds. It was none other than the powerful Li Huowang.

“Hah!” Li Huowang shouted, his four mouths opening in unison. He swung a giant jade axe and hacked the pillar.

Shrouded in murderous aura, Li Huowang rushed to the fracture point of the pillar before it could fall. He roared as he chopped repeatedly at the falling pillar.

The massive pillar that extended from the Baiyu Capital kept descending, but every section was promptly severed by Li Huowang, who was now imbued with the power of Jiang Xiangshou.

He had now reached the seventh stage of “Truth” cultivation. In addition, he had used the Lion Dance Palace to merge with Jiang Xiangshou. This giant pillar from Fu Shengtian was not a match for him.

Li Huowang relentlessly cleaved the pillar from the Great Liang upward into the heavens. Finally, he hurled it toward the stars.

A tear in the heavens at the Baiyu Capital made chaos and disorder spill out, spreading down toward the mortal realm.

Li Huowang roared, driving his jade axe into the opening and sealing off the pillar’s influence in the mortal world.

However, he knew that this wasn’t enough. The breach remained, and if left unchecked, it would only widen.

He stared intently at the axe lodged in the gap with bloodshot eyes. It quickly morphed and finally formed into a shape that blocked off more of the breach.

He was not done. As he focused, shards of the Ox Tail Gate that had previously fallen began to reassemble.

Each fragment flew up from the ground and returned to its place. One jade shard, about the size of a table, flashed past him. It bore a faint red seal on it.

Li Huowang caught a brief glimpse of the characters “Zhuan Xu” before the shard vanished and returned to its original position.

With Li Huowang’s cultivation, the shattered Ox Tail Gate reassembled itself, sealing its gaps and once again taking the form of an enormous jade pendant. It was suspended between the Baiyu Capital and the mortal realm.

However, the situation did not improve much despite the repairs. Li Huowang remembered precisely what was unfolding at the Baiyu Tower.

He saw the chaos surge again within the gate and cried loudly with his six mouths. He reached over his shoulder to rip out his spine before charging straight into the gate.

The Baiyu Capital, which was previously in chaos, had transformed into a turbulent sea of Heavenly Daos that blended and collided with one another.

The Siming closest to him was a faceless Bodhisattva. Her graceful, flowing motions, accompanied by her robes that seemed to flutter randomly in the air, gave the impression that she was drifting underwater.

A pale, strange circle halo enveloped the back of her head, which made it hard to distinguish her appearance. At a closer distance, he saw that it was composed of countless white eyes.

The light behind the Bodhisattva continued to radiate outward, illuminating everything around.

With his heightened perceptions, he could faintly sense that this Siming seemed to have another side. However, he couldn't discern exactly what it was because he lacked the sensory organs to perceive it fully.

Li Huowang didn't know who this figure was, but he was sure it was a Siming of Baiyu Capital. He had once encountered this entity during his desperate fight with Dan Yangzi.

"Get your ass here and help! Don't just stand there!" Li Huowang shouted at the Siming as he charged toward the black, cracked sky.

Li Huowang stumbled and tripped over the high edge of the doorway, falling forward.

"Careful!" Yang Na caught up behind him and supported Li Huowang. They peered into the dilapidated temple together.

A torrential downpour raged outside. It leaked heavily inside the neglected rural temple, with water dripping everywhere.

The temple was littered with broken statues of Arhats and Buddhas, covered in dust and scattered without order. Every now and then, flashes of lightning would illuminate the scene, adding an eerie and sinister touch.

Yang Na noticed cigarette butts on the ground and deduced that someone had been there before. However, it was evident they hadn't been there for any proper business.

The Arhat statues had been defaced and smeared with filth, and some of the broken ones had been randomly reassembled.

She helped the panting Li Huowang toward the altar. But as they passed a statue with a broken finger, he froze, staring at it before bursting into maniacal laughter.

"Hahaha! A finger? All my effort, all my suffering, all I went through—and it was just a finger?

"You think that's enough to scare me? You think I'm afraid? Dream on!"

Li Huowang abruptly stood up. He stomped hard on the ground and lunged at the Arhat statue with a broken finger.

The clay statue was massive and heavy. Li Huowang crashed into it like an egg smashing against a rock. A dull thud resonated, and he immediately started bleeding from his head.

Ignoring his injuries, he raised his military knife and furiously hacked at the Arhat statue.

Yi Donglai stood outside the temple, completely drenched in the pouring rain. He stared dumbfoundedly at the scene unfolding before his eyes.

Yang Na, alarmed by his actions, shouted, "Step back! Let me handle this!"

She raised her pistol and fired two shots directly at the statue's head.

The combined efforts of the two began to show results. The large clay statue started to shed its outer shell and paint. Its structure became unstable, and some broken parts even revealed the bamboo framework beneath.

Finally, with a thunderous crash, the Arhat statue collapsed, burying Li Huowang beneath the rubble.

Li Huowang could be heard violently coughing amidst the dust. Yi Donglai gritted his teeth and prepared to rush into the temple to help.

"Stop! Don't move!" Li Huowang's roar froze him in place.

Li Huowang's eyes burned with a mix of terror and shock. He stared at Yi Donglai from inside the rubble, and his voice trembled as he shouted, "We can, but you can't! Don't come in! Whatever you do, don't come in!"

Chapter 997 - Change

“Don’t come any closer! Stay back!”

He stood beneath the torrential rain, his gaze fixed on the scene unfolding inside. His thoughts were in complete disarray.

Yang Na looked at the seemingly possessed Li Huowang with a pained expression. She turned toward Dr. Yi outside the door and shouted, “Dr. Yi! Since you’re fully conscious, help us! Huowang can’t hold off all these Simings from Fu Shengtian alone!”

“I... I...” Yi Donglai’s breathing quickened and turned more erratic. He clenched his teeth and slapped his forehead uncontrollably.

He even wanted to grab a mirror to check if he looked younger. He wanted to see if his previous experiences were real or just hallucinations.

For the first time, he understood why his patients acted the way they did.

Suddenly, Li Huowang burst from the debris with his military knife in hand, still streaked in dust and blood. He lunged forward, viciously kicking another clay statue to his left.

The impact toppled the statue, making it crash against a nearby column along with Li Huowang.

Creak! The wood splintered as the half-rotten column began to bend and distort.

Crack! Another sound quickly followed as the column snapped. The moss-covered tiles began to fall from above, increasing in number.

“Get out! The temple is collapsing! You’ll both be buried inside if you don’t get out!” Yi Donglai warned urgently. Noticing the temple shake, he momentarily put aside his confusion.

Yang Na's heart skipped a beat. She grabbed Li Huowang's arm and tried to pull him outside.

Li Huowang had no desire to remain in such a predicament, but he was stuck. His left foot was trapped within the chest of a clay statue, and he couldn't pull it free no matter how hard he tried.

As the tiles continued to fall and the temple tilted further, he shoved Yang Na toward the exit without hesitation.

The next moment, a disturbing gulp from above chilled him to the very bone.

His body trembled uncontrollably, though he wasn't the one shaking. The white tassels from the Lion Dance Palace were vibrating. They vibrated harder and harder until they dissolved into streams of blood that dripped down his frame. With the tassels gone, Jiang Xiangshou also started to separate from his body.

Unable to escape, he sensed something and looked up sharply. There was an oppressive, hollowed, and inverted black mountain. It filled his entire field of vision.

Something was roaring and thrashing within while the exuded Heavenly Dao caused Li Huowang's figure to erode.

The inverted black mountain pressed down with unyielding pressure. He suddenly understood that this wasn't a mountain at all. It was a tooth. Something was trying to devour him.

If just a tooth was so large, how enormous must the Siming of Fu Shengtian be? And what power did it hold?

Li Huowang figured it out, but it was already too late. The tooth descended, and he could only watch as the abyss behind it pulled him into the darkness.

He didn't die. He began seeing fragmented memories in a state between dream and reality. Some were snippets from his childhood, or maybe just memories.

In his dimly lit home, his mother, Sun Xiaoqin, was cheerfully carrying a cake toward him. He remembered this scene from his

tenth birthday. He'd spent the entire day playing games, and it had been one of the happiest days of his life.

Out of nowhere, the darkness crept in from the left. The scene lit up once more for a fleeting moment. The cake frosting had splattered onto the floor, and the ribbon that had once adorned the cake box now dangled from the ceiling fan.

The ribbon was wrapped around Sun Xiaoqin's elongated tongue, dragging her body along. The image stopped here, just before Li Huowang.

The image froze in Li Huowang's mind as well. From that point on, his mother was absent from his memories.

His health deteriorated, becoming sickly and frail as though deprived of his mother's presence. His complexion worsened, and he even seemed shorter.

This was only the beginning. All his cherished memories gradually gave way to scenes of despair.

He saw his father spiral into alcoholism, picking him up and beating him mercilessly. Eventually, his father drank himself to death on the sofa.

Li Huowang felt his heart darken. His personality changed, and resentment consumed him.

No! This isn't right! It shouldn't be like this! Horrified, Li Huowang struggled desperately in the darkness. He didn't know what was going on, but he could feel that something was seriously wrong.

He saw himself pulling out one of Yang Na's fingernails and biting off her fingers one by one. He screamed in fury.

No! These aren't my memories! They're not mine! Li Huowang opened his skull in the darkness, reaching in and yanking something out.

Those depressing memories disappeared, but his old memories didn't return. Only a blank, empty space remained.

I need to get out of here! I will get out of here!

Li Huowang gathered the last of his Dragon Qi into his hand and plunged it into the darkness. The rain outside mixed with flashes of lightning, which burst inside.

A rough hand and a delicate hand reached inside, grabbing his clothes and yanking him out of the temple ruins.

The cold rain continued to pour and splashed on his face.

Li Huowang was in pain, but he ignored his injuries and grabbed Yang Na's hands to inspect them closely.

His pupils constricted sharply when he saw her right index finger was indeed severed at the root.

Yang Na shook her head. "It's okay. I don't blame you. I know you couldn't control yourself back then. Let's leave this place quickly. It's too dangerous."

Chapter 998 - Draw

Li Huowang stared at Yang Na's severed finger, the rain pouring down as he held her hand.

The finger had already healed, but this wasn't just a matter of Yang Na losing a finger. If her finger had indeed been severed, everything else he saw must have also been real.

The realization that his grim visions had manifested in reality struck Li Huowang with bone-deep dread. A profound horror filled his eyes as the truth dawned on him: this Siming of Fu Shengtian had altered his past, rewriting the events of his life.

No... this can't be! I have to kill it! I need to go back and change everything back to the way it was before! Li Huowang struggled to his feet, with his head bleeding and his body still wounded. He dragged himself toward the ruins of the dilapidated temple.

"Little Li! You're badly injured! Lie down, don't move!" Yi Donglai blocked his path and shouted at him to stop. He was completely soaked by the rain.

"Get out of my way! You don't understand what I've been through!" Li Huowang roared, his veins bulging as he raised a hand to shove Yi Donglai aside.

Yi Donglai moved first, shoving Li Huowang back into Yang Na's arms. "No! I do understand!"

Yi Donglai's eyes were bloodshot, perhaps due to the rain or some other reason. He continued, "I was your attending physician! I know everything you've been through! I even know exactly what you're thinking now!"

"Don't forget I studied medicine! I know way more than you do! Now, sit tight! Leave this to me!"

Without waiting for a response, Yi Donglai turned and walked

toward the temple ruins. He bent down, picked up a broken tile, and moved purposefully through the debris.

The temple's rubble was in a mess. There were all sorts of shattered bricks, broken tiles, and splintered wood piled haphazardly, making it easy to get injured while walking through.

However, Yi Donglai didn't care. He used his hands to push aside the debris, clearing a large area of uneven bricks.

Shards of broken tiles scraped his arms as he did, but he ignored the pain. He held up a shard and began to furiously scratch lines onto the rough surface of the stone bricks.

The shard scraped against the stone with a grating sound as the lines began to take shape.

Yang Na supported the battered Li Huowang over to Yi Donglai's side. At that moment, lightning lit up the sky and illuminated everything for an instant.

In that fleeting, silvery light, Li Huowang finally saw what Yi Donglai was drawing. It was a roughly sketched figure with certain distinguishing features. Li Huowang immediately recognized the person Yi Donglai was depicting.

It was a slim woman with tattoos on her left side, a forked tongue, and a lip piercing.

Yi Donglai was drawing Ba Nanxu, Ba-Hui's projection.

The figure of Ba Nanxu was strange and distorted in an almost inhuman way. Perhaps Yi Donglai's lack of skill had made her body unnaturally elongated and twisted.

Ba Nanxu seemed to be emerging from a vague, contorted shape. Her mouth was wide open like a serpent, as if ready to devour the surrounding rubble.

Yi Donglai didn't stop there. His hand moved feverishly, sketching the other Simings who had departed with Zhao Shuangdian. Each figure was crudely drawn and sketched in a strange form, yet imbued with an eerie, lifelike quality.

“What are you doing?” Li Huowang shouted amidst the rain.

Yi Donglai didn’t stop drawing. “They couldn’t come here because they couldn’t find the path! They need a medium! Do you get it, Li Huowang? Qing Wanglai was right! They’re all projections! They’re all projections, and projections need a background!”

For a moment, doubt flickered in Yi Donglai’s eyes, but when he caught sight of his own reflection in a nearby puddle, he steeled himself. He tightened his grip on the shard and drew with renewed vigor.

“It’s okay! We won’t lose! I finally get it—I am the projection of Da Nuo! That’s the truth! The difference is that it’s insane, while I’m not!”

Yi Donglai’s newfound resolve didn’t shock Li Huowang as much as the next figure he drew. It was a bloated young man with something seemingly stuffed beneath him.

Although the face was unfamiliar, his smile was disturbingly recognizable. Li Huowang instantly knew who it was—Qing Wanglai, the projection of the Three Pure Ones.

The Three Pure Ones hadn’t left at all. He was just hiding nearby.

A fire blazed in Li Huowang’s heart when he saw that disgusting face. Memories of Qing Wanglai’s past despicable deeds flashed through his mind.

Without hesitation, Li Huowang picked up a piece of broken brick and smashed it down onto Qing Wanglai’s face in the drawing. There was a crisp, cracking sound.

As Li Huowang approached Yi Donglai’s artwork, he couldn’t help but notice something peculiar. Qing Wanglai was disturbingly close to Zhao Shuangdian’s figure, almost overlapping with her.

“What is he doing? What’s he planning? At a time like this, how dare he!”

Li Huowang had broken into a cold sweat. He pushed Yang Na

aside, leaped high, and plunged headfirst into Yi Donglai's drawing.

Splash! He was instantly submerged in freezing liquid. He was in.

Without even bothering to survey his surroundings, he hastily shouted, "Zhao Shuangdian, watch out! Qing Wanglai is stealing your Heavenly Dao!"

The icy liquid rushed into his mouth, and he felt like his organs were coming alive. He realized the kind of liquid that had surrounded him, as it had the same dark, iridescent hues he'd seen before. It was the same liquid that had engulfed the Great Qi in the past.

He had entered Fu Shengtian.

A chill swept over him as he realized a horrifying truth hidden in all this chaos.

Fu Shengtian was disturbingly close to Baiyu Capital, much like Qing Wanglai's drawing was to Zhao Shuangdian's.

Chapter 999 - Fu Shengtian

Within Fu Shengtian, Li Huowang's consciousness distorted, his senses blending into a tangled, chaotic mass. His vision was impaired, yet he could still perceive the Three Pure Ones and the Siming it was stealing from. It was Zhao Shuangdian!

The two figures began to merge, their forms intertwining with each other.

Li Huowang didn't know what the Three Pure Ones was plotting, nor did he fully grasp the events unfolding before him. However, one thing was clear: he could not let the Three Pure Ones succeed.

He immediately ran forward, swinging his arms at the Three Pure Ones.

He felt a string-like touch. Prompting him to quickly raise his spine sword and slash forward.

This time, things were different. In the past, he could sense things without touching them. Now, with the Three Pure Ones being physically present, Li Huowang had the power to wound him.

“Qing Wanglai! Die!”

A sharp sound pierced the air as he severed the secret karmic chains binding Zhao Shuangdian. They dissolved into the murky, iridescent black water surrounding them.

The Three Pure Ones' figure flickered wildly upon seeing Li Huowang ruining his plans.

As he writhed, a karmic chain of secrets emerged from within Li Huowang, eventually linking into the Three Pure Ones' network

of secrets.

The tension in this chain of secrets suddenly snapped, and a flood of memories surged into Li Huowang's mind.

He remembered the Elder Shen Benyou of the Ao Jing Sect, sitting in the dim Cross Temple under the Sacrificial God's statue. He was discussing with the five other elders.

"I've ensured that Li Huowang owes us a favor. Now, we only need to wait for the right moment and use it to atone for the past massacre."

"I bought information from Moongate indicating that he still believes the Sitting Oblivion Dao caused the incident. He absolved himself of any involvement, and we can use this to lure him into using the Inch Dissection Ritual."

"No, this child is not an ordinary Strayed One. The Inch Dissection Ritual alone is not sufficient. We must plan carefully since he's no ordinary person. We must ensure he becomes the next Sacrificial God to complete our pact with Ba-Hui."

This sudden memory appeared in Li Huowang's mind. He remembered the deserted, lifeless town and Jiang Yingzi's revenge.

Was it all true? Did I actually kill all those people?

Before he could process the revelation, another realization struck him.

Ba-Hui was colluding with the Ao Jing Sect, intending for me to become the next Sacrificial God. Was she deceiving me from the start? Had she been plotting against me all along?

Cracks appeared on Li Huowang's body as the thoughts surged through his mind. Unbearable pain radiated throughout his entire being.

It was both physical and mental agony. The pain was intense, relentless, and overwhelming, making him tremble uncontrollably.

Li Huowang shook his head, trying to clear his mind.

He cursed through gritted teeth. "What's the rush? I'm not the

Three Pure Ones. I know how to prioritize! I'll deal with you later!"

Li Huowang focused back on the Three Pure Ones. He yelled fiercely, "Did you think you could sway me? Do you think I'll believe anything you say?"

"I've doubted everything you've shown me ever since I learned about your alliance with Shai Zi. Even if some of it is true, who's to say it's not a trick? Shai Zi excels at this! You'll never deceive me!"

Li Huowang's eyes shone with a murderous gleam. He grabbed a karmic chain of secrets and plunged his bloodied military knife into the Three Pure Ones. "This is for Suisui!"

As he pulled out the knife, more secrets gushed from the Three Pure Ones' form, dissolving into the dark seawater.

He summoned all his strength and drove the blade into the Three Pure Ones again. "This one is for Zhuge Yuan!"

Just as he prepared for a third strike, Li Huowang noticed some strange objects emerging from the Three Pure Ones, which did not seem to be influenced by the surroundings.

There was a particular symbol with the character "Wang," which was oddly familiar to him. He recognized it as something the Three Pure Ones had stolen from him.

Li Huowang reached out, passing through the dense network of karmic chains, trying to touch the "Wang" character.

As he drew near, the Three Pure Ones tore off a writhing mass of secrets from himself and stuffed it into Ji Zai.

Each secret brought a new perspective, transforming Li Huowang's perception of the world. The once-dim fluid around him cleared, revealing a previously invisible realm. He could now perceive things that he would've missed entirely before.

More importantly, everything around him was layered and multi-dimensional. Each layer was merely a projection.

After fully absorbing the secret of the Three Pure Ones, he finally saw the things beneath the surface. They appeared as

incomprehensible images and text, both in his mind and before his eyes.

The rainbow decides the face. The primordial mud lies within the dark origin, flowing with foam beyond the depths. It bends at the dark armpit. The person has semicircular, firm wings that cover three sounds. When viewed, it has an unusual perception, like the brilliance of the stars. Yet there is no visible structure; only the ear perceives the emptiness.

This great secret of the Three Pure Ones was the same as the elephant Zhao Shuangdian had mentioned. It was also the Fu Shengtian in Li Huowang's own understanding.

It had always existed, but he hadn't been able to see it due to his insufficient perception.

Li Huowang tried to act, but he couldn't move. Even his thoughts grew sluggish.

Fu Shengtian was incredibly vast, and its unimaginable form completely covered the sky and the earth.

It was approaching the Baiyu Capital at a peculiar speed. It seemed slow, yet unbelievably fast.

As it moved, it continuously shed certain substances, much like unwanted dandruff.

Li Huowang focused on one of the dandruff-like fragments. It was a massive piece with a mouth of black, jagged teeth, resembling inverted, hollow mountains.

Chapter 1000 - Helper

The entity that once devoured him—the Siming that rewrote his past—turned out to be nothing more than a mere fragment fallen from Fu Shengtian.

A deep despair surged within Li Huowang as he grasped this harsh reality. Against such an incomprehensibly powerful force, what could his efforts as a Siming ever hope to achieve?

Li Huowang recalled the words and expressions of Qing Wanglai, who had once shared similar thoughts. Only now did he truly understand the hopelessness that had consumed Qing Wanglai. They had never stood a chance against Fu Shengtian.

What should I do? Li Huowang's sluggish mind grappled with this question.

His despair turned into an intense urge for self-destruction, starting to surface in his mind. His expression twisted as though his very flesh was compelling him to surrender to the feeling. Even as a Strayed One, he found himself powerless to resist.

Just then, in the corner of his vision, he noticed the Heavenly Mater standing before him, her countless interlocking eyes revealing an unreadable emotion.

She was unaffected by the secrets of the Three Pure Ones and remained oblivious to Fu Shengtian's presence behind her, so she could still move.

The Heavenly Mater stirred. Her form twisted, and she extended her feathered sleeves toward Ji Zai's mind.

Drawing out her sleeves also removed Li Huowang's desire for death. His muddled thoughts cleared a little.

However, he still couldn't move. His attempts to act were in vain, as the aura emitted by the Fu Shengtian still held him in

place.

No! I must move! I can't just sit here! He gritted his teeth, opened his mouth, and bit down hard.

The agony of biting his tongue into a pulp temporarily freed him.

He realized that escape was futile in this situation, so he resolved to face the threat head-on.

He reached into his chest with one hand, grabbing a secret from the Three Pure Ones. His other hand plunged into his skull, extracting a cluster of memories.

As he held these two items in his hands, the surrounding liquid withdrew rapidly and turned back into its dull, dark, iridescent hue.

Li Huowang immediately sought out Qing Wanglai when he regained his freedom, but he was gone again.

Qing Wawnglai was clearly plotting something. Everything had been premeditated.

He was exploiting the threat from Fu Shengtian to achieve his own goals.

A wave of fear flashed through Li Huowang's mind as he thought of Fu Shengtian. He glanced into the dark liquid around him, feeling a surge of terror.

He couldn't recall the exact reason for his fear, but his trembling body instinctively urged him to flee from this place.

Ripples in the dark fluid suggested that the other Simings were in battle with the Simings of Fu Shengtian nearby. They were seemingly unaware of the actual danger.

Li Huowang knew he had to escape now to figure out the Three Pure Ones' intentions.

"Go! Run! Don't worry about them, just run!"

Li Huowang's voice echoed in the liquid as he thrashed, desperately swimming towards the Baiyu Capital's exit.

The two objects he held made swimming difficult. He nearly

tossed them aside but paused, deciding to stuff them in his clothes instead.

When he reached the entrance, he looked at the enlarged opening and felt his anxiety rising. His current Dragon Qi was insufficient to mend it. He would need more from below.

Suddenly, he had an idea. He bent down, picked up a broken mirror, and shouted with all his might at his exhausted reflection, "Hurry, Li Huowang! The Baiyu Capital needs Dragon Qi. The more, the better! If we don't seal this, the entire sky will leak!"

A few dragon roars echoed from below.

Looking down, he noticed Gao Zhijian leading four Dragon Veins and two golden dragons from the Tianchen Kingdom upwards. "Senior Li, where are you? Senior Li, where are you? The Dragon Qi is here!"

Li Huowang breathed a sigh of relief. He was Ji Zai now and could call for reinforcements through the future Li Huowang.

He grabbed the two Dragon Veins and started stitching them into the rift's edge.

The Dragon Veins resembled needles, with Dragon Qi flowing from them like threads.

He was forced to stop before he mended for long, as the other Simings were still fighting inside.

If he sealed the rift before they returned, the Baiyu Capital would be doomed. Despite this, the widening rift prevented him from leaving it open.

Li Huowang clenched his teeth. He grabbed the Dragon Veins and prepared to dive back into the dark waters to rescue the others.

He knew that attempting to go in alone would be pointless, as he would only end up trapped like them. He paused, grappling with the difficulty of making a choice. His left hand weighed down on him, as if it were burdened with a thousand pounds.

Seeing the fierce waves within the dark waters, he gritted his

teeth and held up the mirror shard again.

He spoke to his reflection with reddened eyes. "We need reinforcements! Call everyone who can help to the Baiyu Capital!"

The mirror shattered, and red streaks suddenly appeared below the Baiyu Capital, surging upwards. A familiar roar echoed from a distance.

It was two Jiang Xiangshous.

He examined them closely and realized these figures were not advancing of their own will. Something was pulling them up.

Bai Lingmiao had both her bodies half-transformed into dragons. She sat cross-legged on a white lotus sky lantern while holding onto the Twelve Merit Jade Lotus. Six White Donkeys accompanied her, and they all rose towards him.

Li Huowang grabbed the Dragon Veins with one hand and dove down. He collided head-on with one of the Jiang Xiangshous. In that instant, all fear vanished, replaced by an intense killing intent.

As he reached out for the other Jiang Xiangshou, a misty figure erupted from the water-filled deep pit. It was the Heavenly Mater.

She was upside down, and with incredible speed, she zipped toward Bai Lingmiao, the sky lantern, and her six White Donkeys.

The white lotus marks on the foreheads of Bai Lingmiao and the White Donkeys began shining intensely. A mysterious force seemed to beckon them.

The six White Donkeys on the sky lantern were elated. They spoke in unison with Bai Lingmiao amidst their center, saying, "Heaven and Earth darken, sun and moon lose light. Red Yang declines; White Yang rises. The great tribulation is upon us. The White Lotus shall be reborn."

Chapter 1001 - Scatter

There were six White Donkeys beside Bai Lingmiao: two Lamas, two devotees of the White Lotus Sect, and two evil entities.

Li Huowang realized the scene unfolding before him was very familiar. Bai Lingmiao was seated atop a lantern, clutching the Twelve Merit Jade Lotus with the six White Donkeys surrounding her.

It took a moment for him to piece it together. This was the same scenery depicted on the murals beneath the Ancestral Hall of Cowheart Village.

He didn't entirely understand it, but he knew it was bad news.

As the Heavenly Mater reached out, almost brushing against the half-dragon Bai Lingmiao, Li Huowang stepped between them, waving his blade. "Don't touch her!"

The Heavenly Mater's body turned translucent before Li Huowang, revealing a single figure—Yang Na, running toward him.

Yang Na's tear-streaked face stopped Li Huowang. He couldn't bear to raise his weapon.

Yang Na was from the real world and Bai Lingmiao was from the Liang Kingdom, but they were the ones he loved the most. Seeing them both together at once was too much for him to handle.

Li Huowang's body broke apart. His organs and blood sprayed everywhere as his body split in half to form two Li Huowangs.

A white hand missing a finger easily brushed past Li Huowang's split body and lightly touched Bai Lingmiao's forehead.

The moment it did, Li Huowang's four pairs of eyes saw both Yang Na and Bai Lingmiao turning translucent, as though they were nothing but projections.

Something began to coalesce within them. Their forms

superimposed on each other, becoming the true Heavenly Mater.

A familiar voice came from beside Li Huowang but soon vanished. "I was right, wasn't I? This is what it means to truly exist. No matter which side we stay on, we are mere projections, similar to shadows of different sizes and shapes caused by the direction of the sun's rays."

Several threads of starlight passed through the Ox-Tail Gate and gathered on the six White Donkeys. They were quickly enveloped by the white light and formed into six orbs. The orbs floated behind the Heavenly Mater, forming the shape of a fan.

Soft white light burst forth and blew away the chaos of Baiyu Capital. The Heavenly Mater's Heavenly Dao of Mercy and Heavenly Dao of Death intertwined, influencing the surroundings.

As Li Huowang observed what was happening, he heard three voices shouting simultaneously, "Huowang, do it now!"

Li Huowang's separated selves superimposed on each other again when he heard the superimposed voices. He looked at the Heavenly Mater and wasn't sure which identity he should use to face her.

Qing Wanglai's voice rang out again, saying, "Do you know the Threefold Body of a Buddha? The Dharma Body, the Retribution Body, and the Response and Transformation Body. I am one beyond the Threefold Body."

"Quiet!"

Li Huowang's roar caused the murderous aura to spread around him. He ran up and looked at the Heavenly Mater with anxiety.

"Who are you? Are you Yang Na, Bai Lingmiao, or something else? Which one of you is real? Which one of me is real?"

Li Huowang's body started to become unstable when he questioned himself.

The imagery of the two worlds continued to appear around Li Huowang, sometimes appearing simultaneously.

Heavenly Mater shook her head and gestured for Li Huowang to look up.

The hole in the sky had widened. There was even the blood of the other Simings mixed into the strange black water.

With a sweep of her white-feathered sleeves, the Heavenly Mater covered the roaring Jiang Xiangshou before placing it in front of Li Huowang.

Li Huowang grabbed Jiang Xiangshou without hesitation. He pulled open his chest and stuffed it into his beating heart.

“I don’t care who you are. If you don’t send Bai Lingmiao back once you’re done, I will kill you!”

Dun dun dun~ Li Huowang heard his heart start beating rapidly, its sound resonating in his ears. An endless murderous aura surged out from his body and solidified as it cloaked him.

“Kill them!” With his spine sword raised, Li Huowang fled the ruins and took cover in the forest to his left.

The rain continued to fall as bullets flew everywhere. Several corpses lay on the ground as blood and rain pooled together.

As Ba Nanxu shot through an enemy’s neck, she caught sight of Li Huowang, unleashing his fury with his blade. His single eye was bloodshot, his veins bulging with anger. He charged toward the enemy without any hesitation.

A single swing with his blade was more than enough to behead one of the enemies. Li Huowang jumped high and used his mouth to tear another enemy’s face to shreds.

Someone tried to shoot Li Huowang from the left, but Yang Na acted more quickly, severing the attacker’s fingers and gun.

Li Huowang stormed into the battlefield with a raging fury. None of the black-shirted men stood a chance against Li Huowang’s rampage.

The corpses piled up as the battle dragged on. Despite the ceaseless rain, the lingering stench of blood remained in the air.

Li Huowang suddenly noticed a shadow above him. He looked up and saw several upside-down black mountains about to crush him.

The mountains trembled, nearly crushing him before vanishing like a dream.

Li Huowang wiped the blood off his face and shouted, “Zhao Shuangdian, stop fighting! Bring everyone back to the Baiyu Capital, quick!”

“Don’t worry. We might not lose here today.”

Although the situation was dire, Zhao Shuangdian was still calmly loading her gun.

Li Huowang tried to explain but found himself unsure of what to say. Panic set in—he had forgotten something important. He knew he was afraid of something, but he couldn’t remember it.

Zhao Lei ran past him. At this point, he had already lost an ear. He was also holding onto a dismembered arm. He bit into it before running back to the front.

Nearby, Wu Qi plunged a syringe into an enemy, injecting a fluid that made their tongue swell until they suffocated.

Li Huowang observed the fight and decided he’d had enough. He cupped his mouth and shouted what he remembered. The rainwater around him turned transparent.

“Everyone, their elephant is crashing into ours!”

Li Huowang saw Fu Shengtian once more, and the dreaded Fu Shengtian made everyone despair. Fear bloomed in Li Huowang’s heart, but the murderous aura of Jiang Xiangshou was continuously pushing it back.

After reminding Zhao Shuangdian, he prepared to reach into his brain to dig out the memories of his fight against Fu Shengtian.

However, something unexpected happened—Fu Shengtian looked at Li Huowang. In an instant, Li Huowang’s body shattered, breaking into pieces.

Chapter 1002 - Kill

Li Huowang's body shattered. His limbs, organs, and brain scattered like leaves on a pond's surface.

All of this happened just because Fu Shengtian looked at him.

Am I dying? The thought flickered through Li Huowang's mind as his consciousness began to fade.

Li Huowang did not fear death. He refused to die because he refused to give up.

"No, I can't die! If I die, who will revive Suisui? I cannot die!"

Li Huowang roared, and his dead body stirred. Under the strange effect of the black water, Li Huowang returned to life as various odd organs grew and hung from his body.

Just then, a feathery sleeve brushed past Li Huowang's body and took away his Death. Li Huowang could no longer die now.

Though unkillable, he was still helpless. He needed to free himself. A plan quickly formed in his mind.

Recalling the powers and techniques of his allies, he devised a solution.

Li Huowang now resembled an eyeball with three limbs resembling fractured baby limbs. He dragged himself and swiftly reached the Five Dhyani Buddhas.

They were fighting against Fu Shengtian right now. Those noticed by Fu Shengtian would have their bodies scattered. However, not all Simings were affected by it—those who didn't have a physical body remained unscathed.

The burning Sacrificial God bought Li Huowang some time. Li Huowang shouted at the Five Dhyani Buddhas, "Five Dhyani Buddhas! Use your powers to help me!"

Li Huowang had barely shouted when the Five Dhyani Buddhas

simultaneously began to chant. An eerie, overlapping voice resonated through the black waters.

“Jie Di Jie Di Ban Luo... Di... Ban Luo Sheng Jie Di, Pu Ti Sheng Sha He, Yi Ban Nuo Po Luo Mi Duo Gu...”

Li Huowang heard the voices and somehow caught the scent of incense in the temple. The fragments of his body knitted together, with flesh sprouting and stitching into place.

He had a new body once the process was complete, but it was hideous, like the Flesh Buddha of the Righteous Monastery.

There was no time to fix it. There was no time to dwell on appearances. Shoving his hands into his own brain, Li Huowang tore out the memory of Fu Shengtian.

The invisible water returned to the iridescent black water, and Li Huowang could no longer see the things in the distance. He sighed in relief.

The biggest issue had been temporarily fixed, but the situation wasn't over yet.

The Simings were still fighting viciously. Li Huowang dragged his grotesque body and charged into the fray.

Bullets flew around him as he swung his blade. With a clear, dinging sound, he managed to deflect the bullets with his blade.

He stabbed his blade into one of the men, and blood sprayed onto his face. His bloodlust intensified as the battle continued. Each kill seemed to invigorate him, his stamina unyielding.

He stabbed another person in the face before dragging the blade downwards and spilling the guts of his enemy.

He was ready to kill another person when he accidentally tripped on someone. He regained his footing and looked down to find Zhao Lei!

As he prepared himself to kill another person, he unexpectedly stumbled over someone. He regained his footing and glanced down to see Zhao Lei.

Zhao Lei's injuries were severe, leaving him on the brink of death. Despite this, he managed to cling onto Li Huowang with his right hand, which had two severed fingers.

"Li Huowang... I tricked you... You did not steal my magnet... It's still with me... I was scared that they coveted it..."

"Don't die here! Die in the Baiyu Capital, or your Heavenly Dao will fall in their hands!" Li Huowang said, doing his best to drag Zhao Lei away from the combat zone.

Looking around, he saw Yang Na in the distance. "Heavenly Mater, come here! Bring the Death away from his body!"

"I have... my own plans... But... no one listens to me... You are all... using me..."

Zhao Lei's eyes began rolling upward, his pupils dilating.

"Hehe... Do you think... that I lost? That might... not be the case... I just... don't want to listen to you..."

Zhao Lei's gaze was fixed on the sky as he uttered his final words. In his last moments, he vomited a lot of blood onto Li Huowang's chest. Then, he went stiff.

Li Huowang threw Zhao Lei's corpse to the side before charging back to the battlefield.

He looked at the unending number of enemies and understood they could not fight like this anymore. The longer the battle dragged on, the more people would die. They had to retreat.

He turned to Zhao Shuangdian and shouted, "Retreat! Go back to the Baiyu Capital! I will stop them!"

Just as the words had left Li Huowang's lips, a bat slammed into his skull. The crack reverberated in his ears.

In a daze, he saw someone winding up to swing the bat again. If they hit him again, Li Huowang was sure that his head would break open.

The enemy swung the bat, but Li Huowang quickly ducked it and avoided it. Before they could swing again, Li Huowang stabbed

his blade into their chest.

Just then, Li Huowang felt a burning pain in his abdomen. He looked down and saw blood seeping out from his left side. He had been shot.

He held his wound and turned around to find three muzzles aimed at him.

Li Huowang's rational thinking snapped as he charged at the guns.

Gunshots erupted. Li Hoowang reached behind himself and swung his bronze coin sword, turning it into a red whip that cut down the bullets, guns, and enemies in one go.

Chapter 1003 - Body

Tak tak tak The sound of hurried footsteps could be heard as the rain slowly subsided.

Yang Na knew who it was based on the footsteps. She cried and hugged her wounded abdomen as she tried to run out from the house.

Chen Hongyu grabbed Yang Na and held her down.

Yang Na tried to scratch Chen Hongyu to make her let go when three people ran in from outside.

One of them was Li Huowang. His injuries were severe with his body covered with wounds from gunshots, cuts, and bruises. He left bloody footprints on the ground as rain washed the blood off his body.

Ba Nanxu and her brother were holding onto Li Huowang. Both of them were injured too, though Ba Nanxu was chuckling from time to time like a psychopath, “Not bad, little runt. I’ve underestimated you in the past. Come hit me up when you have time one day to fuck.”

Li Huowang’s consciousness was already hazy. He used the last of his strength to close the door and lock it.

He slowly lost consciousness as his tired body slowly slid down.

Wu Qi, who was busy treating Zhao Shuangdian, hurriedly ran over with her first aid kit.

She administered some medicine to Li Huowang before trying to stop his bleeding.

But there were so many wounds on his body that she didn’t know where she should start.

“Why... Why...” Li Huowang’s pale lips trembled as he mumbled again and again.

He looked at everyone's faces.

He noticed that Zhao Lei wasn't the only one missing. Ling'er, the girl working with Zhao Shuangdian, who twitched from time to time was missing too. More and more Simings from Baiyu Capital were being killed. He wasn't certain if they could come back this time.

"Why did the timeline not reset even after killing so many of the Simings? Why? Is it because we are not fighting in Baiyu Capital?"

But Wu Qi had no time to entertain his thoughts, "He's losing too much blood. He's going into shock! Does anyone here have blood type O?"

"I am!"

Someone unexpectedly answered her.

Qing Wanglai smiled as he walked past the crowd and extended his right arm to Wu Qi.

Li Huowang glared at him angrily, but Qing Wanglai did not mind as he pushed his frameless glasses higher.

"Don't get excited. You can't increase your blood pressure anymore or all of your remaining blood would be pumped out of your body."

Li Huowang stood up rapidly and was about to swing his bronze coin sword at Qing Wanglai when the others quickly pinned him down.

Click. Two guns were aimed at Qing Wanglai's back as they loaded their magazines. One belonged to Ba Nanxu while the other belonged to Yang Na.

Ba Nanxu was smoking a cigarette when she placed her gun on the back of Qing Wanglai's head. Her voice was tinged with dissatisfaction, "Qing Wanglai, you did something really bad this time."

But Qing Wanglai was calm even though death was so close to

him. He smiled and turned towards Zhao Shuangdian, “Miss Zhao, won’t you give me a chance to explain? Also, I didn’t do anything bad at all.”

“Then explain everything.” Zhao Shuangdian grabbed her laptop and started typing on it.

But Qing Wanglai wasn’t in a rush. He stood there and slowly took out a glass cloth to wipe his glasses. He exhaled on his lens and wiped it thoroughly before wearing it back on his face.

“Li Huowang, did you see it? You must’ve seen it,” He looked down and stared at Li Huowang, “Or everything I’ve done so far would be wasted.”

“I don’t know what you are saying! I just want to tear you to pieces!”

Qing Wanglai sighed in the face of Li Huowang’s threats and shook his head, “You forgot again. If it isn’t because of the situation I would really hate to associate myself with someone like you.”

Wu Qi scoffed, “Stop spouting bullshit and lift your arm high!”

As Qing Wanglai followed her instructions, the red blood flowed from the tube into Li Huowang’s body.

“Do you remember now?”

Li Huowang grabbed the tube and yanked it out from his arm before he stood up.

Wu Qi almost had a heart attack when she saw what Li Huowang did, “Aiya! What are you doing! Lie back down quickly!”

Qing Wanglai looked at Li Huowang puzzlingly, “You saw its existence. Are you still questioning my methods?”

Li Huowang stopped when he heard what Qing Wanglai was talking about.

“Maybe you think that I’m heartless, but you should understand now how strong Fu Shengtian really is. My plan is the best plan for our current situation. We can have a small hope of surviving this if we follow my plan.”

Qing Wanglai stepped forward and spoke softly, “Or do you have another plan when faced with an enemy like this? As long as you can figure out another plan to save us, I swear that I will let go of my plans and follow yours wholeheartedly.”

Li Huowang spat, “You kept saying that you are helping us, but look at what you’ve done! How are you different from Fu Shengtian? In the end, everything will be the same!”

“Of course not! We are but projections right now. Even if we are gone, as long as the curtains still exist, we can reappear once more. But if our real body is gone for good, then we are dead forever.”

Qing Wanglai’s explanation irritated Zhao Shuangdian, “That’s too vague. Be specific.”

Qing Wanglai turned around and explained, “Your theory on the elephants is incorrect. In reality, we are projections, but we are not the only projections. There are two projections, just like how we have two shadows when we have two light sources. Through comparison of the two shadows, we can understand the truth of what others couldn’t perceive.

“To speak in Buddhist terms, it’s the Dharma Body, the Retribution Body, and the Response and Transformation Body.”

Qing Wanglai pointed at himself, “This is the first body, the Response and Transformation Body.”

He then pointed at Li Huowang’s chest, “This is the second body, the Retribution Body.”

Qing Wanglai became serious as he explained, “Junior Li, I am still the same me as before. I did everything to save the masses.”

Li Huowang’s pupil shrank when he heard those words. He bit Qing Wanglai’s left ear out of anger and tore it down.

Qing Wanglai took several steps back. He was bloody but he didn’t mind. He was still smiling as if his body wasn’t his own.

“This is just a projection and it’s not important. My plan is

simple. I want to sacrifice the Retribution Body and the Response and Transformation Body to save the Dharma Body. Only then can we be rescued.”

He extended both arms and held Li Huowang’s hand before pleading earnestly, “Junior Li, help me one last time, and die.”

Chapter 1004 - Mental Illness

“Please die.”

Everyone froze at Qing Wanglai’s words.

He caught everyone off guard. No one, not even Li Huowang, had anticipated him to say something like that. They didn’t think he was capable of it.

“Fuck!” Ba Nanxu cursed.

With a deep drag of her cigarette, she prepared to blow Qing Wanglai’s head off.

However, Zhao Shuangdian stopped her. “Don’t be rash. Let him finish.”

Unlike the others, Zhao Shuangdian remained eerily composed.

Qing Wanglai turned to Li Huowang. “I need you to die. The projections on both sides must shrink simultaneously. You don’t see what I see, Li Huowang. You can barely contact the other projection, but I have a way to contact my true self and figure out what to do. This is the only way.”

Li Huowang’s eyes narrowed. “Every projection? Every projection? Are you saying everyone here—including the Simings—is just a projection to you? You want to destroy everything? *This* is your plan?”

Qing Wanglai nodded confidently and without hesitation. “Li Huowang, you have to see the bigger picture. Some things must be sacrificed for the greater good.”

Li Huowang stared at Qing Wanglai as though seeing him for the first time.

Qing Wanglai smiled faintly and patted Li Huowang’s shoulder.

“Don’t worry. I know what you’re afraid of. But our death this time is not the end—it’s the beginning. We’re just projections, less important than you think. Once the crisis is over, we can be projected again and live in peace.”

Li Huowang’s mouth parted slowly. “You crazy bastard!”

Li Huowang finally understood what kind of person Qing Wanglai was. He wasn’t just misguided. He was *deranged*—a madman, a lunatic!

Disappointment flickered briefly in Qing Wanglai’s eyes. “Li Huowang, you’ve let me down. I thought you’d understand. I thought you would become my ally.”

Li Huowang opened his mouth to argue, but no words came out. He lowered and shook his head.

There was no point in reasoning with a madman. Trying to change a madman’s mind was futile, which he had learned the hard way.

“Qing Wanglai, I know Da Nuo has gone mad, but I didn’t expect the Three Ancient Ones, the holder of the Heavenly Dao of Truth, to be just as deranged. Your craziness is one thing, but dragging me into it is something else. If the heavens fall, someone must hold them up.”

Li Huowang reached behind his back to secretly unsheath his knife.

“Are you always this quick to dismiss those who don’t think like you?” Qing Wanglai asked. “Are you really gonna label me as insane or mentally ill just because I don’t share the same perception? If that makes me insane, then what about the rest of you? Are you all not crazy too?”

Qing Wanglai turned and pointed at everyone.

“If I’m crazy by your standards, then to me, all of you are crazy too! All of you are mentally ill too!”

Ba Nanxu frowned and glanced at Zhao Shuangdian, who was

still typing away on her laptop. “Hey, I think I’ve heard enough. Let’s just kill him.”

The next instant, Li Huowang lunged. His injuries reopened from the movement, but he refused to stop. He drove his knife toward Qing Wanglai’s waist, determined to kill him.

The Three Ancient Ones had descended into madness and wanted to kill everyone. Li Huowang had to kill Qing Wanglai and seize the Heavenly Dao Of Secrets. Only then could they have a better chance.

The blade struck, but no blood flowed. Instead, a loud clang echoed across the hall.

Li Huowang’s eyes widened in surprise—Qing Wanglai was wearing a vest beneath his shirt.

Without hesitation, Li Huowang shifted his grip and slashed upward, aiming for Qing Wanglai’s throat.

“Nana, shoot him! Blast his head apart!”

Yang Na didn’t hesitate. She raised her gun and fired.

But Qing Wanglai was faster. He twisted his neck and dodged the bullet. As he did, he grabbed Li Huowang’s wrist and wrenched it aside to make him stumble. Then, he quickly took out his own gun and pressed it against Li Huowang’s temple.

“Don’t move!” Qing Wanglai yelled.

Now, no one dared to shoot. They were afraid that the other party would shoot first.

Qing Wanglai looked down at the severely injured Li Huowang and smiled. “Stay still. You’ve already lost too much blood. I chose the moment to show myself carefully. If you were at your peak, I might have actually died.”

Bam!

Behind Qing Wanglai, someone kicked the door open.

A man entered the room, bombs strapped to his chest and a detonator clutched in his hand. Reflective sunglasses obscured his

eyes, and he seemed oddly nonchalant, idly playing a game on his phone with his other hand.

“Don’t move!” he barked. “One wrong step and we all die!”

The presence of the explosives created a tense atmosphere.

Even Zhao Shuangdian stopped typing, glaring at Qing Wanglai. “Qing Wanglai, do you really think it’s appropriate to weaken our forces before the final battle?”

Qing Wanglai shrugged. “Appropriate? Do you think unity will help us win? Don’t be foolish. You don’t even understand what we’re facing. Isn’t that right, Li Huowang?”

He turned to Li Huowang, his usual smile missing. “If you calculate with the flow of time in this projection, you should know that that thing will reach the real world in eight days. Eight days! That’s all we have.

“We have no time to waste. If my plan fails within that time, not only will our projections on both sides be destroyed—our real bodies will vanish too.

“The outcome is set no matter what we do in those eight days, so why not destroy our projections on both sides now? That way, our true selves have a chance of survival.”

Chapter 1005 - Food

Tension filled the hall. Part of it stemmed from Qing Wanglai pressing his gun against Li Huowang's temple, but the greater weight came from his words.

Eight days? Li Huowang's mind raced as he processed Qing Wanglai's words.

Fu Shengtian will superimpose with the Baiyu Capital in eight days, and we'll have to fight in eight days? Li Huowang's heart started beating rapidly from that frightening thought.

Eight days wasn't long enough. Their fate was sealed against the might of Fu Shengtian—they could only wait for death.

"No, it's much more frightening than you think. The Fu Shengtian you saw is just one side of its projection. Do you know what it would look like in this world?"

Surprisingly, Li Huowang felt calm. He had endured and experienced so much that he was just numb.

More importantly, he still couldn't trust Qing Wanglai's one-sided information. "I don't believe you. Maybe it's not as terrifying as you claim—assuming you're even telling the truth."

"What?" Qing Wanglai tilted his head, his glasses glinting and obscuring his eyes. "You still think I'm just some lunatic?"

"Heh. Trust you? Why should I? I stopped trusting you when you took away the Heavenly Dao of Lies," Li Huowang said. His tone was growing harsher, but he was actually very calm.

His course of action became simpler now that he realized there was nothing to discuss with Qing Wanglai.

What he needed to do was to kill Qing Wanglai and take away his Heavenly Daos. Only then could he confirm whether Fu Shengtian's arrival in eight days was real.

However, Li Huowang was sure that Qing Wanglai would shoot him based on the cold metal pressing into his temple. Li Huowang was too injured. He needed to find a way to get out of the predicament.

Qing Wanglai was a madman to Li Huowang. Qing Wanglai could do irreparable damage if he wasn't careful.

Zhao Shuangdian broke the silence. "Qing Wanglai, don't be rash. It might not be as serious as you think. First, tell us how you calculated the eight-day timeframe. What method did you use?"

Qing Wanglai didn't answer immediately. Instead, he gave her a playful look, his gaze flicking to her laptop.

"Calculate it? Do you really think typing into your laptop will prove anything? Stop lying to yourself. Your so-called calculations are nothing but a joke. You've been deluding yourself from the start—pretending you can understand this.

"If you managed to get results, why don't you enlighten us? After all these years, have you managed to calculate anything besides shapes? Do you even realize how insane you sound? Have you ever seen madmen in mental wards claiming they can explain everything and anything? You're no better than them."

Li Huowang searched for an opening while Qing Wanglai was distracted, but the gun remained pressed against his head. He couldn't move.

Just then, Li Huowang and Yang Na locked eyes.

He saw the tension in her eyes and knew what she intended to do. He subtly signaled her to stop.

Li Huowang gestured for her to move back and away from the range of Shai Zi's explosives.

Meanwhile, Zhao Shuangdian continued her conversation with Qing Wanglai, her expression turning into a frown as she crossed her arms with indignation.

"Qing Wanglai, you can't be so certain. Do you think you can

explain everything I've calculated? Don't you think there's a chance I've succeeded? You might know some things I don't, but there are also secrets that only I am privy to. Let's exchange information instead of acting rashly."

Qing Wanglai shook his head. What might've once been a handsome gesture now looked feral, his bloodied, severed ear creating a savage impression.

"Stop lying. You're not going to coax any information out of me. You wouldn't know a thing about the ambush if I hadn't leaked it myself."

As their argument escalated, Li Huowang's focus shifted to the bombs strapped to Shai Zi's body. As if sensing Li Huowang's gaze, Shai Zi glanced up from his game and looked back at Li Huowang.

Li Huowang glared at Shai Zi, who not only survived but also became a new Siming.

Li Huowang raised a single eyebrow, a deliberate signal. Shai Zi lowered his sunglasses, his sharp eyes glinting with slyness.

Two seconds later, Shai Zi smirked and raised an eyebrow in return.

Li Huowang suddenly shouted, "Shai Zi, do it now!"

Shai Zi froze in surprise. *Do what?*

But Qing Wanglai didn't hesitate—he turned his gun on Shai Zi.

Li Huowang's gamble paid off. He put himself in Qing Wanglai's shoes and believed he would also be wary of Shai Zi. Shai Zi's oath of allegiance couldn't automatically earn Qing Wanglai's trust.

Just as Qing Wanglai moved his gun away, Li Huowang jumped up and headbutted Qing Wanglai in the nose.

The moment Qing Wanglai stumbled back, Li Huowang grabbed his knife and stabbed Qing Wanglai's neck.

Warm blood splattered over him as Ba Nanxu rushed in, kicking the gun away from Qing Wanglai's grasp. The tide had

turned.

Shai Zi stared in disbelief. “Aren’t you afraid that I’ll detonate the explosives and kill everyone here?”

Li Huowang idly raised his knife. “I would’ve believed the threat if it came from Jiang Xiangshou. But you? I don’t trust you. Qing Wanglai never should’ve made you an ally. I know too much about the Sitting Oblivion Dao—you wouldn’t dare to fight physically.”

Li Huowang ignored Shai Zi afterward, tearing off Qing Wanglai’s shirt before taking off the protective vest beneath it.

“What are you doing? He’s already dying,” Wu Qi said. She couldn’t help but feel a sense of pity, as Qing Wanglai had been one of her long-time allies.

Blood splattered Li Huowang as he plunged his knife into Qing Wanglai’s chest and dragged it down.

“What else? He has several Heavenly Daos in him! We must consume him!”

Chapter 1006 - Suppress

In the timeless chaos of Baiyu Capital, the other Simings stood fused in a ring. At the center were Ji Zai and the dying Three Ancient Ones.

Ji Zai's gaze lingered on the Three Ancient Ones' form. It was woven from interconnected secrets, concealing its nature so well that Ji Zai couldn't distinguish the Heavenly Dao of Secrets from the Heavenly Dao of Growth. For the Siming in control of secrets, concealment was second nature.

But this posed no obstacle for Li Huowang. He didn't need to identify the correct Heavenly Dao—he simply had to consume everything.

As Li Huowang devoured the body of the Three Ancient Ones, he turned to the other Simings with a puzzled expression. "What's wrong? Don't you want the Heavenly Daos of the Three Ancient Ones?"

However, none of the Simings answered him. They just stood there motionlessly.

Li Huowang shrugged and returned to his task. Better that than leaving it to unreliable hands. It was far safer for him to hold the power.

It'd be troublesome if someone else acquired the power but decided not to help. Li Huowang preferred to rely on himself.

Just then, the Heavenly Mater approached and sat beside him. She extended her "arm" covered in white feathers and carefully caressed his own twisted six arms.

Li Huowang felt a warmth in his heart. It felt nice to have someone that would trust him no matter what.

Perhaps that trust was what kept him going through every

ordeal.

Ji Zai and the Heavenly Mater shared a fleeting smile before continuing to absorb the Heavenly Dao.

To Li Huowang's surprise, Qing Wanglai was still alive despite his severe injuries.

Still, Qing Wanglai was on the brink of death. He coughed up blood and chuckled. His gaze shifted to the skies, and he felt a tugging sensation on his body.

Soon, a tattooed woman with a cigarette in her mouth blocked his vision. "It must hurt, doesn't it? Want me to release you?"

A smoke ring drifted downward, enveloping his face.

Even so, Qing Wanglai flashed his signature smile. "Li... do you really... think that... I don't have a backup plan...? You think... I would... so easily?"

Li Huowang paused momentarily, then continued to munch on Qing Wanglai's body. "What are you talking about? In your state, what could you possibly do? Don't tell me you poisoned your own flesh."

"Why... not? I have... caught up... with your perception of the world... I have... anticipated that... you would... do this..."

Shock rippled through Li Huowang as he retched. "You actually poisoned yourself?!"

As Qing Wanglai laughed, Li Huowang felt his abdomen cramping in pain. It was just as intense as the pain he had experienced when he first took the pills at Zephyr Temple, the ones that Dan Yangzi had refined to become immortal.

Li Huowang stuck his finger down his throat to induce vomiting.

He emptied his stomach, but the pain continued to intensify in his abdomen.

"Li Huowang... since you... don't want to die... I will... send you... to your death. My plan... must be completed..."

The others rushed to aid him. Wu Qi was frantic, trying to help him flush out the poison from his system.

Li Huowang's condition deteriorated. His complexion turned pale, and beads of sweat streamed down his face.

Even Yang Na had the same symptoms.

Li Huowang snarled and forced himself up after pushing everyone away. He grabbed Qing Wanglai and pulled the latter upwards forcefully, asking, "What did you do?!"

However, Qing Wanglai could no longer reply. His lifeless body sagged, his lips frozen in a smile.

Despite everything, Li Huowang saw a white object tucked into Qing Wanglai's collar. He took it out and discovered it was a note.

As he read the note, he quickly realized that it was explicitly addressed to him. These were Qing Wanglai's final words.

Li Huowang, if you're reading this, you chose not to help me. You were too shallow to care about the survival of the projections. Since you wouldn't listen, I had no choice but to force you. After consuming me, you'll have no more than two days to live. Of course, I didn't give you two days out of generosity. It's just that a higher dose would've killed me instantly.

Do you think I didn't fight you directly because I couldn't win? No, it was because of hope. The futile hope that maybe, just maybe, you might see reason.

Unfortunately, I was wrong. Up until the very end, I remained the sole voice of reason. Don't worry, though—you won't die alone. The key to saving our true selves is beneath my corpse. Destroy the projections here, and you might save our real bodies.

Li Huowang's eyes darted to the blood-soaked ground beneath Qing Wanglai and spotted several shattered test tubes, their glass shards glinting among the pools of blood.

While the others were panicking, Qing Wanglai had silently smashed three test tubes onto the bloodstained ground.

The three fluids in the test tubes had mixed together, releasing an invisible, odorless gas. Li Huowang didn't know what the fluids were, but he was certain they wouldn't be as simple as anesthetic or paralyzing agents.

Qing Wanglai had been deceiving everyone. It was all a ruse—even without consuming the other Heavenly Daos, he intended to poison everyone else. His goal was to kill every Siming in the Baiyu Capital.

When Li Huowang rechecked Qing Wanglai's corpse, the grin seemed even wider.

Fury ignited within him. He grabbed Yang Na's gun and shot Qing Wanglai's head open with a deafening bang.

Amid the splatter of blood and brain matter, another piece of paper fluttered free.

Chapter 1007 - Death

A jolt of shock ran through Li Huowang when he found the paper note hidden inside Qing Wanglai's head. It meant Qing Wanglai had somehow foreseen that his head would be blown apart.

Qing Wanglai had calculated that there was a chance that a gun would blow away his head.

Clutching his cramping abdomen, Li Huowang watched Qing Wanglai's broken corpse collapse into the spreading pool of blood. Snarling through gritted teeth, he snatched the blood-red paper.

If you're reading this, I've successfully predicted the outcome again. How is it? Do you now see how I am telling the truth? Still, that doesn't matter right now. An arrow released from a bow will continue flying forward. My plan will not stop.

One more thing: the poison inside me is slow-acting, but the ones in the test tubes are not. I'm not giving you two days to work out the antidote—there's no time for that. Heh, how does it feel to suddenly realize all hope is gone? You thought you had two days, and now you have none. Are you afraid yet? Soon, everyone will die.

Oh, forgive me, I misspoke. You're all just projections, after all. I suppose it's more accurate to say you'll simply be snuffed out.

Li Huowang's fists clenched so tightly that his knuckles went white. Yang Na's moans of pain echoed in his ears.

As these projections are snuffed out, the entire projected world will collapse, retracting into the real one. Eight days should suffice for the real world to retract this projection entirely.

This is just the beginning, so don't worry. Without your interference, the other side of the projection will retract just as quickly, and my plan will succeed.

Li Huowang knelt on the ground as he held his stomach in pain. His vision blurred, and the words on the note seemed to twist and writhe. Qing Wanglai's other poison, the one that acted quickly, was killing him.

Li Huowang rubbed his single eye and continued to read the note.

Li Huowang, your thinking is too shallow, just like Zhuge Yuan's. He was a fool who couldn't see the bigger picture. What a waste of education. Fortunately, I'm here. Thanks to me, your childish games will not destroy the real world. I will save the world. I am the savior.

When this crisis ends, the real world will project itself anew. And I, Qing Wanglai, will be reborn. I will no longer be a mere projection. I will be something greater—an existence closer to my real self.

"Fuck you, Qing Wanglai!" Li Huowang roared, his vision darkening as he staggered. Fresh blood seeped out from his reopened wounds.

He tried to hold on but realized that the others weren't in better shape. They were all limping or collapsing onto the ground.

He tried to steady himself, but the others were faring no better. They were all limping or collapsing into the ground, their faces etched with pain.

Wu Qi drained herself of as much blood as possible while trying to figure out how to fend off the poison.

"Nana! Nana!" Li Huowang stumbled toward Yang Na and cradled her frail body. She clutched her abdomen, and her face contorted in agony as tears streamed down her face.

She buried herself in Li Huowang's embrace and weakly whispered, "Huowang... My stomach hurts... Are we dying?"

Li Huowang's breath grew erratic at the sight of her injuries. He pressed his palm against her stomach, rubbing it gently. "Don't be scared, Nana. There's a way out of this. I'll find it. I promise you—you won't die. Just hold on."

“Hahaha!” A shrill, mocking laugh rang out. “A plan? You think you have a plan? You’re already as good as dead!”

Li Huowang raised his head to look at Shai Zi, who pointed weakly at him while making fun of him.

Li Huowang was filled with rage, nearly attacking Shai Zi with his bloodied blade.

However, he suppressed his anger and shouted back, “What are you laughing at? You got deceived by the Three Ancient Ones too! You wanted to become a Siming, but he was actually after your life! You’re the leader of the Sitting Oblivion Dao, and yet you were thoroughly deceived. Pathetic!”

Li Huowang changed the subject promptly after scolding Shai Zi. “Shai Zi, no matter what, we’re in the same boat now. Use your backup plan now, or we will all die!”

Shai Zi pushed his sunglasses lazily and shook his head. “I don’t have a backup plan. I admit defeat. He used his life to seal this. He wins.”

“No! This is impossible!” Li Huowang rushed over and grabbed Shai Zi by the collar. “You must have a backup plan. I know you, Shai Zi—you never trust anyone completely, especially not Qing Wanglai!”

Shai Zi wasn’t afraid of Li Huowang. He lazily scratched his left arm and yawned. “I thought it would be very fun up here, but it’s boring. All of it.”

With an air of indifference, he took out a pistol seemingly out of nowhere.

Li Huowang tensed, but Shai Zi turned the gun on himself, pressing the barrel to his temple. “It’s no fun at all. It was more fun down there.”

Shai Zi shot himself without any hesitation.

“Shit!” Li Huowang kicked Shai Zi’s corpse aside and frantically scanned the room for any hint of salvation.

However, Qing Wanglai would never let anyone stop his plan. Qing Wanglai's poison had already seeped into their veins, and it was killing them quickly. There was no escape.

Bam! Chen Hongyu fell face down while eating a sausage. She was dead.

Li Huowang knew this was just the beginning. As Qing Wanglai's poison spread, every Siming in the Baiyu Capital would die.

Yet even as pain wracked his body, Li Huowang clung to one thought: *I won't die. I won't let them die.*

He turned to look at Zhao Shuangdian. Her hands were frozen over her laptop.

However, she wasn't typing. The laptop displayed a waterfall of data, as if it was automatically calculating something.

"Zhao Shuangdian!" He held her up, only to realize that she was dead as well.

"Damn it! Can any of you be more useless?" he shouted, his voice raw with desperation.

"Huowang..." Yang Na's faint voice drew him back. He dropped Zhao Shuangdian and approached Yang Na carefully.

"I'm sorry..." she wept, her bloodstained tears streaking her face. "I think... I'm dying... You have to... survive..."

Yang Na cried until her breath stopped. Her pale hands slipped from his grasp.

Chapter 1008 - Consuming The Heavenly Daos

“Nana!” Li Huowang’s shout of despair echoed throughout the entire place. Yang Na had died in his arms.

Her peaceful face was a cruel contrast to the torment inside him, as though a dull, rusty blade twisted endlessly in his chest.

“Don’t panic. Stay calm. We haven’t lost yet! There *has* to be a way!”

His breaths came in rapid bursts as he struck his head with the hilt of his knife, desperate to calm himself down.

But it was useless. Despite repeatedly smacking his head, he felt no pain. The Siming of Pain was dead too.

Li Huowang’s vision began to blur as he caught the faint sound of music.

He swept around the corpse-filled place and noticed Zhao Shuangdian’s laptop. It was a notification.

Li Huowang stumbled over and noticed the screen was no longer filled with data. The screen displayed a single infinity symbol.

He realized the symbol was the final clue left by Zhao Shuangdian. There was still a chance.

“What... What is this? Infinity? A loop?”

Li Huowang stared at the screen and tried to figure it out, but he had no idea.

He struck his head again with his broken hand, though the gesture was meaningless—the world no longer had any Pain.

“Why... why can’t any of you... Why can’t any of you just give me a straight answer? Why do you always make me guess?!” Li Huowang exclaimed, kicking Zhao Shuangdian’s corpse away.

When he saw Zhao Shuangdian’s corpse roll over, inspiration struck. “No wonder I can’t understand—I hold the Siming of Bewilderment. I don’t know Zhao Shuangdian’s Heavenly Dao, but it must hold the key. If I absorb it, I’ll understand her message!”

Li Huowang prepared to absorb Zhao Shuangdian’s Heavenly Dao.

But his consciousness once again became hazy, and a wave of drowsiness enveloped him. Pain had long since ceased to exist, but his body was still growing weak and unresponsive.

Li Huowang instantly recognized this familiar sensation—the feeling of impending death. His time was running out.

“No... I can’t die! Not now! If I do, everything ends! I need to figure out a way! There has to be a way!”

He stabbed his own leg, trying to jolt himself awake. However, the drowsiness persisted, becoming heavier and more insidious.

When he next opened his eyes, Yang Na’s peaceful corpse was before him. She looked as if she was sleeping peacefully.

Li Huowang stumbled backward. “No! Nana! I cannot do that! I cannot take away your Heavenly Dao of Death! I cannot!”

Even as he stumbled, the drowsiness hit him again. He snarled and shouted angrily, “Qing Wanglai! Just you wait!”

He didn’t want to do it, but the only way to survive was to absorb the Heavenly Mater’s Heavenly Dao of Death.

He couldn’t die. If he did, Yang Na would never return.

Li Huowang cried tears of blood and crawled to Yang Na’s side with the last of his strength. Shaky and frail, he gently cradled her head and kissed her deeply.

After devouring the Heavenly Dao of Death, Li Huowang felt the sensation of death in his body freeze.

Even though he had temporary immortality, the pain in his heart was so intense that he could hardly breathe.

Even so, he didn't have time to mourn. If he stopped now, everything would be over.

"Don't worry, Nana. I won't leave you here alone. Let's go together!" Li Huowang fashioned her hair into a makeshift rope, tying her head securely around his neck.

Ji Zai glanced downwards and noticed the Heavenly Mater's constantly shifting Chaos fragment hanging on his chest, keeping him company.

"Nana, let's go. We still have a chance," he murmured, stumbling toward Zhao Shuangdian's corpse.

Absorbing Zhao Shuangdian's Heavenly Dao filled him with clarity. As he gazed at the laptop screen, the infinity symbol took on meaning.

"The factory... It's the key. It's still alive. If I destroy it, the timeline resets. We can start over!"

Li Huowang stood up without hesitation and prepared to attack the hidden factory.

As he was walking past Shai Zi, Li Huowang noticed the sunglasses. He quickly squatted down and picked them up. He put them on and absorbed Shai Zi's Heavenly Dao, feeling his body getting slightly better.

He wiped his mouth and grabbed his weapons before approaching the main doors.

He held onto the handle and took a deep breath before opening it. The familiar-looking dunes appeared in front of him again.

He snarled and walked past the dinghy wooden doors to explore the place.

Sweat mingled with blood as he trudged forward, but he wasn't thirsty.

The dunes were massive, and every direction appeared

identical. Li Huowang believed he had gotten lost until a distant black dot caught his eye.

He quickened his pace and approached the black dot.

Minutes later, he reached the black speck. It was Chen Hongyu's corpse, shrouded in a writhing mass of flies.

Chapter 1009 - Reset

The flies on Chen Hongyu's corpse buzzed into the air in unison as Li Huowang approached. Some of them landed on him, greedily drinking his blood.

Li Huowang followed the flies' trajectory, nodded slightly, and then stepped past Chen Hongyu's lifeless body. He pressed on.

After two days of travel, he arrived at the familiar culvert. He walked in confidently, the path ingrained in his memory.

He reached the factory again. There were still fires burning inside, though their light was dimmer than before. The people inside moved about frantically, seemingly searching for something.

The bandits fixed their gazes on Li Huowang and aimed their guns directly at him. Interestingly, some of them were wrapped in bandages.

Li Huowang stares at them peacefully. He reached behind his back and slowly unsheathed his bronze coin sword.

They fired as Li Huowang swung. The bullets hit Li Huowang squarely, but he wasn't afraid—he had the Heavenly Dao of Death.

They had been no match for him before. Now, after absorbing so many Heavenly Daos, they were mere distractions.

With a swift swing of his sword, three heads tumbled to the ground, with blood spraying upward in chaotic arcs.

"Nana, look at this! We're so close to resetting the timeline again!" Li Huowang shouted at the head hanging from his neck as he continued cutting down the bandits. "Wait for me! It'll all be over soon!"

Li Huowang jumped and landed heavily, bisecting someone in half.

A deafening engine roar cut through the chaos. Blinding

headlights swept over him as a massive, spike-covered jeep barreled toward him. Four men inside took aim, their guns trained on him. The vehicle was huge and resembled the head of a beast.

The engine roared, and the jeep charged towards Li Huowang.

Li Huowang pounced, his blade raised high. With a cold flash, he cleaved the jeep in half. Diesel sprayed from the ruptured fuel tank.

He snapped his fingers before touching the ground. "Fire!"

Boom! The jeep exploded, and viscera rained down around Li Huowang.

The viscera slowly pooled together and condensed, forming a coffee and chocolate-flavored mooncake.

Various voices surrounded Li Huowang.

"The Mid-Autumn Festival program is becoming worse over the years."

"Yeah. Even the prison band is better than this."

"Hey, did you know that our mooncakes are popular outside? A lot of people wanted to have a taste of them."

"Ward twenty-six! It's time to eat your medicine."

Li Huowang looked around the familiar place and saw his left arm was complete again. He was back.

"HAHAHA!"

His laughter shocked everyone, but they weren't surprised by this. They just skirted around Li Huowang and went on their way.

Li Huowang happily chewed on the mooncake. He felt the paper note inside and chewed even harder. He was grinning from ear to ear right now.

While the other prisoners were performing, Li Huowang kept his calm and walked towards the toilet.

There, an unexpected figure blocked his path. Yi Donglai stared at him, wide-eyed. "What happened just now? What was that? Why did I come back?"

“You... remember?” Li Huowang hadn’t expected anyone else to retain their memories after a timeline reset. Yi Donglai had always forgotten everything before.

His words shattered Yi Donglai’s fragile hope that it had all been an illusion. Yi Donglai said, “Was everything real? Everything? What is real? What is fake?”

The other patients turned to look at Yi Donglai, so Li Huowang tried to calm him down. “Don’t move! Do you want the others to think that you are crazy too?”

Li Huowang pulled Yi Donglai into the bathroom and whispered, “Don’t panic and listen to me. Don’t forget what happened at the Baiyu Capital! Listen to me.”

Yi Donglai wanted to say something, but in the end, he merely nodded.

Soon, he walked out with Li Huowang, heading for the main gate.

With a swipe of his card, the large metal gates opened.

As they walked, Li Huowang spoke in a low voice, saying, “You already know everything, so I won’t explain again. Trust me no matter what, and talk to me through your phone.”

The two Ba siblings were surprised to find the two walking towards them.

Ba Nanxu leaned against the car window and chuckled. “Not bad, Li Huowang. To think you could kidnap a doctor at the same time.”

Li Huowang ignored her and got in the car. “Give me Zhao Shuangdian’s number.”

After dialing the number, the car slowly headed towards Qing Wanglai’s mansion.

Li Huowang looked at the scenery outside and shook his phone at Yi Donglai to exchange contact information. They texted each other as the car approached its destination. After a long time, Li

Huowang saw the familiar mansion again.

He entered the hall and darted past Chen Hongyu on the couch, racing straight up to the third floor.

He threw open the door to find Yang Na curled up in a corner. Tears streamed down his face as he embraced her tightly, refusing to let go.

“Li Huowang? How did you know she was here?” Qing Wanglai smiled as he brought the others with him into the room.

Li Huowang shook his head. “Get out. I want to be alone with Nana.”

“Of course. Let’s give the couple some space.”

While Li Huowang wanted them gone, he didn’t want Qing Wanglai to leave yet. “Qing Wanglai, wait.”

Chapter 1010 - Past

Li Huowang stood at the top of Shangjing's east gate and looked down.

Even though the murderous aura had tainted the people, they needed to continue their lives. However, there were more criminals now, and the people were rowdier.

Though the murderous aura had tainted the people, life continued. Still, crime surged, and the people became rowdier.

"Are you selling it at fifty coins or not? I will stab you if you're not!"

"You bastard! Look at my neck—go ahead and stab if you've got the guts! Think I'm scared of you?"

"How dare you trick me?! It's one catty lighter than you promised! I will shave the weight off your flesh!"

Li Huowang's eyes scanned their faces, but his mind wandered elsewhere.

Suddenly, something caught his eye, and his pupils shrank. He leaped and dashed across the algae-covered roof tiles.

He brushed past the white banners and saw Bai Lingmiao sitting on a lotus seat. She was okay.

Overcome with emotion, Li Huowang lunged forward, pulling her tightly into his embrace.

Bai Lingmiao blushed when she sensed the gazes from the others. "What are you doing? Look at where we are!"

She waved all four of her arms, and the two of them disappeared.

When Li Huowang regained his senses, he realized they were back in Bai Lingmiao's room.

He let her go and noticed that all four of her eyes were

emitting a murderous aura.

“You... were tainted by the murderous aura too?” Li Huowang was stunned momentarily. “That’s fine. As long as you are alive.”

He was worried that Bai Lingmiao would never return when he saw Yang Na and Bai Lingmiao superimposing on one another.

Bai Lingmiao was still alive. That was all he cared about. Her changed personality was nothing serious.

Li Huowang hugged her once more, holding her incredibly tightly.

Bai Lingmiao pushed him away slightly before unbuttoning her clothes. “Hurry up. There are still issues for me to handle in the Tianchen Kingdom.”

“Wait, Miaomiao. This isn’t what I intended to do.” Li Huowang laughed, quickly stopping her. Bai Lingmiao had become more brazen after being tainted by the murderous aura.

“Miaomiao, that’s not quite what I wanted. I just wanted to hug you, even though it’s been so long since we’ve had time for ourselves.”

Li Huowang carefully hugged her again.

He sniffed her fragrant hair and recalled what they had all been through. After a long while, Li Huowang broke the silence.

“Miaomiao, you can’t leave. You’re the only one I have left...”

The murderous aura in Bai Lingmiao’s eyes softened as she felt the change in his emotions.

She gently patted his back with all four hands and sighed.

“Don’t worry. I won’t go anywhere. We still need to find a way to revive Suisui.”

“Yes.”

Li Huowang nodded and closed his eyes. Too many things had happened in a short period of time. He was exhausted and could feel himself going unconscious.

For the first time in a long while, he felt safe. He could finally

relax a little.

“Senior Li, what’ll we do once we save Suisui?” Bai Lingmiao asked, her voice laced with longing, as if she had just escaped the Zephyr Temple.

“Once we find Suisiu, we can return to Cowheart Village. We don’t have to do anything. I just want to live peacefully. I’m too tired...”

“Is that so? What do you think a peaceful day should be?”

“As long as no one dies, that’s enough. To me, that’s a normal day,” Li Huowang replied, his voice barely audible as though speaking in a dream.

Their conversation drifted to other topics, unhurried and aimless. They held each other close, and their injured hearts seemed to mend a little.

One division later, Bai Lingmiao rested on Li Huowang’s chest, draped in his red Daoist robe while listening to his heartbeat. “I have to go soon. I can’t stay away from the Tianchen Kingdom for long. Most of the people and evil entities now worship the Heavenly MaterWhite Lotus Sect, but there are still stubborn bandits who resist.”

“Sure. I need to find Gao Zhijian to discuss some matters too.”

Li Huowang took off Bai Lingmiao’s golden anklet and gave her some white clothes.

“Senior Li,” Bai Lingmiao said, putting her silk eye covers back on, “we should talk like this more often. It makes me feel at ease.”

Li Huowang nodded as he put on his boots and robes. He froze as he turned to the bronze basin to wash his face.

He saw Ji Zai in the water instead of his own reflection. Ji Zai was panicking.

“Li Huowang! Quick! The Baiyu Capital needs Dragon Qi! The sky will tear open if we don’t patch it up!”

Li Huowang’s thoughts spiraled. Baiyu Capital existed outside

the flow of time. The nightmare wasn't over—it was only beginning!

“What’s wrong? Are you alright?”

Li Huowang shook his head as if he was hiding from something. He stumbled towards the front door. “I... I need to go and find Gao Zhijian. The Baiyu Capital requires Dragon Qi.”

Li Huowang ran out, using his cultivation to travel quickly. He phased past the walls of the palace and finally found Gao Zhijian. He was eating while holding onto his imperial son.

Gao Zhijian stuffed a scallion pancake into his own mouth and asked, “Senior Li, what’s wrong?”

“Dragon Veins!” Li Huowang shouted. “The Baiyu Capital is in danger. I need two Dragon Veins and the support of all five emperors to send them up!”

Hearing the urgency in Li Huowang’s tone, Gao Zhijian turned serious and stood up, abandoning his meal. “Understood.”

Soon, five emperors stood before a bronze tree Li Huowang had conjured. The Dragon Veins were also there, each dragging the past emperors behind them. Their chains had long been undone.

“Daoist Li,” the Khan of Qing Qiu said, “for the sake of our nations, I am more than happy to ascend. I don’t doubt you, but this is an important matter—why will you not come with us?”

“You can just ascend to find me up there. My past self is up there waiting for you!”

Li Huowang started to snarl uncontrollably, as if afraid of something up there.

The Khan wanted to say more, but Gao Zhijian interjected, “Senior Li’s word is law. Without him, the Dharma Sect would’ve destroyed us. We cannot doubt him.”

The dragons roared, and the five Dragon Veins brought two other Dragon Veins to the Baiyu Capital. The people of Shangjing kneeled in worship.

Li Huowang pounded his head in pain as the dragons' roars grew weaker. He murmured to himself, "Don't worry... There's still hope. There must be."

As he muttered, his reflection spoke again, its voice mirroring his panic. "We still need more help! We need allies! Call everyone you can!"

Suddenly, Li Huowang heard quiet footsteps behind him. A gentle hand patted Li Huowang's shoulder. "Senior Li, is it my turn?"

Chapter 1011 - Death

“Senior Li, is it my turn?”

Li Huowang shuddered at the sound of that familiar voice.

He looked up and saw Bai Lingmiao standing before him.

Memories flooded his mind—from when she gave him a bun back in the Zephyr Temple to all the moments they’d shared together. His expression twisted in pain.

“Why... why?! Why is this happening?” Li Huowang exclaimed, tightly clutching his head.

Bai Lingmiao gently pried his hands away from his head.

“Senior Li, is it my turn?”

“No! It’s not your turn yet! Not yet! We need to run and escape!”

Li Huowang didn’t know where they could go. He just wanted to flee.

He gripped her hand and channeled his cultivation, dragging her along. The world around them blurred as they sped through the Qi Kingdom, then the Tianchen Kingdom, and finally Hou Shu.

However, no matter how far he ran, what he sought to escape loomed ever closer.

Li Huowang ran past the places where he had once trodden upon, but the more he ran, the slower he became.

He had nowhere left to run when he arrived back at the destroyed Zephyr Temple.

Staring at the three charred statues on the altar, Li Huowang howled. He clutched his head and trembled, knowing there was no way to hide. He couldn’t alter the path ahead. If he didn’t send Bai Lingmiao up with the two Jiang Xiangshous, history itself would change.

And if it did, everything would be over.

On one side lay the lives of everyone in the world. On the other, Bai Lingmiao's life. He had to choose.

The pain torturing his heart would've been more than enough for him to use the Cang-Qiang Ascension. He wanted to do something to remove his heartache.

He drove a sharp pike into his palm, ripping at his flesh. Pain seared through him, but it did nothing to ease the mental torment. Blood and tears fell to the ground.

Li Huowang reached for another torture tool, but Bai Lingmiao stopped him. "Senior Li, you can tell me what's troubling you. You don't have to bear this alone."

"I... I can't..." His voice faltered as he met her gaze.

While he longed to change everything, there was no way out. Everything up to this point was a consequence of his actions, and the only way forward was to follow the path he'd forged.

Bai Lingmiao, as if understanding her fate, remained calm. She carefully placed her slender fingers on Li Huowang's mouth. "Senior Li, you don't have to worry about me. The Heavenly Mater told me."

Li Huowang pulled her into an embrace, his heart breaking. He couldn't bear the thought of Bai Lingmiao dying.

Bai Lingmiao whispered, "Senior Li, will I die once I go up there?"

Li Huowang shook his head in pain. "I don't know. I really don't know."

Bai Lingmiao patted his back lightly. "Senior Li, don't worry. The Heavenly Mater promised to send me back once everything is over."

Li Huowang wanted to trust her, but he knew it was impossible. Bai Lingmiao was just lying to make him feel better.

Bai Lingmiao was the Saintess of the White Lotus Sect. From

the mural in the underground chamber of Cowheart Village, Li Huowang knew the truth. The Heavenly Mater wanted Bai Lingmiao to ascend and be reborn as the Heavenly Mater of the past—the same one who once ruled the Tianchen Kingdom.

There was an impassable gap between Simings and mortals, except for the Siming in control of the Heavenly Dao of Bewilderment.

He didn't know what fate awaited Bai Lingmiao when she was up there. He wasn't even sure if he would be able to see her again.

"No! I won't accept this!" Li Huowang bit his lips and looked at Bai Lingmiao, determination flashing in his eyes.

"Miaomiao, don't worry. I'll save you! I must save you!"

"I won't let this end here. We promised to return to Cowheart Village together. I won't accept this outcome."

"The Heavenly Mater may be untouchable now, but I swear, once we've dealt with Fu Shengtian, I'll tear her apart!"

"I will save you, and I will even save Suisui! In this crazy world, anything is possible!"

The Second Deity chuckled and kissed Li Huowang's forehead. "Now that's the undefeatable Li Huowang that I know and love. We'll just be assisting them up there, so don't worry. We are not marching to our deaths. We will kill Fu Shengtian!"

Li Huowang wiped his tears and rose to his feet. There was still hope, and he couldn't give up. How could he save Suisui if he faltered now?

He turned to look at the three charred statues and howled. "Three Ancient Ones! Just you wait! I will kill you!"

With a single blow, he smashed the statues to pieces.

"Senior Li, send me back. There's no time."

But he shook his head. "Not yet. We need to go somewhere else first. You weren't alone with the six White Donkeys... There was someone else too."

Gao Zhijian soon returned from the Baiyu Capital. The mission was so smooth that he doubted himself. *Why does Senior Li require all five of us emperors just to send two Dragon Veins up there?*

Just as he passed the Ox Tail Gate and returned to Shangjing, he couldn't help but notice Li Huowang frowning and Bai Lingmiao smiling. They had been waiting for him at the altar.

"Gao Zhijian, something else needs to be sent to the Baiyu Capital."

"Hm? What do you need to send up there?"

"Two Jiang Xiangshous."

Li Huowang's words were like a cold wind, chilling everyone to the bone. The meaning behind them was unmistakable.

Gao Zhijian froze for a moment, then quickly composed himself. After a brief exchange with the other Emperors, he let out a strained smile. "Understood. I'll give the orders right away."

Turning to Bai Lingmiao, he added, "Senior Bai, I need the White Lotus Sect's help for this. Can you do it?"

Bai Lingmiao was no longer as calm as she had been. Two streams of tears stained her cheeks. Li Huowang reached out to wipe them away, but the tears didn't stop.

The Second Deity answered in her stead. "Yes."

The White Lotus Sect and the palace soon issued the command to assemble. Soon, both the soldiers and White Lotus devotees gathered in the open fields to the west of Shangjing. The murderous aura influenced everyone present.

The purpose of their assembly became clear when the orders were relayed.

The millions of soldiers were anxious. Almost half of them were devotees of the White Lotus Sect, and they were pretty much the same as the soldiers after being influenced by the murderous aura.

The devotees of the White Lotus Sect surrounded Bai Lingmiao and knelt sincerely. The sight was awe-inspiring, a testament to

their devotion.

The White Donkeys at the front spoke on behalf of the other devotees. “Saintess, is this the will of the Heavenly Mater?”

Bai Lingmiao had almost cried herself dry. She used her remaining strength to utter a single word. “Yes.”

The devotees all stood up when they heard her.

“Heavenly Mater! The Void Home! Brothers and sisters! It’s time for us to finally return to the Void Home!”

The voices spread out like ripples in a lake.

Everyone from the White Lotus Sect cheered with a thunderous boom, their murderous aura adding to their excitement.

Chapter 1012 - Arise

Under the command of the banner holders, soldiers gathered in the fields outside Shangjing.

There were lots of people, but everything unfolded with meticulous order thanks to the White Lotus Sect's enforcement and the constant stream of directives from their superiors. Banner holders on horseback zipped around the soldiers, ensuring coordination.

At the forefront, Li Huowang stood and saw nothing but an ocean of people. The ground was covered with a dense crowd that extended as far as the eye could see.

A specific ritual was required to summon Jiang Xiangshou. While the Chief of the Liang Kingdom's Surveillance Bureau had died, the Deputy Chief was still alive and fit to conduct the ceremony.

Gao Zhijian, clad in his robes, held onto a special tiger seal. As the murderous aura continued to condense, the tiger seal glowed in a red light and even started to tremble. A faint roar could be heard emanating from it.

He split it in two, keeping one half while handing the other to four Deputy Chiefs.

They bowed ceremoniously before running down to make the final preparations.

The pounding of war drums and the blare of horns filled the air, echoing as everyone's hearts thumped rapidly. Eunuchs distributed jars of potent wine, prepared in advance for this moment.

Everyone was given a single bowl of strong wine, and no one wasted a single drop. They drank it all in one gulp with eyes filled

with conviction, including the children and the elderly.

Li Huowang's heart ached when he looked at the people. He had never imagined the cost of the help he sought back in the Baiyu Capital.

Everything had a price. Some payments were required upfront, while others could be paid later.

Bai Lingmiao, on the other hand, was calmer now. Maybe it was because she would be going up with the others too...

The devotees brought up a massive floating lantern fashioned into a grand lotus throne. Six of the White Donkeys were seated on the outer edge of the lotus throne, just like lotus seeds.

The time was up. Gao Zhijian and the four other emperors stood at the forefront. The light gust rippled their robes and black beards.

Were this a conventional battle, Gao Zhijian would have delivered a rousing speech to inspire the troops, but this was no ordinary war. He hesitated, unsure of what to say. The people before him were marching to certain death.

However, silence wasn't an option—not for a good emperor. A good emperor had to bear the weight of the people's lives, even when there were a million of them.

“My warriors!”

Li Huowang froze as Gao Zhijian's voice covered every corner of Shangjing. “My warriors! My brothers! If we live, we live. If we die, we die. Today is the day when we determine the survival of our people!”

Gao Zhijian chose honesty over pretense and revealed the truth, including secrets about the Baiyu Capital known only to the highest ranks of the Surveillance Bureau.

Suddenly, the ground shook and the sky split apart. A massive upside-down tree slowly crashed onto the ground. “The sky is falling.”

The people filled with murderous aura grabbed their blades and glared at the broken sky. “Kill! Kill! Kill!”

The murderous aura swirled upward, engulfing their bodies. They faced the enormous tree without a trace of fear.

Li Huowang averted his gaze as they raised their blades in unison. The sight was too unbearable for him to watch.

Footsteps approached. He looked up to see Chun Xiaoman, who was wearing new clothes on purpose.

As she cried, she looked at Li Huowang, Bai Lingmiao, and Gao Zhijian. Her voice trembled with despair. “Why? Why is this happening?! I need to know!”

“Xiaoman...” Bai Lingmiao gently extended an arm to Chun Xiaoman, aware of how painful this must have been for her.

The White Lotus Sect was Chun Xiaoman’s home. Everyone in there was her family, and now her family was gone.

However, Chun Xiaoman slapped Bai Lingmiao’s arm away. She looked at the heads of her family members tumbling down and wept, her gaze fixed on the hole in the sky.

“Chun Xuan! Gou Zi! Wang Kunsheng! They were people—real, living people! Just like you! They weren’t beggars anymore. Their life had finally improved, and they could finally eat their fill!”

In her despair, Chun Xiaoman unsheathed the sword that Li Huowang had gifted her. Then, she cut off her own head with one swift motion.

“Xiaoman!” Bai Lingmiao shouted, her tears streaming down her face.

Chun Xiaoman’s head fell among the soldiers’ lifeless bodies, her blood spraying across the earth.

Gao Zhijian stepped forward but stopped, clenching his fists as he bit his lips. Unable to bear the sight, he turned away.

The solidified murderous aura soared upwards and formed into two roaring heads.

With the two Jiang Xiangshous completed, the other living humans in the area gradually went crazy from the murderous aura. Their bloodlust rapidly increased while the range of effect slowly expanded.

“Senior Li! Jiang Xiangshou has been completed! We must send it up, or there will be more trouble down here!”

Still sobbing, Bai Lingmiao clutched Li Huowang’s hands.

“Senior Li, I will go now. Send me up, please.”

Li Huowang nodded painfully, clenching his fists incredibly tightly. He trembled as he escorted Bai Lingmiao to the lotus throne.

Seated on the throne, Bai Lingmiao clasped sacred artifacts in her four hands. Her face glowed with a pure white light, the lotus mark on her forehead shining brightly as it resisted the murderous aura.

The Twelve Merit Jade Lotus glowed brightly, and the sky above Bai Lingmiao opened up. A single lotus seed descended, embedding itself into her body.

At that moment, she understood everything that was happening and why it had happened. She finally smiled, but it was devoid of any sadness or joy. It was a serene smile.

She made a lotus seal with all four hands and floated upwards with the six White Donkeys. They floated past the two Jiang Xiangshous, who were fighting with each other. Then, they dragged them to the Ox Tail Gate.

The pressure from the two Jiang Xiangshous soon subsided, but Li Huowang continued to pant as he watched Bai Lingmiao disappear into the sky.

Despite repeatedly punching himself in the chest, even to the point of caving it in, nothing changed.

Li Huowang fished out the bronze mirror in his pocket and shouted, “Ji Zai! Everyone is gone! They are all gone! You must

send her back! You must! You promised me!”

Chapter 1013 - Truth Or Lies

Burning tears streaked down Li Huowang's cheeks, dripping onto the floor. He stared at the unmoving Yang Na in despair. There was nothing he could do.

Wu Qi sighed and spoke gently, "You used to live in a mental asylum, didn't you? Then you should recognize what's happening to her. Severe depression often ends like this. I can't even imagine how she managed to find us here."

"Nana?"

Li Huowang shook her gently, but her unfocused pupils remained vacant. The timeline had reset, but something was different this time.

Yang Na had always asked about his missing eye when she first saw him in the past.

Now, she looked like an empty husk.

Trying to shake her out of her stupor, Li Huowang suddenly recalled something. "Nana, is this because I took your Heavenly Dao of Death? Is that why you're like this?"

He repeated the question, his conviction growing as he did. He nodded, convincing himself. "Alright, then. I'll give it back to you. I'll return it all!"

Li Huowang kissed Yang Na's lips and bit his tongue hard. Blood flowed freely, which he funneled into her mouth.

But it wasn't enough. He tore chunks of flesh from his mouth and fed them to her.

Holding her tightly, he murmured in her ears, "Nana, come back. I've returned the Heavenly Dao of Death to you. You're the

Heavenly Mater again. You've reclaimed it, so please come back. I need you. I need your help to deal with Qing Wanglai."

Wu Qi pursed her lips and quietly slipped out of the room, leaving the couple to themselves.

Li Huowang talked incessantly to Yang Na, who finally replied after thirty minutes.

She placed her emaciated hand on his back. "Huowang? What's wrong? Why are you crying? Is it because I'm not good enough?"

Li Huowang released her, noticing the light return to her eyes.

"Huowang... What happened to your eye? Why do you only have one? Is it because of me?"

Li Huowang sighed in relief after hearing those words. Yang Na had returned to normal.

Relief washed over him as he hugged her tightly. "As long as you are fine... As long as you are fine..."

Knock, knock. The lovely atmosphere was interrupted by the knocking on the door.

Li Huowang turned to see Yi Donglai standing there, his face anxious.

"Talk. Nana is an ally."

Yi Donglai entered, locking the door behind him. He opened his mouth to speak, but Li Huowang interrupted, "Wait."

Li Huowang stood up and started rummaging around the furniture in the room.

The room didn't have many things, making it easy for him to search. He quickly found what he was looking for: a black microphone.

"Damn it! I knew it! Qing Wanglai always has a backup plan. Of course he didn't leave this room unmonitored!"

Li Huowang removed the black SD card from the microphone, chewed it up, and swallowed the pieces.

Yi Donglai and Yang Na froze in alarm. The discovery prickled

their skin as if there were still unseen gazes watching them. They rummaged around the room to help Li Huowang search for extra cameras.

They soon found a second microphone concealed inside a stool's leg and a third wedged atop a cabinet. Qing Wanglai had been very careful.

Li Huowang crushed all of them. "What a despicable bastard."

Qing Wanglai had never intended to work with them. He had intended to execute his own scheme from the beginning, monitoring them in secret. That was how Qing Wanglai had always managed to seize the initiative.

But now it was different. The timeline had been reset, and Li Huowang already knew Qing Wanglai's plans. Now, Li Huowang had the initiative.

"Huowang, what's going on? Why are these here? Who placed them?"

Glancing at Yi Donglai and Yang Na, Li Huowang gently guided Yang Na to a stool. "Nana, there's something I need to explain. A lot has happened, but you've forgotten."

He proceeded to tell her about Qing Wanglai's betrayal. Li Huowang needed as many allies as possible to kill Qing Wanglai later.

"Nana, do you understand what I'm talking about? Qing Wanglai is the Three Ancient Ones. He's gone mad, and we need to find a way to control him. We need to devour his Heavenly Dao."

Yang Na nodded without hesitation. "I understand. What do we do next?"

Li Huowang pondered momentarily and said, "We need to find Zhao Shuangdian first. We can't fight Qing Wanglai yet—it's too risky. He could turn others against us if we're not careful."

Having taken the initiative, it was simpler to formulate a plan. Li Huowang felt confident that the Three Ancient Ones and Shai Zi

wouldn't threaten the Simings of Baiyu Capital this time.

"Wait," Yi Donglai interrupted. "Little Li, you need to tell me what's going on. What's happening?"

With so much chaos, Yi Donglai was utterly lost.

Frustration flashed across Li Huowang's face. "What do you mean you don't understand? I'm saying that I'm not ill and that everything I've said is real. Everything you've written in your thesis is true too!"

But Yi Donglai couldn't believe it, "But... even if everything you've said is true... what does that have to do with me?"

"Everything! You said it yourself—you're Da Nuo! You're a Grand Siming!"

Yi Donglai's face visibly turned red from anger.

"That's because they're holding my sister hostage! I only said that to fool them. It's all a lie!"

"A lie?" Li Huowang laughed bitterly. "Do you think something becomes a lie just because you call it one? I thought the pill recipe I gave Dan Yangzi was fake too, but he became an Immortal! There's no truth or lies here. You *are* a Grand Siming. You were Da Nuo from the moment you said you were Da Nuo."

Chapter 1014 - Start

Yi Donglai leaned against the wall, bringing a cigarette to his mouth with trembling hands. He lit the cigarette and took a deep drag.

He coughed violently, likely because it had been a long time since his last smoke.

After a few seconds of coughing, he wiped the tears off his cheeks and looked at Li Huowang.

“No, I can’t trust you. What you’re saying doesn’t make sense—not in this world and not in that other world you keep talking about. There’s no proof the timeline resets, except for your words. What if you’re wrong? Maybe it’s not what you think.”

Li Huowang sighed. “Is logic really that important? Not everything is logical. Also, what does that have to do with our situation right now? We just need to deal with the problem at its roots! Do you want to get poisoned by Qing Wanglai again?”

Yi Donglai remembered the pain he suffered the last time, and his expression twisted. Clutching his hair, he stammered, “Why... Why is this happening?”

Li Huowang exhaled sharply and opened the door to check that no one was eavesdropping from the outside. “Doctor Yi, you don’t need to overthink it. You don’t have to understand my perspective—you can stick to your own. What matters is that you’re Da Nuo in my world. Whether or not I’m Ji Zai in yours doesn’t matter. The crucial point is that our enemy is the same.”

Yi Donglai took another drag. This time, he didn’t choke. White smoke obscured his face as he carefully considered Li Huowang’s words.

Yi Donglai carefully considered Li Huowang’s words. “Then,

did you experience this so-called timeline reset before?”

“You’ve seen my medical records and even wrote a thesis about me. Shouldn’t you understand me better than anyone else?”

“But this is different! You were ill last time, and now... I don’t know what you are!”

Li Huowang’s voice rose. “I wasn’t ill! You just couldn’t understand my world!”

Noticing Li Huowang’s growing agitation, Yi Donglai tried to calm him down. “Calm down. I didn’t say I won’t help you. I’m just trying to understand here. I don’t want to go through the timeline reset again.”

Li Huowang chuckled darkly. “You think resetting the timeline is bad? Wrong. Every time, I had to sacrifice so much! Without those resets, we’d all be dead! Qing Wanglai would’ve absorbed all our Heavenly Daos!”

“I... I need more evidence...” Yi Donglai muttered, pacing around the room in circles and clutching his hair.

Li Huowang grabbed him out of frustration. “Fine! Find your evidence! But before that, we need to act! Fu Shengtian is closing in, and we don’t have time to waste.”

A long silence followed before Yi Donglai quietly said, “Fine. Bring Zhao Shuangdian first.”

Li Huowang knew that Yi Donglai was now officially an ally, although he was struggling to cope with it.

“I called her while I was on the way here. The Heavenly Dao she controls is the key to defeating Qing Wanglai. We can’t let him catch wind of our plan. We need her to shoot him from a distance before he has the chance to poison us.”

From the previous timeline, Li Huowang was already aware of Qing Wanglai’s plans and how he would carry them out.

“Does she trust you?” Yi Donglai asked out of worry.

“She might not, but I know how to earn her trust. I’ve lived

through this enough times to know.”

Turning to Yang Na, Li Huowang continued, “Nana, you control the Heavenly Dao of Death. It’s crucial, and I need your help—no matter what.”

“Alright!”

Yang Na nodded spiritedly. With her energy restored, her eyes seemed to gleam.

Li Huowang trusted her completely. He didn’t need to explain much—she was his Yang Na, after all.

After laying out the plan, he glanced at Yi Donglai, who decided not to complain. Instead, he asked a peculiar question. “If I’m Da Nuo in your eyes, what would Da Nuo do now?”

Li Huowang smiled. “Follow me and find a way to treat me.”

They descended the stairs together, joining the others lounging in the hall. Everything looked identical to how it had been in the previous reset.

They sat down and watched the television together like they did in the previous reset.

The weather report came on after the program they were watching ended.

“Good afternoon. This is your weather update. Hurricane Manao is expected to make landfall from the southeast. Coastal residents are advised to take precautions. Here’s the projected path...”

Crunch crunch. Chen Hongyu munched on chips, mumbling, “So the hurricane will pass by our place...”

She then noticed that Yang Na had recovered and offered some chips. “Eat up. It’ll help you recover.”

Yang Na glanced at Li Huowang, who was glaring at the door. Then, she took one of the chips and ate it. Her eyes lit up with delight. “Wow, these tomato-flavored chips are amazing!”

She plopped down beside Chen Hongyu, eating chip after chip.

Wu Qi emerged from the kitchen, sighing. "It's not that they're amazing. You just haven't eaten in days, and your body is starving for nutrition."

She turned to Li Huowang. "Hey, Li Huowang! Aren't you her boyfriend? Shouldn't you be doing something about this?"

But Li Huowang did not answer her. His sharp gaze slowly swept across the room. "Where's Qing Wanglai?"

"He's cooking in the kitchen. Do you want to help him?"

Chapter 1015 - Change

Li Huowang shook his head after learning that Qing Wanglai was in the kitchen.

The familiar roar of an engine echoed from a distance. Li Huowang gave a signal to Yang Na and Yi Donglai.

BAM! The door was kicked open violently, revealing a completely transformed Zhao Shuangdian.

“Where is Li Huowang?”

Li Huowang was stunned. Zhao Shuangdian’s usually smooth, lustrous hair now looked greasy, as if she hadn’t showered in days. She looked disheveled, with baggy, ill-fitting clothes and no makeup.

He remembered her as a beautiful and intelligent woman, but now she appeared to be someone entirely different.

Zhao Shuangdian locked eyes with Li Huowang and laughed before approaching him.

Yang Na wanted to stop her, but Zhao Shuangdian pushed her away. “Li Huowang, why were you looking for me? Is there something that you can only say to me face-to-face?”

“Wha... What?”

Li Huowang was taken aback because her change had disrupted his plans.

But there was no time to waste. He needed to adjust his plans quickly, so he hastily brought Zhao Shuangdian away from Qing Wanglai’s mansion.

They reached the bamboo forest, and Li Huowang turned to face her, his shock evident. “Why are you like this? How did you become like this?”

Zhao Shuangdian, clearly irritated, crossed her arms and

scoffed. “What are you talking about, you crazy lunatic?”

Li Huowang understood what was happening when he recalled Yang Na’s situation.

“Is it because I consumed your Heavenly Dao? Here, let me return it to you!”

Li Huowang attempted to cut into his flesh to offer it to Zhao Shuangdian, but she forcefully pressed down on his shoulder to stop him.

Li Huowang struggled. “Why? I’m trying to return it. Why don’t you want it? Why don’t you want your Heavenly Dao? I don’t know how to use your Heavenly Dao!”

Yi Donglai ran over to help them. “Little Li, she won’t understand what you’re trying to do or say if you keep talking like this.”

Li Huowang sighed when he observed Zhao Shuangdian’s expression. “Fine. Let me go. I’ll explain everything to you.”

“Explain what?” A familiar voice cut in.

Zhao Shuangdian let go of Li Huowang and waved toward Qing Wanglai. “Don’t worry. Li Huowang just wanted to explain something to me.”

Li Huowang turned to see Qing Wanglai approaching them with his trademark smile.

“Let’s talk in the mansion.”

Once they had returned to the mansion, Zhao Shuangdian questioned Li Huowang again, saying, “What do you need to tell me? Go ahead.”

Li Huowang looked at her and then at Qing Wanglai. He didn’t know how to explain things right now.

The Three Ancient Ones were more vigilant than he had thought. Although Qing Wanglai didn’t recall the events of the previous resets, he was still closely monitoring everyone.

Right now, Li Huowang couldn’t reveal that Qing Wanglai

intended to steal all of the Heavenly Daos. His previous efforts would be entirely wasted if he did.

Apart from alerting Qing Wanglai, there was the risk that Zhao Shuangdian wouldn't trust Li Huowang anyway, given how much she'd changed.

At that moment, the sound of the television caught Li Huowang's attention, and an idea struck him. He pointed to the screen. "Look! Fu Shengtian is coming!"

Everyone turned to see footage of the hurricane on the television. A shard of glass from a skyscraper fell and shattered on the ground, causing the reporters to flee in panic.

The others looked at Li Huowang in confusion. He explained, "Fu Shengtian is attacking us and heading closer. We need to find a way to deal with it as soon as possible!"

Qing Wanglai blinked and pushed his glasses up. "Is this the major news you were talking about?"

"Isn't it important? Fu Shengtian will reach us in eight days! I had to risk my life to get this information! We'll all be dead if we don't come up with a plan before it arrives!"

"Six days." Someone interrupted Li Huowang.

He turned to see Chen Hongyu, who was staring at the television. "Huh?"

Chen Hongyu explained, "Not eight days, but six."

She turned up the volume, and the announcer's voice echoed across the room. "Weather reports say the hurricane will reach us in six days. We urge everyone..."

Li Huowang's face paled when he heard the news. Fu Shengtian hadn't been affected by the resetting timeline—it was still approaching them.

Qing Wanglai had said they had eight days, but now they only had six.

"Wait, doesn't that mean..."

Suddenly, Li Huowang recalled something. He pulled out his phone with trembling hands. His fear was palpable, but he dialed Sun Xiaoqin's number.

—Sorry, this number is no longer available.

The recording left him crestfallen. Refusing to give up, he tried Li Jianchen's number. However, he heard the same message.

“This... How... how could this be... Why...”

Li Huowang cried and called his parents repeatedly, but no one answered.

Fu Shengitan was immune to the timeline reset. Its actions affected future timelines.

Fu Shengtian had altered the past, so the deaths of his parents—Sun Xiaoqin and Li Jianchen—had been set in stone.

“Why! Why! Why involve them? Attack me instead!” With a cry of anguish, Li Huowang smashed his phone against the ground.

The others were surprised by his outburst, stepping back in shock.

Ba Nanxu worriedly approached Zhao Shuangdian. “Why don't we send him back?”

Yi Donglai clenched his fist and whispered, “Little Li! Calm down! Don't forget our plan! Things aren't over yet!”

Li Huowang took several deep breaths before collapsing onto the sofa with Yi Donglai's help.

Only then did he realize the others were seated at the dinner table, whispering among themselves while occasionally glancing in his direction.

Chapter 1016 - Clash

Li Huowang could already guess what they were discussing. After resetting the timeline so many times, it was obvious—they were talking about how his condition had worsened.

But that worked in his favor. He could use it as a smokescreen to deceive Qing Wanglai.

Thankfully, he still held the initiative despite how much the situation had changed.

Li Huowang took a deep breath and approached them.

“You guys must think I’m lying, but I’m telling the truth. We need to work together to overcome this crisis.”

Chen Hongyu replied, “But where is your proof? We need more than words to believe you. We need evidence.”

“Proof?” Li Huowang pretended to think deeply before shaking his head. “I don’t have any, but I’m telling the truth!”

Ba Nanxu rolled her eyes. “You think you’re telling the truth? Every lunatic believes that.”

“Now, now. There’s no need to attack him like that. He’s our ally, after all. He must have his own logic,” Qing Wanglai said, surprising everyone by defending Li Huowang.

However, Li Huowang ignored him and turned his attention to Zhao Shuangdian. “Where’s your laptop?”

Zhao Shuangdian was confused. “What laptop? I don’t even have a phone. Why would I need a laptop?”

Qing Wanglai stood up and walked into the kitchen. “We can revisit this topic later. Our food will be ready soon. Wu Qi, come and help me in the kitchen.”

Li Huowang knew this couldn’t go on much longer. He needed Zhao Shuangdian’s help if they were going to kill Qing Wanglai. If

he couldn't convince her, there was a good chance Qing Wanglai would use Zhao Shuangdian against him.

Li Huowang had an idea. He motioned Yang Na to follow him. As Qing Wanglai entered the kitchen, Li Huowang and Yang Na made their way up to the third floor.

Once they were alone, Li Huowang unsheathed his blade and cut a piece of his flesh from his arm.

"Huowang!"

Yang Na's face turned pale with shock. In a hurry, she used her hair tie to stem the bleeding on his arm.

"Don't worry. I'm just separating the Heavenly Dao from my body. We need to return it to Zhao Shuangdian so she can understand what I'm saying," Li Huowang said.

He handed his flesh to Yang Na. "Help me. I can't do this myself since Qing Wanglai is monitoring me. I need you to put my flesh into one of the dishes. She loves spicy food, so I need you to mix it with the stir-fried meat and green chili."

Yang Na hesitated, looking at the bloody flesh with teary eyes. "But... I don't know how to cook."

"Let me handle it," a voice said.

Yi Donglai appeared, looking at Li Huowang's wound with a complicated expression. He felt confused, unsure of what he was supposed to do in this situation. Eventually, he let out a sigh and decided to take Li Huowang's flesh, making his way towards the kitchen.

As Yi Donglai entered the kitchen, Li Huowang called out to Qing Wanglai to distract him. "Qing Wanglai, come out. I need to talk to you."

"Me?"

Qing Wanglai complied. He washed his hands and took off his aprons before heading outside.

Li Huowang needed to keep Qing Wanglai away from the

kitchen for Yi Donglai to succeed.

Qing Wanglai flashed his trademark fake smile. “Is there something wrong? Is it about your girlfriend?”

Li Huowang looked at Qing Wanglai carefully, recalling every atrocious action he had taken in the past. Li Huowang had to suppress his anger to stop himself from killing Qing Wanglai on the spot.

He couldn’t kill Qing Wanglai just yet. Killing the Three Ancient Ones required extreme caution.

For now, he knew that the Three Ancient Ones had the Heavenly Dao of Secrets, the Heavenly Dao of Growth, and a part of Li Huowang.

More importantly, Li Huowang didn’t know if Qing Wanglai had other secret allies. Li Huowang had to be very careful now.

Li Huowang decided to distract Qing Wanglai with some obvious questions. “Why didn’t you save me when I was captured at White Tower Hospital?”

He wasn’t truly interested in the answer. His focus remained on Yi Donglai. He watched as Yi Donglai worked quickly in the kitchen, finishing the dish.

The dish was served, and Zhao Shuangdian ate it happily.

Chen Hongyu noticed the stir-fried meat with green chili and salivated. “Looks delicious.”

She tried to grab some, but Yang Na pulled her back. “Auntie, where did you buy those potato chips? They’re so tasty. I want to buy more.”

With the distraction from Li Huowang and Yang Na’s help, Zhao Shuangdian finished most of the dish herself.

Zhao Shuangdian stood up to head back with the others, but Li Huowang stopped her. “You should play some computer games when you get back. They’re really fun. A boring life without computer games would be a shame.”

Zhao Shuangdian stared at Li Huowang like he was an idiot before she left. But she had just walked past Li Huowang when he whispered a peculiar term to her, “Topology...”

Li Huowang sat back down after Zhao Shuangdian left. This time, he wasn't worried.

He felt his phone vibrate and smiled. Someone had sent him a message.

A few minutes later, Qing Wanglai ran out of his room and shouted, “We need to move out now.”

“Where are we going?”

Qing Wanglai was abnormally serious. “To Zhao Shuangdian's house. She encountered some trouble.”

Everyone hopped into their vehicles. Li Huowang even went down to the basement to rev his motorcycle. Soon, the RV, sports car, and motorcycle roared across the countryside.

They took a winding path before stopping in front of a mountain. The area was rural, with only a dirt path leading the way.

No one would have guessed that Zhao Shuangdian lived in such an isolated place. Li Huowang gripped his blade and began climbing the mountain with the others.

Climbing a mountain without a path was exhausting. After two hours, everyone was panting.

Chen Hongyu struggled to breathe because of her fatigue. “Are we not there yet? How tall is this mountain?”

Li Huowang, carrying Yang Na on his back, passed Chen Hongyu without saying a word.

Qing Wanglai answered, “We are almost there! She lives somewhere nearby! But something isn't right... There weren't this many trees when I came here last time. Can someone call her?”

Wu Qi pulled out her phone but quickly put it away. “There's no signal here.”

Li Huowang made a decision. “Spread out! We’ll have a better chance of finding her this way.”

However, Qing Wanglai stopped him. “No. We’d be walking to our deaths if she’s in danger. We’re too vulnerable alone.”

Li Huowang huffed and glared at Qing Wanglai. “Then what do you propose?”

Qing Wanglai took out a tissue to wipe the sweat off his neck. “Retreat. It’s too dangerous here.”

“Aren’t we here to save Zhao Shuangdian?”

Li Huowang was about to argue further when he saw a red laser dot appear on Qing Wanglai’s forehead.

The next moment, a gunshot rang out, the bullet grazing past Li Huowang’s head and flying toward Qing Wanglai’s forehead.

Chapter 1017 - Three Ancient Ones

Qing Wanglai somehow sensed the attack and twisted his body at an unnatural angle. Though he avoided a fatal wound, the bullet still ripped through his ear.

Qing Wanglai's shattered glasses had barely touched the ground when Li Huowang's blade swung toward his neck. The cold flash of steel reflected the broken glasses.

Li Huowang followed up his attack flawlessly after the first shot from Zhao Shuangdian. Li Huowang and Zhao Shuangdian orchestrated this ambush to kill Qing Wanglai.

Ding! Somehow, Qing Wanglai managed to use his watch to stop Li Huowang's blade.

But it was futile. With his left hand, Li Huowang unsheathed a second blade and slashed again at Qing Wanglai's neck.

Qing Wanglai stared at him in disbelief. Li Huowang was attacking even though Qing Wanglai hadn't set his plan in motion. Why?

Blood sprayed in all directions, but Qing Wanglai remained eerily calm, his mind racing for ways to fight back. He grabbed Li Huowang's wrist and shouted, "Help! Li Huowang's gone crazy!"

The other Simings rushed over to help, but Yi Donglai and Yang Na blocked them. "Qing Wanglai is fooling you all! Li Huowang is sane. Qing Wanglai is using all of you!"

Another gunshot rang out. Once again, Qing Wanglai miraculously dodged it.

Li Huowang roared and exerted more force to cut down Qing Wanglai's head. However, Qing Wanglai managed to withstand it,

preventing Li Huowang from driving his blade closer.

Bam! Qing Wanglai kicked Li Huowang's abdomen. The blow caused his organs to shift around.

"Junior Li, what are you doing?"

To Qing Wanglai's surprise, his words had no effect whatsoever on Li Huowang.

"Everything is your fault!" Li Huowang jumped, aiming to bite Qing Wanglai's face.

Qing Wanglai wanted to evade but couldn't. Another red laser targeted the back of his head. Forced to choose, he dodged the bullet, allowing Li Huowang to sink his teeth into his face.

Li Huowang bit down forcefully and tore apart a huge chunk of Qing Wanglai's face.

The searing pain of the wound and the gash on his neck drove adrenaline through Qing Wanglai's veins. Summoning all his strength, he shoved Li Huowang back, stopping the assault for a moment.

Clutching onto the wounds on his neck, Qing Wanglai chuckled. "You've uncovered something with your 'special techniques,' haven't you? Disagreeing with my plan already?"

Li Huowang had no intention of negotiating with Qing Wanglai. He tightened his grip on the blades, still thinking about how to kill Qing Wanglai.

Noticing that Li Huowang had no intention of talking, Qing Wanglai turned to the hesitant Wu Qi. "Wu Qi, come and help me."

Wu Qi clutched onto her first aid kit and hesitated. Her gaze darted between Li Huowang and Qing Wanglai.

Qing Wanglai shouted, "Wu Qi, come here!"

At last, she drew a scalpel, fending off Yi Donglai before rushing to Qing Wanglai's side to treat his wounds.

"What are you doing? There's no reason to fight! We can sit down and talk!"

While Wu Qi stitched his wounds, Qing Wanglai used her as a shield against the gun aimed at him.

He turned to the others. “Do you all trust Li Huowang? I haven’t harmed him at all—I’ve been helping him all this time. I won’t take revenge on a patient, but we need to get him under control for now. He’s being reckless, and he could injure other people.”

“Is that so? Then tell us, what’s in the three test tubes behind you? Who are you planning to kill with that poison?” Li Huowang replied.

Li Huowang stomped hard and charged at Qing Wanglai, firmly gripping his blades to kill Qing Wanglai for good.

Qing Wanglai naturally had different plans in mind. He shoved Wu Qi toward Li Huowang, creating a distraction.

Li Huowang had to catch Wu Qi. The brief moment of distraction gave Qing Wanglai the chance to flee.

“Zhao Shuangdian, he’s getting away! After him!” Li Huowang roared, pushing Wu Qi aside to pursue.

Qing Wanglai was already wounded—Li Huowang couldn’t let him escape, not when he’d finally gained the upper hand by resetting the timeline.

The mountain’s dense forest made pursuit difficult. Thankfully, Li Huowang could track Qing Wanglai thanks to the blood-red secrets on the ground.

After chasing for some time, Li Huowang finally saw Qing Wanglai’s back. He hurled one of his blades, unexpectedly lodging it in Qing Wanglai’s leg.

Li Huowang pushed the branches away and inspected Qing Wanglai. At this point, Qing Wanglai panted while lying under a tree. The blade Li Huowang had thrown protruded from Qing Wanglai’s leg, his blood seeping into the soil.

Li Huowang grabbed his other blade and snarled at Qing

Wanglai. “Any last words?”

Qing Wanglai raised his right hand, still missing its pinky finger, and pushed his bloodied glasses up. “Hehehe... What are you thinking of doing?”

Despite his dire state, Qing Wanglai showed no fear.

Li Huowang bared his teeth. “I’m going to devour your Heavenly Dao.”

The sound of approaching footsteps alerted Li Huowang. He knew it was Zhao Shuangdian.

“Li Huowang, are you sure this is the time to turn on our allies? The real enemy is right in front of us,” Qing Wanglai said, pointing at the clouds approaching from the horizon.

“Stop trying to deceive me.” Li Huowang said. “I learned what you’re planning in the previous timeline. Your tricks won’t work.”

“Hehehe...”

Qing Wanglai continued to chuckle. This was the first time Li Huowang had seen him like this. An unexpected temperature plunge cast a chilling, eerie atmosphere over the forest.

“You think I’m afraid of you?” Qing Wanglai sneered. “You’re just a deranged patient with some know-how. Do you really think you can win against me, even in an ambush?”

Clack. Qing Wanglai aimed his gun at Li Huowang’s forehead and removed the safety.

“You’re wrong, Li Huowang. Even like this, you can’t win.”

In Li Huowang’s eyes, Qing Wanglai’s body turned big and split into strands of invisible threads.

Li Huowang now stood in the chaos of the Baiyu Capital. After all his effort to find the Three Ancient Ones, he was now slipping away.

“Three Ancient Ones!”

Chapter 1018 - Eyes

Ji Zai roared, unsheathing his spine sword and swinging it furiously.

A gust blew past the area. Li Huowang's cultivation as a Strayed One affected the Three Ancient One's secrets. The chains of secrets started to distort.

Ji Zai seized three chains of secrets and severed them with a decisive strike. The fractured secrets split apart, disappearing into the Baiyu Capital.

As Ji Zai prepared to attack again, strands of secrets phased through his body, shaving away fragments of his Bewilderment.

Even so, Ji Zai did not relent. He continued severing chain after chain.

The scattered chains of secrets around them became denser. The edges of Ji Zai's body began turning into secrets, rendering him increasingly translucent.

"Not enough! This isn't enough. I'm too slow!"

Ji Zai grabbed a mirror and shouted at his reflection, "Help! I need as many allies as possible! Victory or defeat depends on this!"

A blood-red light erupted beneath him, drawing his attention. He looked down to see three Jiang Xiangshous fighting each other while five Dragon Veins towed them closer to him.

Ji Zai reached out to grab them, but the Three Ancient Ones cast a large net woven from secrets, seeking to trap the Jiang Xiangshous.

At the last moment, the Heavenly Mater intervened. As her sleeves brushed past, the living beings stained by the karma within the chains of secrets died rapidly.

The chains of secrets were now riddled with dead beings. Ji Zai

capitalized on the opening, tearing through the weakened net and seizing the three Jiang Xiangshous. He devoured them in one swift motion.

His eyes turned blood-red, his teeth sharpened into fangs, and the spine sword in his grip turned even sharper. The essence of the Jiang Xiangshous coursed through him, altering his very nature.

Ji Zai roared and swung the spine sword covered in a solidified murderous aura.

The attack was so powerful that it nearly shattered the chaos in the Baiyu Capital. Not even the Three Ancient Ones would be able to survive it.

Sensing impending destruction, the Three Ancient Ones disassembled himself at the last moment. The chains of secrets comprising his body scattered like writhing gray snakes, narrowly evading Ji Zai's devastating strike.

The Heavenly Mater seized the opportunity and spread a large wave of Death, enveloping most of the Three Ancient One's secrets.

Ji Zai and the Heavenly Mater almost killed the Three Ancient Ones when an unexpected ally stopped them. It was the Five Dhyani Buddhas.

At the critical moment, she chose to help the Three Ancient Ones.

Under her aid, the Three Ancient Ones began to heal. Only then did Ji Zai notice chains embedded in the back of the Five Dhyani Buddhas.

The Three Ancient Ones used the Five Dhyani Buddhas as a shield.

"Stop hiding!" Li Huowang roared while the Three Ancient Ones changed again.

The Five Dhyani Buddhas liquefied, and her flesh covered the chains of the Three Ancient Ones. Soon, the Three Ancient Ones and the Five Dhyani Buddhas disappeared from the Baiyu Capital,

replaced by a massive clump of flesh and chains.

The strands of flesh-covered chains interlocked with each other, pumping like a heart as sticky blood dripped down continuously.

“Damn! The Three Ancient Ones plundered the Heavenly Dao of the Five Dhyani Buddhas!”

At that moment, Li Huowang remembered that he once erected Zhuge Yuan statues, claiming he was the Buddha. That might have been how the Three Ancient Ones took over the Five Dhyani Buddha’s Heavenly Dao.

At this point, the wounds he had inflicted on the Three Ancient Ones had healed.

The other Simings in Baiyu Capital arrived, floating around the place.

When they saw the Three Ancient Ones’s appearance, they realized that Ji Zai had been telling the truth. Now, they chose to work with Ji Zai without hesitation.

“Attack from a distance! Don’t let Qing Wanglai get close—he uses poison!” Ji Zai shouted, although he wasn’t sure if the warning would be enough.

The Three Ancient Ones didn’t run. Now covered in flesh, he rammed against Ji Zai and the others.

Ji Zai attempted to flee, but several scattered chains of secrets emerged from within his body. They were even denser than the ones on the Five Dhyani Buddhas.

The Three Ancient Ones chose not to fight against the other Siming and instead targeted Ji Zai. He wanted to devour Ji Zai’s Heavenly Dao first.

He realized too late that the Three Ancient Ones had laid a trap inside him. The chains within Ji Zai’s body rearranged themselves, forming the character “Wang.”

The chains were pulling Ji Zai closer to the Three Ancient

Ones. If this continued, Ji Zai would end up like the Five Dhyani Buddhas.

The Heavenly Mater tried to envelop the chains on Ji Zai with Death, but she stopped at the last moment.

She sensed that most of the karmic living beings within the chains belonged to Li Huowang and Zhuge Yuan. If she enveloped the chains with Death, she would be killing Li Huowang's real body as well.

The other Simings were attacking simultaneously, but their attacks proved ineffective. There appeared to be something blocking off the other Heavenly Daos.

Bam! Another bullet pierced through Qing Wanglai, yet it changed nothing. Qing Wanglai used the chance to propel himself closer to Li Huowang.

Ji Zai's anger rose as the Three Ancient Ones closed in on him. He ignored the chains on his body and tightly gripped his spine sword.

"Come here, Three Ancient Ones!" Li Huowang roared, charging toward the Three Ancient Ones without fear.

The two of them were on the verge of colliding when their bodies suddenly fragmented into pieces of varying sizes. They swiftly passed each other before reforming behind each other's backs.

Ji Zai turned around, opening his fanged jaws as he prepared to devour the Three Ancient Ones. He swore to swallow the Three Ancient Ones today.

The Three Ancient Ones used the flesh-covered chains to stop Ji Zai from biting down. As more and more chains appeared on Ji Zai's body, his body slowly liquefied, just like how the Five Dhyani Buddhas did.

"You want to swallow my Heavenly Dao? Dream on!"

Li Huowang raised his arm towards the chaos of the Baiyu

Capital. “Eye!”

Chapter 1019 - Pollute

A bloodied eyeball appeared in Ji Zai's hands. It was the Divine Mountain Ghost Eye—the same one brimming with chaos.

Ji Zai crushed it, unleashing the Heavenly Dao of Chaos in a violent explosion. The chaos radiated outward with Ji Zai at its epicenter, affecting everything except him.

Even the Baiyu Capital, the place perpetually surrounded by chaos, was affected by it. Naturally, the Three Ancient Ones bore the brunt of it.

Due to the Heavenly Dao of Chaos, the Three Ancient Ones' karmic chains of secrets started to break as the flesh was separated from them.

The Heavenly Dao of Chaos caused the karmic chains of the Three Ancient Ones to snap, with the flesh connecting them being ripped away.

Li Huowang heard Qing Wanglai's anguished scream as the wounds on his body began to rot. Pain intruded into his body as the other Simings joined in.

"Fucker! So you can finally feel the pain!"

Li Huowang grabbed a rock and smashed Qing Wanglai's left hand. Qing Wanglai's fingers cracked open, leaving a thin veil of flesh clinging to his broken bones.

Qing Wanglai reached into his robes with his other arm, but Li Huowang anticipated the move. Swinging his blade, he severed Qing Wanglai's hand.

Li Huowang reached behind Qing Wanglai and grabbed the test tubes filled with poison before tossing them far away. Qing Wanglai no longer had any other methods of retaliating.

"Qing Wanglai, you are dead!"

Li Huowang stepped on Qing Wanglai's neck and smashed a rock onto his head forcefully.

Only when blood pooled beneath the rock did Li Huowang allow himself a breath of relief.

But a chill crept over him. Looking up, he saw droplets of rain falling from the dark clouds.

“Hahaha...”

A deep laugh came from underneath the rock. Ji Zai looked down to find that the Three Ancient Ones' scattered bodies were merging once more.

This was thanks to Zuoqiu Yong's Heavenly Dao of Growth. The Three Ancient Ones would continuously revive as long as that Heavenly Dao remained in his possession.

“Li Huowang, oh Li Huowang. Why must you get the way of my plans? Don't you see? You've become the villain—the destroyer of worlds!”

The body of the Three Ancient Ones started to expand once more.

“And you think you're righteous? Your plan was to murder everyone! Fuck you!” Li Huowang snapped back, bringing his blade down on the bloody tentacles of the Three Ancient Ones.

Even so, the Three Ancient Ones' body continued to heal, this time even faster.

Just then, Chen Hongyu appeared behind Qing Wanglai, holding onto a half-rotten corpse as she tried to push Qing Wanglai back down.

With a violent spasm, the dying Qing Wanglai's power returned.

“You don't understand! None of you understand what we're up against!” Qing Wanglai's voice cracked with desperation. “We'll all die if we do nothing! I tried to shoulder this despair alone, but you're leaving me no choice! Since you won't grasp what I've

endured, I'll make you see it for yourselves!"

The chains of the Three Ancient Ones scattered again. After one brushed against Chen Hongyu, she released the corpse, trembling violently. Her eyes filled with an incomprehensible fear.

Ji Zai knew what was going on. The Three Ancient Ones had embedded some unfathomable secret into the Siming of Rot. He didn't know what it was, but it had to be deadly to terrify even a Siming.

"Stay back!" Ji Zai warned the others. "Attack from a distance!"

Despite his warning, Qing Wanglai lunged forward, nearly reaching Yang Na before Li Huowang intercepted him with his blade.

The bloody chains snapped again, but this time, instead of dispersing, they converged on Ji Zai. It had been a ruse—the Three Ancient Ones had been targeting Ji Zai all along.

As the secrets invaded Ji Zai's body, horrifying knowledge flooded his mind.

Fear. A primordial fear from an unknowable source. Fu Shengtian was no ordinary Siming; he wielded the Heavenly Dao of Fear.

The Heavenly Dao it controlled was not ordinary either—Fu Shengtian was a Grand Siming.

No—it was something beyond the Heavenly Dao of Fear. It was a pure, primordial terror that nurtured the other Heavenly Daos.

Even the Three Ancient Ones couldn't comprehend it fully. And from that ignorance, fear was born.

Li Huowang could feel fear welling up uncontrollably in his heart the moment he obtained the secret. For the first time, he was afraid.

The fear he felt was suffocating, clinging to his bones and resisting any attempts to shake it off. It washed over him in

relentless waves, a constant presence that never ceased.

Qing Wanglai grabbed Ji Zai by the head, glaring at him with bloodshot eyes. “Do you see now? Do you understand what I’m up against? Do you think you can face this alone? You’re wrong! The only way we can survive this is by following my plan! Ji Zai, you need to die. Why are you still alive?”

Li Huowang watched despair and terror flicker in Qing Wanglai’s gaze, and a memory surfaced—the tombstone he’d glimpsed in a half-dreaming state. The more he stared, the clearer it became. Qing Wanglai was like a single stroke from one of the tombstone’s characters—one that another character had plucked for itself.

“I understand now!” Li Huowang shouted, reaching for one of Qing Wanglai’s bloodied tentacles before chewing on it. As he consumed its karma, understanding dawned on him. “I finally understand now!”

Qing Wanglai laughed, offering another tentacle. “Do you? Do you truly understand now? Do you agree with my plan now? Do you finally agree to abandon the two projections to save our true selves?”

Li Huowang grabbed the other tentacle with glee and ate it. “No! I just learned why Da Nuo went crazy. It was all because of you! As the Siming in control of the Heavenly Dao of Secrets, you were polluted by Fu Shengtian a long time ago!”

Chapter 1020 - We Will

"NO!"

The Three Ancient Ones forced a multitude of tentacles into Li Huowang's head and squeezed his brain apart.

Qing Wanglai yelled, "You idiots! My plan is the only chance we have to escape this calamity!"

Li Huowang gripped Qing Wanglai's tentacles tightly, refusing to let go. "No! You were right when you said someone betrayed us—it was you! Qing Wanglai, your fear of Fu Shengtian made you mad! And in your madness, you've turned the entire world crazy! The Liang Kingdom, the Qi Kingdom, the Tianchen Kingdom—everything that happened to them is all your fault!"

Qing Wanglai froze, as though a memory had resurfaced.

Li Huowang continued, "Three Ancient Ones, you weren't always like this! Zhuge Yuan was your Twisted One, don't you remember? The compassion you once had was twisted into cruelty, and it was all because of Fu Shengtian's influence!"

Indeed, a Twisted One and a Siming were supposed to mirror each other, with the same personality. However, the Three Ancient Ones had taken a completely different path.

Qing Wanglai's pupils contracted as he stared at his bloodstained hands. A strange feeling tugged at his heart, but he quickly shook it off.

"You lunatic! You incomprehensible madman! Everything I've done has been to save the world! Why can't you see that?" Qing Wanglai roared.

Black karmic chains of secrets swiftly pierced into Li Huowang's body, gradually causing him to become translucent.

As more and more secrets about Fu Shengtian poured into Li

Huowang, the fear within his heart began to bloom and impact his behavior.

The other Simings rushed to help, but the Three Ancient Ones self-detonated, scattering more karmic chains everywhere. Each chain carried secrets about Fu Shengtian, infecting the Simings with fear and despair.

Only then did Li Huowang realize that Fu Shengtian's attack had begun long ago, and Qing Wanglai was its agent. Every action he took had been a calculated move to spread the despair and fear of Fu Shengtian.

"No... I cannot," Li Huowang said.

Fighting back the suffocating dread, Li Huowang reached for the mirror, but the fear and despair shattered it into shards.

"Li Huowang, help me!" Ji Zai shouted at his reflection in one of the mirror's shards.

Li Huowang's reflection shouted back, "Promise me, Ji Zai! Promise you'll bring them all back! Too many have died. There's no one left down here!"

On the edge of being consumed by fear, Ji Zai replied, "I promise! I'll change everything! I'll fix everything! I'll bring them all back!"

From the depths of Baiyu Capital, a roar erupted. Tens of Jiang Xiangshous appeared, their murderous aura repelling the pervasive fear like lanterns piercing the dark.

It wasn't just the Jiang Xiangshous. Li Huowang saw several Dragon Veins flying towards him. All of the Dragon Veins were here.

"Senior Li, we're here to help!"

Gao Zhijian charged through the fear, crashing into Li Huowang and reinforcing him with solidified murderous aura. The Heavenly Dao of Order prevented Li Huowang from turning transparent.

However, Li Huowang still felt that something was missing.

He didn't know what it was, but he laid his eyes on the shards of the mirror. He sunk his hands into the shards of the mirror and pulled. At that moment, Ji Zai plundered everything from him.

The mirror vanished. Only Ji Zai remained in the Baiyu Capital.

As the fear disorientating him disappeared, Li Huowang regained his freedom, but it wasn't over. The Baiyu Capital was still shrouded in fear.

Li Huowang looked up at the Three Ancient Ones and understood that he wasn't fighting against the Three Ancient Ones. No, he had been fighting against Fu Shengtian from the very beginning.

Under his gaze, the bloody fleshy tentacles enveloping the karmic chain of secrets expanded and morphed into a fleshy hand. Li Huowang knew that this was Fu Shengtian's hand.

The hand reached out to grab him. Its numerous tentacles wriggled, attempting to instill fear into his very being.

The indomitable murderous aura scattered everything, but it merely delayed the inevitable. Ji Zai realized that if this continued, he would succumb to terror, just like the Three Ancient Ones did when the murderous aura emanating from his body dissipated.

Seeing how fear consumed the other Simings, Ji Zai had an idea. If he couldn't do it alone, he could use the powers of the other Simings.

Li Huowang, still shrouded in murderous aura, approached the Siming of Rot. Just as he was going to act, he paused.

There was a familiar face on the rotten corpse—Abbess Jingxin. The maggots had formed her visage. She smiled and nodded at him kindly.

“Abbess... Thank you...” Li Huowang cried and swallowed the Heavenly Dao of Rot whole. He tried not to chew and hurt her.

Jiang Xiangshou's murderous aura quickly dispelled the fear

gripping the Heavenly Dao of Rot. Li Huowang absorbed the Heavenly Dao of Rot once it had returned to normal, and the wounds on his body started to rot.

Ba-Hui and the Sacrificial God stabbed into Li Huowang like two sharp blades, delivering the Heavenly Dao of Pain in a flood of agony.

He yelled, “Ba-Hui, you motherfucker! It hurts!”

Li Huowang turned and saw Zhao Shuangdian standing still. She passed the sniper rifle to him.

Zhao Shuangdian stood cold and calculated, just like her former self. “I accept your model. You are very special indeed.”

He nodded and swallowed both the rifle and Zhao Shuangdian.

With this, he finally learned what Siming Zhao Shuangdian was. She was the Heavenly Immortal.

Still, he didn’t know what kind of Heavenly Dao she held onto. He only knew that his body had become much more robust.

As he absorbed more Heavenly Daos, the entirety of the Baiyu Capital started to crumble. Li Huowang picked up the pace.

His body became bigger and bigger, to the point that even the Baiyu Capital could not contain him.

The fleshy tentacles oozed fear as they tried to suppress Li Huowang. The Three Ancient Ones made repeated attempts to pierce Li Huowang with his tentacles, but the murderous aura got in the way.

Li Huowang consumed all of the Heavenly Daos and finally laid eyes on the Heavenly Mater. He paused, but the Heavenly Mater smiled at him.

“Don’t give up, Huowang. I believe in you. We’ll bring Suisui back, and we’ll go to university together.”

Pain stabbed through his heart, amplified by the Heavenly Dao of Pain. Li Huowang’s physical form started to crumble.

He didn’t want to do it, but he had no choice. If he didn’t, Fu

Shengtian's fear would corrupt the Heavenly Dao of Death. Li Huowang had to prevent Fu Shengtian from obtaining the Heavenly Dao of Death, no matter what.

“Don't worry. I won't give up,” Li Huowang promised, his voice trembling. “I will do it. I definitely will. I'll do whatever it takes.”

He embraced the Heavenly Mater—and swallowed her whole.

Chapter 1021 - Past

The Baiyu Capital crumbled as Li Huowang chewed. The chaos started to tear apart, revealing the unending darkness before him.

Still chewing, he raised his sword and spat on it, covering his spine sword with Death.

Turning, he glared at the Three Ancient Ones, who continued scattering Fear around.

“Qing Wanglai!”

Li Huowang raised his blade and swung it down. Death swept away everything, cutting off the source of the fear and despair.

Li Huowang found the Heavenly Dao of Growth within the Three Ancient Ones’ body. He tore it apart and swallowed it. Then, he did the same with the Heavenly Dao of Secrets.

After devouring everything, he uncovered a bone inscribed with the character “Wang.” When he touched it, the character returned to his name, reuniting with him.

Li Huowang finally learned what Qing Wanglai had taken away from him.

It was the counterpart of Bewilderment, the Heavenly Dao of Clarity. Every Heavenly Dao had its counterpart. He hadn’t known because the Three Ancient Ones had taken Clarity before he became the Siming of Bewilderment.

With his Clarity restored, Li Huowang’s thoughts sharpened. He was fully awake now, and even his way of thinking changed.

He sensed something above and turned his gaze to the crumbling Baiyu Capital.

Tearing through it, he shot upward like a chick breaking free of its eggshell. Outside, he crushed the remnants of the Baiyu Capital and shoved them into his mouth.

Li Huowang looked up and finally saw Fu Shengtian's true form.

It was massive—like a suffocatingly enormous planet bearing down on him, crashing toward everything. Fu Shengtian wasn't just attacking; it had attacked a long time ago, its actions transcending time.

Fu Shengtian raised a bident made from fear and despair. The weapon's tips bore the heads of the Three Ancient Ones and Qing Wanglai. With a mighty thrust, it shot the bident, piercing Li Huowang's chest.

Li Huowang grabbed the bident and pulled it out, wrestling it away from Fu Shengtian's control.

He swung the bident to scatter the fear on it. He raised the cleaned bident and pointed it at Fu Shengtian. "Come at me!"

Fu Shengtian attacked again, forming a new bident and flinging it straight at Li Huowang. This time, it had the heads of Wang Changxu and Tong Guchang.

Li Huowang blocked the attack and broke the bident with his spine sword cloaked in Death. Unlike before, the bident did not pierce him.

To Li Huowang's surprise, Fu Shengtian created even more weapons. However, they were much more bizarre than bidents.

Each weapon's tip was steeped in fear and despair. They rained down upon Li Huowang. Though he tried to deflect them all, he failed.

A trident bearing the heads of Shangguan Gedeng, Kouyin Liangong, and Zhu Cuifeng pierced Li Huowang's eyes, pinning him to the void.

In that instant, an archnemesis called Kouyin Liangong appeared in Li Huowang's past. It had two Twisted Ones—Shangguan Gedeng and Zhu Cuifeng. Its existence marked Li Huowang's past with even greater despair.

Taking advantage of the opening, more and more spears stabbed into Li Huowang, forcing their way into his body and starting to squeeze out his insides. The spears were overwhelming him!

“Fuck off!”

Summoning his strength, Li Huowang swung his spine sword and splintered the spears, shattering their shafts. However, their tips remained lodged in his body, altering his past and future.

He panted with all of his strength, but he saw another rain of spears flying towards him. Fu Shengtian was too strong. He couldn't win.

As soon as the seeds of despair grew in his heart, they began to flourish uncontrollably, growing and giving birth to more spear tips aimed directly at him.

As more and more spear tips pierced his body, he finally realized he could not win against Fu Shengtian. He lost the moment he became aware of Fu Shengtian's existence.

The moment he felt fear was the moment he became part of Fu Shengtian. He would become Fu Shengtian's pawn, just like the Three Ancient Ones.

The Three Ancient Ones, who held the world's secrets, succumbed to madness from knowing too much.

“Is this it? Is this all I'm capable of? I refuse to yield! I refuse to give up! So many people died—why can't I win?”

Li Huowang shouted, kneeling as despair consumed his heart. It started to destroy everything in his body.

Under such intense despair, he held onto Death and pointed at himself.

“Daoist, don't give up!” A voice cut through the darkness of the void.

Li Huowang raised his head and saw the illusion of the old monk beside him again. “Daoist. You are a good Daoist. You cannot

die now.”

Another voice joined in—Jin Shanzhao. “Young Daoist, you made a promise. That’s why I left.”

“You want to kill yourself? Don’t be an embarrassment to the others!”

The illusions appeared one after another until even Jiang Yingzi and Dan Yangzi appeared.

Li Huowang saw Zhuge Yuan’s illusion once more. “Junior LI, don’t give up. Don’t lose to yourself.”

Li Huowang looked at them as he despaired. “Who are you people?!”

“It doesn’t matter who we are. What’s more important is who *you* are.”

“Me? I’m Li Huowang!”

His own declaration made him pause. He searched through his fragmented memories, looking for something important.

“Yes, that’s right! I’m Li Huowang. I was mentally ill!”

He stood up, shaking his head as he surveyed the chaos. “No! This isn’t me. This isn’t me!”

Li Huowang began to tear off his own Heavenly Daos, one by one. He even tore off the last character of his name: “Wang.”

He forced everything into Yi Donglai, who had somehow appeared beside him, helping him stand up. “Take it! Take all of it! Everything is yours!”

After forcing everything into Yi Donglai’s mouth, Li Huowang swallowed him whole, hiding him in his stomach.

Then, Li Huowang closed his eyes and shouted, “None of this is real! This is all an illusion! Wake up!”

Only the purest form of Bewilderment remained within Li Huowang. At that moment, a faint voice echoed in his ears.

Li Huowang had once rejected the voice, but he was now embracing it with open arms. He followed the voice, and gradually,

it became clearer.

“Li Huowang, wake up! Li Huowang, wake up! Everything you’re enduring is fake! It’s all a lie!”

The voice shattered the darkness. It reached the ears of Li Huowang, both past and present.

He opened his eyes. Bright light filtered through white curtains as a sharp wailing sound echoed beside him.

Li Huowang glanced down. White hospital beds, an electric wall fan, and the pungent scent of disinfectant surrounded him. It felt surreal yet familiar.

He remembered where he was.

He was in ward number thirteen of the White Tower Hospital.

Chapter 1022 - Cured

Li Huowang lay on the clean hospital bed, his single eye wide open as he took in his surroundings. His gaze swept the room before settling on himself. A realization dawned on him—yet, at the same time, it didn't fully make sense.

The ringing sound disappeared, replaced by a familiar voice. "Li Huowang? Are you finally awake? That's good!"

He turned to see Yi Donglai staring at him with worry etched across his face.

Li Huowang's lips curled into a faint smile. "I'm... awake. I'm finally awake. The hallucinations were too frightening, but thankfully, they were all fake. None of it was real."

Yi Donglai frowned, his expression unusually tense. "What do you mean 'fake'? Everything you saw was real! The timeline has been reset, but we've been placed at a different time. Haven't you noticed you're missing an eye?"

"Don't worry. I'm awake now. I won't mutilate myself anymore."

The room suddenly transformed. The once bright light gave way to darkness, and Yi Donglai grew in size until he reached the ceiling. Terrifying laughter echoed from his mouth.

"Hahaha. Do you think you've succeeded? You fool."

The scene around Yi Donglai twisted and morphed. Black water seeped from the floor, and the walls of the ward crumbled away, revealing a vast void and the horrifying visage Li Huowang had seen just now.

"You've abandoned your powers, so now you're completely defenseless against my fear! You're dead! Da Nuo is dead too! The Baiyu Capital is mine!"

A wave of fear and despair emanated from Yi Donglai, making its way toward Li Huowang.

Despite the dreaded atmosphere, Li Huowang merely looked at the strange form of Yi Donglai. “Doctor Yi, you don’t have to test me anymore. I am cured.”

The moment he spoke, everything around him melted away like snow under the sun. Yi Donglai shrank back to his normal size, though he continued snarling.

Yi Donglai smiled and nodded with satisfaction. “Not bad. You’ve passed the test. Congratulations, Little Li. You’re cured. All my efforts weren’t in vain, after all.”

Just as he finished speaking, the door burst open, and a crowd of people surged into the room, clapping and cheering for Li Huowang.

Among them were Zhao Shuangdian, Wu Qi, and Chen Hongyu, all dressed in white doctor’s coats.

They clapped as they announced, “Congratulations! You’re finally cured.”

“What?” Yi Donglai froze, his face twisting in shock as he stared at the unfamiliar faces. He had never seen these colleagues in White Tower Hospital before, and it was impossible for all of them to be doctors.

“Impossible. How are you...”

His voice faltered, his gaze fearfully snapping back to Li Huowang. “Unless you were telling the truth?”

Yi Donglai’s reaction unsettled the crowd. They tried to console him, but the more they spoke, the more violent he became. Terror consumed his eyes.

In the end, several nurses had to restrain him with a straitjacket. They wheeled him out as he screamed and thrashed.

Qing Wanglai sighed as he watched Yi Donglai being carted away. “What a terrifying patient. We managed to cure you but at

the expense of driving one of our doctors to madness.”

Li Huowang looked at Yi Donglai disappearing at the corner of the corridor and smiled. “Don’t worry. There are a lot of good doctors here. I’m sure he’ll recover quickly in the Baiyu Capital.”

Qing Wanglai patted Li Huowang’s shoulder warmly. “Little Li, come with me. I will prescribe you some medicine. You’re finally ready to go from the intensive care ward to the general ward. You’ll regain some freedom, too.”

They soon entered Qing Wanglai’s office. He took out a disposable white cup and brewed Li Huowang a cup of tea.

“The hospital’s a bit basic, so I hope you won’t mind oolong tea bags,” Qing Wanglai said with a laugh.

“I’m not much of a tea person, so I wouldn’t know the difference.”

“Hoho, you’re quite the frugal person. Give me a moment,” Qing Wanglai said, starting to rummage through the drawers.

“Don’t worry. I have a lot of time now,” Li Huowang said.

Li Huowang took a deep breath and smelled the disinfectant in the air. A newfound serenity washed over him, unlike anything he had ever felt before.

Qing Wanglai teased Li Huowang, saying, “You sound like an old man. Once you’re discharged, go home and focus on your studies so you can get into a good university.”

“Doctor Qing, what will you do while I’m studying?”

“What else? I will continue to work in this hospital. I’ll try to write a thesis about you and see if it gets published. Being a doctor in this field is a headache, you know? Not only do we often have to stay up late and work extra shifts, but we also need to play along with our patients.”

He scratched his ear with the pen from his chest pocket before scribbling something on a piece of paper.

Li Huowang grabbed his teacup and tried to decipher the

paper's contents. "Doctor, can you do me a favor?"

Qing Wanglai stopped writing and looked at him. "Sure. We're all friends now. What do you need?"

Li Huowang sat in a car some time later, watching the scenery blur past. He called his mother.

"Hi, Mom. I'm cured. Yes, this time it's for real. I won't relapse anymore. You can come pick me up next month."

Two hours later, Qing Wanglai and Li Huowang stepped down from a sports car. They had arrived at the entrance of the Sixth Public Hospital. Using Qing Wanglai's connections, they quickly found an isolated ward.

Inside was none other than Yang Na, lying motionless on the bed.

Li Huowang entered the room alone. Qing Wanglai grabbed her medical file, noting the diagnosis: severe depression.

Li Huowang reached the bedside and sat down on a stool. He looked at Yang Na, whose eyes held the vacant stare of a doll.

"Nana, I've kept my promise. Look, I'm really cured. I'll stay by your side until you're also better. Once you're cured, we'll take our exams together and enter university again. This time, I'll be with you every step of the way."

Li Huowang gently held Yang Na's skeletal fingers, noticing the scars on her wrists. He spoke to her nonstop for a full day and night.

Finally, Yang Na's fingers twitched, and she gripped his hand weakly.

Li Huowang smiled.

He leaned forward, wrapping Yang Na in a tender embrace.

Chapter 1023 - Epilogue

It was once again the Qingming Festival in Cowheart Village.

Even though it was night, the streets bustled with people burning paper ingots and money. Most of the villagers were migrants without ancestral altars to honor their dead. They could only afford to draw circles on the ground, leaving an opening in the direction of their ancestors' graves.

White smoke floated upwards. The moonlight cast a soft glow, making Cowheart Village look like a paradise.

A lone figure in red walked past the white smoke.

It was Li Huowang. He clutched a large amount of paper money and ingots as he passed through the village and made his way to the Bai family estate, which was now devoid of any residents aside from himself.

He stood still at the entrance and stared at the white lantern hanging from the large door. He saw the two yellow couplets and let out a hoarse chuckle. "Hehe... I've truly become... The moon is both full and empty. Several remaining stars circled around the incomplete moon. A bright lantern is lit in front of the house, but the house is empty throughout spring and autumn. Ahh..."

Li Huowang stepped inside and slammed the doors shut. He drew a large circle on the ground, leaving evenly spaced openings instead of a single one.

He tossed the paper money and paper ingots into the circle before setting them alight.

"Qingming... Come... Take your money!"

Li Huowang's hoarse voice rang out like the lonely cry of an old crow, echoing through the empty Bai family estate.

As the fire burned, he mumbled the words he wanted to say to

his dead family.

“Suisui, buy whatever you need down there with the paper money. You can buy as many toys as you want. If they don’t have what you want, you can meet me in my dreams and let me know. I will find some paper dolls to burn so that they can accompany you.

“Miaomiao, are you alright down there? I miss you...”

As the paper money continued to burn, the fire flared higher and brighter. Halfway through the bundle of paper money and ingots, Li Huowang broke down.

He stood up and shouted at his shadow vehemently, “Ji Zai! You liar! You promised me! You promised you’d bring them back! Why didn’t you keep your word?”

The world had survived. The Natural Disasters were gone, and there were no more evil entities. The world had sixteen divisions again. Sanity had returned to the world.

Huowang had achieved his goal of changing the world, but bringing back the dead remained beyond his reach.

“Everything impossible has disappeared. We overcame so many difficulties, so why can’t you revive a few people? What good are you, Ji Zai? You’re useless!”

He refused to admit it, but he knew it was impossible. Reviving them went against the laws of the world. Now that the world was normal again, impossible things couldn’t happen. If he revived them, the world would go crazy again.

His anger dissolved into despair. He slumped to the ground and cried. “Why? Why! Why me? Why am I the only one alive?!”

A wave of despair engulfed him, suffocating him under the weight of a mountain. He couldn’t breathe, and the feeling was more agonizing than death itself.

Li Huowang reached into his bag of torture tools and retrieved a dagger. He sliced open his abdomen. Next, he took out three dolls made from the skin of Strayed Ones and threw them onto the

ground.

Raising the dagger, he slashed his own neck, pulling the blade with such force that he decapitated himself. He grabbed his severed head and smashed it onto the ground.

But it was futile. He couldn't die.

When Ji Zai used the mirror to strip everything away from him, he had taken even Death. Ji Zai had plundered everything, including his status as a Strayed One too.

Li Huowang understood that he was Ji Zai's Twisted One. He was fated to become Ji Zai. The world had returned to sanity, and the past could no longer be rewritten. Everything in the future had been set.

Just as despair threatened to consume him entirely, Li Huowang's sharp ears noticed a slight movement from the stool he'd been sitting on.

He stopped and approached the stool. There was something there.

He carefully felt the air above the stool but couldn't sense anything. Still, he needed to make sure. "Is that you? Is that really you?"

Li Huowang looked around and saw the burning paper money twirling in the circle. He remembered something and ran into the house.

He grabbed an umbrella and opened it, bending down to look between his knees.

At that moment, he saw Suisui's smiling face. For the first time in a very long time, Li Huowang smiled. The despair in his heart gave way to joy.

"Hahaha! You are all here! That's good! Don't go away! Don't get reincarnated! You might've become ghosts, but that's fine! Even ghosts can cultivate to become immortals! Wait here. I go to the Surveillance Bureau's archives to find a method for ghosts to

cultivate! Hahaha!”

Placing his head back onto his neck, Li Huowang rushed out of the Bai family estate and toward the village entrance.

“There are ghosts in this world! Hahaha! Ji Zai, I was wrong about you! The moon is both full and empty, with several scattered stars circling around! Hahaha! Ghosts are fine too! Ghosts are fine, too! Hahaha!”

Hearing the commotion, Puppy poked his head out the door, his daughter beside him. He sighed as he watched Li Huowang.

“We endured so many hardships throughout the year. In the end, Senior Li still went crazy.”

“Father, what happened to Uncle Li?”

“Nothing. Don’t scold Uncle Li or make fun of him the next time you see him. Let me know if any kids throw stones or spit at him. He’s our Village Protector from now on.”

“Father, what’s a Village Protector?”

“A Village Protector is someone who shields us from disasters. Because of him, we in Cowheart Village can live in peace.”

Puppy was going to close his door when he noticed a light coming from the village entrance. Unfortunately, he couldn’t see what it was due to the smoke.

Though the smoke obscured his view, he soon saw Lu Xiucan running through it with his nephew, Lu Tongsheng, cradled in his single remaining arm.

Lu Xiucan saw Puppy and pointed at the village entrance excitedly. “Puppy! Come quick! Look! Master has ascended and become an immortal!”

-End-

Chapter 1024 - Epilogue, Qing Wanglai's Pov

Qing Wanglai opened his eyes. He looked at the rising sun and waited for his seven o'clock alarm to ring.

He looked down and admired his mansion. The mansion was small, approximately three hundred square meters. It was simple and minimalistic, with white as its main color.

For someone accustomed to living alone, the house was enough. It felt comfortable, and he had no desire to push beyond his comfort zone.

Ring ring ring~ His alarm rang, marking the start of his day. He took a bath and got dressed.

He departed at exactly seven twenty in the morning. He drove for thirty minutes and bought breakfast along the way, reaching White Tower Prison at eight in the morning sharp.

Though not as chaotic as a typical hospital, working there was far from simple.

As Qing Wanglai prepared to eat breakfast after making tea, someone came into his office. It was a large man with a huge beard. "Doctor Yi, the VIP is here. Come take a look."

"What?"

Qian Fu explained, "It's that person who went viral a couple of days ago. We're lucky he got assigned to us."

Qing Wanglai remembered the news he read a couple of days ago. His interest was piqued. "Sure, let's go see him."

They made their way to the intensive care ward and saw Li Huowang.

"Doctor Qing, this is the medical record of patient number

thirteen. Please have a read. He was transferred here from An Ding Hospital.”

Qing Wanglai accepted the file and read through it. “So this is him?”

Although news channels hadn’t disclosed Li Huowang’s real name, he had long since become famous among psychiatrists. They had been monitoring Li Huowang’s movements for a long time.

“Yes, that’s Li Huowang—the guy who went viral. The lunatic who swung a knife around to rescue his girlfriend.”

Qing Wanglai continued reading while occasionally glancing at Li Huowang through the one-way mirror. He saw the youth shouting in despair while being restrained by a straitjacket. Qing Wanglai carefully listened as Li Huowang rambled incoherently.

“No.” Qing Wanglai closed the medical records and said grimly, “He wasn’t there to save her. He was there to kill her. His condition is too severe.”

“What? How could that be? That’s his girlfriend! She’s such a pretty young lady too!” Qian Fu asked in confusion.

“I’m also trying to figure out his motive. How could he want to harm his own girlfriend? Why? What’s his reasoning?”

“We aren’t detectives. Couldn’t insanity be enough to explain it? Isn’t that motive enough?”

Qing Wanglai scoffed at Qian Fu. “Doctor Qian, your words would devalue our professionalism. Even mentally ill patients would need a motive to kill someone. They might believe their reasons are perfectly rational, even when others see them as madness.”

“Sigh,” Qian Fu stroked his beard. “Why do they always send the crazy demons to us?”

“Stop complaining and focus on a treatment plan,” Qing Wanglai sighed. “He’s been given the standard medications in the previous hospital, but they’ve had little effect.”

“And what do you suggest we do? To be honest, this place is technically a prison. As long as he’s locked up and can’t hurt anyone, that should be enough.”

Qing Wanglai side-eyed Qian Fu. “Well, everyone should have aspirations to chase in life. Do you want to stay here forever babysitting the patients?”

“Pssh. What are you planning, then? Treat him and publish your thesis so you can get a promotion?”

Qing Wanglai reached for the metal door at the side. “We should at least try, regardless of the outcome.”

Qian Fu hurried along. “Then you should be careful. I’ve heard that patient thirteen somehow drove his previous doctor insane too.”

Qing Wanglai decided against revealing himself to Li Huowang just yet. Instead, he eavesdropped on the patient while the other doctors entered to begin treatment.

The prison's upper management was very careful because Li Huowang was a famous troublemaker. They immediately checked on Li Huowang and ordered the doctors to devise a treatment plan.

Qing Wanglai quietly listened to the other doctors discussing a treatment plan.

Ultimately, they chose to use a simple yet safe treatment plan. They prioritized safety above all else.

Qing Wanglai could understand their intentions. Li Huowang was a high-risk patient—essentially a hot potato no one wanted to handle.

While Qian Fu munched on his leftover breakfast, he remarked, “He’s highly resistant to treatment. It’s probably because he’s been subjected to so many attempts before. I’m fairly certain that he’s even built up resistance to some medications.”

“Hmm... Indeed. It’s very tricky.”

Qing Wanglai nodded. After some thought, he said, “I think we

have a chance. Still, I'll need to analyze all our footage of him first."

"What are you thinking?"

"I need to find a fake doctor to masquerade as his main doctor. The fake doctor will try fake methods to treat Li Huowang while we pretend to be the characters from Li Huowang's hallucinations. We will secretly administer the treatment plan when Li Huowang's guard is at its lowest. We can't do this with the other patients, but we might have a shot here. Li Huowang's hallucinations are not only coherent but also very complete."

Qian Fu frowned. "Us? Why me again? You want me to act like a patient again?"

Qing Wanglai patted Qian Fu's blue-and-white striped hospital gown. "What do you mean act? You *are* a patient! Look at how well you fit in your hospital gown. Don't worry. I will shoulder all responsibilities if anything happens."

"Fine, as long as you take the blame. I will also round up other actors for you."

Qian Fu then took out his phone to make several phone calls.

"But... won't this make his condition worse?"

Qing Wanglai waved off the concern. "Don't worry. It won't."

"Let's talk to the chief warden first."

"Alright."

The two headed to the chief warden's office, finding the door already ajar. Inside, the balding chief was in conversation with someone else.

"Chief, I need to discuss something with you."

Qing Wanglai explained his treatment plan to the chief.

The chief took out a cigarette and lit it up. "Alright. Go ahead and try."

Qing Wanglai passed a piece of paper and a pen to him. "Could you sign here?"

However, the Chief did not sign it. "I'm an open person. You

can use whatever treatment plan you have, but I won't sign it. If it works, all the glory will be yours. As your superior, I'll never take credit for your efforts."

Qing Wanglai knew what the Chief meant. That meant Qing Wanglai's treatment plan would be secret and administered without approval. The prison would have nothing to do with it.

Qing Wanglai chuckled and walked out with Qian Fu. He wasn't like the others.

Qian Fu asked, "Qing Wanglai, I can act as a patient, but who will be his doctor? I doubt that the others would follow your plan."

"We don't have doctors, but we have patients."

Qing Wanglai pushed his glasses and looked at Yi Donglai. Yi Donglai was earnestly trying to treat another patient.

"Hoh. You smart rascal. A patient acting as the doctor while the real doctors stay in the background."

"How can we treat patients if we don't explore the unknown a little?"

Qing Wanglai approached Yi Donglai and said courteously, "Doctor Yi, we have a new patient admitted into our hospital. Please assist me in curing that patient."

Yi Donglai leaned back, propping up his legs cockily. "Didn't you already have an assistant?"

Qian Fu grumbled. "What assistant? We went to the same university, so we're closer than the others."

Yi Donglai scoffed. "You know the other doctors too. Why me?"

"Just say yes or no."

"Fine, I will agree to treat Li Huowang. I must, if I have to say so."

"Good, then let me explain to you. Li Huowang isn't always stuck in his hallucinations because they occur in stages. Our treatment plan is as follows..."

Everything was ready. Yi Donglai put on a white robe and

entered Li Huowang's room.

As Li Huowang woke up, Yi Donglai greeted him with a smile. "Hello, Li Huowang. Nice to meet you. I'm your doctor, Yi Donglai."

Qian Fu raised his thumb at Qing Wanglai. "Look at that bastard acting like a doctor."

"Shh. Be serious. Record everything Li Huowang says about his hallucinations. We'll need it later."

"You can record it yourself. I'm just gonna make one up. Why should his perspective matter more than mine? I'm a patient, remember?"

Qing Wanglai nodded. "That's fine too. That way, you won't reveal too much when you communicate with him later on."

Qian Fu paused. "Wait, when should I show up?"

"Shh. Just follow Yi Donglai's rhythm for now. We will determine the time ourselves."

The two of them continued to eavesdrop on their conversation.

While Li Huowang was hallucinating, the three of them exchanged notes and started to analyze Li Huowang's psyche.

It didn't go well initially. Li Huowang rejected everything vehemently, but after some new developments, Li Huowang started to believe Yi Donglai.

There was some trouble during their treatment plan, but in just a few months, they saw progress. One day, Li Huowang stood atop the slide, pulling a dice from the top of a lamp. Everyone cheered.

Qing Wanglai smiled as Qian Fu nudged him. "Hey, your treatment plan is working."

"Now, we need to start stage two. It's your turn now. You will become the projection of the one buried beneath Qing Qiu, the Siming of Death."

"Do you really need to say it out loud? That's so childish." Qian Fu rolled his eyes. "Nevermind, I will go and get changed now."

Qian Fu left, heading toward the intensive care wards. "Chen

Hongyu and the others should show up soon if it's my turn to act. Make sure to contact them first."

"I've already contacted them."

The treatment plan had been going smoothly, but something changed halfway through.

Qing Wanglai stormed into the chief warden's office, anger evident on his face. "What's going on? Why is he being transferred? He hasn't recovered yet!"

Everything was going well, but the higher-ups decided to transfer Li Huowang.

"Wasn't he cured yet? I thought he could already differentiate between the real and fake worlds. We should send him away now. What if something happens while he's in our custody?"

"But that's just a fabricated scene! Our goal is to fully cure Li Huowang, not trap him in it! His family would never agree to it."

"Sigh..." The chief warden lit another cigarette and said, "Doctor Qing, you should know that I'm not the boss here. The one controlling this place is Xie Qiuquan. Don't forget that while we are a hospital, we are also a prison."

Qing Wanglai clenched his fists tightly. "Li Huowang is still a high-risk patient. He has killed before! What if he kills again after the transfer?"

The chief warden reclined in his chair, which creaked under his weight. "Then it won't be our problem. The director and I haven't had a good night's sleep since Li Huowang got here. Doctor Qing, Doctor Qing, I know you're ambitious and capable, but I'm fifty-two. I'll be retiring in a few years, so please don't trouble me further."

Qing Wanglai furiously stormed out of the office and slammed the door shut. Yi Donglai and Qian Fu quickly followed him. "So what's going on?"

"There's no chance. He's determined to transfer Li Huowang,"

Qing Wanglai replied.

“What should we do, then?”

“What else? If Li Huowang is being transferred, we’ll follow him,” Qing Wanglai said decisively.

Yi Donglai was confused. “But I still have work here. How can I go out and treat Li Huowang?”

Qing Wanglai smiled when he heard Yi Donglai. “Don’t worry. You can continue your work. It’s my turn to step in now.”

Sitting in the canteen, Qing Wanglai positioned himself carefully. Hearing footsteps approach, he turned toward the source of the sound.

Setting his food aside, he approached Li Huowang. “Long time no see. How are you doing?”

Although Qing Wanglai had been observing Li Huowang for months and was his main doctor, to Li Huowang, this was their first meeting.

“Hello, Qing Wanglai. I am Li Huowang.”

The second stage of the treatment plan started.

With Qing Wanglai’s involvement, things returned to normal. Qing Wanglai gradually took control of the situation. The treatment progressed smoothly, and he even managed to sneak medicine into Li Huowang’s food from time to time.

In fact, Qing Wanglai could even persuade Li Huowang to take the medicine on his own by earning his trust. It was much easier than forcing the medicine down Li Huowang’s throat.

This was a vast improvement—previously, it had taken more than four men to restrain Li Huowang and force the medicine down his throat.

Li Huowang’s condition improved, and everything seemed to be going well—until something unexpected happened.

“What’s going on? What is happening?”

Everyone stared at the bloody eyeball before them, their faces

pale. As a doctor, Qing Wanglai knew all too well what it meant for a patient to dig out their own eye.

Chen Hongyu muttered, “Whose fault is this? Should we draw lots?”

“There’s no time to assign blame!” Qing Wanglai declared. “This is a necessary cost! We need to focus on treating him. As long as we succeed, everything can be explained. If we fail, I’ll shoulder all the consequences!”

He then looked at Zhao Shuangdian. “Call Li Huowang and figure out what’s going on with him.”

Zhao Shuangdian nodded. She placed the call, but when she hung up, her expression was one of confusion.

Qing Wanglai asked, “What did he say?”

Zhao Shuangdian answered with a confused look. “He said topology. That’s it.”

Qing Wanglai sighed in relief. “Good. The situation is still under control. Everyone, let’s move. We need to keep pushing forward to treat him.”

The treatment continued, with everyone proceeding cautiously toward the final stages of the plan. Qian Fu and the others, who had supposedly died, weren’t slacking off either. They were renting out houses and vehicles while preparing treatment sites as needed.

Finally, with everyone’s help, Li Huowang was once again admitted into the ward of White Tower Hospital.

Li Huowang struggled against his restraints as Qing Wanglai, with sweat dripping from his forehead, whispered repeatedly, “Li Huowang, wake up. Li Huowang, wake up. Everything you’ve experienced is a lie! Everything is fake!”

Li Huowang’s eyes suddenly fluttered open. Bright sunlight shone past the white curtains while a loud buzz deafened him.

“I feel... I feel... Something from both worlds superimposed...”

Li Huowang looked at his own skeletal hands as he muttered.

Yi Donglai sighed in relief when he heard Li Huowang.

“Good. This is normal. That meant my treatment worked. Remember to take your medicine on time. You will be cured in no time.”

The doors burst open as a group of doctors rushed in, clapping to celebrate Li Huowang’s recovery.

Qing Wanglai felt the heavy burden of the past few months lift from his shoulders. He took a deep breath, letting out a long sigh.

As the clapping died down, Qing Wanglai extended his arm and patted Li Huowang.

“Little Li, let’s go. I will prescribe you some medicine. You can finally transfer from the intensive care ward to a regular one. You’ll have more freedom now. Once you’re discharged, work hard and study to get into a good university.”

Li Huowang’s happiness also brought joy to Qing Wanglai. He could write several theses based on Li Huowang’s medical records and treatment plan alone.

“Doctor Qing, can you help me?”

“Is it your girlfriend?” Qing Wanglai had expected that.

“Yes. I want to see her.”

“You should call your mother first to let her know that you are cured. I’ll bring you to see her later.”

Qing Wanglai long knew that Li Huowang’s girlfriend was sick too. He doubted she could remain sane with a partner like Li Huowang.

But this was a minor issue for him. He had managed to cure Li Huowang. The other illnesses were nothing to him.

It took time, but Qing Wanglai managed to stabilize Yang Na’s condition with treatment and medication.

Now he sat in his brand new office. It was larger than his previous office. He sipped his tea as he admired the banner on the wall.

The God of Medicines Reincarnated with a burning compassion that matches a familial bond. Gifted by Li Huowang and Yang Na.

Pride swelled within him as he read the words. He had chosen the right path in life. He was wealthy, but no amount of money could buy the satisfaction he felt now. Indeed, everyone needed a passion to truly feel alive.

His phone suddenly rang. He opened the drawer and fished out his cellphone. "Hello? Auntie Sun? What's wrong? Did Huowang relapse? No, I'm not from this prefecture. Yes, I was born in 1989 and have a house here... Its size? It's not big. Auntie Sun, why are you asking me this?

"No, no, that's alright. Thank you, but I don't need any introductions, not anytime soon. I'm not interested in arranged marriage meetings... What? I know she's a good woman. That's not what I meant."

After a lengthy conversation, Qing Wanglai finally convinced Sun Xiaoqin to drop the matter. Tossing his phone back into the drawer, he took another sip of tea, a smile tugging at his lips as he glanced at the red wedding invitation inside the drawer.

"Heh, she's such an interesting auntie. Now that she doesn't have to worry about her son's marriage, she's already trying to play matchmaker for others."

-Epilogue, Qing Wanglai's POV, End-